THE CALIFORNIA FOSTER YOUTH FAFSA CHALLENGE, led by John Burton Advocates for Youth (JBAY) in partnership with the California Department of Education and the California Community College Chancellor's Office (CCCCO), is a statewide campaign to increase the number of foster youth who are prepared for success as they matriculate from high school into college by ensuring that foster youth are accessing financial aid.

GOAL OF THE CAMPAIGN: The goal for 2019/2020 is that at least 65 percent of California’s high school seniors in foster care complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) or California Dream Act application.

HOW THE CAMPAIGN WORKS: Local efforts are led by County Office of Education (COE) Foster Youth Services Coordinating Programs (FYSCP) in collaboration with local partners including school districts, community-based organizations, child welfare agencies, Independent Living Programs, and local colleges. JBAY provides technical assistance, promotional materials, student incentives, support for tracking FAFSA completion, and other resources to participating FYSCPs to support them in this effort. FYSCPs “taking the challenge” will be recognized and celebrated throughout the campaign.

BACKGROUND: Every year, billions of dollars in federal financial aid go unused because eligible students do not complete the FAFSA. According to the California Student Aid Commission (CSAC), 58 percent of California’s high school seniors in the class of 2018 completed the FAFSA or California Dream Act. While there has been a push in recent years, both nationally and in California, to increase the number of high school seniors who complete the FAFSA, students in foster care are not being reached in high numbers. The rate of FAFSA completion among high school seniors in foster care in 2017/2018 was 45 percent, a rate lower than that of other high school seniors. With education a key driver toward financial stability in adulthood, and receipt of financial aid crucial to enrolling and persisting in college for youth from low-income backgrounds, foster youth need and deserve the same access to financial aid as their peers. As a result of the FAFSA challenge, the completion rate increased to 57 percent in 2018/2019 and it is vital to keep this momentum going.

Successful completion of the FAFSA (or California Dream Act for undocumented students) is the single most important step in ensuring foster youth receive financial aid and subsequently enroll and persist in college, including career and technical education programs provided by California’s 115 community colleges. Data shows that 90 percent of high school seniors who complete the FAFSA go on to enroll in college within 12 months as compared to just 45 percent of high school seniors who do not complete the FAFSA. A February 2017 report on community college students in California found that 47 percent of students with a zero-expected family contribution who received more than $7,500 in financial aid graduated from college or transferred from a 2-year to 4-year institution, compared to 17 percent of those who received between $1,001 and $2,500.

1 While it is anticipated that the majority of foster youth will be eligible to complete the FAFSA, undocumented students, including those with an application for Special Immigrant Juvenile Status pending, are not eligible for federal financial aid but can access State aid by submitting a Dream Act application. If an undocumented student does not have an
application for SIJS pending, the child welfare agency should be contacted to ensure one is put in place immediately.

**PARTNERS:** The lead state agency partnering with JBAY on the California Foster Youth FAFSA Challenge is the California Department of Education’s Foster Youth Services Coordinating Program (FYSCP), a statewide agency charged in state law with preparing foster youth for post-secondary education. This legislative mandate, established in 2016 with the passage of Assembly Bill 854, charges each of the 58 county FYSCPs to prepare foster youth for post-secondary education. Other partners include the California Community College Chancellor’s Office and various local government agencies, school districts, and community-based organizations who will directly support high school seniors in foster care in completing the FAFSA or California Dream Act.

**HOW TO REGISTER:** Registration is open to FYSCPs only. FYSCPs can join the challenge by completing a short registration form that can be found HERE. Partner organizations wanting to support the effort can use this same link to provide their contact information, and JBAY will connect them with their local county contact.

The deadline to register is November 15, 2019, however FYSCPs are encouraged to register as early as possible. Information requested in order to register includes:

1. Name of the FYSCP point persons who will be JBAY’s primary and secondary contact for the FAFSA Challenge.
2. Number of qualified high school seniors attending school in the county for the 2019-2020 academic year (see “Determining the Baseline” for additional information regarding determining this number).

**DETERMINING THE BASELINE:** Upon registration, each FYSCP will be asked to provide the number of current 12th grade foster youth attending school in their county based on the information available in CalPADS. FYSCPs are requested to provide the number of 12th graders as indicated on their countywide CalPADS 5.7 report, Foster Focus Financial Aid Checklist Report or other system used by your county.

All 12th graders should be included, regardless of credit count. While some 12th graders may not have enough credits to graduate, because it is administratively onerous for many counties to track this information on an ongoing basis, it is not practical for the Challenge to exclude these students from the count. Additional information regarding tracking students who enter or exit your county or foster care during the school year is included later in this document.

