




## 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*)

## **Strategically notify students and parents of deadlines associated with the FAFSA**

- “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 in order to maximize attendance.” (*Orem High, 2022*)

## **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*)

## **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*)

## **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*)

## **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*)

## **Involve senior body officers**

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

# **Best Practices for Advertising FAFSA Events**

## **Text, email, postcards and phone call ideas**

- “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 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.” (*Taylorville 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, our CHHS Counseling Center website.” (*Copper Hills High, 2018*)
- “We posted events on social media, Facebook, Twitter and on Taylorville's website.” (*Taylorville High, 2017*)

### **Flyers and more print ideas**

- “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 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 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*)
- “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*)



# 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

- “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*)
- “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, 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*)



- “After College Application Week, we had all senior advisory teachers show the [Paying for College video](#).” (*Ben Lomond High, 2017*)

### **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

- “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 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*)

## Unique Ways to Capture the Attention of Students

### Organized themed weeks on different topics

- Host a themed week to address different topics that teams can help with in the spring, for example: Financial Aid Award Letter Week. Schedule a week that is 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 topics for themed weeks include verification, deferment, and other paying for college help. Food and snacks are always an incentive to encourage attendance. (*USHE, 2022*)

### 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*)

### 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*)

### **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**

### **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 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*)
- “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 of the students who attend the College Application Week events will also show up to 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 very successful FAFSA completion night in conjunction 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 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*)

- "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 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 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*)
- "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*)
- "Families who attended were fed pizza after completion." (*Ben Lomond High, 2017*)

### **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 at 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*)

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

- “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*)

### **Collaborate with other schools**

- 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*)
- “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*)
- “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*)



## 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

- “Every student who completes their FAFSA is given the opportunity to remove one tardy.” *(Ben Lomond High, 2021)*
- “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)*
- “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)*



- “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*)

### **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*)
- “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*)
- “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*)

### **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 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.” (*Taylorville High, 2021*)
- “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.” (*Taylorville 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 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*)



## **Incentives with food**

- “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 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*)
- “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*)
- See also [Make your events family friendly](#) in this document.

## **Provide a scholarship or promote the USHE FAFSA Scholarship**

- 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*)
- “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*)
- “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)**

- “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*)

- “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 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*)
- “We used GEAR UP funds to provide pizza for the students and their families.” (*Ogden High, 2017*)

## Ideas on Meeting One-on-One with Students

- “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*)
- “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*)
- “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*)

## Focus on those Populations Who Will Benefit the Most

- “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. There was an email sent out that included specific resources with financial help for undocumented families. During our FAFSA Night, we had 64 families present, with 54 families completing FAFSA that Night. Within a month of the application being open, we had 120 students with completed applications. This marked a record year for the most completed FAFSA applications in Cyprus history.” (*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*)
- “In order 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 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*)
- “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*)
- “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*)



## Undocumented Student Inclusion

- “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 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*)

## Parent Outreach and Engagement

- “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 on 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 make sure to keep in mind our Spanish-speaking parents and include all announcements in both English and Spanish.” (*Park City High, 2022*)
- “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*)
- “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 made individual phone calls to parents.” (*Water Canyon High, 2017*)
- See also [Make your events family friendly](#) in this document.

## Host In-School Competitions

- “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*)
- “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*)
- “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 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*)
- “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*)



- “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

- “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*)
- “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*)
- “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*)

## Verification, Award Letters, and Next Steps

- “Upon receiving their award letter, I help break down how much of those funds will go towards tuition, how disbursements are scheduled, as well as explain that these funds are contingent on going to class and not failing. If a student does fail a class or drop, 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 make sure to 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. We have noticed 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 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*)
- “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*)
- “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*)

## 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*)

## Preparing Students Before Senior Year

- “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 this year 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 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](#) (now called the Federal Student Aid Estimator).” (*Provo High, 2019*)

