



2016 Dallas County Financial Aid Completion Practice Guide

In 2016, nearly 16,000 Dallas County high school seniors did not file the FAFSA (43%), meaning they had no way of understanding the true cost of college and no opportunity to receive state or federal aid. As a result, over \$32 million in federal aid went unclaimed by our seniors.

The Commit! Partnership invited the 18 Dallas County high school campuses that increased their FAFSA completion rate by at least five percentage points to share their hypothesis on what they did that worked. We asked campuses to reflect on what interventions were taking place during areas of growth (in green on their chart) and what they did differently from 2015 to 2016.

Collected here are the responses we received and contact information to learn more.

A. Maceo Smith New Tech HS (Dallas ISD)

Contact: Roland Reising at (214) 808-7854 or rreising@educationisfreedom.org

- ✓ Increasing the number of workshops
- ✓ Following up with families
- ✓ Spreading their presentations throughout financial aid season
- ✓ Setting up opportunities for parents and students to meet advisors one-on-one
- ✓ Meeting with students after school
- ✓ Utilizing Echo Network New Tech to easily email with students

A. Maceo Smith New Tech HS partners with Education Is Freedom (EIF), which provides college assistance to high school students of Dallas ISD. Their mission is to transform lives through education, and they do that by providing one-on-one assistance to students who need help with applying to college, writing essays, financial aid, and registering for college entrance exams. They are in 14 different schools throughout DISD, and although they focus on seniors transitioning out of high school, they also assist the underclassmen with finding internship and community service opportunities to help them become more marketable. Aside from working in schools, their outreach team provides workshops to the community to help families throughout the week in need of college assistance.

EIF partnered with the AVID Program and Advanced Graphic Design Class put on financial aid workshops. They also partnered with multiple postsecondary institutions to assist the students with completing their financial aid application on a set date. Prior to assisting families with completing the application, they provided information sessions to both parents and students so that way they would be aware of what documentation is necessary to completing their financial aid.

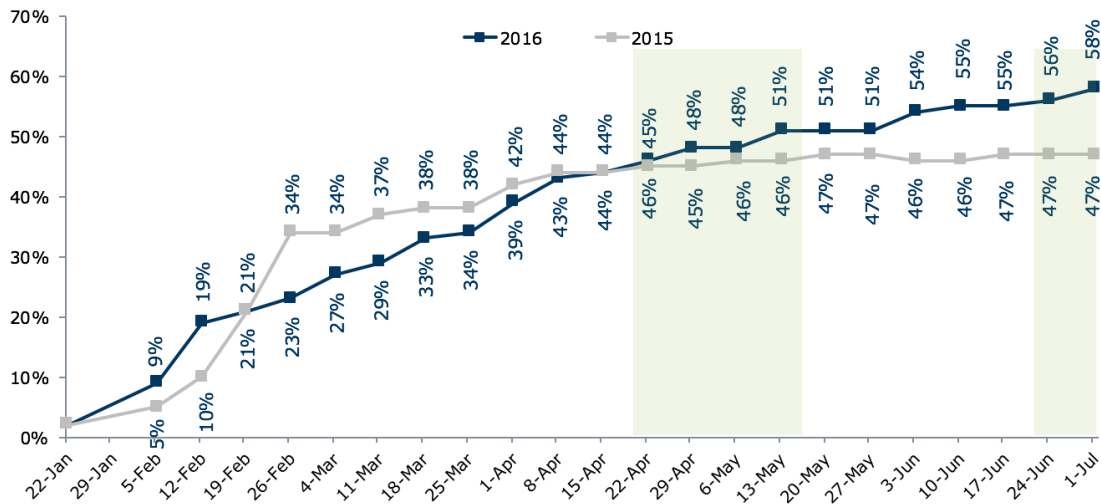
A. Maceo Smith New Tech HS (Dallas ISD), con't

From 2015 to 2016, EIF built on a system and improved it. They increased the number of workshops to increase the number of application completed. They also focused on following up and spreading their presentations throughout the financial aid season. This included providing more opportunities for parents and students to obtain information about financial aid and an opportunity to set up appointments so the EIF advisors could assist them on a one on one basis. The advisors made themselves available to students afterschool who needed extra help. The Echo Network New Tech made it easy for communicating with students via email.

