Alabama Cash for College Dashboard Data Addendum

About Cash for College

Cash for College encourages Alabama high schools to rally around the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) completion. It is an initiative of Alabama Possible, a statewide nonprofit organization that removes barriers to prosperity in Alabama through education, collaboration, and advocacy. Cash for College is part of the Alabama College Campaign partnering with the Alabama Department of Education to promote College Application Week and that every graduating senior apply to at least one college and complete the FAFSA.

About the FAFSA

The FAFSA is required for any student seeking federal and state financial aid, including grants and loans in all colleges. The federal government provides more than $150 billion in grants, loans and work-study funds each year for students to attend college or career school. Many Alabama students qualify for Pell Grants of up to $5,920 per year. According to the Department of Education, 9 out of 10 students who complete a FAFSA attend college the following fall. The FAFSA application opens October 1 and students should complete the FAFSA as soon as possible due to limited funds and colleges' application and admission deadlines.

About the Data

School-level FAFSA completion rates were calculated using data from three sources: the U.S. Department of Education Central Processing System, the Alabama Department of Education's Data Center, and self-reported data for select schools participating in the Cash for College program that are not included in federal or state data sources.

About U.S. Department of Education Data

The U.S. Department of Education provides school-level FAFSA submission and completion data for 12th graders by state, bi-weekly from October to June and monthly thereafter. This data can be accessed at https://studentaid.ed.gov/sa/about/data-center/student/application-volume/fafsa-completion-high-school. Included in this dashboard is school-level FAFSA completion data from October 1 to June 30 comparing current and previous year data.

About Alabama Department of Education Data

All other non-FAFSA school data included in the data dashboard, including school names, enrollments, and free- or reduced-price lunch rates were provided by the Alabama Department of Education's Data Center. Exceptions include private or alternative or sub-division schools participating in the Cash for College program that do not have state-level data. In these cases,

the data is collected and self-reported from those individual schools when they sign up to participate in the Cash for College program.

Matching FAFSA Completion and Public School Data

Official public school names do not always match the federally reported FAFSA Completion data due to the fact that when students submit the FAFSA, they self-report the name of the school and its city. The names therefore vary and are subject to error. The U.S. Department of Education attempts to combine school variations into a single school when possible, but sometimes duplicate exists. In building the Data Dashboard, Alabama Possible analyzed school names and locations and contacted school counselors to determine duplicates and matches and requested that the U.S. Department of Education remove the duplicates. In future cases where school names fail to match, these schools may not be included in the data dashboard.

Schools Missing from the Data Dashboard

The Alabama Cash for College data dashboard allows users to track progress of schools as well as make accurate and reasonable comparisons using FAFSA completion data. The following schools were omitted from the data dashboard:

- Schools that lack FAFSA completion data from the U.S. Department of Education
- All private schools that did not sign up to participate in the Cash for College program
- Public schools with no enrollment and Free and Reduced Lunch percentage data that did not sign up to participate in the Cash for College program
- Schools listed on U.S. Department of Education FAFSA reports whose names were determined too ambiguous to assign a match
- Schools identified as primarily serving adult students

Limitations and other considerations

Schools without FAFSA Completion Data

In an effort to use official data sources, Alabama Possible uses FAFSA completion data collected and reported by the U.S. Department of Education. This list does not include every Alabama high school. For example, an alternative school may have its FAFSA completions included under its district's home school. We are unable to include any schools that lack FAFSA completion data.

Students Age 19 or More

The U.S. Department of Education limits published data to high school seniors no older than 19 who are first-time filing applicants who will have received their high school diploma by the start of the school year to which they are applying for aid. This means their reports do not include high school seniors older than 18. However, the Alabama Department of Education and self-reported school enrollment data may include demographic information from students ages 0-21. This limitation may decrease FAFSA completion rates for schools with 12th graders ages 19-21 that are included in enrollment counts but not FAFSA completion counts.

Students without Social Security Numbers

Students without social security numbers are unable to complete the FAFSA. Because students are not required to submit a social security number to enroll in public schools, it is unknown how many 12th graders enrolled in a particular school are unable to complete a FAFSA. For this reason, some schools with high immigrant or international student enrollments may have lower FAFSA completion rates compared to other schools.

Student Enrollment Changes

Another data limitation are possible changes in enrollment during the school year. Alabama Department of Education 12th grade enrollment counts included on the dashboard may not reflect changes in enrollment taking place over time due to student migration, attrition or other causes. Because FAFSA completion counts do reflect counts recorded over time, FAFSA completion rates may not be accurate.

Schools with less than 5 FAFSAs completed

The U.S. Department of Education indicates schools with students completing between 1 and 5 FAFSAs with a "<5" designator. Schools with <5 FAFSAs completed have no FAFSA completion percentage calculated because it is impossible to determine the precise number of FAFSAs that were completed. Schools with " <5" FAFSAs completed therefore have "N/A" indicated for their FAFSA completion percentage and improvement rate. To learn more about the FAFSA completion rates found in the U.S. Department of Education's reports, including the methodology used, data details, assumptions and frequently asked questions, please visit their site.

Key of Terms and Indicators Used on the Alabama Cash for College Data Dashboard

Completed FAFSA: A completed FAFSA is necessary to determine eligibility for federal, state, and other sources of financial aid. When a student submits the application with requirements missing, it is rejected by the U.S. Department of Education's Central Processing System at which time students are notified of actions required to complete it. U.S. Department of Education includes school data on FAFSA submissions in its reports, but they are not included as a part of the dashboard.

Completion Percentage: Percentage of 12th grade students at each school who have completed a FAFSA for the application cycle during the school year. For example, for the 2017-2018 school year it is data for the 2018-2019 application cycle from the U.S. Department of Education. For the 2016-2017 school year, it is data from the 2017-2018 application cycle.

Improvement Rate: Percent change calculation of the Completion Percentage between the current and last year within the same time period. May be a negative value if there has been no increase in values within the time period.

Low-Income Rate: Percentage of students enrolled at each Alabama public school eligible for a free- or reduced-price lunch provided by the Alabama Department of Education or schools self-reporting via the Cash for College program. Data will always reflect the most current year available. Note: The Alabama Department of Education does not publish current school year data at the beginning of the school year or before the start of the FAFSA application on October 1.

District: School district provided by the Alabama Department of Education or by schools self-reporting via the Cash for College program. Private schools are listed as Private within this search field.

School City, County and Zip Code: Relates to the physical location of each school (not mailing address or assigned school district).

School Name: Full school name provided by the Alabama Department of Education or by schools self-reporting via the Cash for College program.

School Size: This search field is based on a school's number of enrolled 12th graders. The selected answers represent small, medium, and large schools with 1-99 representing small, 100-199 representing medium, and 200+ representing large. Data will always reflect the most current year available. Note: The Alabama Department of Education does not publish current school year data at the beginning of the school year or before the start of the FAFSA application on October 1.

Cash for College: These are Alabama high schools that have signed up to participate in the Cash for College program and set FAFSA completion goals in the current year. It is possible for all high schools in Alabama to participate in the program. Sign up for the Cash for College program is on a rolling basis and schools that sign up to participate after October 1 will be updated as participants in the dashboard on a weekly basis (assuming they have FAFSA completion data from U.S. Department of Education).