

# SIMPLIFICATION MAY NOT BE SO SIMPLE

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**EDUCATION COMMISSION**  
OF THE STATES

Your education policy team.

SFARN

Annapolis, Maryland

June 8, 2017



# Who we are

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The **essential, indispensable** member of any team addressing education policy.



# What we do

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We believe in the power of **learning from experience** and we know informed policymakers create **better education policy**.



# How we do it

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**RESEARCH**



**REPORT**



**COUNSEL**



**CONVENE**

# Goals

- Refresh on federal-level initiatives to simplify the FAFSA
- Review findings from a 50-state survey of state agencies that utilize FAFSA data
- Increase awareness of ECS support to state-level stakeholders that will have to adapt should simplification happen

# FAFSA Simplification in the News



06.19.14

## Senators Alexander, Bennet Form to 2 Questions

Their six-part legislation also sim  
Grants, discourages over-borrow

## STUDENT AID SHORT FORM

### STUDENT INFORMATION:

Last name, First name, MI

Street address

City/State/ZIP code

Date of birth

Social Security Number

### FINANCIAL AID QUESTIONS:

FAMILY SIZE  INCOME IN 2012 \$



# State Perspective

In 2014, programs requiring FAFSA information accounted for **77 %** of all state financial aid expenditures.



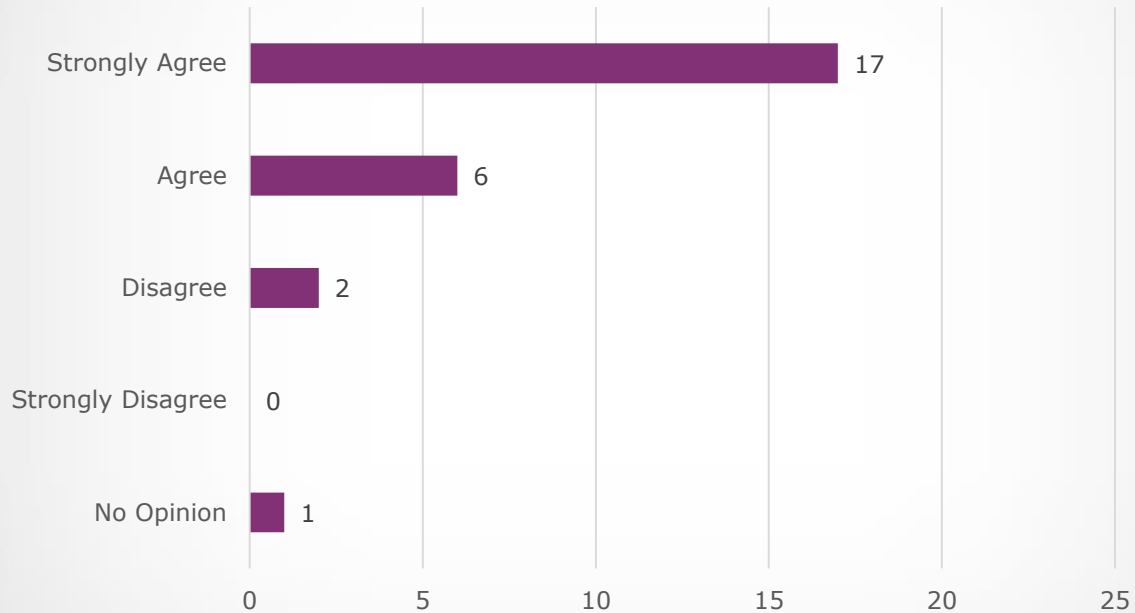




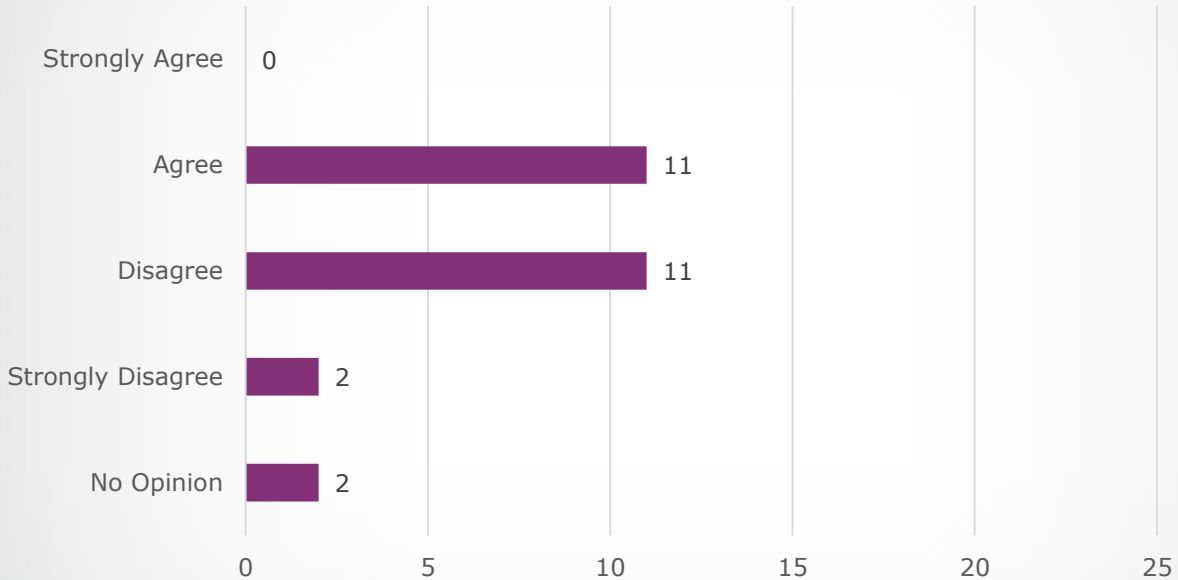
# Finding #1

There is strong agreement on the important role states play in informing federal policy development- but respondents are split on clarity of pathways to exert influence.

