



March 5, 2024

The Honorable Omar Fateh, Chair
Senate Higher Education Committee
3219 Minnesota Senate Bldg.
St. Paul, MN 55155

The Honorable Zach Duckworth, Republican Lead
Senate Higher Education Committee
2229 Minnesota Senate Bldg.
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Chair Fateh, Republican Lead Duckworth, and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of Students United, EdAllies, LeadMN, YouthPrise, Coalition of Asian American Leaders, Reviving Sisterhood, and Latino LEAD, we urge members to support SF 1275 because only half of Minnesota high school students complete the FAFSA. This leaves our state 40th in the country for FAFSA completion as of 2023. As a result, Minnesota's graduating classes of 2021 and 2022 left nearly \$100 million of federal student aid on the table. It is time to pass this common-sense measure to ensure high school seniors take advantage of needs-based and potentially transformative resources that make their college dreams possible.

How would SF1275 work?

Under universal FAFSA, high schools would integrate FAFSA completion into their senior graduation and post-secondary planning process, weaving it into a course, counseling, or another support system. Seniors would be required to complete the FAFSA or an application for state financial aid before graduation unless they complete a "no questions asked" opt-out form with a parent or guardian signature or if they are 18 years of age. High school principals may also issue a hardship waiver if a student cannot meet the requirement due to extenuating circumstances, and this coalition will support amendment language that simplifies the waiver process for high school principals and, therefore, eases the administrative burden.

In establishing this requirement, Minnesota can also take advantage of a simplified form, as the federal government is making significant [changes to the FAFSA](#) process to make a once-byzantine form simple and accessible. The simplified FAFSA form reduces the number of questions from over 100 to under 40, lessening the time needed to complete the form and easing the burden on guidance counselors and school administrators.

To be sure, the launch of the new FAFSA form was rocky, but the tech issues will be fixed long before Minnesota students will be required to complete the new FAFSA form for graduation. Implementing a universal FAFSA policy would ensure Minnesota students can take advantage of this simplified FAFSA process and that students learn about the availability and types of financial aid available.



Why is the requirement necessary?

In 2020, the Minnesota Legislature enacted legislation directing the Office of Higher Education (OHE) and the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) to set an annual goal for FAFSA filing among high school seniors. OHE has set a goal of increasing FAFSA filing by 5 percentage points every year for 5 years, focusing on closing gaps in FAFSA filing for Black, Indigenous, and other students of color. Yet, these gaps persist. Minnesota remains in the bottom tier of state FAFSA completion rates, and we are not on track to hit our target, which is why this graduation requirement is necessary and necessary now.

In recent years, states as different as California, Alabama, Maryland, and Texas have all made completing the FAFSA a high school graduation requirement. By doing so, they have seen increases in FAFSA completion and, most importantly, postsecondary enrollment gains.

How would this benefit Minnesota?

With millions of dollars of federal aid left unused by Minnesota students, we know that the status quo cannot continue. Senator Duckworth's SF 1275 is the only proposal introduced in this session that will move Minnesota forward and empower students with information about what financial aid is available. Critically, many other states that have enacted universal FAFSA policies have also managed to do so [without a fiscal impact on state budgets](#).

The completed FAFSA is also a critical component in an increasingly robust support system. Last spring, the Legislature passed [North Star Promise](#), which will ensure tuition is covered for students of families making \$80,000 and under. However, [without FAFSA or the state grant aid application](#), students cannot access this transformative support.

The Minnesota Legislature can impact the dreams of college-bound students this year by prioritizing [universal FAFSA](#).

students united 