New Tech FAFSA completions surpassed 2015 rates as of 4/15 and continued to steadily grow up to 7/1

Weekly FAFSA submissions over time – New Tech HS

New Tech HS FAFSA completions FAFSA to date



commit! ED Data, 2016 and Oct PEIMS Snapshot

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Note: Data used in charts below is from the Department of Education, which differs slightly from the individual student data advisors can see on their ApplyTX Counselor Suite. Percentages are calculated using the October 1 PEIMS senior snapshot. Completion means a student is ready for a financial aid award letter. In other words the student has no missing items on their FAFSA and if they were selected for verification, they have completed the FAFSA process. We also recognize that applications continue to be made/completed past July 1.

Berkner High School (Richardson ISD)

Contact: Rebecca Jimenez at (469) 593-7132 or Rebecca.Jimenez@risd.org

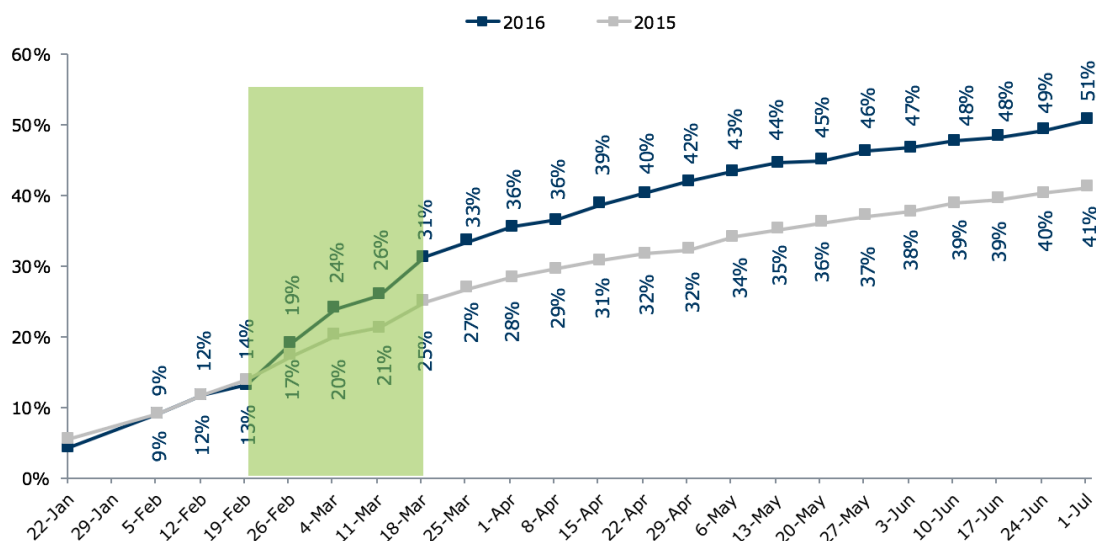
- ✓ Making posters with memes to market to students
- ✓ Visiting AVID, STEM, and senior English classes to ensure they knew the importance of FAFSA
- ✓ Helping students understand what materials would be necessary for FAFSA
- ✓ Calling students in small groups and helping them individual creating an FSA ID
- ✓ Ensuring principal sent out reminders on FAFSA deadlines

I reached out to the seniors by advertising with posters and did class presentations to all senior English classes, AVID classes, and college transition classes and filled them in with the information needed to complete the FAFSA. I had announcements sent out in the morning, we had about three FAFSA nights for parents and students, we announced information about FAFSA at guidance days, and I had Mrs. Gipson send out reminders through Remind 101.

