LEVEL UP VIRGINIA

EVENTS GUIDE

ECMC College Nights

VIRGINIA COLLEGE APPLICATION WEEK

FAF$A NEXT

DECISION DAY VA

2024-2025

LEVEL UP
VIRGINIA

Level Up Virginia Events are co-sponsored by the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV), the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE), Educational Credit Management Corporation (ECMC) and GEAR UP Virginia.

LEVEL UP VIRGINIA EVENTS OVERVIEW

From finding the best fit to meeting application deadlines to figuring out how to finance it all, the road to postsecondary education can be daunting. To help make your journey smooth, Level Up Virginia offers a series of informational, hands-on events designed to help Virginia students and families level up their quest for education beyond high school!

Level Up Virginia Events are co-sponsored by the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV), the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE), Educational Credit Management Corporation (ECMC) and GEAR UP Virginia.

PREPARE

ECMC (Educational Credit Management Corporation) has sponsored College Nights in Virginia every year since 2007. Participating locations across the Commonwealth provide opportunities for students and families to learn about planning and paying for college.

APPLY

Virginia College Application Week is part of a national initiative designed to increase the number of first-generation and low-income students pursuing a college degree or other higher education credential. In Virginia, select public high schools across the state coordinate a week of activities that provide their students hands-on college application assistance and resources, including application fee waivers and informational materials and support from postsecondary institutions.

FINANCE

FAF$A Next is an annual statewide initiative designed to increase completion of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) throughout the Commonwealth. ECMC and SCHEV partner with select Virginia public high schools to host events public high school seniors and their families receive hands-on assistance completing the FAFSA.
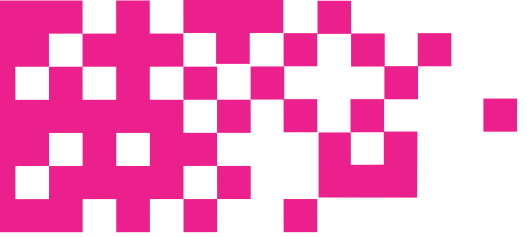
DECIDE

Decision Day, sometimes referred to as Signing Day, celebrates the success of high school seniors in pursuing postsecondary education, workforce training or military. Through celebrations and recognitions, participating schools support students in making final decisions and remind them of next steps.

More information about Level Up Virginia events can be found at www.levelupvirginia.org/events.

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About the event

ECMC College Nights are free, interactive events designed to help high school students and their families understand the college-planning process. The one-hour presentation is most beneficial for juniors, but all high school students and their families will learn from it. Events include a presentation and supporting materials to help students:

- Understand how education can change their lives
- Choose their education path
- Learn how to pay for college
- Identify what steps they can take now to prepare for education beyond high school

As the sponsor, ECMC provides the PowerPoint presentation (with complete speaker's notes), Opportunities booklets to supplement the presentation, and electronic promotional materials.

Any high school, postsecondary institution or nonprofit organization can be a site host. Only high schools and postsecondary institutions are eligible to award an ECMC College Nights scholarship. Site hosts may pick a date to hold their event in person or virtually anytime between October 1, 2024-April 30, 2025. Once site hosts register online to host an event, the ECMC College Nights website will be updated with the event date and location. If your ECMC College Nights date needs to change, please let us know by emailing collegenights@ecmc.org.
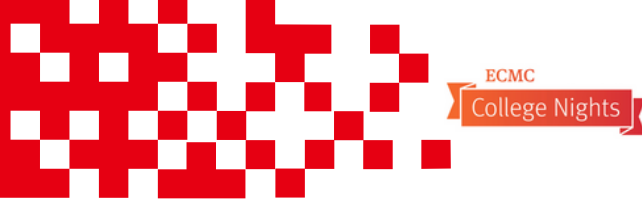
One scholarship will be awarded live at the end of each event for the first 130 registered events. Any high school student who attends an ECMC College Nights event, either in person or virtually, will be eligible to enter the drawing for a $1,000 scholarship. Site hosts can sign up to host more than one event, but they cannot award more than one scholarship. Note that if schools co-host an event together, one scholarship will be awarded per event (not per school).

ECMC will notify site hosts by email at the time of registration whether or not they will receive a scholarship to award. Shortly after registering, ECMC will mail a blank scholarship award certificate to the site host so that the site host can award the certificate onsite at their event (or provide it to the student at a later date for virtual events).

Site hosts who are put on the scholarship waitlist are still encouraged to take attendance at their event. Waitlisted site hosts will be notified via email if a scholarship becomes available, and the scholarship can be awarded to an eligible student even if the drawing takes place after the event.

Only students who attend the event and are present for all four sections of the presentation are eligible to enter and win a scholarship. Parents/guardians cannot enter the drawing on behalf of a student. Scholarships are available to high school students only, grades 9-12. Students in grades eight and below and currently enrolled college students are ineligible to win an ECMC College Nights scholarship. Students may only win one ECMC College Nights scholarship per academic year.

For in-person events, ECMC provides an ECMC College Nights Student Sign-In Sheet to collect student attendance. At the end of the presentation, the site host can use a tool or app to select a random student by registration number (such as Google Random Number Generator) to select the winning student.

For virtual events, site hosts can create an online sign-in sheet (such as Google Forms) to collect student information (student name, student email, student phone, student address, parent/guardian name, parent/guardian email, parent/guardian phone, high school and grade). If SurveyMonkey is preferred, email collegenights@ecmc.org to request a survey template be shared with you to help you collect this information. At the end of the presentation, the site host can use a tool to select a random student by registration number (such as Google Random Number Generator) to select the winning student.
Site hosts will notify ECMC of the winning student by completing the ECMC College Nights Post-Event Survey.

In addition to providing attendance numbers, feedback on the event, and completed sign-in sheets (optional), site hosts will provide the winning student's name and contact information. For the scholarship winner, site hosts will be asked to provide the student name, student email, student phone, student address, parent/guardian name, parent/guardian email, parent/guardian phone, high school and grade level. ECMC will then email claim instructions to the student and parent/guardian.

Instructions for claiming the ECMC College Nights scholarship are also provided on the back of the award certificate mailed to the school. Lastly, this information can also be found at www.collegenights.org under the "Scholarships" tab.

Select a site host

The site host will be the primary contact for the event. The site host will publicize the event, coordinate the logistics as well as supervise the planning, execution and follow-up of the event.

Build a team

To help ensure that your school's event is a success, it is important that the site host recruit 3-15 team members who are willing to support the planning and execution of the event by providing input and assisting with various tasks. Enlist students (former and current), counselors, teachers, local college and community college financial aid office staff and other campus staff to help plan and conduct the event.

It is recommended your team of volunteers include the following:

- Host/speakers: four people (one person for each section of the presentation)
- Check-in table: two people minimum
- Decoration and clean-up: two people or more, as needed
- Translator: one person (only needed if you will have Spanish-speaking and/or hearing-impaired attendees)
- Food servers: four people if you will be providing food/beverages

Choose event date(s) and time(s)

Your school may choose to offer one or more events throughout the academic year. Consider days/times that usually get the most attendance for after-school events and are accessible to families. Your school may want to set an alternative date in case your event needs to be postponed.

Secure a space for the event

Choose a space with sufficient capacity for your anticipated attendees. Ensure the space has audio-visual equipment (LCD projector, screen and microphone). ECMC will provide the presentation in a PowerPoint format so a laptop is also required. We strongly recommend all presenters use a microphone during the presentation.

Create a schedule for your event

Onsite sample schedule
5:30-6:00 p.m.: Students and families arrive and enjoy refreshments (if provided)
6:00-6:45 p.m.: ECMC College Nights presentation
6:45-7:00 p.m.: Q&A session

Virtual Sample Schedule
5:45-6:00 p.m.: Students and families log into virtual presentation
6:00-6:45 p.m.: College Nights presentation
6:45-7:00 p.m.: Q&A session

Consider enhancing your event by adding a college fair to it. You can also kick off the event by having a guest speaker, such as a current senior who can share their college preparation experience so far, a former high school student who has recently graduated and gone to college, or a parent/guardian who is open to sharing their education and career journey.
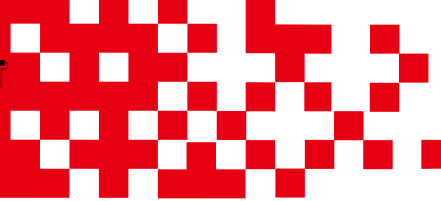
Site hosts should advertise the event through several communication means to ensure that all students and parents/guardians are aware and prepared to attend the event. Advertising is essential as it will also help raise awareness about the importance of attending college.

