

Texas Representative Roberto R. Alonzo's

Capitol Report



Be Prepared for FAFSA Season: Jan. 1 Open Date

While you will be happy to have your college students home for the winter break, it is important to remember that the 2016-2017 FAFSA application open date is just around the corner and now is the time to sit down with your student and prepare. It is crucial to start the financial aid process as early as possible because aid is often times awarded on a first come, first serve basis. The FAFSA form can be filed as early as January 1st preceding the academic year that you are requesting aid.

"The task of filling out the FAFSA form is often dreaded and can be confusing; however, it is one of the most essential steps in preparing for your student's financial future and academic success. Get started early, be prepared for different aid packages, and keep in mind the changes in the FAFSA program that are soon to occur."

Starting in 2016, students will see adjustments to the FAFSA process, including when they can file the federal financial aid form and how their families' assets are counted. The current FAFSA filling system requires students and parents to complete the form as soon as possible after Jan.1, typically before they've filled the previous year's taxes. Families often have to estimate their income, and the update their information later. With the new adjustment, the government will start accepting FAFSA applications three months earlier for the 2017-2018 academic year. Applicants and families will be able to submit the FAFSA as early as Oct. 1 2016.

Also, asset protection will plunge next year, and could affect students' financial aid eligibility. In previous years, when parents report their financial information on the FAFSA, apportion of their assets are not counted toward the amount of money they are expected to contribute, often leading to a higher financial aid award for their students. With the plummet in the protected portion, It is estimated that \$10,000 decrease in asset protection cuts a student's financial aid eligibility by up to \$564.



Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) Signed Into Law

President Obama recently signed into law the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA), reauthorizing the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (ESEA). Over the past seven years, a stronger emphasis has been placed on our schools and the need to reform one-size-fits-all mandates such as the No Child Left Behind Act.

Signing into law the ESSA will allows schools to further build on the progress that has already been made and ensure educational opportunity for all students by:

- holding all students to high academic stands that prepare them for success in college and careers;
- ensuring accountability by guaranteeing that when students fall behind, states redirect resources towards what works to help them and their schools improve, specifically focusing on the lowest-performing schools;
- Empowering state and local decision makers to develop their own strong systems for school improvement based upon evidence;
- Reducing the burden of unnecessary and ineffective testing on students and teachers, making sure that standardized tests don't crowd out teaching and learning, without sacrificing clear, annual information parents and educators need to know their children are learning; and
- Providing more children access to high quality preschools.



State Rep. Alonzo and Secretary Clinton, in Dallas

St. Jude's Ranch Recycled Card Program

Remember to drop off any holiday cards that you are finished enjoying. There will be a drop-box set up at the Capitol Post Office, as well as in Rep. Alonzo's office, room 1N.12. We will be sending two large batches to St. Jude's Ranch in Jan. and Feb.