

FAFSA Simplification Post-Implementation Survey

NASFAA

November, 2024

OVERVIEW

As a follow-up to our February 2023 [FAFSA Simplification Pre-Implementation Survey](#), NASFAA administered a post-implementation Survey in October 2024. The overall results from this survey are presented below. While these survey results provide insights into the experiences of financial aid offices during the implementation of FAFSA simplification for the 2024-25 academic year rollout, we encourage readers to visit NASFAA's [FAFSA Simplification Web Center](#) for a full list of resources and historical documentation.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

NASFAA's initial plan was to compare members' preparedness for FAFSA simplification and their feelings about specific provisions of the FAFSA Simplification Act pre- and post-implementation. We would then compare pre-launch expectations to the reality of implementation and identify best practices for ED and institutions to implement for future significant changes. The troubled rollout of the 2024-25 FAFSA presented new opportunities to also ask members about their experiences with the rollout and how it impacted their students, their financial aid office, and their institution as a whole. This allowed us to add a new goal of sharing feedback with the Department of Education (ED) that they can use to implement any future significant changes, such as the long-overdue reauthorization of the Higher Education Act.

NASFAA asked members in our pre-implementation survey to rate a number of resources from different sources by how helpful they were in helping them prepare for upcoming changes from the FAFSA Simplification Act. In the post-implementation survey, we asked respondents to rate similar resources in terms of how helpful they were in helping them navigate the delays associated with the 2024-25 FAFSA launch. Notably, post-implementation ED guidance was rated "Poor" by just over half (51%) of respondents, versus 16% pre-implementation, highlighting the importance of communication during such high-stakes projects. Comparatively, NASFAA communications via webinars, the "Off the Cuff" podcast, *Today's News* coverage, and our AskRegs service all saw higher ratings of "Excellent" in the post-implementation survey than in the pre-implementation survey.

During the pre-implementation phase, more than 50% of respondents listed staffing shortages, lack of time, lack of guidance from ED, and lack of confidence in student information systems (SIS) providers being ready for the 2024-25 FAFSA as one of their top three anticipated barriers to successful implementation of the FAFSA Simplification Act. In the post-implementation survey, we asked for respondents' top 5 barriers and added several new barriers based on the unplanned-for FAFSA launch delay and associated downstream events. Just one factor, lack of guidance from ED, featured as a top barrier to implementation in both surveys. The late delivery of Institutional Student Information Records (ISIRs), ISIR data integrity issues, and lack of guidance by ED were cited in the top 5 by 60% or more of respondents. The delayed FAFSA release and delayed availability of a corrections process for students were cited in the top 5 by more than 40% of respondents.

When asked in our pre-implementation survey in February 2023 about their confidence in ED's ability to release the 2024-25 FAFSA by October 1, 2024, fewer than 3% of respondents indicated they were completely confident. In the post-implementation survey, only 1% were completely confident ED could release the 2025-26 FAFSA with full functionality (excluding batch corrections) by December 1. Fewer than 5% of respondents indicated they were completely confident in ED's ability to provide any of the 9 deliverables listed for a successful 2025-26 FAFSA implementation, while roughly half of respondents were not confident at all in ED's ability to deliver 5 of the 9 deliverables.

New questions were added to the post-implementation survey to address the impacts of the 2024-25 rollout that could not have been anticipated when we administered our pre-implementation survey. Seventy-three percent of respondents indicated that the issues surrounding the 2024-25 FAFSA rollout contributed greatly to resource shortages in their offices. Only 4% indicated those issues did not impact their offices at all.

Ninety percent of NASFAA member respondents indicated the issues associated with the 2024-25 FAFSA rollout impacted their ability to send financial aid offers to applicants on time. More than half (51%) reported that FAFSA delays and related issues impacted their ability to originate Pell Grants or Direct Loans. The same share of respondents indicated their ability to predict student enrollments in order to ensure adequate student services were impacted. Thirty-eight percent of respondents indicated their scheduled enrollment deposit deadline was impacted, and the same share reported their ability to disburse financial aid was impacted.

Other new questions in the post-implementation survey aimed to measure the impacts of policy changes from the FAFSA Simplification Act, including the overall student experience with the new FAFSA, changes to the treatment of families with more than one family member contemporaneously enrolled in college, changes in the treatment of small business and family farm owners, and changes to the Pell grant eligibility formula.

