



# The Florida FAFSA Challenge

2018-19 FAFSA  
*Completion Toolkit*

**FLORIDA**  
COLLEGE ACCESS NETWORK

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# Dear Reader,

## **On behalf of Florida College Access Network (FCAN),**

thank you for participating in the 2018 - 19 Florida FAFSA Challenge! This initiative aims to increase the proportion of Florida high school seniors who complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).

Students must complete this application to qualify for financial aid, like Pell Grants, to help pay for college. The Florida FAFSA Challenge encourages schools, districts, and communities to set bold and attainable FAFSA completion goals and to implement strategies that help more students afford college.

Many communities in the state have already been working hard to boost FAFSA completion rates. This initiative recognizes their achievements and supports their efforts with access to resources and proven strategies. Use this guide as an introduction to the campaign and as a one-stop shop for FAFSA resources.

**Please share your successful strategies with us.** We may even feature your achievements throughout the campaign! Contact our Community Engagement and Programs Manager, Amy Bolick, at [abolick@floridacollegeaccess.org](mailto:abolick@floridacollegeaccess.org) or at (813) 974-6429 with questions and suggestions.

**FCAN thanks the Helios Education Foundation and the Swift Family Foundation for their generous support of the Florida FAFSA Challenge.**



# About Florida College Access Network

**Florida College Access Network (FCAN)** is a statewide network of leaders, organizations, educators, and individuals who are collectively committed to dramatically increasing postsecondary opportunities for all Florida students—especially students traditionally underrepresented in higher education, such as low income students and those who are the first in their families to go to college.

**Our Mission:** To create and strengthen a statewide network that catalyzes and supports communities to improve college and career readiness, access, and completion for all students.

**Our Vision:** At least 60% of working-age Floridians will hold a high-quality post-secondary degree or credential by the year 2025.

## Our Guiding Values:

- **College is postsecondary education.** Florida College Access Network uses the term “college” to refer to the attainment of high-quality postsecondary credentials beyond high school, including technical certificates and academic degrees.
- **College readiness is career readiness.** All Florida students deserve to receive a high-quality Pre K-12 education which prepares them academically for success in college or a career.
- **College is for everyone.** All Florida students deserve the opportunity to pursue a high-quality postsecondary education that prepares them to effectively communicate, engage, and compete in the 21st century knowledge-based global economy.
- **College is a public good.** Postsecondary educational opportunity and attainment are critical to a just and equitable society, strong democracy, robust economy, and healthy communities.
- **Reaching Goal 2025 will require collective action.** Accelerating high-quality degree production in Florida to meet Goal 2025 requires strategic partnerships and active involvement from all sectors.

# Florida Students are Losing Money

## Florida Lags in FAFSA Completion

An estimated **59% of all Florida high school seniors** qualified for Pell Grants, the **3rd highest** in the nation. But despite the high number of Pell-eligible students, Florida ranks **31st in the nation** for FAFSA completion.

Last year, **fewer than 50%** of Florida's public school students had completed the FAFSA by June 30, 2018. According to FCAN estimates, high school graduates in Florida leave behind over **\$100 million in Pell Grants** each year because they do not complete the form.

Completing the FAFSA is the **first step** to accessing financial aid for college.

FCAN research shows that FAFSA completion is a strong indicator of **future college attendance**.

## Taking on the Challenge

In **2015**, FCAN introduced the Florida FAFSA Challenge as an effort to boost the statewide FAFSA completion rate.

Schools and communities participating in the challenge adopt the goal of **increasing FAFSA completion by at least 5%** over the previous year.

In the 2017-18 school year, **124 schools in 42 districts** met or exceeded the 5% increase goal.

### FAFSA Challenge Participation

- 2017-18: 290 schools in 37 districts
- 2016-17: 153 schools in 17 districts
- 2015-16: 50 schools in 14 districts

### FAFSA Challenge Outcomes

When the FAFSA Challenge started in the 2014-15 school year, Florida ranked **41<sup>st</sup>** in FAFSA completion out of 50 states and DC.

By the 2016-17 school year, Florida's rank increased to **31<sup>st</sup>**.

## Register Today

Schools, districts, LCANS, and community organizations can **register as participants** in the Florida FAFSA Challenge.

Registrants get access to **free resources and promotional materials**, and updates on the latest FAFSA information and resources.

Registering helps FCAN connect schools and communities with the resources they need to support their students.

