

The Florida FAFSA Challenge

*2023-2024 FAFSA
Completion Toolkit*

Table of Contents

Dear College Access Champion
Introduction
Florida Students are Losing Money
Winning the FAFSA Challenge
Meeting Your FAFSA Completion Goal
Hosting a FAFSA Completion Event
Promoting Your FAFSA Event
Helping Families with the FAFSA
FAFSA Information Resources
Event Planning and Handouts
Professional Development
Working with Special Populations
Office of Federal Student Aid Social Media
Data & Research

Dear College Access Champion,

On behalf of Florida College Access Network (FCAN),

thank you for being one of over 500 schools participating in the 2023-2024 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 FCAN's webpage as a one-stop shop for FAFSA resources.

The Florida FAFSA Challenge 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](#), [Florida College Decision Day](#), and [Plan It Florida](#). These initiatives support high school seniors with applying to college, celebrating students for their postsecondary plans, and ensuring all students graduate high school with a college or career plan. We look forward to your school participating in the Florida FAFSA Challenge and, we hope, all four College Ready Florida initiatives!

Please share your successful strategies with us! Much of what makes this toolkit helpful is 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!

FCAN thanks cornerstone funder Helios Education Foundation for their generous support of the Florida FAFSA Challenge



About Florida College Access Network

Florida College Access Network 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 work is guided by our Seven Conditions for Success:

1. **Opportunity for Everyone:** To build a talent-strong economy, all Floridians need access to a postsecondary education and the supports to complete it.
2. **Clear information and guidance:** Students of all ages and their families need exposure and counseling early and often to make informed decisions about their futures.
3. **Affordability:** Postsecondary education needs to be within everyone's financial reach, regardless of household income or life circumstances.
4. **Multiple pathways to success:** Floridians benefit from multiple learning opportunities for academic achievement and career advancement.
5. **Lifelong learning:** No degree or credential is "one and done;" Floridians need to prepare for career changes through continuous learning.
6. **Data-informed decision-making:** Transparent access to data on education and economic outcomes, especially for Florida's diverse populations, help achieve our goals.
7. **Community collaboration:** When community partners work together toward a shared vision, they remove barriers, build a resilient workforce, and improve the quality of life for their regions.

Florida Students are Losing Money

Florida Lags in FAFSA Completion

Over the past year, **about 33%** of Florida's public-school students had completed the FAFSA by March 31, 2023.

According to FCAN estimates, high school graduates in Florida leave behind over **\$300 million in Pell grants** each year because they do not complete the form.

Completing the FAFSA is the **best way to make college affordable.**

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

The Florida FAFSA 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 2022-2023 school year, **171 schools and 10 districts** met or exceeded the 5% increase goal.

Taking on The Challenge

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

Each year, FCAN recognizes all schools and districts that achieve their goal of increasing FAFSA completion by at least 5%.

Additionally, FCAN honors the top schools who go above and beyond to help more students afford college by completing the FAFSA. These winners are formally recognized during the Awards Luncheon at the annual FCAN Summit.



Why the March End Date?

While students can complete the FAFSA throughout 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.

2023 – 24 FAFSA Challenge Dates

January 3, 2024

Challenge Begins

March 29, 2024

Challenge Ends

May 2024

Awards Luncheon

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 Dashboard** allows schools and communities to track their FAFSA completion rates in real time.

FCAN dashboard includes FAFSA completion data for 12th graders at over **600 schools across the state of Florida**.

Accessing Student-Level Data

The Florida Department of Education Office of Student Financial Assistance (OSFA) 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.

Knowing which students have submitted FAFSAs with errors can help you identify and reach out to students who may need extra help.

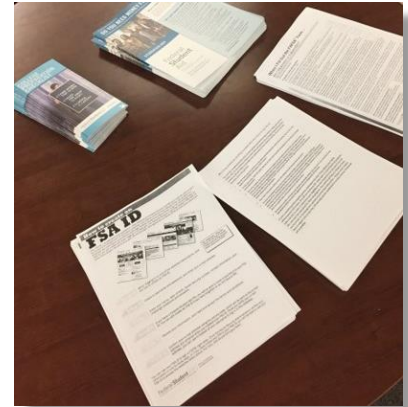
For more information on how school districts can access to this data, contact Pedro Hernandez, OSFA director of Outreach services, at pedro.hernandez@fldoe.org



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: Incorporate alternate activities, like applying for scholarships, for students who are not eligible to complete the FAFSA.

