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FAFSA Challenge Calls On Schools and Communities To Help Students Secure Cash For College

The statewide initiative encourages communities to compete on increased completion of the federal application process.

Link to FAFSA Challenge logo and photos

TAMPA, FL–With the full release of the 2026–27 Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), the Florida College Access Network (FCAN) is proud to launch the Florida FAFSA Challenge, a statewide initiative that runs through March 27, 2026. Through the Florida FAFSA Challenge, FCAN encourages schools, districts, and community partners to help more high school seniors complete the FAFSA and access the resources needed to pursue education after high school.

This year's challenge carries special significance: it marks the first on-time FAFSA launch since sweeping changes were introduced during the 2024–25 cycle. The September 24 release now complies with the federal FAFSA Deadline Act, standardizing the application's release date nationwide. A key improvement allows students and parents with a Social Security Number to have their identity instantly verified with the Social Security Administration when creating an account—eliminating the previous three-to-five day waiting period.

Given the recent changes and new streamlined process, the FAFSA Challenge is an invitation for Florida communities to host FAFSA completion events.

"FAFSA completion opens doors for students," said Braulio Colón, executive director of FCAN. "For lower-income students, the FAFSA is often the only pathway to affordable postsecondary education, which is why we're excited to rally schools, organizations, and partners to increase their community's FAFSA completion rate."

Completing the FAFSA is a critical first step for unlocking federal, state, and institutional financial aid, including Pell Grants, which provide up to $7,395 annually for students with the greatest financial need.

As of the latest data, Florida ranks 35th nationally in FAFSA completion rates, with only 51.3% of the Class of 2025 seniors finishing the form, according to the National College Attainment Network (NCAN). While Florida has led in keeping public college tuition low, additional costs such as housing, food, transportation, and childcare create real financial barriers.

Earlier this year, the state passed House Bill 1255, which will add FAFSA instruction to high school financial literacy courses. This will undoubtedly help thousands of students become aware of the importance of FAFSA. However, FAFSA completion is not yet a statewide requirement for current seniors. That makes community-driven efforts like the Florida FAFSA Challenge important to ensuring students and families get the support they need to successfully complete the application.

Launched in 2015, the Florida FAFSA Challenge encourages schools and districts to boost FAFSA completion rates by at least five percentage points over the previous school year. In 2024–25, 88 schools and 3 districts met or exceeded this goal according to FCAN's Florida FAFSA Challenge Dashboard.

This year's top performers will receive:

- Public recognition
- FAFSA Challenge Award
- "FAFSA Champion" status for increasing FAFSA completion by 5+ points
- Legislative FAFSA Champion Awards (FCAN's newest category to celebrate legislative efforts to increase FAFSA completion rates in their communities.)

Schools, districts, and community organizations can register now to access exclusive updates, promotional materials, and success strategies. Register for the Florida FAFSA Challenge.

Resources to Help

FCAN and its partners provide a suite of tools to support schools and students:

- Florida FAFSA Challenge Toolkit – Best practices and templates
- NCAN's Financial Aid Resources – For high school students and recent grads
- FSA YouTube Channel – FAFSA walkthroughs and training videos

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About Florida College Access Network

Florida College Access Network (FCAN) is Florida's collaborative network committed to ensuring all Floridians have the opportunity to achieve an education beyond high school and a rewarding career. We envision a Florida working together where education is the pathway to economic mobility for all.

FCAN strives to expand knowledge of research, data, policies, and practices that impact postsecondary access and attainment in Florida. For more information, visit www.floridacollegeaccess.org.

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