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# FAFSA Challenge 2023-24

Informational Webinar | 9/13/23



# Thank You for Joining Us!



Thank you for taking time out of your busy schedules to attend today's informational webinar.

We are excited to kick off Year 4 of the CT FAFSA Challenge, and we hope your school will consider applying for this exciting opportunity!

# Session Overview

## Objectives

- Provide an introduction to the Connecticut FAFSA Challenge.
- Briefly share successes and learnings from Year 3 of the FAFSA Challenge in 2022-23
- Launch the fourth year of the FAFSA Challenge and provide guidance for eligible schools and districts regarding next steps in the application process.

## Agenda

1. Introduction to the FAFSA Challenge
2. Year 2 Overview and Outcomes
3. 2023-24 Application Process
4. Next Steps and Q&A



*Please feel welcome to drop any questions into the chat!*

# Our Team

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# Introduction to the FAFSA Challenge

# Introduction to the FAFSA



- Students must complete the FAFSA to be **eligible for federal aid** (e.g., Pell Grants, work study, loans) most college-based aid.
- Connecticut students are eligible to receive **up to ~\$20,000** in aid each year.
- FAFSA aid supports **multiple pathways**, including 2/4-year college and trade/vocational schools.
- **New state legislation** requires twelfth grade students to complete the FAFSA, a institutional based financial aid form, or a waiver form in order to graduate, starting for the class of 2025.
- The Better FAFSA **opens in December** and is applicable for the following academic year. Schools often distribute aid on a first-come-first serve basis.

# CT FAFSA Challenge Overview

The Connecticut FAFSA Challenge is designed to **spark and support local innovations** to:

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Increase FAFSA completion rates



Improve postsecondary access



Close opportunity gaps

# Year 3 Overview



# Evolution of the FAFSA Challenge

2020-21

- CSDE launched the **first FAFSA Challenge** in response to new opportunity gaps presented by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **26 high schools (16 districts)** participated in the first Challenge.
- On average, FAFSA completion rates increased by **4 points**.

+4

2021-22

- CSDE continued and expanded the FAFSA Challenge during the 2021-22 school year.
- **40 high schools (19 districts)** participated in Year 2 of the FAFSA Challenge.
- On average, FAFSA completion rates increased by **8 points**.

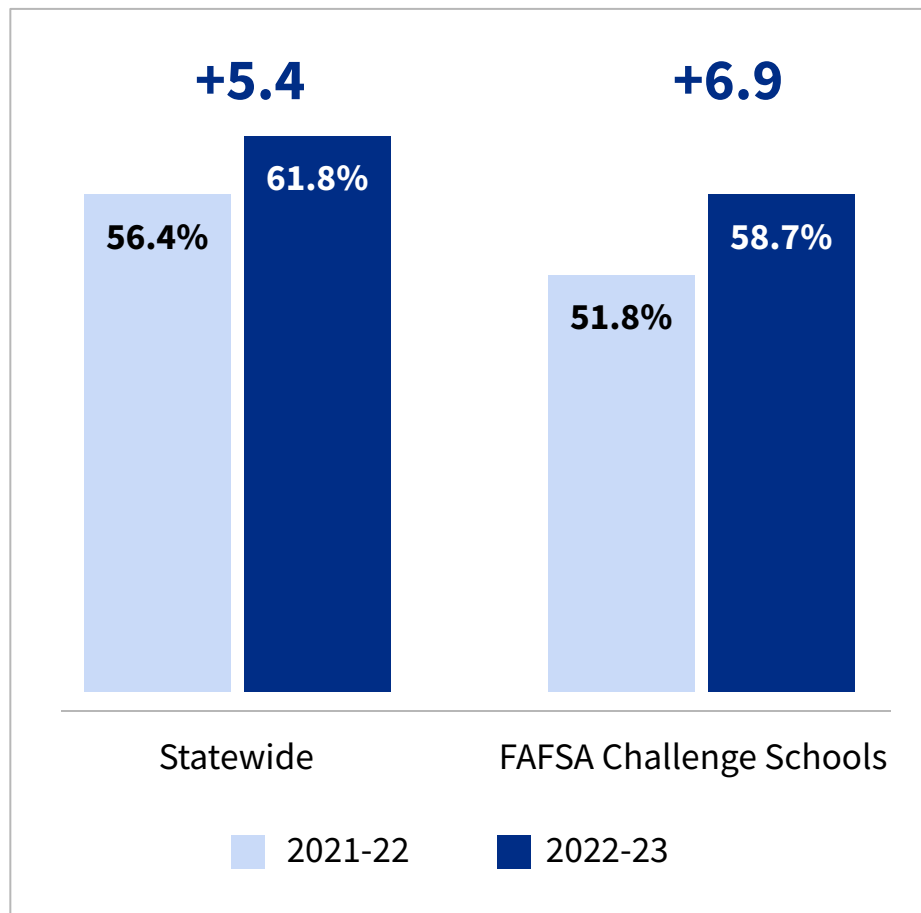
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2022-23

- CSDE continued and expanded the FAFSA Challenge during the 2022-23 school year.
- **57 high schools (29 districts)** participated in Year 3 of the FAFSA Challenge.
- On average, FAFSA completion rates increased by **7 points**.