## States have an important role to play in informing federal financial aid policy development



## States have clear pathways to act to influence federal financial aid policy development.

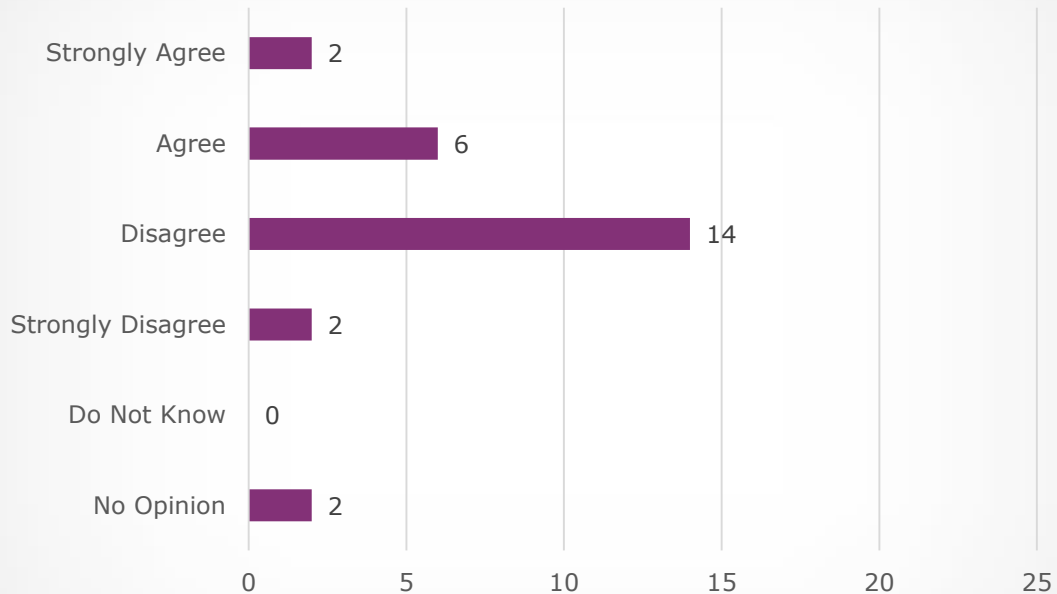


## Finding #2

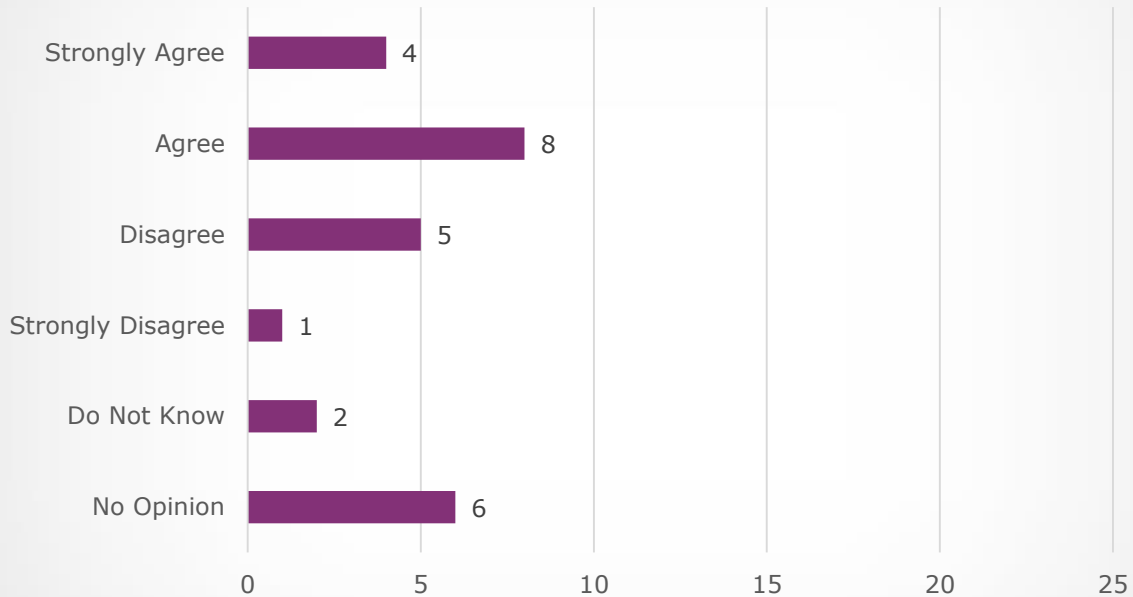
No clear agreement among agency staff on whether or not the FAFSA is in need of simplification.



## The FAFSA is overly complicated.



## Congress should act to simplify the FAFSA process.





Simplification should be approached cautiously, since oversimplification will likely result in more secondary state applications...



