Social Security Number

CHAPTER *4*

To be eligible to receive FSA funds, each student must provide a correct Social Security number (SSN). To confirm the student's SSN for schools, the Department conducts a match with the Social Security Administration. In this chapter, we discuss the SSN requirement and the match process.

The FAFSA collects the student's and dependent student's parents' Social Security numbers (SSNs) so that the Central Processing System (CPS) can validate the numbers through a match with the Social Security Administration (SSA). The CPS verifies that the name and birth date associated with the SSN match the name and birth date on the application. For the full list of SSN match results, see the *2020-2021 SAR Comment Codes and Text.*

The CPS won't process an application without an SSN. A student who doesn't have an SSN or doesn't remember it must contact their local Social Security office for help. There is one exception to the requirement to provide SSNs (see the Exception for the Freely Associated States section later in this chapter). The SSN is a key identifier for the student's records, so you must be sure the Department knows the right SSN if you find out it's wrong on the application, SAR or ISIR. We discuss correcting such errors later.

SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER (SSN) MATCH

The CPS prints the SSN match result in the "FAA Information" section of the output document as the SSN Match Flag. If the match is successful, the CPS doesn't match the student's data against the Social Security database on subsequent transactions. However, the CPS will attempt the match again if the student makes corrections to the name, birth date, or SSN. The FAFSA will not be processed without a valid SSN for the aid applicant.

Successful match

If the CPS match with the SSA confirms the student's SSN and the Social Security records have the same name and birth date as reported on the FAFSA, you may disburse aid to the otherwise eligible student. No comment is provided on the output document when the SSN match is successful. Of course, if you have any conflicting information about the SSN, you must resolve the conflict before disbursing FSA funds to the student. Once a student's SSN is confirmed and there is no discrepancy on the name or birth date, the student can't change the SSN.

If a student whose match data have been confirmed subsequently tries to change his SSN, the CPS won't accept the change. Instead, the student's SAR will have a comment telling the student to contact his financial aid administrator for help. In the unlikely event that the confirmed SSN is wrong, the student must correct it by filing a new FAFSA.

No match on the Social Security number

You must resolve any problems with the match before disbursing aid. If the SSN is not found in the SSA database, the student's application will be rejected. The student will also receive a comment that instructs her to correct her SSN or contact the SSA if she believes the number reported is correct. If it is wrong on the application, the student will have to correct it with the CPS and get a successful match result before she can receive aid.

▼ *Student reported wrong SSN on the FAFSA.* If the student's application is rejected because she reported an SSN that is not in the SSA's database, the student must provide the correct SSN to the CPS. This will change the current SSN in the CPS, but it will not change the original, identifying SSN. A student can file a new FAFSA to correct the original SSN, but since the Common Origination and Disbursement (COD) System will use the current SSN to process records, changing the original SSN is not always necessary, however, see "Applicants Using Same SSN" later in this chapter.

COD replaced the Direct Loan and Pell reporting systems, but there are other systems, such as EDExpress and some mainframe and servicer systems, that will still use the original SSN to identify records. These systems will be able to interface with COD but might still need the original SSN to process records.

▼ *FAFSA data entry error.* If a student provided the correct SSN on the FAFSA, but the SSN on the output document is wrong, the student can contact the Federal Student Aid Information Center at 1-800-4-FED-AID (1-800-433-3243). If the Information Center confirms that there was a data entry error, it will refer the error to the Department for correction—the student does not need to submit a correction. After the data entry error is corrected, the CPS will produce new output documents. See the *Application and Verification Guide, Chapter 5* for general information on data entry error corrections.

▼ *Error in Social Security database.* If the SSN on the FAFSA is correct but isn't in the Social Security database, the student must contact a local or regional SSA office to correct the database, which is updated daily with information from local and regional offices. The student must report the correct SSN and provide verifying documentation, and report the SSN directly to the SSA office—the Department of Education cannot correct SSA records. Once the database is updated, the student can submit a correction by re-entering the SSN originally reported as if it were a correction. The CPS will then do another SSN match. The student can't simply verify that the SSN is correct; the application will be rejected until the SSA database is updated.

No match on name or birth date

The student's application will be rejected if her or a parent's SSN is in the Social Security database but the name there differs from the one she gave. Misspellings or name changes due to marriage are common reasons for a non-match. The student should make sure that the name on the application matches the one on the Social Security card.

This reject is verifiable, which means that the name is questionable but not necessarily wrong. The student can eliminate the reject by entering the right name. If the name was correct on the application, she reenters it on the paper SAR, or she chooses "Data is Correct" for both the first and last name on Corrections on the Web. If her name is incorrect in the SSA database, we strongly recommend that she contact the SSA to correct it.

If the student's (or parent's) name and SSN match the SSA's database but the date of birth does not, the application will also be rejected, and the student must correct the application. If the error is with the SSA's database, he should contact the SSA to correct the record. He can override the reject by reentering the date on the paper SAR or on Corrections on the Web, by choosing "Data is Correct" for the date of birth. The application will be sent through the match again, and if the SSA's record has been corrected, the match flag will be cleared and no further action is needed. If there is still a disagreement with the SSA record, the student will need to provide the aid office with documentation of his date of birth.

If the student reported the current or a later year as her birth date, her application will be rejected and she must correct the error.

Example: Incorrect name on application

When Zobrist Technical Institute receives Miguel's ISIR, the SSN match shows the name on the application isn't the one associated with the SSN in the database. The aid administrator asks Miguel to bring in documentation showing his correct name and SSN. He brings in his Social Security card, and the first name on the card is Jose, not Miguel. He also has a driver's license showing his first name is Jose. The administrator tells Miguel to correct his name on the FAFSA to Jose.

