



# The Florida FAFSA Challenge

*2025-2026 Toolkit*

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# About Florida College Access Network

On behalf of Florida College Access Network (FCAN) *thank you for participating in Florida FAFSA Challenge!*

**FCAN** is the heart of a movement to ensure today's students are prepared for tomorrow's jobs.

**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 families need exposure and counseling early and often to make informed decisions about their futures.
3. **Affordable:** 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 opportunities.
6. **Effective use of data:** 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 robust workforce, and improve the quality of life for their regions.

# Education is transformational.

Today's students can start anywhere to develop a lifelong career— a college degree or certificate is a great start. 72% of jobs will require education beyond high school by 2031. Studies show that postsecondary education is the surest path to stability, prosperity, and greater lifetime earnings. The impact is life-changing.



## *Higher education, Higher rewards.*

You play a pivotal role in guiding students' educational journeys—your insights shape their path forward.

Share our free tools and resources to support students explore education options that align with their aspirations.

- [FAFSA Dashboard](#)
- Statewide Initiatives: [Apply Yourself Florida](#), [Florida FAFSA Challenge](#), and [College Decision Day](#), and [Plan It Florida](#)
- Research Reports: [Understanding Career and Technical Education](#), [The Case for Dual Enrollment](#), and [The Real Cost of College in Florida](#)
- [Register](#) for statewide initiatives to receive more information to free webinars, new resources, and more.

**Together, we are building a [Talent Strong Florida!](#)**

<sup>1</sup>Source: Georgetown Center for Workforce and Education, March 2024 report.

# About 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.

Over the past year, **36%** of Florida's public-school students had completed the FAFSA by June 28, 2024.

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

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

## Participating in 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.

Additionally, FCAN recognizes the top schools who go above and beyond to help students complete the FAFSA. These schools are formally awarded at the annual FCAN Talent Strong Florida Summit.

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.

### 2025 – 26 FAFSA Challenge Dates

**October 2025: Challenge Begins**

**March 2026: Challenge Ends**

**May 2026: Awards Ceremony**

# 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.
- **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.

# 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 Workshop:** 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.

## 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.

## 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.

## Celebrating FCAN's 2025 FAFSA Trailblazers

At the [2025 Talent Strong Florida Summit](#), FCAN recognize two schools as FAFSA Trailblazers.

Read more about their FAFSA completion efforts and how they encourage students to complete the form:

- [Hagerty High School, Seminole County](#)
- [Sandalwood High School, Duval County](#)

Nominations for FCAN's 2026 awards will open in January 2026.

# 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.
- Local Community Resources: Visit [FCAN's FAFSA Challenge](#) page to view resources from local communities.
- 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.

## First-Generation Students

Being a first-generation student means that neither parent of the student has completed a bachelor's degree. Some colleges or universities have specific scholarships and resources focused on first-generation students.

Visit the following websites to learn more: [FAMU](#), [FAU](#), [FGCU](#), [FIU](#), [FSU](#), [UF](#), [UNF](#), [USF](#), [UWF](#).

Review the [First Generation Matching Grant](#) (FGMG) to see if a student is eligible to receive need-based funding from the grant. Access [FCAN's First Gen and Fearless webpage](#) for more.

## Inspirational Stories

- [Citrus County Coalition Helps Students Complete Their FAFSA](#)
- [Floridians Stood Up to the Challenge to Increase FAFSA Completions Over the Summer](#)
- [Community Organizations Host Summer Activities to Increase FAFSA Completion](#)
- [FCAN Partner Connects Professionals with Financial Aid Resources](#)
- [Florida Organizations Lead the Way Through FAFSA Beta Testing](#)

# 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. Modules are labeled as free or at a cost. NCAN members can access modules for free.

## **National Training for Counselors and Mentors**

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.

# FAFSA Information Resources

## College 101 Webinars for Students: September 2025

[College 101](#) virtual sessions will cover key topics including: college and career pathways, the application process, and how to pay for a postsecondary education. [Registration is available here.](#)

## 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.

## Federal Student Aid Resources

**YouTube:** This [YouTube channel](#) includes several videos that can be shared with students and families. Be sure to use the most recent videos, as some information has changed.

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

**Federal Student Aid Financial Aid Toolkit:** The [FSA Financial Aid Toolkit](#) provides information and outreach tools for counselors, college access professionals, and others. It includes videos, infographics, guides, event planning assistance, 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.

## Handout: Strengthening Statewide FAFSA Completion (May 2025)

This [handout](#) explains why FAFSA completion is important and recommendations on how to increase the state's completion rate.

## Subscribe to FCAN's Mailing List

FCAN publishes a monthly e-newsletter, as well as information and resources for students, families, community leaders, and professionals. [Sign up](#) for updates on college and career readiness, access, and success.