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PRESS RELEASE
FLORIDA C.A.N.!
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The 2016-17 Florida FAFSA Challenge has begun!

New October 1st start date poised to help more students get money for college

Florida College Access Network is pleased to announce the second annual [Florida FAFSA Challenge](#), a statewide call to action to schools, districts and communities to help more graduating high school seniors get money for college by applying for the [Free Application for Federal Student Aid \(FAFSA\)](#). The Florida FAFSA Challenge encourages schools and districts to boost FAFSA completion rates by at least 5% compared to last year and recognizes the schools that have made the greatest advances.

Last school year, nearly fifty schools and districts increased the percent of 12th graders who filled out the form by at least 5% compared to the previous year. With the FAFSA now available beginning October 1st (compared to January 1st previously), schools and communities have even more time to help their students qualify for financial aid.

“Last year’s FAFSA Challenge showed us there are many schools and districts across the state doing amazing work to help students complete the FAFSA and receive financial aid,” said Troy Miller, Associate Director for Research and Policy with Florida CAN. “Each year, tens of thousands of Florida high school graduates miss out on over \$100 million in Pell Grant dollars alone. We are encouraged by the schools and communities committed to ensuring that every student gets the money they need to attend college or career school.”

The 2016-17 Florida FAFSA Challenge runs through March 31, 2017. The highest-performing schools and districts in the following categories will receive awards and public recognition:

1. “MVP” (Highest FAFSA completion rate through March 31, 2017)
2. “Most Improved” (Improved the most compared to previous year through March 31)
3. “Biggest Boost” (Largest week to week improvement in FAFSAs completed)

All schools and districts that increase their FAFSA completion rate by at least 5% from the previous year will also be recognized. To learn more about the Florida FAFSA Challenge and how to register, please visit the [Florida Initiatives](#) page of the Florida CAN website.

There are more resources than ever before to help students complete the FAFSA:

- [***Florida FAFSA Challenge Toolkit***](#): Florida CAN's toolkit contains resources and strategies to support efforts to increase FAFSA completion rates.
- [***Florida FAFSA Finish Line Data Dashboard***](#): Florida CAN's interactive dashboard includes FAFSA completion rates of over 600 public schools in Florida, with comparisons to schools' FAFSA rates of the previous year. Schools' FAFSA completion rates are updated every two weeks beginning November 2016.
- [***CGS!Florida***](#): Florida campaign coordinated by the Florida Department of Education's Office of Student Financial Assistance (OSFA) provides free, in-person assistance with completing the FAFSA at over 20 high schools and colleges across the state.
- [***Form Your Future Campaign and Outreach Toolkit***](#): New digital campaign launched September 30th by National College Access Network to support FAFSA completion efforts, including promotional materials geared toward students.
- [***Up Next text reminders***](#): Part of First Lady Michelle Obama's Better Make Room campaign, a new service that allows students to text "COLLEGE" to 44044 for free financial aid and college search text reminders.
- [***National College Access Network FAFSA resources***](#): List of financial aid and FAFSA resources vetted by college access professionals and national experts.
- [***U.S. Department of Education Office of Federal Student Aid \(FSA\)***](#): The FSA offers a FAFSA Toolkit as well as Early FAFSA resources to help counselors, advisors and advocates assist students and their families with the financial aid process.

Additionally, the Florida Department of Education's [***Office of Student Financial Assistance \(OSFA\)***](#) can also provide districts access to the names of students in their schools that have completed the FAFSA form, enabling schools to identify students that most need assistance. Eighteen school districts currently take advantage of this resource. For more information about this effort or to receive this information in your district, contact Lori Auxier, OSFA's Director of Outreach Services, at [***Lori.Auxier@fldoe.org***](mailto:Lori.Auxier@fldoe.org).

Florida CAN will post updates ("Leaderboards") to the Florida FAFSA Challenge regularly at [***www.floridacollegeaccess.org***](http://www.floridacollegeaccess.org). For any additional questions, contact Arianna Pineiro, Florida CAN's Special Projects Coordinator, at [***apineiro@floridacollegeaccess.org***](mailto:apineiro@floridacollegeaccess.org).

The Florida FAFSA Challenge is 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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