

What is the FAFSA? The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) is an application that can be filled out annually by current and anticipating college students to determine their eligibility for federal student financial aid and to defray the personal costs of enrolling in postsecondary education.

Why is the FAFSA important? The accurate completion and early submission of the FAFSA is important for entering and completing postsecondary education, especially for economically disadvantaged students. A 2008 report by the Consortium on Chicago School Research (CCSR) found that students who completed the FAFSA were 50% more likely to enroll in a 4-year college than were those who had not. A review of FAFSA and postsecondary enrollment data for Austin Independent School District's (AISD) Class of 2011 revealed 84% of students who were enrolled in a postsecondary institution the year after high school completed a FAFSA.

How did AISD support students and their families in completing the FAFSA? Using FAFSA completion data made available by the U.S. Department of Education (USDE) and Texas Higher Education Board (THECB), AISD Project ADVANCE and school counselors provided strategic and targeted support to help seniors complete the FAFSA. Greatly supported by a partnership with the Austin Chamber of Commerce, the high schools also hosted Financial Aid Saturdays, at which trained volunteers provided help for families completing the FAFSA. The chamber recruited volunteers for the Saturday events, distributed FAFSA information in newspaper inserts, and sponsored public service announcements on radio and television.

What did seniors say about FAFSA on the AISD 2012 Senior High School Exit Survey? Each spring, AISD seniors are asked to complete the [Annual AISD High School Exit Survey](#). The results have shown that seniors not planning to enroll in a postsecondary institution cite financial concerns as their primary challenge to postsecondary enrollment. Although 82% of seniors in 2012 reported they were *somewhat well or very well informed* about obtaining financial aid, 61% of seniors reported some level of difficulty understanding the financial aid application process. Project ADVANCE staff (college and career advisors) and [the Austin Community College's \(ACC\) College Connections program](#) were the most frequently cited sources for students' FAFSA completion support. When seniors were asked how they planned to pay for education after high school, their top three responses were scholarships and/or grants, working in summer/during school year, and family/personal savings. In 2012, 58% of seniors reported completing the FAFSA in preparation for education after high school.

About the FAFSA data. In 2010, AISD was one of 20 school districts selected by the USDE Federal Student Aid (FSA) program to receive access to its student FAFSA completion data through the federal FAFSA Pilot Project. In subsequent years, THECB also provided AISD with students' FAFSA completion data. Following strict security guidelines consistent with the expectations of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), AISD staff submitted students' directory information (e.g., name, date of birth, zip code) to FSA and THECB to access its students' FAFSA submission and completion status information. FAFSA completion data from USDE and THECB was returned to the district to be merged, summarized, and used programmatically.

Note. USDE and THECB used slightly different algorithms to match students' records. Although the data sets were largely comparable, some students were found in only one dataset or the other. The use of both sources enabled school district staff to merge both sources and build a more complete set of results.

Table 1. What percentage of AISD’s 2012 seniors completed the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) process? The FAFSA completion rate (54%) was the same in 2011 and 2012. This total was consistent with the 58% of seniors self-reporting a FAFSA completion on the AISD High School Exit Survey in 2012. Beginning in January 2011, high school staff had real-time FAFSA completion information for the purpose of supporting and following up with students. This information is presumed to be a contributing factor in the increased FAFSA completion rates after 2010.

	2010 FAFSA completion (N = 4,648)	2011 FAFSA completion (N = 4,453)	2012 FAFSA completion (N = 4,444)
Akins	24.1%	50.3%	46.0%
Anderson	37.7%	56.8%	60.9%
Austin	31.2%	53.1%	50.3%
Bowie	43.1%	63.0%	61.9%
Crockett	27.5%	58.4%	55.9%
Eastside	19.9%	37.8%	38.4%
Garza	15.2%	25.3%	29.5%
Lanier	18.0%	38.9%	46.5%
LASA	60.1%	52.7%	73.3%
LBJ	21.6%	84.6%	63.6%
McCallum	32.5%	69.5%	63.3%
Reagan	16.2%	45.0%	39.0%
Travis	19.0%	48.5%	56.9%
District Total	29.0%	54.2%	54.2%

Source. Federal FAFSA Pilot Project and the Texas Higher Education Board FAFSA databases, 2010–2012, prepared by AISD’s Department of Research and Evaluation staff

Note. For each FAFSA completion, a Student Aid Report (SAR) was generated and an estimated family contribution (EFC) was calculated. The EFC was subtracted from the school’s cost of attendance to determine the student’s financial need. The school tries to meet the need through a financial aid package that combines aid from federal, state, school, and private sources with loans and the student’s employment income.

