



# DEPARTMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

## FINANCIAL AID DEVELOPMENTS

By Kim Slote, Assistant Associate

### TRAINING

Dear Colleague Letter [ANN-21-01](#) was published by the USDE Jan. 6, 2021: Online Training Course – 2021-2022 Verification. This self-paced training course will assist financial aid administrators in completing verification for the 2021-2022 award year. Instructions for accessing the training on the [Federal Student Aid E-Training website](#) are provided in the DCL.

The USDE published a Dear Colleague Letter [ANN-21-02](#) Jan. 21, 2021: Additional Virtual Workshop Sessions – 2020-2021 Fundamentals Training Series. Additional virtual workshop sessions are scheduled through Sep. 2021. The series includes an online FSA Coach Fundamentals course and the Fundamentals of Federal Student Aid Administration Virtual workshop. Dates and times are provided in the announcement.

### FSA STRATEGIC PLAN

An [Electronic Announcement](#) was published by the USDE Jan. 13, 2021: Fiscal Year 2020-2024 Strategic Plan Published. The office of Federal Student Aid finalized and published their Fiscal Year 2020-2024 Strategic Plan at [StudentAid.gov/strategicplan](http://StudentAid.gov/strategicplan). The five strategic goals are as follows.

- Goal 1: Empower a High-Performing Organization
- Goal 2: Provide World-Class Customer Experience to the Students, Parents, and Borrowers We Serve
- Goal 3: Increase Partner Engagement and Oversight Effectiveness
- Goal 4: Strengthen Data Protection and Cybersecurity Safeguards
- Goal 5: Enhance the Management and Transparency of the Portfolio

### CORONAVIRUS

There were several electronic announcements related to coronavirus provisions published. Each linked announcement is listed with the date of publication.

- [PRESS RELEASE: U.S. Department of Education Quickly Makes Available More Than \\$21 Billion in Taxpayer Funds to Support Continued Education at Colleges, Universities – Jan. 14, 2021](#)
- [Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund – Submitter/Editor Information Reporting Requirements – Jan. 15, 2021](#)
- [Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund – Student Reporting Requirements – Jan. 15, 2021](#)



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- [Issuance of Dear CPA Letter CPA-21-01, Extension of Site Visit Exemption During COVID-19 National Emergency – Jan. 22, 2021](#)
- [COD System Operational Update – Reporting Deadlines and Reminders for CARES Act Relief, Coronavirus Indicator and R2T4 – Jan. 22, 2021](#)

### ABILITY TO BENEFIT

On Jan. 15, 2021, the USDE published an [Electronic Announcement](#): Ability to Benefit Frequently Asked Questions. In response to recent inquiries, the USDE provides four new questions and answers that supplement those in the attachment to Dear Colleague Letter [GEN-16-09](#). The guidance clarifies ATB alternatives for students enrolled in an eligible career pathway program.

### HEAL PROGRAM

An [Electronic Announcement](#) was published by the USDE Jan. 15, 2021: HEAL Program Information - Maximum HEAL Program Interest Rates for Quarter Ending March 31, 2021. The “Current Maximum Interest Rates” section of the [HEAL Interest Rates](#) page of the [HEAL Information Area](#) on the Information for Financial Aid Professionals website has been updated with the maximum

HEAL Program interest rates for the quarter ending March 31, 2021.

### GUIDANCE DOCUMENTS

A [Federal Register Notice](#) was issued by the USDE Jan. 19, 2021: Notice of the Rescission of Outdated Guidance Documents - Correction. On Aug. 31, 2020, a Federal Register Notice provided lists of guidance documents that were rescinded. The documents are outdated or superseded by subsequent statutory amendments or enactments. This Federal Register Notice makes corrections to the list of documents. Eighteen documents were not intended to be rescinded. The notice lists the documents with their location on the original lists.

### DISTANCE EDUCATION

The USDE published an [Electronic Announcement](#) Jan. 19, 2021: Guidance on Accreditation and Eligibility Requirements for Distance Education. This announcement notifies accrediting agencies and institutions about the rescission of DCL GEN-06-17. It also outlines requirements on institutional eligibility for distance education. Those requirements are currently waived during the COVID-19 national emergency.

### FEDERAL PELL GRANTS



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Dear Colleague Letter [GEN-21-01](#) was published by the USDE Jan. 22, 2021: 2021-2022 Federal Pell Grant Payment and Disbursement Schedules. Both PDF and Excel versions of the Federal Pell Grant Payment and Disbursement Schedules are attached to the announcement. These schedules must be used to determine Federal Pell Grant awards for the 2021-2022 award year for full-time, three-quarter-time, half-time and less-than-half-time students. The maximum award for the 2021-2022 Federal Pell Grant is \$6,495. There are a number of important reminders in the announcement.

The USDE published an [Electronic Announcement](#) Jan. 29, 2021: Federal Pell Grant Program Reconciliation. Information provided in the announcement assists both the Financial Aid Office and Business Office with reconciliation of the Federal Pell Grant Program. Definitions for internal and external reconciliation are included. Deadlines are provided for data submission and funding cancellation of Pell Grants. Additional information is explained in the [Question and Answer](#) document that is attached to the electronic announcement.

### CAMPUS-BASED PROGRAMS

On Jan. 26, 2021, the USDE issued a [Federal Register Notice](#): Campus-Based Deadline Dates Notice for the 2021-2022 Award Year. The notice announces the

2021-2022 award year deadline dates for postsecondary institutions to submit requests and documents for the Federal Perkins Loan, Federal Work Study and Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant Programs. To ensure continued funding levels and participation in the programs, institutions must comply with the campus-based reporting deadlines.

An [Electronic Announcement](#) was published by the USDE Jan. 26, 2021: 2019-2020 Campus-Based Awards Closeout. The 2019-2020 awards closeout process for the Campus-Based programs is provided, along with information regarding the notification process. Topics discussed in the electronic announcement cover the following:

- 2019-2020 Awards Closeout for the Campus-Based Programs
- Closeout Amount in G5 and on G5 Reports
- Closeout Amounts Determination Process
- Notification of Award Decrease

The USDE published an [Electronic Announcement](#) Jan. 28, 2021: Tentative 2021-2022 Funding Levels for the Campus-Based Programs. Tentative funding levels and corresponding worksheets for the Campus-Based Programs were posted to the [Common Origination and Disbursement](#)



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[website](#) Feb. 1, 2021, for the 2021-2022 award year. Attached to the announcement are two documents [2021-2022 Explanation of Worksheets](#) and [2021-2022 Expected Family Contribution Procedures and Standard EFCs](#).

### STUDENT AID INTERNET GATEWAY

On Jan. 28, 2021, the USDE published an [Electronic Announcement](#): Reminder: Mandatory Software Upgrade by Apr. 17, 2021 to Maintain Access to the SAIG. The USDE is upgrading the Student Aid Internet Gateway to comply with a federal mandate to improve email and web security. All publicly accessible federal websites and web services must support Transport Layer Security version 1.2 or higher. Required installation of the new versions of TDClient and EDconnect software that support TLS 1.2 has been extended to Apr. 17, 2021. Information on how to obtain the upgraded software is provided in the announcement.

### LOAN SERVICING

An [Electronic Announcement](#) was published by the USDE Jan. 28, 2021: Loan Servicing Information – Temporary Closures of Federal Loan Servicing Centers Due to Hazardous Weather Conditions. Federal loan servicers are located in different centers across the country. While servicers remain open as much as possible, each location has

a contingency plan to implement when hazardous weather affects their area. Servicers will generally communicate a temporary closure through a recorded message on its Interactive Voice Response system and/or a message posted on their website. Situations that involve widespread and significant impact to borrowers and school customers will prompt an electronic announcement on the [Information for Financial Aid Professionals website](#).

The USDE published an [Electronic Announcement](#) Jan. 29, 2021: Loan Servicing Information – Reporting Student Loan Interest Payments for 2020. The announcement includes general information for the financial aid community about reporting student loan interest payments. Answers to the following questions are provided.

- Under what circumstances do federal loan servicers report interest payments on IRS Form 1098-E?
- How many 2020 1098-E's should a borrower expect to receive?
- What are the different scenarios that may apply to 2020 1098-E dissemination?

### PROFESSIONAL JUDGMENT



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Dear Colleague Letter [GEN-21-02](#) was published by the USDE Jan. 29, 2021: Update on the use of “Professional Judgment” by Financial Aid Administrators. This DCL provides important reminders for financial aid administrators on their ability to exercise professional judgment. During the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, students and families may have special circumstances that need to be considered when determining eligibility for federal student aid. The USDE assures schools it will not consider the increased use of PJs when selecting a school for program reviews for the 2019-2020 through 2021-2022 award year.