



Education  
Strategy  
Group

# FAFSA Completion

Minnesota P-20 Council Meeting  
June 25, 2020

“

The number of Minnesota residents ages 25 to 44 years who hold postsecondary degrees or certificates should be increased to at least **70 percent by 2025.**

Meeting and maintaining the goal . . . will likely be difficult without achieving attainment rates that are **comparable across all race and ethnicity groups.**

MINNESOTA SF 5 (2015)

# The Importance of the FAFSA

## Enrollment

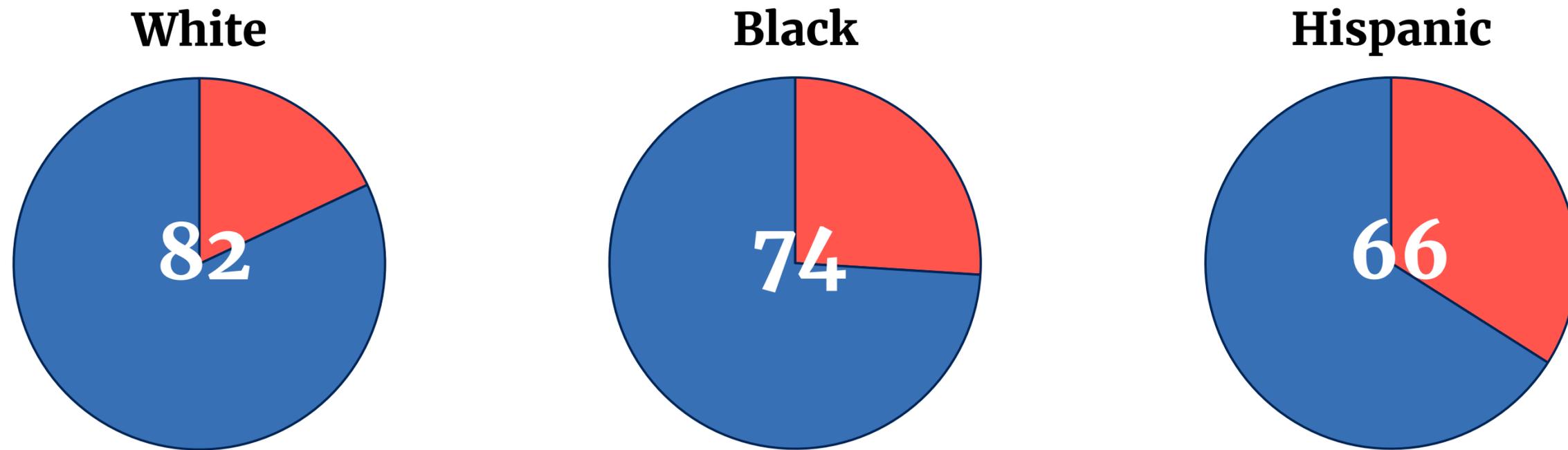
90 percent of students who complete the FAFSA enroll directly in college after high school, compared to just 55 percent of non-completers.

## Persistence

For every \$1,000 in financial aid a student receives, the rate at which they persist in their coursework increases, on average, by four percentage points.