ECMC has provided the following customizable electronic materials for your event:
- Flyers (full-page and half-page)
- Postcards
- Marketing poster
- Suggested copy for advertising
- Social media image

Ways to advertise include:
- School website
- District text or phone outreach system
- Intercom announcements
- Newsletters
- Banners/posters
- Social media pages
- Letters or postcards mailed to students and parents/guardians
- Emails sent to students and parents/guardians
- Local media
- Public service announcement

ECMC's Opportunity Booklet
ECMC's Opportunities: Preparing for College Guide and Workbook is referenced throughout the presentation. Site hosts are encouraged to order at least one copy for every student in the junior class, but you are welcome to order as many as you like. Booklets are available in English and Spanish.

You can order booklets here. Please allow up to four weeks for delivery. Digital and PDF formats are also available online at www.ecmc.org/opportunities.
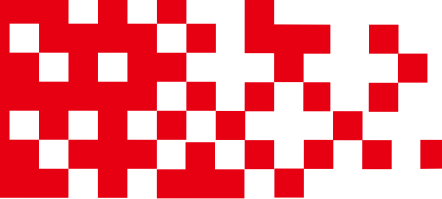
Refreshments

Refreshments are a great way to encourage students and families to join your ECMC College Nights event. Many local franchise-owned restaurants (e.g., pizza parlors, sub shops, delis) welcome the opportunity to participate in community-related programs and activities. Offer to advertise who provided the refreshments and provide them with a thank you during your program.

Presenter Guidelines and Presentation Materials

Select knowledgeable, dynamic presenters for your event. If possible, choose a different presenter for each section of the presentation. Often, a variety of speakers can keep the audience's attention. Is your event being held in California, Colorado, Connecticut, Minnesota, Oregon or Virginia? Contact your local ECMC The College Place (TCP) Director to request they be one of your speakers. We ask that you avoid securing presenters from for-profit organizations, such as financial planners and others. We want to keep our events free from sales pitches, whether implied or real.

Presenters need to pay close attention to time. Decide on a schedule and stick to it. Encourage questions and engagement, but don't let these make you late.

The presentations are available in both English and Spanish. However, the speaker's notes are only available in English. Note that the presentations are not to be shared with students and parents/guardians. They are only to be used by site hosts during an ECMC College Nights event.

Visit https://www.ecmc.org/studentseducators/college-access-centers to access the PowerPoint presentations online. The speaker's notes are embedded into the presentation, so you will need to download the presentation in order to access them. Please download the presentation well in advance of your event in case you run into technical difficulties. It is also encouraged that you print the presentation as "Notes Pages" as a backup, which will include the speaker's notes.

No modifications to the PowerPoint presentation are allowed. Location-specific slides can be presented by the site host at the end of the presentation, but the ECMC College Nights slide template may not be used to share this content. In addition, the name of the event should not be altered from "ECMC College Nights."

Post-Event Tasks (due no later than May 5, 2025)

After the event, you will be required to provide attendance numbers to ECMC through the ECMC College Nights Post-Event Survey. Please include the total number of students and parents/guardians. This is also where you will report your scholarship winner. Review the Scholarship Information section for more details.

ECMC COLLEGE NIGHTS CHECKLIST
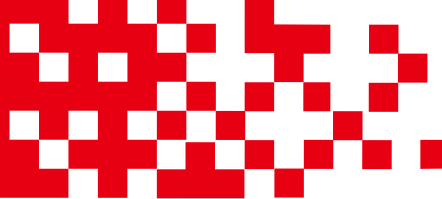
Planning Your ECMC College Nights Event

- ☐ Determine location, date and time of event
- ☐ Secure translation services, if needed
- ☐ Order ECMC's Opportunities booklets at least four weeks prior to event date
- ☐ Reserve room and ensure your location has audio-visual equipment (LCD projector, screen and microphone)
- ☐ Advertise event with posters, email, phone, text, social media, etc.
- ☐ Select team members to help carry out a successful event, including knowledgeable, dynamic presenters
- ☐ Solicit local vendors to donate refreshments

Two Weeks Before Event

- ☐ Confirm room reservation
- ☐ If you will be offering refreshments, place order with local vendor
- ☐ Organize and print any needed materials
- ☐ Send and post reminders of event to students and parents/guardians
- ☐ Download presentation and send to all speakers
- ☐ Review presentation speaker's notes

One Week Before Event

- ☐ Load presentation onto laptop
- ☐ Verify projector and microphone will be available
- ☐ Verify a screen or blank wall will be available to project presentation onto
- ☐ Verify electrical outlet for projector and laptop
- ☐ Obtain extension power cord and a surge protector with multiple outlets
- ☐ Validate equipment needs with translator, if using
- ☐ Send reminders of event via social media, email, newsletter, etc.

Day of Event

- ☐ Mention your ECMC College Nights event on the morning announcements and other applicable school announcements
- ☐ Post event reminder via social media, email, text, etc.
- ☐ Gather supplies (sign-in sheet, scholarship award certificate, Opportunities booklets, etc.)
- ☐ Download a random number generator
- ☐ Verify room seating is set up and that room cleanliness and temperature are appropriate
- ☐ Set up refreshments (optional)
- ☐ Test projector, laptop and microphone
- ☐ Set up decorations (optional) and materials (Opportunities booklets, handouts, etc.)
- ☐ Take photos of event

Day of Event

- ☐ Complete post-event survey with scholarship winner contact information and attendee count
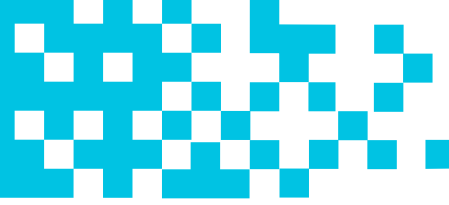
About the Event

Virginia College Application Week (VCAW) is part of the American College Application Campaign (ACAC), an effort of ACT's Center for Equity in Learning, a national initiative to increase the number of first-generation and low-income students who pursue a postsecondary education. The purpose is to help high school seniors navigate the college admissions process and ensure each participating student submits at least one admissions application.

This year in Virginia, VCAW will be from October 21-25, 2024. However, there may be variations to the scheduled week in order to accommodate school-specific needs. As students depart the event, they should be provided with information about the FAFSA to ensure that they apply for financial aid as part of the enrollment process.

**Responsibilities of Participating High Schools**

High schools implementing a successful VCAW event at their school will include the following as part of their initiative:

- Hosting a program during the school day that is open to any student interested in applying with a focus on engaging first-generation students, low-income students and students who may otherwise not apply to college. Virginia's initiative is a week long, but most schools host events on specific days, depending on the size of the senior class.
- Securing computer and internet access.
- Identifying and convening a school support team comprised of staff and community members.
- Leveraging support of the school team to ensure that students are prepared to participate in the event (essays are completed prior to the program, students have researched the institutions to which they want to apply, etc.).
- Using provided educational and marketing materials
- Engaging the local community, families and others through volunteer opportunities, informational letters and advertising the program.
- Creating a college-going culture within the school, not just for seniors, through a variety of approaches – some suggestions are included in this guide.
- Collecting data as requested by the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV) including, but not limited to, the number of students participating and the number of applications submitted.
- Following-up with students after the event to ensure applications submitted are complete (transcripts, college entrance exam scores, letters of recommendation, submitting a complete FAFSA, etc.).

VCAW Contact Information

For questions about VCAW and the LUV campaign in general, contact SCHEV at levelup@schev.edu.
For questions regarding event stipends, email ECMC at levelup@ecmc.org.
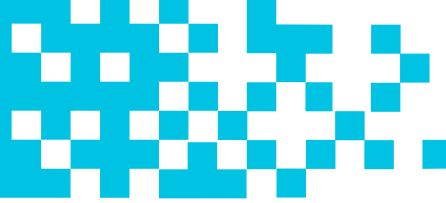
Program Implementation at the School-Level: Site Coordinator

Each high school will identify a site coordinator, typically a high school counselor or college advisor, who will be responsible for implementing the program locally. Level Up Virginia has provided tools and resources that participating high schools can use or customize to your school's program.

Planning and Communicating the Event

It is important that your school communicate the opportunity to students, their families and your local community. Suggestions for communicating and marketing your school's VCAW event are available in this manual and on the Level Up Virginia website.

