



Postsecondary Access

POLICY BRIEF 2

Increase Awareness of and Access to Advising on Career & College Pathways and Federal Financial Aid

Preparation for postsecondary success is only valuable if students **know how to and are able to enroll in postsecondary opportunities**. In North Carolina, only about three out of five high school seniors apply for federal aid¹ and only two-thirds enroll in postsecondary programs within two years of graduation. Those rates are much lower for underrepresented students and students from rural counties.²

Recommended Legislative Actions 2021

To improve thoughtful, career-minded postsecondary enrollment, during the 2021-22 Session, the North Carolina General Assembly should:

- **Expand Access to Postsecondary and Career Advising**
- **Re-Envision Access to Postsecondary Financial Aid**

myFutureNC Commitments for 2021

- Continue to Endorse Postsecondary Financial Aid Innovations

Recommended Student to Counselor Ratio:

250:1



North Carolina Student to Counselor Ratio:

350:1





Postsecondary Access

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Recommendations

Expand Access to Postsecondary and Career Advising

The nationally recommended student to counselor ratio is 250:1, but in NC that ratio is over 350:1.³

Action: Strengthen Early Emphasis on Career Planning.

Student entry into most postsecondary career and college pathways often depends on completion of a series of courses, experiences, and explorations that should [begin as early as middle school](#).⁴ However, many younger North Carolina students currently do not have access to high-quality career development advisors⁵ who can help them navigate the connections between their current school choices and their future postsecondary and career opportunities.

For 2021: To improve and expand support for middle and high school students as they develop postsecondary pathways connected to their personal career goals, the state should support expansion of the corps of middle- and high school-embedded Career Development Coordinators.

Action: Expand Availability of NC Community College Career Coaches.

Career coaches—community college employees embedded in high schools—help high school students [determine career goals](#) and identify community college programs that align with those goals.⁶ Current Career Coach cohorts conducted over 24,000 sessions with students in 2019-20 but were able to serve only about half of the counties in the state—and none in the far west and upper northeast.⁷

For 2021: To increase community college enrollment, myFutureNC recommends raising current state support to provide at least one Coach for every community college.

Action: Expand the College Advising Corps (CAC).

The Corps promotes all forms of college enrollment among [low-income, first-generation college, and underrepresented high school students](#) by offering guidance on college admission, financial aid/FAFSA, and enrollment.

For 2021: To increase overall postsecondary enrollment, CAC seeks support to grow program capacity in currently-served counties and to provide Corps members for ten additional counties (92 counties total).

Re-Envision Access to Postsecondary Financial Aid

Action: Increase Support for FAFSA⁸ Completion.

Completing the FAFSA not only is a requirement for a student to become eligible for federal financial aid but also a requirement in North Carolina for accessing state aid programs. Yet in 2019, [only about 64% of NC high school seniors completed a FAFSA form](#),⁹ and rates typically are much lower for lower-income students.¹⁰

For 2021: To begin boosting FAFSA completion rates and increase postsecondary enrollment among high school graduates, the state should provide support for NCSEAA's proposal for staffing and organizing the agency's FAFSA completion efforts.¹¹ Optimizing NCSEAA capacity in this area will allow the agency to better offer the guidance many applicants need to hurdle language barriers, navigate the complexity of the form, and overcome other challenges.¹²





myFutureNC's Commitments for 2021

Continue to Endorse Postsecondary Financial Aid Innovations

- **Make First in FAFSA an Annual Event.** myFutureNC is committed to expanding on the success of the 2020 [First in FAFSA](#)¹³ campaign by making the event annual and exploring options for expanding the campaign with virtual advising and automated completion reminders. myFutureNC's long-range plan includes handing off the campaign to NCSEAA once resources are in place for support.
- **Investigate Options for Providing Targeted FAFSA Completion Data to Schools.** Existing [FAFSA Completion Tracking Tools](#) provide counselors with real-time data on FAFSA submissions, completions, and verifications. myFutureNC will work with NCSEAA and NCDPI to complete a scan of approaches other states use to track FAFSA completion to determine whether there are other practices the state should adopt to provide counselors with additional data and support to help them improve completion rates for targeted student populations.
- **Explore Ways to Leverage the State Personal Finance Course.** For example, myFutureNC will work with NCDPI representatives to consider options for including FAFSA completion as a possible course requirement, as well as information about the value and return on investment of education after high school.
- **Identify Options for Providing Last-Dollar Tuition Coverage.** Following the lead of several North Carolina community colleges and a handful of other states¹⁴, myFutureNC will study prospects for expanding last-dollar initiatives—programs that help students pay for tuition costs not covered by state or federal aid—statewide.

Looking Ahead: Actions to Consider for 2022-23

Improving our state's approaches to increasing access to postsecondary opportunities will continue to be an important area of focus for reaching the [2M by 2030](#) goal. Going forward, the state should consider additional actions such as:

- **Better Coordinating College and Career Advising Efforts.** Each North Carolina college and career advising program already plays a critical role in helping many high school students—especially lower-income and first-generation college-goers—determine career goals and choose postsecondary pathways that support those goals. Identifying ways for these programs to work together more seamlessly could help open pathways for even more students.
- **Supporting Creation of Student Career Development Plans (CDPs).** To encourage more students to translate career goals into postsecondary action plans, middle schools and high schools could help students construct formal CDPs. CDPs help students identify postsecondary credit opportunities they can earn before graduation that align both with their interests and with career pathways in high-growth/high-demand fields. CDPs would pair well with work already under way at NCDPI, which is reviewing ways to elevate competency-based mastery via development of a Graduate Profile (informed by industry input) that will detail traits beyond test scores alone that North Carolina expects to see in all high school graduates.

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¹ National College Attainment Network (2021)

² Tippet & Khan (2018)

³ NCDPI (2019)

⁴ Coalition for Career Development (2019)

⁵ While there are currently about 400 high school-based Career Development Coordinators across the state, there are only about 40 based in middle schools.

⁶ In keeping with the importance of aligning postsecondary opportunities with workforce trends, myFutureNC believes the focus of these Coaches should continue to be on increasing enrollment in high-demand, high-growth workforce pathways.

⁷ NCCCS (2020)

⁸ [Free Application for Federal Student Aid](#)

⁹ myFutureNC (2020)

¹⁰ USED (2018)

¹¹ NCSEAA's specific plans for enhancing their FAFSA work include increasing outreach to students, families, and schools (including trainings, FAFSA events, and college application weeks), as well as providing communication about federal financial aid changes and the State's financial aid simplifications.

¹² ECS (2020); for example, NCSEAA currently only has two Spanish-speaking staff members available to serve the entire state.

¹³ June 2020

¹⁴ Including [Tennessee](#), [Idaho](#), and others