



Lincoln Public Schools

FUND YOUR FUTURE

LPS FAFSA Completion Messaging Campaign



SYNOPSIS

The Nebraska State Legislature amended its graduation requirements, adopting a Universal Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) law similar to several other states in 2023.

The [new state law](#) requires all Nebraska public school students to complete a FAFSA form or opt out of filing one before graduating. State lawmakers stated the revised statute will be effective starting the 2024-25 school year with the 2025 senior class.

The Lincoln Public Schools counseling team partnered with LPS Communications to develop a strategic communications plan to inform the 2025 seniors and their families of the new state law graduation requirement. There was a 10% decline from the 2024 LPS senior class completing the FAFSA compared to the previous year.

For the 2024-25 school year, the team created a communication strategy to get all LPS seniors to complete or opt out of the FAFSA to comply with the new state law while prioritizing the FAFSA filing benefits to boost the completion rate.

Team Members

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School Information

Lincoln Public Schools

- › K-12 public school district
- › 42,282 students
- › More than 60 schools
- › 5905 O Street
Lincoln, NE 68501

RESEARCH

LPS Communications performed a [situational analysis](#) with primary and secondary research to determine the campaign’s audience, key messages, and best communication methods for the FAFSA Completion Messaging Campaign.

Below is a summary of the information collected and how the team utilized it.

Primary Research

- **Nebraska State Law:** Nebraska state lawmakers revised public high school graduation requirements, adding a Universal FAFSA law in 2023. Following the other states, the Nebraska Legislature wanted to increase FAFSA completion to help more Nebraska students access higher education affordably by unlocking federal financial aid. All Nebraska public high school seniors must complete or opt out of the FAFSA before graduating in 2025.
- **Historical LPS FAFSA completion rates:** There was about a 10% decrease in LPS seniors completing the 2024-25 FAFSA application compared to the 2023-24 one. For the 2024-25 FAFSA, 56% of the 2024 LPS senior class filed. For the 2023-24 FAFSA, 63% of the 2023 LPS seniors completed the application.
- **FAFSA’s purpose:** the application is one of the main tools U.S. colleges and universities use to determine financial need and financial aid packages to help students pay for higher education.

Secondary Research

- **National FAFSA completion rates:** The completion rates for graduating high school seniors have been trending downward nationwide since the COVID-19 pandemic. This decline has prompted a national campaign by the [National College Attainment Network \(NCAN\)](#) to encourage states to adopt Universal FAFSA laws to increase comple-

tion rates. According to the network, only 46% of the class of 2024 filed the FAFSA through June, compared to about 53% of the class of 2023.

- **FAFSA completion barriers:** [NCAN reports](#) people’s lack of knowledge about the FAFSA, their eligibility to file, the complexity of the form, college debt adversity, and a general disinterest in pursuing higher education are the top reasons preventing students from completing the form.
- **FAFSA completion benefits:** In 2023, the federal government [changed the FAFSA form](#) to simplify the process and widen eligibility, such as allowing [about 1.5 million more students to qualify for the maximum Pell Grant amount](#). Research shows a strong correlation between FAFSA completion and postsecondary education enrollment. Studies also show that thousands of federal aid dollars are unclaimed annually by students not filing the FAFSA, which means there’s an increased opportunity for several students to get free money for college potentially. It is estimated that between the graduating classes of 2022 and 2023, U.S. [seniors left behind \\$7.6 billion in Pell Grants. Half of Nebraska graduates didn’t file the FAFSA, missing out on an estimated \\$23 million in aid in 2022.](#) Also, several Nebraska colleges and universities offer free tuition to eligible recipients of the Pell Grant..
- **U.S. social media trends:** The team concentrated its social media efforts on two main platforms, Instagram and Facebook, based on the target audience’s (high school seniors and their caregivers) media consumption habits. Pew Research Center reported that [59% of teens \(ages 13-17\)](#) and about half of adults use Instagram, and [close to 70% of adults use Facebook](#).

Research Takeaways

Problem Statement: To comply with new state law, LPS needs seniors to complete the FAFSA or opt out of it for graduation.

