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The Four F's of 2024 – The FAFSA Fiasco Fraught with Frustration

Ann Cools – Executive Consultant, RNL

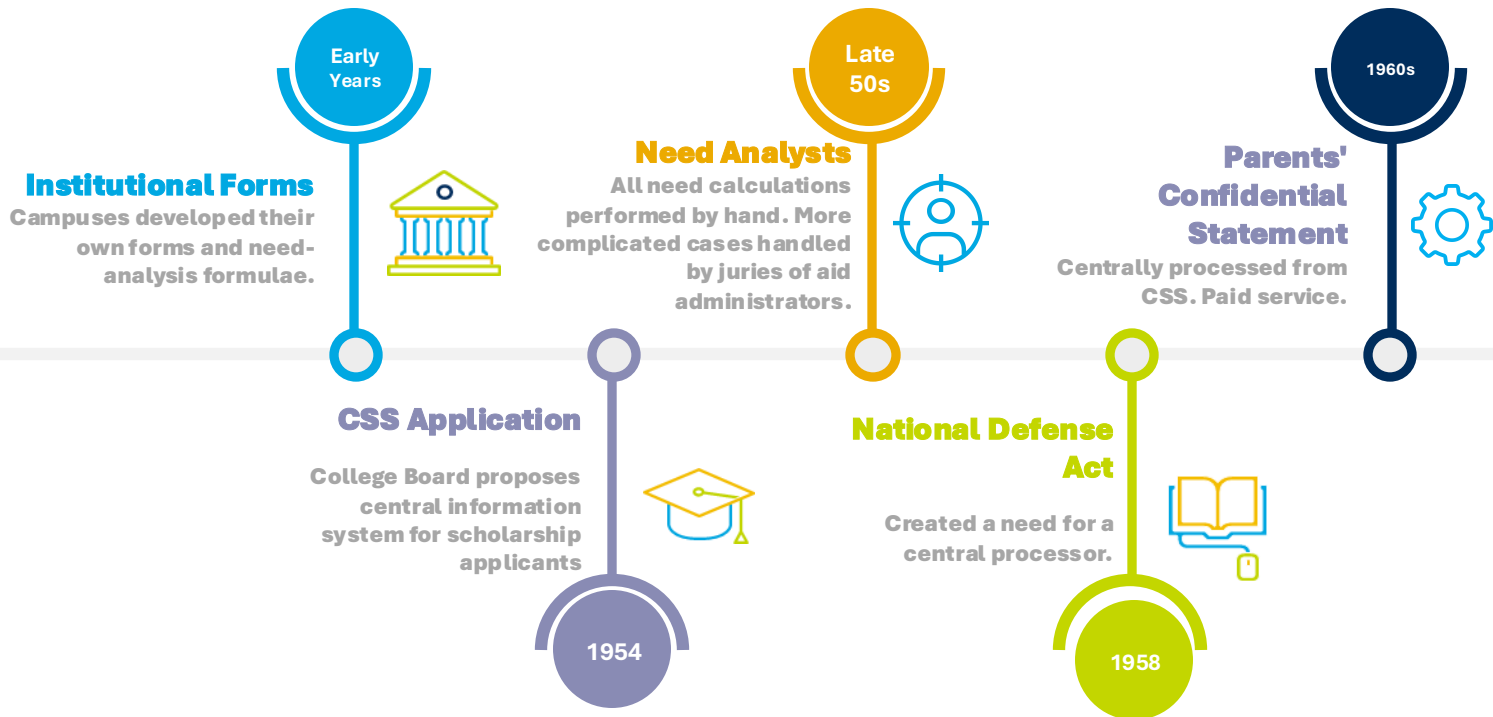
The Four F's of 2024

1. Founding of the FAFSA
2. Finessing of the form
3. Frustration with the rollout
