




## FAFSA Nights and FAFSA Completion Best Practices

**For high school counselors, college advisers, and other college preparation professionals who need ideas**

FAFSA completion is a difficult obstacle for high schools, students, and families here in Utah. Therefore, we have organized the most impactful strategies our high schools have used to increase their FAFSA completion. These ideas come from some of the top FAFSA completing schools in Utah, who have had many years of experience. The schools referenced in this document are from the competitors and winners of the statewide FAFSA Cup. [Click here](#) for more information on the FAFSA Cup. We encourage you to use these ideas, build upon them, and create new ideas to help your school take FAFSA completion to the next level!

A word of advice: every example in this document is unique; it's not a one-size-fits-all approach. Not every exercise may be a good fit for your school. Explore ideas that put your students first and consider what would work best for them!

Please be aware that all quotes in this document may have been lightly edited for clarity and brevity. If you're an author of a quote and have a question or concerns, please reach out to [fafsahelp@ushe.edu](mailto:fafsahelp@ushe.edu).

You'll notice in this document that there are underlined words. When you see a word that is underlined, you can click on it. Doing so will navigate you to the respective page in this document or corresponding weblink. You'll also notice that there is an arrow  in the corner of each page. That arrow will navigate you to the Table of Contents. Happy navigating!

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# The Ultimate Best Practices

## **Make your event a priority at the beginning of the school year (with available volunteer resources)**

- Our observation of FAFSA events here in Utah shows that FAFSA Nights are highly attended in the months of October and November. Not only that, but having it earlier in the school year avoids deadline complications for institutions and scholarships. (*USHE, 2022*)
- “Our FAFSA Night tends to be heavily attended near the beginning of the year.” (*Taylorville High, 2021*)

## **Use the school’s TVs & TV channel**

- “FAFSA ads were prepared and displayed on the general school TVs and the TV in the counseling center.” (*Jordan High, 2021*)
- “Our Team talked about FAFSA on our student led morning show” (*Park City High, 2021*)

## **Involve senior body officers**

- “Student body officers did lunchtime activities to promote college awareness and FAFSA.” (*Hunter High, 2017*)

## **Have envelopes and stamps ready to provide to students who need to mail their signatures**

- “For our families who need to physically mail their FAFSA signature, I have envelopes and stamps ready to send.” (*Cottonwood High, FAFSA Cup Winner, 2019*)

## **Create a FAFSA checklist for students**

- “We give each FAFSA applicant a checklist, **when they apply**, that identifies all required steps to receiving financial aid. This same checklist is a 4x5 poster posted in the hall . . . this year, we have prepared step-by-step instructions to send to each student along with the name of someone who can help them.” (*Jordan High, 2020*)

## **Have a list of Financial Aid Office contacts ready to direct students to their correct resources**

- “For these students, the college access adviser has also created a sheet with all the contacts for each of Utah’s institution’s financial aid office so the student has all the resources they need on one simple sheet.” (*Weber High, 2020*)

## **Get creative with how you schedule appointments**

- “We have a QR code printed on pass-along cards for students to schedule a time for one-on-one help in the Career Center [i.e. help completing the FAFSA, navigating verification, or reading their financial aid award letter].” (*Cedar Valley High, 2021*)



## Collect College and Career Readiness (CCR) specific information for specialized outreach emails

- “Use information from CCRs to identify the schools the student wants to attend. The FAFSA specialist identified the scholarship deadline for each school. The email included the name of the school the student selected along with the scholarship deadline. It included **why** they were receiving the email –more opportunities for financial aid may be available **if** the FAFSA is completed before the scholarship deadline. The goal was to encourage students to apply for financial aid by completing the FAFSA application **before** the scholarship deadline to increase possible financial aid awards.”  
(Jordan High, FAFSA Cup Winner, 2021)

## Stay up-to-date on FAFSA information, even if you feel competent in your knowledge

- “Attended the FAFSA Bootcamp hosted by USHE’s FAFSA State Coordinator. The USHE Financial Aid webinars are very helpful. They not only provide a direct link to the colleges and the information about FAFSA, but the ability to ask questions that relate to specific situations.” (Jordan High, FAFSA Cup Winner, 2021)

# Best Practices for Advertising FAFSA Events

## Text, email, postcards and phone call ideas

- “We used a text-messaging site called Remind 101 to send out text messages to parents about FAFSA completions.” (Ben Lomond High, 2017)
- “We sent individual appointment postcards to each senior for a different FAFSA Night. The postcards gave each student a date and time to come and complete their FAFSA, but corresponded to our scheduled FAFSA nights. The postcards also detailed what items to bring to their appointment. This meant that any senior was effectively invited to every FAFSA Night, even though their individual post card might have had a specific date.” (Ben Lomond High, 2017)
- “An automated phone call was sent to all parents a few days before the events.” (Taylorsville High, 2017)
- “We have a monthly newsletter where we promote activities.” (Utah County Academy of Science, FAFSA Cup Winner, 2017)
- “We used our automated phone callers. We sent postcards home with items families would need for FAFSA completion.” (Ben Lomond High, FAFSA Cup Winner, 2018)
- “We . . . sent postcards to our Spanish-speaking families with the dates of the Spanish nights and their instructions in Spanish.” (Ben Lomond High, FAFSA Cup Winner, 2018)
- “Before UCAW, we made automated phone calls in student’s languages to inform parents about FAFSA.” (Cottonwood High, FAFSA Cup Runner-Up, 2020)



