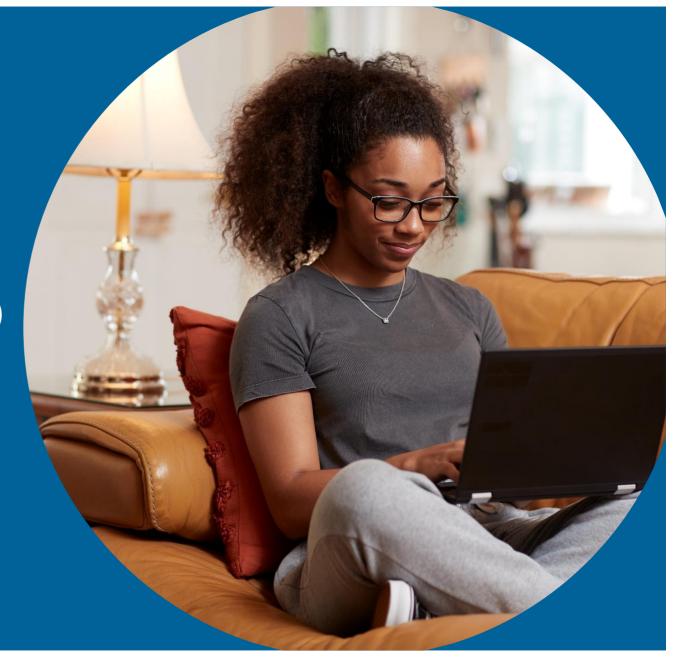


# Getting It Done: How School Counselors Can Help Boost FAFSA Completion Rates

**Counselor Webinar Series 25-26** 



#### Thank You for Joining Us Today!

#### Recording of Presentation

### **Event Resources**

## **Questions and Answers**

#### **CEU Credit**

Attendees will receive a link to the recorded presentation within 24 to 48 hours at the email address used for registration. You have access to a copy of the PowerPoint slides and various downloadable resources under the Event Resources Tab. The presenter will answer as many questions as possible during the Q and A session after the presentation. If your question isn't answered, we'll directly email you the answer to your question.

Most of our webinars come with free CEU credit. You must watch the entire webinar to gain access to the CEU quiz. It'll pop up in a separate window once the webinar is concluded.

#### **Pre-Webinar Poll Questions**

#### How knowledgeable are you about this topic?

- A. Very knowledgeable
- B. Somewhat Knowledgeable
- C. Not at All Knowledgeable

Based on your current practices, to what extent do you share/use information about this program/topic with your students?

- A. Consistently I regularly incorporate this program/topic into my counseling activities and correspondence.
- B. Occasionally I share information when it feels relevant or when students ask about it.
- C. Rarely I've only shared this program/topic once or twice, or not in a structured way.
- D. Not at all I do not currently share this program/topic with my students.

#### **Meet your Presenters**



Bill DeBaun
Senior Director, Data and
Strategic Initiatives
National College Attainment
Network (NCAN)



Atua Emu Director of Post-Secondary Match KIPP Forward | KIPP Atlanta Collegiate (GA)



Sandra González-Moore College, Career, Military Readiness Coordinator Palo Duro High School (TX)

#### NCAN WHO WE ARE, WHAT WE DO

The National College Attainment Network (NCAN) pursues its mission by building network capacity, advocating for policy solutions, and supporting systems change

