



THE SECRETARY OF EDUCATION
WASHINGTON, DC 20202

March 15, 2024

Dear Presidents and Chancellors,

Higher education powers students' dreams and unlocks potential that can change lives. It strengthens our economy and our society. And for too long, too many have been shut out of accessing that potential.

The Department's work to transform the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA®) expands that promise for hundreds of thousands of additional students who may have been too daunted by the costs and complexity of the system to pursue higher education.

We know the process of overhauling a broken system—making the most significant upgrade to the FAFSA form in more than 40 years—has put great pressure on you and your institutions. I appreciate the feedback you've given us over these last several months as we navigated this change together. I thank you for your ongoing partnership as we work through the challenges to deliver a successful enrollment process—and a simpler, more streamlined FAFSA experience.

Today, I'm writing to a) update you directly on the progress we've made on implementing the Better FAFSA, and b) outline some steps we must take together to ensure your teams are ready to process FAFSA forms, provide aid packages, and welcome students onto your campuses.

Given this next crucial step of processing Institutional Student Information Records (ISIRs), we have recommendations outlined below based on this week's progress.

Updates on Implementing Better FAFSA

First: As we previewed at the end of January, we started to send ISIRs to institutions in the first half of March.

We are ramping up the volumes of ISIRs we are sending. We are continuing to work with you, your vendors, and other service providers to make sure volume and any impediments to processing are managed.

We have received more than 5.82 million applications, and we are aiming to fully process and send those student records about two weeks after we reach peak processing capacity.

Second: The Department is also ramping up support to schools through the FAFSA College Support Strategy we announced last month. We have deployed and dedicated federal personnel and nonprofit financial aid experts to support nearly 300 schools to help them process aid packages as quickly as possible. If your school needs support, we encourage you to reach out to our College Support Concierge [mailbox](#) as soon as possible. If your school already has requested support and our partners have reached out, I urge you to confirm and begin support as quickly as possible. Every day is precious now.

Third: As [announced](#) last month, we are also significantly reducing certain verification requirements and have suspended new program reviews through June 2024, with some

exceptions for the most serious issues. Institutions with ongoing program reviews can request extensions for responses to program reviews, reports, or requests for additional documentation.

The Department also is waiving the 90-day requirement for schools that have a program participation agreement expiring in March, June, or September 2024, meaning these schools have until their expiration day to submit a recertification application.

Steps Needed to Process FAFSA

Prepare for ISIRs: Based on some of the requests we received from schools earlier this week, we believe some schools are still not fully prepared to receive ISIRs. We recognize the compressed timelines have created challenges for you, your staff, financial aid administrators, students, and families. I urge you to continue to partner with us and utilize all the resources we have offered to facilitate a smooth 2024-2025 FAFSA process.

It's critical that your team is ready to receive student records and can begin putting together student aid packages as efficiently as possible.

This means making sure your teams have completed their Student Aid Internet Gateway (SAIG) mailbox agreement, downloaded and configured key software – such as EDconnect, and developed staffing plans for processing. We are finding that some schools have not done this yet; the Department can provide technical assistance through our [Concierge service](#). Requests will be considered against available resources, including those offered by our nonprofit partners. Further delays can be prevented, and the resources we have made available can help.

Extend decision dates and payment deadlines: We're encouraged to see many of your institutions change their decision dates and payment deadlines to give students and families that time to make the best college decision possible. If you have not done so already, we encourage you to reconsider aid application deadlines so that all students have time to submit and correct their FAFSA forms, and to ensure funding remains available so that all students will have equitable access to aid.

Encourage returning students to apply for aid: The Department continues to engage with state leaders and superintendents to drive FAFSA submissions for high school seniors, so students are prepared to enroll in your institutions this spring. We have also launched a broader outreach campaign to our K-12 partners to ensure that high school seniors are completing and submitting the Better FAFSA form. We request that you continue to develop strategies to ensure your returning students are filling out the Better FAFSA form.

Leverage the Department's Resources: On Monday, March 18, 2024, at 12:00 PM ET, I will host a [webinar](#) with senior FSA officials to brief your team on the latest on FAFSA data transmissions. The webinar also will be available as a recording on FSA's training center.

Based on your feedback, we have developed a set of resources for Better FAFSA that includes toolkits and videos you may use for messaging to families and students. They can be found [here](#). If you still need additional support, you can reach out to the College Support Concierge [service](#).

Our federal liaisons can answer questions, connect you to available resources, and provide direct access to financial aid experts. For assistance with more technical issues with ISIR processing or with navigating the FAFSA Partner Portal, you can call 1-800-330-5947 or email .

For more general questions related to the 2024-2025 FAFSA, we encourage you to continue to use FSA's Partner Connect Help Center by submitting a Contact Customer Support form [here](#).

Our experts will continue to work directly with your staffs to provide the support they need.

Make no mistake: the Better FAFSA will be transformational.

As we send ISIRs out and ramp up delivery, the processing at your schools will be critical to get students and families the information they need to make important life decisions.

Please ensure your school is prepared and taking advantage of the resources being provided. This is my most urgent priority.

Our team at the Department of Education will not rest until every student who qualifies for aid can fill out a FAFSA form with ease, and institutions receive the information they need to support students.

Together, we'll deliver a Better FAFSA and transform our student financial aid system for generations to come.

In Partnership,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Miguel A. Cardona". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Miguel" being more prominent.

Miguel A. Cardona, Ed.D.
U.S. Secretary of Education