



December 9, 2020

Dear Superintendent,

Building on our efforts to improve postsecondary enrollment and student outcomes, the CT State Department of Education has partnered with CT's College and Career Readiness Alliance (CCCRA) to announce Connecticut's first FAFSA Completion Challenge. Modeled after the National College Attainment Network's (NCAN) FAFSA's Completion Challenge, the Connecticut FAFSA Challenge is designed to spark and support local creativity to increase FAFSA completion and postsecondary enrollment rates. Districts and schools will develop plans to pilot new strategies to increase FAFSA completion during the 2020-21 school year. This builds on the CSDE's previous effort to support districts' FAFSA completion efforts by providing student-level data through EdSight Secure.

The coronavirus pandemic has disrupted many facets of our education system and FAFSA completion has not been spared. Here in Connecticut, FAFSA completions are down 16% compared to this time last year. These declines are reflective of the challenging circumstances we are navigating together. Students are facing economic uncertainty, food and housing insecurity, and overcoming the stresses of fluid learning models due to community spread. We understand that with everything else going on in your districts, FAFSA completion can sometimes feel like a lower priority. At the same time, we must turn the tide on this declining trend if we want our young people to succeed beyond high school in the dynamic world that awaits them following graduation. The educational trajectory of thousands of students are on the line, as are their own economic futures and those of their families, communities, and the state of Connecticut overall.

Even before COVID, FAFSA completion proved challenging. Now more than ever, we are committed to ensuring our most vulnerable students have the same postsecondary opportunities as their peers. This first ever Connecticut FAFSA Completion Challenge provides communities with an opportunity to galvanize partners and resources in order to demonstrate a shared commitment for postsecondary success.

I strongly encourage your district to participate in this unique opportunity.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Miguel A. Cardona".

Dr. Miguel A. Cardona
Commissioner of Education