



## NEWS RELEASE

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# Statewide “FAFSA/ORSAA Challenge” Aims to Increase Financial Aid Applicants among High School Seniors

*Over 120 high schools have already joined the “FAFSA/ORSAA Challenge,” and state partners are encouraging participation*

(Salem, Ore.) - The Higher Education Coordinating Commission, the Oregon Department of Education, and participating partners are pleased to announce the recent launch of the [FAFSA/ORSAA Challenge](#), a statewide initiative aimed to help students in Oregon’s high school Class of 2020 to afford and achieve their college and career goals. The FAFSA/ORSAA Challenge goal is to increase the statewide rate of students completing the primary forms required for federal, state, and institutional financial aid—the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and Oregon Student Aid Application (ORSAA)— by five percentage points during the upcoming year. All Oregon public high schools are encouraged to [join this statewide challenge](#), and high school seniors are encouraged to seek the support of their schools in completing these important financial aid applications.

The FAFSA and ORSAA are used to help students qualify for numerous forms of public and private financial aid for college; if students do not apply, they may miss out on thousands of dollars in federal, state, and private aid for which they may be eligible. Timely completion of financial aid forms is a challenge for many students and families, particularly first-generation students. Schools that participate in the Challenge receive free resources to help their seniors, including: posters in English and Spanish, monthly newsletters with training resources and tips, and data on completion rates to help schools set targets and monitor their efforts.

“Financial aid can change the arc of a student’s education, career and life,” said Oregon Department of Education Director Colt Gill. “We’re excited to partner with other organizations to support this challenge and help ensure students gain equitable access to financial aid.”

While state initiatives in recent years have improved the number of financial aid applicants, Oregon’s rate of completion remains low in national comparisons. Oregon’s Class of 2019 had a combined FAFSA/ORSAA completion rate of 59 percent, and Oregon education partners have set a goal to



increase this rate to 64 percent statewide by June 2020. Since Oregon partners began inviting high schools to join the FAFSA/ORSAA Challenge in August, over 120 high schools have registered and additional schools are signing up each week.

Ben Cannon, executive director of the Higher Education Coordinating Commission, said, “We are excited to join in this partnership challenge to improve college affordability, a key strategic goal for our agency. When a student submits the FAFSA or ORSAA, they gain access to valuable financial resources they need to succeed in their academic and career goals, whether they are pursuing a certificate, training option, or degree program.”

By completing the FAFSA, students may demonstrate eligibility for federal aid such as Federal Pell grants and federal loans, state aid such as the Oregon Opportunity Grant and the Oregon Promise Grant, institutional scholarships, and more. By completing the ORSAA, students may demonstrate eligibility for these same state grant programs, as well as institutional and private scholarships. The FAFSA is available to U.S. citizens, permanent residents, and certain eligible noncitizens, while the ORSAA is available to Oregon students who are undocumented, including those with Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) status. For some financial aid programs, students must complete additional application requirements beyond the FAFSA or ORSAA.

Roberto Aguilar, a school counselor at Milwaukie High School who signed his school up to participate in the Challenge, explains why: “We must help students access affordable quality higher education to break the cycle of poverty, so that they can become the computer programmers, engineers, nurses and other industry leaders they aspire to become. Our school needs to support all students as they complete their FAFSA or ORSAA so that they can receive financial assistance to pursue advanced education and training.”

The FAFSA/ORSAA Challenge is organized by a collaborative group of organizations from across Oregon: Higher Education Coordinating Commission’s Office of Student Access and Completion, Oregon Department of Education, Oregon Goes to College, ECMC The College Place Oregon, and Oregon Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators. Schools can learn more and register online: <http://oregongoestocollege.org/cc/fafsa-orsaa>.

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