**Who’s included in the number?**

Students attending school in the following settings are included in your county’s baseline:

- traditional high schools
- non-public schools
- charter schools
- alternative education
- continuing education
- juvenile halls
- independent study

Additionally, non-diploma track students are also included in the baseline number.

Finally, students in family maintenance and family reunification placements are also included in the baseline number.

JBAY recognizes that the number of 12th graders will change over the course of the year as students enter and exit counties. This baseline number is meant to provide JBAY with a general sense of the size of your county’s eligible population. **Note that the campaign is based on FAFSA completion rates of current foster youth who are high school seniors and does not include former foster youth who exited foster care prior to their senior year.**
DETERMINING FAFSA COMPLETION: Reports can be generated through the WebGrants system that show which students have submitted a FAFSA or Dream Act, which have not, which of these applications are complete, and which are incomplete. This information should be matched to the list of foster youth who are high school seniors within each county to determine the rate of FAFSA completion overall. Note that all FAFSA completions should be included regardless of whether the FAFSA was completed before or after the FYSCP signed up for the FAFSA challenge.

Information regarding FAFSA completion is typically updated in WebGrants about 5-7 business days after submission of the application. If a student completes the California Dream Act application, information is updated in real time. WebGrants reports are updated every weekend.

In order to request a log-in credential to the WebGrants system, FYSCP Coordinators should first determine if their COE already has a WebGrants administrator. COEs without an existing WebGrants administrator can contact JBAY for additional instructions or consult the WebGrants manual posted on the FAFSA Challenge webpage.

Once a log-in credential has been obtained, FYSCP coordinators can consult the WebGrants manual on the FAFSA Challenge website or contact the JBAY support team for assistance with downloading the appropriate reports. The California Student Aid Commission also offers a user help line at schoolsupport@csac.ca.gov or (888) 294-0153 and provides webinars about how to use the WebGrants system HERE.

It is required that FYSCPs utilize the WebGrants system as this will provide the most up-to-date and accurate information as well as be the easiest and most accessible method of tracking FAFSA completion. Local schools and districts also have access to WebGrants, and if an FYSCP is unable to utilize WebGrants themselves, requesting data from individual schools or districts can also be a method for obtaining the data, however counties must confirm that the school or district verified the information through WebGrants. Keep in mind that this method will require FYSCPs to contact each high school or district individually for each reporting period and will make it challenging for an FYSCP to update their FAFSA completion list on a regular basis. It is recommended that FYSCPs also request that the school or district provide information regarding whether the student has a "No EFC" flag and if a GPA was successfully matched.

In the case of a student attending a non-accredited or non-public school whose information cannot be obtained through WebGrants, viewing the student’s FAFSA submission confirmation or Student Aid Report (SAR) is allowable, but only in these limited circumstances.

STUDENT OUTREACH: Based on the information obtained from WebGrants regarding which students have and have not completed the FAFSA or Dream Act, FYSCPs should coordinate with local school districts and other local partners such as ILPs and community colleges to ensure direct support is provided to students who have not yet completed the FAFSA or Dream Act.

During student outreach, it is also strongly encouraged that FYSCPs assist students to ensure that their high school GPA has been uploaded to WebGrants by their high school, to submit a Chafee Grant application (if eligible) and to sign up for a student WebGrants Account.

- **GPA Verification:** In order to qualify for a CalGrant, students must have a verified GPA submitted to CSAC. In most cases this will be submitted electronically by their high school. It is important to verify that the information has been correctly submitted and matched to the student’s FAFSA or CADAA. Consult the WebGrants User Manual for additional information.

- **Chafee Grant Application:** If the student was in foster care between 16 and 18 they may be eligible for $5,000 a year for their post-secondary education.

- **Student WebGrants Account:** This tool helps students manage the financial aid process including managing their Cal Grant and/or Chafee accounts online. Students can create a WebGrants for Students account at mygrantinfo.csac.ca.gov.

DATA SUBMISSION DATES: Participating counties will submit periodic reports with FAFSA/Dream Act completion information to JBAY. Data will be submitted to JBAY two times:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>REPORT DEADLINE</th>
<th>PERIOD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>March 13, 2020</td>
<td>Cumulative report on those who submitted between November 1, 2019 and March 2, 2020 (FAFSA priority application deadline)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 29, 2020</td>
<td>Cumulative report on those who submitted between November 1, 2019 and May 29, 2020</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If a student shows up in WebGrants as “No EFC,” meaning the student has submitted the FAFSA but the application contains errors that do not allow the FAFSA to be processed or the Expected Family Contribution (EFC) to be determined, the application will count toward the challenge but JBAY strongly encourages FYSCPs to follow up with any student who is designated as “no EFC” to correct errors so these students can get financial aid.

