

From: Pitts, Ted <TedPitts@gov.sc.gov>
To: Soura, Christian <ChristianSoura@gov.sc.gov>
Date: 3/7/2014 2:37:27 PM
Subject: FW: Letter from Secretary Duncan re: FAFSA Completion Initiative
Attachments: 14-003999.Q&A.DOC

From: Walls, Courtney
Sent: Friday, March 07, 2014 12:58 PM
To: Baker, Josh; Pitts, Ted; Soura, Christian
Subject: FW: Letter from Secretary Duncan re: FAFSA Completion Initiative

I'm CYAing. This looked important.

From: Honeysett, Adam [<mailto:Adam.Honeysett@ed.gov>]
Sent: Friday, March 07, 2014 12:34 PM
Subject: Letter from Secretary Duncan re: FAFSA Completion Initiative

March 7, 2014

Dear Governors:

To meet President Obama's ambitious goal of leading the world with the highest proportion of college graduates by 2020, we must not only enroll more students in college, but also support them so that they can complete their studies and attain their degrees. Incredibly, one simple step by students--completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) form--could have a powerful impact on both student enrollment and persistence. That is why I am pleased to announce that the U.S. Department of Education will be partnering with state student grant agencies to launch the *FAFSA Completion Initiative*. This new initiative will allow state student grant agencies to share specific, limited information about FAFSA form completion with high schools and school districts, helping them to encourage and assist students in completing and filing a FAFSA form. The enclosed set of *Questions and Answers (Q&As)* explains in more detail the history, requirements, and procedures for this new initiative, which builds on the success of the U.S. Department of Education's FAFSA Completion Pilot Project.

For many students--particularly students from low-income backgrounds--completing the FAFSA form is a critical step in making the dream of attending and completing college a reality. Filing the FAFSA form is required in order for students to receive access to Title IV student aid programs like the Federal Pell Grant and Federal student loans. It also is used by states, colleges, and universities in awarding other state-based or institution-based aid. Research has shown that receiving financial aid is associated with increased chances of college enrollment and persistence; nonetheless, millions of students do not file a FAFSA each year, and many who do not file may be eligible for Federal student aid.

Our students cannot afford to forgo Federal and other aid that could help them attend college and earn a degree or certificate, and we cannot allow a lack of access to available financial resources to prevent talented students from attaining a postsecondary educational credential and the lifetime of higher earnings associated with having such a credential.

As noted, this new program will build and expand on the success of our FAFSA Completion Pilot Project, a three-year effort in which the U.S. Department of Education partnered with approximately one hundred school districts to provide them with limited information about high school seniors' progress in completing and filing the FAFSA application. Initial results from the pilot project show that high schools that have access to FAFSA completion information can post impressive increases in the number of FAFSA filers. Having access to such information enabled the participating schools and their guidance counselors to target their outreach efforts and resources more effectively toward those students who had not yet filed or completed a FAFSA form.

Now, with the upcoming nationwide implementation of the *FAFSA Completion Initiative*, school districts, high schools, and certain designated entities--working with state student grant agencies--will have the opportunity to increase the number of students who apply for Federal student aid by better identifying students who have not yet filed. By working together and strategically using these data, we will make progress toward the President's ambitious 2020 goal. And by increasing the number of students with postsecondary degrees and certificates, we will help ensure that American workers have the skills and knowledge necessary to prepare for the jobs of the twenty-first century that will support their families and help grow our economy.

I urge you to encourage your state student grant agency to work with us in the implementation of the *FAFSA Completion Initiative* in your state.

Thank you for your continued partnership in this work.

Sincerely,

Arne Duncan

Enclosure