

FAFSA for All: Improving Educational Attainment in Florida

By ensuring every high school student completes the FAFSA before graduation, Florida can increase postsecondary participation

By 2030, the “SAIL to 60” initiative aims to have 60 percent of Florida’s working-age residents equipped with a high-quality postsecondary degree, certificate, or credential of value—a critical goal to address a looming gap in the state’s labor market.¹ But, in order for more Floridians to pursue higher education, they first must be able to pay for it.

The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) opens the door to grants, low-interest loans, and work-study opportunities that make college accessible to individuals with limited financial resources. Unfortunately, many students who are eligible to receive financial aid never fill out the FAFSA, often because they do not realize that they are eligible for aid or find the form too difficult to complete.² In Florida, where less than 60 percent of graduating high school students submit the FAFSA,³ improving completion rates could make a big difference: students who fill out the FAFSA are 84 percent more likely to immediately enroll in postsecondary education.⁴

To secure our future economy and equip Floridians with the skills to compete in the job market, Florida must ensure that every high school student has the support necessary to complete the FAFSA and does so before graduation.



In recent years, multiple states have made completing the FAFSA a graduation requirement in an effort to produce a better-trained workforce. The strategy is starting to pay off: In Louisiana, the first state to institute universal FAFSA, a 10 percentage point increase in a school’s FAFSA completion rates has translated to a 3 percentage point increase in postsecondary enrollment.⁵

The key to ensuring that universal FAFSA works is ensuring that students and families have the support they need to navigate the process and complete the application in time to be eligible for aid.⁶ The students who need the most financial support often struggle

to complete the FAFSA and are more likely to file their FAFSAs late,⁷ which can limit their available resources and educational choices.⁸ With nearly 60 percent of Florida jobs requiring postsecondary education as of 2018, ensuring that students have as much support as possible is vital to our state's future workforce.⁹

Florida has the opportunity to lead the nation in developing a skilled, credentialed workforce by ensuring that every student can access the resources they need to launch their careers. Universal FAFSA—along with the support to fulfill it—could be key to making higher education affordable and accessible.

1 Lumina Foundation (2020). A stronger nation: Learning beyond high school builds American talent. Florida's progress towards the goal. <https://www.luminafoundation.org/stronger-nation/report/2020/#state/F>

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4 DeBaun, B. (2019). "Survey Data Strengthen Association Between FAFSA Completion and Enrollment." National College Access Network. <https://www.ncan.org/news/news.asp?id=456025>

5 Deneault, C. (2021). "College Enrollment and Mandatory FAFSA Applications: Evidence from Louisiana." Annenberg Institute at Brown University. <https://edworkingpapers.com/sites/default/files/ai21-425.pdf>

6 Cameron, M. (2020). "Many states require FAFSA filing before high school graduation, but timing can be everything." Brookings. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/brown-center-chalkboard/2020/06/04/many-states-require-fafsa-filing-before-high-school-graduation-but-timing-can-be-everything/>

7 Salerno, C. (2018). "Timing is Everything: FAFSA Filing Trends." Campus Logic. <https://resources.campuslogic.com/thought-leadership/timing-is-everything-fafsa-filing-trends>

8 Roderick, M., Nagaoka, J., Coca, V., & Moeller, E. (2008). "From High School to the Future: Potholes on the Road to College. Consortium on Chicago School Research, University of Chicago. https://consortium.uchicago.edu/sites/default/files/2018-10/CCSR_Potholes_Report.pdf

9 The Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce. Florida. https://cew.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/HW_Florida.pdf

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