Leveraging a Statewide, Cross-Sector Strategy to Increase FAFSA Completion

Troy Grant & Jessie Greene, Tennessee Higher Education Commission
Goals for Today

• Overview of statewide strategies to increase FAFSA filing
• Best practices and strategies for increasing FAFSA filing
• Discussion on strategies you can adapt for your work
What challenges do you face in increasing FAFSA completion in your program, school, or context?
FAFSA in Tennessee
**Tennessee Context**

- The FAFSA is required for Tennessee state aid, including TN Promise, the Hope Scholarship, and TSAA.
- Last year, Tennessee awarded $485.8 million in state financial aid – most of this aid requires the completion of the FAFSA.
- In Tennessee, FAFSA submission “season” is tied to the TN Promise deadline.
- TN Promise Checklist for HS Graduating Class
  - Application Due – **November 1, 2022**
  - FAFSA Filing Deadline – **March 1, 2023**
FAFSA Filing in Tennessee

The chart shows the trend of FAFSA filing in Tennessee from 2013-2014 to 2020-2021. The filing rate increased significantly from 2013-2014 to 2015-2016, with a slight decline in 2016-2017. From 2017-2018 onwards, the filing rate continued to increase, reaching a peak in 2019-2020. However, there was a notable decrease in 2020-2021 compared to the previous year.
# 2021 - 2022

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Current Rank</th>
<th>% of Seniors Completing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Louisiana</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>69.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Tennessee</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>68.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Washington, D.C.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>67.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Mississippi</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>67.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Delaware</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>66.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>66.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>65.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>New York</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>63.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Alabama</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>63.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>New Jersey</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>62.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Estimated Percent of Seniors Completing a FAFSA

Tennessee vs. National

% of Class of 2021 Completing a FAFSA

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70%

3.9% 7.3% 14.1% 17.2% 21.5% 30.1% 43.5% 52.3% 57.4% 62.4% 62.9% 65.1% 65.4% 64.1% 64.5% 63.4% 67.3%
Pell Grant Dollars Left on the Table

Tennessee (2021)

$47,596,044

NCAN Report: $3.75 Billion in Pell Grants Goes Unclaimed for High School Class of 2021
Statewide Efforts to Increase FAFSA Completion
TN FAFSA Frenzy

A strategic, data-driven campaign to encourage as many students as possible to submit the FAFSA, with a special emphasis on submitting the FAFSA in time to remain eligible for the TN Promise scholarship.

**Resources** – Toolkit, CollegeforTN.org, student resources

**Communications** – Frequent email communications, FAFSA Challenge, etc.

**Collaboration** – THEC, TSAC, TN Department of Education, the Ayers Foundation, and tnAchieves

**Data** – weekly high school by high school updates on FAFSA submission
Resources: TN FAFSA Frenzy Toolkit

84 pages of FAFSA and Financial Aid information!

• Event planning support including templates, best practices, and webinars.
• TN Financial Aid Overview
• FAFSA specific resources for completing the form

Resources include:

• Step by Step FSA ID guide with screenshots
• Updated volunteer recruitment and training materials
• FAFSA worksheet previewing all questions asked on the FAFSA
Resources: CollegeForTN.org

SCHOOL RESOURCES
Resources and guides focused on helping high schools strengthen their TN FAFSA Frenzy efforts.

STUDENT RESOURCES
Step-by-step FAFSA-filing instructions and videos to help students complete the FAFSA.

TN FAFSA CHALLENGE
A statewide challenge for Tennessee public high schools with the goal of increasing FAFSA completion.

EVENT RESOURCES

High School
- 2021-2022 TN FAFSA Frenzy Toolkit
- 2022-2023 FAFSA Worksheet
- FSA ID Worksheet
- TN FAFSA Frenzy Event Poster
- TN Promise Flyer
- 4 Sources of Fin Aid – Federal Government
- 4 Sources of Fin Aid – TN Financial Aid
- 4 Sources of Fin Aid – Private Scholarships
- 4 Sources of Fin Aid – Your College
- Do the FAFSA

Middle School
- TN FAFSA Frenzy Toolkit 2021-22
- College Comic Strip
- College Road Map
- TN Promise Flyer
- TN Reconnect Flier
- TN Reconnect Flier – Spanish
- Financial Literacy One-Pager
- TN Stars S29
- TNStars S29 Updates
- Vault: Financial Literacy Game from Every1

Elementary School
- College Scholarship Web
- Path to College Salary Activity
- TN Reconnect Flier
- TN Reconnect Flier – Spanish
- Federal Student Aid – Elementary School College Prep Checklists
- Vault: Financial Literacy Curriculum from Every1
Resources: Student Resources

MONEY FOR COLLEGE

HOW TO FILL OUT THE FAFSA

Most federal and state financial aid programs require you to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). Filing the FAFSA is free! We’ve made it easy for you to gather the information you will need to complete the FAFSA. The FAFSA is an important part of your higher education journey and it might even mean free money to cover your college costs.

