

April 18, 2017

As financial aid administrators from across the State of South Dakota, we are writing to express our deep concerns regarding the impact that the outage of the IRS's Data Retrieval Tool (DRT) is having on our students' ability to apply for and receive federal student aid. For nearly ten years, the DRT has allowed students to transfer their tax information directly into the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). The IRS DRT is the cornerstone of FAFSA simplification. The outage directly affects both the 2016-17 and 2017-18 award years and adversely affects low-income students. If not addressed by October 1, this will also affect 2018-19 applicants.

Along with the National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (NASFAA), we write to ask for your support in seeking relief for the millions of FAFSA filers who are, or will be, affected by the DRT outage. Students who are unable to use the DRT are more likely to be selected for verification—an often-arduous process that can delay the delivery of financial aid, or even deter students from completing the financial aid process and attending college.

With a sincere desire to assist our students, in alignment with requests made by NASFAA and members of House and Senate education committees, we request that the Department of Education provide the following relief for students:

- 1) Allow applicants to use signed copies of **federal tax returns** to satisfy verification documentation requirements in place of DRT information and/or IRS tax return transcripts.
- 2) For **tax non-filers**, allow for the submission of W-2 forms and allow applicants to note their non-filing status within the institutional verification worksheet.
- 3) Revise the **verification selection criteria** to provide a more **generous tolerance** to ensure that the numbers of students selected for verification remains stable and manageable by institutions so that financial aid processing can continue uninterrupted.
- 4) Provide an increase in the tolerance level before assigning an error **(399) code** that indicates a conflict in a student's information between the 2016-17 FAFSA and 2017-18 FAFSA.

Students and colleges in South Dakota need the IRS to bring this tool back online as securely and quickly as possible. **However, in the interim, these steps will go a long way toward helping students, particularly those with low income, access federal funding for postsecondary education.**

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
South Dakota Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (SDASFAA)
Becky Pribyl, President