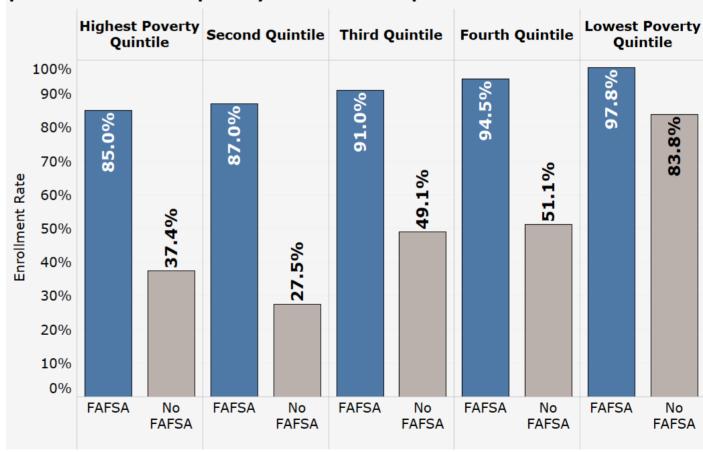
**Build field capacity** 

Advocate for policy solutions

Increase alignment & collaboration

# WHY FAFSA COMPLETION MATTERS SO MUCH

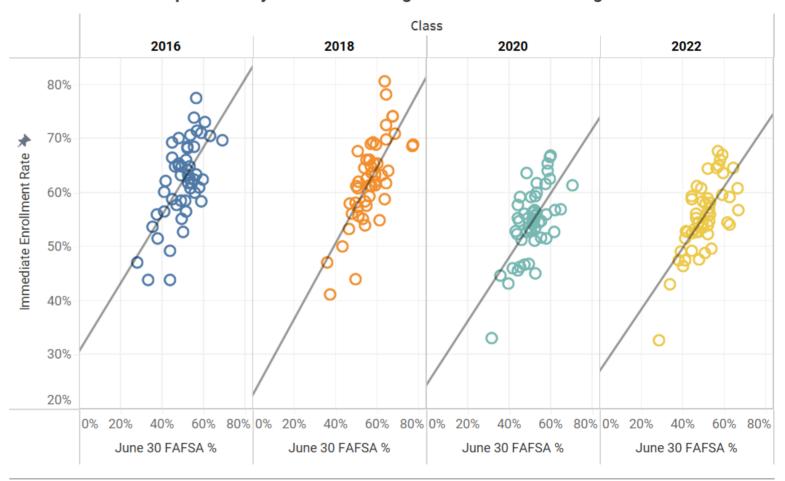
Immediate college enrollment following high school graduation, by percentile of district poverty and FAFSA completion status.



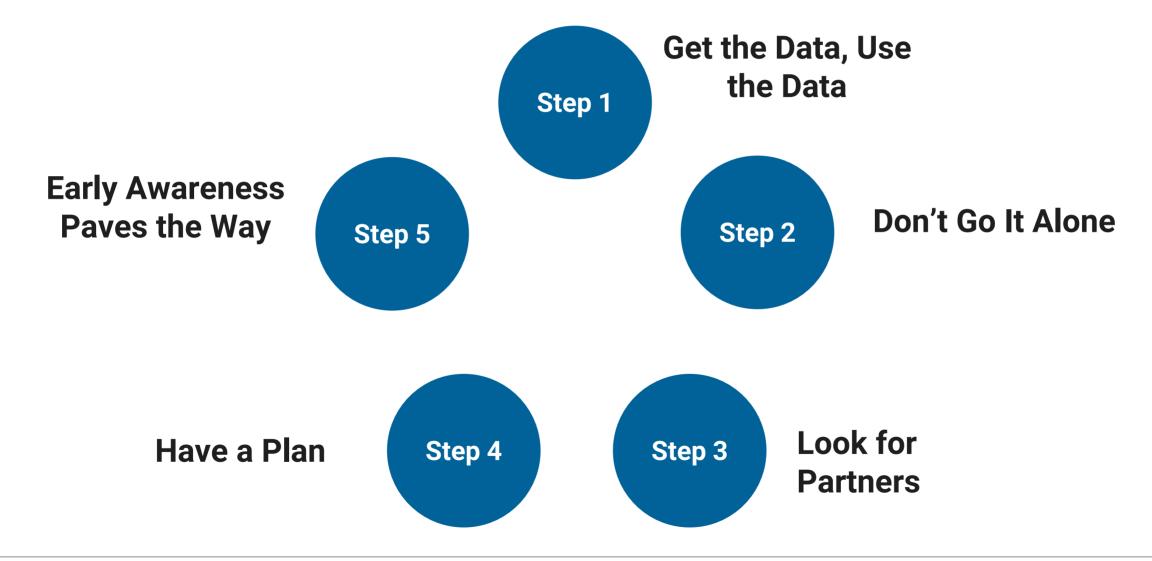


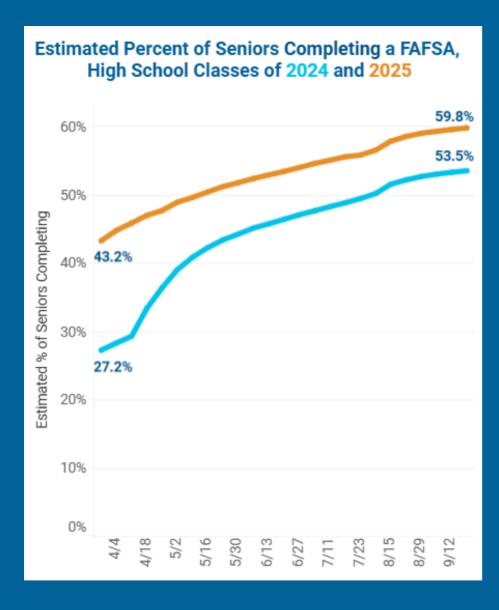
# WHY FAFSA COMPLETION MATTERS SO MUCH

June 30 FAFSA Completion % by Immediate College Enrollment Rate of High School Seniors



#### Five Ways to Turn the FAFSA from "Unfun" to "DONE"





#### Get the Data, Use the Data.

- Get <u>student-level FAFSA completion</u> data from the state (where available).
- Working in an "upside-down triangle," triage the right supports to students and families.
- Using past district and school FAFSA completion data, set completion goals.



#### Don't Go It Alone.

- Expand the bench!
- Empower school leaders, teachers, and other professionals to pitch in:
  - -Key messages
  - -Key dates
  - -Encouragement
- Rally around school-wide goals / completion targets, not just at the end of the year but throughout it.



#### **Look for Partners.**

- Partners can promote FAFSA & contribute to completion
- Area nonprofits? Boys & Girls Clubs? 4-H?
- Local higher ed?
- Empowering peer mentors/advisors?



