LOUISIANA OFFICE OF STUDENT FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

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As 2021 continued to be a unique year for Louisiana students, it also brought the opportunity for renewed focus on college access and affordability. LOSFA introduced a new way for students to ask questions about TOPS 24/7, promoted a new grant to help students near completion finish their degrees and certifications, and created a new division to expand LOSFA's outreach support and advance its engagement strategies to reach students.

HERE ARE SOME OF LOSFA'S HIGHLIGHTS FROM 2021

LOUISIANA RANKED #1 IN FAFSA COMPLETION: In May 2021, data from the National College Attainment Network's (NCAN) FAFSA Tracker showed 70.9 percent, or 33,134 of Louisiana's high school seniors had completed the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), making the state number one in the country for FAFSA completion. As of September 24, 78.0 percent of students (36,454) in the Class of 2021 completed the FAFSA.

Completing the FAFSA indicates whether students plan to seamlessly enroll at a postsecondary institution following high school graduation. The FAFSA also levels the playing field, affording students a way to pay for their college education. The data from NCAN also demonstrated that despite any financial impacts COVID had on their families, students and parents understood the value of education beyond a high school diploma.



LOSFA's efforts were highlighted in a FAFSA blog series by the Education Commission of the States.



FAFSA NOW CAMPAIGN: LOSFA's FAFSA Now pilot program, introduced during the 2020-21 academic year, encourages students to complete the FAFSA before the federal deadline. Forty-one schools participated in the pilot, which also pushed Louisiana's priority FAFSA deadline from July 1 to February 1. Two of the pilot schools reached 100 percent, and 75 percent exceeded the national FAFSA completion average 59.5%.



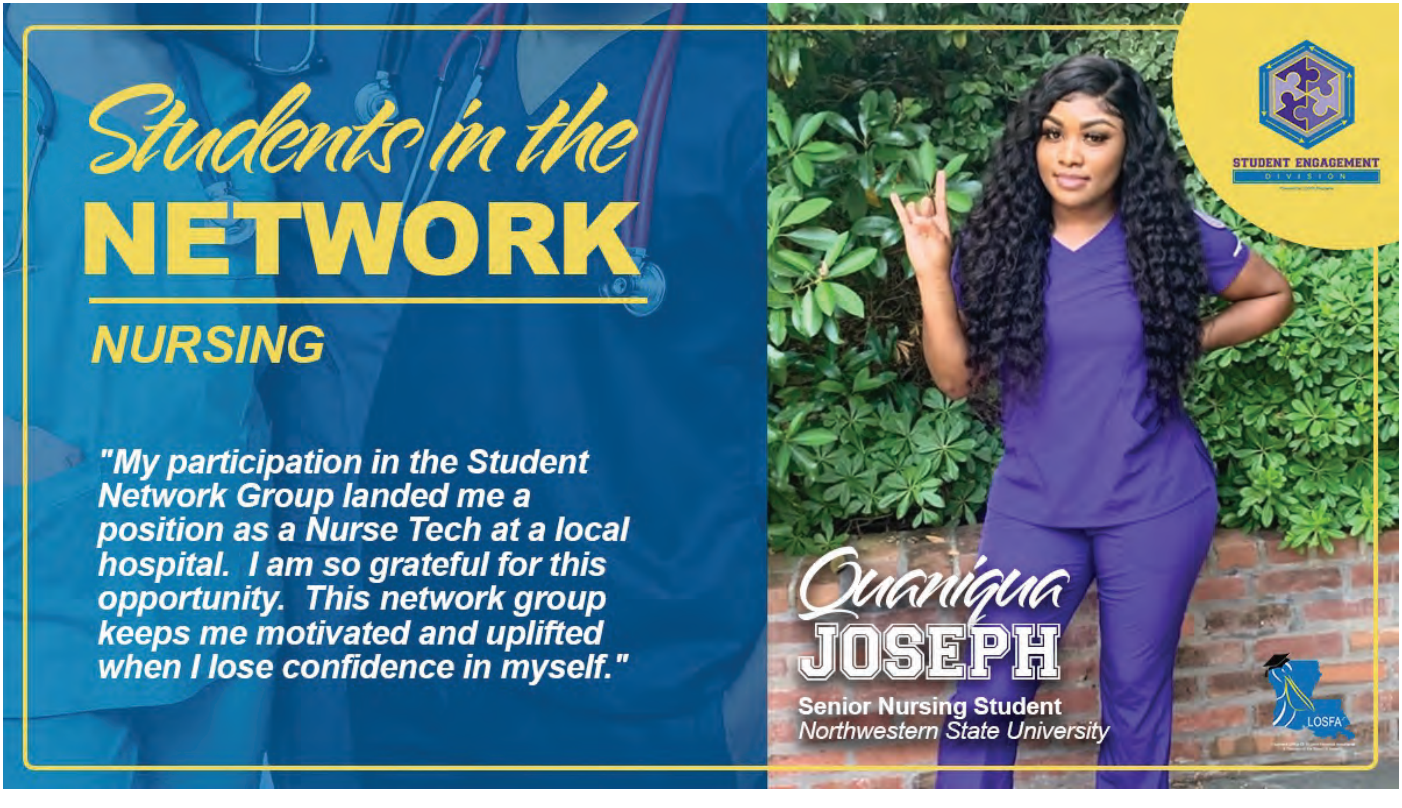
High school seniors also urged their classmates to complete the FAFSA. Noah Miller, a 2021 Jewel M. Sumner High School graduate, had the following advice, "If you plan on going to college, completing your FAFSA is absolutely crucial. You really need to make use of all the financial aid and scholarship opportunities that are offered to you. Not filling out the FAFSA if you plan on going to college would be a big mistake."

