

FAFSA Nights and FAFSA Completion Best Practices

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

FAFSA completion can be a difficult obstacle for high schools, students, and families in Utah. Therefore, we have organized the most impactful strategies Utah high schools have used to increase their FAFSA completion. These ideas come from some of the top FAFSA-completing schools in Utah, who have many years of experience. The schools referenced in this document are from the competitors and winners of the statewide FAFSA Cup. Information on how to apply for the FAFSA Cup will be provided via email during the spring of each year. Try these ideas, or use them as a reference, build upon them, and create new ideas to take FAFSA completion to the next level!

Every example in this document is unique; FAFSA completion is not a one-size-fits-all approach. Only some exercises may be a good fit for your school. Explore ideas that put students first and consider what would work best for them.

In this document, there are underlined words, headers, and arrows to aid navigation. Selecting a link may navigate to a respective page or external web link. Notice the corner arrows also navigate to the [Table of Contents](#).

Note that the quotes in this document have been lightly edited for clarity and brevity. If you're the author of a quote and have a question or concerns, please contact fafsahelp@ushe.edu.

Table of Contents

<u>The Ultimate Best Practices.....</u>	3
<u>Best Practices for Advertising FAFSA Events or the FAFSA Form.....</u>	5
<u>Host Paying for College Events to Introduce and Promote the FAFSA.....</u>	7
<u>12th Grade Classrooms' Best Practices for FAFSA Promotion or Completion.....</u>	8
<u>Ideas for Information Packets & Handouts for Students.....</u>	9
<u>Goal Making Ideas.....</u>	10
<u>Unique Ways to Capture the Attention of Students.....</u>	11
<u>Best Practices for Hosting FAFSA Events.....</u>	13
<u>Incentives for Students to Complete the FAFSA.....</u>	16
<u>Ideas on meeting 1-on-1 with students.....</u>	19
<u>Focus on those Populations Who Will Benefit the Most.....</u>	20
<u>Ideas to Help Students and Families Who Speak Other Languages.....</u>	21
<u>Undocumented Student Inclusion.....</u>	21
<u>Parent Outreach and Engagement.....</u>	22
<u>Make FAFSA a Team Effort.....</u>	23
<u>Host In-School Competitions.....</u>	23
<u>Provide Online Resources to Help Students Complete the FAFSA.....</u>	24
<u>Ideas for Following Up with Students, Especially without FAFSA Lists.....</u>	25
<u>Verification, Award Letters, and Next Steps.....</u>	25
<u>Incorporating FAFSA in Decision Day.....</u>	27
<u>Preparing Students Before Senior Year.....</u>	27



The Ultimate Best Practices

FSA ID account creation is a priority early in the school year

- "During UCAW, the creation of an FSA ID was included in our work with seniors during class time." (Hillcrest High, 2023)

FAFSA events are a priority at the beginning of the school year

- "Our observation of FAFSA events here in Utah shows that FAFSA Nights are highly attended in the months of *October and November. Also, having it earlier in the school year avoids deadline complications for institutions and scholarships." (USHE, 2022)
- *Remember that the FAFSA is delayed for the 2023-24 school year; push completion in January and February.
- "Our FAFSA Night tends to be heavily attended near the beginning of the year." (Taylorsville High, 2021)

Strategically notify students and parents of deadlines associated with the FAFSA.

- "Our counselors and college advisor spoke to seniors about the Opportunity Scholarship and the requirement to submit the FAFSA to be eligible for the scholarship. Many students and parents were convinced to do their FAFSA to get the Opportunity Scholarship. This was a great strategy to use until the final deadline passed." (Box Elder High, 2023)
- "Our College Access Advisor has also made it a priority to continually remind parents and students about upcoming FAFSA deadlines for Utah institutions." (Canyon View High, 2023)
- "FAFSA Night is a wonderful opportunity to help students and parents complete the application BEFORE any scholarship deadlines. We don't want any student to miss out on a scholarship because the FAFSA application wasn't completed before the scholarship deadline." (Jordan High, 2023)
- "We strategically sent emails to parents and students before major FAFSA deadlines at colleges and universities (i.e., February 1st, April 15th, May 1st)." (Cyprus High, 2022)

Inform students of your events early on to maximize attendance.

- "We start to advertise our FAFSA night dates along with our UCAW week from the beginning of the school year to maximize attendance." (Orem High, 2022)

Use the school's TV & 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)

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 and 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.

- "At least one of our team members has attended the FAFSA webinars and other training to get updated on the FAFSA changes every year. Our goal is to have every person have this training next year." (Salt Lake Center for Science Education)
- "Attended the FAFSA Bootcamp hosted by USHE's FAFSA State Coordinator. The USHE Financial Aid webinars are beneficial. 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)

Create a FAFSA checklist for students.

