



FAFSA Filing in Iowa: 2020

In order to qualify for most forms of college financial aid, students must file the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, or FAFSA. This report examines trends in FAFSA filing in Iowa over four cycles, including equity gaps and the potential effects of COVID-19.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Completing the FAFSA is a critical step in the college-going process. At Iowa College Aid, we are focused on increasing the FAFSA filing rate for high school seniors through a variety of Community Engagement programs. This report details Iowa's FAFSA filing rate for public high school seniors over time, overall and broken down by school and student characteristics. In response to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, we also analyze trends in overall FAFSA filing and FAFSA renewals. For these analyses, we examine FAFSAs filed prior to June 1 in the 2017-18 through 2020-21 FAFSA cycles.

We find Iowa's FAFSA rate increased substantially from the 2017-18 FAFSA cycle to the 2020-21 cycle. For the three most recent years, Iowa's FAFSA filing rate has approximately matched the national filing rate as of May 31. When we compare Iowa's FAFSA rates over time, we find that the 2020-21 rate falls below previous years, likely due to COVID-19. There has been a 1 percent decline in the number of FAFSAs filed by public high school seniors for 2020-21 compared to 2019-20.

We also find a relationship between some school and student characteristics and FAFSA filing rates. As the percentage of White students in a high school increases, the percentage of seniors filing a FAFSA increases. As the percentage of low-socioeconomic students increases, FAFSA filing rates decline.

Schools in urban areas have lower FAFSA filing rates than schools in rural areas.

The proportion of high school counselors to students within a high school is unrelated to FAFSA filing rates. FAFSA filing rates at high schools participating in our Community Engagement programs are similar to rates at schools that do not participate.

Males, minorities, and low-income high school students are less likely to file the FAFSA than their female, White, and higher-income counterparts. Over time, FAFSA filers in Iowa are coming from wealthier families, suggesting that more work is needed to address important equity gaps in FAFSA filing within high schools.

Iowa's overall number of FAFSAs filed by May 31 in the 2020-21 cycle is lower than the number filed by the same time in the previous cycle by approximately 3 percent. This finding is driven by a decline in new FAFSAs. Among FAFSA renewals, we find that a lower percentage and lower number are from students who are Pell-eligible, suggesting that low-income students are more likely to be reconsidering their postsecondary plans than students from wealthier families. We find that all higher education sectors in Iowa are receiving fewer FAFSAs for 2020-21 than for 2019-20, suggesting, again, that students are reconsidering their postsecondary plans for fall 2020.

INTRODUCTION

The price of higher education continues to rise every year. Many students cannot afford to attend postsecondary institutions without financial aid from the federal government, states, and institutions. One way that students obtain financial assistance is through the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). The FAFSA is required for all federal student aid, including Pell Grants and federal student loans, and is typically required for state and institutional financial aid. For example, in Iowa, the FAFSA serves as the application for the Iowa Tuition Grant and the Future Ready Iowa Last-Dollar Scholarship, two programs that make up more than three-quarters of Iowa student financial aid (State of Iowa Budget Appropriations, 2020).

Because filing the FAFSA is critical for financial aid and the college-going process, this report examines Iowa FAFSA filing rates over time using the most recently available data. Specifically, we analyze FAFSAs filed from October 1 through May 31 for the past four FAFSA cycles. We are especially interested in understanding filing rates for 2020-21 compared to previous years because of the COVID-19 global pandemic. Surveys of 2019-20 high school seniors suggest that some are reconsidering and possibly delaying postsecondary education in the wake of institutional changes (Simpson Scarborough, 2020). Some institutions are concerned about enrollment in the 2020-21 academic year because of the possibility of online-only instruction and drastically changed on-campus experiences (Friga, 2020). Given increased unemployment

(Iowa Workforce Development, 2020) and potentially fewer job opportunities for high school graduates, we believe that higher education is still a good investment for both new high school graduates and current college students, even with anticipated changes in the college experience. Therefore, we examine public high school seniors' FAFSA filing rates, overall FAFSA filing, and FAFSA renewal rates over time. See the appendix for more information about how we constructed the data for these analyses.

We also include analysis of filing rates for high schools that participate in specific Iowa College Aid programs, such as Course to College, GEAR UP (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs), and LCAANs (Local College Access Networks). See the appendix for details about these programs.