## Attainment

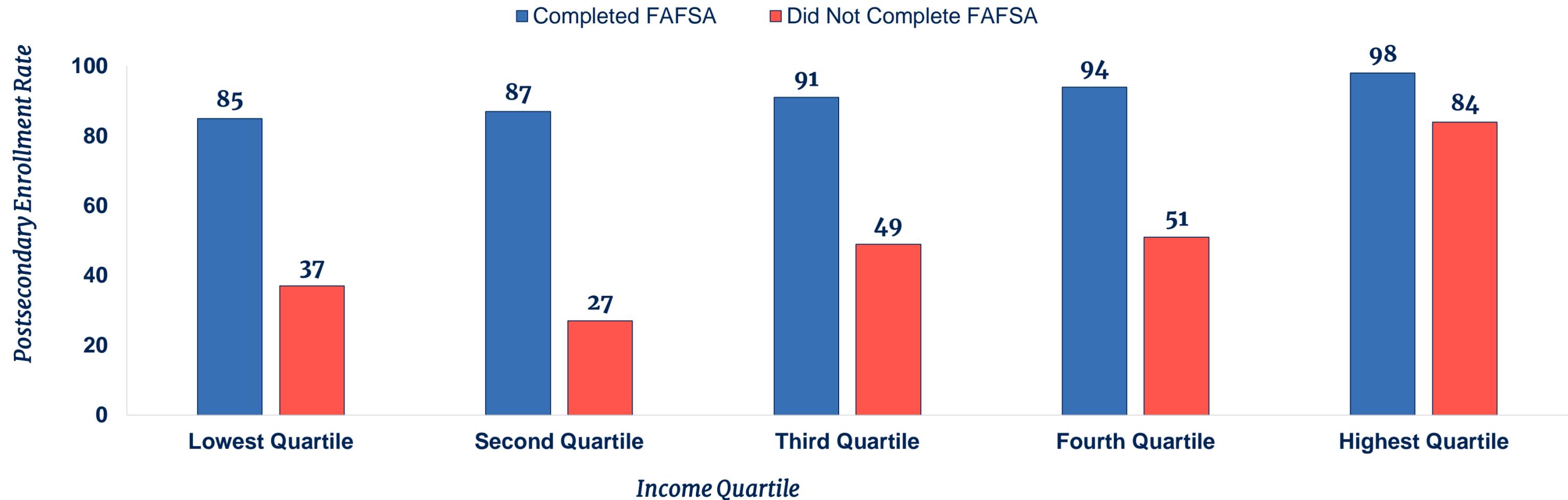
# FAFSA as an Equity Issue



**Each year, over \$3.4 billion in aid is left on the table.  
In Minnesota, over \$50 million in Pell grants went unclaimed last year.**

# FAFSA Narrows Enrollment Gaps

## Postsecondary Enrollment Rates by FAFSA Completion and Income Quartile



Source: High School Longitudinal Study, National Center for Education Statistics (2009)

# Key Barriers to FAFSA Completion



**Lack of Awareness**



**Complexity of the Form**



**Parental Mistrust and  
Misconceptions**

# The Effects of COVID-19 on FAFSA

3.3%

average decline in year-to-year FAFSA completion rates seen nationally since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic

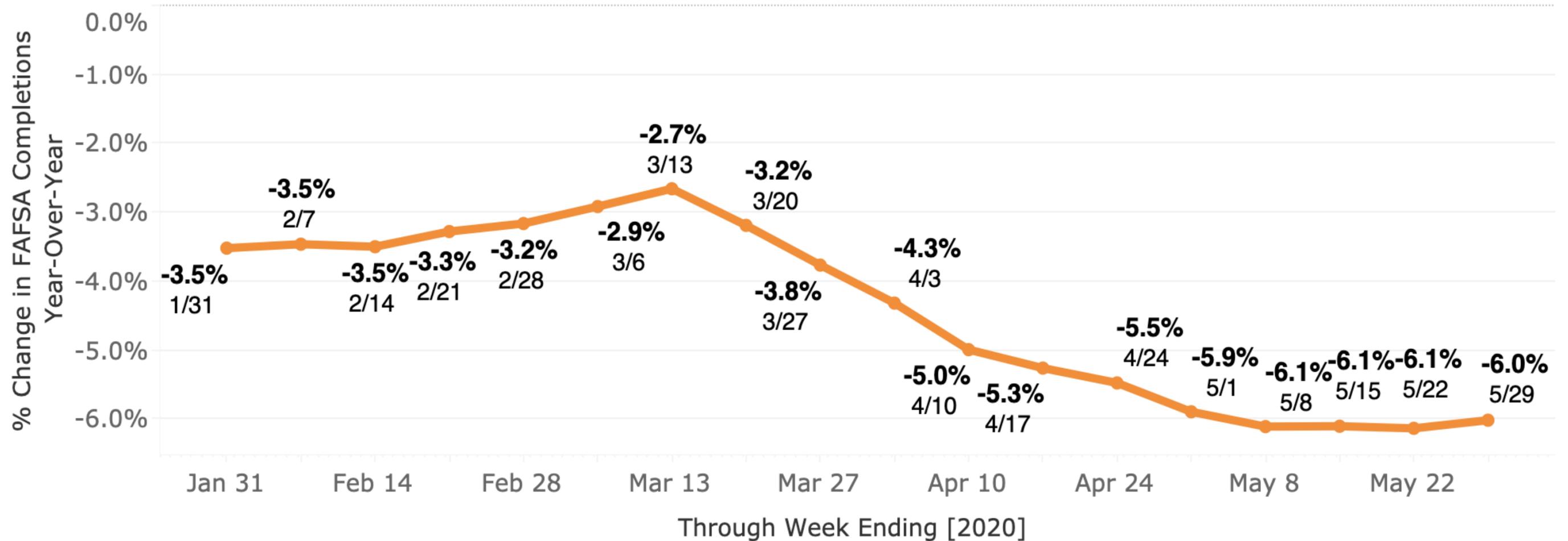


70,984

fewer high school seniors across the country have completed the FAFSA this year compared to the same time last year



# FAFSA Completion in Minnesota



Source: NCAN

# FAFSA Strategies



**Set a Goal**



**Build Shared  
Ownership**



**Spread  
Awareness**



**Use Data**



**Establish  
Partnerships**

“

The legislature directs the commissioner of the **Office of Higher Education**, in coordination with the **Minnesota Department of Education** and the **Minnesota Association of Secondary School Principals**, to set an **annual goal** for the percentage of Minnesota's high school seniors completing the **Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)**.

MINNESOTA SF 3683 (2020)

# Set a Goal

## Action Steps

- Set **equity targets by race and income** and be explicit about them when writing about the goal and reporting on progress.
- **Localize the goal** by providing opportunities for local leaders to review their data, set interim goals, and develop action plans with concrete strategies for meeting them.

## Examples

- **Hawaii** set a goal for 70% of high school seniors to complete the FAFSA by 2018 and 90% by 2020.
- **Rhode Island** set a statewide goal of 85%, with every high school having at least 70% of seniors complete the FAFSA.
- **North Carolina** set a FAFSA completion goal of 80% by 2030.

# Build Shared Ownership

## Action Steps

- Identify a **cross-sector working group** that will regularly meet to monitor progress, coordinate activities, and make any necessary refinements to the statewide strategy in the long-term after the goal is set.

## Examples

- **Tennessee** convened a cross-functional team, with representatives from the TN Higher Education Commission, TN Department of Education, tnAchieves, and the TN Student Assistance Corporation, to develop a FAFSA strategy. A cross-sector working group then met biweekly to assess progress.

# Spread Awareness

## Action Steps

- Lead a **communications campaign** to spread awareness about the importance of the FAFSA, share key resources and deadlines, promote statewide goals and competitions, and address common misconceptions.
- Consider launching a **competition** to incentivize local action.

## Examples

- **Michigan** College Access Network led a statewide “College Cash Campaign,” which was supported by Governor Whitmer, featured a public leaderboard, and provided tiered incentives for both students and counselors.
- **Colorado** encouraged students to “Get Your Piece of the Pie,” and **Ohio** promoted their “3 to Get Ready” campaign.

# Use Data

## Action Steps

- Prioritize **outreach and training** to schools and districts to expand access and use of **student-level data**.
- **Increase visibility** of aggregate data by school and district to drive competition.
- **Disaggregate by student subgroup** to analyze equity gaps.

## Examples

- **Get2College (MS)** manages a statewide data tracker, sends a monthly newsletter with aggregate data to counselors, and holds regular trainings with school leaders on how to leverage the data to target student supports.
- In Cleveland, **Say Yes to Education's** data-driven approach to support has led to a four-percentage point increase this year.

# Establish Partnerships

## Action Steps

- Expand **partnerships** across state agencies, districts, college access organizations, higher education institutions, and local community organizations to lend volunteers, resources, and support.
- Leverage **near-peer** and **parent-to-parent** mentor models.

