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TCCC's FAFSA Pilot Project surpasses target
Financial aid application completions jump from 28% to 48%

North Charleston, SC – The FAFSA Pilot Project, an initiative of Tri-County Cradle to Career Collaborative (TCCC), has met and surpassed its target, resulting in a 20-percentage point jump in FAFSA completions at five local high schools over the past year.

The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) provides grants, loans and work-study funds to students and is a pivotal part in many students' decision to attend college.

The project's five pilot schools – Burke High, Cross High, North Charleston High, R.B. Stall High and St. John's High – had an average FAFSA completion rate of 28% during the 2016 academic calendar.

“Our pilot schools had some of the lowest FAFSA completion rates and highest poverty rates in our region, which resulted in them missing out on Pell Grant opportunities and other forms of financial aid,” said Alexa Stephens, Director of Strategy and Community Insight, who oversaw the FAFSA Pilot Project. “Many students who aspire to go to college never make it there because they don't have financial assistance. The FAFSA is the first step to getting it.”

The goal of the project – funded by a \$25,000 contribution from The InterTech Group – was to raise the FAFSA completion rate in the five schools to 45%, which is both the national and tri-county average. The project surpassed that goal in June, when the five schools combined to reach a FAFSA completion rate of 48%.

“Time was spent in the schools, walking students, parents and guidance counselors through the application process,” Joan Green, Director of the FAFSA Pilot Project, said. “We worked to gain their trust and explain the forms in the easiest possible way. We're thrilled so many students applied for college funding this year and are hopeful even more will apply during the next school year.”

Green also worked with college access TRIO programs, such as GEAR UP, EOC and ETS, at each of the pilot high schools to support their FAFSA completion efforts.

About 90% of high school seniors across the country who complete the FAFSA go on to attend college immediately after high school, compared to just 55% who don't complete the FAFSA, according to data referenced by the National College Access Network.

In the tri-county region, it's especially important for more high school graduates to attend college. In 2015, only 43% of adults 25 and older in the region held an associate degree or higher, and many local graduates do not meet regional workforce demands.

~ more ~

www.TriCountyCradleToCareer.org

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Several factors impact FAFSA completion, including:

- Lack of awareness of the FAFSA, especially for first-generation students and families.
- Lack of understanding of the FAFSA process, eligibility and what is needed for completion.
- Incomplete and incorrect tax forms.
- Failure to apply for a PIN to complete and submit the FAFSA.
- Students not identifying themselves as college bound.
- Language barriers and immigration status, particularly in rural areas.

Now that the FAFSA Pilot Project has reached its target, TCCC leaders will assess what worked and what didn't work.

"We're impressed by the increases in FAFSA completion rates in the five pilot schools and are eager to see similar increases across the entire tri-county region," TCCC CEO John C. Read said. "At this point, this is only a pilot program, so we'll review the results and determine whether and how to proceed."

About the Tri-County Cradle to Career Collaborative

The Tri-County Cradle to Career Collaborative (TCCC) is a community-wide movement in Berkeley, Charleston and Dorchester counties, South Carolina focused on improving the quality of life of its citizens and its workforce through education. Using data and focused community collaboration across a continuum from "cradle-to-career," TCCC serves as a catalyst for widespread systemic change, with the ultimate goal of increased student success and economic prosperity for all.

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