How much financial support did FAFSA completers

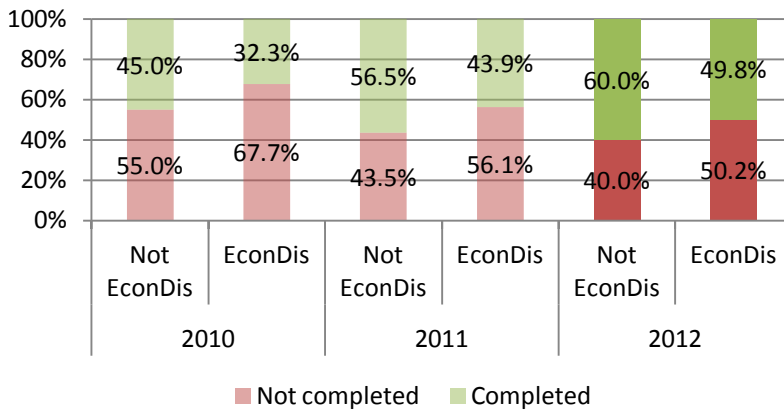
receive? Most financial aid is need based; that is, it is allocated in proportion to demonstrated need. The College Board (2012) reported the average amount received by full-time students who received any type of financial aid was \$13,218 in 2011–2012, with an average of \$5,056 coming from federal loans. The average amount reported included all types of financial aid from any source (i.e., except parents, friends, or relatives). Using the conservative estimate of \$9,100 per FAFSA completion for both full- and part-time students (NCES, 2009), the total amount of financial aid for the 2012 AISD seniors approximated \$21,931,000, based on a total of 2,410 (54%) FAFSA completions.

Who is concerned with college

affordability? Most American families have college affordability concerns (College Board, 2012; Lumina Foundation, 2012; National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2002). From 1980 to 2010, average family income declined. Tuition and fees at public universities increased almost 130% over the last 20 years, and the share of family income that is needed to pay for tuition and other college expenses has increased. More students at all income levels are borrowing more money than ever before to pay for postsecondary education.

Figure 1. Did students with economic need submit a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) application?

Although the percentage of economically disadvantaged students who completed a FAFSA increased in 2012, compared with the percentage of students who did so the previous year, a completion gap remains between economically disadvantaged and non-economically disadvantaged students.

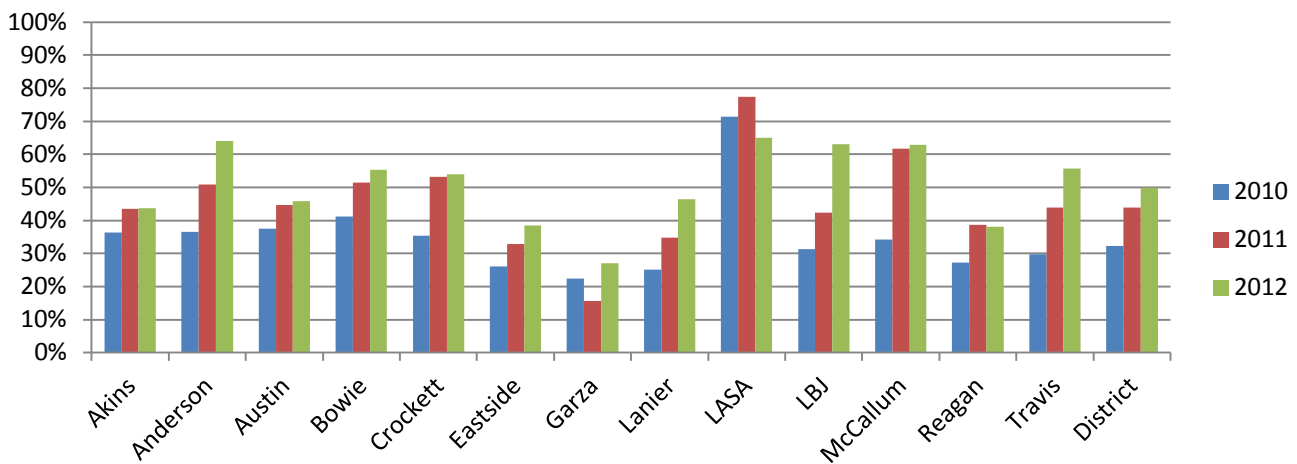


Source. Federal FAFSA Pilot Project database, 2010–2012

Note. Students categorized as having economic disadvantage were those who were eligible to receive a free or reduced-price lunch.