- "We give each FAFSA applicant a checklist when they apply, identifying 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)

Follow up when students and families are unable to attend FAFSA Night.

- "Due to four other events happening simultaneously, most of our seniors could not stay for our FAFSA Night, so I quickly opened up a Calendly for students to book an appointment with me! They signed up pretty fast! I had about five weekly FAFSA appointments, and students came prepared with all their items." (Pine View High, FAFSA Cup Winner, 2023)
- "If families could not attend FAFSA night, we reached out to families to schedule 1:1 appointment if they needed help with the FAFSA." (Salt Lake Center for Science Education, 2023)



Involve senior body officers.

- "Our student government even included a story on their Instagram page to get students involved with FAFSA Night." (Canyon View High, 2023)
- "Student body officers did lunchtime activities to promote college awareness and FAFSA." (Hunter High, 2017)

Build FAFSA culture by including it in all college conversations.

- "I have asked every senior I see, whether in my office, other counseling offices, classrooms or sports events, if they have filled out their FAFSA." (Granger High, 2023)

Best Practices for Advertising FAFSA Events or the FAFSA Form

Promoting the FAFSA early in the school year and communicating in a variety of ways

- "We first promoted the FAFSA during our senior presentations, emails home, social media posts on Instagram and our website, announcements, texts, and phone calls home, and personal reminders when meeting with students one-on-one." (Hunter High, 2023)
- If FAFSA has a bad reputation with the families at your school, try advertising your FAFSA events as "Financial Aid Night" or "Financial Aid Assistance Night." (USHE, 2023)

Text, email, postcards, and phone call ideas

- "We advertised our FAFSA Nights through our school's Remind 101 text message chain, parent email reminders, and Logan High School's social media account." (Logan High, FAFSA Cup Winner, 2023)
- "Before UCAW, we made automated phone calls in student's languages to inform parents about FAFSA." (Cottonwood High, FAFSA Cup Runner-Up, 2020)
- "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)
- "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 postcard might have had a specific date." (Ben Lomond High, 2017)
- "We have a monthly newsletter where we promote activities." (Utah County Academy of Science, FAFSA Cup Winner, 2017)

Social media and school website ideas



- "The most effective way we found this year to communicate with our student body was through the school's Instagram stories and TikTok videos." (Provo High, 2022)
- "We felt it would be good to get our admin involved this year by having them post things to our social media page." (Cyprus High, 2022)
- "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)
- "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, and our CHHS Counseling Center website." (Copper Hills High, 2018)

Flyers and more print ideas

- "We hosted two FAFSA Night events in the fall of last year. We advertised these events by handing out event flyers at our Utah College Application Week." (Logan High, FAFSA Cup Winner, 2023)
- "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)
- "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)
- "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)
- "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 the next steps and followed up with financial aid offices on their college campuses." (Hunter High, 2017)



Announcements, in-school TV ads, and marquee ideas

- "We have announced the number of FAFSA completions and the number of pending FAFSA applications at the high school during morning announcements and assemblies. We continue to announce this throughout the year." (Ben Lomond High, FAFSA Cup Winner, 2018)
- "We posted our event on our school marquee by the parking lot." (Fremont High, 2018)
- "Daily announcements were made before 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)
- "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)

Unique practices

- "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)
- "We 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)

Host Paying for College Events to Introduce and Promote the FAFSA

- "USHE has provided a new [Paying for College Toolkit](#) to aid professionals as they teach students how to afford college costs. This toolkit has FAFSA information naturally spread throughout to help promote its importance to students." (USHE, 2023)
- "The school's UCAC Advisor did a whole presentation about FAFSA and college before the FAFSA night." (Taylorsville High, 2023)
- "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)



12th Grade Classrooms' Best Practices for FAFSA Promotion or Completion

Ideas for promoting the FAFSA in class

- "I presented in each of the Financial Literacy classes at Logan High School about the FAFSA and other ways to pay for college." (Logan High, FAFSA Cup Winner, 2023)
- "The UCAC Advisor visited Senior LIA classes to talk about FAFSA as well as Dream Centers." (Taylorsville High, 2023)
- "We assist in teaching about Work-Study, a federal program that allows students to work part-time on campus and earn money to pay for their education." (Green Canyon High, 2023)
- "This year, we had a financial advisor from a college come into the school and speak with students about paying for college and ways to save. I believe they will ask for them to return next school year." (Uintah High, 2023)
- "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 application portion. He 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. Twenty-one senior advisory classes meet weekly with seniors, providing important information from graduation credit evaluations to college financial aid." (Ogden High, 2017)

Ideas for completing the FSA ID/FAFSA in class

- "All of our seniors are in a class called senior seminar. This class does many things, including college applications, essay writing, scholarship writing, and the FAFSA. ALL students made an FSA ID during this class before FAFSA night." (Salt Lake Center for Science Education, 2023)
- "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. We gave each senior a handout with our FAFSA Night date and a checklist of documents to bring." (Hunter High, 2018)
- "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)