...the level of difficulty of completing the FAFSA for most students has been overblown nearly to the point of urban myth. I feel it is as important to combat the negative opinions and hype as it is to actually simplify the FAFSA.



# Finding #3

Thirty-two states plus D.C. use at least 3 of 5 major FAFSA data elements to administer state aid programs.





# 5 Main Data FAFSA Elements

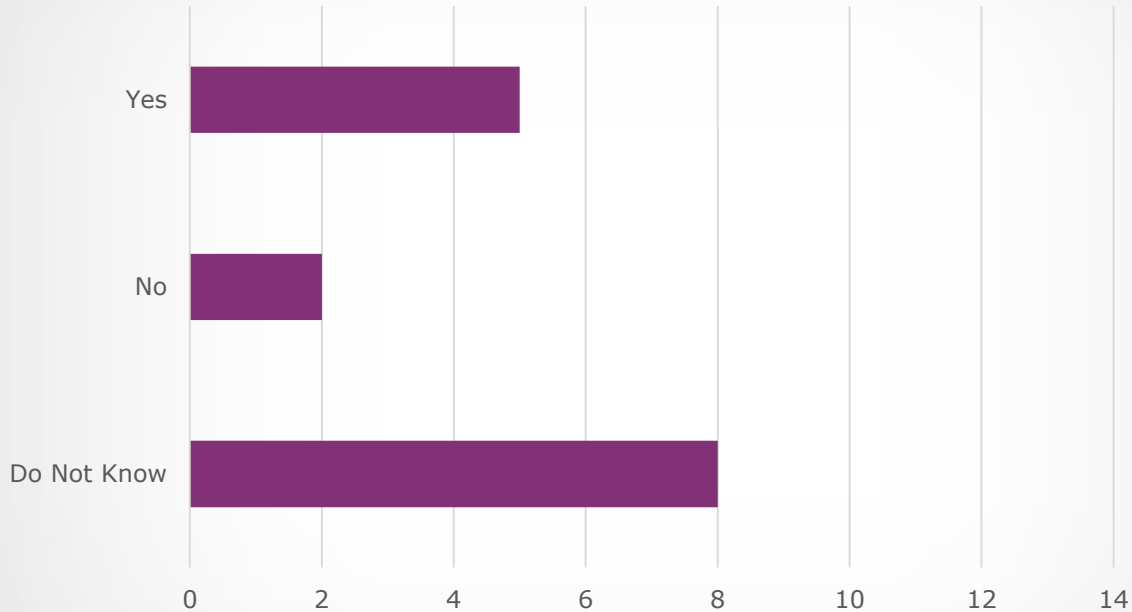
	Number of States Utilizing
Demographic Information	29 states + D.C.
EFC	43 states + D.C.
Other Income or Asset Information	25 states + D.C.
Application Date	32 states + D.C.
Institution List	17 states + D.C.

