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**Colorado FAFSA project hits the national stage**

DENVER, October 22, 2015 - Experts from the Colorado Department of Higher Education and the Colorado Department of Education went to the White House earlier this week to discuss the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, known as the FAFSA. Colorado created a model approach that has been adopted by many other states and has drawn national attention due to its effectiveness in increasing college enrollment among low income students.

The “Reach Higher” FAFSA Summit highlighted the Colorado-based FAFSA project, as well as other FAFSA projects nationwide. The Colorado project consists of a web tool that securely provides information to school counselors about students who have not yet completed a FAFSA.

In Colorado, the first year the statewide data portal was implemented (2012), FAFSA completion increased by more than 5 percent.

“When we talk about college affordability, we have to address the FAFSA. It is the first step to getting low-income students the financial help they need to continue their education,” said Lt. Governor Joe Garcia, executive director, Colorado Department of Higher Education. “Once students complete the FAFSA, they become aware of federal, state, and institutional aid that can make college affordable. Too many low-income students assume that college is out of reach because of the cost but, once they fill out the FAFSA, they discover that it is within reach.”

Approximately 30 percent of low income students that attend college do not complete a FAFSA. For high school seniors in Colorado, that equates to \$12 to \$14 million in Pell grants that is left on the table annually. Of course, many more who fail to fill out the FAFSA never enroll at all, leaving not only money, but human potential, on the table.

“A vast majority of Colorado students who complete a FAFSA during their senior year of high school enroll in college within one year,” said Interim Commissioner of Education Elliott Asp. “The FAFSA project empowers school counselors to better help students achieve their college goals and be college ready.”

Thirteen other states have joined Colorado so far in its FAFSA efforts, either by participating in the professional learning community or using the free Colorado web tool as a model for their states.

“Generous funds from the Kresge Foundation allowed us to create an application for other states to use the portal in their state,” said Dr. Beth Bean, who is leading the Colorado project in partnership with Misti Ruthven from the Colorado Department of Education. “We were also able to create a national professional learning community where we share best practices and address challenges and propose solutions. Colorado is learning from others as much as states are learning from us.”