Teacher's assistance in FAFSA promotion

- "The financial literacy teacher discussed 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)
- "After College Application Week, we had all senior advisory teachers show the [Paying for College video](#)." (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 still needed to complete 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

- "Each month, seniors are given a packet of pertinent information that we call "green sheets." Every month, we have included deadlines, tips for creating an FSA ID, steps for the FAFSA itself, and FAQs about the FAFSA in the packet." (*Hillcrest High, 2023*)
- "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 financing process." (*Ogden High, 2017*)
- "In our information packets, the student received:
 - a. Start your FAFSA: This form lists the FSA ID webpage, the nine steps to complete their FSA ID, and places for the student and parent to write the email, password, and username.
 - b. The parent's checklist is provided with a link to FAFSA.
 - c. List of telephone numbers for financial aid offices at colleges in Utah so students can contact the school with questions.
 - d. SLCC Promise: printed handout given to students applying to SLCC



- e. 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

- "My goal was to have at least 50% of our seniors fill out the FAFSA application. We currently have 52% of our seniors who have submitted the application, and we continue to work with our seniors who have not submitted it." (*Logan High, FAFSA Cup Winner, 2023*)
- "Taylorsville High School set a specific goal of having 238 students complete the FAFSA this academic year." (*Taylorsville High, 2023*)
- "Our goal this year was to get more students to attend our FAFSA night. In previous years, we were unable to gain more than 40 students. This year, we reached 103 students and families who attended. Our biggest strategy to gain students to attend our FAFSA night is having a taco truck attend so our families can get free food after doing good work applying for the FAFSA." (*Hunter High, 2023*)
- "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*)
- "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*)
- "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 the 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 aimed to help 50 more students complete the FAFSA by the end of the month." (*Pine View High, FAFSA Cup Runner-Up, 2018*)

Unique Ways to Capture the Attention of Students

Use morning announcements or school news

- "During the week of the event, we used morning announcements to do college trivia with our students. The students were asked a college question, and the first class to respond were rewarded with a bag full of college swag." (*Emery High, 2023*)
- "BEET TV is Jordan High's official station for news, short stories, music videos, and student life as a Beetdigger! Students produce each newscast. They have added FAFSA Shorts to their presentations. We have provided 15 scripts for the students to reference as they prepare these "shorts." We provide



concise scripts (2-3 min) about financial aid that our film class produces. These "shorts" are humorous and light-hearted, with the hope that the students will listen to the message because it's a fun and interesting way to learn about financial aid FROM STUDENTS." (Jordan High, 2023)

Use in-school recruiters (students or staff) to navigate students to your office.

- "Hall Monitors: Our hall monitors are amazing! They talk with students in the halls and learn about their challenges and interests. They tell the students that we can help them apply for financial aid for post-high school education. They send students to us – a new resource we started using, and it has been effective." (Jordan High, 2023)
- "Current and former students: We have a student "pipeline" going where current and former students who have benefited from our help actively recruit other students to come find out how we can help them." (Jordan High, 2023)

Use student groups or clubs to coordinate paying for college activities.

- "During our college week, the counseling office works closely with our Latinos in Action group. Together with LIA, we plan daily lunchtime activities to get students excited about going to college and inform students of the FAFSA." (Spanish Fork High, FAFSA Cup Runner-Up, 2023)

Strategically inform students in a variety of ways.

- "When I was a high school teacher, I learned I had to say something three times before the students retained what I was saying. We are more likely to retain the information if we "hear" something three times. To accomplish this, we focused on informing students in multiple spaces: Senior CCRs, Classroom presentations, UCAW Week, FAFSA Night, One-on-one interactions, and Former students." (Jordan High, 2023)

Organized themed weeks or themed events

- "The December and February FAFSA workshops were holiday-themed. The advertisement for the December event was FAFSA and Cookies, with a winter-themed flyer design. The flyer for the February event was Valentine's themed." (Tooele High, 2023)
- "Host a themed week to address different topics teams can help within the spring, for example, Financial Aid Award Letter Week. Schedule a week advertised throughout the school year for counselors or advisers to assist students with their award letters. Cover topics like receiving, reading, understanding, and calculating the award letters. Host it during lunch, before or after school, or schedule one-on-ones. Different issues for themed weeks include verification, deferment, and paying for college help. Food and snacks are always an incentive to encourage attendance." (USHE, 2022)

Find ways to praise FAFSA completers.



