

OPENING

Connecticut FAFSA Challenge 2021-22 School Application



The Connecticut FAFSA Challenge is designed to spark and support local creativity to increase FAFSA completion and postsecondary enrollment rates. [53 high schools in 25 school districts are eligible to apply](#) to participate in the 2021-22 FAFSA Challenge. Selected schools will be expected to develop plans to pilot new strategies to increase FAFSA completion during the 2021-22 school year. The next several screens will provide you with background information before you begin completing the application.

Application Deadline: Monday, October 18, 2021

All applicants are encouraged to attend the [FAFSA Challenge 2021-22: Overview and Application Informational Session](#) on Wednesday, September 29, 2021 at 2:30 pm, where CSDE and partners will discuss the application and provide an overview of the resources available to eligible schools this year. [Register for this event.](#)

For questions about the FAFSA Completion Challenge, please contact John Scianimanico at john.scianimanico@ct.gov

Section 1: ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Equal Opportunity Statement

Under federal antidiscrimination laws, the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE), as a recipient of federal funds, must include a statement of nondiscrimination in all publications, posting, handbooks, announcements, bulletins, and application forms that it makes available to employees, students, parents, applicants, sources of referral of applicants, and all unions and professional organizations (see below). This must be done in order to ensure compliance with federal requirements. The Department's approved statement reads as follows:

The CSDE is committed to a policy of affirmative action/equal opportunity for all qualified persons. The Connecticut Department of Education does not discriminate in any employment practice, education program, or educational activity on the basis of age, ancestry, color, civil air patrol status, criminal record (in state employment and licensing), gender identity or expression, genetic information, intellectual disability, learning disability, marital status, mental disability (past or present), national origin, physical disability (including blindness), race, religious creed, retaliation for previously opposed discrimination or coercion, sex (pregnancy or sexual harassment), sexual orientation, veteran status or workplace hazards to reproductive systems, unless there is a bona fide occupational qualification excluding persons in any of the aforementioned protected classes.

Inquiries regarding the Connecticut State Department of Education's nondiscrimination policies should be directed to:

Levy Gillespie

Equal Employment Opportunity Director/American with Disabilities Act Coordinator

State of Connecticut Department of Education

450 Columbus Boulevard, Suite 607

Hartford, CT 06103-1841

860-807-2101

Levy.Gillespie@ct.gov

CSDE Reserves the Right:

The CSDE reserves the right to withdraw this Request For Proposals after the proposals are received if the CSDE, in its sole discretion, determines that no applicant has met the requirements. The CSDE also reserves the right to accept a proposal subject to conditions that CSDE imposes.

Request For Proposals Grant Awards:

Applicants are required to submit narratives to the CSDE electronically. The CSDE reserves the right to make changes to the RFP grant awards without discussion with the applicants. Therefore, proposals should represent the applicant's best effort to ensure a quality proposal from both a technical and cost standpoint. All awards are subject to the availability of state and federal funds. The grant award is not final until the award letter is executed. The CSDE will issue notification of the RFP award. The effective dates of the project will be set forth in the notification of the RFP award.

Freedom of Information Act:

All of the information contained in a proposal submitted in response to this RFP is subject to the Freedom of Information Act Sections 1-200 et seq. The FOIA provides that, except as provided by federal law or state statute, records maintained or kept on file by any public agency (as defined in the statute) are public records, and every person has the right to inspect such records and receive a copy of such records.

Section 1AB: Overview of Challenge - Purpose and Measurement

APPLICATION INFORMATION

A. Purpose

The FAFSA Completion Challenge aims to strengthen postsecondary access and enrollment by raising FAFSA completion rates among high school seniors. Thousands of Connecticut students who are eligible for federal student aid fail to submit the FAFSA each year, leaving millions of unclaimed dollars that could support students' postsecondary education. The FAFSA is a critical access milestone in preparing high school students to pursue a higher education. Administered by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Federal Student Aid, the FAFSA provides hundreds of millions of dollars in aid to Connecticut students.

This is critically important, in part, because more than 70 percent of Connecticut jobs require some form of education beyond a high school diploma, and nine of the 10 fastest-growing occupations [require at least an associate's degree](#). While many students aspire to a higher education, less than half of Connecticut high school graduates will earn a college degree within six years of graduating from high school. College enrollment and completion data also reveal [opportunity gaps for historically marginalized subgroups](#). Completion of the FAFSA is one of the best predictors of whether or not seniors will enroll in college; students who complete the FAFSA are 84 percent [more likely to immediately enroll in postsecondary education](#). However, only 55 percent of Connecticut's Class of 2021 completed the FAFSA by June 2021.