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT
DIVISION
Powered by LOSFA Programs

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT DIVISION:
The Student Engagement Division furthers LOSFA's outreach support and advances engagement strategies to reach K-12 students, postsecondary students, and returning adults.

The division builds partnerships with community organizations, connects students with business and industry professionals, and shares resources to assist students with degree completion.

The Student Engagement Division also highlights the importance of LOSFA's fifth match point of the agency's 5 Point Match: Retention, by connecting students with similar backgrounds and majors to professionals (in their field of study) who can connect classroom learning to workplace experience.



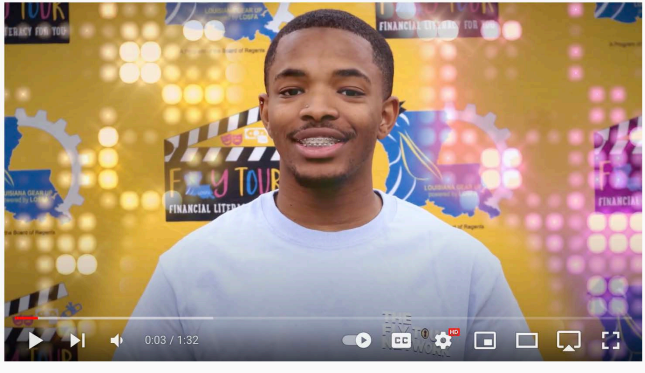
FINANCIAL LITERACY FOR YOU (FLY) TOUR:
LOSFA Programs held two virtual FLY Tours in 2021 and found success in exposing more students to the importance of understanding why college selection, financial aid, and degree completion lead to a successful career start.

In 2020, just over **1,900 students** attended the Spring in-person FLY Tour, which was held prior to the pandemic. LOSFA's Spring and Fall 2019 in-person FLY Tours hosted **3,725 students.** A total of **9,041 students** logged in to Zoom to see the Spring 2021 and Fall 2021 FLY Tours. Another **910 viewers** were exposed to the FLY Tours on LOSFA's YouTube channel.

Click here to see the 2021 F.L.Y. Tour Highlight video!

The LOSFA College Advocates led students through interactive games to expose them to their postsecondary options and learn the costs associated with college. They also discussed how financial aid helps pay for college and which institution might be their best match.

Postsecondary administrators and presidents also met with students in breakout rooms to discuss financial aid options, majors, and more.



