FAFSA Series Part 1: Universal FAFSA Policy – Examples of Advocacy, Adoption, and Implementation

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Welcome!

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Questions & Conversation

• Submit your questions in the box

• Share on social media
  Twitter: @FLCollegeAccess
  #FCAN
  #TalentStrongFL

This webinar is being recorded; all materials will be available within a week of recording
Louisiana
VISION for SUCCESS
Introduction

Barrye Bailey
Education Program Consultant Postsecondary Readiness
Office of Career and College Readiness
Louisiana Department of Education

Our division manages financial aid planning, Community Service, Fast Forward, course codes, credit recovery, diplomas and endorsement seals, Extension Academies, JAG Aim High!, transcripts, high school equivalency, Students of the Year, U.S. Senate Youth, gifted and talented academics, proficiency exams, high school academics/policy, and the Jump Start Construction Connect Scholarship.
Financial Aid Working Group

In order to provide even greater access to financial aid for Louisiana students in 2014, the Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE) formed the Financial Aid Working Group (FAWG) to evaluate the state’s financial aid application completion rates, identify deficiencies and solutions for communities with low completion rates, and provide a comprehensive list of recommendations to the LDOE on how to improve financial aid completion rates statewide. The Financial Aid working group continues to meet quarterly to analyze current trends and best practices in financial aid planning and create a network of resources for students around the state.
FAWG Tasks

1. Develop a state action plan to track school-level financial aid form completion and make recommendations to the Department regarding changes in policy or funding opportunities deemed necessary to ensure that the new policy is implemented with fidelity;
2. Support the Department in the ongoing identification of services and programs available for schools and families; and
3. Assist in the development of partnerships and alliances with financial aid-related support programs, services, and stakeholders.
Policy

In December of 2015 the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) approved a policy regarding postsecondary planning for graduating public high school seniors. The policy sought to increase student access to state and federal financial aid by requiring graduating seniors to either

- complete the Taylor Opportunity Program for Students (TOPS) application or the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA);
- declare a hardship by waiver; or
- submit a parental or student of age waiver to the local school system.

These policies were made effective with the start of the 2017-2018 school year and applied to the Class of 2018. The data is collected in the Student Transcript System.
The State of Financial Aid in Louisiana

An additional charge of the FAWG was for the LDOE to create an annual report called the State of Financial Aid in Louisiana. It can be found on the LDOE website’s Financial Aid page. It details FAFSA submission rates by school system as well as a breakdown of data by subgroup categories.

In addition the LDOE hired one full time financial aid specialist and a part time counselor to aid schools with FAFSA submission.
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Ebony Holmes
Director of Public Information & Advising
College Access, Success, and Communications
FAFSA NOW CAMPAIGN

• Pilot launched October 2020

• Urge high school seniors to complete their Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) by February 1 each year.

• Use text messaging and social media outlets to get the word out to students about the importance of completing the FAFSA.

• Encourage stakeholders to get involved by downloading our press kit, which contains FAFSA NOW logos, graphic templates, and social media posts.
OUTREACH EFFORTS

- FAFSA Completion Events: assist students and parents in completing their respective portions of the FAFSA.
- LOSFA FAFSA Lab
- Virtual Office Hours: FAFSA Assistance
- GeauxFAFSA.la.gov
- Text 50056 (SignalVine, texting platform) for assistance
- FAFSA Error Reports
- Virtual FAFSA Marathon
- Partnerships with other members of the college access community: FAA at postsecondary institutions, high school stakeholders, community partners, etc.
FAFSA COMPLETION PROJECT

• Federal initiative to encourage all high school seniors to complete the FAFSA. To participate, school boards, charter schools, and non-public schools must enter agreements with the agency to ensure that all data exchanged is handled securely and will be used only as intended.

  • Public school boards will enter the agreement on behalf of all public schools within the district, and charter and non-public schools will enter individual agreements.

  • An authorized requestor is assigned to receive the FAFSA data for the district. The authorized requestor then provides the data to each individual high school in the district.

• School boards/schools receive student-level data to know which students to follow up with.

  • The only data that will transfer between the agency and the school boards/schools is the student’s name and whether the student has completed the FAFSA.

  • These schools will still be able to receive aggregate data from the USDOE.
• Statewide tracker of completed FAFSAs broke down by district and school.

• The “monthly champion” measures the percent increase of completion for the month to date being reported. The current rankings measure the highest percentage increase on a week-to-week basis.