4. Findings and future endeavors

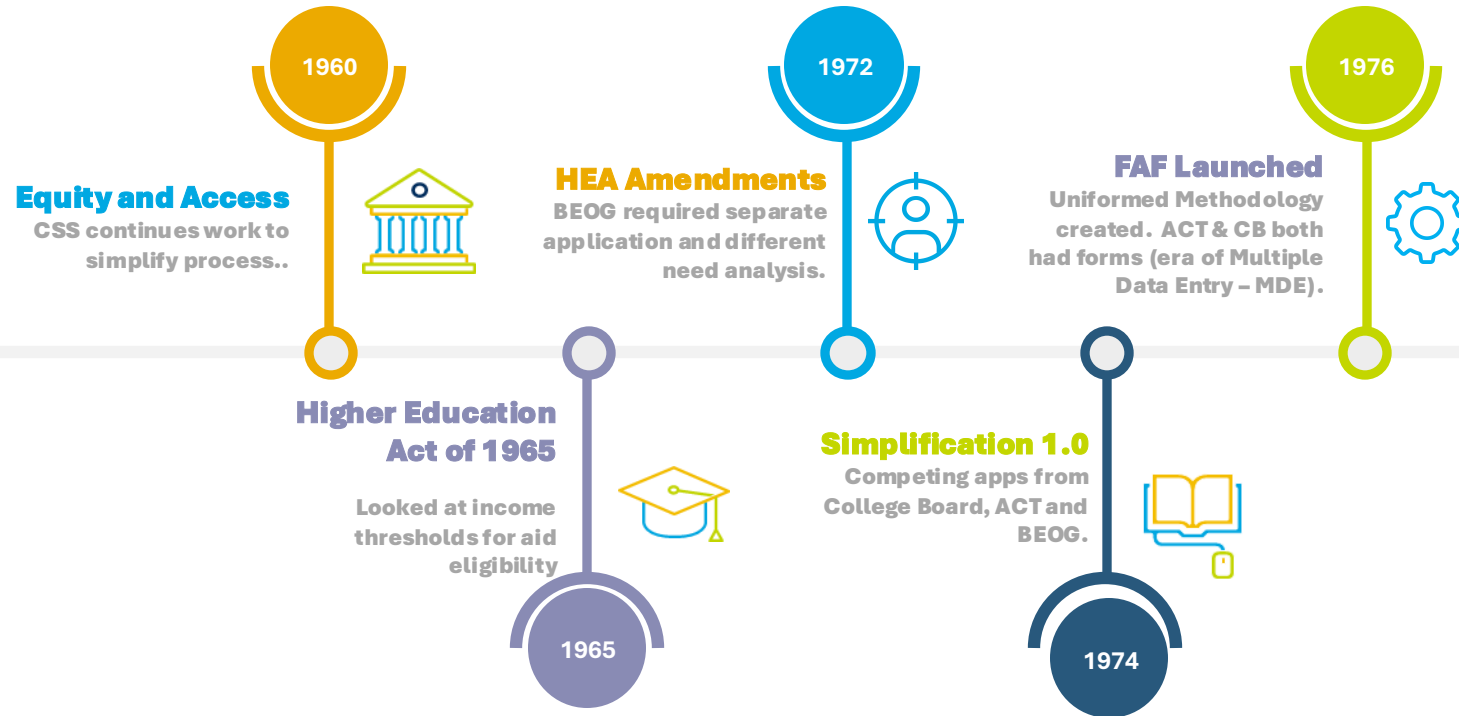
Founding of the FAFSA



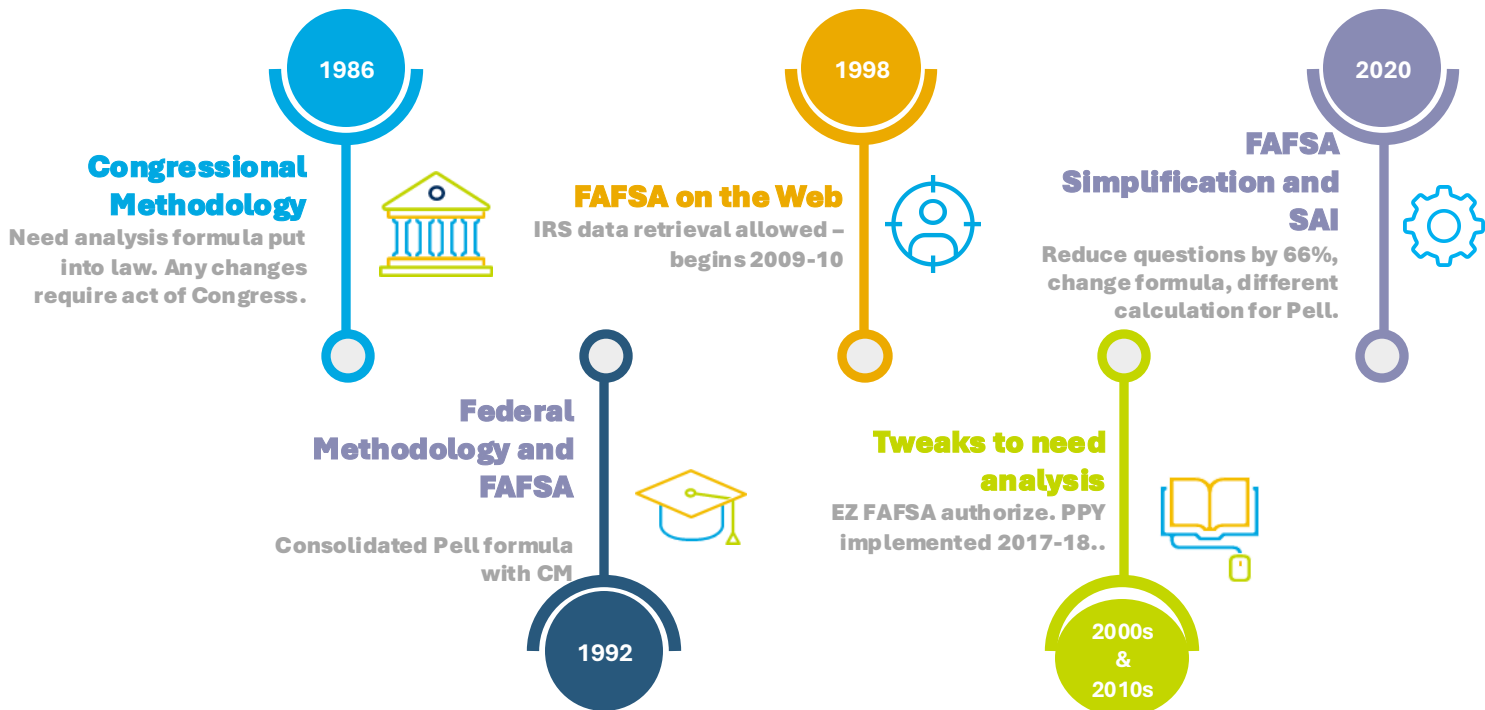
Evolution of the FAFSA



Evolution of the FAFSA

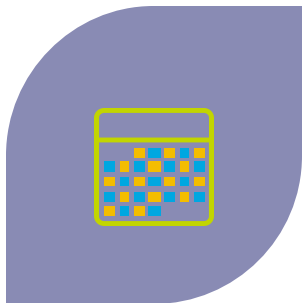


Evolution of the FAFSA



Remember When?

The good ol' days...



Pell Calculator

Hand calcs and separate calculators for state aid



January Start

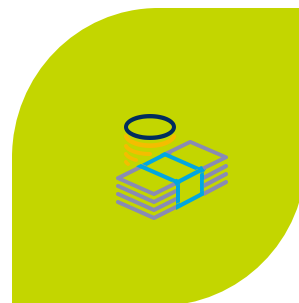
FAFSAs available Jan. 1st

File taxes before submission or do amended form.



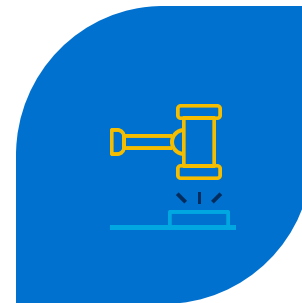
FAFSA Position

Used as an enrollment likelihood indicator.