B. FAFSA Completion Measurement

Each school's 2021-22 **FAFSA completion rate** will be measured as follows:

Total FAFSAs completed by high school seniors by June 30, 2022

Number of high school seniors

Section 1C: Final Awards

APPLICATION INFORMATION (continued)

C. Final Awards

In September 2022, the Governor and Commissioner of Education will publicly recognize schools for their growth and overall achievement in boosting FAFSA completion rates for the class of 2022, compared to the Class of 2021:

1. CT FAFSA Challenge High Schools

- **Governor's Award:** Awarded to a FAFSA Challenge school that showed the largest percentage point growth from previous year (small, medium, and large schools)
\$5,000 + Governor's certificate*
- **Commissioner's Award:** Awarded to a FAFSA Challenge school that showed the highest FAFSA completion rate at end of school year (small, medium, and large schools)
\$5,000 + Commissioner's certificate*
- **Monthly Awards:** Awarded to a FAFSA Challenge school that showed the highest month-to-month growth in FAFSA completion rates
Recognition on CSDE website

2. All Other High Schools

- **Governor's Award:** Awarded to school that showed the largest percentage point growth from previous year (small, medium, and large schools)
Governor's certificate
- **Commissioner's Award:** Awarded to school that showed the highest FAFSA completion rate at end of school year (small, medium, and large schools)
Commissioner's certificate
- **Monthly Awards:** Awarded to school that showed the highest month-to-month growth in FAFSA completion rates
Recognition on CSDE website

3. All Schools

- **Challenge Award:** Awarded to schools that boost FAFSA completion rates by at least 5 percentage points
Recognition on CSDE website
- **Bronze, Silver, and Gold Awards:** Awarded to schools that meet certain FAFSA completion thresholds (70%, 75% and 80% of students)
Recognition on CSDE website

*These monetary awards will help schools continue their FAFSA completion work during the 2022-23 school year.

See [2020-21 FAFSA Challenge winners](#)

Section 1D-G

APPLICATION INFORMATION (continued)

D. Management and Technical Assistance

The FAFSA Completion Challenge will be managed out of the CSDE. For questions about the FAFSA Completion Challenge, please email John Scianimanico, FAFSA Challenge Completion Project Director, at john.scianimanico@ct.gov.

Additionally, all applicants are encouraged to attend the FAFSA Challenge 2021-22: Overview and Application Informational Session, where CSDE and partners will discuss the application and provide an overview of the resources available to eligible schools this year. [Register for this event](#) which is scheduled for September 29, 2021 at 2:30 PM.

E. Selection Process

To guide the FAFSA Completion Challenge, the CSDE will assemble a committee of individuals with expertise in school improvement and FAFSA completion strategies. The committee will review applications from eligible schools for selection and confirm winners of the prizes described above.

F. Eligibility Determination and Eligible Applicants

The CSDE has determined that [53 high schools are eligible to apply](#) to participate in the 2021-22 FAFSA Challenge because they met all the following criteria:

- FAFSA completion rate below 55 percent during the 2020-21 school year (as of June 8, 2021);
- Free- or reduced price meal eligibility rate above 40 percent during the 2020-21 school year;
- At least 50 students in Grade 12 as of June 8, 2021; and
- Not identified as winner in the 2020-21 FAFSA Challenge.

Applications must be submitted by an eligible school. For districts that have multiple eligible high schools, each high school should submit its own application.

G. Selection Criteria

The selection committee will evaluate applications received using the following criteria:

- Strength of the school's FAFSA completion strategy
- Willingness to use data to drive strategy and efforts
- Capacity to pursue new FAFSA strategies, including through collaboration with college access organizations, nonprofits, and higher education institutions as well as possible participation from local government, the business community, faith-based organizations, the media, or other groups

Section 1H-I

APPLICATION INFORMATION (continued)

I. Application Timeline and Submission Requirements

Announcement of 2020-21 FAFSA Challenge winners

September 24, 2021

Call for 2021-22 proposals

September 24, 2021

Prospective applicant webinar
September 29, 2021, 2:30 PM

Application deadline
October 18, 2021, 5:00 PM

Award notification
October 29, 2021

Kickoff event (all Challenge participants invited)
November 2, 2021

Implementation period
November 2021-June 2022

Announcement of 2021-21 FAFSA Challenge winners
September 2022

For questions, contact John Scianimanico, FAFSA Completion Challenge Project Director, at john.scianimanico@ct.gov.

