

ST. PETERSBURG  
COLLEGE HIGH SCHOOL  
School at St. Petersburg College



# Florida College Decision Day

*2021 Site Coordinator Toolkit*

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# Dear Reader,

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

thank you for hosting a College Decision Day event at your school! Florida College Decision Day recognizes and celebrates high school seniors for their post-high school plans. It also encourages younger students and their families to prepare early for college.

It is important that we celebrate this big step for seniors and involving all your students will help build a college-going culture at your school. Florida College Decision Day is held annually on or around May 1, coinciding with the date many seniors must inform a college of their plans to attend.

Florida College Decision Day is one of four statewide initiatives that encourage and support high school seniors as they take their next educational steps. FCAN also coordinates Apply Yourself Florida, the Florida FAFSA Challenge, and Plan It Florida. These initiatives assist high school seniors with applying to college, applying for financial aid, and graduating high school with a college or career plan. We look forward to your school participating in Florida College Decision Day and, we hope, all four College Ready Florida initiatives!

This guide is adapted from a toolkit originally produced by the Michigan College Access Network (MCAN). A special thanks to MCAN for permission to adapt this guide for use in Florida, as well as their guidance on the process.

**Please share your successful strategies with us!** Much of what makes this toolkit helpful are the many successful strategies shared with us from schools like yours around the state. Your story will help fellow coordinators host impactful programs at their schools. We may even feature your achievements throughout the campaign on our blog or social media!

Contact LaVerne Handfield, our Programs Coordinator, at [lhandfield@floridacollegeaccess.org](mailto:lhandfield@floridacollegeaccess.org) or at (813) 974-8712 with questions and suggestions.

**FCAN thanks Helios Education Foundation and Wells Fargo  
for their generous support of Florida College Decision Day**



# 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:** We lead the collaborative movement to ensure every Floridian achieves an education beyond high school and a rewarding career.

**Our Vision:** We envision a Florida working together where education is the pathway to economic mobility for all.

## **Our Seven Conditions for Success:**

- **Opportunity for Everyone:** To build a talent-strong economy, all Floridians need access to a post-high school education and the supports to complete it.
- **Clear information and guidance:** Students of all ages and families need exposure and counseling early and often to make informed decisions about their futures.
- **Affordable:** Post-high school education needs to be within everyone's financial reach, regardless of household income or life circumstances.
- **Multiple Pathways to Success:** Floridians benefit from multiple learning opportunities for academic achievement and career advancement.
- **Lifelong learning:** No degree or credential is "one and done;" Floridians need to prepare for career changes through continuous learning.
- **Effective use of data:** Transparent access to data on education and economic outcomes, especially for Florida's diverse populations, help achieve our goals.
- **Community Collaboration:** When community partners work together toward a shared vision, they remove barriers, build a robust workforce, and improve the quality of life for their regions.



**LaVerne Handfield**

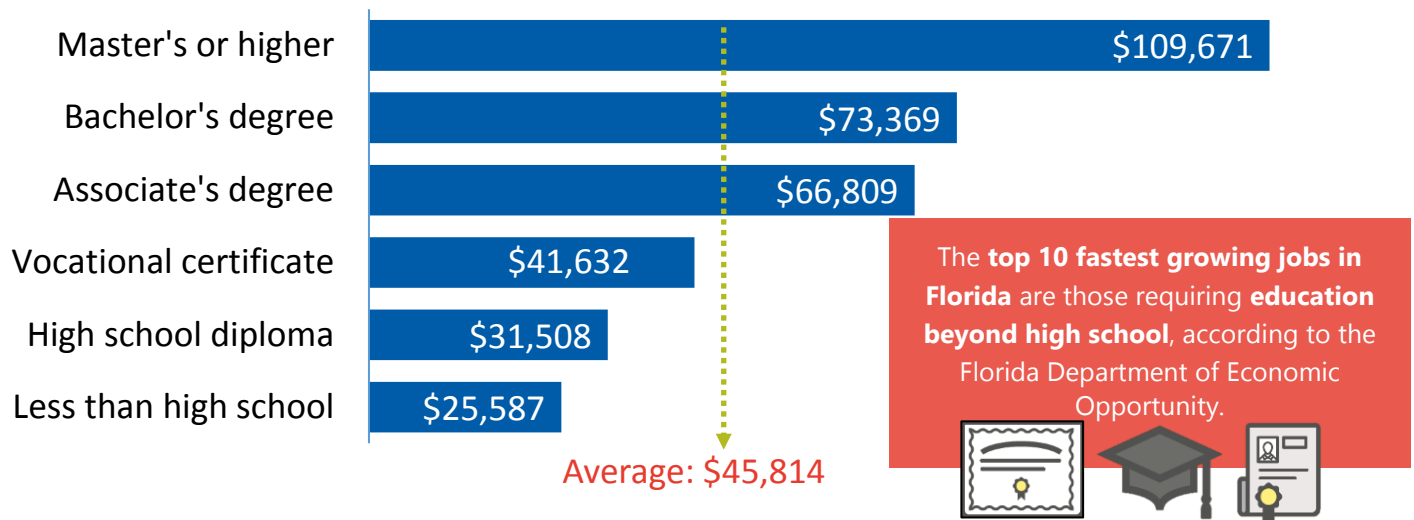
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# The More You Learn, The More You Earn!