# Finding #4

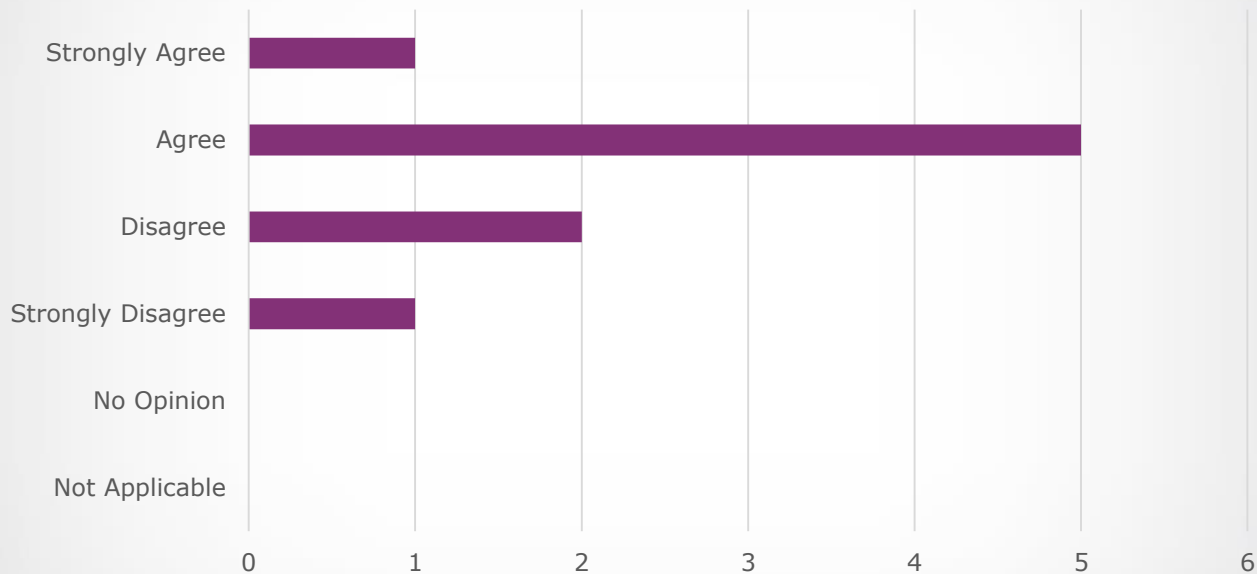
The potential for state-level application development remains unclear.



## Would your state develop a secondary application if the FAFSA removed needed information?



## Would your state continue the use of a secondary application even if the FAFSA provided the information needed?



# Summary of Findings

- 1) Strong agreement on important role states play in informing federal policy- but split on clarity of pathways to exert influence.
- 2) No clear agreement among agency staff on whether or not the FAFSA is in need of simplification.
- 3) Thirty-two states plus D.C. use at least 3 of 5 major FAFSA data elements to administer state aid programs.
- 4) The potential for state-level application development remains unclear.

# Implications

- State-level stakeholders must be included.
- Need to define what the FAFSA is intended to do- and not intended to do.
- States don't just need the EFC- they need the items underlying it.
- Awareness of trading current alignment for possible future efficiency.
- Be open to change.

# Next Steps

Will states be impacted?



How will they be impacted?

Which states will be impacted?

How can we help them prepare?


# For More Info

Check out the Report:

- Go to [www.ecs.org](http://www.ecs.org)
- Search “FAFSA”

Contact Sarah:

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EDUCATION COMMISSION OF THE STATES  
YOUR education policy team.

APR 2017

**Simplification May Not Be So Simple:**  
Gauging state alignment with the FAFSA

SARAH PINGEL

Applying for financial aid can be a complicated, time-consuming endeavor for students and their families. Fortunately, many state aid programs have taken strides to align aid applications to the form used for federal aid programs, the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), making state aid more readily accessible. New conversations surrounding simplifying the FAFSA can lead to new efficiencies for students completing the process - but only if state-level stakeholders are willing to rework current alignments.

**32 states plus D.C.** use at least **three of five major FAFSA data elements** to administer state aid programs

States play an important role in **informing federal financial aid policy development**, but lack clear pathways to exert influence.

IN 2014, PROGRAMS REQUIRING FAFSA INFORMATION ACCOUNTED FOR 77 PERCENT OF STATE FINANCIAL AID EXPENDITURES.

[www.ecs.org](http://www.ecs.org) | @EdCommission