Section 1J

APPLICATION INFORMATION (continued)

J. Support for Selected Schools

Eligible schools may apply to receive one of two tiers of support:

Tier 1: Basic Support

Tier 1 provides resources for schools who need financial support to boost FAFSA completion rates but don't have the time or desire to participate in the more comprehensive Tier 2 program.

In Tier 1, schools can apply to receive:

- A modest microgrant, scaled to senior class size
- Access to aggregate and student-level data about FAFSA completion (through [EdSight public](#) and EdSight Secure), empowering educators with information to then target student support.

Tier 2: Intensive Support

Tier 2 provides a larger set of resources for schools who wish to commit more time to improving FAFSA completion, invest in their own professional development, and learn from other schools and experts.

In Tier 2, schools can apply to receive:

- A larger microgrant, scaled to senior class size
- Participation in the FAFSA Challenge Community of Practice (attendance required*), where the RISE Network will hold monthly gatherings for school staff to collaborate and share successes, challenges, and promising practices
- Training, in-person coaching, and professional development opportunities for school staff in FAFSA completion
- **Access to aggregate and student-level data about FAFSA completion** (through [EdSight public](#) and EdSight Secure), empowering educators with information to then target student support.

*Schools that apply for Tier 2 will be expected to attend monthly Community of Practice meetings with their school peers.

Section 2: APPLICANT INFORMATION

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Select District, then School

District

School

Name of School-Level Staff Completing Application

Title of School-Level Staff Completing Application

Email of School-Level Staff Completing Application

Name of District Point of Contact

Title of District Point of Contact

Email of District Point of Contact

Section 3: APPLICATION NARRATIVE

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The following questions must be completed by school-level staff, though schools may solicit input from district staff or an outside partner (i.e. community based organization, institution of higher education, or other partner). Schools seeking to receive Tier 2 resources must complete Question 5 as well in order to be considered. Please keep

each response limited to 2,000 characters (approximately 300 words).

1. Use of Data: What was your school's FAFSA completion rate in 2020-21 (use [EdSight public](#) for school FAFSA completion rates)? What are some of the root causes contributing to the data? How will your district use real-time [data posted on EdSight](#) during October 2021 through June 2022 to guide your FAFSA completion work?

Section 3: Application Narrative (Strategy)

2. Strategy and Commitment to Equity: Describe how your school intends to use funds in order to raise FAFSA completion rates among high school seniors by at least 5 percentage points for the period of November 2021 through June 2022, compared to the Class of 2021. Explain how the school will use new resources to pursue new and innovative strategies, promote equity, and close opportunity gaps. See also the Promising Practices brief on CSDE website for ideas on how three Connecticut schools developed new and effective strategies during last year's FAFSA Challenge.

Section 3: Application Narrative (Implementation)

Implementation: Summarize key implementation milestones in the fall, winter, and spring. Describe the school's capacity to implement new strategies.

Section 3: Application Narrative (Cross-Sector Collaboration)

Cross-Sector Collaboration: Please identify all organizations that are collaborating in your school's FAFSA completion initiative and explain their role. High schools are strongly encouraged to partner with an outside organization, whether it be a community based organization (CBO), institution of higher education, or other college access organization. Other partners may include local government, the business community, faith-based organizations, the media, or other groups. Describe the structure and/or mechanisms you use to coordinate among partners. Give particular attention to how you will use and leverage the seed grant with partners to maximize success.

See the [FAFSA Challenge Buddy List](#) for a list of nonprofits, institutions of higher education, and other organizations willing and eager to partner with a high school in the FAFSA Challenge. High schools are encouraged to identify and reach out to a community based organization or institution of higher education on this list prior to the application deadline.

Section 3: Application Narrative (Level of Support)

Select the Level of Support Desired by the School

Tier 1: Basic Support

Tier 1 provides resources for schools who need financial support to boost FAFSA completion rates but don't have the time or desire to participate in the more comprehensive Tier 2 program.

In Tier 1, schools can apply to receive:

- A modest microgrant, scaled to senior class size
- Access to aggregate and student-level data about FAFSA completion (through [EdSight public](#) and EdSight Secure), empowering educators with information to then target student support.

Tier 2: Intensive Support

Tier 2 provides a larger set of resources for schools who wish to commit more time to improving FAFSA completion, invest in their own professional development, and learn from other schools and experts.

In Tier 2, schools can apply to receive:

- A larger microgrant, scaled to senior class size
- Participation in the FAFSA Challenge Community of Practice (attendance required*), where the RISE Network will hold monthly gatherings for school staff to collaborate and share successes, challenges, and promising practices
- Training, in-person coaching, and professional development opportunities for school staff in FAFSA completion
- **Access to aggregate and student-level data about FAFSA completion** (through [EdSight public](#) and EdSight Secure), empowering educators with information to then target student support.