I called students in small groups and helped them individually with creating a FSA ID and understanding what materials they would need to complete the FAFSA. I might not have been able to help students out one by one, but I made sure to let all the senior teachers, and senior students know that I was available to help in any way needed.

Berkner FAFSA completion rates had surged above 2015 rates by late Feb and continued to steadily climb

Weekly FAFSA completions over time – Berkner HS



Bryan Adams High School (Dallas ISD)

Contact: Khanh LaManna at knguyen@aspdallas.org or Lorelehi Berrios lberrios@dallasisd.org

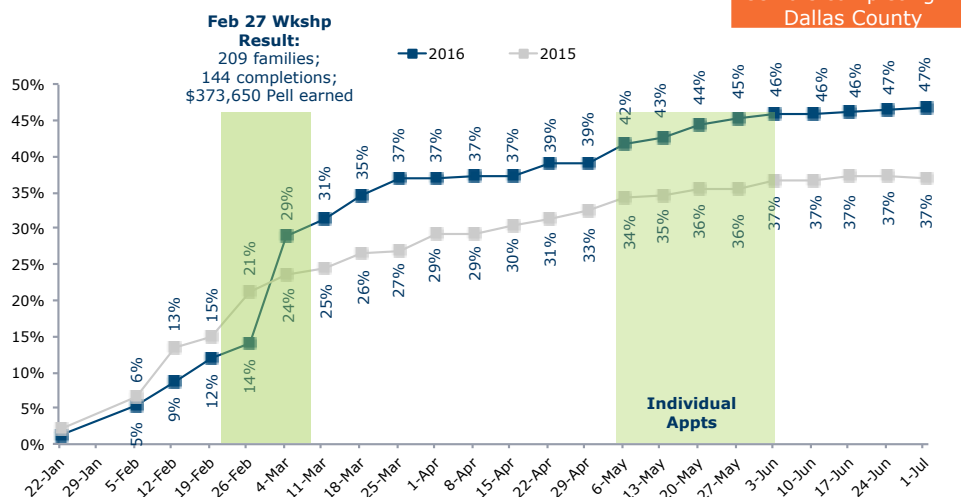
- ✓ Generating one-on-one FAFSA appointment letters that were mailed home to over 385 seniors using mail merge and Excel spreadsheets
- ✓ Sending an additional letter home with students, posting the appointment times in the senior hallway, and using the district automated call out system and campus texting programs (Remind and Signal Vine) to provide additional points of contact and reminders of appointment times to families. By using the "appointment only" language, it gave families the appearance of being a mandatory part of the process.

Collaborating with Commit!, we hosted three FAFSA Super Saturday workshops in strategic locations throughout Dallas ISD that were staffed by ASP staff, local University Go-Center and financial aid office volunteers, as well as United Way and corporate volunteers. These advertised events are open to all community members, though attendance is heavily skewed to students who attend the specific host high school. Previous workshops have centered around a "walk in" approach, but for 2015-2016, Bryan Adams decided to do something different to improve student attendance.

This year, we employed the use of FAFSA "appointments" to increase attendance at our FAFSA Super Saturday event. Using mail merge and Excel spreadsheets, we generated one-on-one FAFSA appointment letters that were mailed home to over 385 seniors. We sent an additional letter home with students, posted the appointment times in the senior hallway, and used the district automated call out system and campus texting programs (Remind and Signal Vine) to provide additional points of contact and reminders of appointment times to families. Rather than spending time switching appointments, we told students with conflicts to come when they were available. By using the "appointment only" language, it gave families the appearance of being a mandatory part of the process. 200 families met their appointments on February 27, 2016. As of August 12, 2016, 205 Bryan Adams seniors had submitted a FAFSA (184 completed), a 26% increase from 2015 submissions.

