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### **CHESLA Sponsors Connecticut's First FAFSA Completion Challenge**

**Hartford, CT, December 29, 2020-** The Connecticut Higher Education Supplemental Loan Authority (CHESLA) announced that it will partner with the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) to support the first statewide Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) Completion Challenge.

The goals of the Connecticut FAFSA Challenge are to increase FAFSA completion rates, college access and success among historically marginalized students. The Connecticut FAFSA Challenge will build awareness around the importance of the FAFSA and promote FAFSA completion in districts eligible for the challenge throughout the state. CSDE will select up to 10 districts to engage in the FAFSA Challenge.

The challenge will target districts with high schools that had FAFSA completion rates below 50% during the 2019-20 school year; free and reduced lunch rates above 45% during the 2019-20 school year; and a senior class larger than 50 students in 2019-20. Those selected for the challenge will benefit from additional resources and support including, but not limited to data tracking assistance, targeted communications to increase FAFSA awareness and completion, and grant funding for districts that demonstrate the highest increase of FAFSA completion rates.

Jeanette W. Weldon, CHESLA Executive Director stated, "We are proud to sponsor this important program as we continue to build on our track record of innovative initiatives that increase access to higher education for all of Connecticut's residents while supporting workforce development on a statewide basis."

Connecticut's 2019-20 FAFSA completion data shows that only 68.5% of Grade 12 students completed the FAFSA and 12,416 of Grade 12 students did not complete the FAFSA last year. 21 Alliance Districts had FAFSA completion rates below 50% and 60 high schools had FAFSA completion rates below 50%. Every year, students nationwide miss out on a staggering **\$3 billion** in available federal funding by not submitting the FAFSA.