

Remote FAFSA help available for city students

Justin Murphy

Rochester Democrat and Chronicle USA
TODAY NETWORK

Goodbye, FAFSA Fest. Hello, FAFSATHon.

Rochester high school students will be able to call or text for help filling out the Federal Application for Financial Student Aid on several days this winter, including from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. this Saturday.

Those FAFSA-Thons will replace the FAFSA Fest, an in-person event held each year by the Rochester Education Foundation. COVID-19 made it necessary to change the format.

The remote events will be held Nov. 14, Dec. 5 and Jan. 16. Students can text (585) 571-7226 on those days, or in advance, to schedule a time for remote help on the FAFSA and other college application questions. There will be appointments on the same day, but students can also schedule them for later.

The organization is also seeking volunteers to help guide students; training will be provided. More information is available at www.rochestereducation.org.

Pandemic hurt college access

The majority of Rochester’s high school graduates qualify for substantial student aid packages, enough to cover most or

all of their expenses. None of that is possible, though, until they fill out the FAFSA.

Before COVID-19, FAFSA completion rates were an emerging bright spot in the Rochester City School District. In 2018-19 about 44% of 12th graders in RCSD and local charter schools had filled out a FAFSA, up from 40% the year before. That was a total of 818 students, said Pat Braus, director of strategy and policy for the Rochester Education Foundation.

Key to that success, though, are students’ relationship with teachers and guidance counselors who might encourage them to apply for college and then walk them through the process. When everyone was sent home from school, those relationships were ruptured.

At the same time, about half of students who completed their FAFSA got help from the Rochester Education Foundation’s college access programs, including by attending a FAFSA Fest, Braus said.

Just 33% of students completed a FAFSA by June 2020, about 200 fewer students than the year before. The same trend was visible nationally, Braus said.

“The pandemic really hasn’t made things easier for college access,” she said. “The key thing for kids is their teachers and counselors encouraging them to go to college. When schools went remote, that became more challenging.”

at www.rochesteran.org.

Contact staff writer Justin Murphy at jmurphy7@gannett.com.



Students fill out their FAFSA at one of REF’s FAFSA Fests. ROCHESTER EDUCATION FOUNDATION FILE PHOTO

More information about efforts to improve
college access, including volunteer
opportunities, is available

[Copyright © 2020 Democrat and Chronicle 11/14/2020](#)

[Powered by TECNAVIA](#)

Saturday, 11/14/2020 Page .A03

Copyright © 2020 Democrat and Chronicle 11/14/2020