



PANDEMIC IMPACTS POSTSECONDARY ENROLLMENT OUTLOOK IN METRO ATLANTA

New Learn4Life Report Indicates That 1,100 Fewer Atlanta-Area Students Completed the FAFSA, a Critical Financial Aid Application, Last Year

ATLANTA – (November 18, 2021) – [Learn4Life \(L4L\)](#) today announced the release of a new study, **“Postsecondary Trends in the Metro Atlanta Region.”** The report, built on data analysis from Bellwether Education Partners, estimates a regional Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) completion decline of 4% over the past year, which translates to nearly 1,100 fewer student applications submitted in 2021 compared to 2020. The FAFSA is used to determine eligibility for federal student aid including low-cost loans, grants, work-study, and in some cases, state and school aid.

Completing the FAFSA increases postsecondary enrollment from 55% to 90% and every additional \$1,000 in financial aid increases postsecondary persistence rates by 4%. Given the impact of FAFSA completion on postsecondary success, these findings require decisive action to reverse this trend, put more students back on track to choice-filled careers, and protect the vitality of metro Atlanta's workforce and economy.

“The isolating impact of the pandemic has had a profound effect on students as they make the transition to postsecondary education. Students need additional support to navigate the complexity of the financial aid process but these findings indicate that the pandemic has made this difficult process all but impossible for too many kids,” said Dr. Kenneth Zeff, executive director of Learn4Life.

Low-income students and students of color who were already struggling with postsecondary access prior to the pandemic are now even worse off. During the pandemic, students in high-poverty schools saw the biggest drop in FAFSA completions. Learn4Life’s study found that between 2020 and 2021, there has been a 27% gap in FAFSA completion between schools with 75% or more students of color compared to schools with less than 75% students of color. Atlanta’s rate of decline has been sharper than the rest of the nation, which is also experiencing a significant drop in FAFSA completion.

To help mitigate these declines and increase postsecondary enrollment throughout metro Atlanta, Learn4Life has joined forces with [United Way’s College Bound Initiative](#) and [The Scholarship Academy](#). Together, they are harnessing the power of collective impact to offer a comprehensive suite of supports to add capacity to school counseling teams in Title I schools throughout the region: free FAFSA training for staff and community volunteers, in-person and virtual FAFSA completion events, one-to-one office hours, marketing materials, scholarship resources, and incentives for completion.

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“To access these critical funds, the College Bound program meets students during the school day, evenings, weekends, and virtually to provide the technical support from experts and trained volunteers,” said Jessica Johnson, executive director of The Scholarship Academy. “By working closely with school leaders, nonprofits, and our partners at the United Way and Learn4Life, we are seeing students begin to reengage which will make postsecondary school affordable.”

The report findings drew from national research and an in-depth analysis of FAFSA completion databases including the Georgia Office of Student Achievement, US Department of Education and the National College Attainment Network. FAFSA submission and completion data were accessed for all high schools in the eight districts in the Learn4Life region of metro Atlanta from 2015-2021.

While there are several reasons for the sharp decline in FAFSA completion, the research points to several key factors:

- Remote learning disconnected students from the normal support they may have received before the pandemic
- Compounding pandemic-related demands on times which were already struggling with high student to counselor ratios (currently 466:1)
- 21% of low-income students said money from their jobs is needed to support their family rather than paying for college expenses

For more detail on this analysis and possible solutions, please access the full report [here](#).

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About Learn4Life:

Learn4Life (L4L), composed of leaders from school districts, businesses, and nonprofits, is the metro Atlanta regional education partnership. L4L was founded in 2016 by the Atlanta Regional Commission, Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta, Metro Atlanta Chamber, and the United Way of Greater Atlanta to identify best practices at key education milestones and scale those proven solutions throughout the region.

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