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Working Groups

- Careers & Citizenship
- Financing Post-secondary Education
- Post-secondary Access, Completion & Persistence
- Marketing & Communications

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Through effective school counseling programming and strategic partnerships, Reach Higher Massachusetts will inspire every student to take charge of their future by completing their education past high school.

March 2018

New Data Tool Available for Tracking FASFA Completion!

The **Departments of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE)** and **Higher Education (DHE)** recently announced the development of new data reporting tools to monitor whether students have filled out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). These new reports that will be available to counselors through [Edwin Analytics](#), a powerful reporting and data analysis tool that gives authorized users access to a variety of reports on educational data. Counselors and other authorized school and college personnel will have access to [two new FAFSA reports](#) that allow them to see whether a student has submitted a completed FAFSA to the U.S. Department of Education, or whether the application has been marked “incomplete” or “not found.” Counselors will be able to follow up with individual students to see if they need assistance in completing the FAFSA, and will also be able to monitor the overall FAFSA completion rates for their individual high school and district. See [press release](#) for more information.

While Massachusetts currently ranks 5th in the nation for the percentage of students who complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, the overall number of high school seniors who complete the FAFSA still hovers at 48.5% statewide. Officials hope the new reports, coupled with a streamlined application and earlier filing deadline, will spur even higher completion rates.

Excerpted from a [press release](#) issued by the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education.

Catherine Chiu, Director of Guidance in the Boston Public Schools comments on the importance of the FASFA completion tool.

Almost 140,000 college students are drawn to Boston to study and create the foundations of their careers. The impact is that we have an incredibly educated workforce: Over 64% of Boston residents have some college or higher. (46.4% of Boston residents have a bachelor’s degree or higher) Source: [Boston at a Glance 2018](#).

For urban school districts such as Boston, where a large number of low income and first generation students are served, having a solid post-secondary plan and earning a college credential is critical in order to get on the road and become part of the city’s workforce.

Completing the FAFSA is essential for students to access almost all forms of financial aid. That is why Boston chose in 2010 to apply to be included in the FAFSA



Completion Pilot Project, offered by the U.S. Department of Education from 2010-2013. In the pilot project, our district received student level data every two weeks that showed the student's FAFSA Filing Status Information. We are so thrilled that we will once again be able to see whether a senior has completed the FAFSA, started it/incomplete, or hasn't started it/not found. Having access to this information will allow us identify which students need more nudging and support. Low-income and first generation students may have unique family circumstances, questions regarding guardianship and dependency status, or need more time to access or locate financial documents. By starting the FAFSA completion challenge in the fall, and having FAFSA filing status by student, our Boston Public School counselors have more TIME to follow up and keep following up.

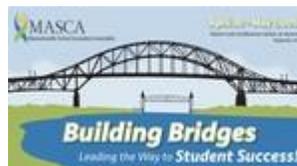
Boston is also incredibly fortunate that Mayor Walsh is such a strong believer that college is too important to be limited to those who can afford it. The City of Boston created the Tuition-Free-Community-College-Plan for low-income, Pell Grant eligible students. This scholarship pays for the costs of tuition and mandatory fees that are not covered by the Pell grant. To enable income-eligible graduates of Boston high schools to earn both their associate and bachelor's degrees, entirely free of tuition or mandatory fees, our students could choose to take advantage of the pilot Boston Bridge program and go on to earn their bachelor's degree. This is a collaboration between the city's [Tuition-Free Community College Plan](#) and the state's [Commonwealth Commitment](#) program. Boston Bridge students can attend one of three community colleges – Bunker Hill Community College, MassBay Community College, or Roxbury Community College – and then transfer to any UMass campus or Massachusetts state university.

The FAFSA is the ticket to get on to this career and college train and reach higher. Our school counselors now have the FAFSA completion student level data in their toolkit to target their outreach and support. Completing the FAFSA will enable our Boston students to reach higher.

[Sign up for RHM email updates](#)

Upcoming Events

2018 Massachusetts School Counselors Association Annual Conference



The 2018 Massachusetts School Counselors Association (MASCA) Conference will be held on April 30 (pre-conference) and May 1 (full conference) at the Resort and Conference Center in Hyannis, MA. This exciting conference will feature 32 engaging breakout sessions on career and college readiness, personal and academic planning, and social/emotional learning. Special features include a keynote by Julia Cook, a message from Ann Reale, Undersecretary from the MA Executive Office of Education, many

exciting exhibitors and vendors, and a chance to network with colleagues across the Commonwealth, all of whom are committed to helping students “reach higher”. Once again, we will be offering a Reach Higher Track for the conference, and PDPs and Graduate Credit are available. For more information, check out the [MASCA Conference Website](#). If you have questions, please contact Ruth Carrigan, MASCA Conference Chair, at Ruth.Carrigan@whrsd.org.



Webinars offered by Massachusetts Educational Financing Authority (MEFA) for counselors

The Massachusetts Educational Financing Authority offers webinars for counselors on a variety of topics. Here is a listing of upcoming webinars:

Introduction to MEFA Pathway – Student Features & Counselor Tools

March 14, 2018, 1:00pm [RSVP](#)

Helping Families Understand Financial Aid Award Letters

April 3, 2018, 10:00am – 11:00am [RSVP](#)

Introduction to MEFA Pathway – Student Features & Counselor Tools

April 10, 2018, 2:00pm [RSVP](#)

Using Social Media to Communicate to Families

May 2, 2018, 10:00am – 11:00am [RSVP](#)

Introduction to MEFA Pathway – Student Features & Counselor Tools

May 10, 2018, 10:00am [RSVP](#)

For more information on these webinars please go to the [MEFA Training and Events](#) page for counselors. If you need closed captioning for any of these webinars please contact MEFA at info@mefapathway.org



Better Make Room supports the Reach Higher Initiative

[Better Make Room](#) supports the Reach Higher Initiative started by former First Lady Michelle Obama to encourage all students to pursue education beyond high school and to build the capacity of school counseling. The Better Make Room website provides information and resources to help youth navigate the process of applying, financing and attending postsecondary education. It includes a toolkit on how to have your own College Signing Day, provides information on a free texting tool used to provide personalized support for college access, including financial aid and application deadlines for high school and college students. It also provides resources and multiple links to postsecondary education access supports provided by federal agencies and private organizations. You can follow their work on social media platforms including Instagram, Twitter and Facebook.

On February 2, 2018, Mrs. Obama presented the [2018 Counselor of the Year Award](#) to Kristen Perry at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, D.C.

Save the Dates!

Reach Higher MA Guiding Coalition Meetings

March 29, 2018

10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

American Student Assistance
100 Cambridge Street, Suite 1600
Boston, MA 02115

June 28, 2018

9 a.m. to 12 p.m.

MSSAA, Franklin, MA

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