- "Something that we did to award students who filled out their FAFSA application was after they submitted their FAFSA, they got to pick out some college swag from the college they wanted to attend or pick out a candy bar." (Payson High, 2023)
- "Every student who comes to my office with a completed FAFSA receives a tootsie roll and high-five." (Granger High, 2023)
- "In the counseling center, when a student completes their FAFSA, we ring a loud cowbell, and everyone stops to cheer for them. The students get a little embarrassed, but they love being recognized!" (Ben Lomond High, 2021)
- "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)

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)

Best Practices for Hosting FAFSA Events

Event Best Practices

- "We planned these events during the evening, which allowed most students to come with a parent/guardian. Our counseling team attended the event, as well as other UCAC Advisors and members of the Financial Aid team at Utah State University." (Logan High, FAFSA Cup Winner, 2023)
- "We also provided students the opportunity to complete the FAFSA scholarship survey by printing large QR codes throughout the room." (Emery High, 2023)



- "We also supplied the students, volunteers, and parents with cookies, brownies, and drinks during the event." (Emery High, 2023)
- "The sign-up sheets USHE provides are helpful – we have a monitor stationed at the entry/exit point to ensure the student signs out and indicates IF the FAFSA application was or was NOT completed. With this information, our follow-up is more effective." (Jordan High, 2023)

Host multiple FAFSA events.

- "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 November. We will also have an additional night during April for any additional students needing help with FAFSA." (Hunter High, 2020)
- "We held six different evening events and one Saturday event." (Ben Lomond High, FAFSA Cup Winner, 2018)
- "We held 10 school-sponsored FAFSA nights in our school library." (Ben Lomond High, 2017)

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

- "We have found that most students who attend the College Application Week events will also attend a FAFSA night during the same week. This is why we have our first FAFSA night of the year during UCAW." (Canyon View High, 2022)
- "During UCAW, the counseling center visits each senior English class and uses the whole class period to help students apply to at least one college. On top of that, we used the time to walk students through creating an FSA ID. Later that week, we host a successful FAFSA completion night with USHE." (Hillcrest High, 2022)
- "The first week of October, all seniors in English classes attend UCAW week. The team explains how to apply for college, encourages the students to apply for at least one college, and walks them through completing the FSA ID to prepare for the FAFSA application. Handouts in each student's packet include the step-by-step instructions for creating an FSA ID and a detailed list of the steps required to receive financial aid." (Jordan High, FAFSA Cup Winner, 2021)
- "Having our FAFSA night during UCAW 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 our UCAW. All the seniors attended UCAW and received information (including the list of the required documents) 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)
- "We did something different this year: to hold our FAFSA night during our Utah College Application Week. Having our FAFSA night during UCAW was great because we were able to notify all seniors about the upcoming event." (Taylorsville High, 2020)

Make your events family-friendly.



- "We let families know that small children are welcome to our FAFSA Night, as many of our parents do not have access to babysitting. We also host our event for several hours to accommodate most work schedules." (Park City High, 2022)
- "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)
- "Students, parents, and families were invited for free street tacos and FAFSA help." (Ogden High, FAFSA Cup Winner, 2020)
- "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)
- "Our Saturday event was called Super Saturday FAFSA Pancake Breakfast, and families were fed breakfast." (Ben Lomond High, FAFSA Cup Winner, 2018)
- Host FAFSA events in specific languages
- "This year, Canyon View hosted a FAFSA night for Spanish-speaking families. We had two College Access Advisers who speak fluent Spanish to help individuals that needed assistance with their FAFSA application." (Canyon View High, 2022)
- "We also hosted a FAFSA night for our Spanish-speaking parents in a smaller group with translation services available." (Park City High, 2020)
- "We held an all-Spanish session for our Spanish speakers." (Brighton High, 2019)
- "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 on both nights. We believe this helped our undocumented students as well." (Ben Lomond High, FAFSA Cup Winner, 2018)

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)

Combine FAFSA events with other ongoing events.



- "A strategy that helped increase the attendance at some of our FAFSA nights was to host them during parent/teacher conferences." (Payson High, 2023)
- "We hosted four FAFSA nights, three scholarship nights, and on some of these nights, we carried out resource and job fairs." (Provo High, 2022)
- "CVHS also had two college nights where FAFSA completion was attached to student college enrollments." (Cedar Valley High, 2021)
- "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)
- "We also assisted with FAFSA at Parent-Teacher Conferences on February 9th, offering parents a computer and assistance with the application." (Ogden High, 2017)

Collaborate with other schools.

- "Schools could partner with another local school to host events at each other's schools or the community." (New idea from USHE, 2022)
- "Team up with your local schools to host a sizeable 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)
- "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 that would work better with their schedule. We are lucky to have several neighboring schools who work with us." (Taylorsville High, 2020)
- "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)

Focus on what works best for your students and your school.