#### Have a plan.

- Who's doing what, when, and why?
- "Financial aid nights" are great, but what else?
- Some places to jumpstart planning:
  - NCAN: 2026-27 FAFSA
  - <u>Get Schooled: FAFSA Student & Family Engagement</u> <u>Playbook</u>
  - NASFAA: Financial Aid Night Planning Guide
  - TN FAFSA Frenzy
  - <u>USHE: FAFSA Nights and FAFSA Completion Best</u> <u>Practices</u>
  - <u>SchooLinks: FAFSA Toolkit for Counselors and Administrators</u>

# YESTERDAY YESTERDAY

#### Early Awareness Paves the Way.

- Socialize the idea of FAFSA completion and financial aid
- Why the school-wide goal is helpful for early awareness
- Dispelling myths about who the FAFSA is "for"
- Early start -> smoother sailing

# "When do FAFSA conversations occur on your campus – and who's part of them?"



#### **Why FAFSA Matters**

1

#### **Establishes a Foundation**

For college, career, and military readiness.

2

#### **Post-Secondary Enrollment**

Those to submit FAFSA are more likely to enroll in college.

3

#### **Graduation Requirement**

In Texas & other states FAFSA or a state application (TASFA in TX) are a graduation requirement.

4

#### **Funding**

FAFSA connects students to grants, scholarships, and aid opportunities at two and four year colleges, technical colleges, and trade schools.

#### **Graduation Requirement Advantage**

- State requirement provides structure for:
  - Educating families about available aid.
  - Addressing common myths.
  - Framing FAFSA as empowerment, not an obligation
- States that require FAFSA for high school graduation:
  - Alabama, California, Connecticut, Illinois, Indiana, Louisiana, Maryland, Nebraska, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Oklahoma, Texas



#### **Laying the Foundation**

#### 9th Grade: Explore & Dream

- Introduce college, career, and financial aid awareness early through classroom lessons.
- Connect interests to future college and career pathways.

#### 10th Grade: Research

- Explore college options, costs, and scholarship opportunities.
- Attend college fairs and learn how financial aid makes college accessible.

#### 11th Grade: Prepare & Preview

- Begin FAFSA awareness: costs of attendance, award letter review, and begin compiling college lists.
- Link test preparation and academic performance to scholarship opportunities.

#### **College Research Project**



#### **Research Costs**

	GEORGIA SOUTHERN UNIVERSITY	HOWARD UNIVERSITY	NEW YORK UNIVERSITY
Tuition (In-state or Out of State)			
Money charged for instruction (in-person			
or online) by a college or university. If			
tuition is listed by credit hour, use 12 credit			
hours for full-time.	\$5,610	\$37,996	\$65,622
Fees			
Mandatory charges every student pays,			
including for athletics, student activities,		100000000000000000000000000000000000000	Tuition and fees are
technology, health services, and more.	\$1,534	\$940	combined
Housing			
Includes on-campus, off-campus,			
traditional, suite-style, or apartment		90.0	
options.	\$11,492	\$12,380	\$25,516
Meal Plan			
Often required for freshmen living on or			
off campus and include a set number of			
meals per day, week, or an unlimited	Housing and Meal Plan are		Housing and Meal Plan are
option.	combined	\$6,602	combined
Books and Supplies			
Allot at least \$600 per semester for books,			
as many cost a minimum of \$150.	\$1,216	\$1,220	\$1,470
Personal Expenses			
Vary based on your lifestyle,			
extracurricular activities, and the location		1.000000 1.11.0000000	
of your institution.	\$4,106	\$2,494	\$2,014
Transportation			
Includes plane tickets for out-of-state			
institutions, gas, MARTA cards, and other			
travel costs.	\$1,500	\$4,320	\$4,562
Link to Financial Aid Website	https://www.georgiasouthern.edu/	https://financialservices	https://www.nyu.edu/admission
Estimated Toal COA	\$25,458	\$65,952	\$99,184

#### **Build Awareness Early**

1

**FAFSA Kickoff** 

Hosting events each fall and spring

Visibility

Using social media, posters, announcements to amplify communication.

**3** Success Stories

Highlight last year's achievements: Questbridge Match, full scholarships, and significant awards received.

4 Partnering

Partnering with local IHE and our Regional Support. Partner with teachers to normalize FAFSA as part of senior year.

#### **Start Conversations Early!**

#### Rising Senior Night

Spring/Summer Prep

**Data Collection** 

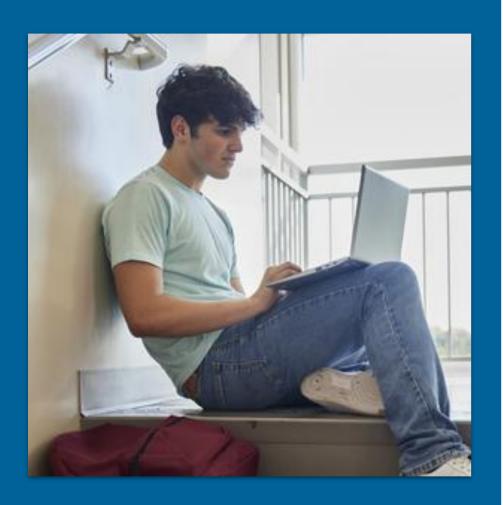
**FAFSA Launch** 

In late spring, we initiate FAFSA awareness activities with our junior class, inviting both parents and students to participate in sessions focused on understanding financial aid and creating FSA IDs.