Volunteers are a critical component of many schools' VCAW event. To assist your school in identifying volunteers from your local community, sample information letters intended for community partners and families of your seniors can be found on the Level Up Virginia website.

It is important to begin planning for the program as early in the school year as possible. A preferred timeline to guide the planning of your school's event is provided in this manual.

Identifying Stakeholders and Convening a School Team

Schools that have successfully implemented Virginia College Application Week have done so through the collaboration of multiple stakeholders. A key approach to engaging stakeholders is the creation of a school team that will provide input on and support for the various preparatory steps and logistics necessary to implement a successful VCAW at the school level. Below you will find a list of recommended local resources and resource audit worksheet that you can use to identify the key stakeholders in your community. Keep in mind that this list is not exhaustive, and you should engage any other community partners that have a vested interest in college access and success. When planning and implementing your school's VCAW, you should follow all division and school policies regarding non-school personnel visiting, volunteering or otherwise assisting with your school's program.

Potential community partners include:
- Admissions representatives from colleges (two-year and four-year)
- Local business leaders
- Local Chamber of Commerce
- College access providers (federally-funded, state-funded or community-based)
- Faith-based community organizations
- Non-profit organizations such as the YMCA, 4H, Boys and Girls Club, etc.
- PTA and other parents/family members who want to be engaged in the process
- Student leaders in your high school
- Retired school personnel
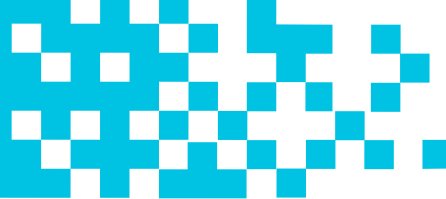- Local government officials and/or elected representatives.
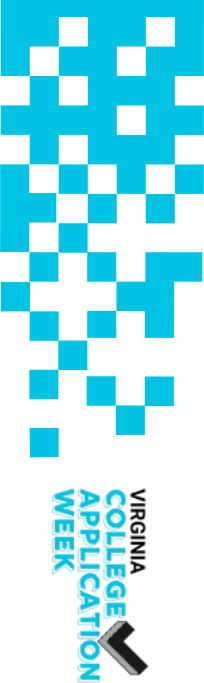
College Application Event Resource Audit

Level Up Virginia Events held at participating high schools are collaborative initiatives. As such, engaging education partners from the local community is highly recommended at the school level. This worksheet is intended to assist your school in identifying potential partners to assist with the planning and implementation of your school's College Application event. The list is not exhaustive and other key stakeholders and initiatives in your community should be included in the College Application Week event as determined by your school's leadership. Keep in mind when planning for engagement of your school team, that you should follow all district and school policies regarding non-school personnel visiting, volunteering or otherwise assisting with your school's program.

School Partners

Use the table below to identify potential partners in your school's College Application Week event. Space has been provided at the bottom of the table for you to add additional education partners, if needed.

Potential Partner	Name of Contact	Email Address	Phone Number
Admissions Representative from local college			
Local business leader			
Local Chamber of Commerce			
Community-based college access initiative			
Faith-based community representative			
Non-profit representative			
PTA or parent representative			
Student representative			

School Team: Agenda Items for Your Convening

As outlined above, a school team comprised of a variety of stakeholders is extremely effective in creating support and buy-in for your school's College Application Week event. There are a variety of topics that can be and should be discussed with your school team.

Some of the key discussion topics for the school team are:

- What is the College Application Week event?
- Role of school team
- Date(s) for the event (Oct. 21- 25, 2024)
- Communication strategy: student, parents, school staff, community
- Pre-Application events – ensuring students are prepared
- Pre-Application events – creating or enhancing a college-going culture for all students
- Creating a schedule of activities and opportunities that allow all eligible students to prepare and participate
- Space and equipment
- Mayoral Proclamation
- Recruiting students for the initiative
- Including underclassmen in the program
- Engaging volunteers
- Evaluation and data collection
- Application follow-up – ensuring the college and financial aid processes are completed

After your College Application Week event, your school team should meet to celebrate and debrief on the successes and challenges of the current year's initiative – feel free to use the topics above to guide the discussion. The debriefing meeting should occur as close to the conclusion of your school's College Application Week event as possible. By quickly assessing what worked and what areas need improvement, your school team can get a jump-start on planning next year's program and create an action plan to follow up with participating students who need to complete the college application and financial aid application processes.

Use this QR code or visit www.levelupvirginia.org/VCAW to find all of the resources needed to successfully plan and prepare for your Virginia College Application Week Event.
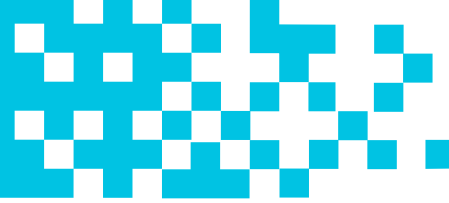
There are a variety of activities that high school site coordinators can do prior to, during and after the school's College Application event to ensure it is successful and meaningful for participating students. These activities are outlined below. Sample materials listed below are located on the VCAW Event Page located on www.levelupvirginia.org under the "Decide" tab. A site coordinator check list is also available to assist you with tracking implementation of activity.

Pre-event Activities: Creating a College-Going Culture and Getting Students Prepared

There are several activities that schools participating in the College Application Week program can do prior to the event in order to prepare students for the event and to generate enthusiasm and support for the program, both within the high school and in the community. This section of the manual focuses on pre-event activities that high school site coordinators are encouraged to utilize as they plan for the program.

- **Activity Resume**
- **College Application Worksheet**
- **"Ask Me About It!" Signs**
- **Promotional Materials including:**
  - Information letters to families and community partners
  - Phone blast templates
  - Sample press release
  - Mayoral Proclamations
  - Social Media template
- **Application Fee Waiver flyer**
  - Students who are eligible for fee waivers associated with college entrance exams (SAT or ACT) are also usually eligible for college application fee waivers. It is important to begin talking with students about this payment option early in the school year.

During your College Application Week

You have completed all of the planning for your College Application Week program and due to the pre-event activities, your students are prepared and the community is engaged in this exciting initiative. Use these activities and resources to help make your event a success!

- Ask Me! Button, Badges, Stickers
- Volunteer Tasks
- Student Instructions on the Day of the Event
- Sign-in/Sign-out Sheet
- Fee Waiver Chart
- Student Survey
- Photo Release
- Higher Education Contact Sheet
- Reminders and Recognition
- Next Steps Handout
- FAF$A Next! Save-the-Date

After your College Application Week

Congratulations! You have successfully implemented College Application Week for your students and started them on the pathway to enrolling in college next fall. After the event, it is important to thank the volunteers who assisted you in the process, communicate to the community and the State Coordinator about your successes and update your school team. The following templates and suggestions are provided to assist you with those efforts.

- Volunteer Thank You Letters
- Post-Event Press Releases
- Other Follow-Up

Reminder!

Participating participating schools must turn in their site coordinator survey by December 6th, 2024!
A link to an electronic survey will be provided to you closer to the event for you to share with participating students in order to get their feedback on the event. Another electronic survey will be issued to each Site Coordinator to complete and provide comments and summarize event information.
Supporting institutions will also be assessed.

As we all know, the journey to successfully enrolling in postsecondary education does not end with the submission of a college application. There are several more steps that each participating student will need to complete over the next few months including, but not limited to, submitting college admissions test scores, submitting transcripts (current and final), submitting recommendation letters and completing and submitting a FAFSA. As such, it is important that your team implements a plan to follow up with participating students.

There are a variety of other activities your school can implement before College Application Week to help enhance the college-going culture and spread the word and excitement about the upcoming event.

Incorporate College Application Activities into the Classroom

These worksheets allow students to compile some of the most common information asked on college applications prior to the event. Ensure students have these well in advance of College Application Week so they can ask any questions they may have before they apply.

See if Civics or Social Studies teachers will lead a college match lesson where students research and identify schools that fit their academic records and goals well. Educated citizens are more likely to vote and be engaged in their communities.

Ask Math teachers if they would be willing to do a lesson on calculating financial need and repayment options. A critical component of a student being an informed consumer is having an understanding of the cost of attending college, the financial aid that is available and what, if any, repayment students will need to do. Investigating the average salaries of students who graduate with their major is an important piece of the research.