AUDIENCE	KEY MESSAGES	COMMUNICATION METHODS
To comply with new state law, LPS needs seniors to complete the FAFSA or opt out of it for graduation.	Key Message #1: Fund your future – file your FAFSA. Millions of dollars in federal aid are left behind because students are not completing the FAFSA.	Email <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direct • E-Newsletters
Primary: LPS graduating seniors and their families	Key Message #2: Higher education is attainable, and LPS is here to help.	Social Media <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • District accounts • High school accounts
Secondary: LPS high school administrators, staff, and counselors	Key Message #3: LPS seniors must complete the FAFSA or opt out of completing it for graduation per new state law.	Website <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LPS Homepage • New LPS FAFSA webpage • Counselors • Google sites
		Print <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Banners • Printed flyers
		News Media <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Word of Mouth

PLANNING

LPS Communications took the information from its research and started working with the LPS Student Services Department to create the FAFSA Completion Messaging Campaign in June 2024.

LPS Communications collaborated with the school counseling team for about a month to develop the campaign's strategy, including the [communications plan](#), [message map](#), and [creative brief](#) to align messaging with the statewide FAFSA completion coalition's communications.

Budget

There was no specific budget for this project. The expectation was to utilize the school district's resources like the LPS Graphics Department and operate within already allocated funding for the Communications Department and high schools in the approved 2024-25 LPS budget.

FAFSA Completion Messaging Campaign Plan Overview

Goal

Encourage LPS seniors to complete or opt out of the 2025-26 FAFSA for graduation before the state's reporting deadline.

Measurable objectives

- Increase the LPS FAFSA completion rate by 10%.
- Aim for 100% participation for state compliance with 55% FAFSA completion and 45% opt-out ratio.

Strategies and Tactics

Strategies

- Inform LPS seniors, families, and educators of the new state law and its requirements.
- Create awareness about the benefits of completing the FAFSA.
- Collaborate with LPS school counselors and community partners (e.g., EducationQuest) to share resources and information.
- Develop a clear call to action to drive participation.
 - *CTA: complete or opt out of the 2025-26 FAFSA by April 18, 2025.*
- Delay access to opt-out forms until the beginning of the spring semester to encourage more FAFSA completion.

Tactics

- Create an LPS FAFSA graduation requirement website.
- Utilize current LPS e-newsletters to share information with LPS seniors, families, administrators, and staff.
- Curate targeted email messages for LPS seniors and families.

- Craft social media campaigns prioritizing Facebook and Instagram.
- Pitch campaign efforts for news coverage to local media partners around related events (e.g., National School Counseling Week).
- Develop a toolkit with branded messages and resources for high schools.
- Conduct a drip campaign for seniors who haven't fulfilled the grad requirement after the LPS deadline of April 18 to push further participation.

Roles and Responsibilities

LPS Communications

- Serve as project lead for the LPS FAFSA Completion Messaging Campaign.
- Develop the campaign's strategy and key messages in collaboration with LPS school counselors.
- Create and distribute the campaign's mass communications and messaging tools (e.g., *direct emails, graphics, and sample social media posts*) for the school district.
- Manage the school district's main communications platforms (e.g., LPS website and social media accounts).

LPS Student Services Department

- LPS School Counseling Supervisor
 - Campaign's liaison between LPS Communications, LPS leadership, and the high school counseling team leads.
- Individual high school counselors
 - The primary contact for LPS seniors and their families to help fulfill this state requirement.
 - Campaign's partner for distributing messaging and communication tools developed by LPS Communications with their students and schools.

IMPLEMENTATION

Below is a summary of the implementation timeline for the LPS FAFSA Completion Messaging Campaign.

Fall (August - December 2024)

- **August:** new [LPS FAFSA Completion Graduation Guidelines web page](#) launch
- **Early September:** first direct email to LPS seniors and families about new state law and its requirements.
- **September - December:** reminders about the state law change and benefits of completing the FAFSA incorporated into the monthly district-wide e-newsletter for staff and families.
- **Late November:** development and distribution of campaign communications toolkit, including social media graphics, sample social media posts, sample newsletter

blurbs, handouts, and banners to all high schools and LPS special sites (e.g., Focus Programs).

