



COLLEGE DECISION DAY FLORIDA

2026-27 Toolkit

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About Florida College Access Network

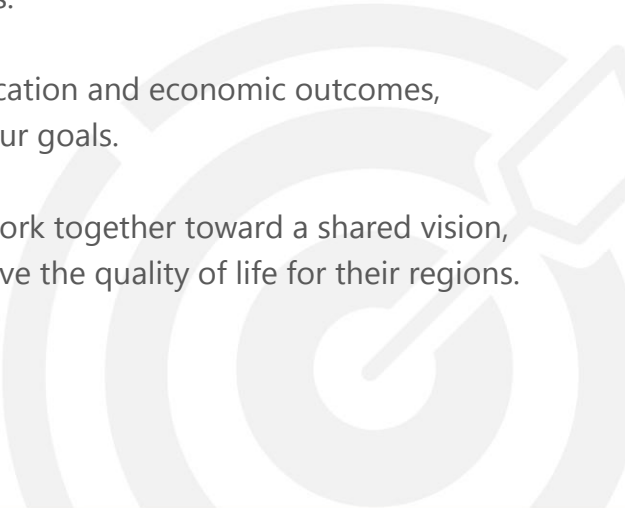
On behalf of Florida College Access Network (FCAN) *thank you for participating in Florida College Decision Day!*

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.
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About Florida College Decision Day

Florida College Decision Day is one of four statewide initiatives - [Apply Yourself Florida](#), the [Florida FAFSA Challenge](#), and [Plan It Florida](#) - that encourage and support high school seniors as they take their next educational steps.

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 post-high school plans.
- Influence younger students and families by building excitement about college.
- Build and support a college-going culture at your school.

Register Today!

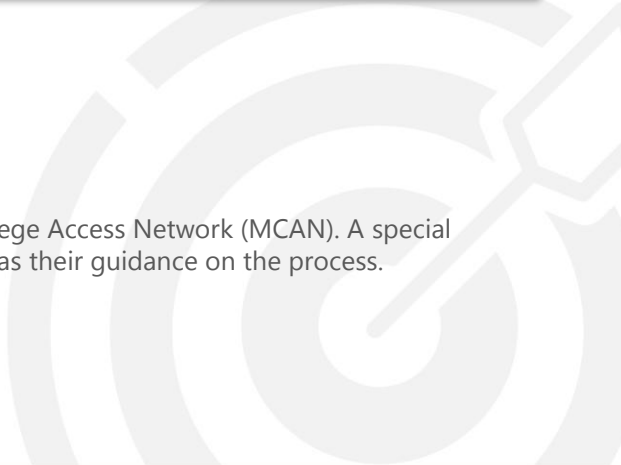
- Schools, districts, local college access networks (LCANs), and community organizations can **register to host** Florida College Decision Day events for students in their community.
- Registrants get access to **free resources and promotional materials**, as well as email updates highlighting helpful event ideas.
- Registering helps FCAN track the impact 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.

Schools and organizations can choose a date that works for their schedule.

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.



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.

- 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!](#)

¹Source: Georgetown Center for Workforce and Education, March 2024 report.

Decision Day Ideas

School-Wide Assemblies

Schools can **host a dedicated assembly** or can make Decision Day an **add-on** to another school-wide event.

Hosting the event in front of the entire school community can help **build excitement about college for younger students**. Encourage students to **dress in attire from their identified pathway**.

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 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 to build school-wide excitement or recognition.

Tips:

Invite high school alumni, elected officials, parents, local college leaders, and business leaders to address students and congratulate them on their accomplishments.

Provide prizes like gift cards or dorm room items.

Best Practices

In Gainesville, College Decision Day is a community event.

Gainesville is home to one of the largest universities in the country. For students without a family history of college, that proximity does not automatically translate into access.

Nearly a quarter of Alachua County residents live below the poverty line, roughly double the state and national averages. More than half of the county's elementary school students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch. The University of Florida's research labs, law school and medical center are fixtures of the local economy, but for many students growing up in Gainesville, higher education can feel like something that happens to other people's children.



The Greater Gainesville Chamber Foundation's annual College Decision Day was designed to push back against that perception: directly, publicly and with a community behind it.

What Makes It Different

Most College Decision Day events happen on school campuses. Gainesville's version moves the celebration into the broader community. Students from multiple public and private high schools gather at a shared venue, surrounded by families, local business partners, Greek letter organizations, and community leaders who show up specifically to bear witness to this milestone.

The signing board behind the students bears the logos of dozens of colleges and universities: Florida A&M, Bethune-Cookman, Edward Waters, Tuskegee, Santa Fe College, LSU, UF, and more. Students hold pennants representing their chosen schools. The room is loud. Younger siblings are in attendance. So are grandparents, often in matching shirts.

That is exactly what Gainesville's College Decision Day builds. Pulling the event out of individual schools and into a shared public space signals that a student's decision to pursue education beyond high school belongs to the whole community.

