

The Honorable Miguel Cardona
Secretary
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue SW
Washington, DC 20002

June 10, 2024

Dear Secretary Cardona,

We, 25 undersigned organizations representing counselors, college access programs, financial aid and college administrators, state officials, and higher education associations and advocates, write to urge the administration to commit to the traditional FAFSA launch date of October 1, 2024, including FAFSA processing, school receipt of processed FAFSAs, processing of paper FAFSAs, and FAFSA correction functionality for applicants, schools, and states. In advance of the launch, we urge a timely release of the federal student aid estimator, the FAFSA demonstration site, communication and training materials, a user-friendly Pell look-up table, eligibility and technical guides, and a quick, effective, and secure process for attaining an FSA ID. If it is not possible to commit to an October 1 launch, we urge you to communicate a timeline for the complete FAFSA launch as soon as possible. Transparency for next year will be critical.

With less than four months until October 1, and no draft paper FAFSA form yet available for public comment (a milestone that typically occurs by late February), we are concerned that the FAFSA will be delayed again, and that the release date will remain uncertain until just before the form becomes available. This approach will lead to a repeat of last year, with schools and counselors unable to plan the counseling and outreach efforts that are needed, colleges unable to ensure a smooth and timely process for generating financial aid offers, and students left in the lurch.

The stakes of another delay are clear from the '24/'25 cycle. The December 30 FAFSA release, coupled with significant technical issues, repeated need for re-processing of millions of records, and inadequate customer support has resulted in FAFSA completion rates that are 13.5%ⁱ lower than the previous award year for high school seniors. This drop is twice the magnitude of the FAFSA completion decline that occurred during the pandemic, which portended a 7.4%ⁱⁱ drop in college enrollment.

Unless the current trajectory changes dramatically, we will again experience a significant decline in college enrollment this fall, during a time when college enrollment is still below pre-pandemic levelsⁱⁱⁱ. Another delayed FAFSA release, combined with vague communication about when the form will open, would have disastrous impacts on students, counselors, and financial aid administrators, deepening the gaps in access and enrollment that resulted from the issue ridden FAFSA rollout this year.

We urge the Department to confirm that the FAFSA will be released on October 1, 2024, or tell the field, students, and families when it will launch to ensure that stakeholders are best

prepared to plan for the fall and that students can receive the aid needed to pursue their postsecondary aspirations.

Sincerely,

American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers
American Association of Community Colleges
American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU)
American Council on Education
Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU)
Center for Higher Education Policy and Practice at SNHU
Council for Opportunity in Education (COE)
EdTrust
Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP)
National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC)
National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities (NAICU)
National Association of State Student Grant and Aid Programs (NASSGAP)
National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (NASFAA)
National College Attainment Network (NCAN)
National Council for Community and Education Partnerships (NCCEP)
National Immigration Law Center
New America, Higher Education Program
SchoolHouse Connection
State Higher Education Executive Officers Association
The Century Foundation Higher Education Team
The Hope Center at Temple University
The Institute of College Access & Success (TICAS)
Today's Students Coalition
uAspire
Young Invincibles

Cc:

Neera Tanden, Domestic Policy Advisor to President Biden

Cindy Marten, Deputy Secretary, U.S. Department of Education

James Kvaal, Under Secretary, U.S. Department of Education

Richard Cordray, Chief Operating Officer, Federal Student Aid

ⁱ *NCAN FAFSA Tracker*. (May 24, 2024). National College Attainment Network. Retrieved May 29, 2024 from [FAFSA Tracker - National College Attainment Network \(ncan.org\)](https://ncan.org/FAFSA-Tracker)

ⁱⁱ *Overview: Spring 2022 Enrollment Estimates*. (Spring 2022). National Student Clearinghouse Research Center. Retrieved May 28, 2024 from [CTEE Report Spring 2022.pdf \(nscresearchcenter.org\)](https://nscresearchcenter.org/CTEE-Report-Spring-2022.pdf)

ⁱⁱⁱ *Current Term Enrollment Estimates*. (Spring 2024). National Student Clearinghouse Research Center. Retrieved May 28, 2024 from [Current Term Enrollment Estimates | National Student Clearinghouse Research Center \(nscresearchcenter.org\)](https://nscresearchcenter.org/Current-Term-Enrollment-Estimates)