- **Dec. 1:** second direct email to LPS seniors and families announcing the 2025-26 FAFSA opening and pushing them to apply now.
- **Dec. 2-15:** first round of the “Fund Your Future - File Your FAFSA” social media campaign implemented.

Spring (January - April 2025) – still in progress

- **January - April:** additional reminders about the new graduation requirement, FAFSA completion benefits, available resources, and direct links to opt-out forms in various translations used in the monthly district-wide newsletter to staff and families.
- **February:**
 - LPS FAFSA Completion Graduation Guidelines webpage update with direct links to the opt-out forms.
 - News pitch about LPS FAFSA completion initiative during National School Counseling Week (Feb.3 -7).
 - Third direct email to LPS seniors and families of the requirement, FAFSA benefits, and direct access to the opt-out.
 - The second round of the “Fund Your Future - File Your FAFSA” social media campaign was conducted (Feb. 17 -28).
- **April 14-18:** Coinciding with the federal tax filing deadline, a final push campaign including the last direct email to all LPS seniors and their families and social media reminders to complete or opt out by April 18.
- **Late April - Early May:** Drip campaign to follow up with LPS seniors and families who have met the state requirement to complete or opt out of the FAFSA by May 1.

- **LPS started tracking opt-outs this year as a part of the new state law, so there isn't a strong baseline yet.**

- As of March 10, 2025, only 76 out of 3,053 LPS graduating seniors, or about 2%, chose to opt out of completing the FAFSA.

- **For social media, the campaign's Instagram content performs the best out of the six posts made so far compared to Facebook.** The team views Instagram's performance as successful since most of the campaign's target audience is on that site. LPS Communications will look into improving Facebook's performance or pivoting to another medium.

- **Here's a quick breakdown of the performance metrics of both platforms so far:**

› **Instagram**

- Combined views: 17,387
- Combined reach: 11,131
- Combined interactions with link clicks: 235
- Engagement rate: 2.11%
- Current industry average engagement rate: 1.63%

› **Facebook**

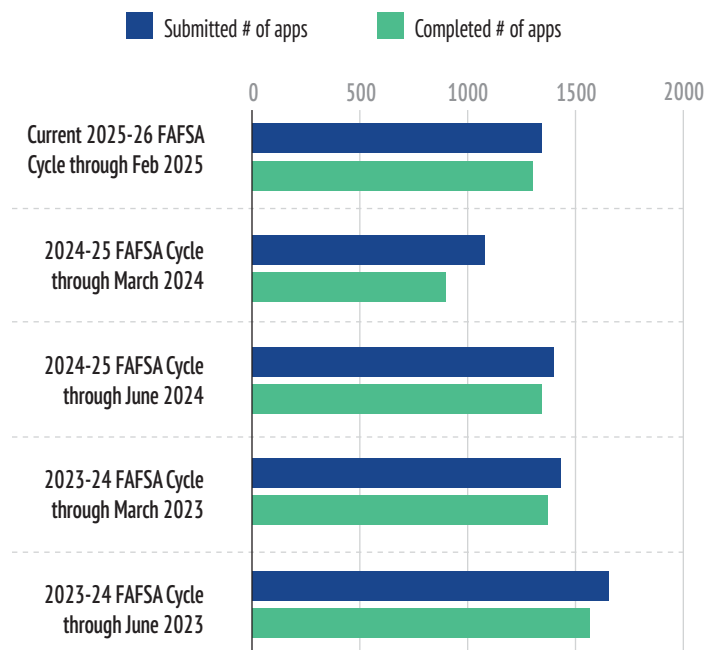
- Combined views: 27,097
- Combined reach: 17,763
- Combined interactions with link clicks: 70
- Engagement rate: 0.39%
- Current Industry average engagement rate: 2.19%

EVALUATION

The campaign is still in progress, and final numbers won't be available until later this summer. However, there are some positive trends for completion so far compared to the 2024 senior class.

