

Summary of Results: FAFSA Simplification Survey

About the Survey...

Recently, Senator Lamar Alexander (R-TN) proposed reducing the number of questions on the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) to two: what is your family size and what is your family income? To gauge response to the proposal from states and a small set of institutions, surveys were e-mailed to the NAICU Committee on Student Aid and NAICU State Executives. Preliminary survey results were presented to the Committee on Student Aid at the NAICU Board of Directors meeting in April. A final summary of survey results is presented below. Note the results are not presented in the same order as the questions appeared on the survey.

Although there was some support of simplification, most respondents felt the FAFSA could be streamlined in several areas but not so much as to remove important fields. Interestingly, there was a variety of responses as to what should be kept and/or removed.

Fifteen of 23 institutions (65.2%) and 22 of 38 state associations (57.9%) responded to the survey. State associations based their responses on their state grant programs, often in consultation with state grant agencies. Despite the small number of institutions surveyed, the results provide a general framework for how people feel about the proposal as well as a basis for further inquiry.

Institutional responses included: Augsburg College, Bethel University, Brevard College, College of the Ozarks, Concordia College, Drake University, Ferrum College, Gonzaga University, Johnson & Wales University, Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College, Sterling College, University of Puget Sound, Warren Wilson College, and Wartburg College.

Responses received from state associations included: Alabama, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, New Jersey, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Texas, Vermont, and Washington.

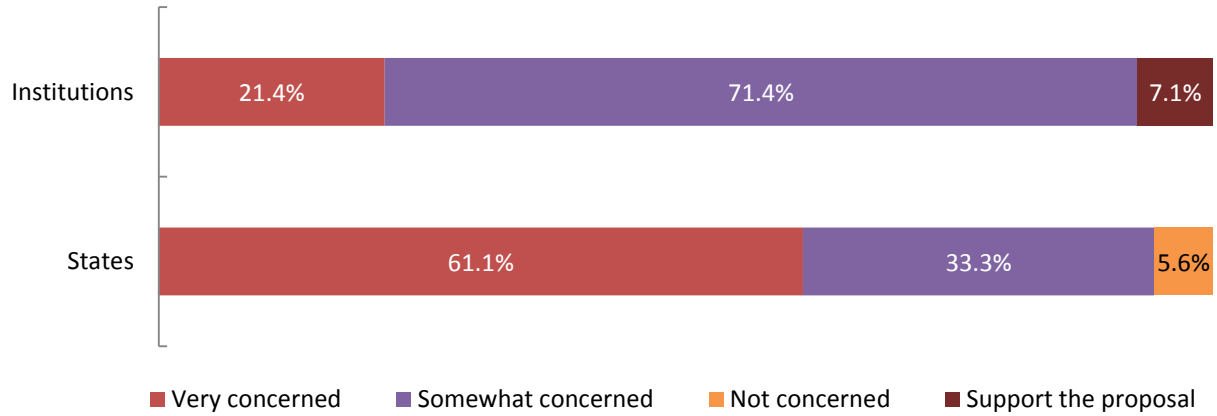
Not all respondents answered every question, so the denominators are noted in the figures below.

Results

- **All institutional and state association respondents reported a reliance on the FAFSA.** Few respondents reported that their state included state-specific questions on the FAFSA (see Figure 2 below).

- The proposal by Senator Lamar Alexander (R-TN) to simplify the FAFSA form is concerning to institutional and state association respondents alike.

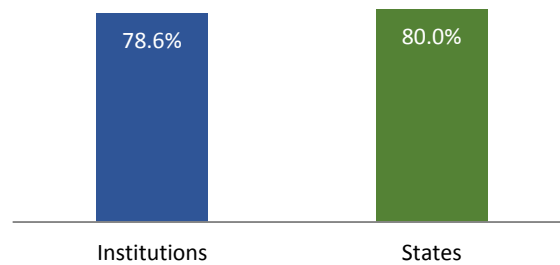
Figure 1. Concern Level for Senator Alexander’s Proposal



Number of respondents: Institutional (14), State Association (18).

- The FAFSA is the primary tool for determining institutional and state need-based student aid.

