



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

THE UNDER SECRETARY

August 8, 2016

Dear College President:

On behalf of Secretary John King, I want to thank you for helping students of all backgrounds access and successfully complete postsecondary education. I also want to recognize the commitment of your financial aid staff and staff from other parts of your institution, such as those in Admissions and Enrollment Management, who will play an important role in supporting students with the earlier availability of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) this coming October. Traditionally available on January 1, the FAFSA will now be available three months earlier on October 1 (October 1, 2016 for the upcoming 2017-2018 FAFSA), and will use income and tax information from one year earlier; for 2017-2018 that will be information from the 2015 tax year. The goal of early FAFSA is to expand college opportunity by ensuring that students and families have more time to consider their college options with an understanding of the financial resources available to help them pay for college.

To meet with this goal, in a March 2016 letter, I asked you to “consider providing earlier award notifications in order to maximize the benefits to students and their families.” I would like to provide more detail about that request as you finalize your financial aid calendar and procedures to accommodate the early FAFSA and share additional resources that can support you in your efforts to ensure that students and families can benefit the most from the early FAFSA process.

First, I strongly encourage you to help make sure that your students and prospective students are aware of the earlier availability of the FAFSA and that, if at all possible, **they file their FAFSA as soon after October 1 as possible**. A key resource to support you and your staff in this effort is our Financial Aid Toolkit available at FinancialAidToolkit.ed.gov, and specific information about the early FAFSA can be found at <https://financialaidtoolkit.ed.gov/tk/learn/fafsa/updates.jsp>.

Second, **I hope you are working to provide your prospective students, especially those from low-income backgrounds, with financial aid packages as early as possible** to allow them to have critical financial aid information before choosing a college. **Where earlier official awards are not possible, we ask you to consider providing students with estimated financial aid packages**, which can help provide the necessary information to students and families, even as your college may be awaiting final budget and funding allocations.

Third, in order to provide your prospective students and their families more time to explore their postsecondary education options as well as to preserve the ability for those students to receive institutional and campus-based aid, **I ask you not to move any priority financial aid deadlines earlier than your deadlines for recent years**. Moving institutional aid deadlines earlier could put undue pressure on high school seniors to rush through the financial aid and college admissions process, counteracting one of the main benefits of an early FAFSA - more time to explore and apply to schools. In addition, schools should strongly consider not having their financial aid deadlines earlier than their state

student aid deadlines and later if possible. Early priority aid deadlines most negatively impact students from low-income backgrounds and first-generation students who often have the least amount of information and support through the college financial aid and admissions application processes.

I understand that it may be a challenge to balance the twin objectives of providing award packages earlier and not setting earlier priority deadlines that some colleges use to prompt students to apply for state and institutional aid. One way to address this issue would be to carefully analyze historical trends, making adjustments for anticipated demographic and timing changes, especially the change to the early FAFSA, and adjusting award strategies so that those students with the most need have full access to funds, regardless of when they apply. Actions such as these help to realize the full benefits of early FAFSA, while ensuring that low-income and first-generation are not unintentionally negatively impacted by the aid process.

You should also encourage your students to carefully review the information provided on their Student Aid Report (SAR) that is sent to them upon completion of their FAFSA, your institution's Net Price Calculator (NPC), and the Department of Education's College Scorecard (available at <https://collegescorecard.ed.gov/>). The information from the SAR along with the information from these sites can provide a student with important information about possible amounts of aid as well as institutional costs and student aid procedures.

Finally, our FSA ID is used, among other things, to submit a FAFSA electronically. We recommend that you encourage your students to obtain their FSA ID as soon as possible so that they are ready to complete their FAFSA in the fall. Information about obtaining an FSA ID is available at <https://studentaid.ed.gov/sa/fafsa/filling-out/fsaid>.

I thank you in advance for your cooperation in helping students realize the benefits of using our early FAFSA.

Additional information about the earlier availability of the FAFSA is available at <https://studentaid.ed.gov/sa/about/announcements/fafsa-changes>.

Sincerely,



Ted Mitchell
Under Secretary of Education

cc Financial Aid Administrator