• A school can lead in increase from week to week but not lead in monthly overall completions.
• Virtual FAFSA Ceremony
  • Schools of Excellence – 100% completion
  • Schools of Achievement – Exceeded the national completion average
• Recognition of Schools of Excellence and Schools of Achievement at our Advisory Board Meeting
• Recognition of Monthly FAFSA Champions
• Highlight student and counselor voices
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Alabama
About Alabama Possible

Alabama Possible is a statewide nonprofit organization that breaks down barriers to prosperity through advocacy, education, and collaboration.
Sponsors
Partners
Alabama Possible | Scope of Work

- Postsecondary Access
- Postsecondary Success
- Advocacy
- Civic Engagement
Alabama Possible | Initiatives
Postsecondary Access
Alabama Goes to College Campaign

**Campaign Components**

**CASH FOR COLLEGE**
Cash for College’s goal is for every graduating senior to complete the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) before they graduate from high school so that they can access federal, state, and institutional aid to pay for their education after high school.

**ALABAMA COLLEGE APPLICATION WEEK**
Alabama College Application Week is part of a national effort to increase the number of first-generation college students and students from low-income families pursuing a college degree or other higher education credential. The primary purpose of this effort is to help high school seniors navigate the complex college application and admissions process and ensure they apply to at least one postsecondary institution.

**COLLEGE AND CAREER DECISION DAY**
College and Career Decision Day celebrates students committing to pursue their education past high school: whether to obtain a two-year degree, a four-year degree, a certificate or industry recognized credential, enter the military, or pursue a skilled trade.
Postsecondary Success
Alabama College Attainment Network and Higher Education Alliance

- Alabama College Attainment Network
  - Regional College Attainment Network
- Higher Education Alliance
  - (Re)Engage Alabama
  - Historically Black Community Colleges/
    Predominantly Black Community Colleges Network
Civic Engagement

Barriers to Prosperity Data Sheet
  - Barriers to Prosperity Toolkit
Advocacy
FAFSA Advocacy Strategy

Student Voices

Social media

Media outlets
FAFSA + COVID

FAFSA is more important than ever!

March 6: Class of 2020 had 1.96% more FAFSA completions than Class of 2019

June 26: Class of 2020 had 3.05% fewer FAFSA completions than Class of 2019
Why This Matters
Why This Matters

*Source: Alabama Workforce Council*

Only 45% of the Alabama workforce has a high-value credential beyond a high school diploma.

Alabama needs 500,000+ highly skilled workers with valuable credentials by 2025.
FAFSA Completion in Alabama (Class of 2021)

ALABAMA RANKED #32 IN FAFSA COMPLETION
For Alabama’s Class of 2021, around 2 out of 5 seniors had completed the FAFSA by the time they graduated high school.
FAFSA Advocacy Strategy

- **Advocacy Efforts**: Engage students, parents, educators, workforce leaders
- **Universal FAFSA Policy Passed**: Dispel myths, support/training/resources
- **Policy Implemented**:

  - **October 2020**
  - **April 2021**
  - **August 2021**
FAFSA In-Person Workshops

300+

- Calhoun Community College
- Trenholm State Community College
- Lawson State Community College
- Bishop State Community College
- Wallace State Community College, Dothan
Postsecondary Access
Alabama Goes to College Campaign Resources
Social Media & Webinar Resources
Cash for College Data Dashboard
alabamapossible.org/dashboard

Cash for College Data Dashboard

Most Alabama high school seniors who file their FAFSA get financial aid to help pay for education after high school — including Pell Grants of up to $6,495/year. This money can be used for technical and academic programs at two- and four-year colleges and universities and does not have to be paid back. Alabama’s 2020 high school graduates left approximately $60 million in grants on the table because they did not complete their FAFSA. You can see FAFSA completion data for more than 350 Alabama high schools with the dashboard and search tools below.
Data Tools

fafsa.ache.edu
Celebrate

2021-22 CASH FOR COLLEGE WINNERS

MVP
- HARTSELLE HIGH SCHOOL: 84.00% completion rate
- RAMSBAY HIGH SCHOOL: 96.00% completion rate
- GENEVA COUNTY HIGH SCHOOL: 98.15% completion rate

MOST IMPROVED
- DECATUR HIGH SCHOOL: 100.63% improvement rate
- WOODLAWN HIGH SCHOOL: 195.59% improvement rate
- BARBOUR COUNTY HIGH SCHOOL: 647.50% improvement rate

Awards are based on data collected as of April 29, 2022.