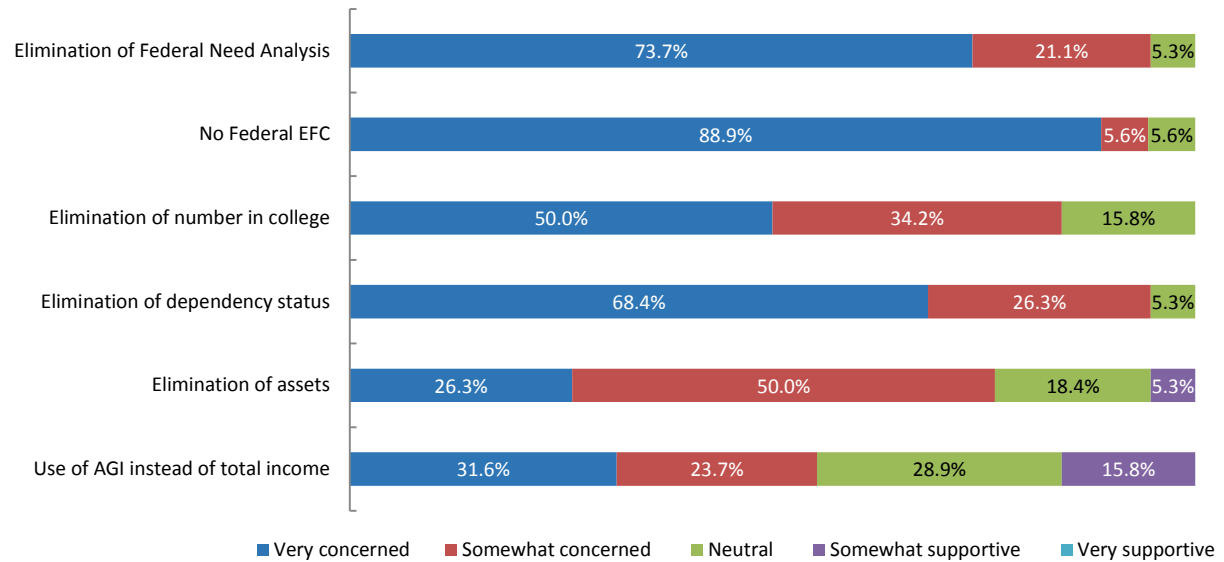
Figure 2. Percentage Exclusively Using the FAFSA for Determining Need-Based Aid



Number of respondents: Institutional (14), State Association (20).

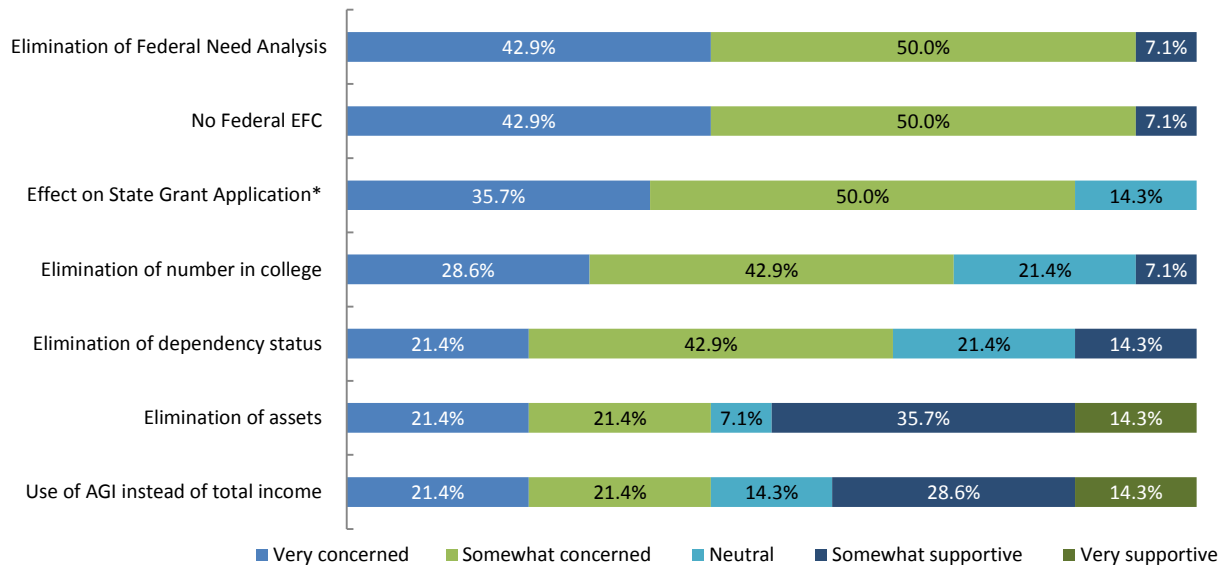
- **Of greatest concern to respondents was the potential elimination of Expected Family Contribution (EFC) and federal need analysis.**
- **Also of significant concern were the elimination of dependency status and the number of family members in college.**
- **Of mixed concern was the potential use of Adjusted Gross Income (AGI) instead of total income.**

Figure 3. Concern Level for Senator Alexander’s Proposal for States, by Element



Number of respondents: 18.

