

# Counselors and Mentors: What You Need to Know About the 2017–18 FAFSA®

## What’s changing for 2017–18?

Starting with the 2017–18 *Free Application for Federal Student Aid* (FAFSA®), these changes will be in effect:

- **Students will be able to submit a FAFSA® earlier.** Students can file a 2017–18 FAFSA as early as Oct. 1, 2016, rather than beginning on Jan. 1, 2017. The earlier submission date will be a permanent change, enabling students to complete and submit a FAFSA as early as October 1 every year.
- **Students will use earlier income and tax information.** Beginning with the 2017–18 FAFSA, students will be required to report income and tax information from an earlier tax year. For example, on the 2017–18 FAFSA, students (and parents, as appropriate) will report their 2015 income and tax information, rather than their 2016 income and tax information.

The following table provides a summary of key dates as we transition to using the early FAFSA submission timeframe and earlier tax information.

When a Student Is Attending College (School Year)	When a Student Can Submit a FAFSA	Which Year’s Income and Tax Information Is Required
July 1, 2015–June 30, 2016	January 1, 2015–June 30, 2016	2014
July 1, 2016–June 30, 2017	January 1, 2016–June 30, 2017	2015
<b>July 1, 2017–June 30, 2018</b>	<b>October 1, 2016–June 30, 2018</b>	<b>2015</b>
July 1, 2018–June 30, 2019	October 1, 2017–June 30, 2019	2016

## Why are the changes being made?

For many years, the FAFSA has been available for applicants to complete on January 1 for the following school year; and the FAFSA has required income and tax information from the previous calendar year. Recent research and the Department of Education’s own data suggest that implementing an earlier start date and using earlier income and tax information may benefit students in the following ways:

- **Alignment.** For some students, the traditional FAFSA application cycle is not aligned with college admissions application deadlines, which typically occur in the fall prior to the FAFSA launch. The new financial aid application process will be more aligned with the college admission process for those students.
- **Certainty.** Many deadlines for state aid are as early as March. If the FAFSA asks for information about tax forms that aren’t due until April 15, applicants have to estimate income or taxes paid in order to meet those state deadlines. And unfortunately, many students and parents mistakenly think they are not able to file a FAFSA until they file their tax return. This may cause students to miss certain federal, state, and/or institutional financial aid deadlines. As a result of the change to requiring earlier tax information, more students and families will be able to complete FAFSAs using data imported electronically from the IRS, rather than submitting applications with estimates that may need correcting later.
- **Less pressure.** Students and parents will have more time to explore and understand financial aid options and apply for aid before state deadlines.

## **Will FAFSA deadlines be earlier since the application is launching earlier?**

We expect that most state and school deadlines will remain approximately the same as in 2016–17. However, several states that offer first come, first served financial aid will change their deadlines from “as soon as possible after January 1” to “as soon as possible after October 1.” So, as always, it’s important that students check their state and school deadlines so that they don’t miss out on any aid. State deadlines are on [fafsa.gov](http://fafsa.gov); school deadlines are on schools’ websites.

## **Since the 2017–18 FAFSA asks for the same tax and income information as the 2016–17 FAFSA, will a student’s 2016–17 FAFSA information be carried over into the 2017–18 renewal FAFSA?**

No; too much could have changed since the student filed the 2016–17 FAFSA, and there’s no way to predict what might be different, so the student will need to enter the information again. However, keep in mind that many students and parents will be eligible to use the IRS Data Retrieval Tool to automatically import their tax information into the FAFSA, making the process of reporting tax information quick and easy.

## **Can a student choose to report 2016 information if the family’s financial situation has changed since 2015 taxes were filed?**

The student must report the information the FAFSA asks for. If the family’s income has changed substantially since the 2015 tax year, the student should talk to the college financial aid office about the family’s situation.

Note: The FAFSA asks for marital status “as of today” (the day it’s filled out). So if the student or parent is married now but wasn’t in 2015 (and therefore didn’t file taxes as married), the spouse’s income will need to be added to the FAFSA. Similarly, if the student or parent filed 2015 taxes as married but is no longer married when filling out the FAFSA, the spouse’s income will need to be subtracted.

## **Will students receive aid offers earlier if they apply earlier?**

Not necessarily; some schools will make offers earlier while others won’t. You might want to recommend that students look at the College Scorecard at [collegescorecard.ed.gov](http://collegescorecard.ed.gov) to compare costs at different schools while they wait for aid offers to arrive. Note: The maximum Federal Pell Grant for 2017–18 won’t be known until early 2017, so keep in mind that even if a student does receive an aid offer early, the offer could change due to various factors.

## **How will this affect my school’s or organization’s fall schedule of outreach to our students about college preparation?**

You’ll want to start FAFSA awareness activities as soon as possible once school starts. Although most state and college FAFSA deadlines are expected to fall at about the same time as they did for the 2016–17 application cycle, there are some first-come-first-served programs that may award aid in the autumn and early winter. For that reason, you should encourage each student to create a username and password

called an FSA ID in September, and then to submit his or her FAFSA as soon as possible once the application is available.

- Learn about the FSA ID at [StudentAid.gov/fsaid](http://StudentAid.gov/fsaid).
- Federal Student Aid is developing a suggested calendar of FAFSA outreach activities for the fall and will update this fact sheet once it's available.

Note: If you wish to begin your outreach to juniors before the end of the school year, you should encourage them to create their FSA IDs over the summer; and be sure to share some of the resources below with them.

## **What materials and resources are available to help me educate my students about the FAFSA?**

There are two websites you need to know about: StudentAid.gov and the Financial Aid Toolkit.

StudentAid.gov is a site for students and parents. It provides detailed information about the FAFSA, the FSA ID, the IRS Data Retrieval Tool, student dependency status, reporting parent information, and what happens after the FAFSA is submitted. Send students and parents to [StudentAid.gov/fafsa](http://StudentAid.gov/fafsa).

The Financial Aid Toolkit, at [FinancialAidToolkit.ed.gov](http://FinancialAidToolkit.ed.gov), is a site specifically designed for you, the school counselor or college access mentor. The toolkit consolidates FSA resources into a searchable online database intended for use by organizations and individuals who interact with, support, or counsel students and families on making financial preparations for postsecondary education. Visit the toolkit for the following, all of which can be accessed from [FinancialAidToolkit.ed.gov/fafsa-changes](http://FinancialAidToolkit.ed.gov/fafsa-changes):

- General information about the FAFSA, as well as tips and talking points for your outreach to students
- Updates on when various FAFSA materials will be available as the new FAFSA season approaches
- Items you can use in your outreach, including fact sheets, videos, infographics, sample tweets, and more

Thank you for your efforts in helping students and parents understand the federal student aid programs and application process!

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