



Apply Early for Federal Student Aid with the FAFSA

New Features Make Filing Easier and Faster

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The start of the calendar year also marks the beginning of the college financial aid season with the release of the U.S. Department of Education's 2008-09 Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). The FAFSA is the qualifying form for all federal grants and loans as well as many state and private student aid programs.

Each year, the U.S. Department of Education disburses more than \$80 billion in higher education grants and loans to students attending postsecondary schools, but, to qualify, students must first complete the FAFSA.

"We want to make sure students and families take full advantage of the billions of dollars in federal financial assistance available to them for postsecondary education each year," Secretary Margaret Spellings said. "Most families are eligible to receive some type of financial aid; they just have to take that first step and complete the application."

Each year, an estimated 14 million applicants apply, and more than 10 million receive some type of federal grant or loan.

More than 95 percent of FAFSAs are submitted online, and now, with several added features, it is easier than ever to apply online. Students and families can:

- Request a personal identification number (PIN) and immediately receive it to electronically sign the application.
- Submit an online FAFSA and immediately receive a confirmation with a preliminary expected family contribution.
- List up to 10 schools to receive the provided financial aid information.
- Copy parental information to another FAFSA application for a second or third child.

To determine aid eligibility, students and families should fill out the FAFSA as early as possible after Jan. 1 for the academic year beginning July 1. Many factors contribute to a student's eligibility for federal financial aid besides income, such as the size of the family and the age of the oldest parent. Completing a FAFSA is the only way students and families can find out how much federal aid they are eligible to receive.

Although completing the FAFSA online is the preferred method for most families, there are other FAFSA filing options available, including downloading the form or ordering a hard copy.

Both online and hard copy FAFSAs are available in English and Spanish at the Federal Student Aid Web site, www.federalstudentaid.ed.gov, by clicking FAFSA Filing Options.

Federal Student Aid, an office of the U.S. Department of Education, ensures that all eligible individuals can benefit from federally funded or federally guaranteed financial assistance for education beyond high school. To learn more, visit www.federalstudentaid.ed.gov.

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