Challenge participants are strongly encouraged to get as many students as possible to complete the FAFSA or Dream Act by March 2nd, so they have access to the greatest amount of aid.

For more information regarding submission requirements, FYSCP FAFSA Challenge awards and important dates, see page 6.
STEPS TO TRACKING ENTRIES AND EXITS OF HIGH SCHOOL SENIORS AND FAFSA COMPLETION: JBAY recognizes that foster youth are a highly mobile population and that new students will enter your county during the course of the school year, and students who were included in the original foster youth count will exit your county or foster care. Below are the steps that JBAY recommends that your FYSCP takes to track both entries and exits of high school seniors and FAFSA Completion.

We recommend using an internal spreadsheet to track both the total cumulative count for the year and to easily track which students require additional outreach. Because the 5.7 report provides only a point-in-time snapshot, the protocol described below should be used to track entries and exits of students in order to provide accurate reports. A template of this spreadsheet is available at www.jbaforyouth.org/fafsachallenge

If you utilize Foster Focus, the Financial Aid Checklist Report will automatically generate a cumulative list of seniors who have been attending school in your county for 30 days. The protocol described below is not necessary.

STEP 1 Compiling your list of students

Beginning November 1, 2019, FYSCPs should prepare a list of all high school seniors who are identified as attending school in their county. All 12th graders should be included, regardless of credit count.

While some 12th graders may not have enough credits to graduate, it is administratively onerous for many counties to track this information on an ongoing basis. Therefore, it is not practical for the Challenge to exclude these students from the count.

Note: If a student is in a charter school that is incorporated in one county but physically located in a different county, the county of incorporation does not need to include that student in the count. Please contact the FYSCP coordinator in the county of residence to ensure that the student has been identified to their program.

STEP 2 Entering “student name” and “start date”

Those who are included on the initial list should be given a “start date” that corresponds to the date that the list was pulled. For a detailed example see FIGURE 1.2 in the tracking Visual Guide below.

STEP 3 Verifying FAFSA

As FAFSAs or CADAAs are completed and verified through WebGrants, use the drop-down menu to indicate “YES” completion on the spreadsheet. For a detailed example see FIGURE 1.3 in the tracking Visual Guide below.

STEP 4 (Student exits from the county)

As students exit the county or foster care, an exit date should be recorded on the spreadsheet. The spreadsheet will automatically populate the number of days the student resided in the county and if they will be included in your Challenge Total Foster Youth Count. For a detailed example see FIGURE 1.4 in the tracking Visual Guide below.

STEP 5 (Calculating TOTAL FOSTER YOUTH count)

The internal tracking sheet will automatically populate individual students who are included in the Total Foster Youth count.

The sheet will also calculate the cumulative Total Foster Youth count. For a detailed example see FIGURE 1.5 in the tracking visual guide below.

The numbers reported to JBAY are a cumulative total of the number of students enrolled in school in your county for at least 30 cumulative days on or after November 1, 2019.

IMPORTANT NOTES & REMINDERS

- COUNT FAFSA COMPLETION BETWEEN OCTOBER 1 – 31, 2019. Students who were in your county between October 1, 2019 and October 31, 2019 who completed a FAFSA can be included in your Total Foster Youth count AND FAFSA completion numbers.
  - If a student was in your county between October 1, 2019 and October 31, 2019 and exited before November 1 but did not complete a FAFSA, do not include that student in your Total Foster Youth count or FAFSA completion numbers.
  
For a detailed student examples, see the “student examples” on page 5 in the tracking visual guide below.

- All eligible students enrolled in your county for at least 30 cumulative days AFTER November 1 must be included in your Total Foster Youth count for a given reporting period.

- If a student has been enrolled in your county for less than 30 days, that student should not be included in the Total Foster Youth count. Except if the youth completed a FAFSA while in care, in your county (see student examples on page 5 for a visual explanation).

- If a student left your county after 30 cumulative days, the student is still included in your Total Foster Youth count even if they did not complete a FAFSA while they were in your county.

- If, however, a youth is enrolled in your county for less than 30 days and you assist her or him with completing the FAFSA while in your county, that student may be added to the Total Foster Youth and the Total FAFSA Submissions counts.
• Students who graduate prior to the end of the school year, who were enrolled in school in your county for at least 30 days, should be included in your total.

• JBAY strongly encourages FYSCP staff to work with school staff to ensure the students remains eligible for the CalGrant if the student graduates early. This includes confirming GPA and High School verification is submitted in a timely manner to CSAC.

