

Ms. Luisa Santos, Board Member

**SUBJECT: PROMOTING FAFSA COMPLETION AND UPDATING FAMILIES ON MANDATED CHANGES TO THE FAFSA APPLICATION**

**COMMITTEE: ACADEMICS, INNOVATION, EVALUATION & TECHNOLOGY**

**LINK TO STRATEGIC PLAN: INFORMED, ENGAGED, & EMPOWERED STAKEHOLDERS**

At the School Board Meeting of August 18, 2021, the School Board approved School Board Agenda Item H-16 (Revised), *Post Secondary Success Commitment*. The *Framework for Post-Secondary Success* includes:

1. **Baseline Data:** understand where we are to determine where we can improve and grow
2. **Universal Standards:** implement a post secondary planning curriculum that aligns the efforts of all stakeholders advising students in post-secondary planning
3. **Personalization:** increase opportunities for all students to access individual advising
4. **Best in Class CAP Advisors:** provide new CAP Advisor orientations and high-quality, ongoing professional development aligned to newly created universal standards
5. **Centralized Leadership:** secure the centralized personnel needed to oversee and execute this framework
6. **Ongoing Evaluation:** set annual metrics and reports to track success and best practices
7. **Culture Shift:** cultivate and norm district and community wide expectations regarding post-secondary planning
8. **The Tools:** leverage the power of the tech tools we currently use, such as SCOIR

A survey conducted by The Princeton Review has shown that financial support will be a necessity as students embark on their journey through post-secondary education<sup>1</sup>. The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) measures a student's eligibility for financial assistance, and completing the application allows institutions of higher education, including two- and four-year colleges and universities, vocational, trade, and career schools, online schools, and graduate schools, to craft a student's financial aid award packet. Scholarship programs also use FAFSA. For example, FAFSA completion during a student's senior year of high school is a requirement to receive the highly acclaimed Florida Bright Futures

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<sup>1</sup> The Princeton Review. (2023). College Hopes & Worries. Retrieved from <https://www.princetonreview.com/college-rankings/college-hopes-worries>

scholarship.<sup>2</sup> Promoting the FAFSA application will allow our students in Miami-Dade County Public Schools to reach transformative milestones that will positively impact their lives and our economy. With a significant shift in demand for careers that require post-secondary education, and Florida's SAIL to 60 initiative that aims to have 60% of working-age Floridians have a high-value postsecondary certificate, degree, or training experience by 2030, it is imperative that as a District we motivate and empower students to successfully attain a degree or certificate following high school.

FAFSA is the application that students must submit in order to obtain financial assistance, which includes Pell Grants, federal student loans, and work study programs. It provides over 13 million students with financial aid nationwide<sup>3</sup>. FAFSA is completed online and uses financial information to calculate a student's expected family contribution (EFC). The EFC has historically been used by states, colleges, career schools, and private organizations to assess your federal assistance eligibility and financial aid award.

The FAFSA has now undergone a new set of changes to the application as a result of Congress enacting the FAFSA Simplification Act in 2020. Students will be presented with a new FAFSA application form this year. This simplified form asks fewer than the 108 questions previously included, depending on each student's case.<sup>4</sup> Beginning with the 2024-25 award year, the redesigned FAFSA will use a Student Aid Index (SAI) statistic to calculate needs, rather than the EFC. The SAI will take family size into account in its computations and will offer additional financing to low-income applicants. With these revisions, more students will be eligible for federal Pell awards, which are need-based awards provided to students who qualify based on their family size and federal poverty level. The FAFSA application will open December 2023.<sup>5</sup>

This School Board has consistently prioritized post-secondary pathways for students as evidenced by the establishment of the College Assistance Program (CAP) in 1977 and the annual support of The National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC) Miami National College Fair. Subsequent items that have reaffirmed this commitment include, but are not limited, to: H-8 Informing Parents and Students of Changes to the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) Process (August 10, 2016), Dr. Lubby Navarro; H-8 Post-Secondary Resources For Undocumented and Mixed Status Families (December 9, 2020), Ms. Luisa Santos; H-16 Post-Secondary Success Commitment (August 21, 2021), Ms. Luisa Santos; and H-7 College Kick-Off Task Force (March 15, 2023), Ms. Mary Blanco.

FAFSA-compliant students are more likely to enroll in college and complete their degrees. According to the Florida College Access Network (FCAN), 90% of students who complete the FAFSA enroll in college straight out of high school, compared to only 55% of non-completers<sup>6</sup>. Promoting FAFSA completion in our schools will benefit students who require financial support to pursue post-secondary education. The National College Attainment Network

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<sup>2</sup> Florida Education Foundation. (2021). Florida Bright Futures Scholarship: What You Should Know. Retrieved from <https://www.floridaeducationfoundation.org/blogs/florida-bright-futures-scholarship-what-you-should-know>

<sup>3</sup> College Board. (2023). What Is the FAFSA?. Retrieved from <https://blog.collegeboard.org/what-is-the-fafsa>.

<sup>4</sup> Federal Student Aid. (2022, November 4). FAFSA Simplification Act Changes Implementation 2023-24. Retrieved from <https://fsapartners.ed.gov/knowledge-center/library/dear-colleague-letters/2022-11-04/fafsa-simplification-act-changes-implementation-2023-24>

<sup>5</sup> Keller, M. (2023) Will the 2024-2025 FAFSA Open on October 1? Plan Now for Potential Delays. Retrieved from <https://www.ncan.org/news/631637/Will-the-2024-2025-FAFSA-Open-on-October-1-Plan-Now-for-Potential-Delays.htm>

<sup>6</sup> National Center for Education Statistics. (n.d.). High School Longitudinal Study of 2009 (HLS:09). Retrieved from <https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/hsls09/>

(NCAN) has reported that in Florida, the class of 2022 left \$313 million dollars in Pell Grants on the table.<sup>7</sup>

Given the millions of dollars in funds that students are leaving on the table and Florida's commitment to the SAIL to 60 initiatives, promoting the FAFSA application and its changes is imperative to student success, as well as meeting priority 1, objective 1 of M-DCPS' strategic plan of ensuring that all students graduate with a relevant, viable post-secondary plan. The Board and the District have an urgent responsibility to strengthen post-secondary enrollment and attainment rates by advocating for FAFSA completion in school, in addition to updating students and parents on the new mandated changes on the FAFSA application.

This item has been reviewed and approved by the Office of the General Counsel as to form and legal sufficiency.

**ACTION PROPOSED BY  
MS. LUISA SANTOS:**

That The School Board of Miami-Dade County, Florida, reaffirm its commitment to supporting post-secondary success for students by continuing the implementation of the Framework for Post- Secondary Success and by directing the Superintendent to:

1. Promote FAFSA completion in our schools through, but not limited to, FAFSA Nights, community events, partnering with local community based organizations, and other creative and interactive ways to meet our families where they are at;
2. Launch an informational campaign to ensure that all students and families are aware of the new mandated changes to the FAFSA application and are encouraged and supported in completing it;
3. Use the FCAN Florida FAFSA Challenge to encourage our schools to increase our FAFSA completion to at least 50%; and
4. transmit to the Board a monthly update on school site and district-wide FAFSA completion rates from January 2024 - May 2024.

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<sup>7</sup> AlQaisi, R., & DeBaun, B. (2022, October 12). NCAN Report: In 2022, High School Seniors Left \$3.58 Billion on the Table in Pell Grants. National College Access Network. Retrieved from <https://www.ncan.org/news/629039/NCAN-Report-In-2022-High-School-Seniors-Left-3.58-Billion-on-the-Table-in-Pell-Grants.htm>