## Social media and school website ideas

- “We posted events on social media, Facebook, Twitter and on Taylorsville's website.” (*Taylorsville High, 2017*)
- “Information was posted on a financial aid webpage from our counseling center site.” (*Copper Hills High, 2018*)
- “We posted FAFSA invitations to the open houses on Twitter, Facebook, our CHHS Counseling Center website.” (*Copper Hills High, 2018*)
- “The West High community is very active on Instagram. We asked the grade level accounts, club accounts and other related social media accounts to share the FAFSA information and help advertise FAFSA events.” (*West High, FAFSA Cup Runner-Up, 2021*)

## Flyers and more print ideas

- “FAFSA Night flyers were posted around the school. They were also sent out through our electronic flyer system called Peach Jar to families that have subscribed to school communication.” (*Ben Lomond High, 2017*)
- “We handed out flyers in their Language Arts 12 class to remind students of our FAFSA Night and also of what they needed to bring to the FAFSA Night.” (*Water Canyon High, 2017*)
- “We handed out fliers to parents and students on parent/teacher conference.” (*Taylorsville High, 2017*)
- “We had handouts for students on next steps and followed up with financial aid offices on their college campuses.” (*Hunter High, 2017*)
- “We included information on what to bring and flyers to dispel myths about the FAFSA.” (*Copper Hills High, 2018*)
- “Flyers were passed out, and each counselor had a never-ending stack of flyers in their offices. The flyers were great to give to every senior who came in to see a counselor.” (*Fremont High, 2018*)
- “I posted posters with statistics about paying for college and how FAFSA can help.” (*Pine View High, FAFSA Cup Runner-Up, 2018*)
- “We hung the banner in our student commons announcing that the FAFSA was open for students.” (*Copper Hills High, 2018*)
- “FAFSA bookmarks were given out.” (*Cottonwood High, 2018*)
- “I passed out mini flyers with the event details to all the seniors and on the back of the flyer told them what to bring for that night.” (*Cottonwood High, FAFSA Cup Winner, 2019*)
- “Ogden High used the "First U Hafta FAFSA" logo and created T-shirts for the FAFSA team along with school-wide posters and flyers tailored for each FAFSA event to create some excitement for the FAFSA.” (*Ogden High, FAFSA Cup Winner, 2020*)



## **Announcements, in-school TV ads, and marquee ideas**

- “We talked about FAFSA Nights regularly during school announcements. We used examples of how much money could be earned and how much money went unclaimed each year. We also posted FAFSA events on our electronic bulletin board called the *9 Screen*.” (*Ben Lomond High, 2017*)
- “TV ads with reminders to students” (*Jordan High, FAFSA Cup Runner-Up, 2017*)
- “Announcement on Wolverine TV and daily announcement over the PA system.” (*Hunter High, 2017*)
- “We posted our event on our school marquee by the parking lot.” (*Fremont High, 2018*)
- “Daily announcements were made prior to all five events.” (*Copper Hills High, 2018*)
- “Announcements were made throughout the school year in regards to how FAFSA can help pay for college.” (*Cottonwood High, 2018*)

## **Unique practices**

- “Stacey Worthen worked with our CHTV News students to put out a vlog.” (*Copper Hills High, 2018*)
- “A list of what students needed to bring with them to their FAFSA Night was distributed to senior English classes a day before and the day of the events.” (*Cottonwood High, 2018*)
- “We advertise FAFSA Nights taking place in the Salt Lake Valley as well as encourage students to attend a FAFSA workshop at SLCC regardless of whether they plan to attend SLCC or not.” (*Cottonwood High, 2018*)
- “FAFSA forms printed in both English and Spanish were available for undocumented students to complete and submit to financial aid offices.” (*Jordan High, 2018*)
- “We utilized our Distributive Education Clubs of America (DECA) and Future Business Leaders of America (FLBA) clubs to advertise in new ways” (*Herriman High, 2020*)

# **12<sup>th</sup> Grade Classrooms’ Best Practices for FAFSA**

## **Promotion or Completion**

### **Ideas for promoting the FAFSA in classes**

- “I partnered this year with our financial literacy teacher who invited me to his class periods of seniors to educate them about FAFSA and its purpose. He then made it a requirement for the students to fill out their portion of the application, and then offered extra credit for their parents to attend FAFSA Night and finish the application process.” (*Fremont High, 2018*)
- “This year we have presented to all our financial lit classes on FAFSA. We have a PowerPoint with information and some fun videos. It is an interactive presentation that lasts about 40-50 minutes.” (*Davis High, 2017*)