- "They made it 3 hours long, so that parents could come after work, and put all information in both English and Spanish to ensure that everyone could understand the process." (Taylorsville, 2023)
- "I figured out the best time hosting a FAFSA event for Tooele High is Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday after 5 PM." (Tooele High, 2023)
- "We recognize as a charter school, many of our students do not live near the school, and we have struggled with attendance in after-school sessions. Vanguard is a Title 1 school, with most 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 could invite all our seniors to attend, not just those with parents who could bring them to the school. We encouraged them to bring their tax information to the school. We 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

- "Every student who completes their FAFSA is allowed to remove one tardy." (Ben Lomond High, 2021)
- "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 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)
- "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)
- "We gave Citizenship Point Average (CPA) credit for coming to FAFSA Night." (Hunter 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)

Giving Out Prizes

- "The College Access Adviser has created a FAFSA Raffle to motivate students to complete their FAFSA by drawing three names for prize bundles each week." (Canyon View High, 2022)
- "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)
- "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)
- "We gave movie gift cards for the first 40 completers of the FAFSA." (Hunter High, 2020)
- "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)
- "After students submit 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)

Ideas for prize drawings or raffles



- "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 and Sodalicious cards. We pulled winners each week during our UCAW and in November." (Provo High, 2021)
- "Students who have completed the application or have attended our FAFSA nights are entered into a raffle to win 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)
- "Students who have completed the application or have attended one of our FAFSA nights are entered into a raffle to win prizes at the end of the school year. Our counseling center has worked together to fund some amazing prizes." (Taylorsville High, 2020)
- "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 in October-December were asked to bring a copy of their FAFSA Student Aid Report to be entered into a prize drawing. We awarded winners 15 prizes of socks and Old Navy gift cards." (Copper Hills High, 2018)

Incentives with food

- "The school invited a taco truck to incentivize FAFSA completion, along with the USHE scholarship that they could apply for once they finished." (Taylorsville High, 2023)
- "We purchased pizza for dinner and had snacks for families to enjoy while they filled out the FAFSA." (Salt Lake Center for Science Education, 2023)
- "In March, we were able to deliver gourmet popcorn to each of our FAFSA 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 lunch. We will also have a table 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)
- "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 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)

Provide a scholarship or promote the USHE FAFSA Scholarship.

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



- "Students that came and completed their FAFSA during our FAFSA completion open house were allowed 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)
- "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)

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

- "Logan High School's Gear Up program provided Costa Vida dinner for all who attended a FAFSA night event." (Logan High, FAFSA Cup Winner, 2023)
- "This year, we are so excited to be able to offer two scholarships to seniors connected to their filling out FAFSA and participating in one of our FAFSA events in the fall. Money often gets people's attention, and I hope the junior class feels motivated to complete FAFSA next fall after watching us celebrate the success of the senior class this year at our Spring scholarship awards ceremony." (Park City High, 2023)
- "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 who have completed their FAFSA to receive a gift card for 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 and 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 allowed us to build relationships with our students and learn more about their after-graduation goals." (Ben Lomond High, 2021)
- "Cottonwood was lucky this year to have funding from United Way to help with FAFSA promotion; 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. We used United Way funds for the second night 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 who completed their FAFSA by designated deadlines. We also hosted a FAFSA lunch where students could start/work on their applications and get a free Chick-fil-A sandwich. Overall, having multiple FAFSA nights throughout the year helped remind students 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 grant money awarded to us for FAFSA completion to buy movie tickets and McDonald's gift cards for students that had completed the FAFSA application." (Hunter High, 2019)

Ideas for Meeting One-on-One with Students

- "When we discuss the FAFSA process, we emphasize that completing the FAFSA is only halfway there. We also have to educate students that the "award" will come from the school, not directly from FAFSA. Even though we "educate" them on the process, we also ask them to return in April, and we can help them identify their financial award. Some students need us to walk them through the process – usually those students who are the first to attend college." (*Jordan High, 2023*)
- "I noticed from advising last year that many students planning on technical college don't complete the FAFSA nor apply for scholarships. Some I've talked to assume the FAFSA is only for traditional colleges. When I meet with those students, I remind them that many technical programs accept Pell grants." (*Tooele High, 2023*)
- "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 in one of those groups can meet with our UCAC adviser." (*West High, FAFSA Cup Runner-Up, 2021*)
- "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*)

Focus on those Populations Who Will Benefit the Most

- "As a team, we prioritize our underrepresented populations. At the beginning of the year, I met with all of our first-generation students to start the process of FAFSA." (*Logan High, FAFSA Cup Winner, 2023*)
- "Our scholarship advisor plans a FAFSA night, talks about FAFSA in yearly classroom presentations, and shows up to help first-generation students compete in their FAFSA on a specialized first-generation FAFSA night. She also plans and works out FAFSA completion in our special and support educational classes and is available all year to help students and families with one-on-one completion." (*Park City High, 2023*)
- "It's rewarding to provide assistance, especially to those students who are first-generation students or in need of extra financial help to go to college. Helping them navigate a confusing system is important in creating equity within our school community." (*Park City High, 2023*)
- "Filling out financial forms isn't on a student's list when food and housing are daily struggles. This is where counselors can sit with the student and walk through the FAFSA step by step, completing it and submitting it to ensure they get access to federal grants and, potentially, school funding to help secure their future college dream. Our counselors pair FAFSA assistance with other resources at the high school, such as getting them grocery gift cards, opening access to the high school pantry with



