

Financial Aid Workshop for Parents and Students

Mullins High School

Mullins, South Carolina

To show parents and students how to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) for postsecondary school, Mullins created a financial aid workshop. The workshop was held in February so it would be after parents had received wage statements and before they started their tax returns.

The area surrounding Mullins has a high unemployment rate. Many of the parents of students at Mullins have difficulty navigating the complex financial aid form. As a result, many students cannot access the financial assistance they qualify for and need to take advantage of postsecondary education opportunities.

To create the program, Mullins researched how other schools were helping their students and families navigate the financial aid system, borrowing several of those practices. The guidance office contacted local college financial aid advisors to help design and implement the workshop. These advisors did most of the content planning and supplied the required materials. The sessions demonstrated the step-by-step process required to fill out the forms and addressed the questions and concerns of students and their parents. The advisors provided each parent with a copy of the FAFSA form. By the end of the workshop, each student's financial aid application was complete.

Mullins knew its biggest challenge would be getting parents to attend. Other parent involvement initiatives had only drawn a handful of participants. To publicize the financial aid classes, the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) offered a bonus incentive to students who attended the workshops: a tardy pass that could be used once anytime until the end of the school year. Guidance counselors visited classrooms to invite juniors and seniors to attend, and the daily televised broadcast included announcements and reminders about the tardy pass incentive. The school encouraged students to remind their parents about the workshops. The ATP also used traditional publicity methods to reach out to the parents directly, including signage outside the school, fliers for visiting parents, the website, and newsletter announcements.

In the end, 56 students and 73 parents participated in the workshop. Thanks to the efforts of teachers, administrators, community members who acted as financial aid advisors, and students who helped with publicity, the event was a success. Students and parents received valuable information about financial aid, and they realized how much the school cared that they attend the workshops. Best of all, the students walked out of the meetings with filled-out financial aid applications in hand!

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