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MEDIA ALERT  
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## Florida 12<sup>th</sup> Graders Miss Out on \$100 Million in College Pell Grants

*Only 55% of state high school grads complete the form to qualify for federal grants, loans and work-study. New policy brief lays out recommendations for getting federal cash to deserving students.*

**Tampa, FL** — One of the most persistent barriers to college access takes less than an hour to complete. It's called the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, or the FAFSA, and it qualifies students for grants, loans and work-study funds. Last year, only 55% of Florida high school seniors sat down with their families or college advisors to fill it out. Why?

“Many students lack ‘college knowledge’ and trusted adult figures to explain the process. A common explanation given by those who don’t complete the FAFSA is that they don’t think they will be eligible for aid,” said Troy Miller, senior researcher and policy analyst for the Florida College Access Network. “If they don’t understand their financial aid options, too many deserving students miss out on college. But with a targeted approach to increasing FAFSA completion rates, tens of thousands more high school seniors could gain access to higher education.”

In the new policy brief by Florida C.A.N.I., [“\\$100 Million in Pell Grants Left Behind: FAFSA Completion in Florida,”](#) we discuss the state of financial aid access and outline interventions for removing roadblocks to deserving Florida students.

[Download \\$100 Million in Pell Grants Left Behind: FAFSA Completion in Florida \(640 kb PDF\)](#)

### **KEY FINDINGS**

**FEDERAL AID UNDERUTILIZED BY HIGH SCHOOL SENIORS.** Using very conservative figures, it is estimated that Florida’s 2013 high school graduating class missed out on over \$100 million in financial aid by not completing a FAFSA.

**MOST STUDENTS QUALIFY FOR FINANCIAL AID.** 59% of 12<sup>th</sup> graders in Florida who completed the FAFSA in 2013 were eligible for a Pell grant, worth up to \$5,645 a year in financial assistance for college or trade school that doesn’t have to be repaid.

**FEDERAL APPLICATIONS LAG BEHIND STATE APPLICATIONS.** Last year, Florida students only filed 93,000 FAFSAs, 30,000 less than the number of state aid applications filed. If Florida students filed as many FAFSA applications as state applications, that alone could result in over \$50 million in Pell grant dollars to high school grads.

**TARGETED INTERVENTIONS WORK.** Summarizing research from multiple studies, we found that students whose families get tax-time help with financial aid, students who have the assistance of at least one trusted adult to help them complete the forms, and students who have access to school or community-based financial aid assistance programs are more likely to complete the FAFSA.

**FAFSA COMPLETERS ARE MORE LIKELY TO FINISH COLLEGE.** Low-income students who complete the FAFSA are more likely to enroll in, persist and complete a college degree, according to longitudinal studies on the subject.

### ***KEY RECOMMENDATIONS***

**SHARE NAMES OF FAFSA COMPLETERS WITH HIGH SCHOOL COUNSELORS.** Currently, Florida schools are not able to receive the names of their students who have completed a FAFSA. Access to this data would empower counselors and other school officials to target the students who stand to benefit from help.

**TEACH FINANCIAL LITERACY IN SCHOOLS.** A bill proposed this session, the Personal Financial Literacy Education Act, would require a financial literacy course as a high school graduation requisite. Helping students understand basic money skills like saving and investing could help them make more informed long-term decisions, such as planning for college and learning how to manage student debt.

**BUILD A COLLEGE-GOING CULTURE IN COMMUNITIES.** Students need adults, programs and mentors to help them access and achieve college success. Connecting students to the resources they need, such as help with completing the FAFSA, can benefit communities as a whole by ensuring that students have the opportunity to gain the postsecondary education needed to prepare them for the 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce.