

Instruction

FAFSA Completion Program

The CREC Council recognizes that college is an important pathway to attaining necessary skills for work and for lifelong learning for many students. Research has indicated that students who complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) are more likely to attend college with financial aid.

Many students who are eligible to attend college fail to complete the FAFSA each year, potentially losing funds that could help support their postsecondary education. The goal of this policy is to improve the FAFSA completion rates for students in grade 12 or in adult education programs. This goal aims to strengthen CREC efforts to improve postsecondary enrollment and student outcomes and to make it easier for students to pursue postsecondary education.

In order to graduate or be granted a diploma, each student must (1) complete the FAFSA; (2) complete and submit to a public institution of higher education an application for institutional financial aid for students without legal immigration status; or (3) complete a waiver, on a form prescribed by the Commissioner of Education, signed by the student's parent or legal guardian, or by the student, if the student is a legally emancipated minor or eighteen years of age or older.

On and after March fifteenth of the school year, a principal, school counselor, teacher or other certified educator who affirms that they have made a good faith effort to contact the parent, legal guardian, or student about completion of the FAFSA or an application for institutional financial aid for students without legal immigration status, may complete a waiver on behalf of any student who has not satisfied any of the above requirements.

The Council believes that the goal of increased FAFSA completion rates can be attained by using the following (non-exhaustive) strategies/considerations:

1. Designing FAFSA completion systems, tools and events, focusing on students who might otherwise not complete an application, such as students who are low-income, English learners, experiencing homelessness¹, in foster care, or new arrivals to the community.
2. Establishing and maintaining strong partnerships with as many stakeholders as possible, with multiple organizations to assist. These will include local postsecondary institutions, as well as parents and the community. Building trusting relationships will ensure that students and their families feel comfortable completing the financial aid forms.
3. Providing individualized contact between students and staff, such as one-on-one meetings, telephone calls, and text message reminders; and using existing programs and forums, such

¹ Students who are defined as “homeless” or unaccompanied youth” in 42 USC § 11434a (2) and 42 USC § 11434a (6).

as advisor periods, college and career planning assemblies, to provide assistance.

4. Making the FAFSA completion process a component of graduation (providing a parental opt-out so the student is not denied a diploma).
5. Incorporating financial aid training into the existing curriculum. Raising awareness about FAFSA early, prior to senior year, and emphasizing that financial aid is available for technical, two, and four-year schools.
6. Collecting and monitoring appropriate data to identify which students are not completing applications and target extra support to them. Building a school or program-based FAFSA team to monthly review data and discuss and implement strategies to reach students.
7. Providing a network of resources to support to school/program staff, including counselors and teachers.
8. Providing sufficient and easily accessible resources on district/school or program websites. Creating a FAFSA student/parent portal pertaining to FAFSA.
9. Offering school-day and evening support for students and their parents/guardians.

The Council directs the administration to develop plans to pilot and initiate strategies to increase yearly student FAFSA completion rates, being mindful that not all students are eligible for federal financial aid, and such students' circumstances must be respected.

CREC will publish and make available the annual FAFSA completion rate for the graduating class of each high school within the district.

CREC may accept gifts, grants, and donations, including in-kind donations, to implement this policy.

Legal Reference: Connecticut General Statutes

P.A. 21-199 An Act Concerning Various Revisions and Additions to the Statutes Relating to Education and Workforce Development

P.A. 24-45 An Act Concerning Education Mandate Relief, School Discipline and Disconnected Youth

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CAPITOL REGION EDUCATION COUNCIL
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