FAFSA.com

Companies charging up to \$1,600 to complete forms.



Social Responsibility Questions

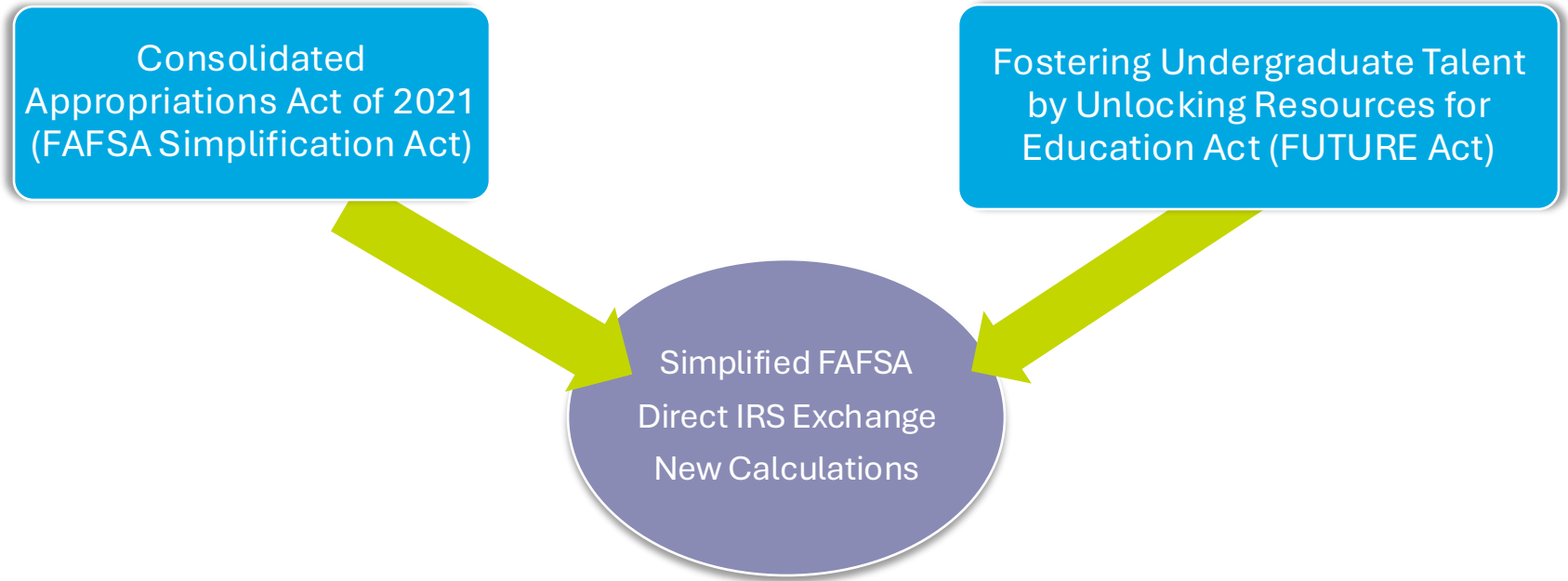
Selective Service, drug convictions, etc.

Finessing of the Form



Finessing the Form

Decades in the making.



FAFSA Simplification

Why?



Increase Pell eligibility and awareness



Reduce the FAFSA questions from 108 to 33



Data automatically transferred from IRS

Re-thinking Need

Pell



Students can preview Pell eligibility using AGI and household size.



Award amount reported on Student Aid Report.



Maximum and minimum Pell will be based on Pell calculation. Pell Grant awards in the middle ranges of eligibility would be determined by subtracting the SAI from the maximum Pell Grant amount.



Can be easily estimated prior to filing a FAFSA.



Calculation based on tax filing status, number of parents in household, and income.

Re-thinking Need

Student Aid Index



EFC now Student Aid Index.