Bryan Adams FAFSA completion rates spiked after workshop and continued to climb throughout the year

Weekly FAFSA completions over time – Bryan Adam HS



Irma L. Rangel Young Women’s Leadership School (Dallas ISD)
 Contact: Ann Marano at C151@dallasisd.org

From 2015-2016, the counselors focused on several areas:

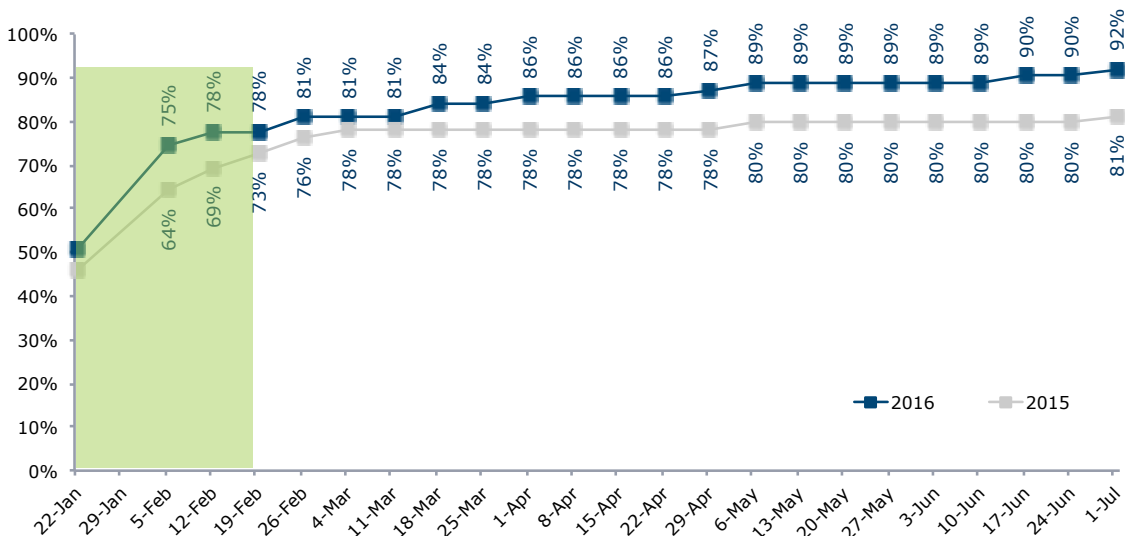
- ✓ Talking about FAFSA early and often, including financial aid information into every conversation about college
- ✓ Setting the expectation that FAFSA/TAFSA will be filed well before federal deadlines
- ✓ Offering several workshops on campus using trained volunteers
- ✓ Promoting off-campus workshops
- ✓ Conducting SAR review sessions and making SAR a part of the senior clearance for graduation

At the Irma L. Rangel Young Women’s Leadership School, advisors start discussing the financial aid process and how to pay for college with students and their families in middle school. Then, once the students are in high school, they talk about it early and often, including financial aid information into every conversation about college. They took advantage of the financial aid toolkit available through the Department of Education, resources offered through uAspire and Capitol One, and distributed FAFSA/TAFSA checklists to students and parents and set the expectation that their FAFSA/TAFSA will be filed well before federal deadlines. They offered several workshops on campus using trained volunteers (including alumni from their school, financial aid counselors, etc.) and also promoted off-campus workshops. Lastly, they conducted SAR review sessions and made SAR a part of the senior clearance for graduation.

Irma Rangel FAFSA completion rates surged in late January/early February and continued to grow

Weekly FAFSA submissions over time – Irma Rangel HS

Irma Rangel FAFSA completions FAFSA to date



Molina High School (Dallas ISD)

Contact: Karina Hernandez at khernandez@aspdallas.org or Loree Jones-Huggins lorjones@dallasisd.org

