



MHEC
Creating a state of achievement

Larry Hogan
Governor

Boyd K. Rutherford
Lt. Governor

Anwer Hasan
Chairperson

James D. Fielder, Jr., Ph. D.
Secretary

December 19, 2019

The Honorable Thomas V. Mike Miller
President
Senate of Maryland
H-107 State House
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

The Honorable Adrienne A. Jones
Speaker
Maryland House of Delegates
H-101 State House
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: **Report on Near Completer Campaign and
Match Program**
MSAR #11586

Dear President Miller and Speaker Jones:

Section 11–209 of the Education Article requires a near completer communication campaign to identify near completers in the State and to encourage near completers¹ to re-enroll in an institution of higher education to finish a degree. By December 1, 2019, and every December 1 through 2025, the Commission shall submit a report to the General Assembly on the details of the statewide communication campaign and the match program, including implementation of the campaign and match program and a detailed account of the expenditures under the grant program.

The Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC) last spring requested all institutions to identify students who were no longer enrolled and who met the definition of a “Near Completer” so MHEC could conduct a targeted outreach campaign during the 2019-2020 academic year (see attached memo). Four institutions explicitly chose not to participate in this statewide campaign. Several institutions noted in their response that they already have a near completer-type program, campaign, or outreach in place. We received contact information for 12,877 Near Completors from 21 institutions².

¹ As defined in Education Article §11–209, the communication campaign must focus on near completors who: (1) earned a minimum grade point average of 2.0 on a scale of 4.0 while in college and (2) earned at least 45 credit hours if the individual attended a community college or at least 90 credit hours if the individual attended a senior higher education institution.

² MHEC received contact information for near completors from the following institutions: Allegany Community College, Anne Arundel Community College, Community College of Baltimore County, Baltimore City Community College, Cecil College, Chesapeake College, Coppin State University, College of Southern Maryland, Frederick Community College, Garret College, Hagerstown Community College, Montgomery College, Maryland Institute and College of Art, Morgan State University, Prince George’s Community College, St. Mary’s College of Maryland, Towson University, University of Maryland, Baltimore, University of Maryland Eastern Shore, University of Maryland Global Campus, and Wor-Wic Community College.

On July 1, 2019, MHEC launched the Match Program on a devoted webpage³, which utilizes Maryland's existing Academic Program Inventory (API). Using the website, a Near Completer can match their original major with Maryland institutions that currently offer the same or similar majors. Near Completers can identify both 2-year and 4-year colleges and universities by searching for academic programs by areas of interest (i.e., major) or by searching for academic programs by institution and degree level. Once a program of study has been identified, a Near Completer is encouraged to contact the relevant universities and colleges that match with the major they are interested in and inquire about re-enrollment. MHEC plans to individually notify Near Completers of the Match Program and the Near Completer Grant by the end of December, 2019 utilizing the contact information that the institutions provided.

The statewide communication campaign began July 1, 2018, with a social media push letting the public know that the Near Completer Grant would be available during the 2019-2020 academic year. The goal of the FY2020 statewide communication campaign is to promote messaging that (a) Near Completers are encouraged to complete their program of study in Maryland and that (b) they may be eligible for the Near Completer Grant.

MHEC expects to enter into an Interagency Agreement (IA) with Maryland Public Television (MPT) to oversee all television, radio, and digital media buys and implementation of those purchases over the eight month-long campaign (\$98,000). Other messaging will be promoted through various forms of advertising and enhancing outreach by way of brochures*, billboards*, digital media, television*, radio*, social media*, and podcasts (*as specified in Education Article §11-209). MHEC will use the lists of identified Near Completers from the institutions to determine the regional outreach of potential students. Promotional items and banners will also be purchased as part of this campaign (\$27,000).

The campaign will emphasize that "Life Happens" and will target students that may not have completed their program of study due to financial circumstances, family responsibilities, health reasons, or other reasons. MHEC is considering a variety of specific campaign messages, including:

- Get ready... Get set... Go back to college! Did you start a degree, but dropped out for whatever reason and now are ready to go back and finish it? If so, The Maryland Higher Education Commission has money to help you achieve your goal. To learn more about the Near Completer Grant go to MHEC.maryland.gov
- Get ready... Get set... Go toward your Goal - Learn more about getting money to finish your college education with funding from the Near Completer Grant at MHEC.maryland.gov
- Don't let money be the reason you miss out on a college degree! (Sound of referee's whistle and "It's Good") If you are One Step Away from Achieving **your** Goal, go to mhec.maryland.org to learn more about the Near Completer Grant which will help you pay to go back to college and finish your degree!
- Did you start your college degree, but for some reason never finished it? Well, the Maryland Higher Education Commission wants to give you money that could help you finish what you started. To learn more about the Near Completer Grant go to MHEC.maryland.gov
- Experience the thrill of being handed your college degree, after not finishing that dream years ago. It's not too late! The Maryland Higher Education's Near Completer Grant has money to help you finish what you started. To learn more go to MHEC.maryland.gov and click on Near Completer.
- Did you start your college degree, but due to family obligations never finished it? Well, the Maryland Higher Education Commission wants to give you money that could help you finish what you started. To learn more about the Near Completer Grant go to MHEC.maryland.gov

³ <https://mhec.maryland.gov/Pages/Near-Completers.aspx>

- Did you start your college degree, but due to health issues never finished it? Well, the Maryland Higher Education Commission wants to give you money that could help you finish what you started. To learn more about the Near Completer Grant go to MHEC.maryland.gov
- Want to move up in your job, but need to finish that degree to be considered for a promotion? Well, the Maryland Higher Education Commission wants to give you money that could help you finish what you started. To learn more about the Near Completer Grant go to MHEC.maryland.gov.

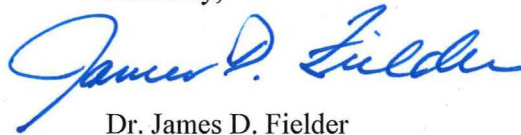
Several performance measures will be used to evaluate the effectiveness of the statewide communication campaign, including:

- ✓ Online analytics will be utilized to measure the effectiveness of each vendor.
- ✓ Web traffic analytics for the MHEC “match” webpage (additional details regarding this initiative can be found below).
- ✓ Web traffic analytics for the MHEC for the Near Completer Grant webpage.
- ✓ Analytics for relevant social media posts; data will also be collected directly from the vendor where appropriate.

MHEC expects that the IA with MPT will allow for billboards, TV advertisements, and other forms of advertising to launch late January/early February. This outreach will support MHEC’s efforts to communicate critical deadlines (e.g., FASFA filing deadlines) while notifying the public of the Near Completer Match Program.

If you have any questions regarding this report, please feel free to contact Mr. Lee Towers, Director of Legislative Affairs, at 410-767-3059, or lee.towers@maryland.gov.

Sincerely,



Dr. James D. Fielder
Secretary