# Winning the FAFSA Challenge

## Winner's Categories

- **MVP:** Schools and districts with the highest overall rates of FAFSA completion.
- **Most Improved:** Schools and districts that have the highest increase in FAFSA completion over the previous year.
- **FAFSA Champions:** All schools and districts that achieve 5% or more increase in FAFSA completion by the end of the challenge.
- **\*NEW\* FAFSA Innovator:** Awarded to schools, districts, and community organizations taking an innovative approach to improving FAFSA Completion. To learn more about the award, see the FAFSA Challenge Press Release.



## Why the March End Date?

While students can complete the FAFSA through the year, the Florida FAFSA Challenge ends in March to **encourage early completion.**

Since financial aid is distributed on a **first-come first-served basis**, students who complete the FAFSA early are more likely to receive the full amount of aid they are eligible for.

Additionally, many colleges and universities also have **earlier priority deadlines** for distributing institutional aid. Completing the FAFSA early increases a student's chances of accessing this aid.

### 2017-18 FAFSA Challenge Dates

**October 1, 2018:**

Challenge Begins

**March 31, 2018:**

Challenge Ends

**May 8, 2019:**

Awards Luncheon

# Helping Families With the FAFSA

Completing the FAFSA can be challenging for both students and parents. Use these resources to assist students in the process.

## FAFSA Completion

- **Federal Student Aid YouTube Channel:** This YouTube channel includes a variety of video walkthroughs for the FAFSA
- **FAFSA First:** FutureMakers Coalition, an LCN in Southwest Florida, has created a variety of resources to address common myths and frequently asked questions about FAFSA.
- **Additional Resources:** Reference the appendix at the back of this guide for more FAFSA completion resources

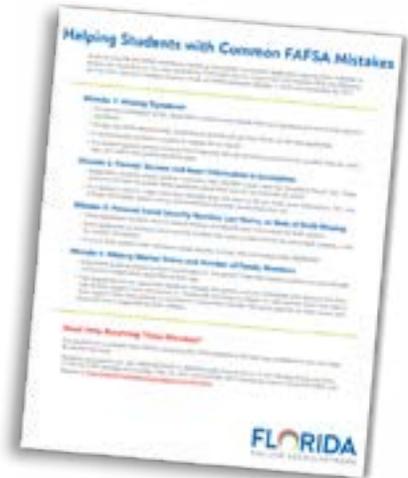


## Submitted vs. Completed

In some cases, a student may think they completed the FAFSA, but have actually submitted a form that is incomplete or contains errors.

Helping these students correct or complete their forms can help boost FAFSA completion rates.

FCAN's one-pager "Helping Students with Common FAFSA Mistakes" outlines four of the most common FAFSA mistakes, and how to resolve them.



## FAFSA Verification

Verification is a federal audit of students who submit a FAFSA.

Approximately half of Pell-eligible students are selected for FAFSA verification.

Future Ready Collier's FAFSA verification guide provides helpful tips for assisting students with the verification process.



# Meeting Your FAFSA Completion Goal

## Tips for Setting a FAFSA Goal

- Make your goal **ambitious but attainable**. FCAN recommends a 5% increase goal.
- If your community has a **Local College Access Network (LCAN)**, work with them to set a community-wide goal.
- **Make your goal public!** Share your goal with your school and community to build excitement.

## Tracking Your Goal

The **Florida FAFSA Challenge Data Dashboard** allows schools and communities to track their FAFSA completion rates in real time: [floridacollegeaccess.org/research-and-data/florida-fafsa-challenge-dashboard/](http://floridacollegeaccess.org/research-and-data/florida-fafsa-challenge-dashboard/)

FCAN's dashboard includes FAFSA completion data for 12th graders at over **500 schools across the state of Florida**.

**New:** Thanks to FCAN's advocacy with the Department of Education, the dashboard now includes data for high school seniors **up to age 19**.

## Accessing Student-Level Data

The Florida Department of Education Office of Student Financial Assistance (OFSA) works with school districts to make **student-level FAFSA completion data** available to schools. This dataset shows by name which students have started a FAFSA, completed a FAFSA, or submitted a FAFSA with errors.

On average, nearly **10% of FAFSAs submitted** in Florida are incomplete or incorrect. Knowing which students have submitted FAFSAs with errors can help you identify and reach out to students who may need extra help.

