# Community Partnerships Spotlight

## The Commit Partnership

### The Landscape

- **Region:** North Texas
- **Partner districts:** 37 K–12 districts, public charter networks, and independent private schools

### The Work

- **Connect 200+ partners across Dallas County and the state of Texas**
- **Provide hands-on support for 120+ school districts representing over 2.1 million students enrolled in Texas’ public schools**
- **Support state legislation to increase access to quality schools, facilities, and educators**

### Background

The Commit Partnership (Commit) connects over 200 school districts, institutions of higher education, and community organizations across Dallas County and the state.

Commit describes its true north goal as working to ensure that 50% of Dallas County residents between the ages of 25 and 34 can earn a living wage through increasing educational attainment. Since 2012, Commit has been helping Dallas County meet key academic milestones, including increasing financial aid application completion rates.

### The Need and Solution

Dallas County, the eighth most populous county in the United States, is home to about 10% of students in Texas and 1% of students nationwide. More students are enrolled in Dallas County schools than in 20 US states.

Commit found that 70% of K–12 students in Dallas County live in households facing economic insecurity. Considering these numbers, Commit recognizes the importance of educational attainment, its impact on the economic success of the state, and the inequities that exist. Students need support to find pathways to higher education, credential opportunities, and higher wages. Commit saw that it could provide this support by increasing financial aid application completion.

Stakeholders include nonprofit organizations, higher education institutions, school counselors and administrators, government officials, and workforce agencies. Working together, Commit developed support systems to increase financial aid application completion. This means that more students could earn credentials aligned with high-demand jobs and economic opportunity. These solutions focused on the following goals:

- Creating a more effective system for data access and monitoring
- Providing effective professional development to all campus staff that support financial aid applications
- Supporting campuses in hosting financial aid completion events
- Convening to share best practices and build upon each other’s success

### Turning Ideas into Actions

We know that community partners serve unique functions and offer different strengths. Consider how your organization can bring Commit's support practices into your work.

### Data Access and Monitoring

The task of monitoring financial aid application completion was both tedious and time-consuming. Promise Case Management, a web-based portal for school staff, was Commit's solution to this problem. The portal combines senior rosters from its scholarship program and FAFSA completion data from ApplyTexas to create a more effective monitoring process. By automating the monitoring process, Commit could let school counselors refocus their time on students.

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**Learn More**

[The Commit Partnership](#)
Your Action Items

- Find out where your K–12 school partners get student-level financial aid data. Schools and partners can work with their region's Educational Service Center and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board to get data through ApplyTexas. Schools can also enter into an agreement with the US Department of Education.

Professional Development

Commit recognizes the value of continuous improvement using data from financial aid completion. They host trainings and workshops to help campuses adopt improvement cycles. To help build capacity, Commit also provides ongoing training opportunities with the support of uAspire and Texas OnCourse. And to support college access work, they host summer institutes that help campuses build teams including administrators, coaches, teachers, and parent liaisons.

Your Action Items

- Learn where your school partners get financial aid training. If they don’t have access to training, direct them to the Texas OnCourse Academy. It has self-paced modules on both the FAFSA and the TASFA.

Financial Aid Completion Events

Commit staff support campus financial aid events and share out strategies that work. One successful campus strategy provides low-touch training just before campus financial aid events for teachers, staff, and volunteers. What they learn lets newly trained staff answer basic questions. Meanwhile, the school counselors float and address more complicated financial aid questions.

Your Action Items

- Consider what you already do to help students complete financial aid applications. Build a team of school counselors, district and campus administrators, staff, teachers, coaches, volunteers, and community partners to support your efforts.
- Depending on your role, consider how you can train your staff or provide training for other volunteers in the area.
- Schedule your time and communicate the seriousness of these events.

Best Practices Networking

Four times a year, Commit brings together its network of 57 high schools for Bright Spot Share Outs. At these networking events, Commit uses data to showcase schools that have improved. These schools then have a platform to share their best practices. These events have inspired many districts to adopt practices with proven results.

Your Action Items

- Work with your district counseling leadership to develop networking opportunities for school counselors to share bright spots. Don’t be afraid to share what’s working and what’s not. And learn from other campuses that are finding success.
- Find networking opportunities outside your district. Connect with institutions of higher education, community organization, and more!