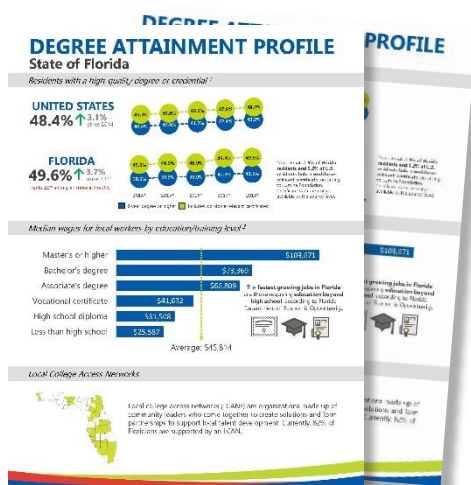
By the time today's students enter the workforce, 2 out of every 3 jobs in Florida will require a degree or credential beyond high school. The word "college" is used to describe any high-quality, credential-granting **education or training beyond high school**, including **2-year degrees, 4-year degrees, technical certificates, and industry-recognized credentials**.

*Median wages for local workers by education/training level<sup>1</sup>*



## Why College Matters

- **Higher education levels** lead to higher paying jobs and **more lifetime earnings**.
- Today's students need a post-high school degree or credential to **earn a middle-class income**.
- By the year 2025, **67% of jobs** will require education beyond high school; currently, **only 52.7% of Floridians** hold such a credential.



## Learn about Your County's Degree Attainment

Download your county's degree attainment profile to learn more about your area's college-going rates

<sup>1</sup>Average Earnings: Florida Department of Economic Opportunity, 2018.



# About Florida College Decision Day

College Decision Day is inspired by the NCAA's National Signing Day event to reinforce the value that **academic achievements should be just as celebrated as athletic ones**. It is adapted from former First Lady Michelle Obama's [Better Make Room](#) initiative, aimed at increasing post-high school access for low-income and first-generation students.

## College Decision Day Participation

- 2019-2020: 379 schools in 36 counties
- 2018-2019: 323 schools in 31 counties
- 2017-2018: 239 schools in 26 counties
- 2016-2017: 104 schools in 17 counties
- 2015-2016: 74 schools in 14 counties

## Why Host a Decision Day?

The purpose of Florida College Decision Day is **to recognize and celebrate students' plans for life after high school**.

Florida College Decision Day events should:

- Recognize all students for their post-high school plans.
- Influence younger students and families by building excitement about college.
- Build and support a college-going culture at your school!

## Register Today!

- Schools, districts, local college access networks (LCANs), and community organizations can **register to host** Florida College Decision Day events for students in their community.
- Registrants get access to **free resources and promotional materials**, as well as email updates highlighting helpful event ideas.
- Registering helps FCAN and Better Make Room track the progress of College Decision Day events across the state and nationwide.

## When is Decision Day?

Decision Day is usually **held on or around May 1**, the day students must notify colleges of their intent to attend.

Host sites are free to choose a date that works for their schedule.

# What Does a Decision Day Event Look Like?

## Types of Events

### School-Wide Assemblies

- Schools can **host a dedicated assembly** or can make Decision Day an **add-on** to another school-wide event.
- Hosting the event in front of the entire school community can help **build excitement about college for younger students**.