food and toiletry supplies, and giving access to a washer and dryer. We also put together a college care package with a large duffle bag full of supplies to get them started on a strong foot. One thing all of our students seem to need more of these days is hope. They need counselors cheering them on with bright hope for a happy, interesting, and successful future, no matter their plan. At PCHS, we are devoted to helping them find their right fit, and working out what makes sense financially is a part of that process." (*Park City High, 2023*)

- "We worked closely with the LIA teacher to make sure all of the Latinx students completed the FAFSA form. We saw a huge difference this year in making sure students saw the value in the form." (*Green Canyon High, 2023*)
- "We worked with our Family Center to support Hispanic and Refugee students and their families." (*Cyprus High, 2022*)
- "We worked with our family center to call all parents with students on the free and reduced lunch list to invite them to FAFSA Night. They also called all English as a Second Language (ESL) families to ensure they would be notified of the event. An email that included specific resources with financial help for undocumented families was sent out. During our FAFSA Night, we had 64 families present, with 54 families completing FAFSA that Night. Within a month of the application opening, we had 120 students with completed applications. This marked a record year for Cyprus's most completed FAFSA applications." (*Cyprus High, 2022*)
- "We made sure to send out surveys to our LIA and AVID classes to see if they had completed FAFSA. Our College Advisor was notified if they had not and would meet with them." (*Cyprus High, 2022*)
- "To ensure that our underrepresented students are also fully aware of the opportunities that may be available to them, we meet with the Upward Bound Advisor regularly, speak with our LIA representatives, go into the classrooms to give presentations, and look at any student that may fit into the first-generation student profile." (*Orem High, 2022*)
- "The FAFSA team first compiled and analyzed the OHS 2019 Senior Exit Survey from the previous year and 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*)
- "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*)

Ideas to Help Students and Families Who Speak Other Languages

- "We made a focus this year to help our Spanish-speaking communities here at the high school. Our UT College Access Advisor prepared Spanish FAFSA information packets distributed to seniors in our ESL flex classes." (*Canyon View High, 2023*)



- "We also had interpreters available for families that needed them, which helped us get to our underrepresented populations." (*Salt Lake Center for Science Education, 2023*)

Undocumented Student Inclusion

- "As a team, we are very aware of our students who are undocumented. We have worked with each of these students 1-on-1 to start the process of HB-144 and to find other private scholarships. We continue to follow up with these students to provide the necessary resources for them to attend college." (*Logan High, FAFSA Cup Winner, 2023*)
- "For our undocumented students, we worked with them to find out which college they want to apply to and connected them with the resource center that would help them go to college even though they aren't documented." (*Salt Lake Center for Science Education, 2023*)
- "For undocumented students, we had one-on-one scholarship meetings and provided those students with extra support filling out scholarship forms." (*Green Canyon High, 2023*)
- "If a student informed us that they were undocumented, our adviser would sit down with them often and help them find scholarship through various DREAM Centers and [Educate Utah's website](#)." (*Cyprus High, 2022*)
- "Our scholarship adviser meets with our undocumented students to provide financial aid support and help in searching for available funding; a few of them fill out the paper FAFSA to submit to the DREAM center at the University of Utah for scholarship consideration." (*Park City High, 2022*)
- "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*)
- "During UCAW, 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 ensure that the monarch butterfly is displayed in our counseling department to let students know this is a safe place for them. The book *DREAMERS: Living in the Shadows and the Undocumented Experience in Word and Image* is also displayed." (*Cottonwood High, 2018*)

Parent Outreach and Engagement

- "We hosted a Parents Info Night in late September to learn about post-secondary options, including a FAFSA presentation, work-study, and scholarships. This was to help educate parents/students on what aid or scholarship opportunities would be available after filing for Financial Aid. For the Parents Info Night, we invited most Utah colleges, universities, and technical colleges to meet parents/students and discuss how FAFSA works for their programs. I created FAFSA info packets on important dates, what to bring, and the steps to complete the FAFSA application and handed them out to every senior." (*Pine View High, FAFSA Cup Winner, 2023*)