Figure 4. Concern Level for Senator Alexander’s Proposal for Institutions, by Element

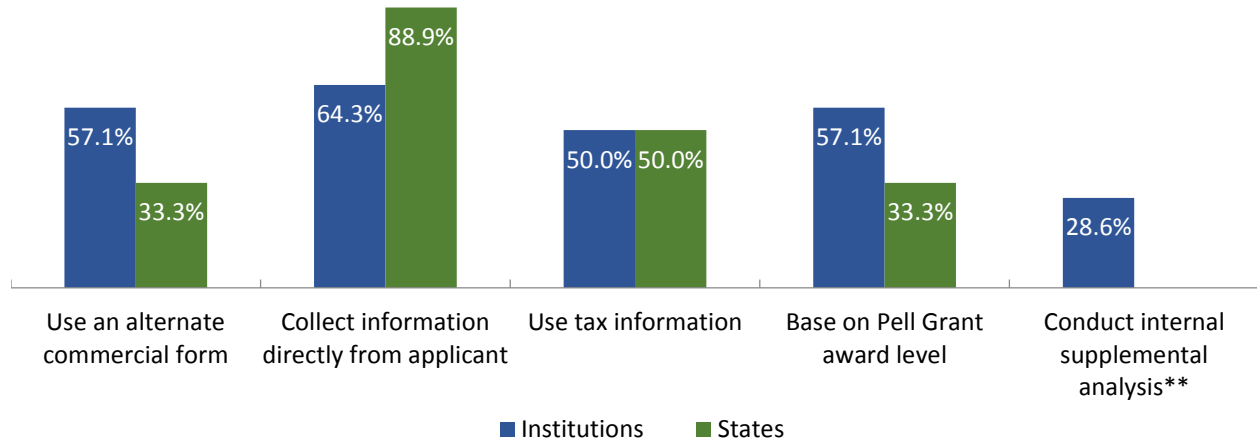


Number of respondents: 14.

*This option was not available to State Association respondents.

- **Most respondents think that to determine aid eligibility under the new proposal, additional information will need to be collected directly from applicants.** Responses regarding other methods yielded mixed results.

*Figure 5. Expected Method for Determining Institutional Need-Based Aid without the FAFSA**



Number of respondents: Institutional (14), State Association (18).

*Respondents had the option of choosing more than one option.

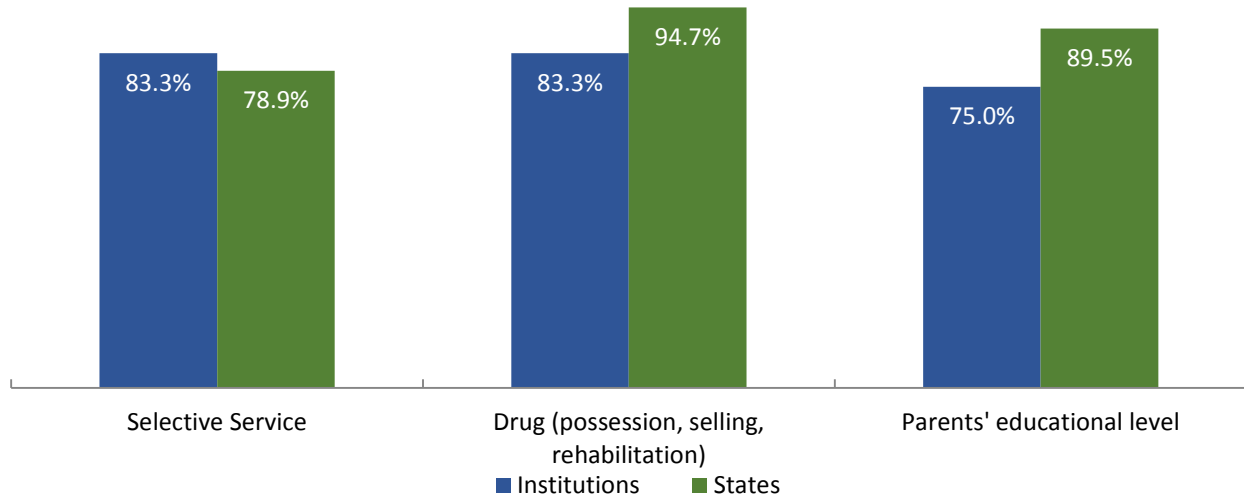
**This option was not available to state association respondents.

- **Combining institutional and state association responses yielded 26 suggestions for FAFSA fields that need to be maintained in order to award aid or reach the neediest families.** Of the 26, the following were mentioned by five or more respondents:
 - EFC factors (incomes, allowances, assets)
 - State and length of residence
 - Number in college
 - Names of colleges
 - Grade level
 - Dependency status
 - Citizenship status.