Individual parent appointments begin immediately afterwards for hands-on support.

We begin populating our Senior Checklist Tracker during these meetings, several months prior to the start of senior year. Early preparation sets the tone for a stress-free fall FAFSA season!





#### The Challenge!

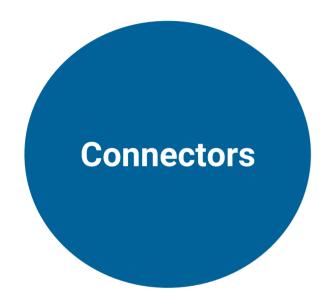
#### Common Barriers:

- Confusion or misinformation
- Fear around sharing personal data
- First-gen family uncertainty
- Access or language challenges
- FAFSA Simplification rollout delays
- Counselors overcome these through early engagement and connection.

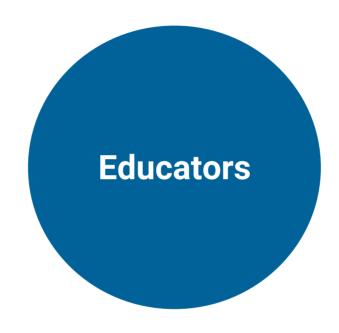


#### The Counselor's Role

Relationship-driven counseling creates sustainable success



Linking families, staff, and community partners.



Breaking down the form and process.



**Connecting FAFSA to post-secondary plans** 

#### Personalized One-on-One Support



One-on-One Senior meetings are the heart of our approach.



Provides time to explain FAFSA's purpose and process.

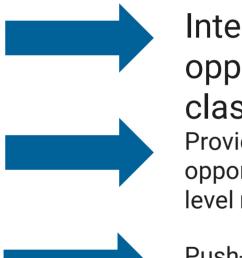


Reduces fear, builds confidence, and minimizes mistakes.



These personal connections drive long-term completion success.

#### **Leverage Classroom Guidance**



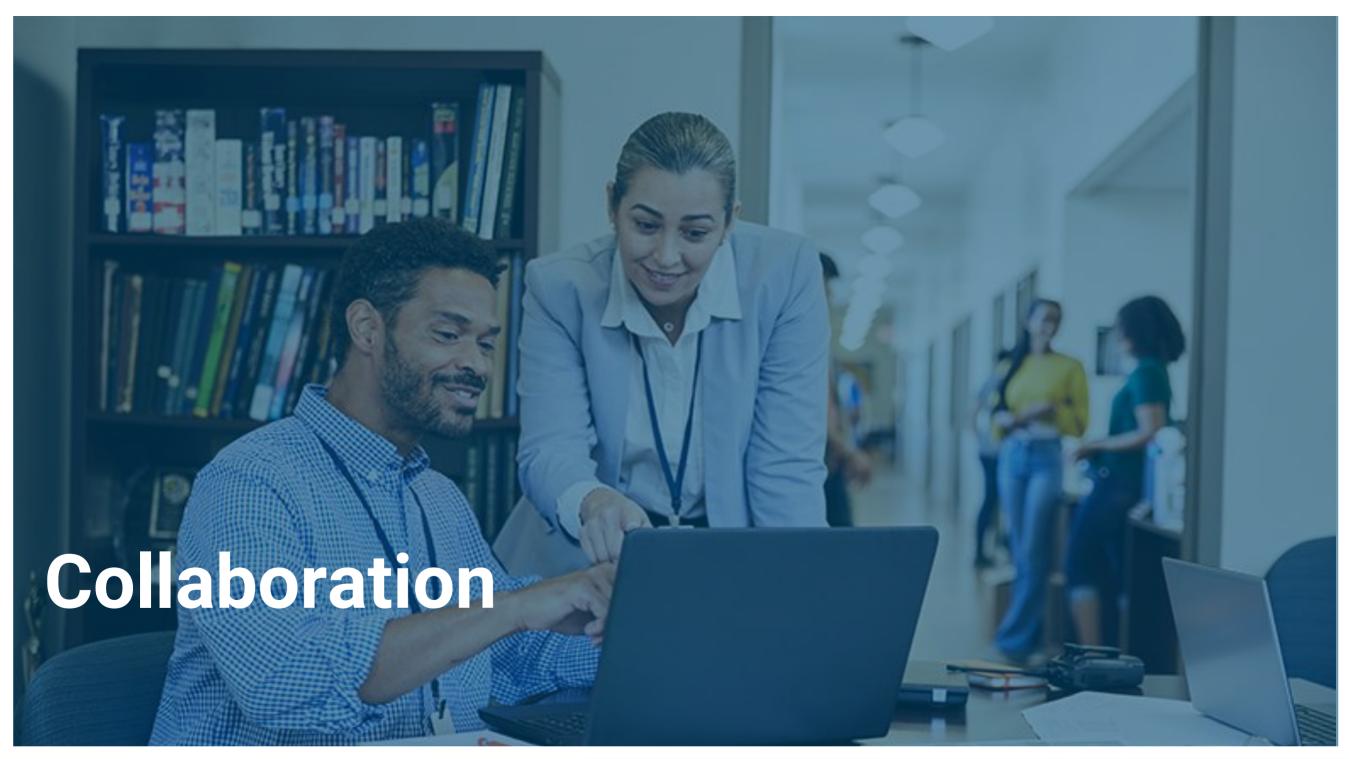
Integrate FAFSA completion opportunities into senior classes

Provide guided practice opportunities during senior grade level meetings

Push-in lessons with homeroom advisors and teachers

#### Focus on People, Not Just Strategies

- Our philosophy: "If we don't have the right people, strategies won't succeed."
- Everyone on campus leadership, teachers, and counselors – contributes.
- When the whole school understands FAFSA's impact, completion grows.
- Culture > Compliance.