Figure 2. Did Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) submissions by students with economic need vary by campus?

The percentage of FAFSA submissions by students with economic need varied across schools. However, greater percentages of economically disadvantaged students submitted a FAFSA application at most high schools in 2012 and than did so the prior year.



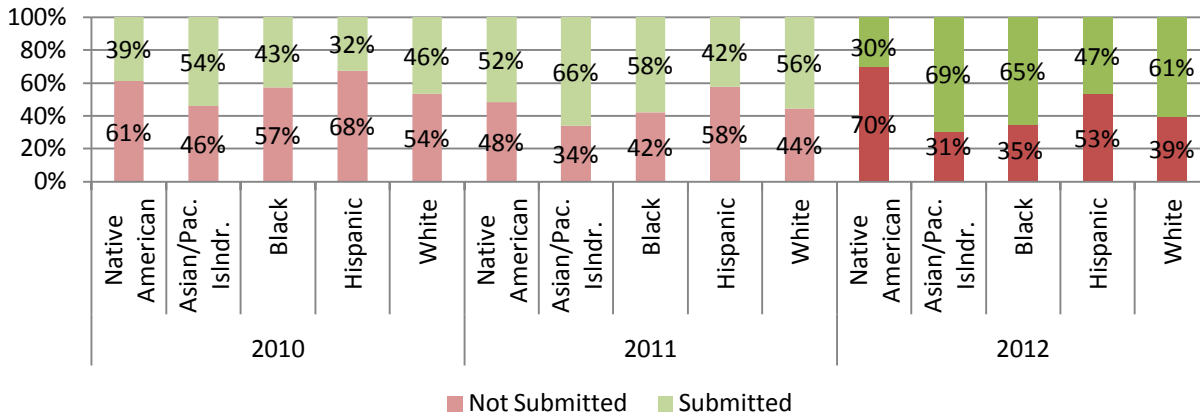
Source. Federal FAFSA Pilot Project database, 2010–2012

How much federal financial aid for college do Texas students receive?

College students receive financial aid from three major sources: the federal government, the state government, and the colleges and universities they attend. Of these three, the federal government’s contribution is primary.

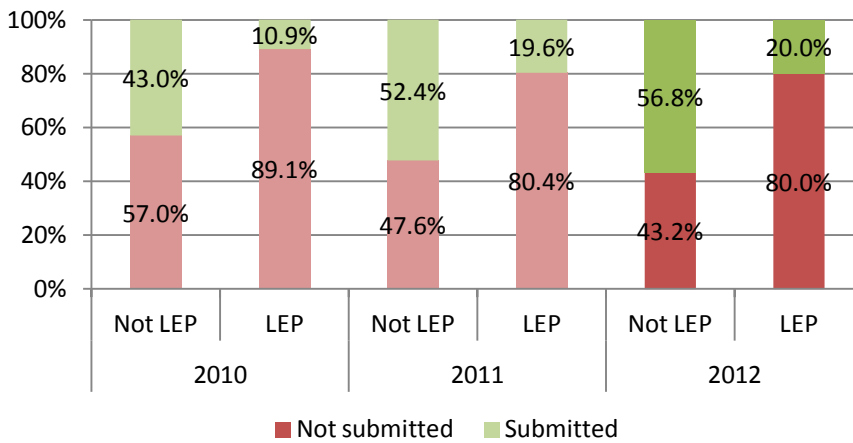
Nationally, the federal government provided 77 percent of the generally available direct financial aid for students in 2009–2010. In Texas, the federal government’s role accounted for 85 percent of aid that year. Texas colleges and universities provided a much smaller percentage of financial aid than colleges in other states. Texas institutions provided nine percent of aid versus 18 percent for colleges nationally (Creusere, Fletcher, Neal, and Shook, 2011).

Figure 3. Did Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) submissions differ across student ethnicity groups? FAFSA submissions continued to vary among student groups in 2012, and gaps in FAFSA completion rates were observed between Hispanic and Native American students and their Asian, Black, and White counterparts. Notably, FAFSA completion rates increased seven percentage points for Black students in 2012, compared to the prior year. Again, the results from the High School Senior Exit Survey (2012) indicated that more Hispanic students than students from other groups were planning to pay for college by working or through scholarships, loans, and/or savings.