Others mentioned multiple times included veteran status, federal program benefits (e.g., SSI, TANF), housing plans, parent education level, number in household, name of high school, and contact information.

- **A large number of all respondents favor removing selective service, drug related, and parent education level questions.** However, one respondent noted that for affected students Selective Service registration is required to receive state aid.

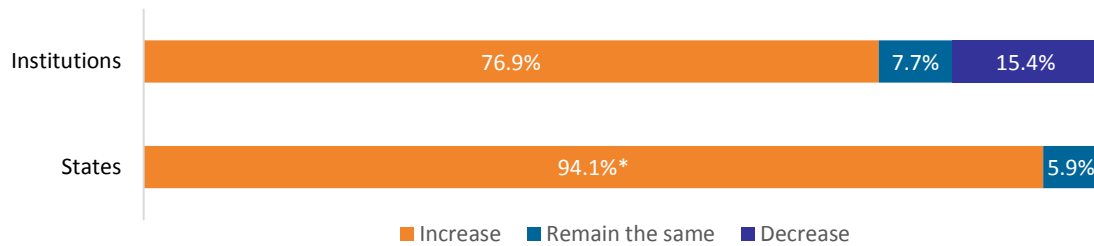
Figure 6. Percentage in Favor of Eliminating Specific FAFSA Questions, by Question



Number of respondents: Institutional (12), State Association (19).

- **Many institutional and state association respondents expect workloads to increase with the proposed changes.**

Figure 7. Percentage Expecting a Change in Workload

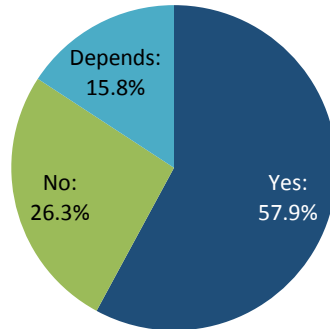


Number of respondents: Institutional (13), State Association (17).

*State association respondents were asked if they expected a short-term or continued workload increase, with 82.4% saying a continued increase.

- Asked only of state association respondents, a small majority believe Senator Alexander’s proposal would require legislative changes to their state grant program.

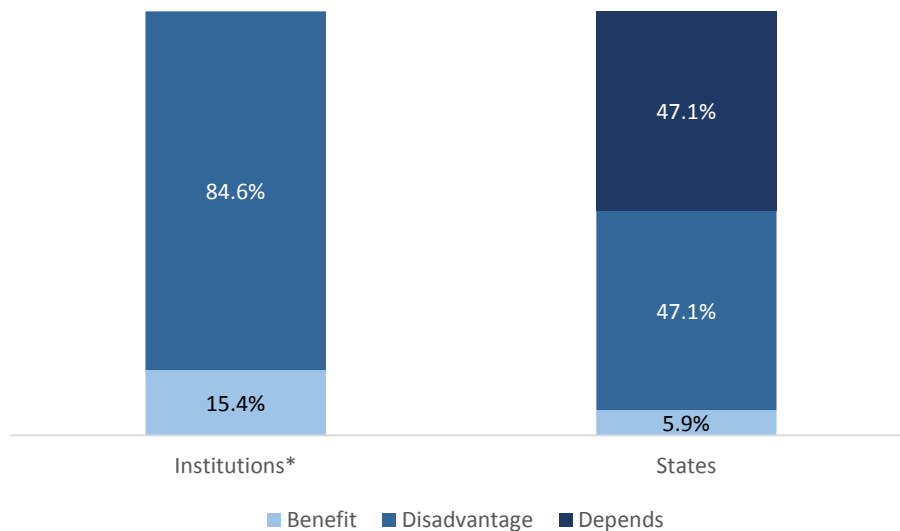
Figure 8. Percentage Expecting a Legislative Change to State Grant Programs



Number of respondents: 19.

- Most institutional respondents felt the simplification proposal would be a disadvantage to students. State association respondents, with the option of saying it *depends*, were more mixed in their response.

Figure 9. Expected Benefit or Disadvantage to Students?



Number of respondents: Institutional (13), State Association (17).

*Institutional respondents were not given the option of *Depends*.

- **In excess of 50 additional comments were submitted.** Several ideas were suggested by multiple respondents, including:
 - Due to a lack of information, a simplified FAFSA form may lead to the misapplication of aid (state and federal). Of greatest concern is that aid would not go to the students most in need.
 - As it stands now, the FAFSA is an effective and uniform tool for determining a student's ability to pay.
 - Ironically, simplifying the FAFSA may lead to additional and more complex work for schools and ultimately students.
 - Using prior-prior year financial data may be a better way to facilitate the process.

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