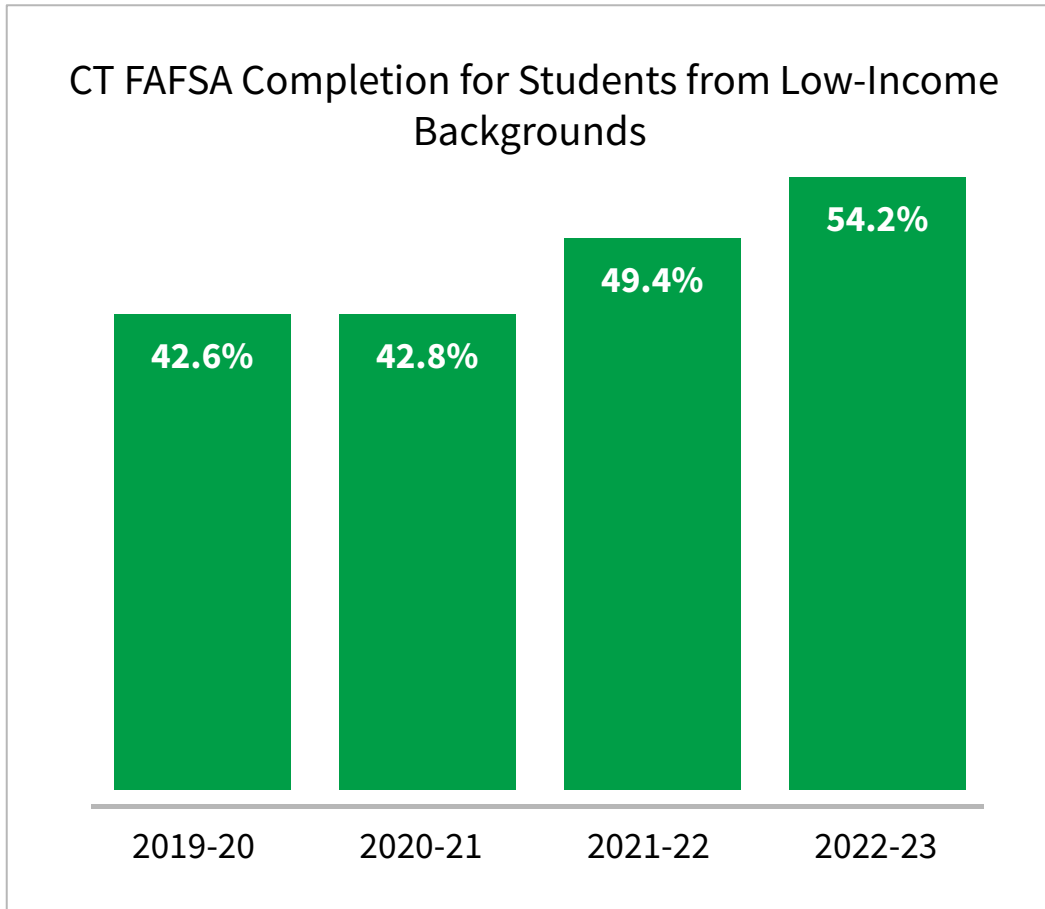
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# Year 3 FAFSA Challenge Results



- On average, YR 3 FAFSA Challenge schools improved their year-over-year FAFSA completion rates by **6.9 percentage points**.
- **37 of 57 Challenge schools** met or exceeded the 5-point growth goal.
- **15 schools** more that 80% towards goal.

# FAFSA Completion among Higher-Need Subgroups



Statewide, FAFSA completion rates are up nearly **5 points** from 21-22 SY to 22-23 SY among Connecticut's students from low-income backgrounds.

FAFSA Challenge schools serve higher concentrations of need.

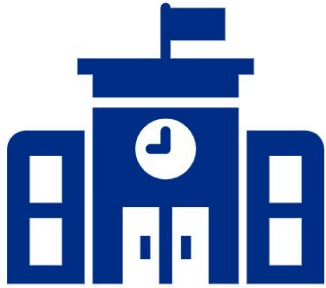
# 2023-24 Application Process

# FAFSA Challenge Timeline



Activity	Date
Call for 2023-24 applications	September 6, 2023
Prospective applicant webinar	September 13, 2023
Application deadline	September 29, 2023
Award notification	October 6, 2023
Kickoff event (all Challenge participants invited)	October 18, 2023
Implementation period	October 2023-August 2024

# School Eligibility



**109 high schools** are eligible to participate in the 2023-24 FAFSA Challenge. Eligibility is based on 2022-23 data. Schools are eligible to apply if they meet the following criteria:

- **Whole school:** FAFSA completion rate for **all students** is **below 70 percent for the 2022-23** school year, **percentage of students receiving free- or reduced-price meals is greater than or equal to 20 percent**, and the senior class was **greater than or equal to 50 students in 2022-23**; or
- **Free or Reduced Lunch:** FAFSA completion rate for **students eligible for free- or reduced-price meals was below 70 percent** during the 2022-23 school year and their free- or reduced-price meal **cohort size was greater than or equal to 40 students.**

# FAFSA Challenge Goal



## + 5 Percentage Points

In September 2024, the Governor and Commissioner will recognize schools that increase FAFSA completion rates for the Class of 2024 compared to the Class of 2023 by 5+ percentage points. CSDE will also recognize schools for growth and promising practices in monthly spotlights.

$$\text{FAFSA Rate} = \frac{\text{FAFSAs completed by HS seniors (incl. early graduates) by Aug. 2024}}{\text{Number of high school seniors}}$$

# Two Tiers of Support

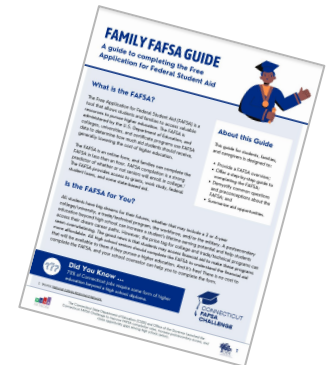
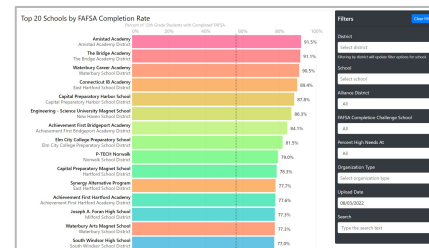
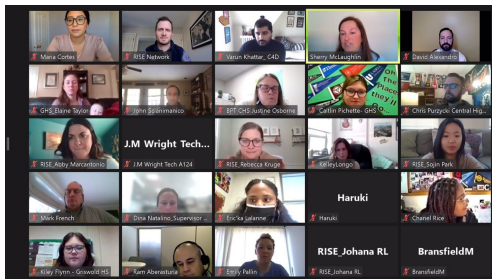
*Eligible schools may apply to receive one of two tiers of support.*

## Tier 1: Basic Support

- A microgrant, scaled to senior class size
- Participation in the FAFSA Challenge Community of Practice (**attendance optional**)
- Access to aggregate and student-level data about FAFSA completion through EdSight
- Free FAFSA trainings available for school staff

## Tier 2: Intensive Support

- A larger microgrant, scaled to senior class size
- Participation in the FAFSA Challenge Community of Practice (**attendance required**)
- Access to aggregate and student-level data about FAFSA completion through EdSight
- Free FAFSA trainings available for school staff
- Monthly coaching provided by the RISE Network





# Practices to Promote FAFSA Completion

*Schools must pursue at least two of the following promising practices.*

## FAFSA Task Force

Teams of counselors and teachers to support a caseload of students and families with FAFSA completion.

## Incentives & Celebrations

Raffles, giveaways, and events to celebrate FAFSA completion and build awareness around the FAFSA.

## Family Engagement

Communication and engagement with families to support FAFSA completion and knowledge-building.

## Culture-Building Activities

Consistent messaging, visuals, and activities to support a FAFSA and postsecondary culture among students.

## Marketing & Promotion

Branding, signage, and communication with students and families around FAFSA deadlines and supports.

## Community Partnerships

Collaboration with volunteers and outside partners to provide additional support and expertise around the FAFSA

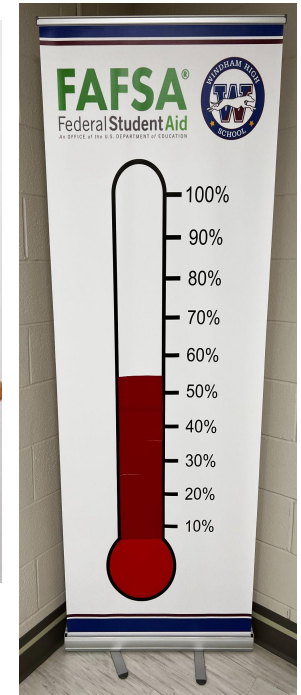
# Promising Practices



**Middletown High School  
FAFSA Task Force**



**Windham High School  
School Engagement + Incentives**



# Application Instructions



- The application includes 4 total questions for Tier I applicants, and 5 questions for Tier II applicants.
- Applications must be completed by school-level staff with input from district staff.
- Schools are also encouraged to collaborate with outside partners (e.g., community-based organization, institution of higher education, or other partner).
- Please keep each response limited to 300 words (2,000 characters).

# Next Steps and Q&A

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## Questions?



### Next Steps

- Access the application and webinar at <https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Performance/FAFSA-Completion>
- Complete and submit the application by Friday, **September 29, 2023**
- Save the Date: **October 18, 2023** at 2:30 PM for a virtual kickoff event for Challenge participants
- **Contact Information:**

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