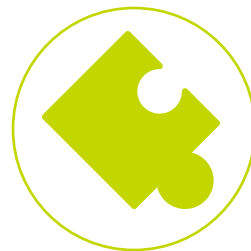


The SAI will be used to calculate need.



A negative SAI will identify the neediest students.

The negative SAI establishes a framework to allow the very neediest students to be identified. It is the new zero.



Similar to current need-analysis formula.



Used to calculate eligibility for campus-based and institutional funds.



Need calculation similar:

$$\text{COA} - \text{SAI} - \text{OFA} = \text{Need}$$

Frustration with the Roll Out



Preparing for the Transition

Shifting our Thinking

- No more “expected family contribution”.
- **Student Aid Index** - To be used by financial aid administrators to calculate financial aid.
- Determination of Pell grant eligibility will change.
 - Not tied to SAI.

Education and Outreach

- Students and parents
- Campus partners and leadership



Analyzing EFC vs. SAI

Assessing the shift in eligibility.

		Original Financial Tiers											
Count of Yield		Column Lab											
Row Labels		1	2	3	4	5	7	8	9	10	11	Grand Total	
New SAI Tiers	1	1579	275	109	48	56	41					2108	
	2	26	152	235	56	14	5					488	
	3	3	89	431	626	398	7					1554	
	4			64	241	573	33					911	
	5			1	23	375	1468	271				2138	
	7				1	57	1074	4560				5692	
	(blank)		1		1	2	2	4794	75	174	58	77	5184
	Grand Total		1609	517	864	1405	3585	9711	75	174	58	77	18075



Ready, Set....

Red Light, Green Light

Or Simon Says?

- Delayed opening.
- Technical issues from the user (parent/student).
 - Mixed status families.
 - Lost/uncalculated SAIs
- Incorrect calculations.
- Challenges with aid software platforms (institutional vendors).
- Delayed access for campuses to make corrections.
- Lack of ED transparency.
- Congressional input.

And Go!