- **As of March 10, 2025, 44% of this year's seniors have completed the 2025-26 FAFSA.**
 - About 31% of last year's seniors completed the 2024-25 FAFSA by March 29, 2024, and nearly 47% of them filed by the end of June 2024.
 - The LPS completion rate analyzed on March 10, 2025, is very close to the percentage of the 2023 LPS senior class, which 47% reported by the end of March 2023. These metrics show the completion rate could be rebounding.
 - Based on these current trends, the team believes this year's cohort completion rate will continue to climb.

LPS FAFSA Filing Comparison Chart



CAMPAIGN EXAMPLES

Website

LPS FAFSA Completion Graduation Guidelines

Fund Your Future – File Your FAFSA



Lincoln Public Schools is dedicated to preparing ALL students for successful careers, lifelong learning and civic engagement.

Helping our students achieve their higher education dreams is a part of fostering lifelong learners. College is attainable and can be affordable by utilizing federal dollars. This is why we encourage our graduating seniors to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).

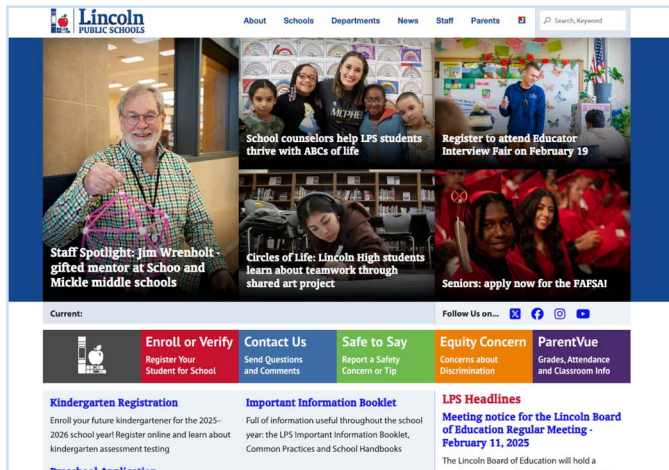


Complete by April 18, 2025 for graduation
[File Your FAFSA Now](#)

Why do the FAFSA?

- \$ High school seniors **left more than \$4 billion behind** in Pell Grants in 2024 by not completing a FAFSA.
- 🇺🇸 The U.S. Department of Education **updated and simplified** the FAFSA in 2023.
- 👉 The new FAFSA form has expanded eligibility allowing up to **€10,000**

LPS FAFSA Completion Graduation Guidelines landing page
[View our webpage](#)

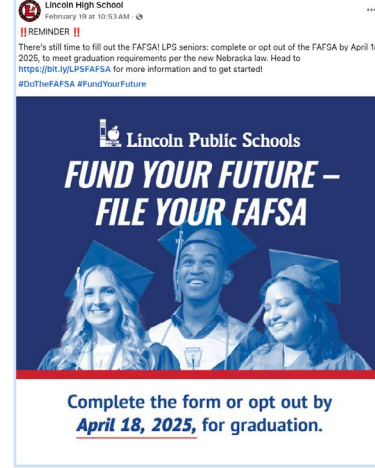


The screenshot shows the Lincoln Public Schools website homepage with various navigation links and featured content. Key elements include:

- Navigation: About, Schools, Departments, News, Staff, Parents, Search, Keyword
- Featured Content: Staff spotlight (Jim Wrenholt), School counselors help LPS students thrive with ABCs of life, Register to attend Educator Interview Fair on February 19, Circles of Life: Lincoln High students learn about teamwork through shared art project, Seniors: apply now for the FAFSA!
- Quick Links: Enroll or Verify, Contact Us, Safe to Say, Equity Concern, ParentVue
- Important Information: Kindergarten Registration, Important Information Booklet, LPS Headlines

Main homepage reminder

Social Media



The Facebook post is from Lincoln High School, dated February 19 at 10:53 AM. It features a blue header with the Lincoln Public Schools logo and the text "FUND YOUR FUTURE – FILE YOUR FAFSA". Below the header is a photo of three graduates in caps and gowns. The main text reads: "Complete the form or opt out by April 18, 2025, for graduation." There is also a "REMINDER" icon and a link to the FAFSA completion page.

Facebook




The Instagram Reel shows a young man sitting at a round table in a classroom, working on a laptop. The background shows a window with blinds and some colorful decorations on the wall. The caption for the reel says "Watch our reel".

