

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

OCTOBER - JUNE 2021

Data can be a powerful tool for you to use to support student financial aid completion. The NYS FAFSA Completion Initiative data from HESC will be available this fall. Our online data tool will be available beginning in early 2021. 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 OCTOBER 16, 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 NYS Application for TAP completion rates

EACH WEEK FROM OCTOBER – JUNE 2021

The designated person on your staff should:

- Check the **NYS FAFSA Completion Initiative website** and track your school's FAFSA and NYS Application for TAP completion rates
- Starting in early 2021, 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:
 - ❓ Did your school’s FAFSA completion rates decline last spring when schools began remote learning? What strategies can you put in place this year if there is remote learning to support all seniors to complete their financial aid for college forms?
 - ❓ 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 events 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