- “Ogden High School took advantage of the school’s advisory class to teach FAFSA directly to seniors. There are twenty-one senior advisory classes that meet weekly with seniors and provide important information from graduation credit evaluations to college financial aid.” (*Ogden High, 2017*)

### **Ideas for completing the FSA ID/FAFSA in classes**

- “We conducted classroom visits to all senior English classes, we had all senior English classes come to the Career Center to do their FSA ID the week before the FAFSA night.” (*Hunter High, 2017*)
- “Financing College: FAFSA & Scholarships Event—Senior advisory classes were assigned a computer lab and students had two assignments: create an FSA ID and start their FAFSA application, or if they had completed their FAFSA, or were unable to, they could apply for a scholarship. (*Ogden High, 2017*)
- “In October and November, we arranged for entire senior English classes to come to the Media Center and use computers to obtain FSA IDs and begin the FAFSA application.” (*Copper Hills High, 2018*)
- “We called our seniors down during their English classes and showed them the 2-minute YouTube video from StepUp to Higher Education (now Utah College Awareness & Financial Aid) about the different ways to pay for college. We had our seniors create their FSA ID after watching the video and gave each senior a handout with our FAFSA Night date and a checklist of documents to bring.” (*Hunter High, 2018*)

### **Teacher’s assistance in FAFSA promotion**

- “After College Application Week, we had all senior advisory teachers show the Paying for College video.” (*Ben Lomond High, 2017*)
- “The financial literacy teacher, talked about the importance of higher education and financial aid options for an entire unit. They taught multiple lessons on financial aid including how to find and apply for scholarships, work-study, Pell Grants, and student loans.” (*Pine View High, FAFSA Cup Runner-Up, 2018*)

### **Outside of the classroom, FAFSA promotion and completion**

- “We invited any family to come during Parent-Teacher conferences to complete their FAFSA.” (*Ben Lomond High, 2017*)
- “We also assisted with FAFSA at Parent-Teacher Conferences on February 9th offering parents a computer and assistance with the application.” (*Ogden High, 2017*)
- “We had a special assembly for all seniors about paying for college. In this assembly, we addressed all the components of the FAFSA and other ways to pay for college.” (*Ben Lomond High, 2017*)

### **Best practices in the spring**

- “The Career Center and GEAR UP program visited fifteen senior language arts classes to show a “commercial” regarding FAFSA and spring scholarships. Students were encouraged to: 1) Start the FAFSA, if they had not completed the process, 2) Check their college portal to review their FAFSA award and/or 3) Complete the verification process if their college asked for supporting documents. A final FAFSA checklist was provided.” (*Ogden High, 2017*)



- “In February, we used a whole class period of Language Arts 12 to offer more help with filling out their FAFSA and/or scholarships.” (*Water Canyon High, 2017*)

## Ideas for Information Packets & Handouts for Students

- “At their senior meeting with their counselor in August or September, all OHS seniors, and parents that attend, receive a folder complete with information on the college application and college financing process.” (*Ogden High, 2017*)
- “In our information packets the student received:
  1. Start your FAFSA: This form lists the FSA ID webpage, the nine steps required to complete their FSA ID, and places for the student and parent to write the email, password, and username.
  2. Parent's checklist provided with link to FAFSA.
  3. List of telephone numbers for financial aid office at colleges in Utah so students can contact the school with questions.
  4. SLCC Promise: printed handout given to students applying to SLCC
  5. Verification list checked monthly to notify students who require verification and inform students who think they have completed the application if their name doesn't appear on the list.” (*Jordan High, FAFSA Cup Runner-Up, 2017*)

## Goal Making Ideas

- “Our department has a data project this year to increase FAFSA completions by 10% for our English Language Learners.” (*Ben Lomond High, FAFSA Cup Winner, 2018*)
- “Our team goal was to improve number of completed applications by 3%.” (*Copper Hills High, 2018*)
- “As a team, we noticed that despite our efforts to promote FAFSA, many of our students have yet to apply. We made the goal to increase FAFSA completion by 25%. I personally made the goal to help 50 more students complete the FAFSA by the end of the month.” (*Pine View High, FAFSA Cup Runner-Up, 2018*)
- “We worked with our district to set FAFSA completion goals for the year.” (*Granger High, FAFSA Cup Runner-Up, 2019*)
- “Our goal usually was set to beat our year’s data goal, which was set at 30% and every year our goal is beating whatever the previous goal that was set, and so far, we are 7% above last year’s goal.” (*Cottonwood High, FAFSA Cup Winner, 2019*)
- “This year we set a goal to increase our FAFSA Night attendance by 20%, because last year we only had a few students attend FAFSA Night.” (*Cedar Valley High, 2021*)





# Unique Ways to Capture the Attention of Students

## Encourage students by promoting peer FAFSA success stories

- “Success stories—Highlights separated to emphasize problem, obstacles, and how FAFSA helped the applicant overcome them. These were printed, laminated, and placed on the stairway walls.” (*Jordan High, FAFSA Cup Runner-Up, 2017*)