Responses were mixed on the student experience with the new FAFSA, with just under half (47%) indicating that students who were not impacted by technical issues had a better experience with the 2024-25 FAFSA compared to prior years and just under a third (31%) responding that their students did not have a better FAFSA experience. Of impacts to families with specific circumstances that experienced a change to how they are treated in the eligibility formula starting in 2024-25, respondents reported the most significant impacts were to families with more than one member enrolled in college, with nearly three-quarters of respondents (73%) indicating their student populations were impacted somewhat or a lot by that change. Just over half of respondents (52%) indicated their student populations were impacted somewhat or a lot by the change to treatment of small businesses, and 45% reported that their student populations were impacted somewhat or a lot by the change to treatment of family farms. Demographic differences among institutions may explain some or all of the differential impacts reported in these areas since students with certain characteristics may be more likely to attend certain schools (e.g., a religiously-affiliated institution may have more families with multiple children enrolled in college, or a school that offers programs of study in agricultural education might attract more students whose families own a family farm.)

METHODOLOGY

This electronic survey was emailed to at least one contact at NASFAA membership institutions, 2,906 potential respondents. These survey questions were embedded into a larger survey instrument, NASFAA's 2024 Administrative Burden Survey. The survey was open for three weeks and closed on Monday, October 21, 2024. After it was closed,

blank survey responses were cleaned, and the results were approximately 782 respondents who answered the survey questions related to 2024-25 FAFSA Simplification Post-Implementation. This is a 27% response rate.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

We would like to thank the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation for their generous support for this important research. The findings and conclusions contained within are those of NASFAA and do not necessarily reflect positions or policies of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

OVERALL RESULTS

To what extent did the issues with the 2024-25 FAFSA rollout contribute to resource shortages in your office?

Greatly	73%
Somewhat	23%
Not at all	4%
n	782

Please rate the following resources in their effectiveness at helping you navigate the delays and issues associated with the 2024-25 FAFSA launch.

	Excellent	Good	Average	Poor	Have not used this resource	n
ED Guidance	3%	13%	30%	51%	3%	773
ED Ask-a-Fed or direct emails to FSA topic-specific or individual staff mailboxes	5%	13%	23%	32%	27%	772
ED Webinars	8%	23%	43%	25%	2%	774
ED FAFSA Simplification topics web page	6%	21%	46%	22%	4%	774
ED FAFSA “Issue Alerts” web page	7%	24%	42%	22%	5%	774
ED “FAFSA Updates” web page	6%	22%	42%	23%	7%	775
ED “FAFSA Fast News” blog	3%	15%	34%	20%	29%	772
State/regional association resource(s)/training	18%	37%	25%	10%	10%	773
FSA Training Conference	12%	21%	36%	24%	7%	777
NASFAA SAI Modeling Tool	23%	31%	17%	5%	25%	777
NASFAA FAFSA Simplification checklist	31%	41%	14%	1%	12%	774
NASFAA FAFSA Simplification case studies	22%	34%	16%	2%	26%	774
NASFAA FAFSA Key Dates timeline	36%	39%	14%	2%	10%	778

NASFAA Comment Codes Crosswalk	45%	31%	10%	2%	12%	776
NASFAA Explainers/One-Pagers	31%	35%	11%	1%	23%	774
NASFAA Webinar(s)	51%	36%	8%	1%	4%	777
NASFAA “Off the Cuff” Podcast	35%	29%	12%	1%	23%	776
NASFAA Today’s News coverage	66%	28%	4%	1%	2%	779
NASFAA AskRegs	67%	24%	6%	1%	3%	781
Other organization/association resources not listed here (e.g., Vera Institute for Justice, NCAN)	6%	19%	14%	2%	60%	742

Do you think NASFAA should continue to advocate for Congress to permit ED to ask questions on the FAFSA about student housing plans, student enrollment status, and/or whether independent students want to provide parental information? Select all that apply

Yes, NASFAA should continue to push for the student housing question to be added back to the FAFSA	79%
Yes, NASFAA should continue to push for the independent student option to provide parental information question to be added back to the FAFSA	30%
Yes, NASFAA should continue to push for the student enrollment status question to be added back to the FAFSA	31%
No, NASFAA should not push to have any of these questions added back to the FAFSA	5%
No opinion because my office does not rely on these FAFSA questions	13%
n	778

Please choose the top five barriers to your office’s successful implementation of the FAFSA simplification changes on your campus.

Late ISIR delivery	64%
ISIR data integrity issues	62%
Lack of guidance from the Department of Education	60%
Late FAFSA opening date	42%
Delay in availability of student corrections process	41%
Unavailability of institutional batch corrections process for all of 2024-25 cycle ¹	39%
Delay in availability of institutional manual ISIR corrections process	29%
Staffing shortages	25%
Lack of time	25%

¹ At the time this survey was administered the Department of Education was on record stating they had abandoned batch corrections for 2024-25.

Late announcement that institutional batch corrections process would not be available for 2024-25	25%
Student information system (SIS)/financial aid management system (FAMS) provider was not ready for changes	20%
Late processing of paper FAFSAs	15%
Lack of institutional information technology resources	13%
Lack of NSLDS information on ISIRS	12%
Delayed availability of DHS-SAVE processing	10%
Funding shortages	6%
Lack of buy-in from senior leadership	3%
n	780

How much has the change to the treatment of multiple family members enrolled in college at the same time impacted your student population who have other family members concurrently enrolled in college?

Not at all	12%
Somewhat	49%
A lot	24%
Unsure	16%
n	782

How much has the change to treatment of small businesses impacted your student population whose families own small businesses?

Not at all	18%
Somewhat	43%
A lot	9%
Unsure	30%
n	782

How much has the change to treatment of family farms impacted your student population whose families own family farms?

Not at all	27%
Somewhat	33%
A lot	12%

Unsure	28%
n	781

Did your institution use PJ to mitigate the impacts of the changes to treatment of multiple family members enrolled in college at the same time, small businesses, or family farms?

No	56%
Sometimes	33%
Frequently	6%
Unsure	5%
n	781

Did your institution use institutional funds to mitigate the impacts of the changes to treatment of multiple family members enrolled in college at the same time, small businesses, or family farms?

No	61%
Sometimes	23%
Frequently	13%
Unsure	3%
n	778

Is your institution seeing an increase in families with low incomes and high assets receiving Pell Grants in 2024-25 as compared to 2023-24 (please estimate to the best of your ability)?

No	9%
Small increase (<20%)	42%
Moderate increase (21% - 50%)	26%
Large increase (51% - 100%)	5%
Unsure	19%
n	780

Overall, did your students who didn't experience technical issues completing the FAFSA report a better experience with the FAFSA in 2024-25 versus prior years?

Yes	47%
No	31%
Unsure	22%
n	778

Did the delayed FAFSA release and associated errors throughout the processing cycle impact your institution's ability to do any of the following for any of your students (Select all that apply)?

Ability to send aid offers on schedule	90%
Ability to keep scheduled enrollment deposit deadline	38%
Ability to issue bills on schedule	22%
Ability to keep scheduled bill due date deadline	29%
Ability to originate Pell Grants or Direct Loans	51%
Ability to disburse aid	38%
Ability to issue credit balance refunds	16%
Ability to predict enrollments to ensure adequate student services (e.g. housing needs, course offerings)	51%
n	752

Please rate your confidence in the Department of Education's ability to provide the following deliverables for successful FAFSA simplification implementation in the 2025-26 award year:

	Completely confident	Fairly confident	Somewhat confident	Slightly confident	Not confident at all	n
Release of timely training opportunities	1%	8%	21%	32%	38%	774
Release of timely updates on processing, including identification of known issues	1%	5%	14%	28%	53%	772
Fix issues identified during testing phase and/or after full FAFSA release	1%	3%	11%	27%	59%	772
Release of timely, helpful technical specifications	1%	4%	13%	33%	49%	769
October 1 release of 2025-26 FAFSA to a limited number of students and schools for testing	4%	13%	17%	34%	31%	770
December 1 release of 2025-26 FAFSA with full functionality except for	1%	6%	13%	31%	49%	772

already-announced delay to batch corrections process						
Batch corrections functionality available before the date my institution plans to begin packaging aid	0%	2%	7%	19%	72%	771
Batch corrections functionality available at any time during the 2025-26 aid year	1%	5%	11%	32%	52%	772
Update problematic FAFSA question text, help text, instructions, etc. using feedback from listening sessions and ED's Request for Information	1%	4%	15%	34%	46%	771

RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

Full-time equivalent (FTE) enrollment²:

Under 1,000	21%
1,000-4,999	47%
5,000-9,999	14%
10,000-19,999	17%
20,000 and above	1%
n	782

Region

MASFAA	26%
EASFAA	21%
SASFAA	18%
WASFAA	17%
SWASFAA	10%
RMASFAA	9%
Blank	0%
n	782

Sector

Nonprofit	39%
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² As defined by the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System 12-month Enrollment (E12) variable.

Community College	30%
Public 4-Yr	25%
Proprietary	3%
Graduate/Professional	2%
System	0%
n	782