



FAFSA for 2025-2026 School Year Opens December 1



For the second year in a row, the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, commonly known as the FAFSA, will be delayed. The FAFSA for the 2025–2026 school year will open on December 1 instead of the typical October 1 date. Last year, despite a redesigned FAFSA that was supposed to be easier to complete, families faced a perfect storm — a delayed rollout, technical glitches, and processing delays, which led to confusion and late financial aid packages from colleges. By one estimate, as of March 2024, FAFSA completions for the class of 2024 were down 40% from the prior year, with only about 27% of the class of 2024 successfully completing a FAFSA, compared to 45% for the class of 2023.¹

Tips for submitting the FAFSA

The 2025–2026 FAFSA is the same as the redesigned, streamlined version from last year. Here's what you need to know about completing the form.

- **FSA ID.** To file the FAFSA online, parents and students each need their own FSA ID, which is a username/password combination that functions as a legal signature. You can create an FSA ID online, and the same ID can be used for all years of college.
- **Income and assets.** The FAFSA requires two key types of information: income and assets. For income, the 2025–2026 FAFSA will rely on information from your 2023 federal income tax return (it essentially looks back two years). This data will be automatically imported from the IRS. For assets, the FAFSA will use the value of your assets as of the date you submit the form.
- **Student Aid Index.** The FAFSA calculates a figure called the "Student Aid Index," which is a yardstick that measures aid eligibility. Colleges use this figure to craft a financial aid package that attempts to meet a student's financial need (colleges are not obligated to meet 100% of need).
- **Eligibility for Direct Loans.** All students who file the FAFSA are eligible for an *unsubsidized* federal Direct Loan, regardless of financial need. But students who demonstrate need on the FAFSA are eligible for a *subsidized* Direct Loan, which means the government pays the interest that accrues during school and any loan deferment periods. Students with a high level of financial need may also qualify for a federal Pell Grant.
- **College aid.** Some colleges might require the FAFSA before awarding students certain college-based aid, including merit scholarships and grants, so filing it can still be beneficial, even if a student does not plan on taking out any federal loans.

The FAFSA must be submitted every year for students to be eligible for federal aid. For more information, families can visit the federal student aid website at studentaid.gov.

1) National College Attainment Network, April 8, 2024



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