Social Security Number

To be eligible to receive FSA funds, each student must provide a correct Social Security number (SSN). To confirm the student's SSN for schools, the Department conducts a match with the Social Security Administration. In this chapter, we discuss the SSN requirement and the match process.

The FAFSA collects the student's SSN (and parents') so that the Central Processing System (CPS) can validate it through a match with the Social Security Administration (SSA). The CPS verifies that the name and birth date associated with the SSN match the name and birth date on the application. For the full list of SSN match results, see Appendix B of the 2007–08 ISIR Guide (**www.ifap.ed.gov**).

The CPS won't process an application without an SSN. A student who doesn't have an SSN or doesn't remember it must contact the local Social Security office for help. For more information (in English and Spanish), a student should call the SSA at 1-800-772-1213 or go to its website (**www.ssa.gov**). There is one exception to the requirement to provide SSNs, as discussed below (see "Exception for Micronesia, Marshall Islands, Palau").

The SSN is a key identifier for the student's records, so you must be sure the Department knows the right SSN if you find out it's wrong on the application or output document. We discuss correcting such errors later.

SSN MATCH

The CPS prints the SSN match result in the "FAA Information" section of the output document as the SSN Match Flag. If the match is successful, the CPS doesn't match the student's data against the Social Security database on subsequent transactions. However, the CPS will attempt the match again if the student makes corrections to the name, birth date, or SSN.

Successful match

If the CPS match with the Social Security Administration confirms the student's SSN, and the Social Security records have the same name and birth date as reported on the FAFSA, you may disburse aid to the otherwise eligible student. No comment is provided on the output document when the SSN match is successful. Of course, if you have any conflicting information about the SSN, you must resolve the conflict before disbursing FSA funds to the student.

SSN requirement
Higher Education Act
Sec. 484(p),
Student Assistance General Provisions
34 CFR 668.32(i), 668.36

SSN doesn't match

Student reported wrong SSN
➔ Correct FAFSA data

FAFSA processing error
➔ Call 1-800-4-FED-AID

Error in SSA database
➔ Contact SSA office; resubmit SSN as correction after SSA change is made

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Other match problems
➔ SSN matches, but name and date of birth don't match
➔ Missing FAFSA information: student didn't report a name or birth date, or didn't sign the FAFSA
➔ SSN record includes date of death

Once a student's SSN is confirmed and there is no discrepancy on the name or birth date, the student can't change the SSN. If a student whose match data have been confirmed subsequently tries to change his SSN, the CPS won't accept the change. Instead, the student's SAR will have a comment telling the student to contact his financial aid administrator for help. In the unlikely event that the confirmed SSN is wrong, the student must correct it by filing a new FAFSA.

No match on the Social Security Number

You must resolve any problems with the match before disbursing aid. If the SSN is not found in the Social Security Administration database, the student's application will be rejected. The student will also receive a comment that instructs her to correct her SSN or contact the SSA if she believes the number reported is correct. If it is wrong on the application, the student will have to correct it with the CPS and get a successful match result before she can receive aid.

▼ *Student reported wrong SSN on the FAFSA.* If the student's application is rejected because she reported an SSN that is not in the Social Security Administration's database, the student must provide the correct SSN to the CPS. This will change the current SSN in the CPS, but it will not change the original, identifying SSN. Previously the Department recommended that a student file a new FAFSA to correct the original SSN, but now that Common Origination and Disbursement (COD) will use the current SSN to process records, changing the original SSN is not always necessary (but see Applicants Using Same SSN later in this chapter).

COD replaced the Direct Loan and Pell (RFMS) reporting systems, but there are other systems, such as EDExpress and possibly some mainframe and servicer systems, that will still use the original SSN to identify records. These systems will be able to interface with COD but might still need the original SSN to process records.

▼ *FAFSA data entry error.* If a student provided the correct SSN on the FAFSA, but the SSN on the output document is wrong, the student can contact the Federal Student Aid Information Center at 1-800-4-FED-AID (1-800-433-3243). If the Information Center confirms that there was a data entry error, it will refer the error to the Department for correction—the student does not need to submit a correction. After the data entry error is corrected, the CPS will produce new output documents. See Chapter 5 of the *Application and Verification Guide* for general information on data entry error corrections.

▼ *Error in Social Security database.* If the SSN on the FAFSA is correct but isn't in the Social Security database, the student must contact a local or regional Social Security Administration office to correct the database, which is updated daily with information from local and regional offices. The student must report the correct SSN and provide verifying documentation. He must also contact a Social Security office directly—the Department of Education cannot correct SSA records. Once the database is updated, the student can submit a correction by re-entering the SSN originally reported as if it is a correction. The CPS

COD and SSN changes

See the electronic announcements on the ifap website at **www.ifap.ed.gov** for information about COD. See the January 7, 2004 announcement for SSN corrections in CPS.

will then do another SSN match. The student can't simply verify that the SSN is correct; the application will be rejected until the SSA database is updated.

No match on name or birth date

The student's application will be rejected if her or a parent's SSN is in the Social Security database but the name there differs from the one she gave. Misspellings or name changes due to marriage are common reasons for a non-match. The student should make sure that the name on the application matches the one on the Social Security card.

This reject is verifiable, which means that the name is questionable but not necessarily wrong. The student can eliminate the reject by entering the right name. If the name was correct on the application, she reenters it on the paper SAR, or she chooses "Data is Correct" for both the first and last name on Corrections on the Web. If her name is incorrect in the SSA database, we strongly recommend that she contact the SSA to correct it.

