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Journey to College & Show-Me FAFSA Challenge Update

Coordinating Board for Higher Education
June 15, 2022

BACKGROUND

The Outreach Team within Communications & Outreach Unit of the Missouri Department of Higher Education & Workforce Development (DHEWD) 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, DHEWD developed and launched a statewide FAFSA completion competition called the Show-Me FAFSA Challenge. All public high schools in Missouri were automatically entered and eligible to compete. The goal of the challenge was to increase FAFSA filing by high school seniors in Missouri 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.

CURRENT STATUS

Journey to College

The number of schools hosting Journey to College events declined during the 2020-21 academic year. However, the program grew this year, reaching back up to pre-pandemic levels. Data collected from J2C site coordinators indicated that more students participated this year, with some high school counselors able to reach 100 percent of their senior class.

Apply Missouri – Eighty-four schools hosted events in Fall 2021, with more than 120 events held. More than 1,750 high school seniors submitted 3,256 admissions applications. Schools reported approximately 65 students are headed to the military, with 218 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 Kristy Dalton, the counselor at Blue Eye High School south of Branson, for her commitment to reach each member of her senior class.

FAFSA Frenzy – During the 2021-22 academic year, 166 schools or organizations hosted more than 230 FAFSA Frenzy events to help students file their FAFSA. Those events served approximately 1,330 students, and increase of nearly 1,000 compared to the 2020-21 academic year.

Decision Day – Just over 105 schools throughout Missouri celebrated Decision Day in Spring 2022. That’s an increase of about 25 compared to 2021.

Show-Me FAFSA Challenge

The most recent Show-Me FAFSA Challenge became active Oct. 1, 2021, when the 2022-2023 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. Forty-one schools reached or exceeded the 55% 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 and video.

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 55% for the class of 2022.

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 April 22, 2022, 46.4% of the high school class of 2022 has completed a FAFSA. There have been 1,875,318 completions nationally, a +4.1% change compared to last academic year.

Missouri: Through April 22, 2022, 42.3% of the high school class of 2022 has completed a FAFSA. Missouri is 33rd in national filing rankings. There have been 31,618 completions in the state, a +0.2% change (+71 completions) compared to last academic year. Missouri is ranked 31st in percent change for completion. FAFSA filing rates have been down nationally since at least 2020, including in Missouri. Filing rates in Missouri are currently at a slight increase from this time last year. It is still possible we will reach the 55% statewide filing goal.

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 a few slight changes for the 2022-2023 competition, including increasing the statewide filing goal back to 60 percent to match the educational attainment goal outlined in the Strategic Plan.

DHEWD is hosting FAFSA Frenzy Summer Events at 17 Missouri Job Centers across the state May-July. These events give high school seniors and others planning to attend college next fall and spring the opportunity to complete their FAFSA and still secure financial aid.

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 2022-23 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 26.

The Missouri General Assembly appropriated \$75,000 in general revenue to help increase FAFSA filing among minorities and underrepresented students. A contract initiative and plan is being developed to utilize this funding. Efforts will likely include paid digital marketing in targeted areas, materials or other promotional items, travel to help students file, and FAFSA filing incentives for students and parents attending filing events.

NO RECOMMENDATION.

This is an information item only.