Compressed Yield Cycle

Inconsistency

Treatment of initial ISIRs

Timing of awards

Decision dates

Student responses

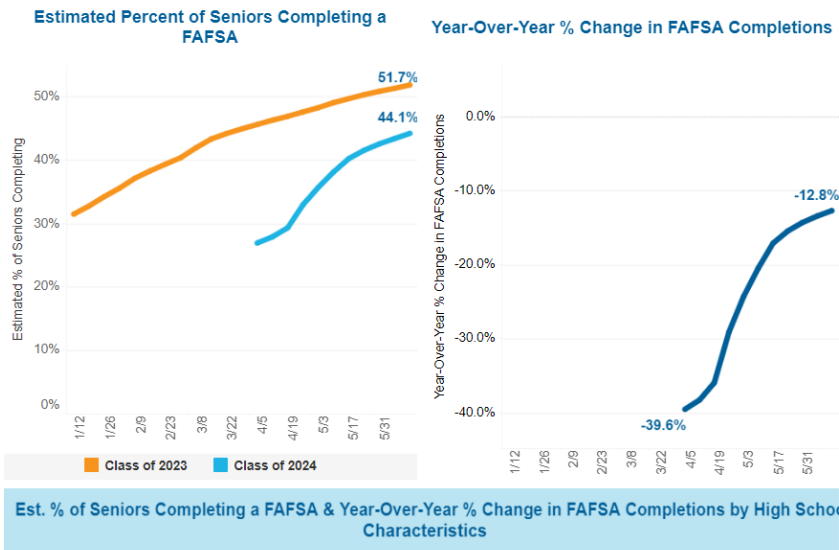
Missing SAIs

Corrections



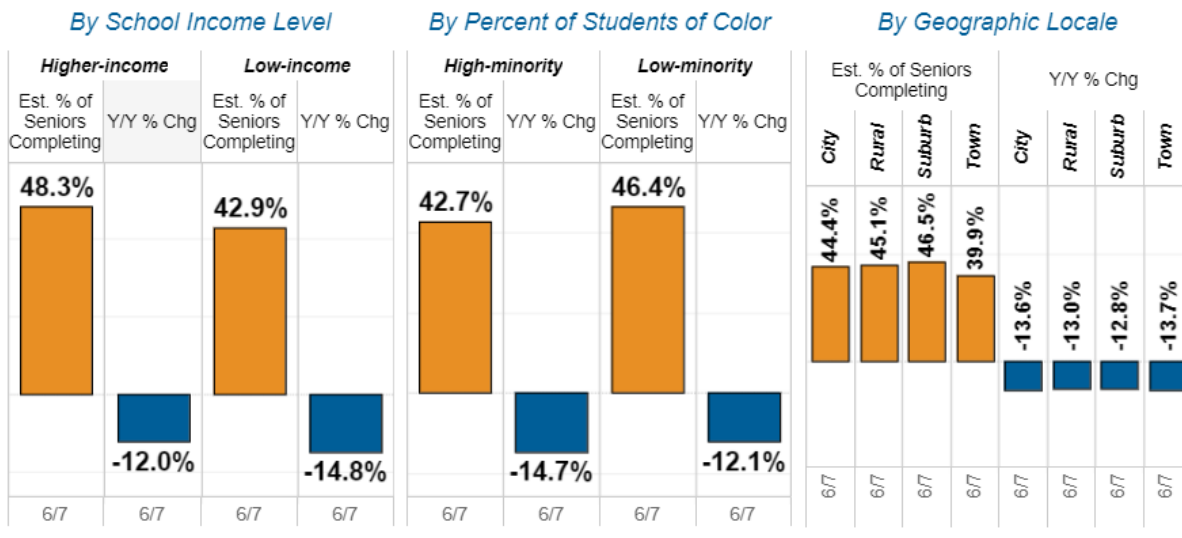
Missing FAFSAs

Through **June 7, 2024**, **44.1%** of the **high school class of 2024** has completed a FAFSA. There have been **1,838,012** completions nationally, a **-12.8%** change compared to last academic year.



Foregoing Filing

Missing the potentially neediest.



Findings and Future Endeavors





“Woo them with outstanding customer service.”

Back to Basics

Relationship building



**Calling and
texting
campaigns**



**One-on-one
campus
meetings rather
than group
sessions**



**Handwritten
notes**



**Student
ambassadors**

Creating videos
Live chats



Awarding early

New Endeavors

Some new strategies paid off.

Pell promise strategies

Merit-only scholarship
calculator

New yield activities and
recreated visit days

Throwback to paper
estimates (positioned
as part of the admission
process)

Early estimated awards

- Timing was critical
- Dependent upon when competing offers were released

Communication was Key

Look for the helpers.



Lots and lots and lots of communication

Targeted assistance (walking through the process)

Unrelenting patience

Tone



More drips and more postcards

Multi-channel

Re-Targeting Messaging

Tell me again

Parents are just as important and students

Early affordability/ROI conversations

Cost conversations

Leveraged internal marketing gurus

Focused messaging on targeted groups

Scoring or analytics to identify populations for action



Strategy and Staff

Staffing Made Its Mark

All Hands-On Deck

- Extended/flexible hours for outreach
- Additional yield events
- Cross pollination – admissions, student affairs, athletics
- Concierge-level service
- Used staff to implement strong strategy
- Understanding and grace

Early Results

Goals might be met.

- Initial reviews of campus data show an increase in Pell eligible students.
 - Most are eligible for full Pell
 - Fewer partial Pell awards
- Fewer students falling into middle need levels
- More low and no-need students
- Streamlined experience for some families.

Moving Forward

- Concern for 2025-26 timeline
- Calls for tweaks to the form
 - Housing question
 - Parent info for independent students
 - Refining dependency questions
- Reconsidering the formula
 - Number in college
 - Business/farm
 - Alternate SAIs for periods of enrollment other than 9 months
 - Update Asset Protection Allowance

Final Thoughts

- Financial aid administrators are tough
- Enrollment teams rose to the challenge
- It may take years to recruit back those we lost
- Congress and the Department of Ed.

Thank You

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