

## PRESS RELEASE

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### **Orange County Lauded for Supporting Educational Goals of Foster Youth**

*Ranked first among large counties in statewide FAFSA Challenge*

**Orange County, CA** – [The County of Orange Social Services Agency](#) (SSA) is pleased to announce the county’s successful efforts in assisting foster youth in applying for college financial aid. SSA collaborated with the [Orange County Department of Education](#) (OCDE) and other partners to help high school seniors in foster care sign up for the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).

FAFSA determines student eligibility for grants, fee waivers and low interest loans for current and prospective college students.

The county initiative was part of the [California Foster Youth FAFSA Challenge](#), a statewide competition designed to encourage foster youth to pursue higher education. The combined team of SSA, OCDE and its partners placed first among large counties in the state, with 71 percent of Orange County high school seniors in foster care completing their FAFSA applications this year. This exceeds the campaign goal of 61 percent completion.

SSA, OCDE and its partners formed a multi-agency FAFSA Challenge Strategic Planning Committee, which held numerous FAFSA completion trainings with school districts, social workers and housing groups. Participating agencies also developed partnerships with local colleges to hold FAFSA workshops.

[John Burton Advocates for Youth](#) (JBAY), the San Francisco organizer of the challenge, bestowed the county with a \$1,000 award which will be earmarked for scholarships to students graduating high school next year. In addition, thirty students selected from participating counties were named Burton Scholars and each awarded \$500 scholarships to be used for their post-secondary education. Two Orange County students were among the recipients.

Former state Senator and JBAY founder John Burton commended the county for “opening the doors of higher education to the most vulnerable and making their college dreams come true.”

Burton continued, “Orange County has been a leader in its efforts to reach high school seniors in foster care, and the completion rate in the county — about twice the rate for foster youth statewide in past years — shows it.”

Completion of the FAFSA is a crucial step for students seeking financial aid for college. For some, the determination of awards may drive the decision of whether or not to enroll. Among first-time applicants, more than 80 percent of foster youth qualify for community college fee-waivers, and nearly 60 percent receive federal Pell Grant subsidies.

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