Florida College Decision Day

2020 Site Coordinator Toolkit

FLORIDA
COLLEGE ACCESS NETWORK

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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 seniors for their postsecondary 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 encourages and assists 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 support high school seniors with applying to college, applying for financial aid, and ensuring all high school seniors graduate with a college or career plan. We look forward to your school participating in 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. Spanish translations were kindly provided by Dr. Sonia Ramírez Wohlmuth of the Department of World Languages at the University of South Florida.

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

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: To create and sustain a statewide network that catalyzes and supports communities to increase college and career readiness, access, and completion for all students.

Our Vision: At least 60% of working-age Floridians will hold a high-quality postsecondary 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.

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Does Everyone Need to Go to College?

We must encourage students to choose a plan for life after high school that best meets their unique needs. That's why FCAN embraces a **broad definition of college** that embraces these various options.

When We Talk About College

- FCAN uses the word "college" to describe any high-quality, credential-granting **education or training beyond high school**.
- This definition of college includes **2-year degrees**, **4-year degrees**, and **industry-recognized credentials**.
- College Decision Day events should celebrate all **postsecondary plans**, including continuing education, military enlistment, entrance to the workforce, etc.

Why College Matters

- Today's students need a postsecondary degree or credential to **earn a middle-class income**.
- The **fastest-growing jobs** in Florida are those that require at least 2 years of education beyond high school.
- By the year 2025, **65% of jobs** will require education beyond high school; currently, **only about 49% of Floridians** hold such a credential.
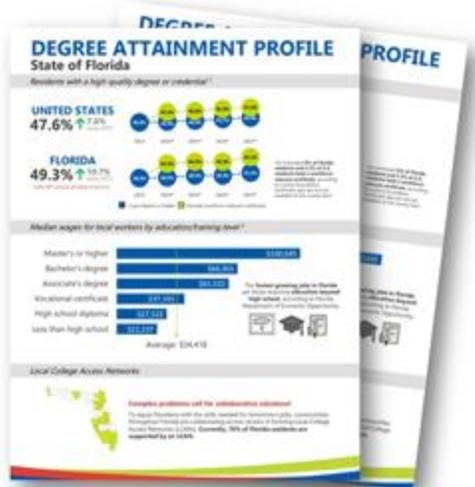
Learn about Your County's Degree Attainment

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

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 postsecondary access for low-income and first-generation students.

College Decision Day Participation

- 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 postsecondary 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

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

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 still 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.

Interviews

Interview seniors about their college plans and feature their stories in the school newspaper, newsletter, or news channel.

Food and Refreshments

Reach out to your local business community for donations of food and snacks for your events.

Raffle Prizes

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

Preparing for Your Event

Event Promotion

- Inform students about the event through the **morning announcements** or **school news channel**.
- Encourage students to **wear college gear** from their chosen institution.
- 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 #CollegeReadyFL, #DecisionDayFL, and #BetterMakeRoom, or hashtags specific to your school.
- **Create a "College Wall"** where students can post their acceptance letters, sign their names, or place pins on a map to show where they're going to college.
- **Send text updates** through free services like Remind (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 sample press release at 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. There 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.

College Spotlight

Choose a different college, university, or postsecondary path to feature each week in the morning announcements. You can consider asking trivia questions and awarding prizes.

Adopt-a-College

Classrooms can "adopt" a college. They can do research on the institution, and decorate their classroom with the college colors, logos, and fun facts about the college.

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, 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 with your community's LCAN, please reach out to LaVerne Handfield at lhandfield@floridacollegeaccess.org
- Mayors, city leaders, or other elected officials
- School alumni or underclassmen
- Student families/Parent-Teacher Association
- Volunteer, senior or church groups
- Community college and university representatives, including faculty, as well as admissions and financial aid offices
- Business, community, and political 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

Contacting and Scheduling Volunteers

- Send potential volunteer groups a recruitment letter or email.
- When promoting your Florida College Decision Day event, always mention the need for volunteers.
- 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, set up/tear 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
7-8 Weeks	☐ Set up a College Decision Day committee at your school to aid in planning ☐ Evaluate resources and budget for the event ☐ Brainstorm possible agenda and speakers
6 Weeks	☐ Confirm event date and time ☐ Share information with school administrators, teachers, and staff ☐ Discuss possible tie-in assignments with teachers ☐ Share plans with LCAN (if possible) and FCAN
5 Weeks	☐ Invite potential guest speakers ☐ Reach out to businesses/colleges for donations and sponsorship using letter templates found here: www.floridacollegeaccess.org/initiatives/florida-college-decision-day/ ☐ If providing food, reach out to a restaurant/catering company
4 Weeks	☐ Provide seniors with enrollment checklist ☐ If necessary, begin volunteer outreach ☐ Plan and prepare outreach and publicity efforts: Prepare a press release (template provided on FCAN's website), and hang flyers around the school
3 Weeks	☐ Send parents and students letters to notify them of the event, remind them about filing the FAFSA, and ensure them that it's not too late to apply ☐ Use social media, text messages, robocalls, announcements, school website, marquee, etc. to remind students and parents about the event
2 Weeks	☐ Finalize event agenda and speakers ☐ Send your press release to the media ☐ Purchase non-perishable supplies ☐ Confirm college plans with seniors
1 Week	☐ Remind teachers, counselors, and administrators of the day's schedule and planned activities ☐ Encourage students and staff to wear college gear the day of the event ☐ Follow up with invited media to encourage attendance
Day of Event	☐ Set up the venue ☐ Take pictures and upload to Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc. with hashtags #CollegeReadyFL, #DecisionDayFL, #BetterMakeRoom, and school-specific hashtags
After Event	☐ Send a letter to participating students congratulating them on their plans ☐ Remind students of remaining steps (financial aid, making deposits, etc.) ☐ Send thank-you letters to volunteers and businesses who supported the event ☐ Submit participation data and feedback to FCAN using the site coordination survey (the link will be emailed mid-May)

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 supervisor 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/

What Supplies Will I Need?

The supplies you will need for your event will depend on the type of event you are planning on hosting. These may include:

- Food
- Prizes/raffle
- 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 plans to recognize on Decision Day, you will likely encounter some students who 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 **MyCareerShines** (www.mycareershines.com) or the **College Scorecard** (collegescorecard.ed.gov) to explore postsecondary options and financial aid information.
- Connect the student with a community 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 **MyCareerShines** (www.mycareershines.com) or the **College Scorecard** (collegescorecard.ed.gov) to explore postsecondary 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 the 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 to help students complete the summer before college:

1   **Make a budget.** Review the student's financial aid award letter and 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** through 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.** Their 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 child care needs, financial support to family, other home/family responsibilities, working, etc.