



Date: June 26, 2024
To: Local Educational Agency Leads
Route To: Principals, School Leads, School Counselors
From: Jorden Schiff, Ed.D., Assistant Commissioner
Division of Teaching and Learning Services

New Graduation Requirement Reminder: Completing Financial Aid Applications (P.L.2023, c.295)

This broadcast serves to remind local education agencies (LEA) of the requirements of [P.L.2023, c.295](#).

Earlier this year, Governor Murphy signed into law legislation requiring public school students to complete either the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) or the New Jersey Alternative Financial Aid Application (NJFAAA) as a prerequisite to receiving a high school diploma. The law:

- Applies to the graduating classes of 2025, 2026, and 2027;
- Allows a student's parent or guardian to complete a waiver form exempting their student from this requirement. A student who is at least 18 years old may exempt themselves from the requirement;
- Provides that, if a student is under 18 years old and a waiver form cannot be reasonably obtained from the parent or guardian, the student's school counselor may authorize the waiver;
- Requires each school district and charter school to annually notify students and parents/guardians of this requirement;
- Prohibits school districts from taking adverse action against a student due to the student's receipt of an exemption; and
- Requires the Higher Education Student Assistance Authority (HESAA) to issue a report that includes the number of students that completed a financial aid form under this requirement and the number of students exempted.

Access to Student Financial Aid Application Completion Status

To support LEAs in implementing this requirement, the NJDOE is re-sharing the following [memo](#) from HESAA. The memo advises that LEAs may enter into a data-sharing agreement with HESAA to allow the Authority to share information with LEAs about students' financial aid application completion status. The NJDOE urges LEAs to consider such data-sharing agreements to gain ready access to student-by-student completion status and to offer targeted support to students who have not yet filled out an application.

Waiver and Reporting Guidance

To support LEAs in implementing this requirement, the NJDOE is providing [template forms](#) LEAs may use to obtain waivers from parents/guardians or school counselors. Use of those specific template forms is optional; P.L.2023, c.295 does not require use of any State-provided waiver form. LEAs may obtain parental/guardian or school counselor waivers in any manner consistent with the requirements of P.L.2023, c.295.

LEAs are advised to maintain records for which students fulfill this graduation requirement by completing a financial aid application and which students are waived. The NJDOE intends to provide a reporting mechanism via NJSMART for LEAs to provide this data to NJDOE. To support this reporting, the NJDOE encourages LEAs to work with their Student Information System vendors to automate their waiver collection process.

FAFSA and NJFAAA Guidance

For additional information regarding FAFSA, including completion instructions, FAQs, and deadlines, please see HESAA's [FAFSA webpage](#). For additional information regarding NJFAAA, please see [HESAA's website](#).

Contact Information

For additional information regarding this graduation requirement, please contact the NJDOE's Office of Career Readiness at FinAidGradReq@doe.nj.gov. For additional information regarding FAFSA and NJFAAA, please contact HESAA at CustomerCare@hesaa.org.

c: Members, State Board of Education
NJDOE Staff
Statewide Parent Advocacy Network
Garden State Coalition of Schools
NJ LEE Group