



Tab 10

Journey to College and FAFSA Completers

Coordinating Board for Higher Education

June 14, 2023

BACKGROUND

The Outreach Team within the department's Communications & Outreach Unit administers the Journey to College programs to help students plan and pay for college. These programs, Apply Missouri, FAFSA Frenzy, Decision Day, and J2C K-8, have evolved over the years, now including publications, resources, promotional items, presentations, social media, and activities offered during the school day to help students explore careers, to apply to colleges, to complete their Free Application for Federal Student Aid, and to be celebrated for their decisions to continue their education or enter training, an apprenticeship, or the military.

DHEWD identified increasing FAFSA filing as a priority for 2020 with its placemat initiative: "Benchmark best practices to increase FAFSA filing and begin implementation." To accomplish that initiative, staff developed and launched a statewide FAFSA completion competition called the Show-Me FAFSA Challenge. All Missouri public high schools were automatically entered and eligible to compete. The goal was to increase FAFSA filing by high school seniors during the 2020-2021 academic year. The Show-Me FAFSA Challenge was developed with the assistance of a FAFSA Completion Advisory Group that met virtually during May and June 2020. The competition structure was based on best practices identified in 16 other states with FAFSA completion competitions.

The General Assembly appropriated \$75,000 in general revenue to help increase FAFSA filing among minorities and underrepresented students. A contract initiative and plan was developed to utilize this funding. Efforts included paid digital marketing in targeted areas, materials and other promotional items, and FAFSA filing incentives for students attending filing events.

CURRENT STATUS

Journey to College

The number of schools hosting Journey to College events increased by more than 20% during the 2022-2023 academic year. The number of sites increased by 33% adding 60 new high schools for a total of 240.

Apply Missouri – one-hundred and five schools hosted events in Fall 2022 with a total of 137 events held. 1,835 high school seniors submitted 2759 admissions applications. Schools reported approximately 113 students are headed to the military, with 505 going directly into the workforce.

Apply Missouri is a part of The American College Application Campaign (ACAC). The Missouri ACAC School of Excellence Award was presented to Arifa Klokic, College Advisor (Missouri College Advising Corps) at Gateway STEM High School in St. Louis, for her commitment to reach each member of her senior class.

FAFSA Frenzy – During the 2022-23 academic year, 194 schools or organizations hosted more than 283 FAFSA Frenzy events to help students file their FAFSA. Those events served approximately 1,500 students, and increase of nearly 170 students compared to the 2021-22 academic year.

Decision Day – One-hundred and forty-five schools throughout Missouri celebrated Decision Day in Spring 2022. That's an increase of about 40 compared to 2021.

Show-Me FAFSA Challenge

The most recent Show-Me FAFSA Challenge became active Oct. 1, 2022, when the 2023-2024 FAFSA opened, and remained active until April 1, the Access Missouri deadline. Winning schools are awarded in four categories that are significant to FAFSA completion: 1) highest completion percentage, 2) greatest percentage increase in completion, 3) greatest percentage of low-income students who filed a FAFSA, and 4)

most innovative FAFSA outreach strategy. Schools were divided into three groups, and a prize for each category is being awarded in each group for a total of 12 prizes. Four schools reached or exceeded the 60% statewide completion goal and were entered into a drawing for an additional prize.

The Missouri Scholarship and Loan Foundation and the Missouri College and Career Attainment Network have each allocated \$5,000 to fund the prizes for the Show-Me FAFSA Challenge. Prizes are being awarded in the form of scholarships. Winning schools were notified of their award on May 2. MDHEWD announced the winners of the Show-Me FAFSA Challenge in mid-May with a press release.

The goal of the Show-Me FAFSA Challenge was to incentivize schools in a unique way to encourage and help more students file the FAFSA in order to reach a state filing goal of 60% for the class of 2023.

National FAFSA filing data is tracked by Form Your Future at <https://formyourfuture.org/fafsa-tracker/>, which is the primary resource for state percentages and ranking. Form Your Future updates its tracker weekly.

National: Through May 5, 2023, 49.2% of the high school class of 2023 has completed a FAFSA. There have been 2,001,962 completions nationally, a +3.9% change compared to last academic year.

Missouri: Through May 5, 2023, 45.0% of the high school class of 2023 has completed a FAFSA. Missouri is 30th in national filing rankings. There have been 33,527 completions in the state, a +3.6% change (+1,160 completions) compared to last academic year. Missouri is ranked 20th in percent change for completion.

FAFSA Filing Funding

A FAFSA Filing paid digital marketing campaign was used to increase FAFSA filing among hard to reach audiences, including Black, Hispanic and rural Missourians. The campaign increased visits to our Journey to College website, giving us 5k-page views in January. Additionally the percentage of high school students completing the FAFSA increased from 42.3% to 45.0%, moving Missouri from 33rd to 30th in the national filing rankings. The data reveal a +3.9% change in completion compared +0.2% change last year. Additionally, a pilot program was developed to provide FAFSA Completion Graduation Cords to our Journey to College (J2C) schools for those students who have completed their FAFSA this year. More than 3,400 graduation cords during April 15- May 5, 2023.

NEXT STEPS

Scholarships will be awarded to one student from each of the winning high schools. A final report of this year's competition is being completed, and may recommend concluding the Show Me FAFSA Challenge to create a new opportunity for mini FAFSA grants to high school counselor to assist with their FAFSA filing efforts.

Students attending college during the 2023-24 academic year will have another opportunity for free assistance completing their FAFSA through the Summer FAFSA Frenzy Virtual Office Hours. MDHEWD will have appointments available throughout June for students to schedule a one-on-one meeting for individual FAFSA help. These events give high school seniors and others planning to attend college the opportunity to complete their FAFSA and still secure financial aid.

The General Assembly appropriated \$75,000 in general revenue to help increase FAFSA filing outreach activities Efforts include 1.) In-state travel for participating in local school district and other FAFSA events; 2.) Supplies for informational materials; 3.) Audio/Video charges for information and outreach needs; 4.) Annual public relations services for Radio, TV and digital Public Service Announcements; 5.) Printer and communications equipment and maintenance; and 6.) Other incentives for helping meet FAFSA goals.

The Outreach Team is in the planning stages of next year's Journey to College programs. Publications are being redesigned and printed in time for the new academic year. Registration for schools to host 2023-24 events is currently open. College access professionals, high school counselors, and financial aid officers will come together

to learn best practices and hear state and national college and financial aid updates during the department's Annual Journey to College Day on July 27.

RECOMMENDATION

This is an information item only.

ATTACHMENTS

- None