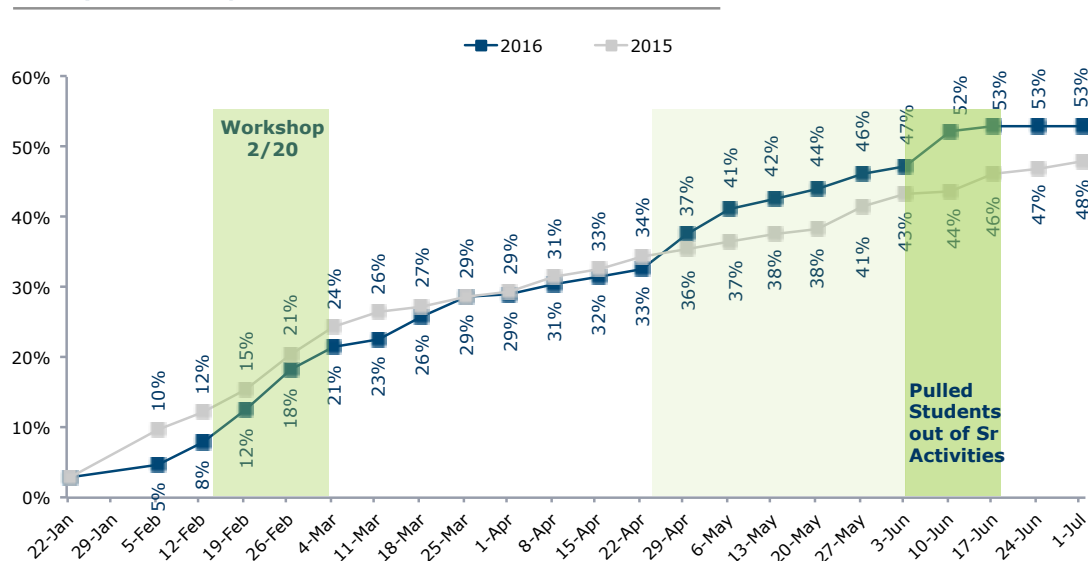
Specifically for their surge in May and June, ASP staff at MHS focused on:

- ✓ Scheduling FAFSA appointments during Senior Week in May. All seniors who had not completed the FAFSA were pulled into a computer lab for submission and completion.
- ✓ Calling parents to complete the form with them over the phone, but in the instance that a phone call would not suffice, parents would come to the school and complete the FAFSA in person with the student during a five-hour window.

Collaborating with Commit!, we hosted three FAFSA Super Saturday workshops in strategic locations throughout Dallas ISD that were staff by ASP staff, local University Go-Center and financial aid office volunteers, and United Way and corporate volunteers. These advertised events are open to all community members, though attendance is heavily skewed to students who attend the specific host high school. The FAFSA Super Saturday event captured a large number of seniors who needed to submit their FAFSA by the Texas priority deadline (March 15), but Molina also posted another surge in FAFSA completion by scheduling FAFSA appointments during Senior Week in May. All seniors who had not completed the FAFSA were pulled into a computer lab for submission and completion. Many times, students were able to complete the form over the phone with their parents, but in the instance that a phone call would not suffice, parents would come to the school and complete the FAFSA in person with the student during a five-hour window. There were only two instances where parents refused to provide financial aid information. This practice led to a second surge in FAFSA completion in May and June. As of August 12, 2016, 261 seniors had submitted a FAFSA (230 completed), an 8% increase from 2015 submissions.

Molina FAFSA completion rates plateaued after priority deadline but had two surges in late April and early June

Weekly FAFSA completions over time – Molina HS



School of Science and Engineering (Dallas ISD)

Contact: Sara Urquidez at smiller@aspdallas.org or
Naveen Kashyap at NKashyap@dallasisd.org

- ✓ Preparing a senior binder with key literature relating to FAFSA, TASFA, and CSS PROFILE, including deadlines
- ✓ Asking students to request a tax transcript for the previous tax year (2014)

