



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **Hyde County Schools Leads Statewide School Challenge in Growth to Send More Students to College**

*High schools across North Carolina are competing for grants in the NC First in FAFSA School Challenge*

**RALEIGH, NC** - Hyde County Schools is currently in first place in the growth category in a statewide School Challenge to encourage students to complete the [Free Application for Federal Student Aid](#) (FAFSA). The most recent data show Hyde County high schools have increased their FAFSA completion rate by 8% from March to April 2021 - the highest of any other district in the state.

Ocracoke School is tied for the number one spot on the Leaderboard in the Extra Small Schools category with 100% of its students completing the FAFSA.

[myFutureNC](#), along with Carolina Demography, College Foundation of North Carolina, College Advising Corps, the Hunt Institute, with generous support from John M. Belk Endowment, are sponsoring the [NC First in FAFSA](#) School Challenge to motivate students to take full advantage of free federal aid to help them pay for college. Studies show students who complete the FAFSA are far more likely to enroll in higher education.

“The FAFSA is the first step to free or affordable college so we are thrilled to see 100% of our school districts across North Carolina participating in our First in FAFSA Challenge,” said **Cecilia Holden, CEO of myFutureNC**. “We are especially grateful to the district leaders, school principals, counselors, faculty, and staff at Hyde County Schools schools who are helping their students go to college and inspiring other schools and districts to increase their FAFSA completion rates.”

While progress is being made, FAFSA completions in North Carolina are still down 5.7% statewide compared to this same time last year. Filling out the FAFSA is more important than ever because more families need additional financial support to make college a reality of the pandemic and related economic challenges. In 2020, North Carolina students left an estimated \$107 million in federal financial aid on the table by not filling out the FAFSA.

"We are always proud to be told that Hyde County Schools is leading the state in growth, especially with our FAFSA completions! We are striving each day to provide resources and options to all of our students that make both college and career training affordable beyond high school," said **Steve Basnight, Superintendent of Hyde County Schools**. "We know that today's jobs already require additional career certifications or college degrees. We also recognize that those opportunities beyond high school are essential in providing our students with the advantages to compete at the highest levels of education, employment, and in the professional marketplace."

All School Challenge leaders [can be found here](#). The data is updated on the second Tuesday of each month to reflect the month prior FAFSA completion data.

There is still time for students and families to complete the FAFSA and attend college in the fall. For any questions or assistance, please visit the [College Foundation of North Carolina's website](#).

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#### **ABOUT THE SCHOOL CHALLENGE:**

NC First in FAFSA launched the inaugural [FAFSA Challenge](#) this semester to encourage high schools to earn the highest FAFSA completion rate and implement innovative strategies to support FAFSA completion locally. 494 North Carolina high schools or 75% of public high schools across the state have registered for the challenge.

Schools compete in the Challenge with schools of similar size and type, with winners earning a \$500 grant in each of the following categories:

- Highest percentage of completed FAFSAs
- Highest percent increase in FAFSA completion rate
- Best FAFSA completion strategy

The Challenge will conclude on June 30th, 2021 with winners announced by July 31st, 2021. Schools can keep track of their progress with the [NC First in FAFSA Tracker](#) to identify specific areas of need and create targeted efforts to increase attainment. Final FAFSA completion rates are calculated using FAFSA completion data from the U.S. Department of Education and final high school graduation counts from NC DPI.

Updates to [the leaderboard](#) are made monthly. Winners will be announced in Summer 2021.

#### **ABOUT NC FIRST IN FAFSA:**

NC [First in FAFSA](#) is a [myFutureNC](#) Collaborative that focuses on increasing the number of high school seniors who complete the FAFSA application. Increasing the [Free Application for Federal Student Aid](#), or FAFSA, completion rate is a fundamental step in North Carolina's efforts to meet our state's 2 million by 2030 postsecondary educational attainment goal. Students who

complete the FAFSA are more likely to enroll in higher education, persist in their college coursework, and obtain a degree.

Partners include Carolina Demography, College Foundation of North Carolina, College Advising Corps, the Hunt Institute, and the John M. Belk Endowment.

For more information on NC First in FAFSA, visit [myfuturenc.org/first-in-fafsa/](https://myfuturenc.org/first-in-fafsa/).