FAFSA Fast Facts

Today's students are more often older, working, parents, financially independent, and the first in their family to attend college. The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) is a federal application to determine a student’s eligibility for federal grants, loans, and work-study programs.

Did you know?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WHO IS COMPLETING THE FAFSA?</th>
<th>WHO ISN'T COMPLETING THE FAFSA?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>42% older than 25</td>
<td>42% of all students</td>
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<td>53% independent students</td>
<td>43% of student parents</td>
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<td>57% eligible for a Pell Grant</td>
<td>34% of students who are single parents</td>
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<td>8% pursuing a certificate</td>
<td>48% of independent students</td>
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<tr>
<td>25% pursuing an associate’s degree</td>
<td>39% of dependent students</td>
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<tr>
<td>48% pursuing a bachelor’s degree</td>
<td>61% work full-time (30+ hours)</td>
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TODAY’S STUDENTS: FAFSA and STUDENT AID ELIGIBILITY

As today’s students interact with the FAFSA, they may face challenges filing and receiving federal student aid. For examples of how policy could better support today’s students through this process, read below.

**Judy** is 34-years-old, working in medical services and earning $27,000 annually. She struggles to afford rent and consistent meals, so she has plans to pursue a certificate program to potentially gain a promotion and increase her earnings. But after filing the FAFSA, she did not receive an auto-zero expected family contribution (EFC) because she does not make less than or equal to $25,000. This means Judy will not automatically qualify for the maximum Pell Grant and she will have to answer additional questions about her income and assets, and may miss the cut off for state and private aid.

**Policy solution:**
Increase the income threshold for auto-zero EFC to $35,000.³

**Melissa** is a first-generation student who is excited about enrolling in college. But she is struggling to complete the FAFSA and her parents are unable to understand the complicated financial questions on the form.

**Policy solution:**
Decrease number of data elements on the FAFSA, especially those required of students without significant family wealth or assets.

**Taylor** is an independent student and working parent of a four-year-old, Ivy. His EFC calculation indicates that he appears to have higher family contributions, reducing his ability to receive a Pell Grant or subsidized student loan.

**Policy solution:**
Increase the income protection allowance (IPA) to allow more accurate and generous exemptions for student parents and caregivers, and account for negative EFC for students with especially high financial need.

Trey, a freshman at Middleton Community College who was recently let go from his retail job isn’t sure where his next meal will come from, and is experiencing a period of food insecurity. He filed the FAFSA and was eligible for the Pell Grant, but he was not made aware that he also qualified for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits to help him afford meals.

Naomi was brought to the United States when she was five-years-old. She qualifies for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) status, which allows some individuals who were brought to the U.S. as children to receive a renewable two-year period of deferred action from deportation and become eligible for a work permit. She filed the FAFSA, but she is not eligible for federal student aid because of her DACA status — only U.S. citizens and/or other eligible noncitizens can receive federal student aid, and DACA students are not currently provided a path to citizenship.

Marco grew up as a foster youth, and he is now entering his junior year at Jupiter University. He filed the FAFSA and was selected for FAFSA income verification for the third time. FAFSA income verification is the process where some students must submit additional documentation to their institutions to confirm that the information provided on their FAFSA is accurate before they can receive federal financial aid. Marco must again explain his situation to financial aid administrators and take time away from his work and studies to discuss his circumstances.

Policy solution:
Notify students who qualify for the “auto-zero” expected family contribution (EFC) that they may be eligible for SNAP and other means-tested benefits.

Policy solution:
Allow individuals with DACA status or those that would be eligible under the DREAM Act to be eligible to receive federal student aid.

Policy solution:
Simplify FAFSA income verification by focusing on data sharing and transparency and exempting students receiving federal means-tested benefits.

Policy solution:
Notify students who qualify for the “auto-zero” expected family contribution (EFC) that they may be eligible for SNAP and other means-tested benefits.