## Examples

- **Texas** has “Go Centers” at higher education institutions to provide peer mentors at local high schools.
- **Grand Prairie Independent School District (TX)** developed a parent ambassador program.
- **Washington** recruited and trained community volunteers to provide in-person support to students during COVID-19.

# Catalyzing Completion in Minnesota

1

**Localize the state completion goal by supporting local leaders in reviewing data, setting interim goals, and developing action plans.**

2

**Set explicit equity targets by race and income for the completion goal and transparently report on progress for each subgroup.**

3

**Expand access and training for counselors and principals on how to harness student-level data to identify gaps and target supports.**

4

**Develop a communications campaign, led by the state, to publicly share and incentivize local action around the completion goal.**

5

**Support local community organizations and higher education institutions in adding volunteer capacity for providing support.**

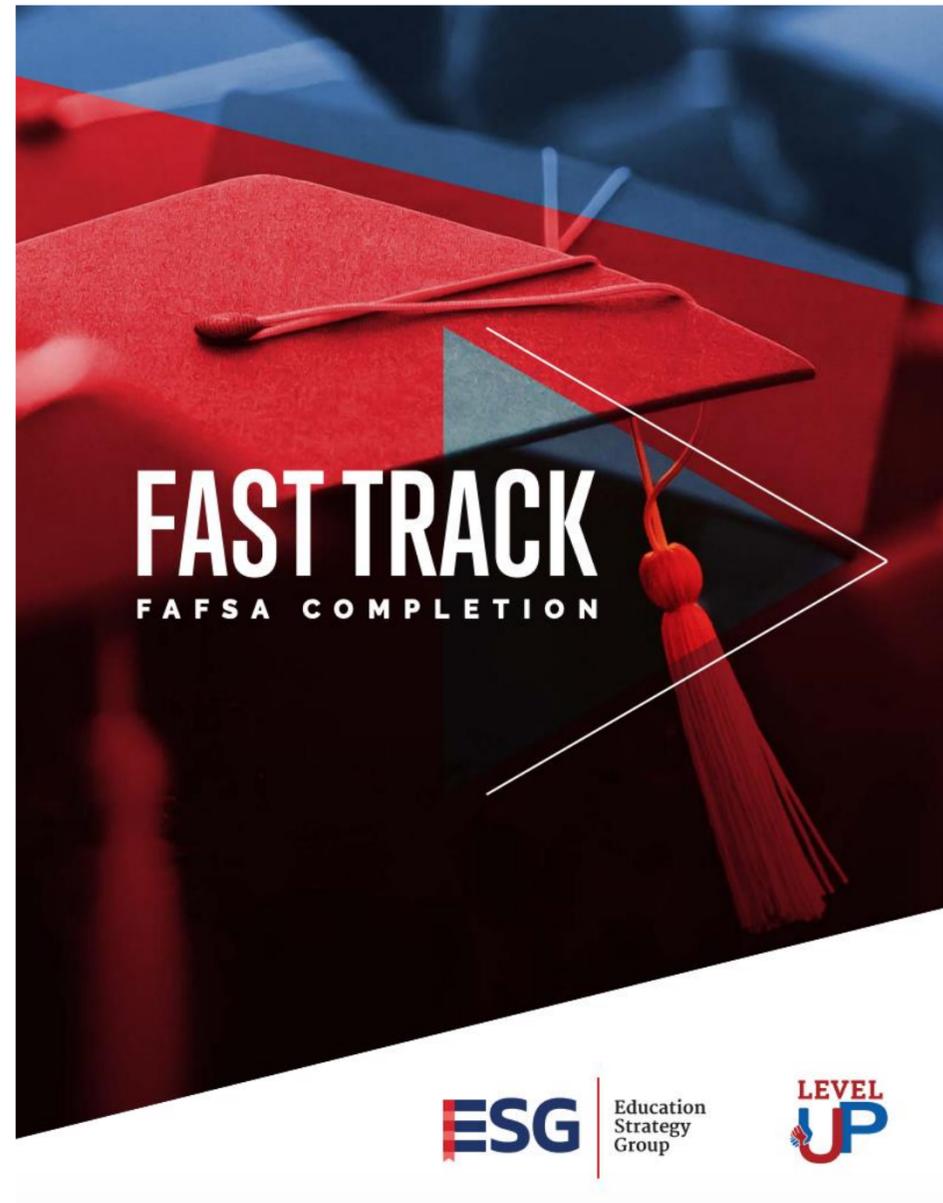


# Discussion

- What are your **initial reactions** to the proposed strategies? Which should be explored more?
- How else can Minnesota support students and families with building **awareness** of their postsecondary options and increasing **affordability** and **access**?
- What role should the **P-20 Council** play in supporting FAFSA completion?

# Appendix

# Our Work on the FAFSA



**FAST TRACK**  
FAFSA COMPLETION

**ESG** Education Strategy Group **LEVEL UP**



Strategy Spotlight

## EQUITY

*How can FAFSA completion efforts be targeted to support traditionally underserved students and families? How can institutions ensure their practices are culturally responsive?*

**WHY THIS MATTERS**

Students who complete the FAFSA are more likely to enroll in higher education, persist in their coursework, and obtain a degree. Despite this, over a third of high school seniors fail to complete the FAFSA each year. And the students who stand to benefit most, including low-income and first-generation students, are the least likely to complete the form. School districts see a three percent decrease in FAFSA completion rates, on average, for every 10 percentage point increase in the proportion of students from low-income families. Students of color are also less likely to complete the FAFSA, with 34 percent of Hispanic students and 26 percent of Black students failing to complete the FAFSA last year, compared to just 18 percent of White students. For this reason, increasing FAFSA completion is not simply a postsecondary success issue—it is an equity issue.