# **Create a Supportive Campus Culture**

- FAFSA is everyone's responsibility.
- Recognize effort and persistence.
- Keep it visible and celebrated.
- Embed FAFSA into your school's culture

#### **Ongoing Team Collaboration**

- Meet weekly with campus leadership.
- Focus areas:
  - Senior accountability and graduation progress
  - Difficult-to reach students and families
  - Problem-solving barriers to FAFSA completion
  - Sharing what's working and what needs adjusting
- Weekly meetings keep FAFSA front and center in campus leadership discussions.

#### **Sub Shortage Days**

- Serve as substitutes in senior classes on shortage days.
- Supports campus operations while providing FAFSA one-on-one support opportunities.
- · Allows us to:
  - Create FSA IDs
  - Review missing documents
  - Have authentic FAFSA conversations
- A creative, collaborative WIN-WIN for staff and students alike!

#### **FAFSA Ambassadors**

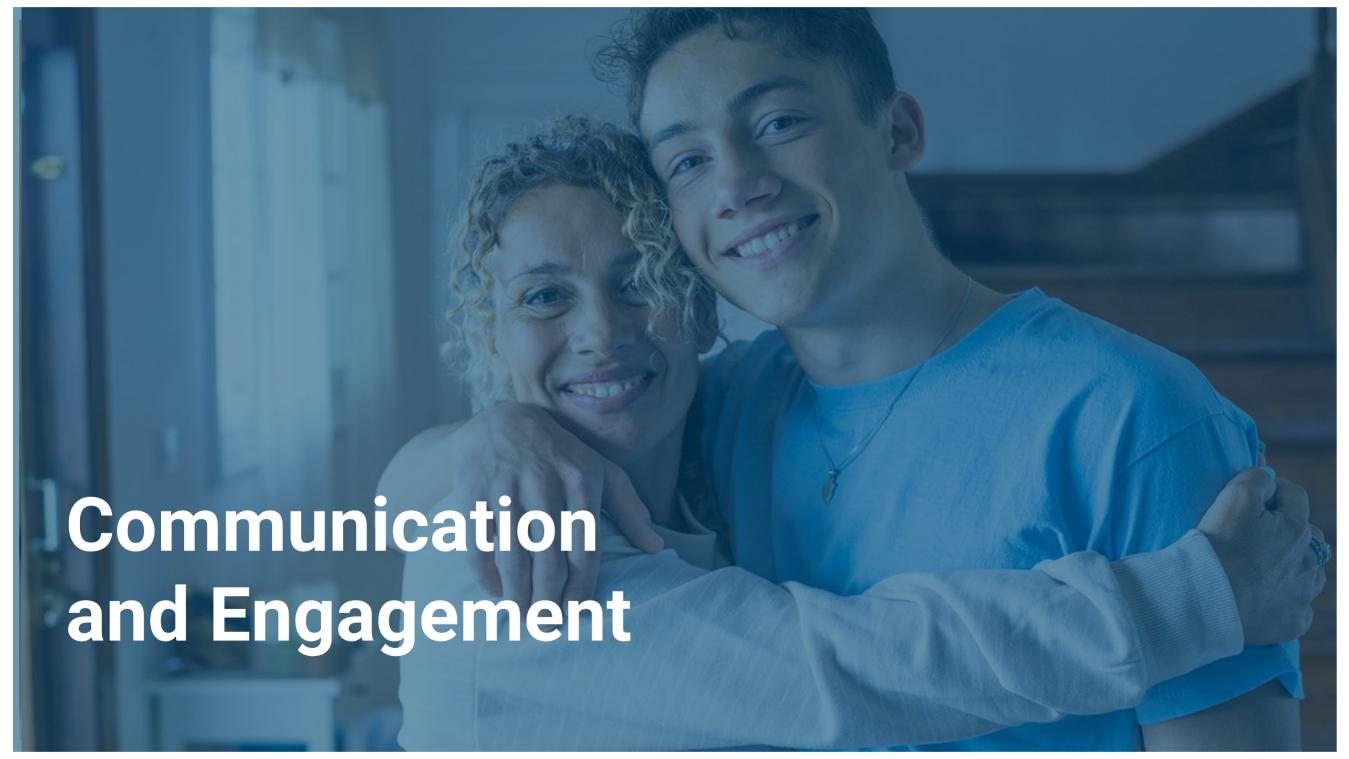
- Empower student leaders as FAFSA Ambassadors.
- Help peers with FSA ID setup and FAQs.
- Promote FAFSA completion among classmates.
- Peer voices create comfort and confidence.



