

Dear Chief School Administrators,

Completion of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) among Pennsylvania high school students reached a near-record high during the current 2025–2026 academic year. Last year, 57.5% of PA high school seniors completed the FAFSA, allowing them to access financial aid that can make a critical difference in their postsecondary decisions. This achievement reflects the dedication of school counselors and Local Educational Agencies (LEAs), nonpublic schools, and private academic schools across the Commonwealth who prioritize financial literacy and ensure students understand the financial aid opportunities available to them as they pursue postsecondary education.

To build on this momentum, Act 47 of 2025 established a state-wide FAFSA completion requirement. Beginning with the 2026–2027 school year, all Pennsylvania high school seniors will be required to file the FAFSA unless a parent or guardian (or the student if 18 years old or older) submits a completed opt-out form. No student may be withheld from graduation or otherwise reprimanded for failing to complete the FAFSA; rather, the intent is to ensure that every student and family is aware of available financial aid and has the opportunity to make informed postsecondary and workforce decisions.

If the FAFSA or opt-out form is not filed, LEAs, nonpublic schools, and private academic schools must make a reasonable effort to contact the student and parent or guardian to provide them with information explaining the purpose of the FAFSA and the benefits available from completing the form before the student may be exempted from the filing requirement. Students, parents, and guardians who choose not to submit the FAFSA or an opt-out form are not required to explain their reason for not doing so.

FAFSA completion is one of the strongest predictors of postsecondary enrollment. State-wide FAFSA completion advances equity, increases access to federal, state and other sources of financial aid, and supports Pennsylvania’s broader postsecondary attainment and workforce goals.

To support consistent statewide implementation, here is a suggested timeline for LEAs, nonpublic schools, and private academic schools to plan for:

Spring/Summer 2026

- Designate a district FAFSA lead to serve as primary point of contact for regional and statewide initiatives.
- Review guidance and develop local implementation plans, including staffing, student supports, and family communication strategies.
- Provide FAFSA information to students and families no later than the start of senior year to promote awareness.
- If needed as a resource, enter into or update your existing PHEAA Remote Access Agreements with PHEAA to ensure LEAs, nonpublic schools, and private academic schools receive updated lists of which students have completed the FAFSA.
 - LEAs, nonpublic schools, and private academic schools that have not previously completed a PHEAA Remote Access Agreement can download it [here](#).
 - If you already have an agreement but need to update who at your school can access these reports, please contact your PHEAA [Higher Education Access Partner](#).
 - If you’re unsure whether an agreement is in place, please contact your PHEAA [Higher Education Access Partner](#).
 - If you currently access these reports successfully, no action is required.

Fall 2026

- Collaborate with the Pennsylvania School Counselors Association (PSCA), the Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency (PHEAA), higher education partners, and community organizations to host, attend, and support FAFSA completion training and events.
- Begin FAFSA completion activities aligned with the federal FAFSA release date of October 1.
- Distribute opt-out forms.

January 2027

- Monitor student-level FAFSA completion status and opt-out submissions.
- Provide targeted outreach and support to students who have not submitted or completed the FAFSA.
- Maintain documentation for compliance.

By graduation – Class of 2027

- Verify that each graduating senior has either:
 - Completed the FAFSA, or
 - Submitted a signed opt-out form.

The Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) will issue additional guidance including:

- Model family communication language
- Opt-out form templates
- Technical assistance and professional development opportunities
- Communications on upcoming PHEAA training workshops
- FAQs

We recognize that successful implementation will require thoughtful planning and collaboration. PDE is committed to supporting LEAs, nonpublic schools, and private academic schools to ensure this policy is implemented with clarity and a focus on student success. You are not alone in this endeavor, and subsequent details and updates will be forthcoming.

Thank you for your leadership and continued commitment to expanding postsecondary access and opportunity for Pennsylvania students.

Please submit any questions to RA-EDPAFAFSAGO@pa.gov.

Resources:

- [PHEAA FAFSA Resources](#)