### Here's a Tip!

If your school has a large number of seniors, group students based on the institution they are attending and/or pathways rather than recognizing students individually.

### Community-Wide Event

- Hosting a community-wide event gives **parents and community leaders** the opportunity to attend and recognize students.
- Some schools choose to **coordinate with other schools** in the area to host a single event for all their students.

### Small Gatherings

- Schools that aren't able to host an event in front of the entire school or community can celebrate Decision Day through small gatherings, such as **pizza parties** for seniors.
- Have students **sign a banner or post college acceptance letters** in a visible space as a way to build school-wide excitement or recognition.



*Image credit: Robert E Lee High School*

## Event Activities

### Guest Speakers

Invite high school alumni, elected officials, parents, local college leaders, and business leaders to address students and congratulate them on their accomplishments.

### Raffle Prizes

Reach out to businesses for donations like gift cards or dorm room items.

# How to Host Your Virtual Florida College Decision Day Event

With COVID-19 adversely affecting millions of students' ability to receive in-person support during the college application process, FCAN is highlighting best practices for hosting virtual **Florida College Decision Day** events.

*The following is adapted from Handshake's [How to Host a Virtual Event](#).*

## 1. Determine the type of event you want to host.

In-person – Decision Day Drive-thru, car parade, etc.

Virtual – social media challenges, pre-recorded videos, slideshow presentation, Teams/Zoom event, etc.

## 2. Determine how students will participate.

Your type of event will determine if students participate in-person or virtually. Participation can include submitting recorded videos, using hashtags to participate in challenges on social media, attending a socially-distanced in-person celebration, or decorating vehicles for a car parade.

## 3. Determine what platform to use to host your event.

Various platforms, such as Microsoft Teams and Zoom, can allow many attendees in one place with the capabilities of screen sharing, video conferencing, and chat/instant messaging. [See more Zoom alternatives](#).

## 4. Plan how you will promote your virtual college application completion event to your students.

What communication channels are your school and district using to reach students and families? What social media platforms are these students on? What do you need to reach students and families that are hard to get a hold of?

### Social media

Use visually appealing designs to capture your audience and targeted messages for each audience group. Parents tend to use Facebook more and students tend to use Instagram and Snapchat.

### Remind

Send quick and simple text messages and updates on a mass scale.

### Robocalls

If your district communications department has the ability, record a voicemail message with the details of your event to be sent out to parents on a designated day and/or time.

### Newsletter

Include information in the school's newsletter. (Tip: partner with your school's PTA to reach parents not connected to other school communication channels.)

### Newspaper/radio

This is a great way to gain community support and recruit volunteers. Invite the community to share opportunities for students to virtually explore careers or perform volunteer activities or internships.

**Leverage community partners!** You may have some students who are hard to reach through your traditional communications channels. Leverage your partner organizations who already have relationships with students and their families to provide support. In most communities, Take Stock in Children, Big Brothers Big Sisters, faith-based organizations and [local college access networks](#) can provide direction and support as students go through the college-going process.



# Preparing for Your Event

## Event Promotion

- Inform students about the event through the **morning announcements**, **school news channel**, **social media**, etc.
- Encourage students to **dress in attire from their identified pathway** (college gear, military uniform, etc.)
- **Involve teachers and administration** and encourage them to **decorate their rooms with items from their alma mater**.
- Encourage students to **share their college decisions on social media** using the hashtags **#DecisionDayFL** and **#CollegeSigningDayFL**, or hashtags specific to your school.
- **Create a “College Wall”** (using [Google Slides](#) or [Padlet](#)) where students can send their photos, post their acceptance letters, sign their names, or indicate on a map to show where they’re going to college.
- **Send text updates** through free services like Remind ([www.remind.com](http://www.remind.com)).
- **Send a press release to local media** and send a copy of your press release to FCAN too! You can find a press release template at [www.FloridaCollegeAccess.org/Initiatives](http://www.FloridaCollegeAccess.org/Initiatives).

### Don’t Work Alone!

Consider forming a **planning committee** comprised of teachers, administrators, community members, parents, and students to help plan the events.