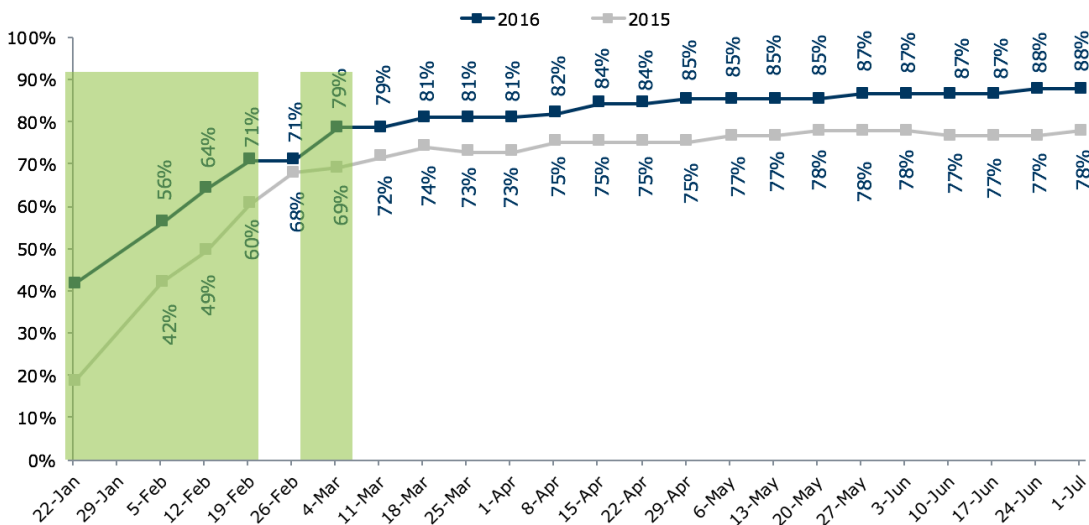
Each year we prepare a senior binder with key literature relating to FAFSA, TASFA, and CSS PROFILE, including deadlines. That information is reviewed with students so they are prepared for the coming school year.

Beginning with the Class of 2015-2016, we asked students to request a tax transcript for the previous tax year (2014). If we were able to access it successfully, then students knew 1) what a tax transcript looked like, 2) how to get one, and 3) that the method their parents used to file taxes the previous year should work well for the present year. Those students who were able to receive the 2014 tax transcript had fewer problems using the IRS Data Retrieval Tool and securing a 2015 tax transcript later for verification purposes.

For the Class of 2016-2017, we required **all** students to request a tax transcript for 2015 to be ready when FAFSA opens on October 1, 2016. Our hope is that using the IRS Data Retrieval Tool on October 1st will be a smoother process if they are able to access the 2015 transcript. If they cannot request the transcript, we have time to fix whatever problem they encounter before FAFSA opens later this year.

SEM FAFSA completion rates started higher than 2015 and maintained growth throughout the year

Weekly FAFSA completions over time – Science & Engineering HS



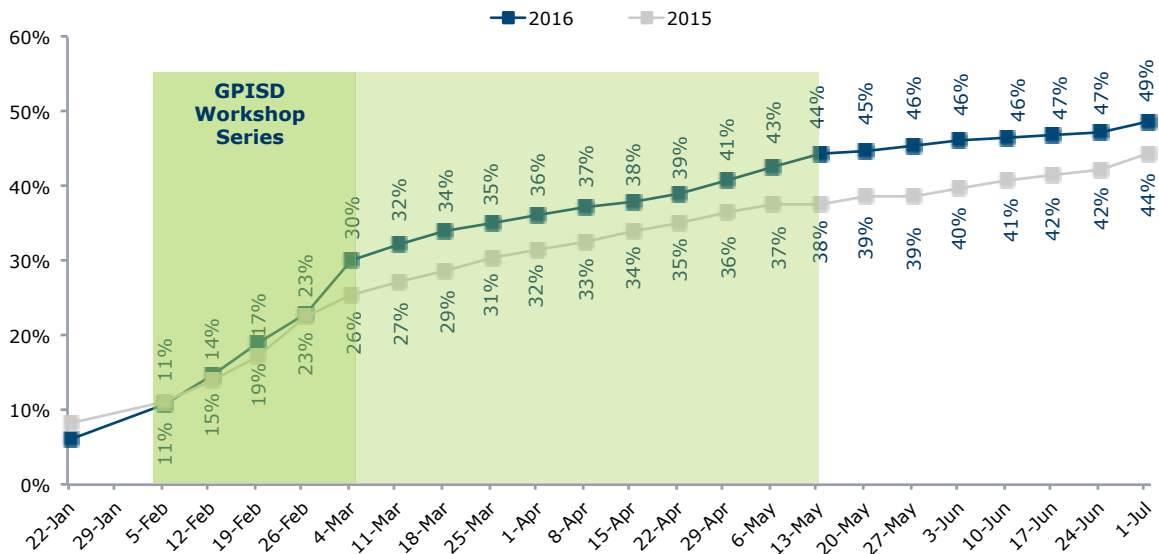
South Grand Prairie High School (Grand Prairie ISD)
 Contact: Citali Molina at (972) 343-1551 or citali.molina@gpisd.org

