December 2013

Dear Counselor or Mentor:

The office of Federal Student Aid, U.S. Department of Education, would like to share some updates to assist you in working with students.

Launch of Financial Aid Toolkit for Counselors and Other Mentors

On December 1, we launched an online "one-stop shop" aimed at guidance counselors and other advisers (such as staff or volunteers at community-based organizations) who assist students through the process of selecting and financing their higher education. The Financial Aid Toolkit, available at **FinancialAidToolkit.ed.gov**, consolidates financial aid resources and content into a searchable online database, making it easy for individuals to quickly access the information they need to support their students. With this letter, we have included a flyer that highlights the major features of the Financial Aid Toolkit.

Publication Updates

We are updating *Your Federal Student Loans*; stay tuned for further information in 2014.

Page 4 of this letter lists our core publications; you can order them and many more at **www.FSAPubs.gov**. Please be sure to provide your e-mail address at the FSA Pubs site so we can communicate with you more effectively. You also can change your postal address or other contact information at that site.

Note: Students and parents can order publications at **www.edpubs.gov**.

FAFSA Enhancements

The 2014–15 *Free Application for Federal Student Aid* (FAFSA^{SM}) will include various changes based on public feedback and U.S. Department of Education initiatives. Below are a few of the more noticeable changes.

1. The FAFSA will include two new tax return filing status questions for students and parents. This change will allow us to identify instances where the reported parent or student marital status is inconsistent with the IRS tax return filing status, ensuring the consistency and accuracy of financial information used to calculate the applicant's Expected Family Contribution (EFC).

2. The FAFSA will collect information from both of the dependent student's legal (biological and/or adoptive) parents if the parents live together, regardless of the marital status or gender of the parents. This change makes the application and the EFC calculation consistent with the Higher Education Act (section 475), which uses the term "parent" rather than "mother" or "father." The FAFSA will now use the gender-neutral term "parent" in lieu of the gender-specific terms. The goal of providing information on the FAFSA is to determine the family's financial strength. Therefore, if both legal parents live in the household (whether they are married or not), the FAFSA wants to know about both of them in order to get the full financial picture.

   FAFSA on the Web instructions will be modified to include the new "Unmarried and both parents living together" response where applicable or will reference the reworded questions. We will also provide guidance informing students and parents on how to input IRS information if they filed separate tax returns (1040, 1040A, or 1040 EZ) or have different filing statuses (e.g., filer, non-filer, or foreign tax return filer). The guidance will include information on how to answer Questions 80–94 on the paper FAFSA and will be available to all *FAFSA on the Web* users.

3. Consistent with the Supreme Court decision on the Defense of Marriage Act, the 2014–15 FAFSA will include guidance explaining that marriage includes both legal marriages of persons of the opposite sex and legal marriages of persons of the same sex in jurisdictions where it is allowed.

As a reminder: *FAFSA on the Web* at **www.fafsa.gov** allows applicants to access their IRS tax information and have it automatically inserted into the FAFSA. The 2014–15 FAFSA will offer this functionality via the IRS Data Retrieval Tool beginning February 2, 2014.

Thank you and have a successful FAFSA season.

Sincerely,

Brenda F. Wensil
Chief Customer Experience Officer
Federal Student Aid

Enclosure

Federal Student Aid: Find the Information You Need Online

	Topic	Resource
FAFSA	Fill out the FAFSA	www.fafsa.gov
	Basic FAFSA info: what is it; how do you fill it out	StudentAid.gov/fafsa StudentAid.gov/complete
	Dependency status for FAFSA purposes	StudentAid.gov/fafsa/filling-out/dependency
	How aid is calculated (including link to detailed EFC info)	StudentAid.gov/how-calculated
Types of Aid/ Getting Aid	Types of financial aid	StudentAid.gov/types
	Who can get federal student aid	StudentAid.gov/eligibility
	Pell Lifetime Eligibility Used	StudentAid.gov/pell-limit
	Finding and applying for scholarships	StudentAid.gov/scholarships
	Loan interest rates and fees	StudentAid.gov/interest
	Aid for military families	StudentAid.gov/military
	Avoiding financial aid scams	StudentAid.gov/scams
Repaying Loans	Loan repayment	StudentAid.gov/repay
	Income-Based Repayment	StudentAid.gov/ibr
	Pay As You Earn	StudentAid.gov/PayAsYouEarn
	Public Service Loan Forgiveness	StudentAid.gov/publicservice
	Loan forgiveness in general	StudentAid.gov/forgiveness
	Loan forgiveness for teachers	StudentAid.gov/teach-forgive
College Prep	College Preparation Checklist: checklists for academic and financial preparation, for elementary school through adult students	StudentAid.gov/checklist
	Why go to college (education and pay/unemployment rates)	StudentAid.gov/whycollege
	Middle school preparation	StudentAid.gov/early
Special Audiences	Info for parents (tax benefits, support your child, college costs)	StudentAid.gov/parent
	Graduate school funding	StudentAid.gov/grad
	Financial aid for adult students	StudentAid.gov/resources#adult-students
	Going to college in another country	StudentAid.gov/international
Social Media	@FAFSA Twitter feed	www.Twitter.com/FAFSA
	Federal Student Aid YouTube channel	www.YouTube.com/FederalStudentAid
	Federal Student Aid Facebook page	www.Facebook.com/FederalStudentAid