If the student's (or parent's) name and SSN match the SSA's database but the date of birth does not, the application will also be rejected, and the student must correct the application. If the error is with the SSA's database, he should contact the SSA to correct the record. He can override the reject by reentering the date on the paper SAR or, on Corrections on the Web, by choosing "Data is Correct" for the date of birth. The application will be sent through the match again, and if the SSA's record has been corrected, the match flag will be cleared and no further action is needed. If there is still a disagreement with the SSA record, the student will need to provide the aid office with documentation of his date of birth.

If the student reported the current or a later year as her birth date, her application will be rejected and she must correct the error.

Missing information

No match is performed if the student doesn't sign the FAFSA or provide a last name or birth date. The student's FAFSA will be rejected and the student must submit the missing information.

Although the CPS doesn't conduct the match, it will check to see whether the reported SSN falls within a range of valid numbers.   If it does, the student will receive a comment explaining that the match could not be conducted without the name, birth date, or signature. The student must submit a correction providing the missing information. When the correction is sent, the information will be sent to the Social Security Administration for matching, and you should check the new output document for match results.

If the SSN is not within the valid range, the student will receive a comment and reject P stating that the reported SSN does not appear to be valid. In addition to submitting the missing name, birth date, or signature on a correction, the student must either contact the Social Security Administration to correct its records (if the reported SSN is

Example: Incorrect name on application

When Sarven Technical Institute receives Tod's ISIR, the SSN match shows the name on the application isn't the one associated with the SSN in the database. The FAA asks Tod to bring in documentation showing his correct name and SSN. He brings in his Social Security card, and the first name on the card is Warren, not Tod. He also has a driver's license showing his first name is Warren. The FAA tells Tod to correct his name on the application to Warren.

Example: Correct name not in database

Elizabeth's ISIR shows that her name doesn't match the one the SSA has on file for her SSN. When the FAA talks to Elizabeth, she explains that she recently got married and changed her last name. Elizabeth gives the FAA a copy of her marriage certificate. The FAA plans to disburse aid to Elizabeth and tells her to reenter her current name and advises her to contact SSA to have its database updated to prevent future problems.

correct) or correct the SSN she reported. Again, you should check the new output document for match results.

Date of death

If the Social Security Administration's database shows a date of death associated with the SSN the student reported, the student's application will be rejected. Students resolve this problem in the same way as problems matching the SSN. The student must either contact Social Security Administration to get the records corrected, or must submit a change with the correct SSN (see "No Match on SSN," p. 52).

MASTER DEATH FILE

The CPS will verify that student SSNs do not appear on a master death file the Department obtains from the SSA. This will be in addition to the date of death match above. The CPS will regularly compare its records with those in the master death file. If a match is found, the CPS will resend the student record to SSA. If the SSA does not confirm a date of death for the applicant, the CPS will do nothing further. If the SSA does confirm a date of death, the CPS will send an ISIR to the schools listed on that transaction but will not send a SAR to the student.

Also, the CPS will disable PINs and will not generate renewal applications for individuals found in the death file. Their record will not be deleted from the CPS database. If an applicant wrongly appears in the death file, he will need to apply for a PIN again and receive a clean match before a new PIN will be issued.

APPLICANTS USING SAME SSN

When one student uses another's SSN, the duplicate SSN flag will be set in the ISIR, and the student's application will likely fail the SSN match, but it will be processed. She will have to make a correction as described earlier in this chapter.

If a student uses the same SSN **and** first two letters of the last name (together these data are the record identifier) as another student, the CPS will not accept her application because it will assume it to be a duplicate application of the first student. If she is using FAFSA on the Web, she will receive an immediate message telling her the proper way to make a correction or, if her record identifier is correct and she is trying to apply for aid, how she can proceed. If she is submitting a paper FAFSA, she will receive a letter giving her the same information and stating that the application was not processed.

If the student using the correct SSN applied after the other student, she must submit a special "correction application" that she can only get from the Department of Education. It will enable the CPS to accept her data instead of treating her application as a duplicate. The first student, who used the wrong SSN, **must** correct the error by filing a new FAFSA because the CPS uses the record identifier for students for the entire award year, even if they later change their SSN or last

name. If the student simply corrected her SSN, her record identifier would still be wrong.

If the student using the correct SSN applied first, the CPS will have her data, so a correction application isn't necessary. The second student will need to submit a new application.

Both students should keep copies of all output documents, including those from the first FAFSAs filed. When a student files a correction application or a new FAFSA, the application receipt date is changed. Because some schools and agencies use this receipt date to determine if the student met a deadline, she should keep the output documents to show the original receipt date and to show why a later application was necessary.

Contact the Department at (703) 284-5666 if you believe that a correction application may be needed; one can be mailed to your office or to the student.

EXCEPTION FOR THE FREELY ASSOCIATED STATES: MICRONESIA, MARSHALL ISLANDS, AND PALAU

Students from the Republic of the Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, and the Republic of Palau are not required to provide SSNs. Instead the CPS will assign an identification number to students who indicate on their FAFSA that their state of legal residence is one of the above Pacific islands and who do not provide a Social Security number. These applications are exempt from the SSN match with the SSA. If the students are using FAFSA on the Web, there is an edit that allows them to enter in the SSN field their identification number, which will begin with 888.

Notes