

# MASON CAN UPDATE

NEWS FROM THE MASON COUNTY  
COLLEGE ACCESS NETWORK

## January 2024 UPDATE

Better FAFSA  
Legislative Updates  
Top Five Reasons  
College Positive Lunch & Learns  
Goal Updates  
Leadership Team 1-on-1 Sessions  
Upcoming Trainings

### Partner News

Changes to the Mason County Promise  
Upcoming Events

## Michigan Legislative Updates!

Several items that have been on the legislative agenda in Michigan may affect Michigan's students in their college-going and college-funding efforts. Our latest information is that movement on the following legislation that was in progress at the end of 2023, may be delayed until April 2024:

- Promise Zone ability to use funding to support funding beyond tuition and fees, up to the full cost of attendance, and for educational activities and non-administrative staff to support Scholars at the college level.
- Universal FAFSA for high school graduation
- Michigan ReConnect--Making the scholarship available to residents 21 and older permanently (not just through Nov. 15, 2024)

Proposed Federal changes to TANF may limit funding for Tuition Incentive Program and Michigan Tuition Grant scholarships in the future.

## Better FAFSA: What We Know So Far!

Federal Financial Aid's "soft open" of the new, "Better FAFSA" application started on December 31st, and continued through mid-January. Based on initial experiences from students, families, and practitioners, here's what we know so far:

- The FAFSA should now be available to all students and families all the time
- Parents and students no longer see the same questions, and will both be required to complete the FAFSA with separate FSA ID's and questions.
- The SAI, or Student Aid Index--which is the new name for the report of what aid a student may be eligible to receive, based on their FAFSA completion--will be available to students upon completion.
- However, initial reports of student-level data related to FAFSA completion and aid eligibility will not be sent to institutions until January ends.
- Confusingly worded questions are known issues.
- Michigan College Access Network advises for Michigan students to check the box that they qualify for free and reduced lunch, ONLY if they know their family income is below \$60,000/year.
- The IRS data retrieval tool to import tax information directly to the FAFSA has not been consistently available. It is coming back but it is unclear when. Schools doing FAFSA nights may want to advise families to bring their 2022 tax information.
- Completing the FAFSA is still required for Community Foundation Scholarships (Feb. 1), Mason County Promise (Aug. 1 prior to fall attendance is preferred), and Michigan's state scholarship/grants programs (Ideally by March 1st).
- **Please encourage students and families to keep trying to complete the FAFSA, even if they do not succeed the first time.**

# Top Five Reasons Young Adults Avoid Choosing College

2023 College Enrollment went up for the first time in several years in Michigan, according to the Michigan Association of State Universities. The increase of 3.9% over 2022 is largely attributed to the initiation of the Michigan Achievement Scholarship (MAS), which, starting with the class of 2023, provides funding for about 80% graduates who complete the FAFSA and enroll in college within 15 months of graduation. The MAS is available to students who pursue bachelor's or associate degrees, along with many trades programs that yield certifications. The MAS can be used at public and private colleges and universities, community colleges, and some trade schools. It is logical, seeing the small uptick in enrollment, then that one of the major factors that has kept students from opting to pursue college after high school is cost. In fact, cost is the greatest barrier that students tend to identify. However, it is not the only barrier, and even with "free college" and "guaranteed tuition" programs across the state, students still delay or opt out of college for several common reasons. According to a recent statewide study in Virginia, here are the top five common reasons high school graduates ages 18-30 avoided choosing college:

- COST
- STRESS
- NOT SURE WHAT TO PURSUE
- OPPORTUNITY COST
- NOT WORTH IT

Source: (<https://www.schev.edu/home/showpublisheddocument/3449>)

While cost and stress are realities, there are ways to help students understand that there are also myths about college--like that an investment into college education "isn't worth it" in the long run, and to help them plan their post-secondary pathway to alleviate cost, stress, and unknowns. To support our communities in working with young talent, Mason and Oceana CANs have put together a four-session virtual "College Positive Lunch & Learn" series. Our goal is to provide key resources and information for local professionals and parents so that they can give students the positive encouragement they need to plan a purposeful post-secondary path forward after graduation. Registration information for the upcoming series is below.

## College Positive Lunch & Learns, February-May 2024: For local HR Professionals, Service Providers, Youth Development Specialists, Educators, Youth Service Volunteers and Parents

**All free sessions take place from Noon-1PM via Zoom. A link will be sent after registration. Register here (for one or any number of sessions: <https://forms.gle/GBRnaxsam9tx7WFH8>)**

- Feb. 15th 2024: Hot Jobs: Reasons and resources to connect to high-pay, high-demand careers in West Michigan
- March 14th: Financial Aid: Understanding options at the local, state, and national level to maximize affordability
- April 11th: Career Exploration: Ways to help students explore different career options
- May 9th: Why College: Discussing education as a worthwhile investment and minimizing student debt



## **Mason CAN Goal Update**

FAFSA Completion Rates are usually a focus this time of year. With the FAFSA changes, the Michigan FAFSA Tracker is also under construction and unavailable. An update to our 75% completion goal will be shared when it becomes available.

