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FAFSA Fest Opens Doors of Opportunity

(January 10, 2024) Responding to the newly revised college financial aid form known as FAFSA, the Rochester Education Foundation (REF) and the Rochester College Access Network, in conjunction with the Rochester City School District and the City of Rochester, are making it easier than ever for Rochester students to attend college.

This year, FAFSA Fest events, where students and families can get help filling out the revised financial aid form, will take place at RCSD and charter high schools throughout the city beginning on Tuesday, January 9th. Students and educators shared that having the events at their own schools creates a level of comfort and familiarity. Additionally, the barrier of getting there is removed for the students because the events will take place either during or immediately following the school day. For those who prefer an event on a Saturday, there will be an opportunity to attend a FAFSA Fest at the Progressive New Cathedral on Saturday, January 20.

"Accessibility is very important. We are grateful to the City of Rochester for printing posters and widely helping us spread the word about the events to students and families. We are also grateful to Crystal Clark, Acting Executive Director of Student Support Services at RCSD and her team as well as the charter schools for hosting these events," said Amy Stein, Executive Director of the Rochester Education Foundation (REF). Families will be able to get more information at <https://rochestercan.org/fafsa-fest/fafsa-fest-events.html>

Although many of Rochester's city students qualify for significant amounts of financial aid through grants and scholarships, the FAFSA form can be challenging to fill out. Indeed, in 2022-23, only 36.5 percent of RCSD and charter school students in Rochester completed the form – meaning most students did not do so. Boosting that rate is a community goal this year.

"Too often, students and families assume higher education is unaffordable," said Mayor Malik D. Evans. "The FAFSA Fests provide an opportunity to learn what financial aid is available and get help filling out the forms to qualify. And even if you've filled out the form before, the changes this year may make it easier than ever to get grants or scholarships. You won't know if you don't try. That's why I want to encourage all of our high school seniors to take advantage of these opportunities."

"Seeing our students go off to college fills me with great pride and excitement," said Dr. Carmine Peluso, Superintendent of Schools. "These FAFSA Fests offer a gateway for our talented students to unlock opportunities, navigate financial aid, and enter college with confidence. I celebrate the achievements of our seniors, congratulate them on their acceptance to college, and look forward to their contributions as young adults."

This is the tenth year of FAFSA Fest events, presented by REF, the City of Rochester, and the Rochester College Access Network, along with a host of sponsors.

Over the years, Rochester Education Foundation has been lucky to have many fabulous volunteers helping students and their families complete the FAFSA forms. Anyone interested in volunteering is encouraged to con-

tact REF Director of College Access Initiatives, Janee Slade at janee@rochestereducation.org.

"We are encouraging everyone who knows a graduating senior in Rochester to encourage them to go to a FAFSA Fest event and fill out the form!" said Stein. "Tell a friend, tell a neighbor, and help our students take full advantage of college opportunities."

Each FAFSA event includes food, drinks, and the opportunity to win prizes.

FAFSA FEST events schedule:

- Monroe - January 9, 12:30-5 pm
- Wilson - January 11, 8:30 am-12:30 pm
- East - January 11, 2:30-5:30 pm
- Vertus - January 16, 3-6 pm
- School Without Walls - January 17, 4-7 pm
- Rochester Prep - January 18, 4-7 pm
- New Progressive Cathedral - Saturday, January 20 from 11am-3pm
- Northeast College Preparatory High School - January 24, 9 am-12 pm
- World of Inquiry School No. 58 - January 25, 5-7pm
- Franklin - January 31, 4-6 pm
- Edison - February 13, 3-5 pm
- Hillside Work Scholarship @ 1 Mustard St 14608 - February 28, 3:30-6pm
- School of the Arts - March 7, 3:30pm-6:30 pm

Students and parents are encouraged to sign up for their FSA ID prior to attending the FAFSA Fest event.

<https://studentaid.gov/fsa-id/create-account/launch>

For information about FAFSA Fest events, please go to www.rochestercan.org.

Rochester Education Foundation's mission is to provide programs and resources to improve learning and success for all students in the City of Rochester through partnerships with educators, businesses, and the community.

The Rochester College Access Network was launched in April 2013. The mission of this collaborative group is to increase college access and success through coordinated communication, coalition, and advocacy to enable students in Rochester to meet their full potential. The group includes representatives from local colleges and universities, guidance counselors, and representatives from Rochester city schools, not-for-profit organizations, philanthropic organizations, and businesses.

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