- "After our events, I made it a priority to call and email the parents of students who did not attend. I have sent follow-up emails offering my help to parents who have started the FAFSA with their student." (*Logan High, FAFSA Cup Winner, 2023*)
- "An initiative we took to get more of our students to submit their FAFSA form was making phone calls to parents informing them of the benefits that come from their student completing their FAFSA and the process of filling out the form. This was a big boost for us and helped the parents be more willing to help their students complete the form." (*Payson High, 2023*)
- "We contacted parents to see if they needed extra assistance when helping their students with the FAFSA form via phone and email. If they did, we scheduled a designated time to give them additional one-on-one support with the application process." (*Green Canyon High, 2023*)
- "As counselors and the senior team promoted FAFSA night by sending home emails and flyers to parents, posting it on our social media and the senior class Canvas page that parents can access and students." (*Salt Lake Center for Science Education, 2023*)
- "Our College Access Adviser posts content on our counseling Instagram page about scholarships and FAFSA. Content includes weekly quizzes on the stories about FAFSA to help inform the students and parents who follow the account." (*Canyon View High, 2022*)
- "Many of our parents and students have misperceptions about how the FAFSA can be beneficial, even if they don't qualify for federal grant money. This year, we tried sending out a simple but clear message that FAFSA is worth filing out to our seniors and parents via newsletters, the PTSO announcements, our school TVs, email, and our morning show. We keep our Spanish-speaking parents in mind and include all announcements in both English and Spanish." (*Park City High, 2022*)
- "We discussed FAFSA at our parent university, an event for parents to learn about college preparation. 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*)

Make FAFSA a Team Effort

- "We make it a priority to discuss our FAFSA total at least once a week during our counselor meeting and talk about the students who still need to fill out a FAFSA." (*Canyon View High, 2023*)
- "We build specific battle plans for each senior, working with our Student Support workers, the counselors, and the College Advisor have been able to track down and identify problems quickly and concisely." (*Hillcrest High, 2023*)

Host In-School Competitions

- "Spanish Fork participated in a competition between Springville and Payson to see which school could submit the most FAFSA applications. Spanish Fork started the competition with 143 students who had submitted the FAFSA. Our school finished with 170 students submitting the FAFSA. Though it wasn't a huge number increase, it is higher than the FAFSA applications submitted last year. It is a great improvement for Spanish Fork. In the end, Springville High won the competition



between the three schools and the bragging rights in our community." (*Spanish Fork High, FAFSA Cup Runner-Up, 2023*)

- "Beginning in February, we started our own FAFSA Cup competition. Our four counselors were competing in the FAFSA Cup. The winner was determined by how many completers they could get during February and March, and we are in the middle of our April competition. The winners receive lunch and a trophy filled with candy for display in their office. This has been very motivating." (*Ben Lomond High, 2021*)
- "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 participation and remind us to apply. We held the competition for FAFSA bucks and awarded prizes through a drawing for our FAFSA completers." (*Bingham High, 2019*)
- "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*)

Provide Online FAFSA Resources to Help Students Complete the FAFSA

- "In Tooele High Counseling's unofficial YouTube channel, Buffalo Bits, I included a FAFSA Help playlist that includes USHE's 22-23 English and Spanish Walkthrough videos, plus some clips from Federal Student Aid's YouTube channel." (*Tooele High, 2022*)
- Jordan High Created a Weebly with instructions 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*)
- "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 creating their FSA ID, completing their FAFSA, and reading their Student Aid Report. We could embed the USHE FAFSA walkthrough video in both English and Spanish. This module was shared with the counselor's 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 before most schools' February 1st financial aid deadline. 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*)
- "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*)
- "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*)



Ideas for Following Up with Students, Especially without FAFSA Lists

- "I've recently sent out a Google form asking many questions: Do you know what FAFSA is? Have you filled out the FAFSA? Did you qualify for a Pell Grant? Do you need assistance filling out the application? This was for me to mark down which students have done FAFSA and which ones haven't and if they needed any help. It's a pretty decent system. I had about 40 students fill it out, and it helped document everything and being able to call down students and help." (*Pine View High, FAFSA Cup Winner, 2023*)
- "I'm in the process of doing senior exit interviews. In these interviews, I will review the student's financial aid status, help the student complete the FAFSA if they have not already done so, and provide answers to any questions they may have." (*Logan High, FAFSA Cup Winner, 2023*)
- "This year, we sent out a Google Doc survey asking whether they have submitted one or not or if they are trying and need some help. This has been a great idea as I can call those students down who need help to see what is going on so that they can get that submitted." (*Uintah High, 2023*)
- "One of the counselors created a Google questionnaire for her students who are seniors, and I asked her to ask about the FAFSA. All her students who expressed a desire to receive help with the FAFSA have been called to the office and supported in their desire to fill it out." (*Granger High, 2023*)
- "I have given a survey to the English teachers to have their classes fill out asking about the FAFSA to gather more information. This survey connects to an Excel sheet, giving me information about each student so I know how to support them in finishing their FAFSA." (*Granger High, 2023*)
- "Our top goal after a student has finished their FAFSA form is to show them how to view their SAR (Student Aid Report) and how to accept their aid on the college and university side. To help them do so, counselors would follow up with students during their CCR meetings and help them know the next steps after FAFSA and how to understand it." (*Cyprus High, 2022*)
- "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 schedule an appointment with the college adviser." (*Hunter High, 2018*)

