



## UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

OFFICE OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

September 14, 2016

Dear Colleague:

With over 50 million students heading into America's public and private schools this fall, our P-12 educational system has never been so large or so diverse, and the need to adequately prepare students to enter and complete college has never been so great. Americans with college degrees are more likely to live healthier lives, be more civically engaged in their communities, pay back their student loans on time, and have well-paying jobs and lower unemployment. It is one of the best investments students can make to help ensure successful futures.

One key to boosting college access is helping students and their families obtain financial aid by making it easier and faster for them to fill out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). The form is available online and in Spanish, and allows many students to automatically import their families' tax information. Additionally, with new changes being made for this year's application, students and families can now apply for financial aid earlier—starting on October 1, as the college application process gets underway, rather than in January—and they can use their families' tax information from two years ago to complete it. For more information on these changes, visit our website at [www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/making-college-more-affordable-more-americans-improving-college-choiceh](http://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/making-college-more-affordable-more-americans-improving-college-choiceh).

However, it is essential that students not only enroll in college—they must also graduate with a high-quality degree. A student who leaves with debt but no degree is three times more likely to default on his or her loans than students who graduated from college. It is essential that students and families have information to help them apply to and enroll in a college or university that will help them achieve their educational goals. With higher education costs and student debt levels continuing to rise, the choices that American families make when searching for and selecting a college have never been more important.

To further empower students and families, today we released our first annual update of the redesigned [College Scorecard](http://CollegeScorecard.ed.gov), a college search tool that President Obama launched in September 2015 and that nearly 1.5 million users across the nation have accessed since. With over 4,000 institutions available for students and families to search, the College Scorecard provides answers to critical questions about each institution, like how likely students are to complete their degrees, how much debt students take out, and how much the students typically earn after attending. And the interactive website provides users with the ability to search by program, degree type, location, or by name of institution. All of this information is available at [CollegeScorecard.ed.gov](http://CollegeScorecard.ed.gov).

While we are encouraged that so many users are seeking out this information, there are still many prospective students, especially low-income students, who are not using a tool like the

College Scorecard in their search process. We are asking for your help so that these students will use this tool, consider their odds of success at each college they research and make more informed decisions.

We need your assistance to ensure that all of your district superintendents, guidance counselors, principals, teachers, mentors, parents, and students are aware of this free, comprehensive resource. To help you reach your audience quickly and effectively, we have included a set of tools to assist in your outreach. These resources are also made available on the College Scorecard website:

- **College Scorecard Communications Toolkit:** The Toolkit will help you easily communicate the unique benefits of the College Scorecard for students and families and how you can reach different audiences through targeted mediums. Within the Toolkit, we have included information about what's available in the Scorecard, examples of social media content for Facebook and Twitter feeds, and a sample e-mail that you can send to stakeholders.
- **How-to guide for educators and families:** We've created a concise one-page guide to using the College Scorecard in the form of a handout for principals, counselors, teachers, students, and families. This "how-to" resource will help your students and educators understand what to look for and how to conduct searches.
- **Video:** If you are working to reach your educators and students through social media or e-mail communications, we've created a video that shows the many advantages of using a tool like the College Scorecard to help broaden their college search. Check out our video at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=oyYsUrW9OTA&feature=youtu.be](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oyYsUrW9OTA&feature=youtu.be).

We know that good information is only useful when people have access to it, so we appreciate your help in providing this information to ensure it reaches its intended audience—prospective college students and those supporting and advising them.

Thank you for your continued commitment to improving educational outcomes for students across the nation. We appreciate your partnership and wish you a productive school year. If you have any questions or need more information regarding the College Scorecard, please e-mail [CollegeScorecard@ed.gov](mailto:CollegeScorecard@ed.gov).

Sincerely,

/s/

Ted Mitchell  
Under Secretary

/s/

Ann Whalen  
Senior Advisor to the Secretary  
Delegated the Duties and Functions  
of Assistant Secretary for  
Elementary and Secondary  
Education

Attachments