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# Summertime program helping SAISD improve college enrollment rates, access

Annual 'Beat the Heat' campus trips help recent high school graduates overcome the 'summer melt' tendency of apathy and procrastination.

By **Scott Huddleston**, *Staff writer*

July 24, 2025

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Anna Mrozinski-Nieto, pictured center, a post secondary navigator with SAISD Foundation, greets students from SAISD as they participate in San Antonio College's "Rock Enroll" event at the Fletcher Administration Building at SAC on Wednesday. The foundation's "Beat the Heat" program helps newly graduated high schoolers in SAISD enroll for college courses in the fall.

Christopher Lee/Staff Photographer


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Along with sunburns, mosquitoes and heatwaves, this is a time of year for “summer melt” — failure among college-bound high school graduates to get enrolled for fall classes.

Summertime apathy, malaise and procrastination can seriously impede a teen's career development when they're at a crossroads in life, experts say. To help graduates survive a seemingly daunting process, the San Antonio Independent School District uses "navigators" — nimble, high-energy problem-solvers who know the pitfalls and always find a workaround, whether it's uploading vaccination records, running down transcripts and test scores or finding a notary for an affidavit to access in-state tuition.

Sometimes it's the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, or FAFSA, that can bog down a teen, especially a potential first-generation college student.

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Anna Mrozenski-Nieto, a post secondary navigator with SAISD Foundation, greets students from SAISD as they participate in San Antonio College's "Rock Enroll" event Wednesday. The SAISD Foundation's "Beat the Heat" program helps newly graduated high schoolers in the SAISD get enrolled for college courses in the fall.

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Patricia Carvajal, a post secondary navigator with SAISD Foundation, helps Atianna Gonzales, a Burbank High School graduate, at San Antonio College's "Rock Enroll" event at the Fletcher Administration Building at SAC on Wednesday. Carvajal is one of five nimble problem-solvers whose work helps ensure recent SAISD high school graduates stay on task for a two or four-year certification or degree plan as part of a long-term career path.

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“It can be the simplest thing like a FAFSA renewal to crazy stuff that we have to do. You never know when life hits how hard it’s going to be,” said Patricia Carvajal, a former assistant principal who became a post-secondary navigator with funding from the nonprofit SAISD Foundation right after retiring from the district in 2021.



Students from SAISD and other school districts participate in San Antonio College's "Rock Enroll" event at the Fletcher Administration Building at SAC in San Antonio, Texas on Wednesday, July 23, 2025.

Christopher Lee/Staff Photographer

That's when SAISD and the foundation partnered for the annual "Beat the Heat" initiative, which buses graduates from their high schools to local colleges and universities and shepherds them through summer enrollment. Carvajal, who follows SAISD grads through their college years, said the summer events are "the funnest part because we're so active with the kids."

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In her quest to get graduates started in college, Carvajal has doggedly tracked them down through relatives, helped families with their taxes and even booked a flight to get one student to his campus in the Northeast. Another lost his ID at the beach, so she arranged to get him a new one from the public library.

“Some of these kids don’t have parents to support them,” she said. “That’s where we really step in and assist them with anything they need.”



Andrew Cervantes, pictured right, college alumni coordinator with SAISD, speaks with other staff and students during San Antonio College's "Rock Enroll" event at the Fletcher Administration Building at SAC on Wednesday. The "Beat the Heat" program, aimed at combating what educators call the "summer melt" phenomenon often driven by malaise and procrastination, helps newly graduated high schoolers from SAISD stay on task to enroll for college courses in the fall.

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Chris Artega, a team lead for the enrollment officials, helps Robert Iruegas, a Lanier High School student, during the San Antonio College's "Rock Enroll" event at the Fletcher Administration Building at SAC on Wednesday. A post-pandemic program called "Beat the Heat" helps newly graduated high schoolers in the SAISD enroll for college courses in the fall.

Christopher Lee/Staff Photographer

The summer program fully launched in 2022, with 88 students participating. It has grown to some 200, with up to 87% leaving registration events with a class schedule in hand.