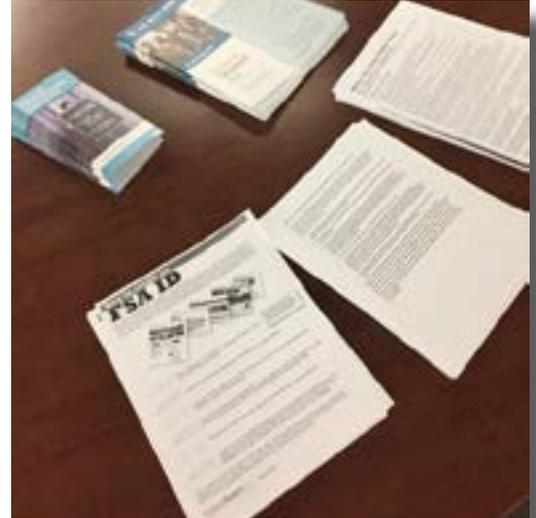
For more information on how school districts can access to this data, **contact Pete Hernandez**, OFSA Director of Outreach, at [pedro.hernandez@fldoe.org](mailto:pedro.hernandez@fldoe.org).



# Hosting a FAFSA Completion Event

## Types of FAFSA Events

- **FAFSA Information Night:** Cover basic financial aid information and familiarize parents and students with the FAFSA.
- **FAFSA Lab:** Provide students and parents the opportunity to complete the FAFSA with the assistance of knowledgeable volunteers.
- **Multi-Purpose Events:** Include FAFSA completion information in other events like a college application drive, back to school night, etc.



## Tips for a Successful Event

- Target students whose grades and course history indicate college readiness, and personally invite them and their parents to FAFSA events.
- Serve food or refreshments at after-school events.
- Work with partners at your school to raffle off yearbooks or prom tickets to students who complete their FAFSA to encourage participation.
- Note: Designate alternate activities, like applying for scholarships, for students who are not eligible to complete a FAFSA.

### Contact FCAN for Additional Support

**Promotional materials** like stickers and posters for events

**Facilitating conversations** with local college access networks (LCANs)

**Technical support** with the FAFSA Challenge Dashboard

**Identifying financial aid speakers** in your area

## Community Partners

- **Local College Access Networks (LCANs):** Last year, communities served by an LCAN saw FAFSA completion rates **10% higher** than those without one.
- **Area Colleges and Universities:** Financial aid representatives can volunteer with, present at, or help host FAFSA events.
- **Local Businesses** can donate food and prizes or provide volunteers.
- **Florida Office of Student Financial Assistance (OFSA):** OFSA's Speakers Bureau can connect your school with a financial aid expert for your FAFSA information night. Contact Pete Hernandez at [pedro.hernandez@fldoe.org](mailto:pedro.hernandez@fldoe.org) for more information.

# Promoting Your FAFSA Event

Many students and parents are unfamiliar with or intimidated by the FAFSA. Others may assume they will not qualify for financial aid. For these reasons, it's important to promote FAFSA completion events in your community.

## Promotion Strategies

- **School Channels:** Morning announcements, newsletter, school website, marquee, social media.
- **Parent Engagement:** Mail letters home rather than relying on students to deliver them; personal phone calls take more time/volunteers, but can be very effective.
- **Use Technology:** Text updates, voicemail blasts, and robocalls can be effective ways to reach parents.
- **Additional Resources:** Reference the appendix at the back of this guide for more promotion resources from around the web.



## Text Updates

- **UpNext:** Part of former first lady Michelle Obama's Better Make Room initiative, UpNext connects students with college readiness advisors via text message. Students can enroll in the service by texting their first and last name to (240) 623-8319. Read more at [whatsupnext.us](http://whatsupnext.us).
- **Remind:** This texting tool is free for educators, who can use it to send text updates to parents and students. Read more at [www.remind.com](http://www.remind.com).

### Did You Know?

Several communities in Florida have texting projects with reminders specific to local colleges and universities.

Contact FCAN or your community's LCAN to learn about specific resources in your area.

# FAFSA Information Resources

## **Webinar: No Dollar Left Behind**

<http://floridacollegeaccess.org/events/key-takeaways-no-dollar-left-behind-organizing-community-based-approach-fafsa-completion/>

In September 2018, Florida College Access Network hosted a webinar with partners from Future Ready Collier and Suncoast United Way discussing community-based strategies to improving FAFSA completion.

## **Webinar: FAFSA is Not Enough**

<http://floridacollegeaccess.org/events/key-takeaways-fafsa-not-enough-verification-keeps-students-entering-college/>

This FCAN webinar features staff from National College Access Network discussing how FAFSA verification presents an additional barrier to low-income students.

## **Webinar: Busting the Affordability Barrier**

<https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/recording/3077335521562062595>

This FCAN webinar from December 2017 covers common issues with FAFSA completion, strategies for using the FAFSA Challenge Data Dashboard, and an overview of Broward County's innovative approach to FAFSA completion.