- SGPHS had a new staff during the 2015-2016, yet they showed gains by:
- ✓ Talking about FAFSA to the students in the December to have them start thinking about it
 - ✓ Persistently stressing the importance of completing it
 - ✓ Creating various incentives to promote completing FAFSA (call outs)
 - ✓ Holding FAFSA workshops once a week across the district where students could start the process, including more bilingual speaking personnel to help

South Grand Prairie High School had a new staff during the 2015-2016 year, but despite the learning curve, they still showed gains. They started talking about FAFSA to the students in the December to have them start thinking about it. The counselors' persistence in stressing the importance of completing it helped. They created various incentives to promote completing FAFSA (call outs), held FAFSA workshops once a week across the district where students could start the process, and also had more bilingual speaking personnel to help. As a result, South Grand Prairie HS had more students come in to talk about FAFSA, coming into the office to get help, and more award letters brought to the counselors for help interpreting.

South Grand Prairie FAFSA completion rates quickly surpassed 2015 rates and continued to climb

Weekly FAFSA completions over time – South Grand Prairie HS



Uplift Williams Prep (Uplift Education)

Contact: Brittney Cooper (404) 803-4061 or bricooper@uplifteducation.org

- ✓ Requiring seniors to complete the FAFSA Forecaster in order to identify scholars who may have difficulty obtaining necessary tax information
- ✓ Hosting a variety of parent/scholar info sessions, open labs, and targeted workshops
- ✓ Requiring all seniors to complete monthly surveys to gauge their progression
- ✓ Making a concerted effort for all seniors to work with their families to request their 2015 tax transcripts in order to be prepared for the verification process
- ✓ Creating a number of handouts in English and Spanish,

For the 2015-2016 FAFSA cycle, the team of counselors at Uplift Williams implemented a multifaceted approach when working with seniors and their families. Prior to January, seniors were required to complete the FAFSA Forecaster in order to influence their college lists and identify scholars who may have difficulty obtaining necessary tax information. In terms of parent outreach, we hosted a variety of parent/scholar information sessions that included general information sessions with financial aid professionals, open labs to provide attendees with access to computers and knowledgeable volunteers, and targeted workshops for those selected for verification or completing the TASFA. In addition, we required all seniors to complete monthly surveys to gauge their progression through the financial aid process and developed action steps for each scholar based on their response. As scholars submitted their FAFSAs, the team inspected their SAR reports for potential errors and identified scholars who may have been selected for verification. Beginning in February, we made a concerted effort for all seniors to work with their families to request their 2015 tax transcripts in order to be prepared for the verification process. Lastly, our team created a number of handouts in English and Spanish, to walk families through the FSA ID creation process, general FAFSA FAQs, and Department of Education contact information.

Williams Prep FAFSA surged above 2015 rates just before the state priority deadline and continued to grow

Weekly FAFSA completions over time – Williams Prep HS