Enter the student’s EXIT DATE (if applicable)

The tracking sheet will automatically populate individual students who are included in the Total Foster Youth count.

**STEP 5**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FAFSA completed (Yes/No)</th>
<th>Include in count? (Yes/No)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total: 1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FAFSA Completion Rate</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**FIGURE 1.5**

The sheet auto-calculates the cumulative Total Foster Youth count.

The numbers reported to JBAY should be a cumulative total of the number of students enrolled in school in your county for at least 30 cumulative days on or after November 1, 2019

**Student Examples**

Jeremy White: Jeremy was in the county in the county for 29 days in October, however he did not complete a FAFSA. He is not included in the total count.

Rebecca Clark: Rebecca came was in the county for between October 1 and left on November 14; but she completed a FAFSA. She IS counted towards the total count.

Trisha Johnson: Trisha was in the county for more than 30 days and completed a FAFSA. Trisha is counted toward the total count.

Shawn Reyes: Shawn was in the county for 25 days; however, he completed a FAFSA. He is counted towards the total count.

Timothy Morales: Timothy was in the county for 50 day; however, he didn’t complete a FAFSA. Timothy is counted towards the total count.
SUBMITTING DATA: To qualify for the FAFSA Challenge awards for counties, a report of FAFSA completion rates must be submitted to JBAY via the online form(s) on or before December 15, March 18, and June 15. The respective forms can be found above under Significant Dates above and will also be sent out to counties two weeks prior to the deadline. The totals number of seniors who completed their FAFSA must be verified by WebGrants.

Reports should include:

1. Cumulative total number of foster youth high school seniors who have attended school in the county during the reporting period for at least 30 cumulative days.

2. Cumulative total number of foster youth high school seniors who have completed a FAFSA or Dream Act application, and

3. FAFSA Percentage completion rate. (Cumulative total foster youth seniors who completed a FAFSA or CADAA/Total foster youth seniors)

The report will also ask you to provide information regarding the source(s) of data used to determine each number.

For an internal tracking spreadsheet template go to http://www.jbaforyouth.org/fafsachallenge.

FYSCP AWARDS: Four participating counties with the highest rates of FAFSA completion among counties of comparable size will be awarded unrestricted grants of up to $1000 to promote foster youth success in matriculating from high school to post- secondary education. JBAY will divide participating counties up by size (very small, small, medium, and large) based on their number of high school seniors in foster care. The county with the highest rate of FAFSA completion in each category will receive the award. Two sets of awards will be given: one for the highest completion rates as of the March 2 priority deadline and one set for the highest completion rates at the close of the campaign in June 2018. The first set of awards will be announced during the Foster Youth Education Summit in April 2019. The second set of awards will be announced no later than June 28, 2019. If more than one FYSCP has the same highest rate, a winner will be selected at random from among those with the highest rates.

In addition, an award will be given to the county with the greatest increase in FAFSA/Dream Act completion rate as compared to the 2018/2019 rate submitted to JBAY.

CELEBRATING SUCCESSES: The award recipients based on the March 2 priority deadline (see above), along with all counties who meet or exceed the 65 percent target rate, will be recognized during the Foster Youth Education Summit in April 2020. The second round of award recipients in June 2020 will be highlighted in local and statewide media and will be celebrated during JBAY’s annual Burton Book Fund event in August.

FOR MORE INFORMATION: Contact Tia Holiday at tia@jbay.org

SIGNIFICANT DATES

OCTOBER 2019

October 1, 2019: California Foster Youth FAFSA Challenge Webinar from 10:00–11:30 am.

Register here: attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/8494593040469154828 or go to www.jbaforyouth.org to listen to a recording of the webinar after October 1, 2019.

October 1, 2019: FAFSA Opens and the Challenge registrations begins, and Challenge begins. Register HERE.

NOVEMBER 2019

November 15, 2019: Deadline to sign up for the challenge. Register HERE.

MARCH 2020

March 2, 2020: Priority FAFSA deadline.

By March 13, 2020: FYSCPs submit to JBAY the number of students who have completed the FAFSA or Dream Act between October 1, 2019 and March 2, 2020. March reports can be submitted online. FYSCPs will be emailed a submission link beginning March 9, 2020.

APRIL 2020

April 20-21, 2020: Awards ceremony for first round award recipients at Foster Youth Education Summit.

MAY & JUNE 2020

By May 31, 2020: Final round of data collected for the 2018/2019 FAFSA Challenge. FYCPs submit to JBAY the cumulative number of students who have completed the FAFSA or Dream Act between October 1, 2019 and May 31, 2020. FYCPs will be emailed a submission link beginning on May 4, 2020.

By June 28, 2020: Final award announced and notified.