Contact FCAN for Additional Support

Promotional materials like stickers for events.

Facilitating conversations with local college access networks (LCANs)

Technical support with the FAFSA Challenge Dashboard

Community Partners

- **Local College Access Networks (LCANs):** Reach out to the [LCAN in your area](#) who can help with volunteers and spreading the word on the importance of FAFSA completion.
- **Area colleges & universities:** Financial aid representatives can volunteer with, present at, or help host FAFSA events.
- **Local businesses** can donate food and prizes or provide volunteers.

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 [here](#).
- **Remind:** This free texting tool can be used to send text updates to parents and students. Read more on their [webpage](#).

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.

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 LCAN 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.

FAFSA Verification

If a student gets flagged for verification, reassure them they did nothing wrong. Verification is a federal audit of students who submit a FAFSA. Ensure students submit all required documentation for this process to be completed.

FAFSA Information Resources

FAFSA Prototype

This [FAFSA Prototype](#) website allows you to walk through the FAFSA process. This is a useful training tool for staff and volunteers who will help students and families with the FAFSA.

U.S. Department of Education Federal Student Aid Social Media

YouTube: This [YouTube channel](#) includes several 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: The [FAFSA Twitter](#) provides reminders of information and deadlines related to federal student aid programs.

Blog: [Federal Student Aid's Homeroom blog](#) publishes timely information and resources relevant to FAFSA completion and federal student aid.

Social Media Toolkit

The U.S. 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.

Event Planning and Handouts

Form Your Future Event Planning Resources

[Form Your Future](#) is a FAFSA completion campaign sponsored by National College Attainment Network. Their website features a financial aid toolkit and event planning resources.

Federal Student Aid Financial Aid Toolkit

The [FSA 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.

Navigating Your Financial Future

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.

Khan Academy: 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.

Sallie Mae: Paying for College

This [website](#) by Sallie Mae provides one-pagers, templates, video tutorials, and much more for students and families figuring out how to pay for college.

Professional Development

National College Attainment Network Training Resources

The National College Attainment 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)

The National Training for Counselors and Mentors is a collaboration between several agencies to provide financial aid training to school counselors and mentors. These [training materials](#) cover federal student aid programs, scholarship searches and other financial aid information.

Mapping Your Future: FAFSA Training for Service Providers

[Mapping Your Future](#) offers a free FAFSA training to financial aid professionals and others helping students complete the FAFSA. Past webinars are also available on-demand.

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

OSFA provides [resources](#) to schools, districts 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 provides resources to schools, districts and community partners on FAFSA and financial aid.

Working with Special Populations

Undocumented Students

College Board: Advising 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

This [webpage](#) answers a number of frequently asked questions about undocumented students and financial aid.

Unique Student Populations

Student Aid Tips for Unique Student Populations

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.

Data & Research

Policy Brief: *Strengthening Statewide FAFSA Completion* (January 2022)

FCAN estimates that Florida students leave behind over \$300 million in Pell grants, simply because they didn't complete the FAFSA. This [policy brief](#) highlights why FAFSA completion is important and recommendations on how to increase the state's completion rate.

Best Ideas for Boosting FAFSA Completion from the 2022 Talent Strong Florida Summit

The FCAN team held an [interactive data presentation and a participatory workshop](#) at our annual summit in May 2022 to get ideas for what is happening to Florida's FAFSA completion rates and how we can work together to increase these numbers. From those conversations, we shared some of our findings and best practices.

Florida Economic Security Report

Access the [Economic Security Report](#) for 2022. This report provides economic and workforce outcome data for graduates of all public postsecondary institutions in the state, which can be useful resource when discussing the costs and benefits of a postsecondary education with students and families.

FCAN Updates

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 nets and best practices, including FCAN's free webinar series.