

Governor Murphy Signs Legislation Requiring High School Students to Complete Financial Aid Applications

01/16/2024

TRENTON – Governor Phil Murphy today signed [A1181/S2054](https://pub.njleg.state.nj.us/Bills/2022/A1500/1181_R3.PDF) (https://pub.njleg.state.nj.us/Bills/2022/A1500/1181_R3.PDF) to make the completion of a financial aid application form a prerequisite to graduation for public high school and charter school students in New Jersey. Beginning with the 2023-2024 11th grade class, and for two school years thereafter, students and their guardians will be required to complete and submit either the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) or the NJ Alternative Financial Aid Application, as guided by the Higher Education Student Assistance Authority (HESAA), in order to receive their high school diploma. The information on a student's financial aid application is used to notify them of any financial aid they are eligible to receive if they pursue a postsecondary education.

The Executive Director of HESAA, in consultation with the Commissioner of Education, will be responsible for providing school districts, charter schools, parents, and students with instructions on how to complete the financial aid applications. This may include webinars, presentations, guidance documents, and a list of available state and federal resources.

School districts will annually notify students and their parents or guardians of this requirement. Students and their families may submit a waiver requesting an exemption from this requirement.

"There are many state and federal resources available to graduating high school students to help make a college education more affordable," **said Governor Murphy**. "Without filling out important applications, students could unknowingly be leaving money on the table that could have enabled them to pursue higher education. Ensuring high school students understand their options is paramount to our goal of making a college degree more attainable for New Jersey residents."

"Under Governor Murphy's leadership, our state has taken significant steps to make postsecondary education more affordable for New Jersey students," **said HESAA Executive Director David J. Socolow**. "HESAA is dedicated to helping students access valuable state, federal, and institutional grants and scholarships. Only by completing a financial aid application can students and their families understand the true net costs of options to further their education and achieve upward social and economic mobility. As New Jersey joins the growing list of states that require high school seniors to apply for financial aid before graduation, our students will be better able to make well-informed decisions."

"The introduction of legislation mandating the completion and submission of a financial aid application is a commendable move towards fostering equal opportunities in education," **said Dr. Angelica Allen-McMillan, Acting Commissioner of Education**. "Recognizing the pivotal role financial aid plays in unlocking the doors to higher education for students, this requirement ensures a streamlined process through the Higher Education Student Assistance Authority. This legislation continues to reinforce our commitment to providing comprehensive support for students and their families. I believe this legislation will contribute significantly to bridging the gap in access to higher education and empowering students on their academic journeys."

The primary sponsors of this legislation are Senator Shirley Turner and former Assemblywoman Mila Jasey. Additional sponsors include Senator Robert Singer, then-Assemblywoman, now-Senator Britnee Timberlake, and Assemblyman Bill Moen.

"Many high schoolers are quick to dismiss college as out of reach based on the price tag alone, without considering the financial assistance that may be available," **said Senator Shirley Turner**. "By requiring students to complete financial aid applications, our goal is not only to help reduce overall student loan debt, but to also open up pathways for college or trade school that will allow students to earn a higher income in the future to better support themselves. I look forward to seeing the impact this legislation has, especially on our low- and middle-income students."

"The student financial aid crisis is growing by the minute and students applying to colleges need all the assistance

they can get,” **said Senator Robert Singer**. “When students receive more money through grants and scholarships, it helps them avoid taking on excessive loans that can take decades to repay. This requirement will help make applying to college less strenuous and ensure that students are more knowledgeable about the financial aid that is available to them.”

“College costs can be daunting, but financial aid is available. Yet studies have shown that students across the country miss out on receiving that money because they have failed to fill out financial aid applications,” **said former Assemblywoman Mila Jasey**. “With this bill, we’ll make sure students have the support they need to understand and properly fill out those applications.”

“A lack of education as it relates to financial literacy can often create a big hurdle navigating financial aid forms and platforms for students. This can make the difference and stand in the way of them going to college,” **said Senator and former Assemblywoman Britnee Timberlake**. “Low and moderate income students can’t receive Pell Grants and other need-based aid without submitting financial aid applications. Getting those forms properly filled out could prove to be the difference for a student who wants and deserves to continue their education but is unable to pay all of the college expenses.”

“As someone who personally knows the benefit of completing a FAFSA application to advance one’s education, I believe that we need to give students as many tools as possible to help them further their education,” **said Assemblyman Bill Moen**. “Requiring them to fill out financial aid forms in school, and providing resources to them and their parents, could be a game changer for students who want to continue their education but need financial aid in order to do that.”

HESAA currently assists many students and families in completing the application process and will be expanding the support available to families and school communities upon implementation of this new requirement. High schools are encouraged to enter into a data-sharing [agreement](https://www.hesaa.org/Documents/Data%20Sharing%20Agreement.pdf) (<https://www.hesaa.org/Documents/Data%20Sharing%20Agreement.pdf>) with HESAA to receive information about the completion status of each 12th grade student’s financial aid application to more effectively provide individualized reminders and support to those that have not yet filled it out. For more information about the upcoming FAFSA and NJ Alternative Financial Aid Application for NJ Dreamers, visit: <https://www.hesaa.org/Pages/financialaidhub.aspx> (<https://www.hesaa.org/Pages/financialaidhub.aspx>).

Governor Phil Murphy

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