alabamapossible
### National Ranking: 10th

% of Seniors Completing the FAFSA (Class of 2022)

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<th>Rank</th>
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<td>Tennessee</td>
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<td>Alabama</td>
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Source: NCAN
National Ranking: 2nd

% Change in FAFSA Completion Year-Over-Year (Class of 2022)

Source: NCAN
Advocacy Strategy

Policy Progress
Collect voice of counselors, coaches, students, parents

Policy Implemented
Monitor & Report progress

Policy Impacts

March 2022
August 2022
Data Tools…Evolved

fafsa.ache.edu
National Rankings: 11\textsuperscript{th} & 44\textsuperscript{th}

% of Seniors Completing the FAFSA (Class of 2023)

Source: NCAN
What We’ve Learned
WHAT WE LEARNED

Set Goals and Create a Timeline

Build and Leverage Strong Partnerships

Incorporate College-Going Activities into Curricula
WHAT WE LEARNED

Family/Parent Engagement is a Major Challenge

Communicate through Multiple Channels

Use Data to Track Progress and Celebrate Success

HOW TO FILL OUT THE FAFSA

1. Go to fafsa.gov or use the myStudentAid app and log in using your FSA ID.
2. Choose which FAFSA you’d like to complete (select the year in which you will be attending college).
3. Enter your personal information exactly as it appears on official government documents.
4. Choose up to 10 schools. Add any school that you plan on attending.
5. Sign and submit with your FSA ID.
Indiana
Universal FAFSA Webinar

Florida College Access Network

Greg Harrell
Director of Legislation
UNIVERSAL FAFSA
WHERE WE STARTED

- FAFSA is the **gateway** to state, federal, and most institutional financial aid.

- The Commission has an **outreach team** dedicated to helping students and families file the FAFSA and training schools and community partners to provide support.

- However, Indiana’s FAFSA-filing rate has remained **below** target goals set by the Commission.
According to NCAN, Hoosier students from the class of 2022 left $70 million on the table simply by not completing the FAFSA.

Indiana finished 40th nationally for FAFSA filing for the class of 2022.
WHERE WE STARTED

- FAFSA percentages across the state have rebounded, but still trail pre-pandemic levels.

- Schools with more free and reduced lunch students, rural schools, and schools that enroll larger populations of students of color have experienced greater declines in FAFSA filing.

- These declines mirror the decline in postsecondary enrollment for short-term certificates to four-year degrees.
CALL TO ACTION

- Failure to address this issue will have a **long-term impact** on Indiana’s economy.

- In response, the Commission has strongly supported legislation aimed at making FAFSA filing a **default option** for Indiana students during successive legislative sessions.
Prior to the 2023 legislative session, bills centered on creating a FAFSA requirement passed one chamber but would fail afterwards in the House or Senate.

Progress was made in 2022 with the passage of Senate Enrolled Act (SEA) 82.

The bill originally included FAFSA requirement language, but this information was stricken by an amendment in the House Education Committee.
CALL TO ACTION

- SEA 82-2022 required the Commission to create a FAFSA Affirmation Form.

- The FAFSA Affirmation Form was built into the Commission’s Learn More Indiana webpage and shared with high schools.

- The form allows students and parents to submit requests to the Commission for assistance with filing the FAFSA.
During the 2023 legislative session, universal FAFSA legislation passed.

SEA 167-2023 makes FAFSA filing a default option for high school seniors beginning with the class of 2024.

It includes broad opt-out provisions:

- Parents or emancipated students can opt out of filing.
- A high school can waive the requirement after April 15, Indiana’s priority deadline for financial aid, if the school has made two reasonable attempts to contact the student and/or parent.
Implementing Efforts

- The Commission has begun implementation efforts for SEA 167-2023.
  - A form will be created for parents or emancipated students to opt out and will be made available prior to the 24-25 FAFSA launching in December.
  - Additionally, a widget will be made available after April 15 in ScholarTrack, Indiana’s one-stop-shop for state financial aid, through which high schools can submit batch uploads of students to opt out of filing the FAFSA after two reasonable attempts have been made to contact them.
LOOKING FORWARD

- There is evidence that SEA 167-2023 will help reverse current FAFSA-filing trends based on results in other states with similar legislation.

- After the implementation of a universal FAFSA requirement:
  - Alabama jumped from 34th to 9th and Texas rose from 23rd to 5th nationally for the percent of high school seniors who filed the FAFSA.
Greg Harrell

Director of Legislation

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Questions?
Conclusion