## Praise students with a visual for all students to see

- “We created a FAFSA tree on the wall near the Counseling Center. After each FAFSA Night, the TRIO advisor would list a student’s name on a mock dollar bill and put that on the tree for all students to see.” (*Ben Lomond High, 2017*)

## Get creative with deadlines

- “We printed FAFSA deadlines for Utah colleges with each college’s logo, laminated them, and placed them on the stairway walls in order from first deadline to last deadline.” (*Jordan High, FAFSA Cup Runner-Up, 2017*)

## Praise students who complete the FAFSA

- “We put up a FAFSA tree in our window showcasing the names of FAFSA completers.” (*Ben Lomond High, FAFSA Cup Winner, 2018*)

## Inform students of college costs

- “We used net price calculators, which help students estimate the cost of attending the school of their choice.” (*Jordan High, 2018*)

## Find new ways to praise FAFSA completers

- “In the counseling center, when a student completes their FAFSA, we have a loud cowbell that we ring, and everyone stops to cheer for them. The students get a little embarrassed, but they love being recognized!” (*Ben Lomond High, 2021*)



# Undocumented Student Inclusion

- “DuringUCAW, we provided information in our packets for undocumented students, that did not draw attention to their citizenship status.” (*Copper Hills High, 2018*)
- “We have a webpage where scholarships for undocumented students are advertised. We make sure that the monarch butterfly is displayed in our counseling department to let students know that this is a safe place for them. Additionally, the book *DREAMERS: Living in the Shadows, the Undocumented Experience in Word and Image* is also displayed.” (*Cottonwood High, 2018*)
- “Scholarships for undocumented students or other financial aid opportunities are emphasized in the quarterly newsletter sent to all seniors. Counselors also use the information to advise these students. Both specialists work to identify undocumented students and provide them with contact information to SLCC’s Dream Center and the University of Utah’s Center to assist undocumented students.” (*Jordan High, FAFSA Cup Winner, 2021*)

# Best Practices for Hosting FAFSA Events and Other Ideas

## Host multiple FAFSA events

- “We held 10 school-sponsored FAFSA nights in our school library.” (*Ben Lomond High, 2017*)
- “We held six different evening events and one Saturday event.” (*Ben Lomond High, FAFSA Cup Winner, 2018*)
- “We started by having our FAFSA night during our College Application Week. In addition, we had two FAFSA completion nights for students and parents during the month of November. We will also have an additional night during the month of April for any additional students needing help with FAFSA.” (*Hunter High, 2020*)

## Utah College Application Week (UCAW) & FAFSA Events best practices

- “Having our FAFSA night duringUCAW also helped quite a bit, because the motivation for pursuing higher education was already instilled in the student body, and they were excited to come and complete their financial aid requirement.” (*Cottonwood High, FAFSA Cup Runner-Up, 2020*)
- “Our first FAFSA Open House was held the week during ourUCAW. All the seniors attendedUCAW and received information (including the required documents list) about the FAFSA completion event. We had 83 seniors attend the first event. This was a huge success compared to the previous year in which only 30 students attended.” (*Kearns High, 2020*)
- “Something we did different this year was hold our FAFSA night during our Utah college Application Week. Having our FAFSA night duringUCAW was great because we were able to notify all seniors about the upcoming event.” (*Taylorville High, 2020*)



- “The first week of October, all seniors in English classes attendUCAW week. The team explains how to apply for college, encourages the students to apply for at least one college, and also walks them through completing the FSA ID in preparation for completing the FAFSA application. Handouts in each student’s packet include the step-by-step instructions from creating an FSA ID and a detailed list of the steps required to receive financial aid.” (*Jordan High, FAFSA Cup Winner, 2021*)

### **Make your events family friendly**

- “Families who attended were fed pizza after completion.” (*Ben Lomond High, 2017*)
- “Our Saturday event was called Super Saturday FAFSA Pancake Breakfast and families were fed breakfast.” (*Ben Lomond High, FAFSA Cup Winner, 2018*)
- “During FAFSA night families received help with FAFSA, helpers to watch small children if needed, and snacks. We gave each family tickets for free tacos at the Taco Truck.” (*Granger High, FAFSA Cup Runner-Up, 2019*)
- “During our FAFSA completion nights, we have pizza, childcare, and give PHS students a ticket for a drawing. The next day we draw a ticket and announce the winner of a \$30 gift card. The winner gets their picture on our social media feeds (if approved by the student/family). Spending \$20 on pizza has drawn more students in to complete their FAFSA than the gift cards.” (*Provo High, 2019*)
- “We had dinner for the students and their parents as well as snacks and set up stations for those who needed extra help that we could not provide.” (*Provo High, 2021*)

