

Strengthening Statewide FAFSA Completion



May 2025

What is the FAFSA?

- The FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) is a form needed to access federal, state, and local financial aid, including grants – **especially Pell and Florida Student Assistance Grants (FSAG)**, institutional aid, work-study, private scholarships, and subsidized loans.
- FAFSA can help unlock aid for students attending a variety of postsecondary institutions, including **technical colleges and career programs**.
- In the past three years, Florida high school graduating classes have missed out on **more than \$970 million** in Pell Grants because they did not complete the FAFSA.

Why is FAFSA completion important?

- In 2019, Governor DeSantis signed HB 7071 into law that created the SAIL to 60 Initiative, which set an ambitious goal for Florida to increase the percentage of adults holding high-value postsecondary degrees, certificates, or training experiences to **60% by 2030**.
- **Currently, Florida stands at 55.1%.**
- Students who complete the FAFSA are more **likely to enroll in college and complete** their degree.
- In 2023, the last year prior to the new FAFSA process, **32.6% of Florida 12th graders completed** a FAFSA by 3/31. Completion of a FAFSA by the end of March generally ensures an award letter can be issued and a post-secondary decision made in time for Fall enrollment.

What about the new “Better FAFSA?”

- The new FAFSA rollout challenges have been largely solved, and **average FAFSA completion times are less than 30 minutes**.
- While 2024 FAFSA completion fell far short of pre-rollout rates, intentional local outreach strategies led by Local College Access Networks yielded a statewide completion rate of **36.1% by June 30, 2024**.
- The 2025 FAFSA launched ahead of schedule and by the end of March, 31.4% of Florida’s public high school seniors had completed a FAFSA, very close to pre-rollout rates and earning an estimated **\$140 million in Pell Grants**.

What are students saying about the FAFSA?

- “If students are taught about FAFSA earlier in high school—say, in their freshman year rather than their senior year—they can better understand the paths available to them and prepare accordingly. When I was in high school, I was required to take a career class. That would’ve been the perfect time to also learn about feasible and real ways to afford college and reach those careers.” – *Kailia G., English Major*
- “Growing up, there weren’t many visible resources or conversations around how to apply for financial aid, the different types of aid available, or how to plan for college expenses early. Many students, including myself, had to figure things out on our own, and that process can be overwhelming and discouraging—especially for first-generation college students.” – *Jasiah B., Information Science Major*

Recommendation

Educate students and increase utilization of FAFSA completion resources

- As part of an effort to create financially savvy Floridians, **financial literacy instruction will now include education on the FAFSA**—its benefits, completion steps, and the only cost: time. In the 2025 Florida Legislative Session, CS/CS/HB 1255 was signed into law by Governor Ron DeSantis on May 30, 2025 embedding FAFSA education into Florida’s high school financial literacy curriculum. A consistent, statewide method of delivering accurate information about the FAFSA is essential to ensure all students are prepared to access the financial aid they’re eligible for.
- To ensure the work of the policy does not fall exclusively on the shoulders of school counselors, **moving the needle requires system-level support** to make sure schools can provide needed resources.
- FCAN’s annual [FAFSA Challenge](#) offers schools and counselors free resources and strategies to support efforts to increase FAFSA completions.

Ensure all districts have access to student-level FAFSA data

- School counselors need **access to student-level data**, so they can see exact numbers and pinpoint which students to reach out to in order to ensure FAFSA completion.
- The process is not overly complicated, and FCAN conducted a letter-writing campaign in 2020 that raised awareness about the option, and **successfully helped 8 districts** complete a data-sharing agreement with OSFA (Office of Student Financial Assistance).
- To date, **51 of Florida’s 67** county-based school districts have a data-sharing agreement.

Explore Florida’s Current
FAFSA Completion By
School and District:

