

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 to 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 2010 revealed 83% 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 to complete the FAFSA? All AISD high school counselors and Project ADVANCE staff dedicated time within and outside of the school day to assisting students and their families to complete the FAFSA. In January 2011, using research literature and FAFSA completion data made available by the U.S. Department of Education's (USDE) and Texas Higher Education Board (THECB), AISD staff provided increasingly 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, where 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 2011 Senior High School Exit Survey? Each spring, AISD seniors are asked to complete the [Annual AISD High School Exit Survey](#), and approximately 87% of seniors completed the survey in 2010 and 2011. Each year on the survey, seniors who were not planning to enroll in a postsecondary institution cited affordability concerns most frequently. A significantly greater percentage of seniors (84%) in Spring 2011 than in 2010 reported they were at least *somewhat well informed* about obtaining financial aid. A significantly greater percentage of seniors in 2011 (57%) than in 2010 (52%) reported they completed and submitted a FAFSA application. However, a significantly greater percentage of Hispanic seniors planned to pay

About the FAFSA data. In 2010, AISD was one of 20 school districts selected by the USDE Federal Student Aid (FSA) to receive access to its student FAFSA completion data through the Federal FAFSA Pilot Project. In 2011, the Texas Higher Education Board (THECB) also provided AISD with its student FAFSA completion data. Following strict security guidelines consistent with the expectations of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), AISD staff submitted student directory information (e.g., name, date of birth, zip code) to the FSA and the THECB to access its student FAFSA submission and completion status information. The FAFSA completion data from the USDE and THECB was returned to the district to be merged, summarized, and used programmatically.

Note. The USDE and THECB used slightly different algorithms to match student records. Although the datasets 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 in 2011.

for college by working (56%) or through personal or family savings (44%), compared with other student groups who based their plans on these reasons (50% and 65%, respectively).

Table 1. What percentage of AISD's 2011 seniors completed the FAFSA process? Using data provided through the Federal FAFSA Pilot Project, a significant increase in the percentage of seniors who completed the FAFSA in 2011 (40.7%) was observed, compared with the increase in percentage the prior year (29%; Table 1). FAFSA data provided by the THECB were merged with the data from the Federal FAFSA Pilot Project, and additional FAFSA completions were documented. Fifty-four percent of seniors in 2011 were found to have completed the FAFSA. This total is surprisingly consistent with the 57% of seniors self-reporting a FAFSA completion on the AISD High School Exit Survey in 2011.

| School | Federal FAFSA project database, 2010 (N=4,648) | | | Federal FAFSA project database, 2011 (N=4,453) | | | Federal and THECB databases, 2011 |
|----------|---|-------------------|------------------|---|-------------------|------------------|--|
| | Not submitted | Process completed | Needs correction | Not submitted | Process completed | Needs correction | Total completed across both databases |
| Akins | 64.4% | 24.1% | 11.5% | 54.0% | 34.0% | 12.0% | 50.3% |
| Anderson | 51.4% | 37.7% | 11.0% | 47.1% | 43.4% | 9.6% | 56.8% |
| Austin | 56.6% | 31.2% | 12.2% | 50.7% | 41.1% | 8.2% | 53.1% |
| Bowie | 47.0% | 43.1% | 9.9% | 40.8% | 51.5% | 7.7% | 63.0% |
| Crockett | 62.6% | 27.5% | 9.9% | 47.1% | 46.3% | 6.6% | 58.4% |
| Eastside | 73.8% | 19.9% | 6.4% | 65.9% | 29.6% | 4.4% | 37.8% |
| Garza | 76.8% | 15.2% | 8.1% | 77.5% | 16.9% | 5.6% | 25.3% |
| Lanier | 76.6% | 18.0% | 5.4% | 64.7% | 25.8% | 9.5% | 38.9% |
| LASA | 29.1% | 60.1% | 10.8% | 55.9% | 31.4% | 12.7% | 52.7% |
| LBJ | 69.5% | 21.6% | 8.9% | 22.9% | 66.2% | 11.0% | 84.6% |
| McCallum | 56.6% | 32.5% | 10.8% | 36.9% | 52.5% | 10.7% | 69.5% |
| Reagan | 73.8% | 16.2% | 10.0% | 59.1% | 32.7% | 8.2% | 45.0% |
| Travis | 70.0% | 19.0% | 11.0% | 55.8% | 34.9% | 9.3% | 48.5% |
| District | 60.8% | 29.0% | 10.1% | 50.3% | 40.7% | 9.0% | 54.2% |

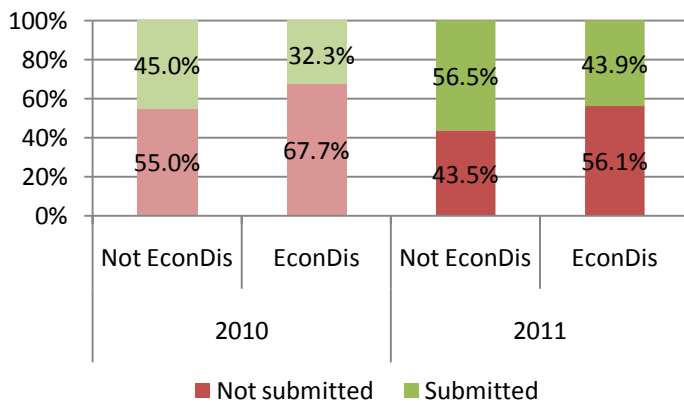
Source. Federal FAFSA Pilot Project and the Texas Higher Education Board FAFSA databases, 2010–2011.

Note. The student-level data set obtained through the Federal FAFSA Pilot Project included a FAFSA submission date, a process completion date indicating that a Student Aid Report (SAR) was generated and an Estimated Family Contribution (EFC) was calculated, and an indicator showing whether errors need to be corrected before federal aid can be accessed. The EFC is subtracted from the school's cost of attendance to determine the student's financial need. The school will try to meet the need through a financial aid package that combines aid from federal, state, school, and private sources with loans and student 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. In 2010–2011, the College Board reported about \$178 billion in financial aid was awarded to undergraduate students. The average amount of aid for a full-time undergraduate student was about \$12,455 and included more than \$6,500 in grants that did not have to be repaid. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reported the average amount received for students who received any type of aid was \$9,100. The average amount reported by NCES included all types of financial aid from any source, except parents, friends, or relatives, and accounted for both full- and part-time student enrollment. Using the conservative estimate of \$9,100 per FAFSA completion (NCES, 2009), the total amount of financial aid for the 2011 AISD seniors may approximate \$21,958,300, based on a total of 2,413 (54.2%) FAFSA submissions.

Figure 1. Did students with economic need submit a FAFSA application? In 2011, at the district level, the percentage of economically disadvantaged students who submitted a FAFSA increased, compared with the percentage of students who did so the previous year. However, the percentages of students who were not economically disadvantaged and who submitted a FAFSA also increased from 2010 to 2011.



Source. Federal FAFSA Pilot Project database, 2010–2011

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

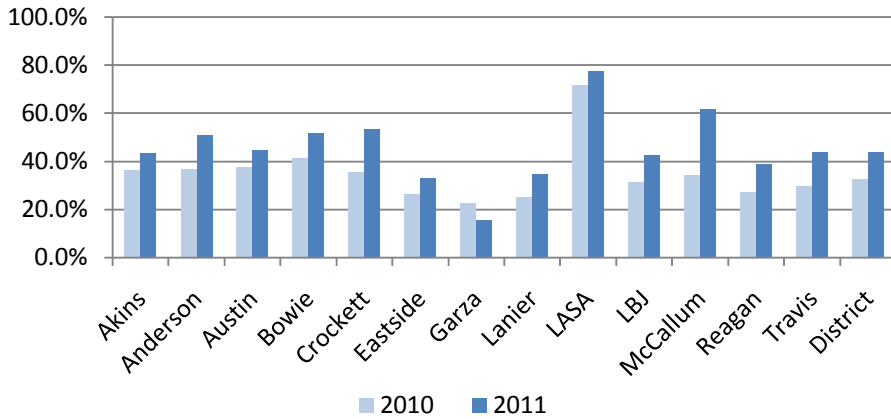
Who is concerned with college affordability?

Everyone! Affordability is a key element in accessing postsecondary education. Most American families have college affordability concerns (College Board, 2011; National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2002). From 1980 to 2010, average family income declined, and the largest declines were for the families in the lowest 20% of the population and for those in the highest 5%. Tuition and fees at public universities increased almost 130% over the last 20 years, while middle class incomes stagnated. The share of family income that is needed to pay for tuition and other college expenses also has increased. More students at all income levels are borrowing more money than ever before to pay for postsecondary education. Federal student aid from the USDE is the largest source of aid in the United States, providing more than \$178 billion in grants, work-study, and federal loans for students attending 4-year colleges or universities, community colleges, and career schools.

Why is postsecondary enrollment 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, 2010). By 2018, 60% of jobs in the United States will require postsecondary education. College graduates are employed at much higher rates than are those who do not graduate from college. Wage gaps between college graduates those who have only completed high school are increasing.

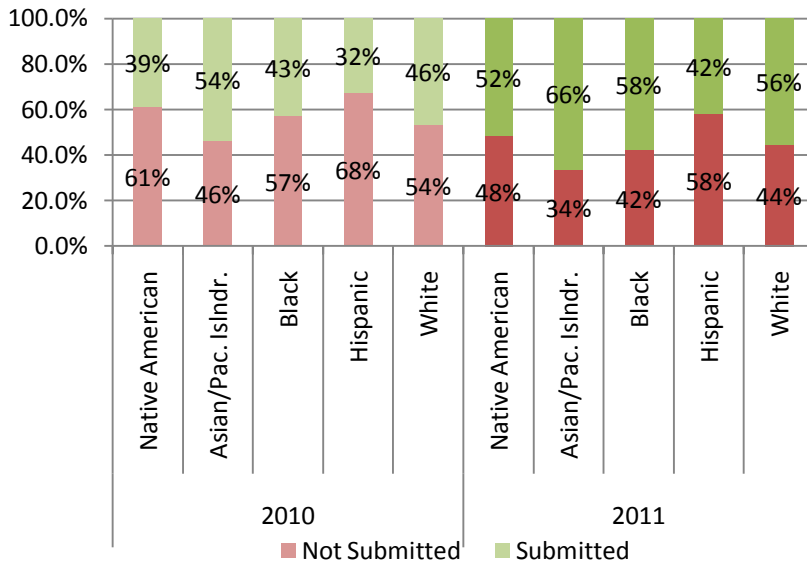
Figure 3. Did FAFSA submissions by students with economic need vary by campus? The percentage of FAFSA submissions by students with economic need varied across schools. However, greater percentages of economically disadvantaged students submitted a FAFSA application at almost all high schools in 2011, compared with the percentage who did so the prior year.



In AISD's Class of 2010, 50% of economically disadvantaged students enrolled in a postsecondary institution, in contrast with 78% of non-economically disadvantaged students who did so (Gossman, 2011). Economically disadvantaged students made up 64% of the district's student population (AEIS, 2011).

Source. Federal FAFSA Pilot Project database, 2010–2011

Figure 4. Did FAFSA submissions differ across student ethnicity groups? Although FAFSA completions increased for all student groups in 2011, Hispanic students continued to have the lowest FAFSA completion rates and White students continued to have the highest FAFSA completion rates. Again, the results from the High School Senior Exit Survey (2011) indicated that more Hispanic students were planning pay for college by working or paying for college through scholarships, loans, and/or savings, compared with other student groups.

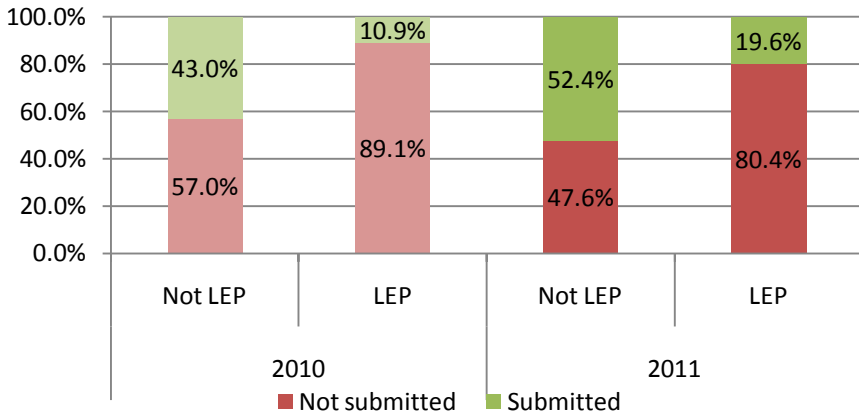


A gap in postsecondary enrollment was found among student ethnicity groups. For AISD's Class of 2010, 52% of Hispanic students enrolled in a postsecondary institution, in contrast with 63% of African American students and 74% of White students who did so (Gossman, 2011). Hispanic students made up 60.3% of the district's student population (AEIS, 2011).

Source. Federal FAFSA Pilot Project database, 2010–2011

Figure 5. Did FAFSA submissions differ across student limited English proficiency (LEP) status?

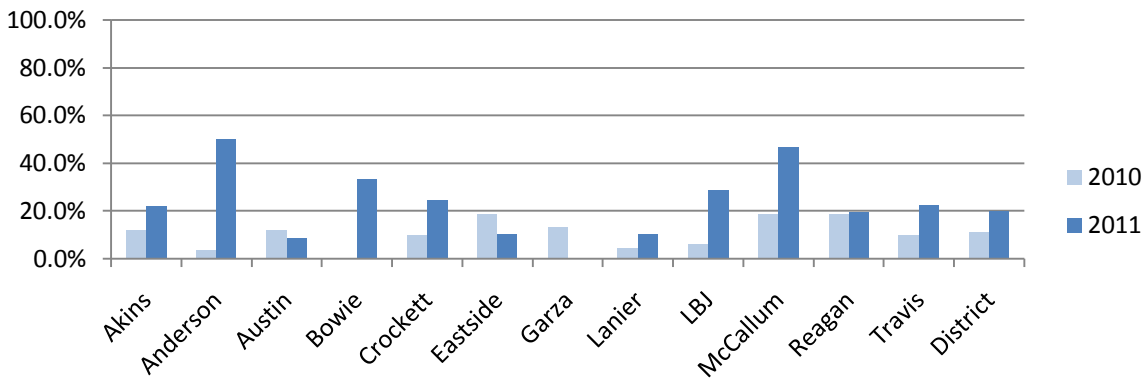
Although a significantly lesser percentage of LEP students submitted a FAFSA, compared with their non-LEP peers, significantly more LEP students submitted a FAFSA in 2011 than did so in 2010.



For AISD's Class of 2010, 28% of current LEP students and 55% of former LEP students enrolled in a postsecondary institution, in contrast with 68% of non-LEP students who did so (Gossman, 2011). LEP students made up 29% of the district's student population (AEIS, 2011).

Source. Federal FAFSA Pilot Project database, 2010–2011

Figure 6. Did FAFSA submissions by LEP students vary by campus? When FAFSA submissions for LEP students were examined at the campus level, greater percentages of LEP students submitted a FAFSA application at almost all high schools in 2011 than did so in 2010.



Source. Federal FAFSA Pilot Project database, 2010–2011

So, how are we doing? In 2011, more AISD seniors submitted a FAFSA application than did so the prior year, and the increase in submissions was observed for all student groups. However, gaps in FAFSA submissions remained among student groups. Work still needs to be done to ensure that all students have access to postsecondary education. 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 FAFSA appears most likely to help.

References

- College Board. (2011). *Trends in college pricing 2011*. Retrieved from http://trends.collegeboard.org/college_pricing/report_findings/indicator/Family_Income
- College Board. (2011). *What it costs to go to college*. Retrieved from <http://www.collegeboard.com/student/pay/add-it-up/4494.html>.
- Consortium on Chicago School Research at the University of Chicago. (2008). *From high school to the future: Potholes on the road to college*. Retrieved from http://ccsr.uchicago.edu/downloads/1835ccsr_potholes_summary.pdf
- Garland, M. (2008). *The determinants of postsecondary enrollment: Evidence from the AISD Class of 2007*. Retrieved from http://www.austinisd.org/inside/docs/ope_ps_enrollment.pdf
- Gossman, G. (2011). *Postsecondary enrollment for 2010 graduates: District report*. Retrieved from http://archive.austinisd.org/inside/docs/ope_1074_Postsecondary_Outcomes_2010_Graduates_District_Report.pdf
- Lumina Foundation. (2010). *A stronger nation through higher education*. Retrieved from http://www.luminafoundation.org/publications/A_stronger_nation.pdf
- National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education. (2002). *Losing ground*. Retrieved from http://www.highereducation.org/reports/losing_ground/ar1.shtml
- Texas Education Agency. (2011). *Academic excellence indicator system, 2010-11 district profile*. Retrieved from <http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/perfreport/aeis/2011/district.srch.html>

**SUPERINTENDENT OF
SCHOOLS**
Meria J. Carstarphen Ed.D.

**OFFICE OF
ACCOUNTABILITY**
William H. Caritj, M.Ed.

**DEPARTMENT OF
RESEARCH AND EVALUATION**
Holly Williams, Ph.D.

BOARD OF TRUSTEES
Mark Williams, President • Vincent Torres, M.S., Vice President
Lori Moya, Secretary • Cheryl Bradley • Annette LoVoi, M.A. • Christine Brister •
Robert Schneider • Tamala Barksdale • Sam Guzman