### **Host FAFSA events in specific languages**

- “We hosted three Spanish-speaking events throughout the year, one with UHEAA (now USHE) hosting. Each time, we talked about the importance of FAFSA and other ways to pay for college.” (*Ben Lomond High, 2017*)
- “Spanish parent meetings are held at the school monthly; filling out the FAFSA was encouraged at these meetings.” (*Jordan High, 2018*)
- “We discovered that we had a low turnout during the 2016-17 school year with our Spanish-speaking parents. This year, we addressed this gap by hosting two special Spanish-speaking FAFSA nights at our school. We arranged to have multiple Spanish speakers available at both nights. We believe this helped our undocumented students as well.” (*Ben Lomond High, FAFSA Cup Winner, 2018*)
- “We held an all-Spanish session for our Spanish speakers.” (*Brighton High, 2019*)
- “We also hosted a FAFSA night for our Spanish speaking parents in a smaller group with translation services available.” (*Park City High, 2020*)

### **Host a virtual event for your students**

- “We held two evening virtual FAFSA events over Zoom with support from the FAFSA State Coordinator. We hosted an open Zoom room all day. Students would check in with their teacher, get the Zoom link from their teacher and were able to get help with their FAFSA, FSA ID and/or reading their Student Aid Report.” (*West High, FAFSA Cup Runner-Up, 2021*)



### **Host a College and Career Night with FAFSA services**

- “Our team planned and successfully held our first college and career night in conjunction with our FAFSA Night. It was well attended, better than previous years, and the students and parents were able to successfully start and/or complete their FAFSA applications that night.” (*Brighton High, 2019*)
- “CVHS also had two college nights where FAFSA completion was attached to student college enrollments.” (*Cedar Valley High, 2021*)

### **Collaborate with other schools**

- “We hold two FAFSA nights at two different locations. The second event is held at Granite Park Junior High to best serve our students from the South Salt Lake area who may not have access to transportation.” (*Cottonwood High, 2018*)
- “The parents and students who could not make it to our first FAFSA night were informed of additional FAFSA nights at Taylorsville. They were also informed of other opportunities close by that would work better with their schedule. We are lucky to have several neighboring schools who work with us.” (*Taylorsville High, 2020*)
- Schools could partner with another local school to host events at each other’s schools or somewhere in the community. (*New idea from USHE, 2022*)
- Team up with your local schools to host a large virtual event where students and families can work on the FAFSA at home. Work with the USHE FAFSA State Coordinator to have someone host while advisers and counselors help students in breakout rooms. (*New idea from USHE, 2022*)

### **Host a FAFSA Drive-In**

- Provide a space where students and parents have access to the internet in a parking lot to work on the FAFSA and get help. Families would be socially distant from each other to provide safety from COVID and when a family needed help you have a designated item that they place on the roof of their car to notify someone that they need help. You can reach out to the FAFSA State Coordinator at USHE to plan the details of the event. (*New idea from USHE, 2022*)

### **Focus on what works best for your students and your school**

- “We recognize as a charter school, many of our students do not live near the school, and we have struggled with attendance in afterschool sessions. Vanguard is a Title 1 school with the majority of our students coming from low socioeconomic households and are first-generation students. By providing the FAFSA open house for a full day during school hours, we were able to invite all our seniors to attend, not just those with parents that were able to bring them to the school. We encouraged them to bring their tax information to the school and encouraged parents to stop by during their lunch break or whenever it worked best in their schedule.” (*Vanguard Academy, 2021*)



# Incentives for Students to Complete the FAFSA

## Ideas for giving credit or points

- “We gave Citizenship Point Average (CPA) credit for coming to FAFSA Night.” (*Hunter High, 2017*)
- “Seniors who filed FAFSA by the end of February received 40 Tiger Points. Students use these points to purchase supplies, OHS swag and other items. Points were also offered to students who attended a FAFSA night event.” (*Ogden High, 2017*)
- “Counselors work with school administration to give incentives for attending FAFSA events like credit toward making up attendance.” (*Jordan High, 2018*)
- “I gave my students bonus classroom cash for attending our school's FAFSA night and gave extra credit to students that completed their FAFSA.” (*Pine View High, FAFSA Cup Runner-Up, 2018*)
- “We held a FAFSA completion night where all students in the financial literacy course at Bingham High School were awarded participation points or extra credit for attending. As a result, we had more students than ever attend the FAFSA completion night.” (*Bingham High, 2019*)
- “We also offered incentives to students for filling out their application. They were given citizenship credit if needed to help with Citizenship Point Average (CPA) recovery or fines at school.” (*Granger High, FAFSA Cup Runner-Up, 2019*)
- “In an effort to get more kids to complete the FAFSA, we have also been offering them extra credit for the financial literacy class when they let us know they have submitted it.” (*Dixie High, 2020*)
- “Students, parents and families were invited for free street tacos and FAFSA help. Students received a Keys to Success Free Key Card, removed four tardies and earned Tiger Points (which are good towards things like treats, dance tickets, movie tickets) when they attended and participated in the event.” (*Ogden High, FAFSA Cup Winner, 2020*)
- “Every student who completes their FAFSA can remove one tardy.” (*Ben Lomond High, 2021*)