Instagram Reel
[Watch our reel](#)

Email

From: Lincoln Public Schools <noreply@lps.org>
Subject: More information for students and families about FAFSA graduation requirements



Dear LPS Families,

Lincoln Public Schools is dedicated to preparing ALL students for successful careers, lifelong learning and civic engagement.

A new Nebraska state law ([Neb. Rev. Stat. § 79-223](#)) states that each public high school student shall complete or opt out of filing the FAFSA form before graduating high school. If you are choosing to opt out, the form is at the bottom of this email.


Don't delay! We are asking that you please either fill out the FAFSA form or the LPS opt out form before April 18, 2025.

What is the FAFSA?

The [Free Application for Federal Student Aid \(FAFSA\)](#) is an online form by the U.S. Department of Education to help colleges and career schools determine what federal money they can give you to help pay for school. The [types of financial aid](#) that you could receive from the FAFSA include:

Direct email to LPS seniors and families
English version

From: Lincoln Public Schools <noreply@lps.org>
Subject: Thông tin cho học sinh và gia đình về yêu cầu tốt nghiệp liên quan đến FAFSA



Thưa quý gia đình LPS,

Các Trường Công Lập Lincoln hết lòng chuẩn bị cho TẤT CẢ học sinh thành công trong nghề nghiệp, học hỏi suốt đời và tham gia hoạt động cộng đồng.

Luật mới của bang Nebraska ([Neb. Rev. Stat. § 79-223](#)) nêu rằng mỗi học sinh trường công lập sẽ hoặc là hoàn thành hoặc chọn không điền Đơn Xin Trợ Cấp Sinh Viên Liên Bang Miễn Thi (FAFSA) trước khi tốt nghiệp trung học. Nếu bạn chọn không tham gia điền đơn, mẫu đơn nằm ở cuối thư.

Đừng trì hoãn! Chúng tôi yêu cầu bạn vui lòng điền đơn FAFSA hoặc mẫu từ chối điền FAFSA của LPS trước ngày 18 tháng 4, 2025.

FAFSA là gì?

Direct email to LPS seniors and families
Translated version
**LPS Bilingual Liaisons translated these emails into our school district's top eight languages*

CAMPAIGN EXAMPLES

Printed Materials

FUND YOUR FUTURE → FILE YOUR FAFSA

- Seniors, college can be accessible and affordable.
- LPS seniors, step toward graduation and your future goals by doing the FAFSA.
- Complete the form by **April 18, 2025**, for graduation.

Apply today!
2025-26 FAFSA now available.

Need help?
Visit your counselor or scan this QR code for more resources!

FUND YOUR FUTURE → FILE YOUR FAFSA

- Seniors, college can be accessible and affordable.
- LPS seniors, step toward graduation and your future goals by doing the FAFSA.
- Complete the form by **April 18, 2025**, for graduation.

Apply today!
2025-26 FAFSA now available.

Need help?
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FUND YOUR FUTURE → FILE YOUR FAFSA

- Seniors, college can be accessible and affordable.
- LPS seniors, step toward graduation and your future goals by doing the FAFSA.
- Complete the form by **April 18, 2025**, for graduation.

Apply today!
2025-26 FAFSA now available.

Need help?
Visit your counselor or scan this QR code for more resources!

Banners

COLLEGE CAN BE ACCESSIBLE AND AFFORDABLE.

Nearly \$4 billion in federal financial aid is left behind by high school seniors not filling out the FAFSA each year.

Don't miss out on **FREE** college cash!

File your 2025-26 FAFSA now by scanning this QR code.

Handout Front

LPS seniors, fast-track your way to graduation and your future goals by doing the FAFSA.

Why do the FAFSA?

- The new form is simplified – easier to understand and quicker to complete.
- More than 610,000 additional students qualify for federal student aid with the new expanded eligibility.
- Students can now access an additional \$1.8 billion in federal funds for college with the new FAFSA.

Fund Your Future – File Your FAFSA.
Complete the form by **April 18, 2025**, for graduation.

Need help?
Visit your counselor or scan this QR code for more resources!

Handout Back

News Coverage

Read this [news story](#).

