

December 14, 2022

Ambassador Susan Rice
Assistant to the President for Domestic Policy
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20500

The Honorable Miguel Cardona
Secretary of Education
400 Maryland Ave., S.W.
Washington, DC 20202

Dear Ambassador Rice and Secretary Cardona,

On behalf of postsecondary financial aid offices and college access and success organizations across the country, we write today with two questions: *Can the administration confirm that the 2024-25 Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) will be ready on October 1, 2023? And, if not, when will the administration confirm the release date of the 2024-25 FAFSA?*

The National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (NASFAA) represents nearly 20,000 financial aid professionals who serve 16 million students each year at colleges and universities in all sectors throughout the country. NASFAA member institutions serve nine out of every ten undergraduates in the U.S.

The National College Attainment Network (NCAN) represents nearly 600 member organizations across almost all 50 states that help first-generation students and those from low-income families to prepare for, apply to, and succeed in postsecondary education. NCAN serves 2 million students annually.

Along with a broad coalition, our organizations advocated for many years for FAFSA simplification. Since the passage of the FAFSA Simplification Act, we have been working with Federal Student Aid (FSA) to ensure a smooth implementation. It is critical for financial aid administrators and college access professionals to be aware of FSA's progress toward implementation, including when the FAFSA will be made available next year.

During the FSA Training Conference, we were heartened by the progress the Department of Education (ED) has made toward implementing the changes from the FAFSA Simplification Act, which was signed into law in December 2020. However, after listening closely, neither ED nor FSA officials confirmed the date the FAFSA would be made available. College financial aid administrators and access professionals need that information now in order to plan how best to help students and families apply for and receive student financial aid.

The FAFSA Simplification Act makes unprecedented changes to the federal student aid process, impacting all areas of the experience from application to eligibility determination. These legislative changes will benefit students greatly by reducing the number of FAFSA questions, expanding Pell Grant eligibility, and improving early awareness. Financial aid administrators and college access professionals are already well into preparations to guide students through the 2024-25 application process. They must have a clear understanding *today* of when the FAFSA will be made available. Without adequate time to prepare, institutions and counselors may not be able to align their systems and processes to the compressed timeline or provide the services and support that many students need to complete the FAFSA.

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We urge the administration to do everything in its power to ensure the FAFSA is released as it has traditionally been on October 1, 2023. However, if this date cannot be met, we need FSA to clearly and thoroughly communicate its implementation and training schedules, with dates on when draft and final application forms will be made available.

To date, schedules for critical elements like file layouts, software developer specifications, draft applications, and output documents indicate only a planned season for release. With fewer than 10 months to the expected launch date, we are becoming increasingly concerned that we do not have a detailed milestones document that includes dates for testing.

Several timelines FSA has shared already differ significantly from prior years and appear incompatible with an October launch of the FAFSA. For instance, test Institutional Student Information Records (ISIRs) are expected in late summer 2023. This could leave as little as one week before the FAFSA launch date of October 1. The draft FAFSA and summary of changes are expected in spring 2023; in the previous year those were released in February.

October 1, 2023 marks nearly three years for FSA to implement the law when considering the one-year extension already granted by Congress. Financial aid administrators and college access professionals are preparing *now* for how they educate prospective students about the financial aid process. They need information and training to ensure their contribution to the implementation process is valuable to students.

Institutions are already in the process of setting their own timelines to begin making financial aid offers in the fall shortly after FAFSAs begin arriving on campuses. A delayed launch of the 2024-25 FAFSA would be a great loss to students and cause significant extra work for financial aid administrators and college access professionals. However, if a delay is necessary to ensure a smooth implementation, relevant stakeholders must be informed immediately so they can adjust their own timelines.

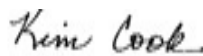
FSA should produce resources and tools that will make it easier for applicants to understand the financial aid that will be available to them. FSA should also share timely updates and provide training to partners about the upcoming changes to ensure they are able to leverage their positions to help usher in a seamless transition to a new process.

FSA officials were clear at the FSA Training Conference that their focus is on changing a process, not just a form. It is essential to recognize the process extends beyond ED and FSA, to the financial aid administrators and college access professionals who humanize the process to make it a successful experience for students.

Sincerely,



Justin Draeger
President & CEO, NASFAA



Kim Cook
Executive Director, NCAN

CC:
James Kvaal
Richard Cordray