October 8, 2019

Dear National College Access Network,

On behalf of Arizona’s college access professionals, the signers below and the Arizona College Access Network (AzCAN), a program of College Success Arizona, would like to recognize the National College Access Network (NCAN). NCAN’s investments in FAFSA completion have played a vital role in creating both expertise and capacity around increased FAFSA completion rates in Arizona.

AzCAN is pleased to have been selected by NCAN to participate in the Kresge FAFSA Completion Challenge in 2016. Through this project, Phoenix Union High School District (PUHSD) worked collaboratively with AzCAN and aligned community partners, like Be A Leader Foundation and Arizona State University (ASU) to exceed the 40% FAFSA completion goal set by the City of Phoenix and increase college-going rates for the graduating high school class of 2017. The grant funds supported the district’s college marketing campaign and FAFSA drives as well as summer collaboration efforts with high school counselors. Based on the district’s collaborative FAFSA completion success, it received additional reward money from NCAN to continue raising FAFSA completion rates for the high school class of 2018. Not only did the Kresge FASFA Completion Challenge help low-income and underrepresented students in Phoenix successfully access federal state and institutions financial aid, it also catalyzed a community-led movement to increase FAFSA completion rates for all high school seniors in Arizona.

In Spring 2017, the Arizona State Board of Education, guided by stakeholders, educational partners and AzCAN members, redefined the meaning of college and career ready to include completion of the FAFSA in Arizona’s accountability system. For the first time in state history, schools began to collect data and report on the number of high school seniors who completed a FAFSA.

Recognizing the role of FASFA completion in increasing participation in postsecondary education, Governor Ducey on September 21, 2018, joined by the Arizona Commission for Postsecondary Education, Helios Education Foundation, College Success Arizona, Achieve60AZ and AzCAN, announced a state goal for FAFSA completion for the 2018-19 school year: 50 percent of Arizona’s high school seniors would complete the FASFA by June 30, 2019.

The statewide AZ FAFSA Challenge utilized a variety of methods to deliver assistance to students, families and educators in the 2018-2019 school year. The approaches included development and delivery of FAFSA trainings and webinars to educators statewide. An interactive dashboard was developed and utilized by schools to track progress towards the 50 percent FAFSA completion goal. The AZ FAFSA Challenge
continues to promote and increase FAFSA completions to achieve the new 2019-2020 school year goal of 52% via a dashboard and website, financial incentives and challenges, trainings and webinars. Arizona will increase FAFSA completion rates to 79% by 2030.

NCAN, funded by The Kresge Foundation and Ascendium Education Group, launched a new FASFA Completion Challenge in Spring 2018 to 25 cities across the country which included Mesa and Tucson, Arizona. Gilbert and Glendale were also identified as “Rising FAFSA” cities and took part in institutionalizing FAFSA in their cities through collaborative strategies. Mesa’s effort so substantially boosted FAFSA completion rates for the high school class of 2019, they were awarded the $100,000 grand prize at the 2019 NCAN National Conference to continue FAFSA completion efforts.

In the same year, Schmidt Futures enlisted ASU to participate in the Alliance for the American Dream, an initiative to increase the net income of 10,000 local households by 10% through innovative solutions. Project Benjamin, a coalition of Arizona organizations, formed and introduced a FAFSA chatbot powered by artificial intelligence (AI) to scale an already successful FAFSA completion model. Project Benjamin shared first place and was awarded $1 million to deploy the FAFSA chatbot in 15 school districts and launch statewide engagement campaigns to encourage more students to complete the FAFSA.

Arizona’s college access professionals and College Success Arizona commend NCAN for investing in FAFSA completion efforts over the past three years. The support and expertise encouraged historic increases in FAFSA completion rates for cities across Arizona and increased capacity to help low-and-middle-income students access the financial aid needed to enroll and succeed in postsecondary education.

In partnership and service,

April Osborn, Executive Director, Arizona Commission for Postsecondary Education
Edmundo Hidalgo, Vice President of Outreach Partnerships, Arizona State University
Teena Olszewski, Executive Director Arizona GEAR UP
Melissa Trujillo, President and CEO, Be a Leader Foundation
Rich Nickel, President and CEO, College Success Arizona
Paul Luna, President and CEO, Helios Education Foundation
Ray Ostos, Director of Student Affairs, Maricopa Community Colleges
Michael Garcia, Director of Opportunity and Achievement, Mesa Public Schools
Arlene Benavidez, Executive Director, Metropolitan Education Commission
Wendy Bruun, Executive Director of Student Affairs, Northern Arizona University
Dolores Ramirez, Postsecondary Articulation Specialist, Phoenix Union High School District
AzCAN Members Impacted by NCAN’s Investments in Arizona

AdviseAZ
Alhambra High School
Apollo High School
Arcadia High School
Arizona College Prep Erie
Arizona Commission for Postsecondary Education
Arizona Ready for College and Career
Arizona State University
Arizona Western Community College
Basha High School
Be A Leader Foundation
Betty Fairfax High School
Bioscience High School
Bostrom Alternative Center
Cactus High School
Camelback High School
Campo Verde High School
Carl Hayden High School
Catalina High Magnet School
Centennial High School
Central Arizona Community College
Central High School
Cesar Chavez High School
Chandler High School
Chaparral High School
Cholla High Magnet School
Coconino County Community College
Compadre High School
Corona del Sol High School
Coronado High School
Cortez High School
Desert Mountain High School
Desert Ridge High School
Desert Vista High School
Dobson High School
Dysart High School
Earn to Learn
Florence High School
Florence Unified School District
Franklin Police and Fire High
GEAR UP
Gilbert High School
Glendale High School
Greenway High School
Hamilton High School
Helios College Knowing & Going
Highland
Higley High School
Horizon High School
Independence High School
Ironwood High School
Liberty High School
Linda Abril Education Academy
Marana High School
Marcos de Niza
Maricopa County Community College District
Maricopa High School
Maryvale High School
McClintock High School
Mesa High School
Mesa Counts on College
Mesquite
Metro Tech High School
Moon Valley High School
Mountain Pointe
Mountain View - Mesa
Mountain View - Marana
North Canyon
North High School
Northern Arizona College Resource Center
Northern Arizona University
Palo Verde High Magnet School
Paradise Valley
Peoria High School
Perry High School
Pima Community College
Pinnacle High School
Poston Butte High School
Project More High School
Pueblo High Magnet School
Queen Creek High School
Raymond S Kellis High School
Red Mountain High School
Regional College Access Center
Rincon High School
Sabino High School
Saguaro High School
Sahuarita High School
San Tan Foothills
Santa Rita High School
Shadow Mountain High School
Shadow Ridge High School
Skyline High School
South Mountain High School
Sunnyslope High School
Sunrise Mountain High School
Tempe High School

Tempe College Connect
Thunderbird High School
Trevor Browne High School
TRIO
Tucson Magnet High School
University High School
University of Arizona
Valley of the Sun United Way
Valley Vista
Washington High School
Westwood
Williams Field
Willow Canyon