

Postings from New Trier's Post-High School Counseling Office Next Steps for Need-Based Financial Aid

The process for applying for need-based financial aid has changed, and the FAFSA, the core document needed to be considered for any money based on your family financial situation, will be available on October first. As a result, we thought this step-by-step guide might be helpful.

STEP ONE:

NOW or at least before September 30:

Every parent and student who will be applying for need-based aid should secure their FSA ID. This will be a lifelong identification used for creating and accessing your federal financial aid documents and records.

Cut-and-paste this site into your browser and create your FSA ID:

<https://fsaid.ed.gov/npas/index.htm>

Students create one and parents create another. **WRITE THIS DOWN SO THAT YOU WILL BE ABLE TO RETREIVE IT FOR THE FOUR YEARS THE STUDENT IS IN COLLEGE;** parents will use this ID for all of the children in their household. Students use it throughout the time they use financial aid for college.

If you have not yet submitted your 2015 federal income taxes (due April 15), do so as soon as possible! This information is required before you will be able to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, or FAFSA!!

STEP TWO:

On October 1 or at least by November 1:

Use your FSA ID to begin to complete the FAFSA, which is the basic document required for any need-based financial help for college.

This form is not hard, no matter what people tell you!!! If you submitted your 2015 taxes electronically, you can use a new link to import your pertinent 2015 tax information directly onto the FAFSA, saving you from digging up your 2015 tax information.

We get aggressive about doing the FAFSA as soon as possible, because the allocation of federal and state dollars always runs out before all needy families can be accommodated. Money is allocated on a first come, first served basis, so get this form in by November first, please!!!!

Here is the URL for the FAFSA (cut-and-paste it into your browser):

<https://fafsa.ed.gov/>

Parents fill out one section of the FAFSA, students another. Each student who lives in the household and who is going to college must complete and submit a FAFSA each year he or she wishes to be considered for aid.

Special circumstances:

In cases of divorce, the parent with whom the student lives the most in any calendar year is the parent who should complete the FAFSA, regardless of custody arrangements

or who pays or receives child support. Please know that the FAFSA considers household income, so any divorced parents who have remarried must include the new spouse's income on the FAFSA.

In case a family's 2016 or 2017 income is expected to be significantly lower than your income in 2015 on which FAFSA eligibility is based, you will need to still use your 2015 income information on the FAFSA. However, you must write a letter to the financial aid administrator at the colleges your student is considering requesting that individual to "use his or her professional judgment in allocating a package for my student, (name of student)." You must include as much documentation of your 2016 income as possible, including but not limited to any notice of job termination, increase in family expenses (credit card bills are not considered), bankruptcy, or other situation. This documentation allows the campus financial aid officers to make exceptions in order to provide a fair financial aid award to your student. This letter should be submitted within a week or two of the FAFSA in order to better assure reasonable financial aid consideration and help the financial aid officers have time to request any additional information from you.

Students considering applying under a binding Early Decision plan should still do their homework before deciding to apply ED. Parents should use the Net Price Calculator on the college website to determine how financially feasible the college is. Next, the parent should contact the admission office and ask if the student may use the ED option if finances are an issue, and if the student may be released from the binding nature of the ED agreement if the financials do not work out. Then, to protect yourself, email what you were told to the person with whom you spoke to have the information in writing.

POTENTIAL STEP THREE:

Some 300 colleges and universities require additional information from families before they will allocate any need-based financial aid. Check the websites of the colleges on your student's list to see if they require the CSS PROFILE form. There may be fees associated with this form; one to register and another to send the results to individual colleges and universities so make sure you really need this form before completing and submitting it. It is a "smart form," so that as you respond to their questions – which can be considered highly intrusive – your fees may be reduced or disappear entirely based on your responses.

The purpose of this form is to make sure that all avenues of a student's resources are considered in creating a fair financial aid award. It includes financial information that the FAFSA does not consider.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

From the Office of Federal Student Aid:

Three days to three weeks after you submit the FAFSA electronically, you will receive an email asking you to log into your FAFSA account (using that handy FSA ID) and see if any corrections are requested.

You will now be looking at the SAR or Student Aid Report which is a synopsis of your financial aid form. You make corrections as necessary, and as directed. The EFC or Estimated Family Contribution is an index that approximates the amount of money your family may be expected to pay for your student's college.

From college or university financial aid offices:

Since the federal government does not allocate financial aid money to colleges until February of 2017 for your graduating year, you have a large window of response, from

December 1 through mid-April. Colleges will estimate a financial aid package for your student and email your student a chart of the type and amount of expected financial aid available along with a guesstimate as to the actual college costs for 2017. Those costs are typically not set until May of 2017 by each college's board.

THE STUDENT'S RESPONSIBILITIES:

Each student who has been awarded a package has the right to accept or deny any specific parts of the financial aid offered by each college and university. The student and parent should review the awards from all colleges before determining whether or not they are financially feasible to manage.

THE PARENT'S RESPONSIBILITIES:

Teach your student fiscal responsibility. While it is perfectly acceptable to call a college financial aid office and politely ask if there could be additional money available for your student, remember that one answer may be "No." Many colleges put forth their best package first, but others may find additional money as other students decline their offers in the spring. It is possible that you may have to tell your student that some colleges are simply out of reach financially.

A WORD ABOUT PRIVATE LOANS:

When you read about individuals who are leaving college with over \$30,000 in student loans, please know that they have used private sources for college money. The current maximum amount of money a student can borrow from the federal government for an undergraduate degree is \$27,500. Some private financial sources prey on uneducated consumers who are simply trying to secure a college education; please consider the repayment schedules of any loan you take out!

SCHOLARSHIP OPTIONS:

Any scholarship information that comes to New Trier is included on the student's Naviance college page; simply scroll down past the college pieces to see three scholarship options. Also, attached to the home page of the individual student's Naviance page are links to several scholarship search sites. Whatever you do, don't pay anyone to fill out the FAFSA or to be considered for scholarships!

ADDITIONAL WEB RESOURCES:

Basic need-based financial aid information can be found here:

<https://studentaid.ed.gov/sa/types>

We also like:

<https://collegescorecard.ed.gov/>

<https://collegecost.ed.gov/catc/Default.aspx>

<https://www.isac.org/>

Remember, your New Trier post-high school counselor is always happy to help!!