## Giving Out Prizes

- “After students submitted their FAFSA, we send out congratulation notes with candy bars to students during class to bring school-wide awareness and celebrate their achievements.” (*Granger High, FAFSA Cup Runner-Up, 2019*)
- “We gave movie gift cards for the first 40 completers of the FAFSA.” (*Hunter High, 2020*)
- “Any student that attended a FAFSA event received a Keys to Success Key Card. Students receive another Key Card once they have completed their FAFSA.” (*West High, FAFSA Cup Runner-Up, 2021*)
- “In order to celebrate the students that complete their FAFSA, we hand out prizes. I give interested students their pick of college swag when they provide proof of completion.” (*Kearns High, 2020*)
- Partner with the yearbook teacher/committee to see if they'd be willing to offer a discount on the yearbook for seniors who completed a FAFSA. (*New idea from USHE, 2022*)



## Ideas for prize drawings or raffles

- “During our five FAFSA events we held drawings for prizes for those in attendance. We gave out two prizes each night; in addition, all attending students received a tube of toothpaste with a motivational quote.” (*Copper Hills High, 2018*)
- “Students who filed FAFSA from October-December were asked to bring a copy of their FAFSA Student Aid Report to be entered into a drawing for prizes. We awarded 15 prizes of socks and Old Navy gift cards to winners.” (*Copper Hills High, 2018*)
- “Students who have completed the application or who have attended one of our FAFSA nights are entered into a raffle to win some prizes at the end of the school year. Our counseling center has worked together to fund some amazing prizes.” (*Taylorsville High, 2020*)
- “We held drawings through the fall semester for students to put their name in when they completed their FAFSA and gave away swag bags from the schools they were applying to as well as Sodalicious cards. We pulled winners each week during our UCAW and in November.” (*Provo High, 2021*)
- “Students who have completed the application or who have attended our FAFSA nights are entered into a raffle to win some prizes at the end of the school year. Our counseling center has worked together to fund some amazing prizes including air pods and college swag.” (*Taylorsville High, 2021*)

## Incentives with food

- “Students were invited to a catered lunch and free FAFSA help. Lunch was catered by Chick-fil-A, who gave the school a discount.” (*Ogden High, FAFSA Cup Winner, 2020*)
- “We also had funding to provide some food for students and their parents who finished their FAFSA application. After the student completed the FAFSA they received a ticket to a taco truck waiting outside. We felt like this was an effective strategy. Our first FAFSA night that the truck was available was very well attended.” (*Taylorsville High, 2020*)
- “In March we were able to deliver gourmet popcorn to each of our completers during our advisory period.” (*Ben Lomond High, 2021*)
- “We are currently planning and advertising our FAFSA fiesta. All completers will be treated to a chips and salsa bar during their lunch. We will also have a table set up near the salsa bar with Chromebooks and counselors available to help non-completers with their FAFSA. If they work on their FAFSA during lunch, they will also be able to enjoy chips and salsa.” (*Ben Lomond High, 2021*)
- See also [Make your events family friendly](#) in this document.

## Provide a scholarship or promote the USHE FAFSA Scholarship

- “We offer a \$500 scholarship (using class change money) drawn out of the names of students who attended/completed FAFSA during the FAFSA night or completed on their own and forward the FAFSA completion confirmation email to us by the specified date.” (*Desert Hills High, 2017*)
- “Students that came and completed their FAFSA during our FAFSA completion open house were given the opportunity to apply for the UHEAA (now USHE) FAFSA completion scholarship. Not only



did it encourage students to file, it recognized those that completed it.” (*Pine View High, FAFSA Cup Runner-Up, 2018*)

- USHE has increased the number of winners for the FAFSA Scholarship from six winners of \$500 to 12 winners of \$500. To qualify for this scholarship a student just needs to attend a FAFSA event (individual meetings could count towards this), complete the FAFSA, and fill out our survey! Our survey is provided every year to FAFSA site coordinators. (*USHE, 2022*)

### **Ideas for schools that receive funds from outside organizations or grants (e.g. United Way, GEAR UP, USHE FAFSA Cup Winners)**

- “We used GEAR UP funds to provide pizza for the students and their families.” (*Ogden High, 2017*)
- “We used grant money awarded to us for FAFSA completion to buy movie tickets and McDonalds’ gift cards for students that had completed the FAFSA application.” (*Hunter High, 2019*)
- “Cottonwood was lucky enough this year to have funding from United Way to help with FAFSA promotion, and this year, we have extra funds. We have decided to use these funds to give six \$500 scholarships to students who have completed their FAFSAs through a drawing; we are also automatically including our undocumented students in this drawing.” (*Cottonwood High, FAFSA Cup Runner-Up, 2020*)
- “We held three other FAFSA nights at the school throughout the year. For the second night, we used United Way funds to secure Chick-fil-A sandwiches for attendees. That night we had 50 attendees. During the spring semester, we utilized the United Way funds to get Amazon gift cards as prize incentives for students that completed their FAFSA by designated deadlines. We also hosted a FAFSA lunch where students could come start/work on their applications and get a free Chick-fil-A sandwich. Overall, having multiple FAFSA nights throughout the year helped remind students that they needed to complete the form. That, in combination with one-on-one follow-ups, made it easy to keep students informed and attentive about completing their FAFSA.” (*Kearns High, 2020*)
- “We used United Way funding to provide \$25 Amazon gift cards to students that completed the application.” (*Kearns High, 2020*)
- “We used the \$1,000 grant from United Way to purchase 50 \$20 gift cards to the West Alumni store. We will randomly select 50 seniors that have completed their FAFSA to receive a gift card to get some West swag.” (*West High, FAFSA Cup Runner-Up, 2021*)
- “This year we have implemented FAFSA Lunches. Using our grant money, we have provided lunch from Wendy’s. Students are selected based on counselor and teacher recommendations as well as inviting students who have been proactive in coming into our College and Career Center looking for assistance in completing their FAFSA. Students are given a personal invite. Up to this point we have held 26 FAFSA Lunches with 74 students attending. Of those 74 students, 36 (49%) have completed their FAFSA! These lunches have also given us the opportunity to build relationships with our students and learn more about their after-graduation goals.” (*Ben Lomond High, 2021*)



