Closing Academic Achievement and Opportunity Gaps

Grant in Action: Sponsoring FAFSA Fests
The Community Foundation believes it is imperative that we — as a community — work together to help students achieve the dream of going to college. Thanks to our donors, last year alone we awarded $828,000 to 507 students to help pay for college, graduate school, and technical studies.

But how can we help more students afford college? It starts with the Free Application for Federal Student Aid form, better known as the [FAFSA](). This online form asks for financial information about a family in order to determine whether a student is eligible for some type of assistance — federal grants, loans, and work-study funds. Some colleges use this form to help determine other forms of financial aid.

Completing the form is the first step, but it isn't always easy.

The Community Foundation has been supporting efforts of the [Rochester College Access Network](), which hosts a series of FAFSA Fests, where students and their families can get free, professional help to complete these forms. Filing early is important as financial aid is distributed on a first-come, first-served basis. Programs such as the New York State Education Opportunity Program and Higher Education Opportunity Program fill up quickly.

The number of students age 19 and under in the Rochester City School District and charter schools who filed their FAFSA form by the end of March increased from 557 in 2016 to 726 in 2017 — a 30.3 percent increase. Of those 726 students, one-third filed the financial aid form at a FAFSA Fest event.

"We have seen more students filing the FAFSA, and more students filing the FAFSA earlier than they did in the past, so they are eligible for more financial aid," says Pat Braus, executive director of the Rochester Education Foundation (REF).

REF's College Access Network is a collaboration of representatives from local colleges and universities, nonprofit and philanthropic organizations, and businesses. Its members work together to remove barriers to college access and success for Rochester students.

FAFSA Fests will be held five times between October 12 and December 7, 2019. See this [list of events]().

What is needed by students to attend a FAFSA Fest:

- In advance, get a Federal Student AID (FSA) ID to fill out the form. That is available at https://fsaid.ed.gov;
- 2016 federal and New York state tax forms for students and parents;
- Social Security numbers of parents and students; and
- A parent or guardian.

For more details on the FAFSA, visit https://studentaid.ed.gov/sa/resources#fafsa.