The Federal Student Aid Office at the US Department of Education has grade-level checklists and research tools to help students become academically and financially prepared for postsecondary education here: https://studentaid.gov/resources/prepare-for-college/checklists. These checklists and resources can be utilized in classroom preparation activities:

Marquee:

Use your school's marquee to inform and remind students, families, staff and the community about your upcoming College Application event. Post this information about two weeks prior to your school's event: "Virginia College Application Week
Class of 2025 Applying to College on (Dates)!"

College T-Shirt/Sweatshirt Day:

An easy and fun way to generate some excitement in your school is to host college t-shirt or sweatshirt days. Get everyone involved – students, staff and administrators! Many schools will host these types of college spirit days on Fridays for a few weeks prior to the school's College Application Week.

Door Decorating Contest:

Taking the "Ask Me!" signs one step further, have staff and administrators participate in a door decorating contest focused on the college they graduated from or what college means to them. Students can then vote on which door wins and the winner can be announced the week prior to your College Application program. See if a local store is willing to donate a gift card to the winning educator as a prize.

College Wall:

Use a bulletin board in the school to celebrate the applications submitted by your seniors. Have students write their names and the names of the colleges they applied to on construction paper and post it on the college wall. Students who apply prior to your College Application event can participate and get the wall started. Students who apply during your event can join the fun and add their notes after they submit their applications.

Morning Announcements:

Generate excitement by highlighting different colleges and universities during morning announcements in the weeks leading up to your event. Students, staff who are alums, community and alums/representatives from the colleges themselves can make the announcements. Make the announcements exciting by having speakers provide a unique fact about the school, sing the school's spirit song or other creative approaches.

Guest Speaker:

Engage a local community leader or a recent graduate of your high school who is attending college to speak with your senior class about the importance of attending college and applying early. Ask the speaker to encourage your students to take advantage of the College Application Week activities that will be hosted at your high school.

School Website:

Use a bulletin board in the school to celebrate the applications submitted by your seniors. Have students write their names and the names of the colleges they applied to on construction paper and post it on the college wall. Students who apply prior to your College Application event can participate and get the wall started. Students who apply during your event can join the fun and add their notes after they submit their applications.

Parent/Student Information Nights:

Invite students and their families to an information night before College Application Week. Provide details on why your school is hosting this event, the importance of students applying to college early in their senior year and the resources that are available for their students to plan and prepare for participation in the program. This is also a great opportunity to encourage family members to participate in your school's event.

The Federal Student Aid office at the US Department of Education has checklists for parents to use to track the steps their students need to take to prepare financially and academically for college: Generate excitement by highlighting different colleges and universities during morning announcements in the weeks leading up to your event. Students, staff who are alums, community, alums or representatives from the colleges themselves can make the announcements. Make the announcements exciting by having speakers provide a unique fact about the school, sing the school's spirit song or other creative approaches.

The Level Up Virginia website also has a checklist (English and Spanish) that may be downloaded for parents to begin supporting their freshman students through their senior year.

Opportunities in Virginia booklets are made available for bulk orders. In addition to a wealth of college-going information and worksheets, each booklet contains detailed college application and financial aid checklists for juniors and seniors to follow in preparation for college enrolment. Order Opportunities at Generate excitement by highlighting different colleges and universities during morning announcements in the weeks leading up to your event. Students, staff who are alums, community, alums or representatives from the colleges themselves can make the announcements. Make the announcements exciting by having speakers provide a unique fact about the school, sing the school's spirit song or other creative approaches.

Samples of the following materials are included in this manual. Common uses for each are detailed below. The materials have been updated by your College Application Week State Coordinator to reflect your state's implementation.

Volunteer Thank You Letters:

It is important to recognize the time, energy and effort that volunteers contributed to your school's College Application Week. A template thank you letter has been provided. Feel free to print this on school letterhead and mail it. Or, if you would like to send by email, that is a great way to show your appreciation as well.

## Post-Event Press Release:

You notified your community that the event was coming up – now make sure you communicate the success of your program! Use this template to update your local media about the impact of your program. (See page 47)

Other Follow Up:

As noted on the timeline and checklist included in this manual, it is important that your school team meet after College Application Week to discuss what worked and identify areas for improvement. This time can also be used to share the results of your program. Use the student sign-out sheet to understand the number of students who applied to college and the number of applications that were submitted. During this debrief meeting, the school team should identify a plan to follow up with participating students to ensure they complete the application process (by submitting transcripts, test scores, etc.) and that they submit a completed FAFSA.

Site Coordinator Survey:

Each Site Coordinator will be asked to submit an online evaluation of the 2024 College Application Week initiative. A link to the survey form will be posted on the LevelUpVirginia.org website for submission, soon after the end of the event. Data will be compiled by SCHEV and used to help demonstrate the value of the initiative and to improve future planning and events.
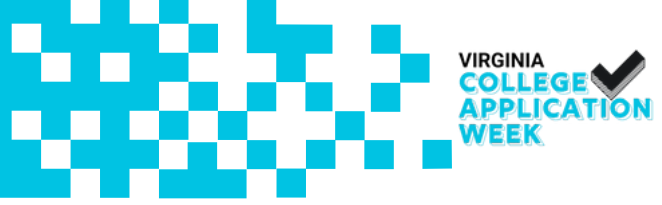
Level Up Virginia

www.levelupvirginia.org

Resources for Virginia students and families to help them plan for their education beyond high school.

Level Up Virginia: Virginia College Application Week

www.levelupvirginia.org/VCAW

All downloadable resources will be available on the website including school coordinators checklists, downloadable promotional materials.

ECMC Opportunities Booklet (available in hardcopy to order, PDF download and digital publication)

www.ecmc.org/opportunities

ACAC College Application Week Resources

https://equityinlearning.act.org/acac/resources/

Level All

www.levelall.com

College Access resources for counselors, students, and families.

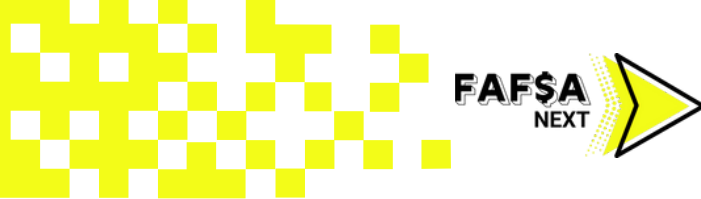**Fastweb (Scholarships)**

www.fastweb.com

National College Attainment Network(NCAN) Resource Page

https://www.ncan.org/page/k12_resources

National resources to support k=12 practitioners.

State Council of Higher Education for Virginia

www.schev.edu

About the Event

On behalf of the Educational Credit Management Corporation (ECMC) and State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV), we would like to thank you for hosting FAF$A Next event at your school!

FAF$A Next is a component of Level Up Virginia, which is a state initiative designed to provide students with assistance and resources from counselors, advisors and volunteers on how to prepare, apply, finance and decide on their postsecondary pathway. FAF$A Next is designed to increase FAFSA completion throughout the Commonwealth with a special focus on schools that serve a student population where 50 percent or more are eligible to participate in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) – the population in greatest need of guidance and resources to conquer the financial aid process. Many of the students who qualify for the NSLP will be eligible for free need-based financial aid, including the Federal Pell Grant. Completion of the FAFSA is the first step to receiving grants and other financial aid.

FAF$A Next sites are challenged to assist their students in completing the FAFSA by organizing and hosting at least one completion event for seniors on a date of their choosing. To help ensure success, it is vital that participating schools not only have interest but also existing resources, such as available staff to coordinate the event and a solid volunteer base.

Participating sites will receive the following:
- Site training webinar and manual
- Promotional materials
- Stipend
- Statewide scholarship drawing for a chance for students to win one of five scholarships
- School competition prizes are awarded to schools with the highest percentage of FAFSAs submitted

By participating in FAF$A Next, sites will enhance their schools' college-going culture – helping students make their dreams of not only being accepted into college but being able to afford to attend college, a reality.

Thank you for your commitment and dedication to increasing Virginia's FAFSA completion rates and college enrollment.