## Ideas on Meeting One-on-One With Students

- “After the FAFSA Nights were completed, we began working on individual students that were still missing. We used the StepUp to Higher Education’s FAFSA Data Site to evaluate who was still needing to complete a FAFSA.
  1. We had our counseling secretary call the students out of class and set up an appointment with them for the following day. She provided them a list of what was required for their appointment. If the students brought the required materials back the next day, they completed their FAFSA with our TRIO representative from Weber State.
  2. The TRIO representative also called each of her TRIO caseload students and their families several times to try and schedule individual appointments. When possible, she could complete a FAFSA one-on-one.
  3. Our GEAR UP Coordinator made individual phone calls home to families, encouraging their FAFSA completion and attempting to set up appointments.
  4. We also had three of our Spanish-speaking parents call other Spanish-speaking parents to explain FAFSA and set up appointments.” (*Ben Lomond High, 2017*)
- “If students missed all of the events, counselors, our scholarship specialist, and TRIO representative were available to help students complete their FAFSA.” (*Ben Lomond High, FAFSA Cup Winner, 2018*)
- “Students have also been receiving 1:1 support from our community partners. PACE and GEAR UP students receive targeted support from those groups. Seniors not participating one of those groups can meet with our UCAC adviser.” (*West High, FAFSA Cup Runner-Up, 2021*)

## Host In-School Competitions

- “We held a homeroom competition for most-completed FAFSAs. The four homeroom teachers with the highest number of FAFSA completions received a gift basket.” (*Copper Hills High, 2018*)
- “We held a competition at the school where all students who applied for the FAFSA could turn in a FAFSA buck to their language arts teacher, and they were entered into a contest for completing the FAFSA. The FAFSA bucks were hung on a money tree outside our counseling office to show the participation and serve as a reminder to apply. We held the competition for FAFSA bucks and awarded prizes through a drawing for our FAFSA completers.” (*Bingham High, 2019*)
- “Beginning in February, we started our own FAFSA Cup competition. Our four counselors were competing for the FAFSA cup. The winner was determined on how many completers they could get during February and March, and we are in the middle of our April competition. The winners receive lunch as well as a trophy filled with candy for display in their office. This has been very motivating.” (*Ben Lomond High, 2021*)





# Provide Online FAFSA Resources to Help Students

## Complete the FAFSA

- “We had a Google document that walked students through all aspects of college applications. One main section included FAFSA information. Students were able to click on documents, websites, videos, and resources to help them with the process of filing FAFSA. This includes the ability for students and parents to watch the [walkthrough video](#) USHE posted, showing all steps of the FAFSA application.” (*Copper Hills High, 2020*)
- “We created a College Access Canvas course for seniors with modules related to UCAW, scholarships and FAFSA. Our FAFSA module included step-by-step instructions on how to create their FSA ID, complete their FAFSA and read their Student Aid Report. We were able to embed the USHE FAFSA walkthrough video in both English and Spanish. This module was shared to the counselor 12th grade Canvas courses and the student government-run 12th grade Canvas course. We made a big push on social media, classes and school announcements prior to the February 1st financial aid deadline for most schools. The week of January 17th we saw 4,560 page views in the College Access Canvas course. Of those page views 93% were related to FAFSA content.” (*West High, FAFSA Cup Runner-Up, 2021*)
- “Our college access adviser uses the Weber High scholarships Google Classroom to post announcements and provide essential links to begin the FAFSA process.” (*Weber High, 2020*)
- Jordan High Created a Weebly with instruction for the FAFSA – “The website explains the FSA ID process, how to complete the FAFSA application, receive awards, and includes frequently asked questions.” (*Jordan High, FAFSA Cup Winner, 2021*)

