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PRESS RELEASE  
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
Friday, September 29, 2017

**The 2017-18 Florida FAFSA Challenge starts next week!**

*Schools, districts, and community organizations can register for the challenge now*

Florida College Access Network (FCAN) is pleased to announce the [Florida FAFSA Challenge](#) for the 2017-18 school year! The challenge calls on schools, districts, and communities to increase the number of graduating seniors who complete the [Free Application for Federal Student Aid \(FAFSA\)](#).

The Florida FAFSA Challenge aims to build off the success of the last year's efforts. According to U.S. Department of Education data, almost 10% more Florida seniors completed the FAFSA over the previous year, which was the third highest increase of any state in the nation. FCAN estimates this resulted in at least \$37 million more in Pell grants for the graduating class of 2017.

Although last year's results are encouraging, the state faces some unique challenges this year. Parts of Florida are still recovering from the damage caused by Hurricane Irma, which resulted in school closures throughout the state in the early part of the fall semester and adversely affected college preparation plans for graduating high school seniors. FCAN plans to track FAFSA completion data early this fall to get a sense of where more help and resources may be needed.

"Hurricane Irma dramatically harmed many communities served by our schools and districts, and students and their families are still in a state of recovery," said Laurie Meggesin, executive director of FCAN. "The good news is our state is resilient. We are inspired by the many ways schools and communities are working to ensure Florida seniors have what they need to stay on track."

One of the most important steps in the college-going process is completing the FAFSA, which allows students to find out how much federal aid they can use to attend college. To recognize the start date for filling out the FAFSA, the 2017-18 Florida FAFSA Challenge begins October 1, 2017 and continues through March 31, 2018. 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, 2018)
2. Most Improved (compared to previous year through March 31)

FCAN will also again recognize “FAFSA Champions” – all schools and districts that increase their FAFSA completion rate by at least 5%. In recognition of the impact of Hurricane Irma on our communities, we will also recognize organizations and institutions that have gone the extra mile to keep students on track, even in these trying times.

New this year, FCAN will also honor schools with the “50/50 Club,” which recognizes schools and districts that have 50% or more students who are eligible for free- and reduced-priced lunches who reach at least 50% FAFSA completion by March 31.

### **Register Today**

Register your school, district or organization for the Florida FAFSA Challenge [here](#). Registered schools receive special updates, tips for success, and are eligible for drawings and prizes. To learn more about the Challenge, visit the [Statewide Initiatives](#) page on FCAN’s website.

FCAN and its partners offer a variety of tools and resources to help schools and districts increase FAFSA completion. Just a few of them are listed here:

- [The Florida FAFSA Challenge Toolkit](#): Florida CAN’s toolkit contains resources and strategies to support efforts to increase FAFSA completions.
- [UpNext Text Reminders](#): This service allows students to text their first and last name to (240) 623-8319 to get text-based advising related to financial aid, college applications, and more.
- [Form Your Future Outreach Campaign Toolkit](#): A digital campaign launched by National College Access Network to support FAFSA completion efforts, including promotional materials geared toward students.
- [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 provide districts access to the names of students in their schools who have completed the FAFSA form. OSFA also has a new Speaker’s Bureau that can connect your school or district with local financial aid experts to speak at your financial aid and FAFSA completion nights. For more information, contact OSFA’s outreach director, Jan Smith, at [Jan.Smith@fldoe.org](mailto:Jan.Smith@fldoe.org).

Florida CAN will post Florida FAFSA Challenge updates (“Leaderboards”) regularly at [www.floridacollegeaccess.org](http://www.floridacollegeaccess.org). For any additional questions, contact Amy Bolick, Florida CAN’s Statewide Programs Coordinator, at [abolick@floridacollegeaccess.org](mailto:abolick@floridacollegeaccess.org).

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