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PRESS RELEASE  
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## **Completing the FAFSA a strong predictor of college attendance in Florida**

*Florida CAN issues challenge to all Florida schools and districts  
to raise FAFSA completion rates by 5% in 2016*

**Tampa, FL** – Completing the [Free Application for Federal Student Aid \(FAFSA\)](#) is the strongest predictor of college-going rates in Florida, according to [new research](#) by Florida College Access Network (Florida CAN). Florida CAN analyzed data from over 460 Florida public schools to quantify the impact of FAFSA completion and 18 other school-level characteristics on college attendance.

“The results of our analysis show the importance of increasing FAFSA completion to boost college attendance in our state,” said Troy Miller, Associate Director for Research and Policy for the Florida College Access Network. “Ensuring that Florida students have information and assistance to complete the form increases postsecondary and economic opportunities for Florida’s students.”

Although completing the FAFSA application increases the likelihood that students will attend college, Florida lags behind most states in the proportion of high school graduates who complete the form. In 2014-15, Florida ranked 35<sup>th</sup> in the country for its percentage of that year’s high school graduating class completing the FAFSA (50.9%). Florida CAN estimates that our high school graduates leave behind over \$100 million in Pell Grant dollars each year by not completing the form—free money they could have used to help pay for college or career school.

Because FAFSA is so important to students' educational futures, Florida CAN is encouraging all Florida schools and districts in Florida to raise their FAFSA completion rates by at least 5% from the previous year.

**The Florida FAFSA Challenge** is a statewide campaign that aims to increase the proportion of Florida high school seniors who complete the FAFSA. The campaign encourages all Florida schools and districts to set a FAFSA completion goal 5% higher than their rate through March 31 of last year. However, schools are welcomed and encouraged to set more ambitious goals or goals that fit their school's unique circumstances. Participating schools will have through March 31, 2016 to reach their chosen goal for the challenge.

To help schools and districts achieve their FAFSA completion goal, Florida CAN has also released the [FAFSA Completion Toolkit](#), a one-stop guide that includes resources and strategies to improve FAFSA completion.

Florida CAN will celebrate the progress and success of all schools that make significant improvements in FAFSA completion for their graduating seniors, with trophies awarded to the schools and districts that have the highest FAFSA completion rate, the most improved completion rate, and reach the 5% goal in the fewest amount of days. All schools that set and meet their own unique goal or achieve the 5% goal by March 31, 2016 will also be recognized.

Schools and districts interested in participating in the Florida FAFSA Challenge can [register here](#). To find the FAFSA completion rate for a Florida school or district as of March 31, 2015, visit the [Florida FAFSA Finish Line Dashboard](#).

Starting February 1, the dashboard will be updated regularly, providing real-time information on FAFSA completion rates for schools and districts across the state. Students interested in attending college during the 2016-17 academic year can begin completing the form on January 1, 2016.

The Florida FAFSA Challenge is made possible thanks to the support of the [Helios Education Foundation](#) and [Swift Family Foundation](#).

### **About Florida College Access Network**

The mission of the Florida College Access Network is to create and strengthen a statewide network that catalyzes and supports communities to improve college & career preparation, access, and completion for all students. Our Big Goal is to increase the percentage of Florida residents who hold a high-quality postsecondary degree or credential to 60% by the year 2025. For more information, visit [www.floridacollegeaccess.org](http://www.floridacollegeaccess.org).

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