Verification, Award Letters, and Next Steps

- "Many seniors have also met with me about their financial aid award letter to better understand what the FAFSA and other aid will provide. I walk through this letter with the student and explain each section's meaning for them." (*Logan High, FAFSA Cup Winner, 2023*)
- "Utah Tech University's Financial Aid office will be helping us out next week to assist a student in understanding their financial aid letter. I will gather this information and call students attending elsewhere to help them understand their letters." (*Pine View High, FAFSA Cup Winner, 2023*)



- "Our scholarship advisor is available to help all students asked for verification from their schools connected to FAFSA or their application. She helps soothe nerves and fills in the needed information to email or fax to the schools with the student. It is a frequent and common occurrence, and the most helpful thing is to reassure the students they didn't do anything wrong. That verification is not only okay, it's a good sign money will likely be offered." (*Park City High, 2023*)
- "For students who were Pell-Grant eligible, we reached out to universities to ensure that each of those students received consideration for the promise scholarship at the school they plan on attending." (*Green Canyon High, 2023*)
- "We help students who qualify for work-study find campus jobs and opportunities." (*Green Canyon High, 2023*)
- "Upon receiving their award letter, I help break down how much of those funds will go towards tuition, how disbursements are scheduled, and explain that these funds are contingent on attending class and not failing. Suppose a student fails a class or drops it. In that case, I explain to them that they're liable to either pay back said money or miss out the following semester on FAFSA eligibility." (*Highland High, 2022*)
- "We show the students how to access their SAR (Student Aid Report) whenever they wish, as well as how to read their financial aid award letters to determine how much tuition remains after scholarships and/or grants are applied." (*Hillcrest High, 2022*)
- "What we do in our counseling office is preemptively explain that some students will be selected for verification. And then we let them know we have a scholarship advisor who will walk through the verification process with them. Students tend to get very anxious and worried about verification emails. Having someone trained to help them see it's just another step to take and very worth it to work towards receiving financial aid from their college." (*Park City High, 2022*)
- "We also advertise that our scholarship advisor is happy to review award letters with students; sometimes they are confusing for students and families to understand." (*Park City High, 2022*)
- "A 'never too late' email was sent to students who had not 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 and 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 opened 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. The look in their eyes is priceless once they see that they have received funds." (*Jordan High, FAFSA Cup Winner, 2021*)
- "A common scenario at Weber High involves concerned students not having heard more about their FAFSA once it is submitted. When this happens, the college access adviser calls them down to review how to access their financial aid award on the institution's portal. Sometimes, the time has been too short to receive an offer, and she advises them to wait longer. If the award is there, together, they go over accepting it. If the student is considering loans, the college access adviser



explains the difference between subsidized and unsubsidized and any other questions the student may have. Once the student is shown the process and the options available, they seem much more confident in completing it." (*Weber High, 2020*)

- "We first took a proactive approach to assist students selected for verification. The back of our FAFSA instructions handout for our students explains the next steps they must take to follow up on their FAFSA. We have been following up with them one-on-one, 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*)

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. Hence, they know about other important deadlines for registration, scholarships, and other important information. Students who have completed their FAFSA at the party 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*)

Preparing Students Before Senior Year

- "We visit all of our Juniors in class in the Spring to review the college application process, FAFSA, and financial aid in our financial literature course so they are aware and ready in the fall." (*Park City High, 2023*)
- "During the student's junior year, we meet with students and their parents to discuss graduation and future college plans, including talking about financial aid. We encourage them to schedule a one-on-one meeting with our scholarship advisor to review the payment process for school in even more detail." (*Park City High, 2023*)
- "Our FAFSA process begins before senior year when counselors meet with all of our juniors for their individual College and Career Readiness Planning meetings in spring. Students are given a Spring/Summer Senior checklist, which includes the dates and timelines of things they can expect to complete during their senior year. Some of those things are: Create a resume, ensure you are on track to graduate, tour colleges, attend College Application Day, etc., but bold and already scheduled are the dates they need to take down for the FAFSA workshop." (*Academy for Math, Engineering, and Science, 2023*)
- "The topic of FAFSA was discussed in sophomore, junior, and senior CCRs throughout the year." (*American Fork High, 2022*)



- "The earlier FAFSA is on a student's mind, the more likely they are to actually file the FAFSA and know of its importance—that is why each junior English class received a 15-minute presentation about everything that needs to be done during their senior year. Emphasis was placed on FAFSA, scholarship deadlines for the universities and other higher education institutions, and participation in other senior events." (*Provo High, 2022*)
- "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 student's 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](#) (now called the Federal Student Aid Estimator)." (*Provo High, 2019*)

