

FAFSA Completion Project
March 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 program. In response to these requests, the Department has established a process, as outlined in this letter, that will allow an additional 12 single-high-school LEAs, including single-high-school, rural LEAs, to participate in the program and to obtain FAFSA completion data for their students for the 2012-2013 FAFSA processing year that began on January 1, 2012. This expansion also will include an additional 80 multi-high-school LEAs. Multi-high-school LEAs were provided an opportunity to participate under a separate letter in January that was posted to www.ed.gov/blog/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/FAFSA-completion-project-letter.doc.

The FAFSA Completion Project allows single-high-school LEAs to access FAFSA completion data for high school seniors in their schools. Each participating single-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 (to include 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 the specified directory information 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 school) to focus counseling services on assisting seniors to successfully complete and submit a FAFSA.

To participate in the FAFSA Completion Project, a single-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 single-high-school LEA applying to participate in the FAFSA Completion Project must:

- ✓ 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), for seniors in their high school for whom FAFSA completion data are being requested. In order for a participating entity to provide directory information to the Department, it must have provided public notice to parents of students in attendance and eligible students in attendance that it has designated as directory information under FERPA the student's name, address, and date of birth. (FERPA defines "eligible students" as those students who are 18 years of age or older or attending a postsecondary institution at any age.) In addition, in accordance with FERPA, if any parents or eligible students have opted out of the disclosure of directory information, the LEA will neither provide directory information on those students to the Department nor request FAFSA completion data on them.
- ✓ Agree to participate in an evaluation of the project, if one occurs for the single-high-school component of the project. Although an evaluation of this portion of the project has not been determined, participants must agree to participate in it if resources permit an evaluation in the future. Such an evaluation might involve, for example, a Department-sponsored evaluator independently obtaining data on financial aid receipt and college enrollment for seniors, and an evaluator might also survey a sample of students or counselors in the district about their experiences.

Single-high-school LEAs, including single-high-school, rural 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 May 1, 2012. At the end of this period, entities will be randomly chosen to participate in this FAFSA Completion Project.

We appreciate your interest and your cooperation in this matter. We have posted a copy of this letter and answers to anticipated questions on our Web site, which can be accessed at the following url: www.fsa4counselors.ed.gov. 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