## Focus on those Populations Who Will Benefit the Most

- “Our college access adviser does a great job identifying the low socioeconomic students and personally sends them information and invites to events; he also pulls them into his office and explains the importance of going to college and applying for FAFSA.” (*Cottonwood High, 2018*)
- “We reach out to first-generation and low socioeconomic status households by making sure they are invited to workshops, luncheons, etc., that inform them and help them with FAFSA application.” (*Ridgeline High, 2019*)
- “The FAFSA team first compiled and analyzed the OHS 2019 Senior Exit Survey from the previous year along with 2019 FAFSA completion rates to create a goal and develop a FAFSA intervention plan. Two populations were identified: Students who participated in the Federal Lunch Program which most likely qualified for a grant (SMART Target), as well as students who were applying for college scholarships (Global Target).” (*Ogden High, FAFSA Cup Winner, 2020*)



## Parent Outreach and Engagement

- “We made individual phone calls to parents.” (*Water Canyon High, 2017*)
- “One strategy we are trying is to send home a monthly newsletter to all students and parents about upcoming scholarship deadlines and reminders to file the FAFSA. I received a handful of replies from parents thanking me for the information and scheduling appointments with me to get help filing the FAFSA.” (*Pine View High, FAFSA Cup Runner-Up, 2018*)
- “We discussed FAFSA at our parent university which is an event for parents to learn about preparing for college. This helped clear up misconceptions and educate our parents about the importance of FAFSA and what opportunities it offered.” (*Granger High, FAFSA Cup Runner-Up, 2019*)
- See also [Make your events family friendly](#) in this document.

## Ideas for Following Up with Students

- “In March we sent out a survey to all the seniors. Two of the questions were regarding FAFSA. ‘Have you filled out the FAFSA?’ and ‘Do you need help filling out the FAFSA?’ This let us know who still needed help and contact them individually.” (*Water Canyon High, 2017*)
- “We have announced the numbers of FAFSA completions and the number of pending FAFSA applications at the high school during morning announcements and in assemblies. We continue to announce this throughout the year.” (*Ben Lomond High, FAFSA Cup Winner, 2018*)
- “After FAFSA, our college adviser follows up with students who could not finish their FAFSA during our FAFSA night. She has a list of students and the problems or issues they had during FAFSA night and calls them down from class to resolve their issues.” (*Hunter High, 2018*)
- “Our team continues to check with our seniors during their appointments with us that they have completed their FAFSA. If they have not, we make time to help them, or have them set up an appointment with the college adviser.” (*Hunter High, 2018*)

## Preparing Students Before Senior Year

- “Counselors present on FAFSA to juniors and seniors several times throughout the year during our guidance curriculum lessons. We explain how FAFSA works and show videos that describe the process.” (*Granger High, FAFSA Cup Runner-Up, 2019*)
- “We begin promoting FAFSA and the importance of planning for post-high school education during the fall of our students' junior year. In September, we ask the English teachers to give their classes a handout with facts about FAFSA. The handout asks the students to complete the [FAFSA4Caster](#).” (*Provo High, 2019*)



## Verification, Award Letters, and Next Steps

- “We first took a proactive approach to assist students who have been selected for verification. On the back of the FAFSA instructions handout we have for our students, it explains the next steps that they must take to follow up on their FAFSA. We have been following up with them one-on-one and providing support and answering questions.” (*Pine View High, FAFSA Cup Runner-Up, 2018*)
- “A FAFSA specialist personally speaks with every senior who has been selected for verification to help them complete the process. This includes help with logging into their school account and identifying the needed information and how to complete it.” (*Jordan High, 2018*)
- “A common scenario at Weber High involves concerned students not having heard any more about their FAFSA once it is submitted. When this happens, the college access adviser calls them down to go over how to access their financial aid award on the institution’s portal. Sometimes the amount of time has been too short to receive an offer, and she advises them to wait a bit longer. If the award is there, together they go over the process of accepting it. If the student is considering loans, the college access adviser explains the difference between subsidized and unsubsidized, as well as any other questions the student may have. Once the student is shown the process and the different options available to them, they seem much more confident in themselves to be able to complete this process.” (*Weber High, 2020*)
- “A ‘never too late’ email was sent to students who had not yet completed the FAFSA in April. The email encouraged them to complete the application before school ended. The emails included the link to the online tutorial as well as contact information where a parent or student could talk with the FAFSA specialist to resolve any problems.” (*Jordan High, FAFSA Cup Winner, 2021*)
- “After they have finished, we meet with them or email them to show them the doors that are now opened to them because they did the FAFSA. Sometimes this allows them to apply for scholarships, and sometimes this allows them to receive other financial aid at the school they plan to attend for higher education. Once they see that they have received funds, the look in their eyes is priceless.” (*Jordan High, FAFSA Cup Winner, 2021*)

## Incorporating FAFSA in Decision Day

- “After students have submitted the FAFSA, we have a College Decision Day party and celebrate all the students who have been accepted and chosen which college or program they will attend. We also give them a “What’s Next” handout so they know about other important deadlines for registration, scholarships and other important information. At the party, students who have completed their FAFSA also get an additional treat.” (*Ridgeline High, 2019*)
- “We put all our student’s names into a drawing and hand out prizes during our Senior Decision Day. We plan to emphasize the importance of the FAFSA during decision day and get footage to use next year when we begin advertising to our new seniors.” (*Granger High, FAFSA Cup Runner-Up, 2019*)