#### **FAFSA Focus Days & Financial Literacy**

- Use testing days, (PSAT, SAT) for FAFSA Focus Days
- Combine FAFSA completion with financial literacy sessions.
- Partners include:
  - Local credit unions for budgeting simulations
  - Colleges and Universities
  - Local Foundations for scholarship & aid rotations.

- Makes financial aid relevant and engaging
- Meet seniors where they are to complete the FAFSA:
  - Lunch events, senior classes, football games, etc.



## **Continuous Communication & Engagement**

### **Seniors receive ongoing reminders through:**



#### **Newsletters**

- Weekly update sent to seniors <u>and</u> parents.
   Newsletters can include:
  - Upcoming Events
  - GraduationRequirements
  - Key focus areas



#### **Digital Classroom**

- Consolidates all essential information for seniors. Classrooms can include:
  - FAFSA guidance
  - Scholarship opportunities
  - Testing information
  - Graduation requirements



#### **Counselor Updates**

- Robocalls
- Mass text messaging
- Senior grade level chats
- Morning and Afternoon Announcements



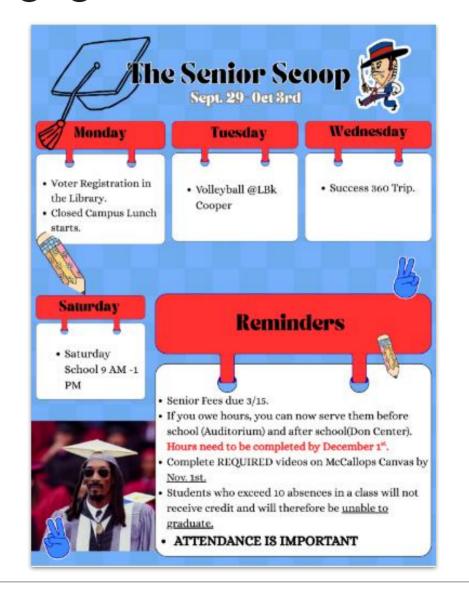
#### **Counselor Tip**

Consistent messaging = consistent progress

- Schedule messages
- Schedule post-secondary content on social media

## **Continuous Communication & Engagement**







# **FAFSA Days v FAFSA Nights**

- Offer bilingual sessions and translation services
- Attendance meet families where they're at
- Extended time
- Students are already present on campus during the day.
- Eliminating transportation and scheduling conflicts.
- Support Staff & Partners



## Ready - Made Resources

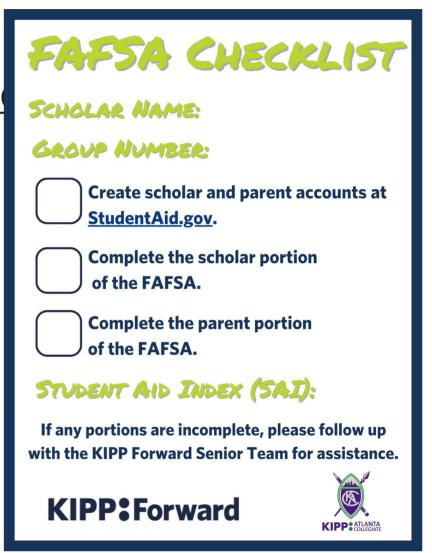


## **Campus Tools:**

- Federal Student Aid PowerPoint Presentation
- Federal Student Aid YouTube Channel
- FAFSA Prototype

#### **Additional Online Tools:**

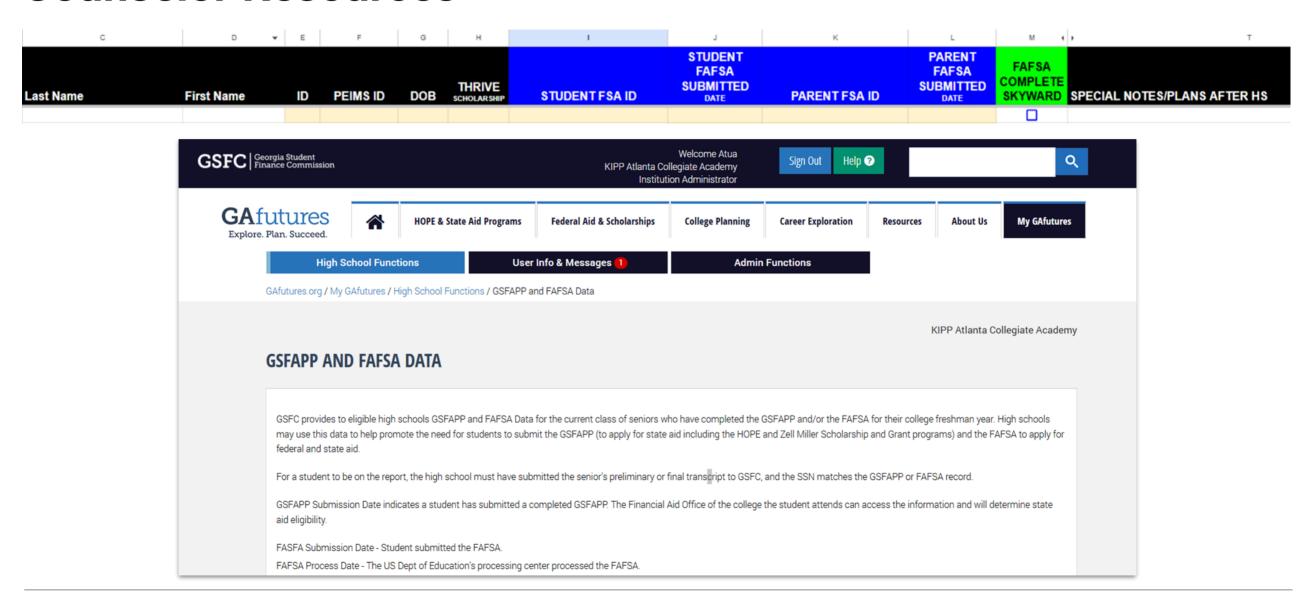
- studentaid.gov
- Appily FAFSA Resource Hub
- Going Merry Parent Guide
- <u>UAspire</u> has documents in multiple languages
- CCMR with Ms. Thrash
- Palo Duro Don Center
- KIPP Forward Atlanta Instagram



