



Florida College Decision Day

2017-18 Site

Coordinator Toolkit

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Dear Reader,

On behalf of Florida College Access Network, 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 of your students will help build a college-going culture at your school. 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 three statewide initiatives that encourages and assists high school seniors as they take their next educational steps. FCAN also coordinates Apply Yourself Florida and the Florida FAFSA Challenge, which support high school seniors with completing college applications and applying for financial aid. We look forward to your school participating in College Decision Day and, we hope, all three 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! We may even feature your achievements on our blog or social media channels! Contact our Statewide Programs Coordinator, Amy Bolick with stories, questions, and suggestions.

Thank you for celebrating your seniors' next educational steps. We hope College Decision Day becomes a tradition at your school that will continue for years to come, encouraging all students to continue their educations beyond high school!

FCAN thanks the Swift Family Foundation for their generous support of the Florida FAFSA Challenge.



About Florida College Access Network

Florida College Access Network (FCAN) is a statewide network of leaders, organizations, educators, and individuals who are collectively committed to dramatically increasing postsecondary opportunities for all Florida students—especially students traditionally underrepresented in higher education, such as low income students and those who are the first in their families to go to college.

Our Mission: To create and strengthen a statewide network that catalyzes and supports communities to improve college and career readiness, access, and completion for all students.

Our Vision: At least 60% of working-age Floridians will hold a high-quality post-secondary 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.
- **Reaching Goal 2025 will require collective action.** Accelerating high-quality degree production in Florida to meet Goal 2025 requires strategic partnerships and active involvement from all sectors.



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Does Everyone Need to Go to College?

Students should choose a plan for life after high school that meets their unique needs. That's why FCAN embraces a **broad definition of college** that acknowledges various options.

What We Talk About 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 enrollment, 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 47% of Floridians** hold such a credential
- Learn more about **education rates in your county** by downloading your degree attainment profile at <http://bit.ly/2tasDCH>



The Need for College is Growing

65%: The percentage of jobs that will require an education beyond high school by 2025

47%: The percentage of Floridians currently holding such a credential

About Florida College Decision Day

What is College Decision Day?

- An initiative to recognize and celebrate students' plans for **life after high school**
- Inspired by NCAA's National Signing Day event to reinforce the value that **academic achievements** should be just as celebrated as athletic ones
- 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

- 2017-18: 239 schools in 26 counties
- 2016-17: 104 schools in 17 counties
- 2015-16: 74 schools in 14 counties

Why Host Decision Day?

- To recognize **all students with postsecondary plans**
- To influence **younger students and families** by building excitement about college
- To build and support a **college-going culture** at your school



Register Today!

- Schools, districts, LCANS, and community organizations can register to host a Decision Day event for students in their community
- Registrants get access to free resources and promotional materials, as well as email updates highlighting cool ideas from school around the state
- Register at <http://bit.ly/2xpjkvO>

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 the entire school community can help build excitement about college for **younger grades**
- Schools can host a **dedicated assembly**, or can make Decision Day an **add-on** to another school-wide event

Here's a Tip!

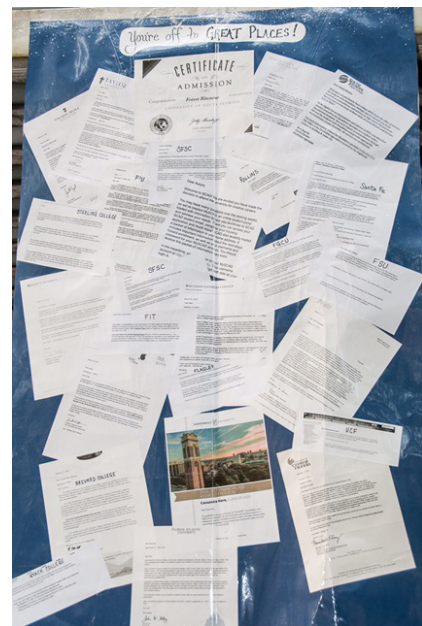
If your school has a large number of seniors, group students based on the institution they are attending, rather than recognizing students individually

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 **lack the capacity** to host an event in front of the entire school or community schools 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**



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 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 **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 and #DecisionDayFL or tags specific to your school
- Create a **“College Wall;”** students can post their acceptance letters, sign their names, or place pins 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 in an editable Word Document 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

One purpose of College Decision Day is to promote early awareness among 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 or logo.

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, etc.

Where to Find Volunteers

- Local College Access Networks (LCANs) ***LINK

If you aren't sure whether there's an LCAN in your community, or if you'd like help getting in touch with your community's LCAN, please reach out to Amy Bolick at abolick@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, admissions office, and financial aid
- Business, community, and political leaders
- Youth programs (i.e., YMCA, Boys and 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 <http://bit.ly/2D2OqvF>

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 dedication to Florida College Decision Day!

Sample Event Timeline

Time to Event	Tasks to Complete
8-7 Weeks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Set up a College Decision Day committee at your school to aid planning □ Evaluate resources and budget for the event □ Brainstorm possible speakers and agenda
6 Weeks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Confirm event data and time □ Share information with school administrators, teachers, and staff □ Discuss possible tie-in assignments with teachers □ Share plans with LCAN (if applicable)
5 Weeks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Invite potential guest speakers □ Reach out to business/colleges for donations and sponsorship using letter templates found here: http://bit.ly/2FZV5tt □ If providing food, reach out to restaurant/catering company
4 Weeks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Provide seniors with enrollment checklist □ If necessary, begin volunteer outreach □ Plan and prepare outreach and publicity efforts: Prepare a press release (template provided here: http://bit.ly/2FssqQa), and hang fliers around the school
3 Weeks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Finalize speakers and event agenda □ Send press release to media □ Purchase non-perishable supplies □ Confirm college plans with seniors
1 Week	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Set up the venue □ Take pictures and upload to Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc. with hashtags #CollegeReadyFL, #DecisionDayFL, and school-specific hashtags
After Event	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Send a letter to participating students congratulating them on their plans □ Remind students of remaining steps (financial aid, making deposits, etc.) □ Thank volunteers and donors □ Share your stories and pictures with FCAN!

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) 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 student to **MyCareerShines** or **College Scorecard** to explore other postsecondary options and financial aid information.
- Connect student with a **local state college**.

Scenario 3: The student was admitted, but has not officially decided/enrolled

- Encourage student to talk to **trusted adults** and share feelings, questions and concerns.
- Connect student 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 to help 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.