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PRESS RELEASE
Florida College Access Network
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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The 2018-19 Florida FAFSA Challenge starts today!

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 2018-19 school year! The challenge calls on schools, districts, and communities to increase the number of graduating high school seniors who complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), which helps students who qualify access funds to pay for college.

Completing the FAFSA is one of the most important steps in the college-going process. To recognize the start date for filling out the FAFSA, the 2018-19 Florida FAFSA Challenge begins today, **October 1, 2018** and continues through **March 31, 2019**. 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, 2019)
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% compared to last school year.

New this year, FCAN will honor “FAFSA Innovators,” the schools and community organizations that demonstrate innovative approaches in helping more students complete a FAFSA.

“From mobile FAFSA labs to holding virtual FAFSA nights after Hurricane Irma hit last year, we’re seeing communities get creative in finding ways to overcome barriers for students in completing a FAFSA,” says Laurie Meggesin, Executive Director of FCAN. “With the FAFSA Innovator award, we can capture more of these unique approaches to share with other communities throughout the state.” FCAN will announce further details on the nomination process at a later date.

The 2018-19 Florida FAFSA Challenge aims to build off the success of last year’s efforts, when Florida boosted the proportion of seniors completing FAFSA by close to 1% compared to the 2016-17 school year. As a result, Florida’s Class of 2018 qualified for [an estimated \\$155 million in Pell Grant dollars](#), which was an increase of about \$6 million from the previous year.

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While Florida communities have made tremendous strides in improving FAFSA completion rates, there is still more work to do. Florida's 61.5% FAFSA completion rate for the 2017-18 school year ranked 31st in the U.S. FCAN estimates that Florida high school graduates are still leaving more than \$100 million in Pell Grant dollars on the table each year given that the state has the 3rd highest number of Pell Grant-eligible students.

Additionally, almost 10% of FAFSAs submitted last school year were incomplete or incorrect, making Florida the state with the fourth highest error rate. FCAN estimates that Florida students missed out on more than \$25 million in Pell grants because of FAFSA errors last year. Florida College Access Network encourages communities to help students avoid and resolve [common FAFSA mistakes](#), and is working with partners across the country to advocate for a simplified form.

FCAN also encourages school districts to take a collaborative approach with their community partners. Schools that partnered with their [local college access networks \(LCAN\)](#) saw even better FAFSA completion results last year, increasing FAFSA completion in their counties by 10% more than communities without an LCAN.

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](#): FCAN'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 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 representative, Pedro Hernandez, at Pedro.Hernandez@fldoe.org.

FCAN will post Florida FAFSA Challenge updates ("Leaderboards") regularly at www.floridacollegeaccess.org, along with publishing a "First Look" data dashboard beginning in November. For any additional questions, contact Amy Bolick, FCAN's Community Engagement and Programs Manager, at abolick@floridacollegeaccess.org.

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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

Florida College Access Network (FCAN) is Florida's first collaborative network committed to ensuring all Floridians have the opportunity to achieve an education beyond high school and prosper in Florida's dynamic economy. Our mission is to create and sustain a statewide network that catalyzes and supports communities to increase college and career preparation, access, and completion for all Florida students. For more information, visit floridacollegeaccess.org.