2021 F.L.Y. Tour Highlights



UPROMISE PARTNERSHIP: The importance of budgeting and saving became a common theme throughout the pandemic. LOSFA capitalized on helping Louisiana families save more through a partnership with its Student Tuition and Revenue Trust (START) program and Upromise, a consumer brand that offers a free reward program to help families save for college. Upromise partners with major retailers, restaurants, and other brands to give members cash back rewards on their purchases. Upromise Mastercard cardmembers earn 1.529% cashback rewards on every purchase when their Upromise program account is linked to an eligible college savings plan like START.

Within months of the partnership, Upromise reported more than 500 members were linked to a START account, and between May and August, monthly contributions from Upromise rose from just under $3,000 to more than $9,000.

Upromise also offered a $529 scholarship to a Upromise member who was linked to a START account.

Louisiana families continue to maintain the advantages of investing in the START Saving Program with their selected investment fund, including the Louisiana Principal Protection Fund. The state matches up to 14% of deposits each year (depending on their adjusted gross income).



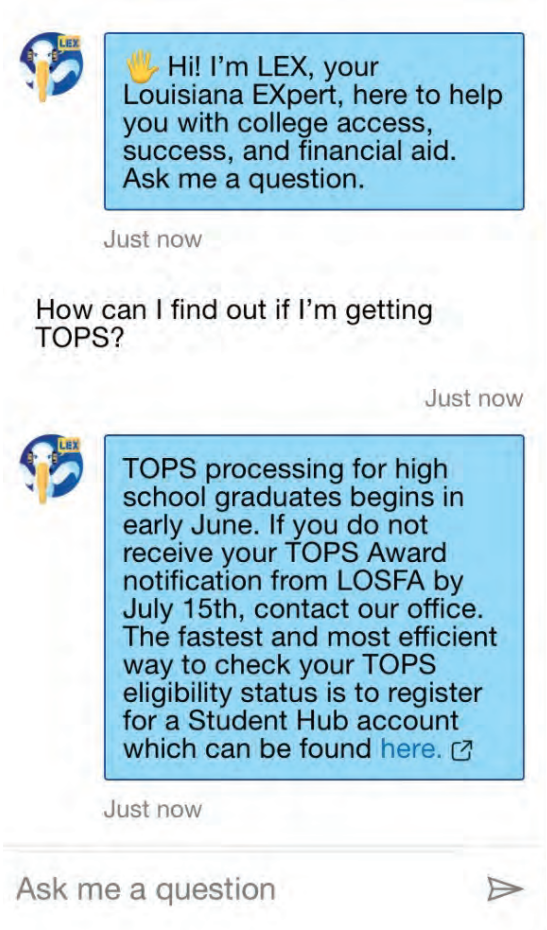
START 529 COLLEGE SAVING CAMPAIGNS: For National 529 Day in May, LOSFA held a month-long campaign to make parents and grandparents aware of the benefits of saving early for a child's college education. The month began with a scavenger hunt and a panel of young students answering questions about what college is, why people should save money, and what is needed to go to college. The first five students received a $29 deposit into their START account. **Click here to see the video!**



Louisiana State Treasurer John Schroder also shared the benefits of saving early. Treasurer Schroder helped celebrate National College Savings Month, in September, with a written piece in The Advocate and a video message.

LOSFA LAUNCHES ITS CHATBOT, LEX:

In August, LOSFA's EXpert, LEX, was introduced. LEX is the agency's artificial intelligence chatbot. LEX is available 24/7 to respond to general TOPS questions, allowing staff members to focus on more complex questions during business hours through virtual office hours. As of December 7, 2021, LEX has answered 2,470 questions (92 of those were answered in December). On average, LEX answers 15 questions per day.





COMPLETERS GRANT:

The pandemic forced many families to choose between working to support family or continuing their education. Through one-time Governor's Emergency Education Relief (GEER) dollars, the Completers Grant provides financial aid to students in all majors who are within 30 credit hours of completing a degree at a Louisiana public two- or four-year postsecondary institution. All degree programs and majors are eligible for funding assistance, with equal priority given to the following high demand fields: healthcare, other Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) fields and teacher education.

Funds for the Completers Grant are available through ***September 30, 2022.***

The grant also incentivized current students and returning adults learners to complete a short-term credential program at a two-year institution.

Click here to access LOSFA's Completers Grant Press Kit.



Wishing you a renewed spirit to support and assist more students in 2022.