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Media Contact:

Mindy Hamlin, Hamlin Communications
mindy@hamlincommunications.com

myFutureNC Recognizes North Carolina First in FAFSA Innovation Grant Winners
Innovative school programs encourage students and families to apply for federal student aid for postsecondary education; 2022-2023 FAFSA Enrollment Opens Oct. 1

Raleigh, N.C. – Five North Carolina high schools have received myFutureNC’s [First in FAFSA Innovation Grants](#) for their programs to increase the number of high school students completing the 2021-2022 Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). Studies have found that students who complete the FAFSA are more likely to enroll in higher education, persist in their college coursework and obtain a degree.

“We want to congratulate these schools and applaud our counselors, college advisors and coaches, and everyone in our school community who have remained focused on our students throughout the pandemic. Their dedication and innovation provided a guiding light to the path of greater possibilities through some of the most challenging times,” said Cecilia Holden, president of myFutureNC. “The promising practices and lessons shared will be a spark for schools around our state to take forward to help our students pursue their dreams in the years ahead.”

The First in FAFSA 2021 Innovation Grant winners are:

- Mountain Heritage High School, *Yancey County Schools*
- North Lenoir High Schools, *Lenoir County Public Schools*
- Person High School, *Person County Schools*
- South Granville High School, *Granville County Schools*
- Statesville High School, *Iredell-Statesville Schools*

Each school will receive a \$500 grant from myFutureNC to expand college access programs and to create a culture that believes all students can pursue a postsecondary education.

Innovation Grant winners were required to meet the [First in FAFSA criteria](#), which included an innovative strategy that was family-centered, and data driven. Strategies were also required to have a collective impact and ensure equity among students by providing families the support they need to complete the FAFSA.

Innovation grant winners launched a variety of programs to build awareness and increase enrollment, including drive-ins at local community colleges, where counselors and translators were able to assist students and families with completing FAFSA forms. Other strategies included data-driven outreach

programs, one-on-one meetings and clubs developed to instill confidence in students and to encourage the completion of applications and student aid forms.

FAFSA Completion Signals Postsecondary Enrollment

Increasing the completion rate is a fundamental step in the state's efforts to align its educational priorities with its rapidly changing economy, providing future economic opportunities for students. As of September 3, 2021, 69,769 North Carolina high school seniors completed the FAFSA. This represents a 3.1% decrease year-over-year.

A study by the consulting firm Education Strategy group found that 90% of students who complete the FAFSA attend college directly after high school, compared to 55% of students who do not complete it. Completing the FAFSA gives students access to more than \$150 billion in federal student aid in the form of grants, scholarships, work-study programs and loans.

Information from the FAFSA is also used by some state and private organizations to award need and merit-based aid.

The announcement of the Innovation Grant winners comes just weeks before enrollment for the 2022-2023 FAFSA opens to students on October 1.

Learn more about the NC First in FAFSA Innovation Grant [here](#).

For information on the upcoming FAFSA enrollment period, visit studentaid.gov.

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About NC First in FAFSA

NC First in FAFSA is a myFutureNC Collaborative that focuses on increasing the number of high school seniors who complete the FAFSA application. Increasing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, or FAFSA, completion rate is a fundamental step in North Carolina's efforts to meet our state's 2 million by 2030 postsecondary educational attainment goal. Students who complete the FAFSA are more likely to enroll in higher education, persist in their college coursework and obtain a degree. Partners include Carolina Demography, College Foundation of North Carolina, College Advising Corps, the Hunt Institute, and the John M. Belk Endowment.

For more information on NC First in FAFSA, visit myfuturenc.org/first-in-fafsa/.

About myFutureNC

myFutureNC is a statewide nonprofit organization focused on educational attainment, which is led by some of North Carolina's most influential education, business and civic leaders. The organization was formed with the goal to create a stronger, more competitive North Carolina. myFutureNC is working across sectors and in communities throughout the state to close gaps in the education pathway, to



promote alignment between educational programming and business/industry needs and, ultimately, to improve educational opportunities for all North Carolinians. Join our efforts, stay in touch and help champion success for our state and all of its people.

Visit www.myfuturenc.org