FAF$A Next Contact Information

For questions about FAF$A Next and the LUV campaign in general, contact SCHEV at levelup@schev.edu.
For questions regarding event stipends, email ECMC at levelup@ecmc.org.
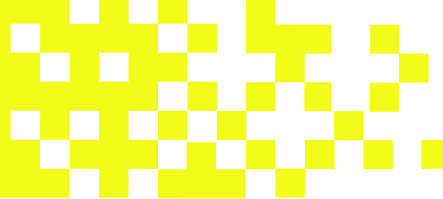
High Schools participating in FAF$A Next are expected to follow the requirements below:

- Host at least one FAFSA event. The event must be:
  - Held between December and February.
  - Open to any member of the senior class who attends the school and plans to attend college during the 2024-25 academic year. Schools should make a concerted effort to ensure that all seniors, especially those who are low-income, first-generation, and underrepresented, have access to the event and its resources.
  - Held on a day and time that is accessible to parents/families.
  - Held in a computer lab or library with computers, internet access, and printers
- Identify a site coordinator who will serve as the primary contact. This person will coordinate the logistics and supervise the planning and execution of the event.
- Build a site team to assist the site coordinator with the planning and execution of the event.
- Attend site training webinar
- Recruit financial aid representatives and other volunteers to assist with the event.
- Use the marketing materials and distribute informational materials provided by FAF$A Next as well as other appropriate resources to assist students/families with the financial aid process.
- Engage students, parents, school staff and administrators, and local college staff and government by promoting and advertising the event.
- Promote FAFSA completion overall by encouraging students and parents/families to attend the event and through other means (e.g., an appointment with a counselor, at home, other events, etc.).
- Distribute/collect student surveys.
- Complete site coordinator survey, which will require the reporting of data including, but not limited to, the number of attendees, student demographics, number of volunteers and contributed hours.
- Submit required information and documents as instructed (e.g., event schedule, sign-in sheets, student survey/scholarship entry form).

Use this QR code or visit www.levelupvirginia.org/fafsanext to find all of the resources needed to successfully plan and prepare for your FAF$A Next Event.
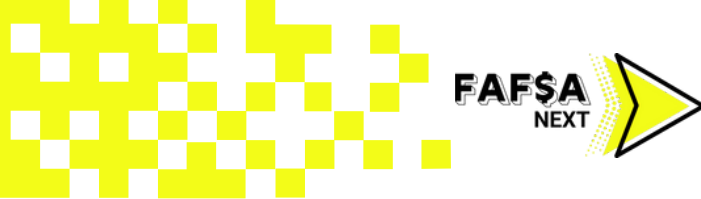
There are several tasks and activities that participating high schools should complete to ensure that it is successful and impactful.

Pre-Event Tasks

Select a site coordinator.
- The site coordinator will serve as the primary contact and supervise the planning and execution of the event. Usually, this position is filled by a staff member in the counseling department at the school.

Build a site team.
- To help ensure that your school's event is a success, it is important that the site coordinator recruit other staff members who are willing to support the planning and execution of the event by providing input and assisting with various tasks.
- Your site team may include administrators, school counselors, college access staff, college/career coaches, teachers, PTA members, and local college staff. The site coordinator may choose to assign team members to be responsible for one aspect of the event (e.g., student/parent coordinator, volunteer coordinator, etc.).

Hold team meetings.
- Your site team should communicate and meet often to discuss the event, brainstorm, and provide progress updates.
- Some important topics to cover:
  - About FAF$A Next
  - Importance of completing the FAFSA
  - Roles and responsibilities of the site team
  - Date and time of the event(s)
  - Event space, required equipment and needed supplies
  - Timeline for pre-event, during event and post-event tasks
  - Event schedule
  - Resources for students and parents
  - Communication plan for site team, volunteers, students, parents, school staff
  - Engaging students and parents
  - Recruiting and engaging volunteers
  - Survey and data collection

Choose event date(s) and time(s).
- Your school may choose to offer one or more events through February.
  - Consider days/times that usually get the most attendance for afterschool events and are accessible to parents/families (Saturdays are an option). Also, your school may want to set an alternate date in case your event is postponed due to the weather.
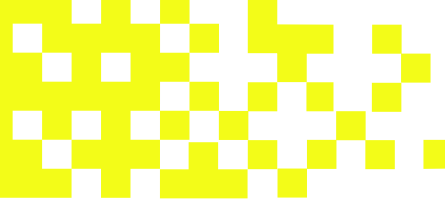
Attend FAF$A Next site training webinar (or view recording).
- The training will provide information to help your school plan and execute a successful event.

Recruit financial aid representatives and other volunteers.
- Schools are responsible for recruiting volunteers, including financial aid representatives, to help with the event.
  - It may be helpful to assign specific tasks to each volunteer.

Reserve event space and/or virtual platform.
- Ensure that the location has a sufficient number of computers with internet access and printers.
  - Students will need to print their FAFSA confirmation pages for their records.

Create a schedule for the event.
- It may be helpful to create an outline for the day of the event.

Submit a stipend request form.
- Provided that a stipend request form is submitted by the deadline, eligible FAF$A Next sites will receive a $50 stipend to be used for event purchases such as refreshments, incentives, advertisements, decorations, etc.

Advertise and promote frequently.
- An event is not successful if no one shows up. Sites should advertise the event through several means to ensure that all students and parents/families are aware and prepared to participate.
- Advertising is essential as it will also help raise awareness about FAFSA completion.
  - Suggestions for advertising:
    - Add event to the school's website, calendar, and marquee
    - Put up posters throughout the school, including counselors' offices and senior classrooms
    - Distribute flyers and other materials to students
    - Set computer screensavers as a reminder in computer lab/library
    - Make daily announcements and include information in the school newsletter
    - Post event details and financial aid resources on social media pages (Facebook, Twitter)
    - Send letters, emails, texts and robocall messages to students and parents/families
    - Incorporate into class and school activities (e.g., sporting events, pep rallies)

Distribute the "2024-25 FAFSA Information Checklist" and other resources to prepare students and parents for the event.
- Distribute informational materials to students and parents prior to the event. Providing this information will allow them to become familiar with the college financial aid process, better prepare them for completing the FAFSA, and save time during the event.
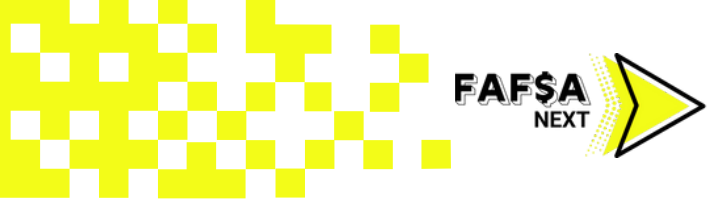
Day of Event Tasks

Welcome your volunteers.
- This is also the time to introduce the site team and other volunteers and provide an overview of the day's events, logistics, and specific assignments.

Set up registration table, refreshments, and decorations.
- The table should include the sign-in sheets and a box to place completed student survey/scholarship entry forms.

Prepare computers and printers.
- Both should be on and ready for use. It would be helpful to students and parents/families to have the FAFSA website (www.studentaid.gov/FAFSA) on the screen before the start of the event.

Post directional event signs.
- These signs can be posted inside and outside of the school to guide students/families to the event space.

Follow the site's event schedule and supervise the event.
- The site team should be available to assist volunteers, monitor all areas of the event, and complete any other duties necessary to ensure that the event runs smoothly.

Greet attendees.
- This is also the time to explain the event schedule and offerings, distribute materials (including student surveys/scholarship entry forms) and identify the volunteers.

Collect student surveys/scholarship entry forms.
- The site team will use the surveys to select one student to be entered into the statewide scholarship drawing.

Distribute the "After FAFSA: What Happens Next?" flyer.
- As students submit their surveys, make sure they take this flyer as it explains, in detail, the process after completing the FAFSA.

Post-Event Tasks

Complete the online site coordinator survey form by the provided deadline.
- Site coordinators will be asked to provide data such as attendance numbers, student demographics, use and distribution of promotional materials, scholarship entry information, number of volunteers and estimated hours, etc.

Forward photos from the event via email.
- If the site team chooses to take pictures during the event, please forward photos.

Follow up with students after the event.
- After students complete their FAFSA, they may be required to complete additional steps with the college. The "After FAFSA: What Happens Next?" flyer will help students through their next steps, but it would also be helpful if site coordinators reach out to students with any additional resources and reminders to ease the process.

23
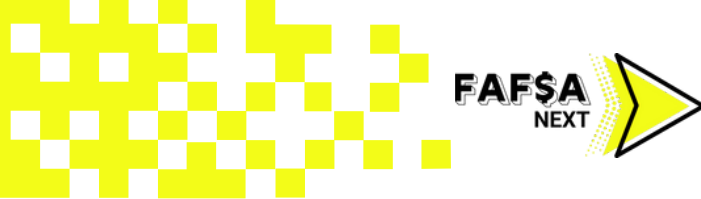
On-site volunteer support is essential to a successful event. Sites are responsible for securing volunteers, including financial aid representatives.