**ACTION STEPS**

While there is no silver bullet to address the glaring equity gaps in FAFSA completion, states and communities should leverage lessons learned from Washington, Utah, and Texas (highlighted below) to better support traditionally underserved students and their families. Specifically, they should:

- Target outreach efforts to meet students and families where they are
- Build partnerships to extend the reach of support provided to students and families
- Leverage students to provide near-peer support on completing the FAFSA
- Examine disaggregated and student-level data to target supports to the students who need it most

**STRATEGIES**

Below, we have highlighted high-impact strategies implemented by schools and districts across the country that support traditionally underserved students and their families with completing the FAFSA.

**Engaging Students, Families, and Partners**

Puget Sound College & Career Network (PSCCN) provides support to 35 school districts in King and Pierce counties, which serve 40 percent of students in the state of Washington. In developing ways to support students and families in completing the FAFSA, Angelica Alvarez, PSCCN's Manager of Postsecondary Readiness, Student, and Family

**SPOTLIGHT DISTRICT**

Puget Sound College & Career Network  
Kent, Washington

**PARTNERSHIPS**

35 SCHOOL DISTRICTS SERVED BY PSCCN

**DISTRICT RESULTS**

In a single school year, PSCCN INCREASED REGIONAL FAFSA COMPLETION BY 5 PERCENTAGE POINTS



Wednesday, May 6, 2020

## Accelerate Recovery: Double Down on FAFSA Completion

With families facing deep financial hardship due to the COVID-19 crisis, completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) is more important than ever. We know that, particularly during an economic downturn, a postsecondary degree or credential is key...

[READ MORE](#)

# Approaches to Goal Setting

## Benchmark

- **External:** Determine that the state wants to be in the top 5 or 10 states nationally (or the top for the region) within a certain time period.
- **Internal:** Identify the 75th percentile (or other percentile) school district's FAFSA completion rate in the state and set that as the target.

