10 evidence-based practices to support all your seniors to complete their financial aid for college applications

OCTOBER 2021 - JUNE 2022

Extensive research shows that high schools can make a big difference in helping low-income, immigrant, and first-generation college hopefuls complete the FAFSA and other state financial aid applications. With the reality of remote and in-person learning this year, targeted support from schools to help students and families complete their financial aid applications is more important than ever.

In this Toolkit, you'll find 10 evidence-based best practices your school can use to support all eligible seniors and their families to complete their FAFSA, NYS Application for TAP, and NYS DREAM Act forms. You can find the Toolkit materials listed in each step at **https://newyork.edtrust.org/fafsa-toolkit/**.

Please note that completing these applications often requires follow-up after a student has submitted their applications, including timely responses to verification requests from financial aid offices. We've included reminders about both submission and follow-up in the strategies below.

1 HOLD A VIRTUAL OR IN-PERSON FINANCIAL AID FOR COLLEGE COMPLETION NIGHT

Hold a virtual or in-person schoolwide financial aid for college completion night in partnership with a community-based organization (CBO) that has trusted relationships with students and their families. It may be particularly helpful to partner with a CBO that has expertise supporting students who are undocumented with college access. Trained school staff should be available to support students and families as they complete their FAFSA, NYS Application for TAP, and NYS DREAM Act forms and respond to verification requests. **Schools should determine which students do not participate in an in-person or virtual event and follow up with them individually.**

IN-PERSON

At the event, students and families should have access to computers and internet, as well as counselors and others, to help complete their FAFSA, NYS Application for TAP, and NYS DREAM Act forms and respond to verification requests. It is often helpful to hold your event at the same time as another mandatory event — such as senior night — to ensure families can prioritize attendance. Schools should follow CDC guidelines regarding health and safety protocols for holding in-person events during the coronavirus pandemic.

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3 DEDICATE CLASS TIME TO FINANCIAL AID APPLICATION COMPLETION

Set aside 1 hour of class time each week for students to work on their applications and respond to verification requests. Ensure there is private space for students who are undocumented to get support without having to publicly share their immigration status.

IN-PERSON

Consider using homeroom or mandatory study hall periods to regularly dedicate time to student financial aid completion.

REMOTE

Incorporate financial aid completion into your lesson plans. Ensure that during the dedicated class time, students are in direct contact with the school so that they can ask questions and get immediate responses.

TIMELINE – Classroom time set aside each week from October – June.

TOOLKIT MATERIALS – **How-to guide: Financial aid for college office hours (pages 21-22 of this Toolkit)** and **lesson plan template (pages 23-24 of this Toolkit)**

4 SEND REGULAR LETTERS OR EMAILS TO FAMILIES

Send monthly letters and emails out to families with reminders about the FAFSA, NYS Application for TAP, and NYS DREAM Act forms as well as information about upcoming opportunities to get support to complete those materials and respond to verification requests.

TIMELINE – Send a letter and email once per month from October – June.

TOOLKIT MATERIALS – **Monthly letters and emails templates in English and Spanish**

5 POST UPDATES IN SCHOOL NEWSLETTERS, EMAILS, AND NEWSPAPERS

Include regular updates in the school newsletter, emails, and newspapers about the FAFSA, NYS Application for TAP, and NYS DREAM Act forms as well as information about upcoming opportunities to get support to complete those materials and respond to verification requests.

TIMELINE – Each school newsletter or newspaper that is released from October – June.

TOOLKIT MATERIALS – **Monthly updates for school newsletters, emails, and newspapers in English and Spanish**

6 SEND REGULAR TEXTS AND ROBOCALLS TO FAMILIES

Using your school or district's text or robocall system, send out at least one update per month to families and students about financial aid completion and responses to verification requests. You can also use those systems to drive participation in your financial aid for college completion night and office hours.

TIMELINE – At least once per month from October – June and at least once per week in the weeks immediately preceding your financial aid for college completion night and office hours.

TOOLKIT MATERIALS – Pre-written text and robocall scripts in English and Spanish

7 POST REGULARLY ON YOUR SCHOOL'S SOCIAL MEDIA

Post regularly on your school's social media accounts about the FAFSA, NYS Application for TAP, and NYS DREAM Act forms as well as information about upcoming opportunities to get support to complete those materials and respond to verification requests.

TIMELINE – At least once per week from October – June, as well as daily in the week immediately leading up to key events such as the financial aid for college completion night and office hours.

TOOLKIT MATERIALS – Regular social media posts in English and Spanish

8 USE DATA TO TRACK YOUR SCHOOL'S PROGRESS TOWARD FULL FAFSA COMPLETION

Regularly check on your school's progress toward full FAFSA completion. This October, you should join the **NYS FAFSA Completion Initiative data access program** organized by the state's Higher Education Services Corporation (HESC) to get student-level completion data. You should also check the **www.NYFAFSAChallenge.org** website starting in early 2022. The information from both of these sites should be used to track how well your school's efforts are working and target resources to individual students and families who need support.

TIMELINE – Track progress and follow-up with students and families at least once per week from January – June.

TOOLKIT MATERIALS – **How-to guide: Using data to track your school's progress toward 100 percent financial aid for college completion** (pages 25-26 of this Toolkit)

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ADD A SECTION TO YOUR SCHOOL WEBSITE WITH INFORMATION ABOUT FINANCIAL AID FOR COLLEGE COMPLETION

In a prominent place on your website, post information about the importance of financial aid for college completion, a list of the supports your school is offering to students, and links to resources that students and families can use to help them complete their applications.

TIMELINE – Add the section to your website by mid-October, and regularly update it with new information through June.

TOOLKIT MATERIALS – **Pre-written copy for your school website section on financial aid for college completion in English and Spanish**

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ENSURE THAT YOUR SCHOOL COUNSELOR AND AT LEAST 2-3 OTHER SCHOOL STAFF ATTEND A TRAINING ABOUT HOW TO SUPPORT STUDENTS TO COMPLETE THEIR FINANCIAL AID FOR COLLEGE APPLICATIONS

In November, we will be hosting a virtual training available to staff from schools that are utilizing this Toolkit to drive financial aid for college completion during the should be 2021-22 school year. Our training will offer specific instruction on supporting students who are undocumented or who have parents who are undocumented navigate the college financial aid application process. Sign your school up for access to the training at **www.NYFAFSAChallenge.org**.

TIMELINE – Sign up for access to the fall training in October 2021.

TOOLKIT MATERIALS – Sign up for the training at **www.NYFAFSAChallenge.org**

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