

# FAFSA Completion Tools from the GA Dept of Education

You've probably seen the projections—in our global economy, 6 out of 10 jobs will require some form of postsecondary education beyond high school by 2020. And as you know well, the financial cost of obtaining a bachelor's degree, associate's degree, or industry-recognized certificate can be daunting for students and their families. Too many feel college is out of reach for them, and some doubt its value—even when the evidence is clear that postsecondary degrees lead to increased earnings and stronger engagement in graduates' communities.

I want to inform you of some new resources from the U.S. Department of Education that are designed to increase the number of students filling out the one form that is the gateway to a diverse set of postsecondary opportunities: the [Free Application for Federal Student Aid \(FAFSA\)](#). Studies have found that FAFSA completion correlates strongly with college enrollment, particularly among low-income students. The FAFSA takes an average of only 23 minutes to complete online, and it's entirely free and secure.

In our efforts to expand college access and success and to increase the number of FAFSA applications, the Georgia Department of Education offers two new digital tools to help your high school principals and counselors identify which students need to fill out the FAFSA and to encourage students and parents to fill out the FAFSA together.

The [FAFSA Completion Tool](#) was created to help financial aid professionals, school administrators, and practitioners track and increase FAFSA completions. The Tool—updated biweekly throughout the spring—provides every high school in the United States whose students have completed five or more FAFSAs with information about how many applications were submitted and completed for the 2014–15 application year as well as comparison data from the 2013–14 FAFSA application year. When I was CEO of Chicago's schools, we found that school-by-school data was a great way to encourage healthy competition among our high schools. Coming online soon will be a new resource for states to provide counselors with information to see if particular students have filled out their FAFSA.

The second tool, the [Financial Aid Toolkit](#), is designed to assist educators, counselors, and others by consolidating financial aid resources in one place, making it easier to find and access information to help students and parents understand the financial aid process, apply for aid, repay loans, and generally prepare for college. For instance, there are tips on how to host a [FAFSA completion workshop](#)—something First Lady [Michelle Obama and I did recently](#) with families in Virginia. The toolkit also contains links to sample [tweets](#), [Facebook posts](#), videos, blog posts, infographics, and [other resources](#) that can be used to encourage and help students and parents to fill out the FAFSA.

Last year, roughly one million high school seniors did not submit the FAFSA, making them ineligible for federal grants and loans as well as most state-based and institutional aid. When students complete the FAFSA, they help themselves *and* make a positive contribution to their school, communities, and states. In Michigan, for example, the governor and legislature leveraged an investment of \$2 million to build a statewide college access infrastructure. More than 50 Michigan communities have organized around a common dashboard to increase college enrollment. Since more than 90 percent of high school graduates attend Michigan higher education institutions, the state hopes its emphasis on FAFSA completion and other metrics will result in tens of millions of dollars in additional student aid for the state, its colleges, universities, and students.