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NCHER Briefing Takes Publishing Break for the Legislative and Leadership Meeting, Resumes Next Monday

The NCHER Briefing will be on a publishing break for the NCHER Legislative and Leadership Meeting, which takes place February 7-9, 2024 at the Hyatt Regency Washington, DC on Capitol Hill. We will resume our regular publishing schedule next Monday, February 10, 2024. We hope to see you at the meeting!



Weekly Rundown

The NCHER Weekly Rundown, which includes the latest information on important events in Washington, DC, is available today and can be downloaded from the [NCHER website](#).

Department of Education Releases FAFSA College Support Strategy, Focus on Under-Resourced Colleges

Today, the U.S. Department of Education [announced](#) that it was releasing a FAFSA College Support Strategy to provide additional personnel, funding, resources, and technology to help schools and students complete the new 2024-2025 Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and to help colleges prepare to process student records as quickly and accurately as possible. The FAFSA College Support Strategy includes deploying federal personnel and expertise to help colleges prepare and process financial aid forms, directing funding for technical assistance and support for under-resourced colleges, and releasing tools to help colleges prepare to quickly and accurately process student records and deliver financial aid packages. “Make no mistake: the Better FAFSA is transformational,” said Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona. “We are determined to get this right. We must, and we will. Our hope is that these steps we’re announcing today are going to go a long way toward helping colleges and universities make the most of the Better FAFSA.”

According to the Department, the FAFSA College Support Strategy will particularly focus on lower-resourced schools that may have a smaller number of administrative staff and may utilize older software systems. The Department’s goal is to not only deploy resources for colleges to accelerate the development of student aid packages, but also to make sure students have adequate time to make important decisions about their higher education options.

Deploying federal personnel and expertise to colleges

The Department will be deploying federal financial aid experts to a group of lower-resourced colleges to ensure these colleges have the tools and information needed to process financial aid packages, understand the steps they need to take to prepare, deliver direct on-campus support, and provide ongoing consultations and training as needed.

Through this effort, the Department expects to serve Historically Black Colleges and Universities, tribal colleges and universities, and colleges that are lower-resourced. The Department is also standing up a new concierge service within the Office of Federal Student Aid, which will provide a broad set of colleges direct contact with financial aid experts to help to provide them personalized support based on an institution's needs. These federal liaisons, many of whom are former financial aid professionals, will answer questions and connect colleges to available resources.

Providing funding for technical assistance and on-the-ground support

The Department is allocating \$50 million in federal funding that will be provided to non-profit groups specialized in financial aid support and services. These groups will use these funds to recruit financial aid professionals to provide additional technical assistance and support, beyond the federal teams deployed by the Department, for under-resourced colleges. Participating colleges will receive additional staff support to deliver services such as assessing financial aid system readiness and implementing necessary updates, training staff, developing aid packages, and carrying out other student aid compliance requirements. The federal funding will be administered by the Educational Credit Management Corporation and will engage experienced nonprofits like the National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators and the Partnership for Education Advancement.

Releasing data and tools to help colleges prepare to quickly and accurately process student records, deliver financial aid packages

The Department will begin releasing test versions of institutional student financial aid information records (ISIRs) within the next two weeks and will be actively working with financial aid system developers so that colleges and states can prepare their systems. These test ISIRs will enable colleges to prepare their own systems and processes to efficiently assemble aid packages.

Department of Education Holds Second Session of Institutional Quality and Program Integrity Committee

This week, the U.S. Department of Education began the second of three sessions of its Institutional Quality and Program Integrity Committee, which is meeting to revise federal regulations around cash management, accreditation, withdrawals and return of Title IV funds (R2T4), state authorization, and distance education. The TRIO Subcommittee is expected to meet on the final day of the session to discuss revising federal regulations around program eligibility. During the morning's session, the committee members

discussed the Department's regulatory language on cash management, including the agency's proposal to require the return (to the student) of leftover funds in cash value meal plans and whether and how institutions can charge for and bundle books and supplies with tuition and fees. After robust debate, the Department took temperature checks on both issues, and neither received full consensus.

During the afternoon session, the committee turned to the Department's regulatory language for Tier One and Tier Two arrangements and the fees charged to students through campus financial products. The temperature check on these sections yielded no opposition. The committee also discussed regulatory language around parental and student authorizations and overpayments. The temperature checks on these items did not yield total agreement.

For further information or to register to listen to the proceedings, visit the [Department's website](#).

HEA Group Releases Report About Relationship Between College Graduation and Student Loan Repayment

Last week, the HEA Group released a [report](#) exploring the extent to which college completion impacts student loan repayment. Researchers studied student loan repayment outcomes of 3.9 million borrowers who attended over 1,900 different institutions of higher education, and found that borrowers who failed to complete their degrees saw roughly a 6 percent increase in what they owed four years after entering repayment. Conversely, borrowers who graduated from their institution were able to pay down their debt, owing 6 percent less than their original loan amount. The report also suggests that the type of education plays a significant role in terms of repayment success. Borrowers with bachelor's degrees owed 8 percent less on their federal student loans four years after graduating, but those borrowers with an associate degree or certificate still owed more than what they originally borrowed over that same four-year window.

U.S. Department of Education News

For today's Federal Register, click [here](#).

The following announcements were posted to Federal Student Aid's Knowledge Center:

- [\(GENERAL-24-07\) Errata – Application and Verification Guide \[2024-2025 Federal Student Aid Handbook\]](#)
 - [System of Records: Aid Awareness and Application Processing](#)
 - [Negotiated Rulemaking Committee: Announcement of Fourth Session of Committee Meetings - Title IV Federal Student Aid Programs, Student Debt Relief](#)
 - [\(CB-24-05\) Application for Participation in the Work Colleges Program](#)
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General News

[Higher Ed Dive](#) reports that multiple higher education groups called for colleges and universities to postpone their decision deadlines because of delays in the Free Application for Federal Student Aid.

[Inside Higher Ed](#) publishes an opinion piece arguing that budget challenges, not hostile takeovers by disgruntled donors, politicians, unhappy alumni, or activist students, are the most crucial challenge for university presidents.

[Time Magazine](#) discusses the relationship between student loan repayment and taxes.

An online version of this Daily Briefing is available to view and print from the [Daily Briefing Section](#) of the [NCHER e-Library](#).

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