



Greetings:

When students succeed, Ohio succeeds. Unfortunately, some Ohio students are missing out on thousands of dollars of financial aid each year that could help them reach their goals. The DeWine-Husted administration believes in maximizing opportunities like these for every Ohioan. And Ohio's strategic plan for education, *Each Child, Our Future*, casts a vision in which each child is challenged to discover and learn, prepared to pursue a fulfilling post-high school path and empowered to become a resilient, lifelong learner who contributes to society. For many students, that vision includes continuing their education beyond high school to attain things such as industry credentials or postsecondary degrees. Taking advantage of available financial aid can be an important tool that helps them succeed. That's why we are proud to announce FAFSA 21, an initiative to ensure that Ohio's students have the support they need to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).

The FAFSA allows students to qualify for federal Pell grants, state grants, and most scholarships. Historically, the FAFSA has been one of the best predictors of enrollment in colleges, universities, and training centers. Seniors who complete the FAFSA are 84% more likely to enroll in college.¹ On average, 52% of students who complete the FAFSA qualify for Pell and the average grant is worth \$4,418. Many will qualify for more, up to the maximum Pell grant amount of \$6,495 in the 2021-2022 academic year.

Unfortunately, both nationally and in Ohio, the FAFSA completion rates have declined dramatically in the time of COVID-19. Recent data suggest that FAFSA completion rates in Ohio have declined 8.9% compared to the same period last year.² This change represents a significant loss in funding for students and, likely, a significant decline in postsecondary enrollment in Ohio. Ultimately, this means fewer opportunities for Ohio's students.

Our students deserve more. Please partner with us in working to achieve a bold and urgent goal; let's work together to ensure more Ohio students complete the FAFSA in this current academic year, putting more opportunities within their reach. The Ohio Department of Higher Education, in collaboration with the Ohio Department of Education, will invest **\$2.85 million** in federal Governor's Emergency Education Relief (GEER) funding for **FAFSA completion projects** over the next year and a half. These funds will be used to support **direct intervention, data system upgrades, and professional development**.

Efforts supporting FAFSA 21 also complement the One Goal of *Each Child, Our Future*, which states that "Ohio will increase annually the percentage of its high school graduates who, one year after graduation, are enrolled and succeeding in a post-high school learning experience." FAFSA completion plays an important role in helping students realize that goal.

¹ <https://www.ncan.org/news/news.asp?id=456025>

² <https://formyourfuture.org/fafsa-tracker/> <https://formyourfuture.org/fafsa-tracker/>



We hope that you will join us in helping to make our vision for Ohio students a reality by creating more opportunities for them through FAFSA completion. **Here are some ways you can get involved:**

- Join the Chancellor and Superintendent at a virtual roundtable from 10 to 11 a.m. on March 16, 2021 to talk about this initiative and the significance for Ohioans. **A formal meeting invitation will be sent via email in the next week.**
- Join our email list to receive further updates by completing this brief [survey](#).
- Let others in your community know about FAFSA 21.

As the first major initiative of FAFSA 21, **we are inviting eligible entities to apply to the FAFSA 21 Funding Opportunity no later than March 19, 2021**. Approximately \$1.8 million dollars from GEER funds will be distributed to college-and-credential-attainment focused nonprofits and Educational Service Center organizations to serve students most impacted by COVID-19. Please see the attached documents for more information about this opportunity and please share it throughout your community.

We believe that, together, we can make the goal of FAFSA 21 a reality. When Ohio students complete the FAFSA, they are opening not only the door to financial aid, but also the door to their futures. Thank you for being part of this important work.

Sincerely,

Randy Gardner
Chancellor

Paolo DeMaria
State Superintendent