2027–28

FAFSA® Specifications Guide

Volume 9 – Testing

July 2026

U.S. Department of Education's
Federal Student Aid

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Acronyms

Table 9-1: Acronyms

Acronym	Definition
ED	U.S. Department of Education
FAA	Financial Aid Administrator
FAFSA®	*Free Application for Federal Student Aid*
FPS	FAFSA Processing System
FSA	Federal Student Aid (ED's office)
FTI	Federal Tax Information
ISIR	*Institutional Student Information Record*
PII	Personally identifiable information

Change History Table

The change history table below is updated each time the “Testing” volume of the *FAFSA Specifications* is updated providing you with a cumulative list of revisions made to the document.

The footer is updated to include the revision date.

Table 9-2: Change History

Date	Page(s)	Changes/Notes
7/26	All	Volume 9 is released

Overview

What's in Volume 9, Testing?

This volume describes the FAFSA Processing System (FPS) testing options available to schools, third-party software vendors, state agencies, and any other Federal Student Aid (FSA) partners for a specific cycle.

For 2027–28, this volume provides guidance regarding test *Institutional Student Information Record* (ISIR) data files provided by FSA for use by the student aid community. During the beta testing phase preceding FPS start-up, FSA posts multiple test ISIR files under different message classes that cover a variety of applicant scenarios for schools and third-party software developers to help prepare their systems and software for the new cycle. As the beta test process progresses, we expand these ISIR files to include exponentially larger groups of test records.

Note: Later in 2026, we will release a prototype of the *2027–28 Free Application for Federal Student Aid* (FAFSA®) website. This prototype offers you an advance opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the FAFSA user experience ahead of the form's release. While the prototype is not a complete replication of the final website, it will demonstrate several common scenarios, such as initiating a new application, completing an in-progress application (as student, parent, or spouse), and test correction functionality. Monitor the "News" section of FSA's Financial Aid Toolkit website (located at financialaidtoolkit.ed.gov) for more information on prototype availability.

Testing Options for 2027–28

For 2027–28, Federal Student Aid will provide a file with simulated ISIR data that you can download for testing with your student aid system.

Testing is optional; FSA does not require it. The test ISIR data is provided for you to use to help ensure that your processing system is prepared for the ISIR data produced by the FPS.

Test ISIR Data

Beginning in Summer 2026 and coinciding with beta testing of the 2027–28 FPS, we will post electronic announcements to the Knowledge Center announcing the availability of test ISIR files for download. Each announcement will describe the unique test files posted under different message classes, which we design to replicate realistic applicant scenarios. Test files will incrementally increase in student record count, enabling you to stress-test your systems in preparation for the upcoming processing cycle.

As the beta test progresses, we will resolve any potential data issues that occur and describe issues resolved or major changes made, if applicable, in the electronic announcements we post.

FPS Test ISIR Data

Steps for Downloading and Using Test ISIR Data

1. Download Test ISIR Data from the Knowledge Center

The FPS Test ISIR Data File is available as an attachment to the *2027–28 FAFSA Specifications Guide* on the Knowledge Center website. To locate and download test ISIR data files available on the Knowledge Center website:

1. Go to fsapartners.ed.gov/knowledge-center.
2. Select **Library** on the menu near the top of the Knowledge Center home page (between the "What's New" and "Library" links).
3. Select **Publications by Resource Type**.
4. Select **Handbooks, Manual, or Guides**.
5. Scroll to and select the most recent date-specific link associated with "**FAFSA Specifications Guide**".
6. Scroll to the **Attachments** section at the end of the page to locate *Volume 9 –Testing.* Select the download link for the **2027–28 FPS Test ISIR Data File**. The zip file attachment includes the test files associated with the posting. The file names will represent a variety of 2027–28 import message classes (such as IDSA28OP.DAT).

2. Download Volume 4A of the FAFSA Specifications Guide from the Knowledge Center

We recommend that you download the *2027–28 FAFSA Specifications Guide, Volume 4A – Record Layouts*, which contains the ISIR record layout. You can use this record layout as a reference to interpret the test data file contents, including valid field content. The *FAFSA Specifications Guide* is available in Adobe PDF format on the Knowledge Center website.

To download this document:

1. Go to fsapartners.ed.gov/knowledge-center.
2. Select **Library** on the menu near the top of the Knowledge Center home page (between the "What's New" and "Library" links).
3. Select **Publications by Resource Type**.
4. Select **Handbooks, Manual, or Guides**.

5. Scroll to and select the most recent date-specific link associated with "**FAFSA Specifications Guide**".
6. Scroll to the **Attachments** section at the end of the page to locate *Volume 4A – Record Layouts* individual downloadable sections of the guide. Select the link to each section to download. Use Adobe Acrobat Reader or a similar PDF-compatible program to view and print the document.

3. Use Test ISIR Data in Your School System

Each school uses different systems and has varied reasons for testing. You can conduct testing at your convenience, and the results are for your use only.

FSA recommends using the test ISIR data file initially to verify your financial system can import the ISIR format correctly, then test more complex, advanced scenarios that take advantage of the variety of student records and data values in the test ISIR data file. You may also want to use larger test ISIR files to perform capacity and speed testing on your system.

Be sure to remove all test ISIR data from your system at the conclusion of your testing process to ensure it is not mistaken for real student data when you begin 2027–28 processing.

Match and FTI Data

The match agency and Federal Tax Information (FTI) data on the test ISIRs is simulated data. It does not compromise any student's personally identifiable information (PII) protected by the Privacy Act.

Getting Help

If you need assistance with the test ISIR data posted to the Knowledge Center, contact the FPS Help Desk at **1-800-330-5947** or by email at support@fps.ed.gov.