

Four Key Steps to Financial Aid

1 Federal Aid -- FAFSA

This is the most important application for financial aid. It is completed fall of senior year. The FAFSA is the *key* to federal grants (like the Pell Grant), federal student loans and work study. It is need-based aid. The application should open December 1, 2024. **The Class of 2025 will be completing the 2025-2026 FAFSA** using your/your parents 2023 federal tax information or tax returns. See the FAFSA website for details on how to apply and to access the application when it opens- <https://studentaid.gov/h/apply-for-aid/fafsa>

We encourage *all* families to complete the FAFSA even if you think you won't qualify -- colleges and many scholarships use information from the FAFSA to award their scholarships/aid. You can complete it even if you don't know where you will attend college/technical school. It's important to complete the FAFSA as soon as it opens - be aware of deadlines each college may have.

2 State Aid – Florida Student Financial Aid

Seniors must complete the Florida Student Financial Aid application to be eligible for state grants and scholarships, including **Florida Bright Futures**. Bright Futures provides scholarship money for students who will attend college in Florida. It is merit-based aid - eligibility is based on GPA, SAT/ACT scores **and** community service/work hours. See your counselor for more information and check the state website for any legislative changes.

Seniors must apply between October 1 and graduation to be eligible. Go to www.FloridaStudentFinancialAid.org/ssfad/bf/ to apply. It's important that you know and understand the eligibility requirements and deadline!

All students should apply-- even if they are not sure if they will qualify, if they are not considering going to college, are planning to go out of state, are taking a year off or are enlisting in the military. There are state grants in addition to Bright Futures for which you may be eligible.

3 Institutional Aid

Check for scholarships at the college you will attend. Many offer scholarships through their financial aid office. Students may need to submit separate applications. Scholarships may be need-based and/or merit-based. Most require that the student have successfully submitted the FAFSA.

4 Private Scholarships

There are many national and local organizations that offer scholarships. Some are specific to a major, an ethnicity or require certain GPA/test scores, so students need to read each carefully for the eligibility requirements.

The College and Career Center at Manatee High School maintains a list of scholarship opportunities that is posted on the school website (<https://www.manateeschools.net/manatee>) – click on “Academics” then “College and Career Center” to see the link. Also on that page are additional scholarship resources.