*Schools that apply for Tier 2 will be expected to attend monthly Community of Practice meetings with their school peers.

What level of support is the school applying for? (select one)

- Tier 1: Basic Support
- Tier 2: Intensive Support

[For Tier 2: Intensive Support Applicants Only]: Please (1) explain why your school is interested in the more comprehensive set of resources provided in Tier 2 -- larger microgrants; monthly Community of Practice meetings with other Challenge schools; and professional development, training, and coaching opportunities on FAFSA completion -- and (2) provide the names and roles of 2-3 team members from your school who will participate in the recurring Community of Practice sessions.

Section 4: COMPLIANCES

Section 4: Compliance

To the best of my knowledge and belief, all the information and data in this agreement are true and correct. I further certify the following:

Acknowledge Each
Item Below by
Checking the Box

We acknowledge and agree that the failure to comply with all Assurances and Certifications in this application, all relevant provisions and requirements of the CRRSA Act, 2021, Pub. L. 116-260 (December 27, 2020), or any other applicable law or regulation may result in liability under the False Claims Act, 31 U.S.C. § 3729, et seq.; OMB Guidelines to Agencies on Governmentwide Debarment and Suspension (Nonprocurement) in 2 CFR part 180, as adopted and amended as regulations of the Department in 2 CFR part 3485; and 18 USC § 1001, as appropriate.

Acknowledge Each
Item Below by
Checking the Box

All ESSER funds will be used for activities allowable under Section 313 of the CRRSA Act, 2021. No funds shall be used: to subsidize or offset executive salaries and benefits of individuals who are not employees of our district; for expenditures related to state or local teacher or faculty unions or associations.

Our district shall provide reports as may be required by the CSDE which could include but are not limited to: the methodology we use(d) to provide services or assistance to students and staff in both public and non-public schools; the uses of funds (by our district and/or other entities) and demonstration of their compliance with Section 313, such as any use of funds addressing the digital divide, including securing access to home-based connectivity and remote-use devices, related issues in supporting remote learning for all students, including disadvantaged populations.

Our district shall cooperate with any examination of records with respect to such ESSER funds by making records available for inspection, production, and examination, and authorized individuals available for interview and examination, upon the request of (i) the United States Department of Education and/or its Inspector General; or (ii) any other federal agency, commission, or department in the lawful exercise of its jurisdiction and authority.

We will comply with the Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards (Uniform Guidance) requirements in Subpart D-Post Federal Award Requirements (2 CFR §§200.300-345) and Subpart E-Cost Principles (2 CFR §§200.400-475), which states that (ESSER II) funds must be used for purposes that are reasonable, necessary, and allocable under the CRRSA Act.

We will comply with the provisions of all applicable acts, regulations and assurances; the following provisions of Education Department General Administrative Regulations (EDGAR) 34 CFR parts 76, 77, 81, 82, 84, 97, 98, and 99; the OMB Guidelines to Agencies on Governmentwide Debarment and Suspension (Nonprocurement) in 2 CFR part 180, as adopted and amended as regulations of the Department in 2 CFR part 3485; and the Uniform Guidance in 2 CFR part 200, as adopted and amended as regulations of the Department in 2 CFR part 3474.

Section 5: ASSURANCES

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The Local Educational Agency (LEA) hereby assures the State Educational Agency (SEA) that the LEA follows all regulations applicable for CSDE, including those outlined below.

Confirm Each Item Below by Checking the Box

Each program will be administered in accordance with applicable statutes, regulations, program plans, and applications;

Control of funds and property acquired using program funds will be maintained and administered by the appropriate public agency;

Fiscal control and fund accounting procedures will be used to ensure proper disbursement of, and accounting for, federal funds;

The LEA will make reports to the state agency or board and to the Secretary as may be needed for the state agency or board and the Secretary to perform their duties under each program, and each LEA will maintain records (as required in Section 443) and provide access to those records as the state board or agency Secretary deems necessary to carry out their responsibilities;

The LEA has adopted effective procedures for acquiring and disseminating information and research regarding the programs and for adopting, where appropriate, promising educational practices to teachers and administrators participating in each program; and

None of the funds expended under any applicable program will be used to acquire equipment if such acquisition results in a direct financial benefit to any organization representing the interests of the purchasing entity or its employees.

Section 6: SIGNATURE

I, the undersigned authorized official, hereby certify that these assurances shall be fully implemented.

Name

Title

Date