Source. Federal FAFSA Pilot Project database, 2010–2012

Figure 4. Did Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) submissions differ across students' limited English proficiency (LEP) status? Significantly lesser percentages of LEP students than non-LEP students submitted a FAFSA in each year. In some cases, LEP students may not have been eligible for federal aid. In response, AISD staff reported assisting approximately 115 students with the Texas Application for State Financial Aid (TASFA).

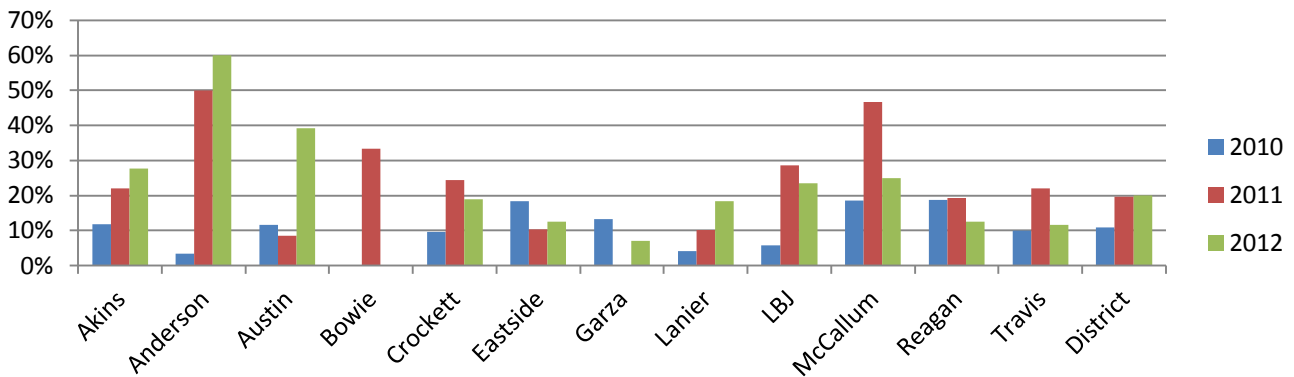


Source. Federal FAFSA Pilot Project database, 2010–2012

What is the TASFA? In 2001, the state of Texas passed [legislation](#) allowing certain categories of immigrant students to meet state requirements for residency. This legislation enabled these students to pay resident tuition and fee rates while attending postsecondary schools in Texas and to qualify for state financial aid programs.

In addition to financial needs, what other challenges to postsecondary enrollment do our English language learners (ELLs) encounter? Texas has one of the highest concentrations of ELL students (17%) in the United States (Kaplan, 2009; AEIS, 2011). Most of the ELL’s are not recent immigrants (documented or not); over 85% of them have attended U.S. public schools for three years or more. When ELL students graduate from high school but continue to struggle with English, or are underachieving in other subjects because their learning has been hindered by their limited English proficiency, they may be required to take remedial courses in a postsecondary institution. This may affect college admissions, require additional financial resources for the student, and influence their college completion rates.

Figure 5. Did Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) submissions by limited English proficiency (LEP) students vary by campus? When FAFSA submissions for LEP students were examined at the campus level, results varied across schools.



Source. Federal FAFSA Pilot Project database, 2010–2012

Note. Bowie High School did not have seniors categorized as LEP in 2010 or 2012.

So, how are we doing? In 2012, FAFSA completion rates remained the same in 2011 and 2012. Gaps in FAFSA submissions also remained among student groups. Work still needs to be done to ensure that all students have access to postsecondary education, and their access to college is not restricted by financial challenges. It is recommended that district staff continue to use FAFSA Pilot Project data strategically to provide targeted assistance for students to successfully complete the FAFSA. AISD’s Department of Research and Evaluation (DRE) will continue to identify characteristics of the students that FAFSA appears most likely to help.

Why is postsecondary enrollment for all students so important? Increases in the education and skills of our population are essential for the economic and civic success of our communities, states, and the nation (Lumina Foundation, 2012). By 2018, 60% of jobs in the United States will require a postsecondary education. College graduates are employed at much higher rates than are those who do not graduate from college. Wage gaps between college graduates and those who have only completed high school are increasing.

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