## **FAFSA Demo Site**

<http://fafsademo.test.ed.gov/>

This FAFSA demonstration website allows you to walk through the FAFSA process. This is a great training tool for staff and volunteers who will help students and families with the FAFSA. This demo is password protected:

User name: **eddemo**

Password: **fafsatest**

## **2017-2018 FAFSA on the Web Preview Presentation**

<https://www.ifap.ed.gov/eannouncements/attachments/1718FOTWPreviewPresentation.pptx>

This presentation, produced by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Federal Student Aid, provides a step-by-step preview of this year's FAFSA. The slides can also be used or modified to create your own FAFSA presentation.

## **FutureMakers Coalition FAFSA First Resources**

<http://www.futuremakerscoalition.com/fafsafirst/>

FutureMakers Coalition, an LCAN in Southwest Florida, has created a variety of resources to address common myths and frequently asked questions about FAFSA.

## **The FAFSA Completion Project: An Annotated Bibliography**

<http://www.floridacollegeaccess.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/FAFSABibliography.pdf>

Published in 2011 by the U.S. Department of Education, this annotated bibliography links to free resources available online to support school systems with FAFSA completion programs and policies.



# Event Planning and Handouts

## Form Your Future Event Planning Resources

<http://formyourfuture.org/>

Form Your Future is a FAFSA completion campaign sponsored by National College Access Network. Their website features a financial aid toolkit and event planning resources.

## Financial Aid Toolkit

<http://www.financialaidtoolkit.ed.gov/tk/>

The Financial Aid Toolkit provides information and outreach tools for counselors, college access professionals, nonprofit mentors, and others. It includes videos, infographics, how-to guides, event planning assistance, presentation templates, and a variety of other financial assistance resources.

## Free Financial Aid Handouts

<https://financialaidtoolkit.ed.gov/tk/resources.jsp>

This catalog from Federal Student Aid allows education professionals to order free handouts, pamphlets, and brochures to educate parents and students about financial aid options.

## Navigating your Financial Future

<http://www.navigatingyourfinancialfuture.org/Resources.aspx>

This resource guide, produced by the Florida Department of Education's Office of Student Financial Assistance, includes a variety of tools to help schools and communities promote FAFSA completion.

## Resources Khan Academy: Paying for College

<https://www.khanacademy.org/college-admissions/paying-for-college>

This Khan Academy module consists of free video tutorials to help guide students and families through the process of paying for college, including a step-by-step guide to filling out the FAFSA.

## Top 10 Mistakes Students Make on FAFSA

<http://www.nerdwallet.com/blog/loans/student-loans/top-10-fafsa-mistakes/>

This short article by NerdScholar highlights some of the most common FAFSA mistakes, and is a useful tool to share with students and families.

# Training For Counselors/Access Professionals

## **National College Access Network Training Resources**

<http://www.collegeaccess.org/ELearning>

The National College Access Network (NCAN) provides e-learning resources to college access professionals, with select modules focusing on federal student aid programs, financial aid and FAFSA completion. The modules are self-paced, available year-round, and reflect evidence-based practices. While some of the modules are free, the two FAFSA-focused modules are \$119 each. NCAN members can access these modules for free.

## **National Training for Counselors and Mentors (NT4CM) Webinar**

<https://financialaidtoolkit.ed.gov/tk/training/trainers/training.jsp>

Additional training materials: <https://financialaidtoolkit.ed.gov/tk/training/trainers/elibrary.jsp>

The National Training for Counselors and Mentors is a collaboration between a number of agencies to provide financial aid training to school counselors and mentors. The webinar is 90 minutes long, and covers federal student aid programs, scholarship searches and financial aid fraud.

## **2017-18 Counselors and Mentors Handbook on Federal Student Aid**

<https://www.edpubs.gov/document/en1341p.pdf?ckti1>

This handbook is another resource for those that will be assisting students and families complete the FAFSA. It includes both information specifically on completing the FAFSA, as well as information on federal student aid more generally.

## **Mapping Your Future: FAFSA Training for Service Providers**

<https://mappingyourfuture.org/services/webinars.cfm>

Mapping Your Future offers a free FAFSA training to financial aid professionals and others helping students complete the FAFSA. To register for one of these webinars, follow the link above. Past webinars are also available on-demand.

## **Florida Department of Education Office of Student Financial Assistance (OSFA)**

<http://www.navigatingyourfinancialfuture.org/>

OSFA provides resources to districts, schools, and community partners on the FAFSA and financial aid, and can also connect you to outside resources that can provide you with the training you need. OSFA also provides in-person training and resources to districts, schools, and community partners on the FAFSA and financial aid. Contact Pete Hernandez at [pedro.hernandez@fldoe.org](mailto:pedro.hernandez@fldoe.org).