Who you should recruit:

- Financial aid representatives from local colleges and other organizations, counselors, advisors, college access staff, administrators, current and retired teachers, local college staff, language interpreters, IT staff, parents, PTA members, school alumni and community/student organizations.

Volunteer tasks include:

- Event set-up and breakdown, greeting, registering, and directing participants, monitoring computer labs, assisting with FAFSA completion, conducting financial aid presentations (if applicable), distributing handouts, collecting student surveys, etc.
- Don't misjudge the need for volunteers.
  - The number of volunteers will depend on the size of your event. It is recommended that each site have one financial aid representative for every ten students and at least five other volunteers to staff the event.

Hold a volunteer registration.

- You can do this by sending emails and letters or creating an online registration form through a free online survey website. However you choose to recruit, be sure to ask for contact information, provide details about the event, and explain how they can help make the event a success.

Schedule shifts.

- You may want to schedule one- or two-hour shifts if you have several volunteers.

Communicate with your volunteers early and often.

- Create a contact list with mailing and email addresses, and be sure to provide them with details such as event schedule, event address, assignments, arrival time, etc. Also, send them reminder notifications.

Conduct an orientation.

- This can be done a few days before or the morning of the event to review details of the event and responsibilities.

**Be familiar with visitor security policies at your site.**

- If necessary, provide security clearance information for all volunteers.

Thank your volunteers.

- Hold a follow-up meeting or send a thank-you letter or email to site team members and volunteers.

⚠️ Remind volunteers that they cannot collect, take or use participants' personal information. Volunteers do not receive compensation for their time.
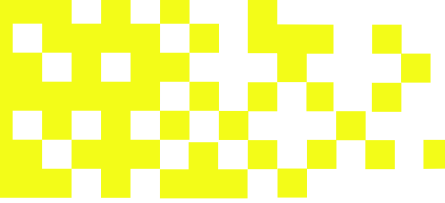
Hold a pre-event registration.
- To ensure participation, sites can hold a pre-registration for students. By doing so, this will help ensure that students and parents are held accountable and feel required to attend.

Distribute the "2024-25 FAFSA Information Checklist."
- Make sure students receive this checklist well in advance, so they have time to compile information and documents.

**Encourage parents/families to attend the event with their students.**
- The FAFSA may be difficult for students to complete by themselves.

Distribute additional resources to attendees, including the "After FAFSA: What Happens Next?" flyer.
- You may choose to create resource packets to hand out before or during the event.

> ⚠️ Encourage all students and parents/families to attend your FAF$A Next event. It is always good to have a FAFSA on file in case changes occur in family income or students need to submit FAFSA results to be considered for certain scholarships. Students will not know what they qualify for unless they apply.
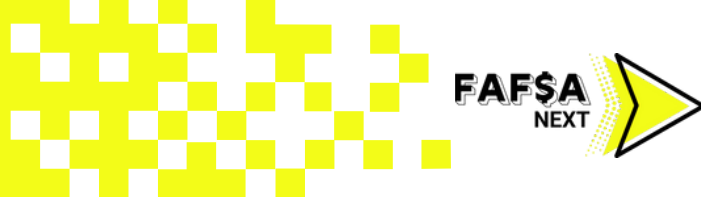
Put up FAF$A Next posters in common areas.
Posters are a great way to encourage participation in the event and provide a reminder for students to fill out their FAFSA. Make sure to hang the posters in high-traffic areas in the school.

Get teachers involved.
Ask teachers to hand out financial aid resources and event materials during class, play FAFSA YouTube videos produced by Federal Student Aid for their students and remind students of the event. They may even find a way to incorporate FAFSA into their class activities.

Invite community leaders and media to the event.
Administrators, school board members, and local and state representatives may want to join the event to network with participants.

Provide refreshments and give away door prizes.
Sites can use the stipend to purchase refreshments, and contact local colleges and businesses to see if they are willing to donate paraphernalia, gift cards, and other items as door prizes.

Promote events during school activities.
Make an announcement or set up a table to display information about the event during sporting events, PTA meetings, pep rallies, etc.

Host a Financial Aid 101 Night or include a financial aid presentation during your event.
Provide a basic overview of the financial aid process and available programs. Your site may also want to invite scholarship representatives to conduct a presentation to inform students about scholarship programs and how to search for legitimate scholarships.

Create and hand out resource packets for students and parents/families.
Packets can include information about federal and state financial aid, FAFSA information checklist, FAFSA on the Web Worksheet, etc.

Pair your event with a college and/or career fair or fundraiser.
Sites can allow student organizations to have a bake sale, car wash, raffle, etc.

Invite tax experts to the event.
Representatives can help answer questions that attendees may have regarding FAFSA tax information.

Decorate your site.
Balloons and streamers will add excitement to your event.

Take pictures.
Invite a photography student to take pictures during your event. A photo disclaimer will be included on the event sign-in sheet.

Provide child care.
Parents/families may bring children, so it would be helpful if childcare and/or activities are available. You may want to play a movie, provide coloring sheets, or put out games and puzzles to help pass the time.
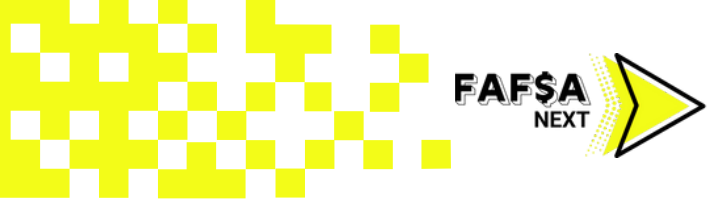
Site Coordinator Survey

All site coordinators must complete the online survey by the provided deadline. The survey will include questions asking for attendance numbers, student demographics, use and distribution of promotional materials, scholarship entry information, number of volunteers, estimated hours, etc.

Survey information will be provided to site coordinators via email.

Student Survey/Scholarship Entry Form

This form can be used to select a student to be entered into the statewide scholarship drawing.
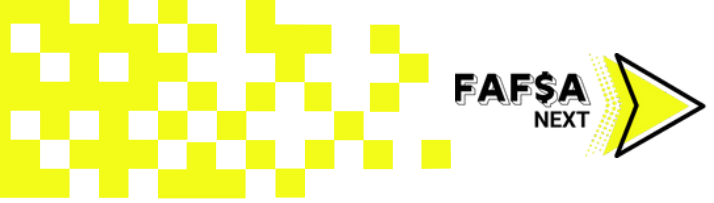
By entering the scholarship drawing, entrants (and the parent/legal guardian of a minor entrant) accept and agree to these Official Rules. At the Sponsor's discretion, any violation of these rules may result in disqualification.

Eligibility

Entrants must be seniors at the participating 2024-25 FAF$A Next sites and attend their school's FAFSA event. Students who attend an event at a nearby college or other venue (virtually or in-person), not specifically hosted by the high school, will not be eligible for a scholarship.

Entry Period

Entries will be accepted from FAFSA events hosted by 2024-25 FAF$A Next sites.

How to Enter

The only way to enter the scholarship drawing is for seniors to attend the FAFSA event hosted by their high school. Sites can use the provided student survey/scholarship entry form or another method for the drawing.

Prizes

There will be five $1,000 statewide scholarship prizes awarded.

Drawing and Notification of Winners

Sites will select one student from their site to be entered into the statewide scholarship drawing. Once the drawing information is received from each site in the site coordinator survey, five winners will be randomly selected from the pool of scholarship entries. Scholarship winners will be notified via email in March and will be required to submit college enrollment/billing documentation. Scholarship checks will be made payable to and mailed directly to the winners' colleges.

Conditions

FAF$A Next scholarships are to be used at the winners' college of choice during the 2025-26 academic year. Funds will be processed through the college's financial aid office. Names of the scholarship winners may be released on FAF$A Next website and email listserv. The site must complete the site coordinator survey in order for their student to be included in the drawing.
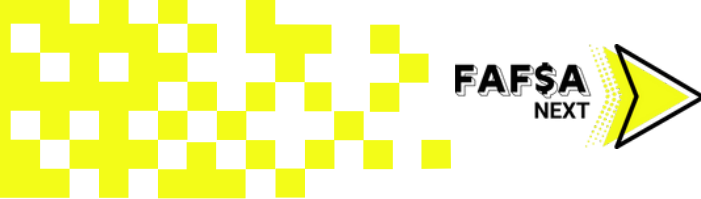
Participating FAF$A Next sites must accept and agree to these Official Rules. At the Sponsor's discretion, any violation of these rules may result in disqualification.

