

## EXPLANATION OF FINANCIAL AID APPLICATION GRADUATION REQUIREMENT

In accordance with Texas Education Code (TEC), §28.0256, beginning with students enrolled in Grade 12 during the 2021-2022 school year, a student must complete and submit a free application for federal student aid (FAFSA) or a Texas application for state financial aid (TASFA) as a requirement for high school graduation.

### Financial Aid Application Graduation Requirement

State law requires all students enrolled in grade 12 to submit a financial aid application to graduate. Financial aid applications inform postsecondary institutions' decisions about student eligibility for federal, state, and institutional funds.

To complete the financial aid application requirement for graduation, high school seniors must take one of the following actions:

- Complete and submit the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)
- Complete and submit the Texas Application for State Financial Aid (TASFA)
- Submit a signed opt-out form

### Opt-Out Form

A student may graduate without completing a financial aid application by submitting an opt-out form signed by the student's parent or guardian, counselor, or the student if age 18 or older to authorize the student to decline to submit a financial aid application. Students who have emancipated from their parents and are under the age of 18 are authorized to sign the form. A parent can also decline to complete the financial aid application by signing the opt-out form.

The opt-out form is available on the Texas Education Agency website in English and Spanish at <https://tea.texas.gov/academics/college-career-and-military-prep/financial-aid-requirement>. Students can also request a copy of the opt-out form from their high school counselor. It's important to note that students who opt out can still complete and submit a financial aid application at any time if they change their mind. High school counselors can answer additional questions about applying for financial aid and opting out.

### FAFSA or TASFA?

Completing a FAFSA or TASFA will meet the financial aid application graduation requirement. Students should complete FAFSA if they meet FAFSA eligibility. Students who cannot apply for federal financial aid using the FAFSA must complete the TASFA or opt out to meet the graduation requirement. Students do not need to complete both the FAFSA and TASFA.

#### FAFSA

The FAFSA is used to collect information to help determine eligibility for federal and state financial aid. This application is only available to US citizens, permanent residents, and certain eligible noncitizens. The FAFSA is administered by Federal Student Aid and the office of the U.S. Department of Education (USDE).

The FAFSA is available on the Federal Student Aid website at <https://studentaid.gov/h/apply-for-aid/fafsa>. The FAFSA form is also available on the myStudentAid app, which can be downloaded from the Apple App or Google Play store.

#### TASFA

The TASFA is used to collect information to help determine eligibility for state financial aid programs that are administered by institutions of higher education in the state of Texas. The application is available to Texas residents who are not eligible to apply for federal student aid through the FAFSA.

A general TASFA application is available on the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board's College for All Texans website at <http://www.collegeforalltexas.com/index.cfm?objectid=a3119543-cbf8-c202-f1b0eefd5f4b9805>. The current TASFA form can be completed on a computer but will need to be printed and mailed to the college(s). Some schools may have their own electronic TASFA students can submit online. Students should check with the Texas college(s) to which they are interested in applying for more information. High school counselors can also help students access the correct TASFA form.

## Important dates and deadlines

The windows to submit the FAFSA and TASFA to apply financial aid funds for the next school year open in the fall. High school seniors must note the following deadlines in order to complete the graduation requirement and be eligible for financial aid for the school year after they graduate.

- October 1 – the FAFSA and TASFA become available
- January 15 – the state priority deadline to submit an application (more aid may be available to students who apply by this deadline)
- Students should check with a high school counselor about their high school’s deadlines for completing the financial aid application requirement to graduate on time. A financial aid application or opt-out form must be completed to meet the graduation requirement.

Students should check with the institution of higher education they wish to attend for other deadlines. Financial aid is often awarded on a first-come, first-served basis, so students are encouraged to apply as early as possible. Students will also need to reapply every subsequent year that they continue their education after high school to be considered for federal student aid. Additional information about when to apply for financial aid is available at Federal Student Aid at <https://studentaid.gov/>.

## Resources for the financial aid application requirement

### Texas OnCourse

The Texas OnCourse platform hosts resources and toolkits for both students and their families. Links to these resources are provided on the Financial Aid Application Graduation Requirement main page: <https://texasoncourse.org/educators/popular-links/the-new-financial-aid-graduation-requirement/>

### Federal Student Aid (USDE)

The Federal Student Aid website provides a variety of resources for FAFSA, including planning worksheets and checklists. USDE also maintains a contact center that students and their families can use to get answers to their questions by email, phone, or chat.

- **Federal Student Aid Website:** <https://studentaid.gov/h/apply-for-aid/fafsa>
- **Federal Student Aid Information Center :** <https://studentaid.ed.gov/sa/contact>  
1-800-4FED-AID  
(1-800-433-3243)

## Completing an application

When it’s time to submit a financial aid application, students will need to have certain records and financial information for their parents and, if applicable, themselves, including tax records and bank records.

Completing the TASFA or FAFSA will be easier if the required documentation has been gathered and is on hand prior to starting the form. Students and parents or guardians may need the following information:

- Social Security number or alien registration number (if an eligible noncitizen)
- Federal income tax returns, W-2s, and other records of money earned from two years prior to completing the application
- Bank statements and records of investments (if applicable)
- Records of untaxed income (if applicable)
- An FSA ID\*\* (FAFSA only) to electronically sign the FAFSA

Before completing a FAFSA, in addition to gathering the required documentation, a student will need to

- identify colleges and universities (up to 10) to which to send financial information; and
- create a Federal Student Aid (FSA) ID\* -- online application only

\* An FSA ID is assigned when a student creates an account to begin the FAFSA process on the Federal Student Aid website.

## Additional support

High school counselors and other campus staff can provide additional information about financial aid events and opportunities for support when it comes time for high school seniors to submit a financial aid application.

[Insert high school counselor contact information and any other community partner or resources]