# **Tracking Progress**

- Shared Senior Checklist (Google Spreadsheet) used by counselors, CCMR, and leadership.
  - Drives data-based follow-up and personalized conversations
  - Accountability meets access.
  - Fluid & real time document.
- Weekly meetings
- College and Career Readiness platforms
- State resources

## **Counselor Resources**





## **Student Resources**

#### PASSWORD TRACKER

Accounts			
Website Name	Website	Username	Password
ACT	MyACT.org		
College and Career Readiness Platform		Log in through Google	
Common Black College App	CommonBlackCollegeApp.com		
Common App	CommonApp.org		
FAFSA	FAFSA.gov		
GAfutures	GAfutures.org		
DecidEd	Decided.MoneyThink.org		
College Board	CollegeBoard.org		
Institution 1			
Institution 2			
Institution 3			

KNOW YOUR NUMBERS	
ACT Composite Score (Highest):	
SAT Score (if applicable):	
Weighted GPA (percentage and on a 4.0 scale):	
Unweighted GPA (percentage and on a 4.0 scale):	
Estimated Class Rank:	
Career Interest	
HOPE GPA:	
HOPE Rigor Credits:	

	SMART GOAL
Specific:	
Measurable:	
Attainable:	
Relevant:	
Time-Round:	





## **Celebrate and Motivate**

#### **Incentives That Drive FAFSA Completion**

#### **Recognition and Rewards**

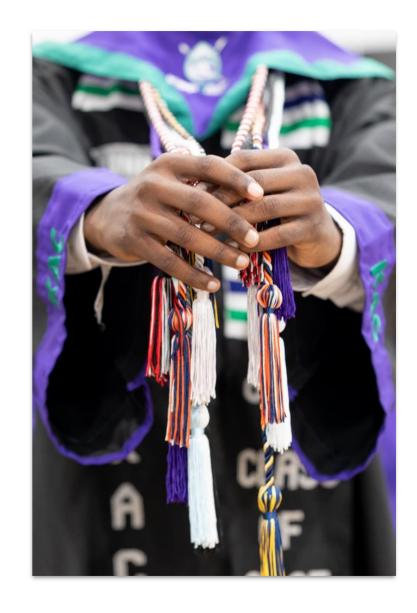
- Raffles, gift cards, spirit wear, and senior cords
- Premium perks: free prom tickets, waived senior fees, parking pass, skip-the-line or double lunch.
- Exclusive experiences: senior swag packs or a field trip to a local college

#### **Food-Based Celebrations**

- "Taco 'Bout FAFSA" lunch, donut or breakfast parties, and FAFSA Food Trucks.
- Treat Cart and FAFSA Prize partrols
- Homeroom Advisory challenges with breakfast or sweet treat rewards

#### **Public Recognition**

- FAFSA Completion Wall of Fame or FAFSA Selfie Wall
- Senior Shoutouts on social media
- FAFSA Finisher Buttons ("Secured the Bag," "Future funded")



# **Creating a Safe Space - The Don Center**

A "One Stop Shop" for seniors and families!

## Staffed by:

- Senior Counselor
- CCMR Team of 3
- Senior Principal

**Built in computer lab** 

Families feel supported, informed, and welcome.

This SAFE SPACE builds trust, increases visibility, and simplifies access to FAFSA help.







# **Call to Action**

- √ Start early and build awareness
- ✓ Engage families. Use communication platforms intentionally
- ✓ Collaborate often. Weekly meetings sustain momentum.
- ✓ Leverage tools: Safe spaces, classrooms, spreadsheets, and ready made resources.



