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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

## **Higher Education Compact Kicks off Second Annual Financial Aid Awareness Month**

**CLEVELAND** – On Wednesday, January 9, 2013, Mayor Frank G. Jackson and his administration, the Cleveland Metropolitan School District, and College Now Greater Cleveland partnered with the Higher Education Compact of Greater Cleveland (the Compact) to ensure that all Clevelanders have access to the most important college-going resource available – the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).

Increasing college attainment has never been more critical to Greater Cleveland; but with tuition rates rising every year, paying for college has never been more challenging for students and families. Now, more than ever, it takes the ENTIRE community to get students to and through college.

“There **is** money available to help students pay for college,” said Mayor Jackson. “The FAFSA is the key to accessing those financial resources.”

The FAFSA is a critical first step in the financial aid process. It is the basis for any type of financial aid – from need-based aid from the government to merit-based aid from colleges and universities or other private funding sources. Financial aid, based on a completed FAFSA, is awarded on a first-come, first-served basis, so filling out the form as early as possible – ideally by the February 15 priority deadline – gives students a better chance of receiving more dollars to put toward their education.

Financial Aid Awareness Month is a community-wide effort to make sure that students and families have access to the financial aid information and resources available to help them finance a college education. From January 9 through February 15, there will be more than 50 opportunities throughout Greater Cleveland for students and families to complete the FAFSA and receive financial aid counseling.

Cleveland Metropolitan School District CEO Eric Gordon said, “We find that many students and families begin a FAFSA but do not complete it. Having experts trained in FAFSA completion will help us significantly increase the number of students who complete the form and have access to the financial aid opportunities that will open doors to higher education for them.”

Lee Friedman, CEO of College Now Greater Cleveland, said, “Through our work at College Now, we know that FAFSA completion is an indicator of whether or not a student will enroll in college and start on the path toward a degree. In order to increase the number of students completing degrees, we need to increase the number of students starting their degrees; as a result, FAFSA completion numbers are very important.”

## **About the Higher Education Compact of Greater Cleveland**

The Higher Education Compact of Greater Cleveland is a collaborative partnership among the City of Cleveland, the Cleveland Metropolitan School District, 15 Ohio colleges and universities, and more than 40 community organizations that seeks to remove the obstacles that prevent Cleveland youth from going to and succeeding in college. Launched in 2011 by Mayor Frank G. Jackson, the Compact's goal is to align the efforts of member organizations to best use limited precious resources and increase the city's number of college graduates.