## Early Awareness

Another purpose of College Decision Day is to promote early college awareness among families and younger students. Here are a few ways you can do this in the days and weeks leading up to your event:

### Workshops

Provide workshops on college readiness topics for students and parents. Potential topics can include decision-making, learning styles, study habits, the importance of GPA and high school course selection, college test prep, etc. See [Broward County Public Schools’ Canvas courses](#).

### College Spotlight

Choose a different college, university, or post-high school path to feature each week. You can consider asking trivia questions and awarding prizes.

### Adopt-a-College

Classrooms can “adopt” a college and do research on the school. Decorate their classroom with the college colors, logos, and fun facts.

# Recruiting Volunteers

Volunteers can be a great resource to help College Decision Day events run smoothly. Site coordinators rely on volunteers to check students in, distribute raffle tickets, serve food, conduct student surveys, answer questions, etc.

## Where to Find Volunteers

- [Local College Access Networks \(LCANs\)](#) – If you aren't sure whether there's an LCAN in your community or you'd like help getting in touch, please reach out to LaVerne Handfield at [lhandfield@floridacollegeaccess.org](mailto:lhandfield@floridacollegeaccess.org)
- Mayors, city leaders, or other elected officials
- School alumni or underclassmen
- Student families/Parent-Teacher Association (PTA)
- Volunteer, senior or church groups
- Area college or university representatives, including faculty, as well as admissions and financial aid offices
- Business, community, and local government leaders
- Youth programs (i.e. YMCA, Boys & Girls Club, United Way)

### FCAN Letter Templates

You can download letter templates for volunteer outreach in an editable Word document on FCAN's website at [www.FloridaCollegeAccess.org/Initiatives](http://www.FloridaCollegeAccess.org/Initiatives)

## Contacting and Scheduling Volunteers

- Send potential volunteer groups the recruitment letter or email.
- Always mention the need for volunteers in promotional communications.
- Create a system for collecting volunteer information. Depending on your school district's policy, you may need to conduct a background check.

## Preparing Volunteers

- Identify specific responsibilities and duties for your volunteers. For example, you may create shifts for greeting, handing out prizes or certificates, setting up/tearing down, managing food and beverage, etc.
- Provide name tags for volunteers on the day of the event.
- Conduct a quick orientation to familiarize volunteers with the details of your event.
- Provide water and snacks for volunteers, especially if they will be volunteering for more than two hours.
- Send a thank-you letter to all volunteers for their participation in your Florida College Decision Day event!

# Sample Event Timeline

Time to Event	Tasks to Complete
<b>7-8 Weeks</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Form a College Decision Day committee at your school to aid in planning <input type="checkbox"/> Evaluate resources and budget for the event <input type="checkbox"/> Brainstorm possible format, agenda, and speakers
<b>6 Weeks</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Confirm event date and time <input type="checkbox"/> Share information with school administrators, teachers, and staff <input type="checkbox"/> Discuss possible tie-in assignments with teachers <input type="checkbox"/> Share plans with FCAN and LCAN (if possible)
<b>5 Weeks</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Invite potential guest speakers <input type="checkbox"/> Reach out to businesses/colleges for donations and sponsorship using letter templates found here: <a href="http://www.floridacollegeaccess.org/initiatives/florida-college-decision-day/">www.floridacollegeaccess.org/initiatives/florida-college-decision-day/</a> <input type="checkbox"/> If providing food, reach out to a restaurant/catering company
<b>4 Weeks</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Provide seniors with the <a href="#">Summer Transition Checklist</a> <input type="checkbox"/> If necessary, begin volunteer outreach <input type="checkbox"/> Plan and prepare outreach and publicity efforts: Prepare a press release (template provided on FCAN's website), and hang flyers around the school
<b>3 Weeks</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Send parents and students letters to notify them of the event, remind them about completing the FAFSA, and ensure them that it's not too late to apply to college <input type="checkbox"/> Use social media, text messages, robocalls, announcements, school website, marquee, etc. to remind students and parents about the event
<b>2 Weeks</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Finalize event agenda and speakers <input type="checkbox"/> Send your press release to the media <input type="checkbox"/> Purchase non-perishable supplies <input type="checkbox"/> Confirm post-high school plans with seniors
<b>1 Week</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Remind teachers, counselors, and administrators of the day's schedule and planned activities <input type="checkbox"/> Encourage students and staff to wear college gear the day of the event
<b>Day of Event</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Set up the venue <input type="checkbox"/> Take pictures and upload to Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc. with hashtags #DecisionDayFL, #CollegeSigningDayFL, and school-specific hashtags
<b>After Event</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Send a letter to participating students congratulating them on their plans <input type="checkbox"/> Remind students of remaining steps (financial aid, making deposits, etc.) <input type="checkbox"/> Send thank-you letters to volunteers and businesses who supported the event

# Budgeting

## What Will My Event Cost?

Most site coordinators host their events with a small budget. Some coordinators have hosted their event at no cost by having supplies donated.

