

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


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Extensive research shows that high schools can make a big difference in helping low-income and first-generation college hopefuls complete the FAFSA and other state financial aid applications. In this toolkit, you'll find 8 evidence-based best practices your school can use to support all eligible seniors and their families to complete their FAFSA, TAP, and NYS DREAM Act applications.

This toolkit will support you in implementing the 8 evidence-based steps to support all seniors to complete their financial aid applications. You can find the toolkit materials listed in each step at <http://NYFAFSAChallenge.org/Resources>.

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

1



HOLD A FINANCIAL AID FOR COLLEGE COMPLETION NIGHT

Hold a school-wide financial aid for college completion night in partnership with a community-based organization that has trusted relationships with students and their families. 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 DREAM Act, and TAP applications and respond to verification requests.



TIMELINE – It is best to hold the event as early as possible, typically in October; if you have not held one yet, we recommend scheduling it for February. It is important for students to complete the applications as early as possible to give them the best chance for the most aid. It is often helpful to hold your financial aid for college completion event at the same time as another mandatory event — such as a senior night — to ensure families can prioritize attendance.



TOOLKIT MATERIALS – [How-to guide: Financial aid for college completion night \(pages 19-20 of this Toolkit\)](#) and a [list of financial aid completion events in your area](#)

2



HOLD REGULAR FINANCIAL AID FOR COLLEGE COMPLETION OFFICE HOURS

Hold regular office hours at least once per month for students and families to receive in-person or virtual support from school counselors or community experts to complete their FAFSA, NYS DREAM Act, and TAP application and respond to verification requests. Publicize these office hours by the end of February.



TIMELINE – Hold office hours at least once a month from February – June.



TOOLKIT MATERIALS – [How-to guide: Financial aid for college office hours \(page 21 of this Toolkit\)](#)

3



DEDICATE CLASS TIME TO FINANCIAL AID APPLICATION COMPLETION

Set aside some class time each week during the spring semester for students to work on their financial aid applications (and other postsecondary planning) and respond to verification requests.



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



TOOLKIT MATERIALS – [How-to guide: Using class time for financial aid for college completion \(page 22 of this Toolkit\)](#) and [lesson plan templates \(pages 23-24 of this toolkit\)](#)

4



SEND REGULAR LETTERS OR EMAILS TO PARENTS/FAMILIES

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



TIMELINE – Send a letter or email once per month from February – June.



TOOLKIT MATERIALS – [Monthly letters or emails templates in English and Spanish](#)

5



POST UPDATES IN SCHOOL NEWSLETTERS, EMAILS, AND NEWSPAPERS

Include regular updates in the school newsletter, emails, or newspaper about the FAFSA, NYS DREAM Act, and TAP applications 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 February – June.



TOOLKIT MATERIALS – **Monthly 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 about financial aid completion and responses to verification requests, as well as to drive participation in your financial aid for college completion night and office hours.



TIMELINE – At least once per month from February – 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 DREAM Act, TAP applications 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 through June, as well as daily in the week 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 in on your school's progress toward full FAFSA completion using our www.NYFAFSAChallenge.org website. You **should also join the NYS FAFSA Completion Initiative data access program** organized by the state's Higher Education Services Corporation to get student-level completion data. This information 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/families at least once per week from February – 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)**