The program seems to be making a difference. SAISD has seen a jump, from 46% in 2019 to 55% in 2023, in the portion of its graduates who were enrolled in college for the fall following spring commencement. The number is an estimated 56% in 2024. Enrolled SAISD graduates rose from 1,201 in 2019 to 1,528 in 2023.

College enrollment battles are won or lost at registration events like “Rock Enroll” at San Antonio College or “Enroll-A-Palooza” at St. Philip’s College — the two institutions that drew the most SAISD graduates from 2019-2024.

When applicants are sent home, navigators say not so fast.

“I tell the students, if they tell you to go home, come to me first. We can usually access whatever they need,” said Andrew Cervantes, SAISD’s college alumni coordinator. “Our students are some of the best and brightest in the country, but they may not have the family or friends to help them through these enrollment steps.”

He estimates 80% of students enrolled through "Beat the Heat" are first-generation college students.

Natalie Velasco, a Highlands High School graduate, will be the first college student in her family. She enrolled through "Beat the Heat" at St. Philip's, where she plans to get a two-year certification in diagnostic medical sonography, hoping to perform ultrasound scans to monitor the health of mothers and unborn babies.

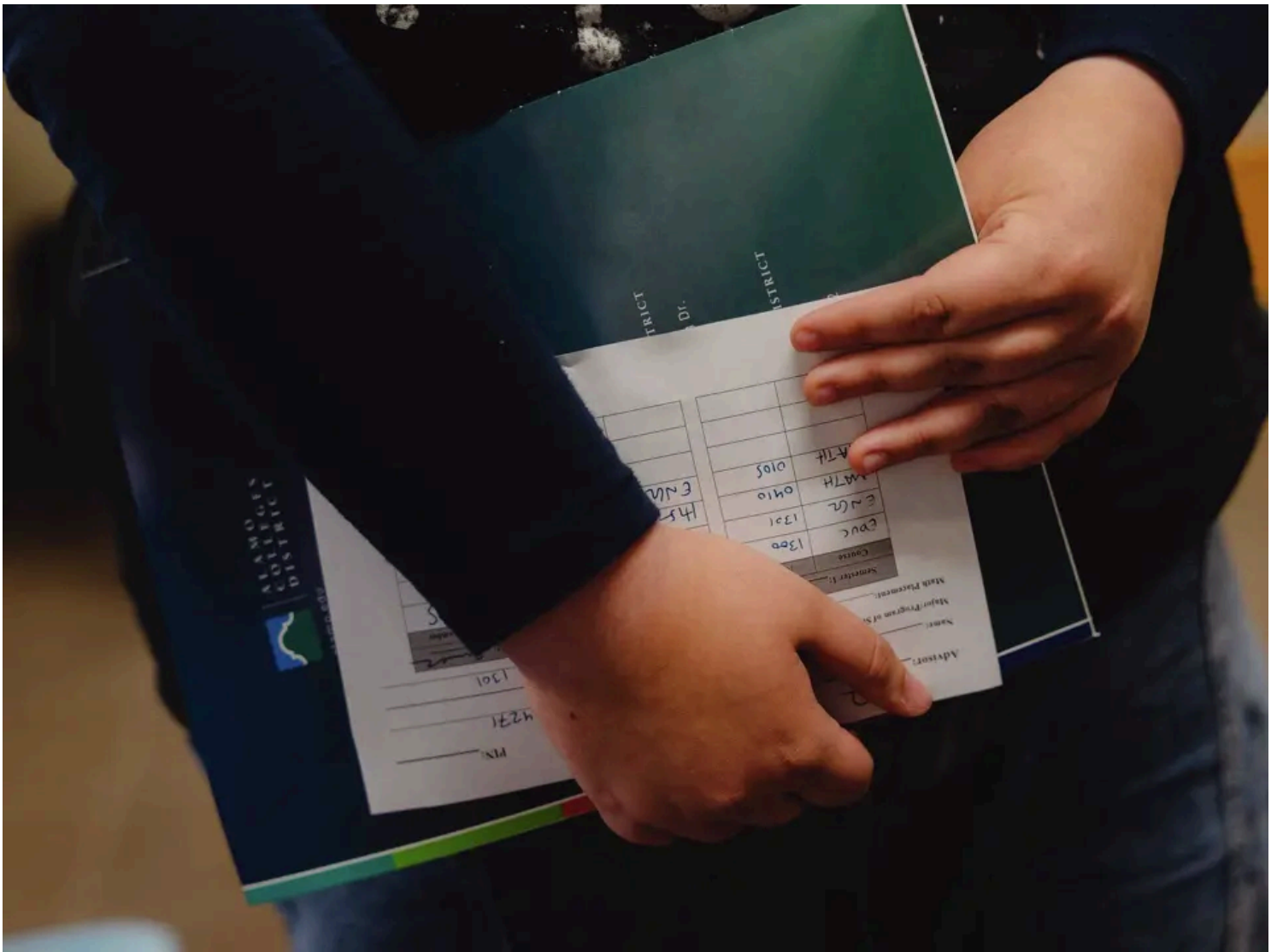
College-bound advisors at Highlands helped her choose a field of study, and navigators made sure she brought records for her meningitis shot to get registered at St. Philip's. She filled out her FAFSA and qualifies for AlamoPROMISE to cover tuition. Velasco, 18, left St. Philip's the day she went to register with a class schedule for the fall and next spring.