Make sure to check with your administration before soliciting donations. Your school may have a policy in place.

For help reaching out to local businesses, FCAN provides letter templates:

[www.FloridaCollegeAccess.org/initiatives/florida-college-decision-day/](http://www.FloridaCollegeAccess.org/initiatives/florida-college-decision-day/)

## What Supplies Will I Need?

The supplies you will need for your event will depend on the type of event you plan to host. These may include:

- Raffle prizes
- Food
- Games/Entertainment
- Decorations



## Sample Budget Table

Item/Service	Purchased/Donated	Anticipated Cost	Actual Cost
Total			

# Steps for Students Who Haven't Enrolled

As you work with high school seniors to identify their post-high school plans to recognize on Decision Day, you will likely encounter some students who intend to go to college but have yet to enroll. This provides a great opportunity to follow-up with these students about their plans for life after high school.

## Scenario 1: The student has not applied or has an incomplete application

- Direct students to **FloridaShines** ([www.floridashines.org](http://www.floridashines.org)) or the **College Scorecard** ([collegescorecard.ed.gov](http://collegescorecard.ed.gov)) to explore college options and financial aid information.
- Connect the student with a state college application or a four-year university that has a **late application deadline**.
- If application(s) is/are not complete, follow up with the official letter/email from the university to **see exactly what is needed to complete the application**. Reach out to the college directly to have a conversation.



## Scenario 2: The student applied but was not admitted

- Direct students to **FloridaShines** ([www.floridashines.org](http://www.floridashines.org)) or the **College Scorecard** ([collegescorecard.ed.gov](http://collegescorecard.ed.gov)) to explore college options and financial aid information.
- Connect students with a **local state college**.

## Scenario 3: The student was admitted but has not officially decided/enrolled

- Encourage students to **talk to trusted adults and share feelings, questions, and concerns**.
- Connect students with an admissions officer, financial aid representative, or other expert at the college.
- **Research the college's steps to enroll** and assist the student in completing all that is required.
- **Assist the student in connecting with financial aid assistance** (particularly for help with paying for enrollment fees and deposits).
- **Help the student complete a FAFSA and/or interpret any financial aid information** that is received. Ask a campus financial aid officer for help.



# Summer Transition Checklist

"Summer Melt" occurs when college-bound high school graduates fail to show up on campus in the fall of their first year of college. This happens to as many as 40% of college-intending students. Here are some specific tasks for students to complete during the summer before college:



1

**Make a budget.** Review the student's financial aid award letter. Pay close attention to the Cost of Attendance and what costs are and aren't included.



2

**Create a payment timeline.** List the steps they need to take before they arrive on campus: When is their deposit due? When is the first tuition payment due? When are housing applications and deposits due? If needed, make a calendar with the student to help them keep track of deadlines.



3

**Request a final transcript** from the high school.



4

**Register for and attend orientation.** Whether online or in-person, orientation informs students about expectations and support services on campus.



5

**Get required immunizations.** The institution will send a list of required vaccinations. Help students schedule a visit with a family doctor or local clinic for vaccinations.



6

**Register for classes.** Students who know their major should start taking basic courses in that department. If they're not sure, they can try out subjects that interest them, but they should still include core courses like math and composition. Help students recognize who their college advisor is; they can help them with registering for classes.



7

**Address special circumstances.** Some students may have special circumstances to address, such as childcare needs, financially supporting their family, other home/family responsibilities, working, etc.

# Acknowledgments

This guide is adapted from a toolkit originally produced by the Michigan College Access Network (MCAN). A special thanks to MCAN for permission to adapt this guide for use in Florida, as well as their guidance on the process.

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