SIMPLIFICATION MAY NOT BE SO SIMPLE

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Who we are

The **essential, indispensable** member of any team addressing education policy.
What we do

We believe in the power of **learning from experience** and we know informed policymakers create **better education policy**.
How we do it

RESEARCH    REPORT    COUNSEL    CONVENE
Goals

- Refresh on federal-level initiatives to simplify the FAFSA
- Review findings from a 50-state survey of state agencies that utilize FAFSA data
- Increase awareness of ECS support to state-level stakeholders that will have to adapt should simplification happen
FAFSA Simplification in the News

Senators Alexander, Bennet, Form to 2 Questions

Their six-part legislation also simplifies grants, discourages over-borrowing.

STUDENT AID SHORT FORM

STUDENT INFORMATION:

Last name, First name, MI

Street address

City/State/ZIP code

Date of birth

Social Security Number

FINANCIAL AID QUESTIONS:

FAMILY SIZE □

INCOME IN 2012 $ □
In 2014, programs requiring FAFSA information accounted for 77% of all state financial aid expenditures.
Finding #1

There is strong agreement on the important role states play in informing federal policy development— but respondents are split on clarity of pathways to exert influence.
States have an important role to play in informing federal financial aid policy development

- Strongly Agree: 17
- Agree: 6
- Disagree: 2
- Strongly Disagree: 0
- No Opinion: 1
States have clear pathways to act to influence federal financial aid policy development.

- **Strongly Agree**: 0
- **Agree**: 11
- **Disagree**: 11
- **Strongly Disagree**: 2
- **No Opinion**: 2
Finding #2

No clear agreement among agency staff on whether or not the FAFSA is in need of simplification.
The FAFSA is overly complicated.

- Strongly Agree: 2
- Agree: 6
- Disagree: 14
- Strongly Disagree: 2
- Do Not Know: 0
- No Opinion: 2
Congress should act to simplify the FAFSA process.

- Strongly Agree: 4
- Agree: 8
- Disagree: 5
- Strongly Disagree: 1
- Do Not Know: 2
- No Opinion: 6
Simplification should be approached cautiously, since oversimplification will likely result in more secondary state applications...

...the level of difficulty of completing the FAFSA for most students has been overblown nearly to the point of urban myth. I feel it is as important to combat the negative opinions and hype as it is to actually simplify the FAFSA.
Finding #3

Thirty-two states plus D.C. use at least 3 of 5 major FAFSA data elements to administer state aid programs.
## 5 Main Data FAFSA Elements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Element</th>
<th>Number of States Utilizing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Demographic Information</td>
<td>29 states + D.C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EFC</td>
<td>43 states + D.C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Income or Asset Information</td>
<td>25 states + D.C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Application Date</td>
<td>32 states + D.C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institution List</td>
<td>17 states + D.C.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The potential for state-level application development remains unclear.
Would your state develop a secondary application if the FAFSA removed needed information?

- Yes
- No
- Do Not Know
Would your state continue the use of a secondary application even if the FAFSA provided the information needed?
Summary of Findings

1) Strong agreement on important role states play in informing federal policy - but split on clarity of pathways to exert influence.

2) No clear agreement among agency staff on whether or not the FAFSA is in need of simplification.

3) Thirty-two states plus D.C. use at least 3 of 5 major FAFSA data elements to administer state aid programs.

4) The potential for state-level application development remains unclear.
State-level stakeholders must be included.

Need to define what the FAFSA is intended to do- and not intended to do.

States don’t just need the EFC- they need the items underlying it.

Awareness of trading current alignment for possible future efficiency.

Be open to change.
Next Steps

Will states be impacted?

How will they be impacted?

Which states will be impacted?

How can we help them prepare?
Check out the Report:

- Go to [www.ecs.org](http://www.ecs.org)
- Search “FAFSA”

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