It is also, according to the research, one of the most effective things a community can do to make sure students actually get there.

Preparing for Your Event

Event Promotion

- Inform students about the event through **morning announcements**, the **school news channel**, **social media**, etc.
- Encourage students to **share their college decisions on social media** using the hashtags **#DecisionDayFL** and **#CollegeSigningDayFL**, or hashtags specific to your school.
- **Create a “College Wall”** where students can send their photos, post their acceptance letters, sign their names, or indicate on a map to show where they’re going to college.
- **Send text updates** through free services.

Early Awareness

Another purpose of Florida College Decision Day is to promote early college awareness among families and younger students. Here are a few ways you can do this all year long at your school:

Workshops

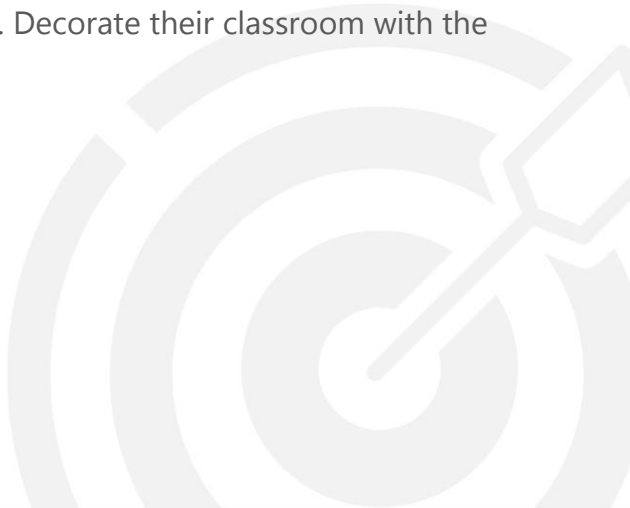
Provide workshops on college readiness topics for students and parents. Potential topics can include decision-making, learning styles, study habits, the importance of GPA and high school course selection, college test prep, etc.

College Spotlight

Choose a different college, university, or post-high school path to feature each week. You can consider asking trivia questions and awarding prizes.

Adopt-a-College

Classrooms can “adopt” a college and do research on the school. Decorate their classroom with the college colors, logos, and fun facts.



Recruiting Volunteers

Volunteers can be a great resource to help Florida College Decision Day events run smoothly. Schools or organizations can rely on volunteers to check students in, distribute raffle tickets, serve food, or answer questions,

Where to Find Volunteers

- [Local College Access Networks \(LCANs\)](#)
- School alumni or underclassmen
- Area college or university representatives, including faculty
- Business leaders
- Youth programs

Contacting and Scheduling Volunteers

- Send potential volunteer groups a recruitment letter or email.
- Mention the need for volunteers in promotional communications.
- 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.
 - Conduct a quick orientation to familiarize volunteers with the details of your event.
 - Send a thank-you letter to all volunteers for their participation in your Florida College Decision Day event.
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Sample Event Timeline

Time to Event	Tasks to Complete
7-8 Weeks	☐ Form a College Decision Day committee at your school to aid in planning ☐ Evaluate resources and budget for the event ☐ Brainstorm possible format, agenda, and speakers
6 Weeks	☐ Finalize event date and time ☐ Share information with school administrators, teachers, and staff
5 Weeks	☐ Invite potential guest speakers ☐ Reach out to businesses/colleges for donations and sponsorships. If providing food, reach out to a restaurant/catering company
4 Weeks	☐ Begin volunteer outreach ☐ Check in on students who plan to go to college but have not applied yet and offer support.
3 Weeks	☐ Send parents/students letters to notify them of the event, remind them about completing the FAFSA, and ensure them that it's not too late to apply to college ☐ Use social media, text messages, announcements, school website, marquee, etc. to remind students and parents about the event
2 Weeks	☐ Finalize event agenda and speakers ☐ Confirm post-high school 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
Day of Event	☐ Set up the venue with college themed decorations; provide a "photo booth" spot where students can take pictures in their college gear ☐ Take pictures and upload to social media with hashtags #DecisionDayFL , #CollegeSigningDayFL , 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

Steps for Students Who Haven't Enrolled

As you work with high school seniors to identify their plans and recognize on Decision Day, you will likely encounter some students who intend to go to college but have yet to enroll. This provides an opportunity to follow-up with these students about their plans.

Scenario 1: Student has not applied or has an incomplete application

- Direct students to [FloridaShines](#) or the [College Scorecard](#) to explore college options and financial aid information.
- Connect the student with a state or technical 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. Have the student provide outstanding information.

Scenario 2: Student applied but was not admitted

- Direct students to [FloridaShines](#) or the [College Scorecard](#) to explore college options and financial aid information.
- Connect students with a local state or technical college.

Scenario 3: Student was admitted but hasn't 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 experts at the college.
 - Research the college's steps to enroll and assist the student in completing all requirements
 - Assist the student in connecting with their college's financial aid office particularly for help with paying for enrollment fees, deposits, and completing the FAFSA.
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