



December 10, 2014

Mr. Levis Hughes, Chief
Office of Student Financial Assistance
Florida Department of Education
325 West Gaines Street, Suite 1314
Tallahassee, FL 32399-0400

Dear Mr. Hughes:

On behalf of the Florida School Counselor Association and the Florida College Access Network, we write to respectfully and urgently request that the Florida Department of Education, through the Office of Student Financial Assistance (OSFA), make available to Florida school districts student-level data pertaining to the completion of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), beginning January 1, 2015. Providing student-specific information on FAFSA completion will go far in helping Florida school counselors and administrators to identify and assist graduating high school seniors who have not completed the form. This, in turn, will impact schools' efficiency and effectiveness to ensure that all qualified high school graduates have the opportunity to pursue and complete a postsecondary degree or credential.

Unfortunately, Florida lags the nation in FAFSA completion rates by graduating high school seniors, and the impact is substantial. In 2013, only 55% of Florida graduating high school seniors completed the FAFSA, only the 28th highest ranking of all states. By contrast, 59% of Florida 12th graders qualified for a Pell grant, which is the 10th highest rate in the country. Based on Florida College Access Network's analysis, Florida's 2013 graduating high school class therefore missed the opportunity to receive, collectively, over \$100 million in Pell Grant funds alone.¹ At an average award of \$3,512 per student, this regrettably resulted in tens of thousands of Florida students missing out on the opportunity to receive Pell grants to help finance college or career school.

FAFSA completion is essential to increasing the number of Floridians who achieve post-secondary degrees or credentials, particularly among populations traditionally underrepresented in higher education. FAFSA completion is a strong indicator of whether students enroll in a college or career school by the fall semester after high school graduation, whether they attend college full-time, and whether they persist and complete a degree or credential within the expected time frame.² Research

¹ Florida College Access Network, "\$100 Million in Pell Grants Left Behind: FAFSA Completion In Florida," Tampa, FL, December 2013, <<http://www.floridacollegeaccess.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/Florida-Degree-Attainment-Data-Brief.pdf>>.

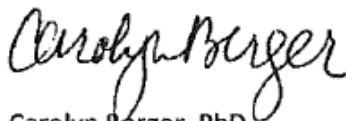
² See Roderick, Melissa, Jenny Nagaoka, Vanessa Coca and Eliza Moeller, "From High School to the Future: Potholes on the Road to College," Consortium on Chicago School Research at the University of Chicago, March 2008 <http://ccsr.uchicago.edu/downloads/1835ccsr_potholes_summary.pdf>; see also Bettinger, Eric, Bridget Terry Long, Phillip Oreopoulos and Lisa Sanbonmatsu, "The Role of Application Assistance and Information in College Decisions: Results from the H&R Block FAFSA Experiment," *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 127:3 (2012) <<http://qje.oxfordjournals.org/content/127/3/1205>>.

also shows that for students whose parents lack higher education experience, professional adult guidance is critical to ensuring that students learn about and access resources like the FAFSA. School counselors are essential to providing such guidance; yet without information on which of their students have completed the FAFSA, counselors are limited in their ability to help the students who need it the most. Providing student-specific FAFSA data to the high schools would go far to remedy this issue.

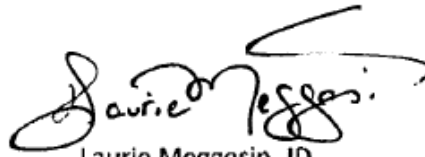
With the FAFSA completion process beginning for Seniors and families across the state next month, we therefore respectfully urge that the Florida Department of Education immediately join the many states across the country, including Texas, Colorado, Illinois, Maine and Michigan, by providing student-level FAFSA data to high school administrators and counselors. Failure to do so this school year will result in a regrettable number of graduates from the Class of 2015 who will miss out on critical resources to finance postsecondary education. Providing student-level FAFSA completion data would also more optimally leverage the staff time and resources that the Office of Student Financial Assistance already dedicates to increasing FAFSA completion and maximize the success of OSFA-lead initiatives such as College Goal Sunday or "CGS!Florida."

Although Florida is projected to soon surpass New York as the third most populous state in the country, we unfortunately rank only 30th among the 50 states in postsecondary degree attainment. As a state, we must do all we can to boost FAFSA completion rates, help our students prepare for their future success, and cultivate the 21st century talent pool vital to Florida's prosperity. Thank you for your attention to our request, and for all you do on behalf of Florida's students.

Respectfully,



Carolyn Berger, PhD
Governing Board Chair
Florida School Counselor Association



Laurie Meggesin, JD
Executive Director
Florida College Access Network

cc: Ms. Pam Stewart, Commissioner, Florida Department of Education