Major Federal Student Aid Resources for Students and Parents

Resource		Summary and URL Note: Most of these items are also available in Spanish, and several in Braille.	Elementary School Student and Parent	Middle School Student and Parent	High School Student (9th-11th)	High School Senior	High School Parent	College Student	Borrower – Student or Parent	Adult Student
Core Documents*	College Prep Checklist	Preparing academically & financially (StudentAid.gov/checklist)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓
	Do You Need Money for College? Federal Student Aid at a Glance	Basic overview of aid & application process (StudentAid.gov/needmoney)			✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
	Funding Your Education	Understanding financial aid process & maximizing resources on our website (StudentAid.gov/funding)			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Direct Loan Basics	Federal loan info for students & parents (StudentAid.gov/resources#loans)				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	FAFSA on the Web Worksheet	Preview of certain FAFSA questions (StudentAid.gov/resources#worksheet)				✓	✓	✓		✓
	Paper FAFSA and PDF FAFSA	Free application for federal student aid (www.fafsa.gov)				✓	✓	✓		✓
Videos	• Types of aid • FAFSA • Borrowing and repayment	Videos of one to two minutes in length, introducing viewers to the concepts of federal student aid (www.YouTube.com/FederalStudentAid & StudentAid.gov/resources)			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Info-graphics	• Financial aid process • Aid eligibility	Images explaining financial aid concepts in a visual way (www.visual.ly/users/FederalStudentAid & StudentAid.gov/resources)			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

*View the full selection of publications you can order from Federal Student Aid at www.FSAPubs.gov. Students and parents may order at www.edpubs.gov.

FINANCIAL AID TOOLKIT

A New Resource for Organizations That Prepare Students and Families Financially for College

Federal Student Aid (FSA) recently launched the Financial Aid Toolkit (FinancialAidToolkit.ed.gov). 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. While the toolkit's target audience is high school counselors and college access professionals, financial aid administrators may also find toolkit resources useful for their student outreach efforts.

Key Feature: The "Search Tools and Resources" Function

Use the toolkit's search function to find and sort resources by

- audience,
- topic,
- time of year for best use, and
- type of resource.

Simply visit the Search Tools and Resources page at FinancialAidToolkit.ed.gov/resources.

Examples of the kinds of resources in the toolkit include

- outreach resources such as financial-aid-night materials, fact sheets, videos, infographics, and PowerPoint presentations;
- suggested messages for social media in the form of tweets, Facebook posts, and blog posts;
- information on embedding videos and infographics in your website;
- sample articles for organization newsletters and sample e-mails; and
- FSA publications.

Explore the Financial Aid Toolkit at FinancialAidToolkit.ed.gov

You can also subscribe to an RSS feed to receive notification when resources are updated or are added to the website.

Other Site Features

In addition to the search-resources function, the toolkit includes the following sections:

- **Learn About Financial Aid** provides tips and resources to help counselors, college access professionals, and other mentors obtain a basic understanding of financial aid and the federal aid application process. This section includes updates on the *Free Application for Federal Student Aid* (FAFSA℠) and basic information about loan repayment.
- **Conduct Outreach** features key outreach topics and resources that are of interest to school counselors and mentors. Topics include hosting a financial-aid night, reaching certain target audiences (e.g., parents, military), using social media, and more.
- **Get Training** shares information about such professional development opportunities as classroom training, webinars, and resources for self-instruction. This section includes information about the National Training for Counselors and Mentors (NT4CM) initiative.