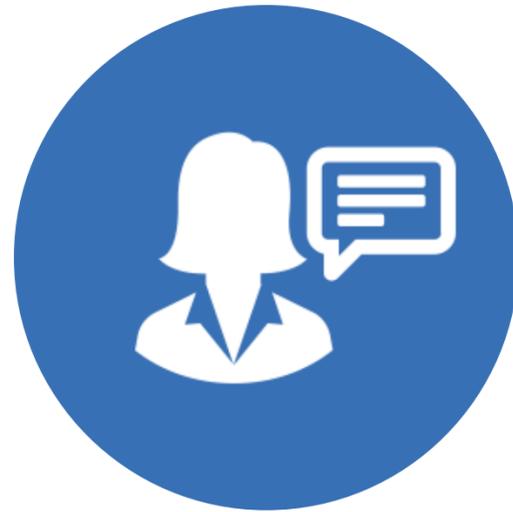
## Growth

- Determine the amount of improvement demonstrated by the fastest growing state (and/or from a subset of Minnesota districts) and use that amount to project out the completion rate over a certain timeframe.

## Trajectory

- Connect the FAFSA completion goal to the postsecondary attainment goal.
- For example, research estimates that 90% of FAFSA completers enroll in higher education, so at a minimum, the state would need 77% of HS students completing the FAFSA to deliver on the 70% goal.

# Virtual Advising



**Virtual  
One-on-One  
Advising**



**Virtual  
“Labs”**



**Phone Banks  
and Text  
Campaigns**

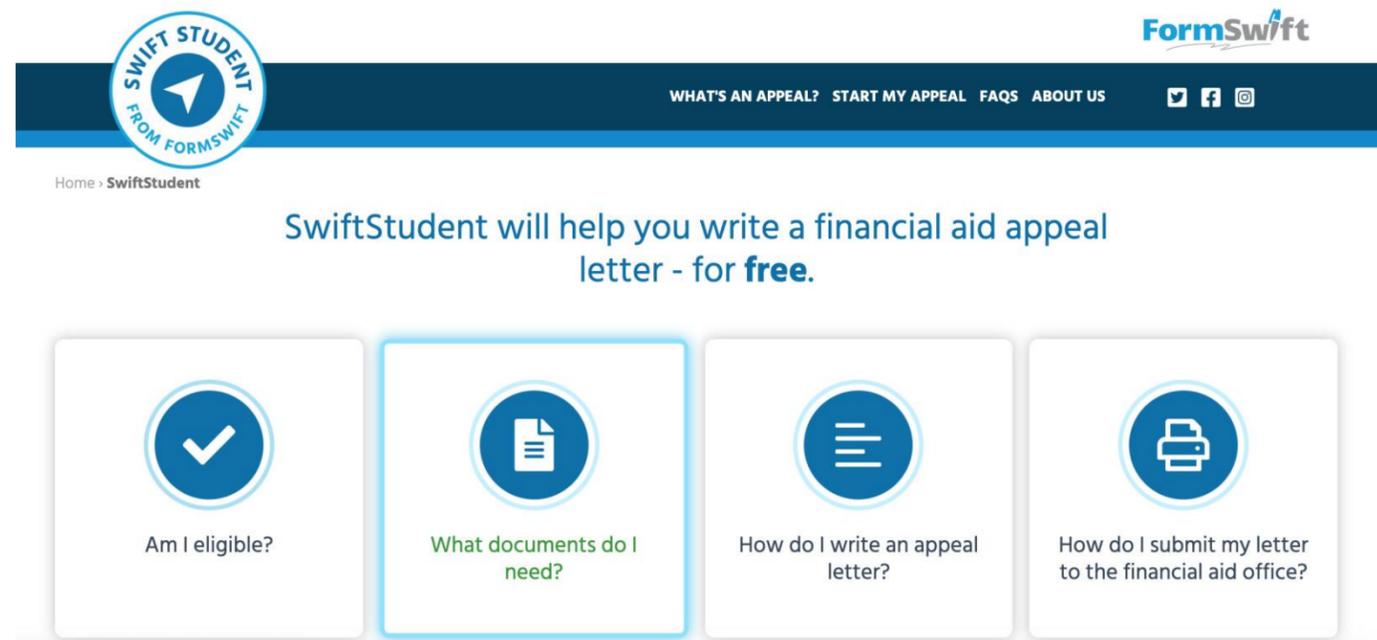


**Peer  
“Influencer”  
Campaigns**



**Email  
“Hotlines”**

# FAFSA Technology



“SwiftStudent”



“Oli”