How-to guide: Using data to track your school's progress toward 100 percent financial aid for college completion

FEBRUARY – JUNE 2020

Data can be a powerful tool for you to use to support student financial aid application completion. You should use completion data to help inspire more students to complete their applications, refine your school's strategy for supporting students and families working on their applications, and celebrate your successes.

TOOLKIT STEPS

BY FEBRUARY 20, 2020

Designate one person on your staff to be the point person on student financial aid application completion data. This person should:

- Reserve about 30-45 minutes each week to track and report on your school's completion data

- Complete the necessary forms to register your school for the **NYS FAFSA Completion Initiative**. The Initiative is run by New York State's Higher Education Services Corporation (HESC), and will provide schools with up-to-date student-level information about your student's FAFSA and TAP application completion rates

EACH WEEK FROM FEBRUARY – JUNE 2020

The designated person on your staff should:

- Check the **NYS FAFSA Completion Initiative website** and track your school's FAFSA and TAP application completion rates

- Use our **online data tool** to track how your high school is doing helping all eligible seniors complete the FAFSA. This tool will be updated regularly as more students submit their applications

- Ask some of the following questions to help analyze the data so it is most useful to your school's strategy to support financial aid application completion:
  - **?** Are there groups of students who have much higher or lower completion rates? (look at race, ethnicity, students who are low-income, gender, English language learner status, disability status, etc.) What unique barriers might those students face in completing their financial aid forms? How might your school be able to target support to reducing those obstacles?
  - **?** How does your school's financial aid completion rate compare to similar schools in New York State?
  - **?** Are completion rates for your school going up right around the completion evens you are hosting? If so, can you replicate those events or what is working at those events? If not, ask students and families who have attended those events what obstacles they are facing that may be preventing them from completing their applications. Make changes to your supporting events to help address their concerns.

- Using the data, each week the designated person on your staff should:
  - Follow-up with individual students and their families to encourage completion and offer support
  - Regularly post updates about your school's progress toward full completion on social media, on school announcement boards, and any other places where most students will see or hear the updates
  - Communicate regularly with students, families, teachers, counselors and school staff about your school's progress (you can add this information to the letter, email, social media and other materials for which we've provided templates in this toolkit)
  - Use the data to inspire younger students — they'll need to apply for financial aid when they become seniors and it's never too early to begin building their knowledge about the steps they'll need to take to get financial aid

Please contact us at fafsa@edtrustny.org if there is any additional information or assistance that we can provide.

NY FAFSA Challenge

The Education Trust—New York