



WHAT DATA PROTECTION CHANGES TO THE COLLEGE BOARD'S STUDENT SEARCH SERVICE MEAN FOR ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT

A REVIEW OF THE SHORT- AND LONG-TERM IMPACTS ON HIGHER EDUCATION

By Jonathan Epstein

The College Board recently announced that high school students who register for in-school assessments, such as the PSAT or SAT exams, can no longer opt-in to its Student Search Service. An industry-leading source of contact information for high school students, Student Search provides colleges, universities, and scholarship programs with the ability to find and communicate with prospective students.

Every year, Student Search data and contact lists are accessed by 1,500 four-year institutions in the U.S., serving as the nexus of many higher education recruitment strategies. The College Board's decision to change how students participate will significantly impact enrollment management.

SUMMARY

- The College Board reduced the number of ways high school students can opt-in to its Student Search Service, a major source of prospect contact information for colleges and universities.
- Short- and long-term impacts of the decision on enrollment management include changes to the technical environment and privacy protection regulations.
- As ways to reach high school students evolve, the most successful institutions will plan and adjust their recruitment strategies by adapting how they engage with prospective students.

How The Change Affects Volume and Other Factors

In the short term, any immediate effects will be minimal, as the updated policy only takes effect for winter 2023 exams. Even then, high school students can still opt-in to the Student Search Service in other ways, such as creating an account on [Big Future](#), a free online college resource operated by The College Board. Indeed, the first pathway to Student Search for 2/3 of high school students now is via Big Future and other opt-in methods.

However, in the long term, the scale of this policy change means that continued innovation will be required to keep up with shifting external circumstances that impact student recruitment.

Notable areas of anticipated change include the technical environment (Gmail algorithms, email link checking software/machine clicks) and the personal privacy environment (Apple MPP/"false email opens"), including more stringent opt-in requirements for minors taking in-school college-preparation assessments.

With other recruitment organizations, including Cappex and CollegeVine, having already eliminated the opt-in option for students, a significant concern is the viability of junior and sophomore search. What we've learned directly from The College Board in terms of volume impacts is that:

- With 2.1 million licensed students (those enrolled in Student Search), the fall 2024 class is locked in, so upcoming senior search campaigns are unaffected.
- More than 1.4 million students are already licensed for fall 2025 (75% of the fall 2024 class), and nearly half a million are licensed for fall 2026, meaning that Student Search remains an option for recruiting upcoming senior and junior classes.
- Because the college counselor community is keenly aware of this change, we could see an uptick in the number of high school students who create a Big Future account, which licenses them in Student Search, per their counselor's

encouragement. However, that increase could be tempered if underserved students without access to an informed counselor's advice do not create a Big Future account, omitting them from Student Search rolls.

- The number of students that license into Student Search solely via in-school assessments is modest.

Privacy Concerns Will Bring More Change

We have a couple of years for this process to unfold and for the degree and type of changes to the audiences and access to students to be made clear. However, because the focus on student privacy is ongoing, enrollment management professionals need to anticipate future changes.

Huron believes that colleges and universities need to prepare for stricter privacy protocols, including further restrictions on the ability to track email performance. The most successful institutions will plan and adjust their recruitment strategies by adapting their methods of engaging with prospective students.

In the meantime, colleges and universities should continue to focus on creating and delivering engaging and compelling recruitment content. Huron tracks enrollment issues closely and is prepared to help. Connect with our enrollment management experts to gain insights on optimizing your enrollment strategy for the future.



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