"I'm excited to start my future," she said. "I just want to go for the highest goals I can and just finish school and make my mom proud like she's always wanted."



Recent Highlands High School graduate Alexea Leal and her father, Deauwayne Leal, depart from San Antonio College's "Rock Enroll" event at the Fletcher Administration Building at SAC on Wednesday. She'll begin studying nursing in the fall, following in her father's footsteps. With help from the summertime "Beat the Heat" enrollment program and other post-secondary support provided by SAISD, she was able to leave the enrollment event with a class schedule in hand.

Christopher Lee/Staff Photographer



Alexa Leal holds her finalized class schedule during San Antonio College's "Rock Enroll" event the Fletcher Administration Building at SAC on Wednesday.

Christopher Lee/Staff Photographer

Alexea Leal, another Highlands graduate, left SAC on Wednesday with a class schedule and plans for a nursing career. Her father, Deauwayne Leal, a nurse with a bachelor's in healthcare administration, was "stoked" about the college's nursing education programs.

“It’s great to see her going into a pathway where she’s kind of following her dad,” he said.

Today’s high school graduates are “more savvy than we give them credit for” in weighing options based on cost, proximity and programs at various institutions, said Angelica Melendez, a longtime college bound advisor at Burbank High School. But, she added, they often get discouraged and frustrated during the enrollment process.

“Sometimes, a little micro-barrier for us is a big barrier for a kid,” Melendez said.

Andres Arredondo, dean for student success at St. Philip’s, said the college’s onboarding and advising teams have people talking to students and parents while they’re waiting in the initial line to register, answering questions up front in what typically is a two-hour visit.



Students from SAISD and other school districts participate in San Antonio College's "Rock Enroll" event at the Fletcher Administration Building at SAC in San Antonio, Texas on Wednesday, July 23, 2025.

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Robert Iruegas (center), a Lanier High School student, at the enrollment stations during the San Antonio College's "Rock Enroll" event at the Fletcher Administration Building at SAC in San Antonio, Texas on Wednesday, July 23, 2025.

Christopher Lee/Staff Photographer

"It's a lot to do in one day, but we have found it's really meeting the students where they are," Arrendondo said. "I've seen them nervously confess that they're scared in front of their mom or dad, aunts, uncles or grandparents. It's such a reminder for me of the vitality and the importance of this necessary work."

Federal pandemic relief funds that support the SAISD navigators will expire July 31, but the foundation is looking for grants and corporate sponsors to keep them funded long term.

Judy Geelhoed, executive director of the [SAISD Foundation](#), said she wants to expand the program to keep graduates in college through completion toward a license, certificate or degree. Higher enrollment rates are a good first step toward a stronger workforce and local economy, she said.

“What we’re trying to do for our kids is ensure that they can really earn a middle-class income. And for some of them, that’s really changing the trajectory of generations of poverty in their family,” Geelhoed said.

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**Scott Huddleston**

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