Eligible Participants

Only participating 2024-25 FAF$A Next sites qualify to participate in the school competition.

Entry Period for FAFSA Submissions

Any 2024-25 FAFSAs submitted to the U.S. Dept. of Education by March 1. Where the student completes the FAFSA or who helps them is not relevant for this prize (FAFSAs submitted during FAF$A Next events, from home, during appointments with counselors, other events, etc.).

Eligible FAFSAs

U.S. Department of Education's FAFSA completion and VDOE enrollment data will be used to track and tally results. Only students who attend the high school will be included in the FAFSA completion data.

Prizes and Notification of Winners

The schools with the highest percentage of submitted FAFSAs will win money to be used for student-related support. There will be four schools awarded. Schools will be divided into two groups:

- Group 1: less than 200 seniors and Group 2: 200 or more seniors. For Group 1, the first-place winner will receive $400 and the second-place winner will receive $200.
- Group 2: the first-place winner will receive $800 and the second-place winner will receive $600. If a tiebreaker is necessary, the school with the highest percentage of students participating in the National School Lunch Program will receive the prize. The winners will be notified and announced via email in March.

Conditions

Only sites that submit a completed site coordinator survey will be included in the school competition prize.
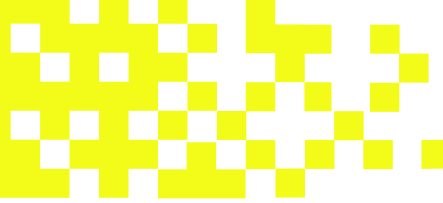
Tracking FAFSA Completion

To track your school's overall FAFSA completion, use the U.S. Department of Education's FAFSA Completion Data by High School website at https://studentaid.ed.gov/sa/about/data-center/student/application-volume/fafsa-completion-high-school.

Use the following calculation to calculate the completion percentage: The number of FAFSAs submitted or completed divided by the number of seniors.

Tracking Event Participation

Pre-Registration

You may want to hold a pre-registration before your FAFSA Completion event. Doing this will help you determine an approximate number of attendees and how many volunteers you will need.

Sign-In Sheets

Sign-in sheets will help track attendance, measure the success of your event, and collect contact information from attendees. You can also use the sign-in sheets to complete the site coordinator survey.
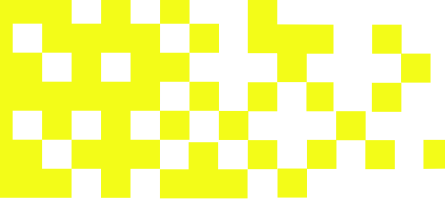
FAFSA Completion Data by State/High School
https://studentaid.gov/data-center/student/application-volume/fafsa-completion-high-school

Fastweb (Scholarships)
www.fastweb.com

Federal Student Aid and FAFSA form
www.FAFSA.gov

Federal Student Aid Resources (available in several formats and Spanish translations)
https://studentaid.gov/resources

Federal Student Aid YouTube Videos
www.youtube.com/user/FederalStudentAid

FinAid
www.finaid.org

Financial Aid Toolkit (Information and tools for counselors, college access professionals, nonprofit mentors, and others
https://financialaidtoolkit.ed.gov/tk/

**State Council of Higher Education for Virginia**
www.schev.edu

Level Up Virginia
www.levelupvirginia.org

Virginia Alternative State Aid (VASA) Application
www.vasaapp.org
The VASA Application is for Virginians who are nonimmigrants, undocumented, have Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) status or are otherwise ineligible to file the FAFSA and would like to be considered for state financial aid. The VASA application provides access only to state financial aid.
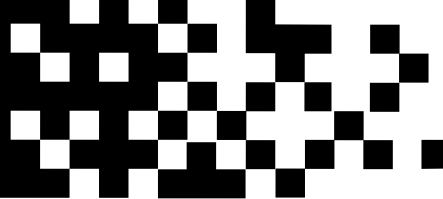
About the Event

Decision Day activities rally support for students as they make their decisions about life after high school. Decision Day activities were first introduced in the late 2000's, then popularized across the nation by college access initiatives from the US Department of Education. In 2017, the Commonwealth of Virginia joined local schools and communities in celebrating the postsecondary choices of our students through Decision Day Virginia.

The goal of Decision Day is to recognize ALL high school seniors for their postsecondary plans and encourage younger students and families to prepare early for postsecondary education. It is important that we celebrate this big step for seniors - and involving underclassmen helps to build a stronger college-going culture and informed student pipeline. Decision Day is held annually on or around May 1.

Why Celebrate Decision Day

- To recognize all students for their postsecondary plans
- To encourage and remind students it's time to make a decision
- To support the best match and fit for each student
- To motivate and excite younger students about their future college and career plans
- To support a school and community college-going culture

Responsibilities of Participating High Schools

High schools implementing a successful Decision Day event at their school will include the following as part of their initiative:

- Hosting a program during the school day that is open to any senior with postsecondary plans including university, community college, apprenticeship, military and/or workforce training.
- Identifying and convening a school support team comprised of staff and community members.
- Leveraging the support of the school team to ensure that students are prepared to participate in the event
- Using the provided educational and marketing materials to engage the local community, families, and others through volunteer opportunities, informational letters and advertising the program.
- Creating a college-going culture within the school (not just for seniors) through a variety of approaches. Some suggestions are included in this guide.
- Completing a Site Coordinator survey at the conclusion of the event

Decision Day Contact Information

For questions about Decision Day and the LUV campaign in general, contact SCHEV at levelup@schev.edu. For questions regarding event stipends, email ECMC at levelup@ecmc.org.
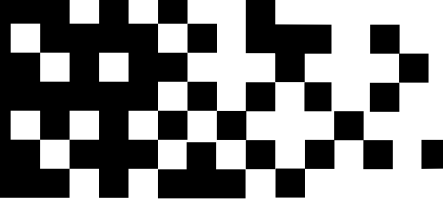
Decision Day Virginia Resources

The sample resources listed below can be found on the Level Up Virginia Decision Day webpage www.levelupvirginia.org/decisiondayva. These resources will help you implement and strengthen your school's Decision Day Event:

- Decision Day Coordinating Resource
- Sample Student/Family Information Letter
- Community Information letter
- Text Blast
- Ask Me! About it flyer
- Cost Comparison Calculator Tool
- Picture Prop Print Outs
- Digital Promotional Materials.

Use this QR code or visit www.levelupvirginia.org/decisiondayva to find all of the resources needed to successfully plan and prepare for your Decision Day Event.
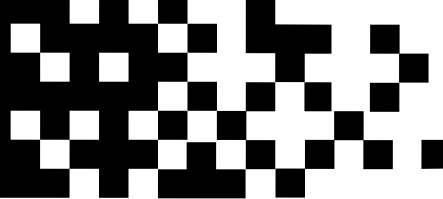
Program Implementation at the School-Level: Site Coordinator

Each high school will identify a site coordinator, typically a high school counselor or college advisor, who will be responsible for implementing the program locally. The State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV) and ECMC provide tools and resources that participating high schools can use or customize to your school's program Decision Day.

Planning and Communicating

Schools that have successfully implemented a Decision Day have done so through the collaboration of multiple stakeholders. A key approach to engaging stakeholders is the creation of a school team that will provide input on and support for the various preparatory steps and logistics necessary to implement a successful event at the school level. Below, you will find a list of recommended local resources and a resource audit worksheet that you can use to identify the key stakeholders in your community. Keep in mind that this list is not exhaustive and you should engage any other community partners that have a vested interest in college access and success. When planning and implementing your school's Decision Day, you should follow all division and school policies regarding non-school personnel visiting, volunteering or otherwise assisting with your school's program.

