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- How much better is the new “better” FAFSA?
- Issues you may face with the new FAFSA



Expert advice on what to expect from the new FAFSA

In this issue, we’re covering the one thing that everyone with their eyes on college is talking about: FAFSA! To do that, we’ve turned to two of our favorite experts on the topic to bring you up to date.

First, for a quick overview, we’d like to introduce Amber Peters of the Instagram site [@ontrackwithmizzp](#). We love her Instagram because every day she lets college-bound students and their families know what they should be working on to get ready for college as well as keeping them informed on the latest moving parts in the college application process. She also has a fun and informative website: [mizzp.nyc](#).

Then, to go into the details of what filling out the FAFSA is like this year, we’ve brought in Kim Nauer, who runs our favorite FAFSA website: [understandingfafsa.org](#). This site covers just about everything there is to know about FAFSA — and in multiple languages, too. Kim works under the auspices of the New School ([newschool.edu](#)) and is a self-described “FAFSA Nerd.” You’ll see why when you read her contribution below.

Plus, if you want to know what happens to your FAFSA application behind the scenes, visit the College Money Matters website and check out [collegemoneymatters.org/fafsa-what-it-is-how-it-works](#).

How much better is the new “better” FAFSA?

FAFSA launched their “Better” FAFSA on New Years Eve. Here’s what we learned so far:

- The system, while glitchy, has been described as “quick” and “easy” by the many families who were able to complete the form successfully.

- Those who have been experiencing technical issues have been having a very hard time getting support online or through FAFSA’s hotline (800-433-3243). If you need to call, remember to exercise patience. They are extremely overwhelmed.
- After a few weeks of limited access, FAFSA was able to return to their 24/7 form availability.
- While aware of the issues, colleges still expect FAFSA submissions by their set deadlines – even though data distribution will be delayed.



As we get closer to experiencing a “Better” FAFSA, you should know that the team managing the site is working hard behind the scenes to create a more streamlined user experience.

**Contributing author:
Amber L. Peters, Founder,
On Track With Mizz P.**

**Good luck with your
applications and follow
@ontrackwithmizzp for
more FAFSA updates!**

Issues you may face with the new FAFSA



**Contributing author:
Kim Nauer, Founder,
UnderstandingFAFSA.org**

Is the FAFSA on your college to-do list?

You may have seen the news that the online FAFSA form is all-new this year and has been rebuilt to be much faster and simpler to use. This is true!

You may have also heard that *lots* of families are having *lots* of problems trying to get the new FAFSA to work. This is true, too!

Here’s the story, and the links will take you to more detail:

Federal Student Aid has posted and is updating [a list of technical problems with possible ways to work around them](#).

If you are experiencing problems filling out the FAFSA, this document may be tremendously helpful. In some cases, FSA offers instructions on how to work around a technical issue. In other cases, there is no help, but at least you know you are in good company.

At [UnderstandingFAFSA.org](#), we have been working with families, counselors, and trade groups to track the issues that families are seeing. We’ll be posting a list of known errors later this week. But in the meantime, here are a few of the common issues to know about.

1. The website gets overloaded and may crash while you are trying to get an FSA ID or fill out the FAFSA. [Read our FSA ID and FAFSA tech tips](#) for advice on how to avoid common issues with crashing.

2. [Parents without Social Security numbers are shut out of the FAFSA for now](#). Parents do not need a Social Security number to help their students with the FAFSA, but they do need to get an FSA ID. And right now, that appears to be impossible. FSA has told trade groups that it is working hard to fix this issue. Students who have undocumented parents need to let colleges know that their FAFSA may be late.

3. There are a range of problems with the “invite”

Federal Student Aid, the government agency in charge of the FAFSA, launched the new form in late December [with a warning that there could be problems](#). Federal law required FSA to launch the FAFSA by the end of the year, but the agency knew the website wasn't ready. Officials announced that January would be a “[soft launch](#)” of the FAFSA. The agency's goal was to have the FAFSA working well by February 1. Families have been told not to rush to do the FAFSA, since [colleges will not get any information from the FAFSA](#) until the end of this month.

The good news? The FAFSA is up and running 24/7 – and [more than a million families have successfully filled out the form](#).

This new FAFSA, when it works, is a remarkable improvement from prior generations of the FAFSA. If you have a standard form and know what you are doing, it can take less than 10 minutes to complete!

The bad news? There are still a tremendous number of technical issues that FSA can't seem to fix.

tool. FSA details these in its [technical issues page](#).

4. The FAFSA may erase prior signatures that other contributors may have made. FSA also details these in its [technical issues page](#). The fix is that the contributors just need to sign the page again. But this might not be obvious to families.

5. It can take more than an hour to get through to live help on the [FAFSA's help desk](#). And even then, your call may be dropped. The help center has been overwhelmed by inquiries about the FAFSA.

One tip: Try finding an answer to your question on parent social media groups. We are seeing lots of good advice being traded on Facebook forums. There may be a simple way around a problem you are experiencing.

Federal Student Aid is asking for patience during this soft launch period. The hope is that many of these issues will be resolved by February 1, though that might not be realistic given that we are nearing the end of the month.

The most important piece of advice?

Communicate with the colleges on your list. They need this information on the FAFSA to create a financial aid package for you. Let the college financial aid office know about the technical difficulties you are experiencing. They may have help for you. And they need to know you are trying your best.

And just remember, the new FAFSA is a much easier form to fill out when it works. This year may be a bit rough, but we expect that next year will be a breeze.

A note in closing

**By Nancy Goodman, Executive Director,
College Money Matters**

At the time of this issue of the College Money Matters newsletter, the information submitted by FAFSA applicants has not yet been transmitted to colleges. So, it's possible that another set of issues could occur later. For instance, the recent improvements in eligibility for need-based financial aid were just announced on January 24th. Keep in touch with the colleges you want to attend to make sure you're as up to date as possible.

Tune in next month for our next issue, when we'll cover the what every student should know about paying for college using student loans.



College Money Matters

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