

FAFSA Completion Project
January 20, 2012

Dear Local Educational Agency:

In 2010, the U. S. Department of Education (the Department) implemented a FAFSA Completion Project designed to assist local educational agencies (LEAs) and secondary school administrators in determining which of their students have completed a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) for the upcoming school year. FAFSA completion information provided under the FAFSA Completion Project can be helpful to LEAs and secondary schools in implementing targeted outreach efforts to assist their high school seniors and their families who have not yet submitted a FAFSA, or who submitted a FAFSA that may be incomplete. As you know, completing the FAFSA can be a critical component of access to postsecondary education.

Since the FAFSA Completion Project's initial implementation, as a pilot with 20 participants, the Department has received requests from other LEAs and secondary schools to expand the project. In response to these requests, the Department has established a process, as outlined in this letter, that will allow an additional 80 multiple-high school LEAs to participate in the project and to obtain FAFSA completion data for their students for the 2012-2013 FAFSA processing year that began on January 1, 2012. The expansion also will include an additional 12 single-high school LEAs. Those single-high school LEAs will be provided an opportunity to participate under a separate letter that will be forthcoming.

The FAFSA Completion Project allows multi-high school LEAs to access FAFSA completion data for high school seniors in their district. Each participating multi-high school LEA will choose one person from the LEA's staff to access FAFSA completion data from the applicable Department system. LEAs will submit, via the Web, directory information (name, date of birth, and zip code) of the seniors for whom the LEA would like to obtain FAFSA completion information. Each LEA will provide a secure downloadable file to the Department, with identifiers for each of their seniors, and, in return, the Department will respond with student specific FAFSA completion data. Specifically, information will be provided indicating whether the student had submitted a FAFSA and, if so, whether that initial submission was complete or not. This information will allow the LEA (and its secondary schools) to focus counseling services on assisting seniors to successfully complete and submit a FAFSA.

To participate in the FAFSA Completion Project, a multi-high school LEA must have software and hardware compatible with the Department's systems, as described below.

- IBM or fully IBM-compatible PC with a 1.2 GHz processor.
- 512 MB RAM memory.
- 60 GB hard drive.
- Windows compatible keyboard and mouse.
- SVGA graphics adapter capable of 800 X 600 screen resolution or higher.
- 56 kbps analog modem using V.90 and an Internet service.
- Windows 2000 Professional or Windows XP Home or Professional.
- Provider (ISP) or a direct connection to the Internet.

No federal funds are available for establishing the technical capability to receive FAFSA completion data or for any other aspect of this project.

In addition to the technical requirements, each multi-high school LEA applying to participate in the FAFSA Completion Project must:

- ✓ Have at least two high schools in their district.
- ✓ For evaluation purposes, agree to a staggered rollout of FAFSA completion data in which half of their high schools would be randomly assigned by the Department to have access to FAFSA data the first year that the technical and counseling components are in place, with the remaining half receiving access a year later. The purpose of this staggered implementation is to establish an experimental group and a control group about whom we will collect data to measure the effectiveness and impact of the counseling efforts that are implemented at the local level.
- ✓ Agree to participate in a national evaluation of the project. As part of the evaluation, a Department-sponsored evaluator will independently obtain data on financial aid receipt and college enrollment for seniors in both sets of schools – those assigned to receive access to FAFSA completion data and those that do not receive the FAFSA data. The evaluator may also survey a sample of students or counselors in the district about their experiences.
- ✓ Enroll with the Department's access and security system, and agree to comply with security and privacy guidelines for protecting information.
- ✓ Provide directory information, to the extent it is consistent with the relevant provisions of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and implementing regulations (20 U.S.C. 1232g and 34 CFR Part 99), initially for seniors in both sets of high schools and then, on an as-needed basis, for those students for whom they wish to obtain FAFSA completion data. In order for a participating entity to provide directory information to the Department, it must have provided public notice that it has designated as directory information under FERPA the student's name, address, and date of birth. In addition, in accordance with FERPA, if any students or their parents have opted out of the disclosure of this student directory information, the LEA will neither provide directory information on those students to the Department nor request FAFSA completion data on them.

Multiple-high school LEAs that are interested in participating in the FAFSA Completion Project for the 2012-2013 FAFSA filing year, and that meet the technical and evaluation requirements, should send an e-mail to Dena Bates at FAFSACompletion@ed.gov. Please include in the subject line "FAFSA Completion Project." The e-mail should include the name of the LEA and the name, position, e-mail address, and phone number(s) of a primary contact person. Requests to participate in the FAFSA Completion Project must be received no later than March 2, 2012. At the end of this period, entities will be chosen to participate in the FAFSA Completion Project through a standard randomized process.

We appreciate your interest and your cooperation in this matter. We have posted a copy of this letter on our Web site at the following address: www.FSA4counselors.ed.gov. Answers to anticipated questions regarding this letter will be posted to that site shortly. If you have further questions about this letter, please contact Dena Bates at FAFSACompletion@ed.gov.

Sincerely,

James W. Runcie
Chief Operating Officer
Federal Student Aid