

EDUCATION

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## EFP Takeaways

The Impact of College Outreach on High Schoolers' College Choices: Results from Over One Thousand Natural Experiments

### *Background*

Selecting a college to attend—or whether to pursue a post-secondary education at all—is one of the biggest decisions for high school students. But what affects their choices? Jonathan Smith, Jessica Howell, and Michael Hurwitz explore the impact of one of the largest college-to-student outreach efforts in the nation, the College Board's Student Search Service. Their work is published in vol. 17 issue 1 of *EFP*.

### *The Study*

The Student Search Service helps colleges connect with students who participate in College Board programs like Advanced Placement, PSAT, and SAT, and who utilize college planning tools. If students opt into the service and meet the colleges' search criteria, they receive outreach and opportunities from the colleges who license the students' contact information. To determine the impact of this direct outreach from colleges on students' college choices, the authors use a randomization process in the Search Service that created 1,068 natural experiments in 2014 and 2015.

### *Findings*

The authors find that students are 23 percent more likely to send SAT scores, a proxy for applying, to colleges that connect to them through Student Search Service than otherwise similar students who are not connected to colleges through Search. Students are 22 percent more likely to enroll in a college that connects to them through Student Search Service than otherwise identical students who are not connected through Search.

The impact of outreach from colleges on application and enrollment is even larger for lower-income students, underrepresented minorities, and first-generation students. The authors conclude that low-cost outreach from colleges to high school students has the potential to inform and improve where students attend college.

#### **For more details:**

- View the [full issue](#).
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- Summary of:  
Smith, J., Howell, J., and Hurwitz, M. (2022). The Impact of College Outreach on High Schoolers' College Choices: Results from Over One Thousand Natural Experiments. *Education Finance and Policy*, 17 (1): 105-128.