# Working With Special Populations

## Undocumented Students

### **College Board: Advising Undocumented Students**

<http://professionals.collegeboard.com/guidance/financial-aid/undocumented-students>

This page provides a brief introduction to the basics of advising undocumented students through the college admissions and financial aid process. While this is primarily intended for school counselors, it may also be helpful to share with any volunteers you have at a FAFSA completion event.

### **U.S. Department of Education: Financial Aid and Undocumented Students**

<http://www.floridacollegeaccess.org/event/florida-can-webinar-supporting-floridas-undocumentedstudents/>

This webinar hosted by Florida CAN brought together a number of experts to discuss the unique challenges facing Florida's undocumented students.

### **Webinar: Supporting Florida's Undocumented Students**

<https://studentaid.ed.gov/sites/default/files/financial-aid-and-undocumented-students.pdf>

This handout answers a number of frequently asked questions about undocumented students and financial aid.

## Unique Student Populations

### **Student Aid Tips for Unique Student Populations**

[http://www.nasfaa.org/Unusual\\_Student\\_Circumstances](http://www.nasfaa.org/Unusual_Student_Circumstances)

These handouts prepare counselors and volunteers to provide assistance to students in unique situations, including wards of the court, foster youth, single parents and more.

### **Special Student Populations PowerPoint**

<http://www.collegegoalsundayusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/2014-2015-3-Special-StudentPopulations.pdf>

For more in-depth information on supporting unique student populations, review this PowerPoint prepared by the Illinois Student Assistance Commission. The PowerPoint focused on homeless and unaccompanied students, students in DCFS/foster care, undocumented students, and students with unique situations that may require professional judgement.

# Office of Federal Student Aid Social Media

## YouTube

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCEnu3BHoR9IYgBnCkqQdgmA>

This YouTube channel includes with a number of simple and engaging videos that can be shared with students and families. Be sure to use the most recent videos, as some information has changed.

## Twitter Page

<https://twitter.com/FAFSA>

The FAFSA Twitter page provides reminders of information and deadlines related to federal student aid programs. The site hosts live question and answer sessions during “#AskFAFSA Office Hour” to give students and parents the chance to ask financial aid questions.

## Blog

<http://www.ed.gov/blog/topic/federal-student-aid/>

Federal Student Aid’s Homeroom blog publishes timely information and resources relevant to FAFSA completion and federal student aid. Some examples of blog topics include: 5 Things to do After Filing Your FAFSA, Top 5 FAFSA FAQs, 7 Common Myths about Financial Aid, and 7 Common FAFSA Mistakes.

## Social Media Toolkit

<https://financialaidtoolkit.ed.gov/tk/outreach/social-media.jsp>

The Department of Education’s Office of Federal Student Aid has a strong social media presence. This page includes some tips on sharing these resources with students and families, such as sample tweets.

# Data and Research

## **Policy Brief: \$100 Million in Pell Grants Left Behind: FAFSA Completion in Florida**

<http://www.floridacollegeaccess.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/FAFSA-Completion-in-Florida.pdf>

The U.S. Department of Education makes over \$150 billion in federal student aid available to college students each year, yet tens of thousands of Florida students fail to complete the form needed to access these funds. Analyzing state and federal data, FCAN estimated that Florida students graduating in 2013 left behind over \$100 million in Pell grants, simply because they didn't complete the form. The December 2013 policy brief highlighted this and other findings, including resources available to students as well as recommendations moving forward.

## **Pell Grants Lost by Florida School Districts**

<http://www.floridacollegeaccess.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/2017-Florida-FAFSA-Challenge-results.pdf>

This analysis of FAFSA completion data was provided in a press release at the end of the 2016-17 Florida FAFSA Challenge.

## **Florida Economic Security Report, BeyondEducation.org**

**Economic Security Report:** [http://beyondeducation.org/temp/ER\\_Report.pdf](http://beyondeducation.org/temp/ER_Report.pdf)

In 2013, the Florida Legislature passed a bill to provide economic and workforce outcome data for graduates of all public postsecondary institutions in the state, which can be a useful resource when discussing the costs and benefits of a postsecondary education with students and families.

## **FCAN Updates, Releases**

<http://www.floridacollegeaccess.org/contact/>

Florida College Access Network publishes a monthly e-newsletter, as well as information and resources for students, families, community leaders, and education professionals. Sign up for timely updates on college and career readiness, access, and success news and best practices, including FCAN's free webinar series.

# FAFSA Contacts at FCAN



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