



## **“Ask Benji” FAQ for Educators and Stakeholders**

### **Who should complete the FAFSA?**

Any student who is considering pursuing a postsecondary education should submit a FAFSA; it is one of the most important steps in applying to colleges or universities and the best way of making college more affordable for students. Arizona students from middle-income families secure an average of \$10,000 per year in federal financial aid just by completing the FAFSA (including work study, grants, and federal loans). In fact, most colleges and universities require a FAFSA to grant financial aid, including scholarships.

### **Where can students and families get help with the FAFSA?**

Traditionally, students and families ask school counselors for answers to FAFSA questions. Often counselors receive more requests than they can handle. Students and families can now “Ask Benji” questions about the FAFSA. Benji is a first-of-its-kind chatbot created as a digital FAFSA assistant to help students and families get quick answers to questions about the FAFSA. Ask Benji’s website, [www.askbenji.org](http://www.askbenji.org), also features resources to learn more about the FAFSA

### **Is completing the FAFSA hard?**

It’s easier than ever to complete the FAFSA. It takes about 30 minutes to complete and can be done from a PC, laptop, or mobile device. Help from Benji along the way makes the process even easier.

### **What is Benji?**

Benji is a first-of-its kind chatbot, specifically designed to help students, parents, and educators get quick answers to a wide variety of questions about the FAFSA. Benji is free and easy to use. It is not an app. There is no download required.



## **How can families and students get started with Benji?**

To get started, a user should text the word “Help” to Benji at 602-786-8171. The user may receive a response from another number. This is Benji. Benji quickly responds to all questions, 24-7. We also encourage you to try Benji for yourself, so you can answer questions you may get about using this tool.

## **Does Benji need any information from users?**

Benji will ask users some basic questions (name, high school, grade), which will be used for targeted “nudge” messaging from Benji, such as reminders about FAFSA deadlines and information about upcoming FAFSA events. The information Benji collects, as well as all questions asked, are completely confidential.

## **How does Benji work?**

Benji has been programmed to immediately answer more than 600 FAFSA and financial aid questions that students and parents may have while submitting their FAFSA. As more Arizona students and parents use this service, Benji will continue to learn and respond to more questions and unique circumstances.

Benji is most effective when used by students and families whose school districts have a signed agreement in place with College Success Arizona. Benji will only provide reminders and proactive messages for students who go to school in a partner school district. Email the “Ask Benji” team at [benji@collegesuccessarizona.org](mailto:benji@collegesuccessarizona.org) to learn more about becoming a partner.

## **Who built Benji?**

Ask Benji was developed and launched by a coalition of state higher education leaders: College Success Arizona, Achieve60AZ, Arizona Commission for Postsecondary Education, Arizona State University, Maricopa Community Colleges, Be A Leader Foundation, and Helios Education Foundation.



The Ask Benji coalition was formed in response to Arizona State University's selection as an inaugural partner for the Alliance for the American Dream, an initiative of Schmidt Futures to restore prosperity to the American middle class. ASU and College Success Arizona, with coalition partners, competed against 40 teams around the country to secure funding through Schmidt Futures for this project.

### **Why was Benji built?**

Benji was built to help ensure that Arizona meets its FAFSA completion goal of 52 percent of Arizona students for the 2020-2021 FAFSA cycle. Arizona is ranked 49<sup>th</sup> out of 50 states in FAFSA completion; the coalition of partners seek to reverse that trend.

For Ask Benji's first year, the coalition seeks to reach 30,000 households and provide direct FAFSA assistance to at least 10,000 families in Maricopa County. Arizona has one of the lowest FAFSA completion rates in the nation and Ask Benji seeks to reverse that trend to ensure that access to higher education is equitable across the state.

### **What else does Benji seek to accomplish?**

By providing immediate, confidential answers to questions about the FAFSA, Ask Benji seeks to ensure that access to higher education is equitable across Arizona. Benji could also affect the number of students enrolling in a college or university. Completing the FAFSA directly impacts the number of students who pursue a higher education. According to the National College Access Network, 90 percent of those who submit the application ultimately enroll at a college or university.

### **Where can I or my students and families get more information?**

Visit [www.askbenji.org](http://www.askbenji.org) for more information about Benji, FAFSA, and other resources for students or parents. Text the word "Help" to Benji at 602-786-8171 to get started today. Email the "Ask Benji" team at [benji@collegesuccessarizona.org](mailto:benji@collegesuccessarizona.org).