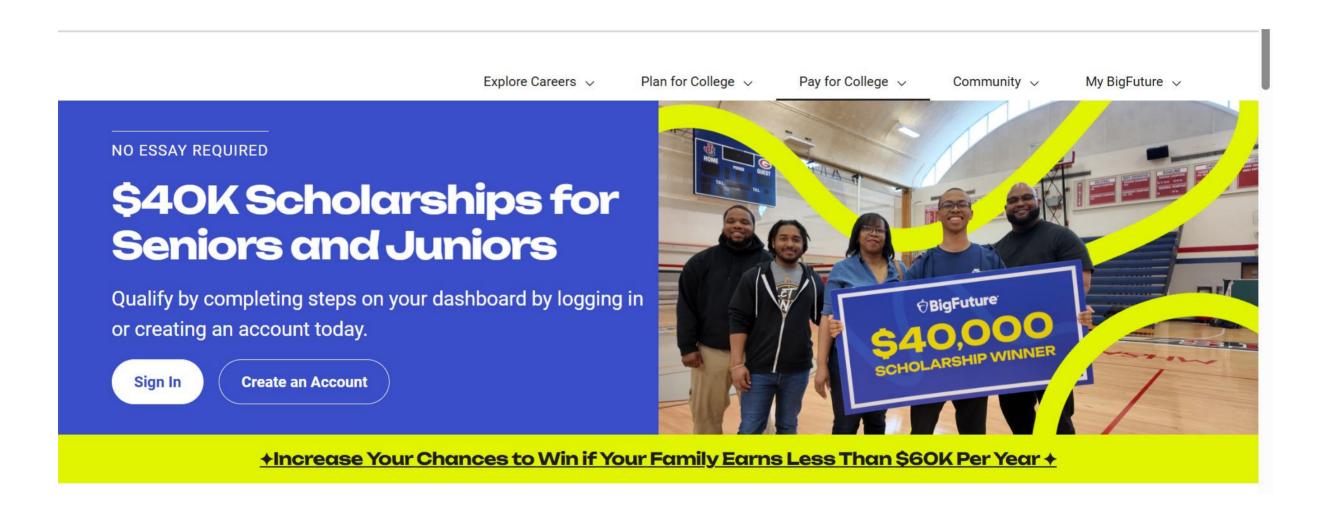
## Final Takeaway:

"When we lead with connection, clarity and consistency – FAFSA completion becomes a culture of success. Think people, not strategies."

# "Who should own FAFSA completion on your campus?"



# **BigFuture Scholarships**



# **BigFuture FAFSA Topics**

Explore Careers >

Plan for College V

Pay for College V

Community V

My BigFuture V

SECURE YOUR FUTURE

# FAFSA Topics and Resources

Learn what information you will need to complete your application and what to do before and after completing the FAFSA® form.

Go to Federal Student Aid



◆Starting your FAFSA Application? Here's what the Class of 2026 should know ◆

## **Post-Webinar Poll Questions**

How knowledgeable are you about this topic?

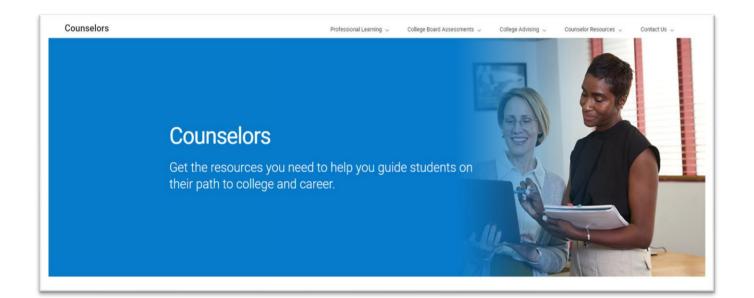
- A. Very knowledgeable
- B. Somewhat Knowledgeable
- C. Not at All Knowledgeable

Based on what you learned in today's webinar, how likely are you to share/use information about this program/topic with your students?

- A. Very likely
- B. Somewhat likely
- C. Not likely
- D. Not applicable

## **College Board for Counselors**

#### Where to find helpful resources



#### **Professional Learning**

Register for upcoming events and workshops so you can develop your skills as a counselor. Plus, you could earn continuing education units (CEUs).

#### **Toolkits for Counselors**

Find helpful resources, strategies, tools, and more to help you support your students' learning and growth as they prepare for college.

#### **Modules for New Counselors**

Free professional development designed to help new counselors as they embark on the career of high school counseling.

## **Counselor Webinar Series 25-26**

**JAN AUG** Middle School Matters: Preparing Middle **Navigating College Application Season: A 22 School Students for Rigorous High Guide for New High School Counselors School Courses** SEP **FEB Using BigFuture School to Access Next Gen Guidance: Counseling Gen Z Scores and Explore Careers—Middle** and Gen Alpha **School** OCT MAR **Getting it Done: How School Counselors College and Career Trends: What Every Counselor Should Know** can Help Boost FAFSA Completion **APR** NOV **Application Trends Unpacked: Emerging** Middle School Matters: College & **Career Conversations Now Patterns in Student's Application Behavior** 

Register today at <u>collegeboard.org/counselors</u>



## Thank you for joining us today!

## At the close of the webinar, please

- Complete the webinar evaluation. We want to ensure we continue to provide excellent professional development.
- Complete the 5-question quiz to earn CEU hours (optional).
- Feel free to review and share today's webinar. The presentation will be forwarded to your email address in 24 hours.
- Thank you for all that you do in the service of students!

## collegeboard.org/counselors