2022 12-month enrollment and 2023 6-month enrollment data is not yet available (as of 1-18-2024) for an update, but 2022's 6-month enrollment was trending up from previous years, which is a hopeful indicator that even as high school graduation class sizes decrease, with free and lower-cost college options through the Mason County Promise, TIP, and Michigan Achievement, more local graduates may see college as an option.

### **Mason CAN Leadership Team Members: Schedule a Quarterly 1-on-1**

Because our goal updates are limited and so is your time, in place of our two-hour January quarterly leadership team meeting, please consider signing up for a 30-minute 1-on-1 to help the College Access Network specialist better understand your thoughts, concerns, questions, and interests related to college access in Mason county. Visit the scheduling page to set up a February session: <https://shorturl.at/kvGM9>



## **Upcoming College Access & Readiness Trainings (Open to Educators and CAN Members)**

### **Michigan College Access Network:**

Guiding Students After the Recent SCOTUS Decisions

Date: Jan. 26, 2024 Time: 2-3 p.m.

SCECH: This webinar was submitted for one SCECH in college preparation and selection.

[Register](#)

Preparing for the Better FAFSA

Date: Jan. 30 Time: 1-2 p.m.

Presenter: Meghan McComb, training specialist, UAspire

SCECH: This webinar was submitted for one SCECH in college preparation and selection.

[Register](#)

Xello Professional Development Series

Dates and times: Variable

SCECH: All webinars in the Xello series will be submitted for one SCECH in College Preparation & Selection or Career Exploration. [Learn more about the Xello webinar series and register →](#)

### **uAspire**

For free training on financial aid basics, FAFSA Completion, interpreting financial aid awards, and other high quality FREE resources for parents and practitioners alike, visit the following link and scroll ALL THE WAY DOWN the page: <https://www.uaspire.org/solutions/training>

## Partner News!

### Michigan County Promise Changes to Remove Minimum Credit Requirement

The Mason County Promise recently made amendments to their development plan, which allow students to use the Promise with more flexibility. In 2023, the Promise's Appeals Committee recommended that the Zone remove its 9-credit minimum to use the scholarship in fall and winter semesters. There is no longer a minimum credit requirement, as of WSCC's Winter 2024 semester.

The number of students who appealed to take under 9 credits in 2023 was 800% higher than the previous year.

Another change made possible by the recent plan amendment is to allow Mason County-based school districts to verify unhoused graduates who qualify as McKinney-Vento, attend that in-county district, and graduate from that in-county district to meet the residency requirement. If students are unhoused and have qualified, they should be advised to type the word "unknown" or "none" in the street address line when applying. The Promise Zone director will verify McKinney-Vento status with the district the applicant indicates that they are attending.

For questions about Promise qualifications, call 231-239-8224, visit [MasonCountyPromise.org](http://MasonCountyPromise.org), or email [info@masoncountypromise.org](mailto:info@masoncountypromise.org)

### Upcoming College-Readiness Events in Mason County

**January 22nd & February 29th: 3:30-6:30:** MCC FAFSA Completion Night.

By appointment.

Students and families can schedule with the MCC HS Counseling Office

**February 20th:** MCE High School FAFSA Completion Event--reach out the the MCE Counseling Office (for more information.

**February-March TBD:** FAFSA Completion event at Ludington HS.

**April 10:** 8:30-Noon "Show Up to Campus" Financial Reality Fair with Filer Credit Union and WSCC College Knowledge event for Mason County Central & Eastern seniors.

May 9, 8:30-Noon: College & Career Expo at MCC High School for MCC, MCE & G2S middle & high school students.

### **MCAN Advocacy Day in Lansing: March 12th--Meet Local Legislators!**

Mason College Access Network has funds to support Mason CAN Leaders and Action Team members to attend this full-day event in Lansing. If you are interested, reach out to Jody Maloney by calling 231-239-8224 or emailing [jodym@ludington.org](mailto:jodym@ludington.org)

### **2024 MCAN Annual Conference: Save the Date, November 6-7 at Soaring Eagle Resort**

Mason College Access Network has funds to support Mason CAN Leaders and Action Team members to attend this two-day event in Mount Pleasant. If you are interested, contact Jody Maloney by calling 231-239-8224 or emailing [jodym@ludington.org](mailto:jodym@ludington.org)

For More information on any MCAN Events, visit [MiCollegeAccess.org](http://MiCollegeAccess.org)

For more information on any Mason CAN resources, visit [MasonCountyCAN.org](http://MasonCountyCAN.org)

This update was prepared by Jody Maloney, Mason CAN Specialist, who can be reached at: [jodym@ludington.org](mailto:jodym@ludington.org), 231-239-8223 or by mailing or visit 119 S. Rath Ave, Ludington, MI 49431