- **Teachers and staff:** During Decision Day, encourage teachers to share their college experience by wearing their alma mater gear, posting signs on classroom doors indicating where they went to school and using the Level Up Virginia first-gen graphic.
- **Underclassmen and feeder schools:** Involving underclassmen and students from feeder schools can provide valuable help and ideas. This not only reduces your workload but also expands your college-going culture.
- **Families/Parents**: Families and parents can volunteer at the event, supporting their student's decision.
- **Potential community partners include:**
    - Admissions representatives from local colleges (two-year and four-year)
    - Local business leaders
    - Local Chamber of Commerce
    - College access providers (federally funded, state-funded, or community-based)
    - Faith-based community
    - Non-profit organizations such as the YMCA, 4H, Boys and Girls Club, etc.
    - PTA and other parents/family members who want to be engaged in the process
    - Student leaders in your high school
    - Retired school personnel
    - Local government officials and/or elected representatives
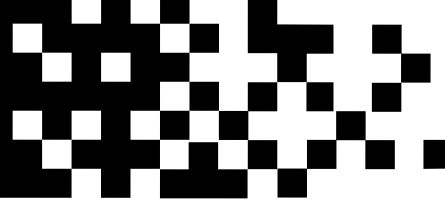
## Prepare and Promote College Going Culture at Your School

- **Organization**: Gather students' college choices in advance. Some schools require seniors to bring evidence of their postsecondary plans in the form of a college acceptance letter, military orders or similar offer letter.
- **Week(s) prior:** Survey the seniors or schedule one-on-one visits or classroom visits. Ask the seniors to provide basic information on where they plan to go to college, where they are in the enrollment process, any questions they have and how you can assist them.
- **Day of**: The simplest and quickest way to ensure you have the decision for each student is by handing the student a blank note card a few minutes before the event begins. Ask each student to write down their name and selected postsecondary plan (name of college, military branch, etc.). This method is sometimes used during graduation ceremonies.
- **Create a "College Wall":** Seniors write the names where they plan to attend on banners or strips of construction paper to hang in a main hallway. Ask art teachers (if available) for additional promotional materials to create a "college-going culture" on the walls of your school.
- **College Spotlight:** In the weeks leading up to Decision Day, choose a different college/university, apprenticeship or military branch to feature in each morning's announcements. Ways to incorporate this include playing the school's fight song, asking trivia questions and awarding prizes for correct answers.
- **College Door Decorating Contest**: This can be the teacher's alma mater or the class may select a college/university or military branch. Students can decorate the classroom door with the colors and logos of their selected pathway or institution. Students can vote on their favorite door, and the winner can be announced on Decision Day.

Day of Celebration

- **Announcements**: Make announcements over the school audio/video system to acknowledge students who decided to enroll and share where they will be going after high school.
- **Assembly:** Host an all-school assembly to celebrate the postsecondary decisions of each of your seniors and their families. This could be an add-on to an already established school event or a stand-alone assembly. Make sure to invite all grade levels to participate.
- **Community Picnic or Fair:** Host an afterschool community-wide picnic or celebration. This may require a larger budget but will engage more community members and students of all ages.
- **Guest Speakers and Special Guests:** Whether you host a school assembly or a community event, invite high school alumni, elected officials, college admissions and financial aid representatives, local business leaders, military and parents to add the event.
- **College, Career and Military Gear:** Encourage students and school staff to wear apparel representing their post-high school path on a particular day of the week.
- **"I Decided" Stickers and/or Shirts**: Students can celebrate their next steps with stickers or shirts.

After Your Event

- Provide students with information about the next steps needed to prepare for post-high school life, including summer opportunities, deadlines for college, military enlistment, apprenticeships and financial aid workshops
- Provide workshops to students and their families. Possible topics: decision making, learning styles, study habits, paying for college, "I'm admitted – now what?", etc.
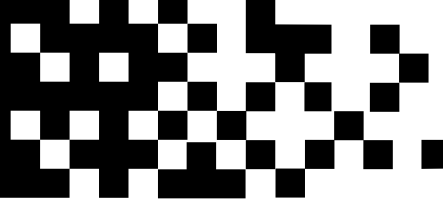
High schools in Virginia vary in demographics, size, etc. and your celebrations will not all be the same. Some may have a week-long set of events while others will have a one-day celebration. Make Decision Day a reflection of your students and school. Here are two examples of what a Decision Day celebration can look like.

Decision Day Celebration (1 day): Decision Day Field Day

Event Set-Up (8:00 AM – 9:00 AM)
- Volunteers and staff arrive early to set up booths, games and food stations.
- Arrange seating areas and signage for the panel discussion.
- Ensure all equipment for color wars or field day is in place.

Decision Day Field Day (9:00 AM - 12:00 PM)

9:00 AM - 9:15 AM: Event Kickoff
- Gather all participating seniors on the field to explain the day's activities, distribute materials and set expectations.

9:15 AM – 11:00 AM Color Wars/Field Day Activities
- Seniors are divided into teams, each representing a color associated with different colleges or postsecondary goals.
- Teams compete in various fun activities and games that promote camaraderie and friendly competition.

11:00 AM – 12:00 PM: Lunch & Learn Panel
- Participating seniors enjoy a catered lunch while listening to a panel of former students.
- Panelists share their transition experiences, challenges and successes.
- Sample Panel Questions:
    - What was your biggest challenge in transitioning to college or your chosen career?
    - How did you balance academics, work and personal life during this transition?
    - What advice would you give to your high school self as you were preparing for your journey beyond high school?

12:00 AM - 12:45 AM: DJ and Ice-cream Social
- Wrap up activities and games, and have students write thank you notes to volunteers.
- Have ice cream or an ice cream truck outside as students wrap up lunch and activities.

12:45 PM - 1:00 PM: Concluding Field Day
- Gather all seniors for the upcoming pep rally.

Pep Rally (1:00 PM - 2:30 PM)

1:00 PM - 1:15 PM: Welcome & Announcements
- Gather all students in the school gymnasium for welcome remarks and event announcements.

1:15 PM - 1:45 PM: Seniors' Postsecondary Plans
- Seniors parade into the gymnasium as the band plays, each holding a sign revealing their postsecondary plans.
- Brief announcements and celebrations of seniors' choice.
- Pep talk on the importance of SOL preparation for underclassmen.

1:45 PM - 2:00 PM: Raffle Prize Announcements
- Draw and announce winners of raffle prizes for participating seniors.

2:00 PM - 2:15 PM: SOL Pep Rally
- Engaging pep rally activities to boost morale and motivation for upcoming SOL exams.

2:15 PM - 2:30 PM: Closing Remarks
- Concluding remarks and words of encouragement.
- School chant and dismissal with high spirits.

The Decision Day Field Day is designed to celebrate students' postsecondary plans, provide valuable transition advice and foster school spirit through fun activities and a memorable pep rally. Seniors leave with a sense of accomplishment and excitement for the journey ahead, while underclassmen are inspired to prepare for their own successful transitions beyond high school.
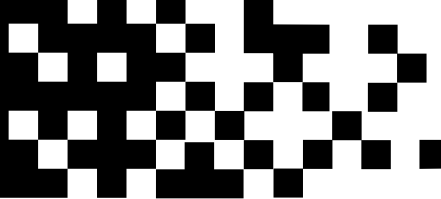
Week Long Decision Day Celebration

Monday:

Senior Breakfast

- Location: _____
- Time: _____
- Description: Students will have donuts. Seniors will decorate signs about where they are going next year
- Students will sign a banner that will hang in the hallway.

Tuesday:

Tie Dye Tuesday

- Location: _____
- Time: _____
- Description: Students will tie-dye their decision day t-shirts. ____ will provide all necessary materials. Students will hand in their tie-dyed t-shirts and site coordinators will rinse them out and wash them using gym washing machines.
- They will receive their shirts on Decision Day to wear that day.

Wednesday:

Way Back Wednesday

- Location: Elementary School
- Time: _____
- Description: Students will take a bus to the elementary school and will walk through the hallway in their cap and gowns with the elementary school students lining the hallway. Students will carry the signs they made earlier in the day indicating where they're going/what they're doing next year.

Thursday:

Thankful Thursday

- Students will write thank you notes to faculty and staff who wrote them recommendations and have played an influential role throughout their high school career.

Friday:

Decision Day

- Location: _____
- Time: _____
- Description: A celebration for the seniors.
    - Decision Day shirts passed out during a seminar for students
    - Games for students to play (musical chairs, 4 corners, etc.)
    - Students will be able to eat their lunch in the gyms. Students who are passing all of their classes can come for the entirety of 3rd block. Others will only come for their lunch block.
    - Raffle Prizes (from donations from the community) and Kona Ice
    - Students will have to fill out the senior exit form to be entered in the raffle
    - The first 30 students who fill out the survey will receive a prize

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UP
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