Name change on the SSA website

If a student legally changes their name because of marriage, divorce, court order or any other reason, they should notify Social Security so they can get a corrected card and have correct SSN matches. Direct students to the SSA name change page for instructions on how to update their name.

Parents with no SSN

On the FAFSA, parents with no Social Security numbers, for example, parents of eligible noncitizens, should enter 000-00-0000 in place of a SSN, in order to avoid a reject code.

Missing information

No match is performed if the student doesn't sign the FAFSA or provide a last name or birth date. The student's FAFSA will be rejected and the student must submit the missing information.

Although the CPS doesn't conduct the match, the student will receive a comment explaining that the match could not be conducted without the name, birth date, or signature. The student must submit a correction providing the missing information. When the correction is sent, the information will be sent to the SSA for matching, and you should check the new output document for match results.

Example: Correct name not in database

Elizabeth's ISIR shows that her name doesn't match the one the SSA has on file for her SSN. When the administrator talks to Elizabeth, she explains that she recently got married and changed her last name. Elizabeth gives the administrator a copy of her marriage certificate. The administrator plans to disburse aid to Elizabeth and tells her to reenter her current name and advises her to contact SSA to have its database updated to prevent future problems.

Date of death

If the SSA's database shows a date of death associated with the SSN the student reported, the student's application will be rejected. Students resolve this problem in the same way as problems matching the SSN. The student must either contact SSA to get the records corrected, or must submit a change with the correct SSN (see "No match on the Social Security number").

COD and SSN changes
E-Announcement June 22, 2017

SSN requirement
HEA Sec. 484(p), 34 CFR 668.32(i), 668.36

Contacting the SSA
For more information (in English and Spanish), students should call the SSA at 1-800-772-1213 or go to its website (*https://www.ssa.gov/*).

DEATH MASTER FILE

The CPS will verify that student SSNs do not appear on a master death file the Department obtains from the SSA. This will be in addition to the date of death match. The CPS will regularly compare its records with those in the master death file. If a match is found, the CPS will resend the student record to SSA. If the SSA does not confirm a date of death for the applicant, the CPS will do nothing further. If the SSA does confirm a date of death, the CPS will send an ISIR to the schools listed on that transaction but will not send a SAR to the student.

For full discussion of how to handle Title IV aid when a student dies, see *Appendix C, Actions a School Can Take When a Student Dies.*

APPLICANTS USING SAME SSN

When one student uses another's SSN, the duplicate SSN flag will be set in the ISIR, and the student's application will likely fail the SSN match, but it will be processed. She will have to make a correction as described earlier in this chapter.

If a student uses the same SSN **and** first two letters of the last name (together these data are the record identifier) as another student, the CPS will not accept her application because it will assume it to be a duplicate application of the first student. If she is using FAFSA on the Web, she will receive an immediate message telling her the proper way to make a correction, or if her record identifier is correct and she is trying to apply for aid, how she can proceed. If she is submitting a paper FAFSA, she will receive a letter giving her the same information and stating that the application was not processed.

If the student using the correct SSN applied after the other student, she must submit a special "correction application" that she can only get from the Department of Education. It will enable the CPS to accept her data instead of treating her application as a duplicate. The first student, who used the wrong SSN, **must** correct the error by filing a new FAFSA because the CPS uses the record identifier for students for the entire award year, even if they later change their SSN or last name. If the student simply corrected her SSN, her record identifier would still be wrong.

If the student using the correct SSN applied first, the CPS will have her data, so a correction application isn't necessary. The second student will need to submit a new application.

Both students should keep copies of all output documents, including those from the first FAFSAs filed. When a student files a correction application or a new FAFSA, the application receipt date is changed. Because some schools and agencies use this receipt date to determine if the student met a deadline, she should keep the output documents to show the original receipt date and to show why a later application was necessary.

Contact the Department at 1 (800)-433-3243 if you believe that a correction application may be needed; one can be mailed to your office or to the student.

Example: Students using same SSN

Hector completes an application in January, but uses his brother Aroldis's SSN instead of his own. When Hector gets his SAR, he realizes that he used the wrong SSN, corrects the SAR, and mails it back to the processor. He gets a new SAR with the correct SSN, but it has the same identifier as the first SAR. Aroldis files an application in April and is surprised to receive a SAR that doesn't match what was on his application because it has Hector's information instead. Aroldis goes to the financial aid office at Guerrero University, where a counselor tells him he'll need to file a correction application. Hector is also attending Guerrero, so the counselor contacts Hector to explain why he'll need to file a new application even though he already has a SAR with the correct information.

EXCEPTION FOR THE FREELY ASSOCIATED STATES: MICRONESIA, MARSHALL ISLANDS, AND PALAU

Persons from the Republic of the Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, or the Republic of Palau (collectively known as the Freely Associated States) typically do not have SSNs. First-time FAFSA filers who indicate on the FAFSA that their state of legal residence is one of the Freely Associated States should enter "666" for the first three digits of their SSN, and the CPS will assign them an identification number. They should use their assigned number in place of their SSN whenever applying for Title IV funds.

For returning FAFSA filers from one of the Freely Associated States, any FAFSAs must be submitted **under the same nine-digit pseudo-SSN** assigned originally by the CPS when the earlier award year was processed. Returning filers and FAAs should not provide only the first three digits of the pseudo-SSN, as this will result in the inappropriate creation of an entirely new SSN.

We strongly encourage you to follow this guidance when submitting application data through the FAA Access to CPS Online website, and to share this guidance with Pacific Island applicants who used a pseudo-SSN in prior years and plan to submit another FAFSA (either online or paper). For more information on eligibility for students from the Freely Associated States, see Chapter 2 of this volume.

Pseudo-SSNs for Pacific Islanders and the FAFSA
Electronic Announcement of June 22, 2017