Need help with the FAFSA?

Check out our resources on this page.

Read our Three-Step Guide to learn how to create a Federal Student Aid (FSA) ID, fill out the FAFSA, and review your Student Aid Report (SAR).

Watch the Video Walk-throughs below to view each step of completing a FAFSA.

Contact Us if you need additional help completing the FAFSA. Reach out to us via email or by calling 615-350-8668. If your call is sent to voicemail, please leave a message with your name, high school name, and phone number (with area code). Someone from our team will respond promptly.
Resources: Student Resources

Video Walk-Throughs

How to Create an FSA ID

How to Complete the FAFSA, Part 1

How to Complete the FAFSA, Part 2

How to Complete the FAFSA, Part 3
Emphasis on data and capacity building at the local level

- Weekly live webinars with TSAC team
- Emails to counselors, principals, and directors of schools
- Student roster emails
- FAFSA Frenzy Newsletters
- Social Media Toolkit
- Student communications from our partnering organizations
Communications: Weekly Emails

North Greene High School

FAFSA Update

FAFSA Deadline Change: Due to the evolving nature of the COVID-19 pandemic and recent weather events, the Tennessee Promise Scholarship FAFSA deadline has been extended to March 1, 2022.

71.90% of Tennessee Promise applicants have completed a FAFSA.

74% of applicants have submitted a FAFSA. The statewide FAFSA completion rate is currently 53.8%.

The rate above reflects FAFSAs filed on or before January 23, 2022. Completed FAFSAs are those where all of the information on the FAFSA is complete and an EFC has been created. A FAFSA that is submitted but not complete may be missing information or signatures. Students will need to complete the FAFSA in order to receive state or federal financial aid.

Make sure that your school is participating in the TN FAFSA Challenge. Schools that increase the FAFSA completion rate of TN Promise applicants by 5 percentage points over last year will be recognized as FAFSA Champions. Additionally, we plan to recognize high schools with the highest year over year increase and the highest completion rate. To learn more, visit the TN FAFSA Challenge webpage.

Tennessee FAFSA Visualizations

TN FAFSA Challenge Social Media Toolkit
Communications: FAFSA Posters and Printable Resources

**TENNESSEE FINANCIAL AID**

Tennessee students have access to financial aid resources and programs that are exclusive to our state. Among these are the TN Promise, HOPE Scholarship, Aspire Award, and the TN Student Assistance Award - just to name a few!

- Most aid requires that you complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) at [studentsaid.gov](http://studentsaid.gov).
- To qualify for the TN Promise, fill out the application at [tn.gov/tnpromise](http://tn.gov/tnpromise) and ensure you complete all TN Promise requirements.
- For more info about TN financial aid, visit [CollegeforTN.org](http://CollegeforTN.org).

**DO THE FAFSA**

- **THE EARLIER, THE BETTER**

[CollegeforTN.org](http://CollegeforTN.org)
Collaboration: Weekly Statewide FAFSA Huddle

- Identify Partners
- Set a Regular Check-In
- Access and Analyze Data
- Compare and Refine Strategies
- Align Efforts and Communications
Collaboration: Partner Organizations
## Collaboration: Aligned Communications

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Audience</th>
<th>Responsible Party</th>
<th>Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Partnering Organizations</td>
<td>James Snider</td>
<td>Send an email announcing the change including language to frame the change when communicating with students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TN Promise applicants</td>
<td>Partnering Organizations</td>
<td>Notification regarding the change in the deadline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K12 Stakeholders</td>
<td>Jason Seay</td>
<td>Send an email to all school counseling/college access contacts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K12 Stakeholders</td>
<td>Troy Grant</td>
<td>Send an email to our TN FAFSA Frenzy listserv, SCORE, and other Tennessee college access organizations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K12 Stakeholders</td>
<td>Troy Grant</td>
<td>Request that TDOE place the update in their CCTE, principal, and director of school communications.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GEAR UP TN/Advise TN sites</td>
<td>Troy Grant</td>
<td>Email site coordinators and advisors announcing the change.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher Education Institutions</td>
<td>James Snider</td>
<td>Send a message to all FAST Users</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher Education Institutions</td>
<td>Leah Louallen</td>
<td>Send a message to all TASFAA members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Public</td>
<td>Jessie Greene</td>
<td>Post on Twitter and Instagram</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Public</td>
<td>Jessie Greene</td>
<td>Add a banner at the top of CollegeforTN.org and update the Tennessee Promise page to reflect the new deadline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Public</td>
<td>James Snider</td>
<td>Update deadlines on the Tennessee Promise website</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Collaboration: TN FAFSA Challenge

Initiative began in 2021

There are two ways a high school can earn FAFSA Champion status:

1. Increase their Tennessee Promise applicant FAFSA completion rate by 5 percentage points or more compared to the previous academic year as of the Tennessee Promise FAFSA deadline

2. Have 95% or more of their Tennessee Promise applicants complete the FAFSA as of the Tennessee Promise FAFSA deadline

- Categories for Highest Completion and Most Improved
- Banners, Media, Acknowledgement
Outcomes: TN FAFSA Challenge

75 high schools designated FAFSA Champions

New criteria for 2022 – 2023

(1) Increase their Tennessee Promise applicant FAFSA completion rate by 5 percentage points

(2) Have 90% or more of their Tennessee Promise applicants complete the FAFSA as of the Tennessee Promise FAFSA deadline

• Categories for Highest Completion and Most Improved

• Banners, Media, Acknowledgement
Collaboration: Finish the FAFSA
Week: Jan. 18 – 21

- Elevated in-person visits to high schools to assist with FAFSA completion
- Statewide communications that emphasize the funding that is at stake for filling out the FAFSA
- Social media campaign
- Media coverage and press releases
- Bridges/buildings lit up green across the state
Data: Sources and Methods

US Department of Federal Student Aid (FSA)

- **FSA Filing Rate:**
  - The number of FAFSAs submitted (per FSA) divided by the number of HS seniors (TDOE)
  - Updated as data comes from the USDOE

Tennessee Student Assistance Corporation (TSAC) ISIR

- **TN Promise Filing Rate:**
  - The number of TN Promise FAFSAs submitted (per TSAC) divided by the number of TN Promise Applicants (per TSAC)
  - Updated weekly

Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE), Membership Files, as of October 1st
Data: Visualizations
# Data: Visualizations

## Current FAFSA Completion Among TN Promise Applicants (Public High Schools)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Completion Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anderson</td>
<td>Anderson County High School</td>
<td>70.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Clinton High School</td>
<td>State Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Oak Ridge High School</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bedford</td>
<td>Cascade High School</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Community High School</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shelbyville Central</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benton</td>
<td>Big Sandy School</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Camden Central H.S.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bledsoe</td>
<td>Bledsoe County High School</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blount</td>
<td>Alcoa High School</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Heritage High School</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Maryville High School</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>William Blount H.I.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bradley</td>
<td>Bradley Central H.S.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cleveland High School</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>North Cleveland Goal Academy</td>
<td>41.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Walker Valley High School</td>
<td>53.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campbell</td>
<td>Campbell County Comprehensive</td>
<td>66.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jellico High School</td>
<td>54.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cannon</td>
<td>Cannon County High School</td>
<td>43.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 2023-2022 School Year

FAFSA completion rate for TN Promise applicants: 70.0%

As of 1/23/2022, 170 out of 243 TN Promise applicants have completed a FAFSA. An additional 12 senior(s) have submitted a FAFSA, but the FAFSA is not complete.

### 2020-2021 School Year

Final FAFSA submission rate (by the TNP FAFSA deadline): 89.3%

Final FAFSA completion rate (by the TNP FAFSA deadline): 87.6%
Data: Weekly Emails

North Greene High School FAFSA Update

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Tennessee FAFSA Visualizations

TN FAFSA Challenge Social Media Toolkit
Keys to Successful FAFSA Submissions and Completions within a School or Program
Keys to Successful FAFSA Submissions and Completions

- Develop a FAFSA Plan
- Create a FAFSA Team
- Implement the Plan
Develop a FAFSA Plan

Strategies for Communication
• Senior Class Meeting
• Parent Financial Aid Meeting

Partnering
• Teachers & Administrators
• Nonprofits organizations & Industry Partners
• Postsecondary Institutions

FAFSA Frenzy Events
Target Students & Parents
Incentives
Creating a FAFSA Team

All hands-on deck, school approach!

- GU Site Coordinator & Advisors
- Senior Teachers & Advisory Teachers
- Counselors
- School Administrators
  - Assistant Principal
  - Administered Assistant
  - Director Of School
- Local College/ Universities Representatives
- Non-profit partners staff
  - Outreach Specialist
  - Statewide Organization Reps.
Implementing the Plan

• Start early
• Remove the fear
• Navigate through obstacles together
• Focus on the at-risk students
• FAFSA Follow Ups
Best Practices

- Partner w/ teachers to make completing the FAFSA a class assignment; Plan and act as if EVERY senior is required to complete a FAFSA
- Incentives for students and teachers, too!
- Empowering students and parents to do the FAFSA; Offer to assist EVERY student and parent
- Have FAFSA Frenzy Days early
- Senior and Parent Meeting concerning Financial Aid
- Early and Continuous Communication to Students and Parents
Success at GEAR UP TN Schools

FAFSA Submission

% Submission

Years


Campbell Jellico

70.2 71.9 85 92.1 88.9 94.3 83.1 95.9

THEC
What strategies have you found successful in your state/at your school?
Questions?
Troy Grant
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