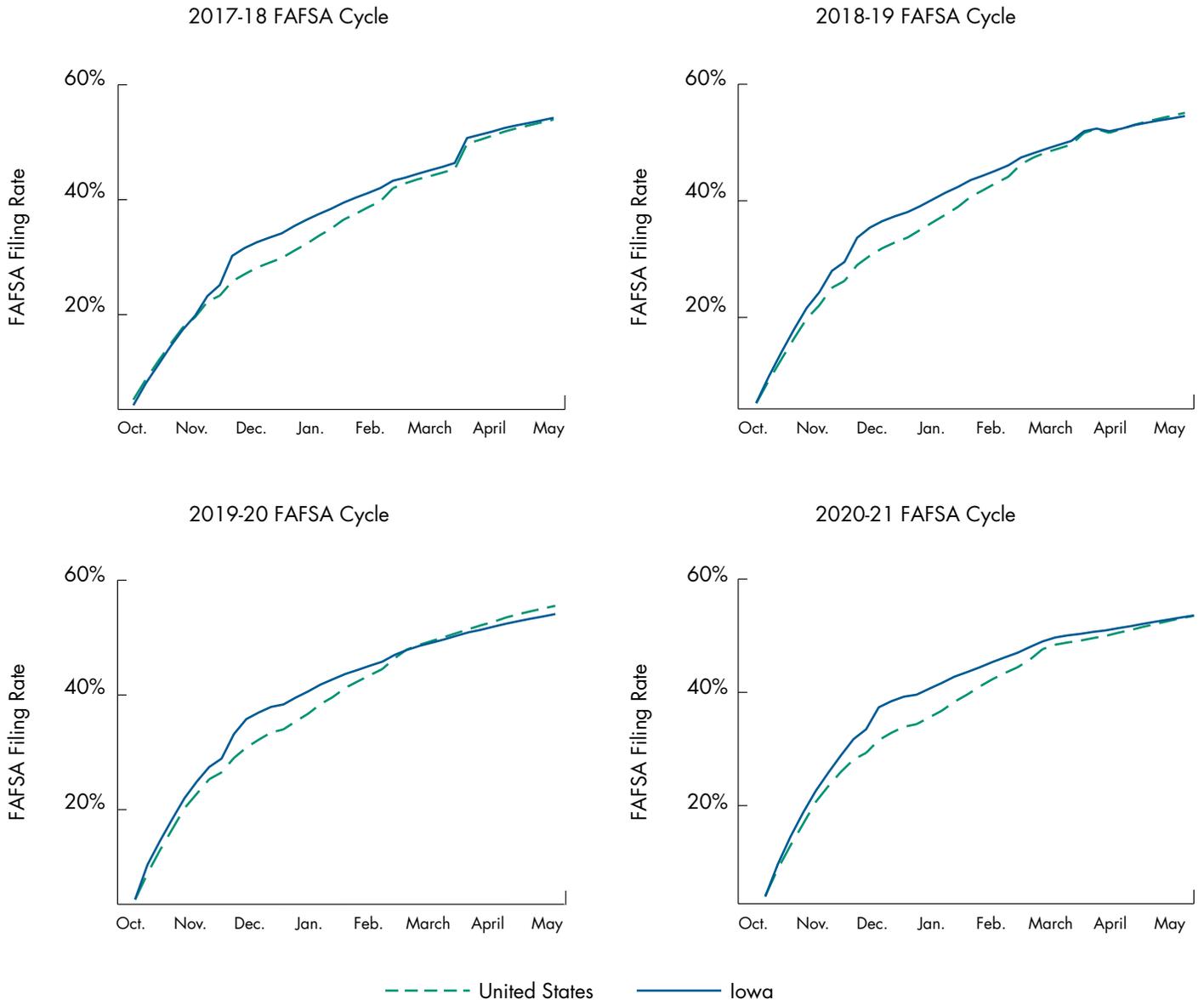
A note about FAFSA cycles: FAFSA cycles are named for the academic year in which aid will be distributed. For example, 2019-20 high school seniors file FAFSAs for the 2020-21 academic year, so their applications are captured in the 2020-21 FAFSA cycle. FAFSA renewals follow the same pattern. For instance, first-year college students in the academic year 2019-20 file FAFSAs for the 2020-21 FAFSA cycle, when they will be in their second year. Therefore, throughout this report, we refer to the “FAFSA cycle” for a given year that describes when the financial aid is expected to be distributed to students.

FAFSA FILING RATES OVER TIME: IOWA VERSUS NATION

We begin our analysis by examining all Iowa high school seniors' FAFSA filing rates (public and private schools) compared to the nation. Figure 1 displays the high school senior FAFSA filing rates for Iowa and the nation from the 2017-18 FAFSA cycle through the 2020-21 FAFSA cycle, ending the last week in May for each year (Federal Student Aid, 2020). During each of the time periods examined, Iowa's filing rate exceeds the national filing rate until March. After March, the national and Iowa FAFSA filing rates are approximately the same in each cycle. Because some

financial aid programs are first come, first served, and some set "priority deadlines" to begin disbursing aid, students who file the FAFSA earlier in the cycle are more likely to receive financial aid. Therefore, Iowa's higher filing rates during the first five months of the cycle might represent better access to financial aid for Iowa's high school seniors. This figure also displays that about 50 percent of high school seniors have filed their FAFSA by the end of their senior year. More seniors need to file the FAFSA by the time they graduate if they plan to continue their education.

Figure 1. Iowa and National High School FAFSA Filing Rates over Time

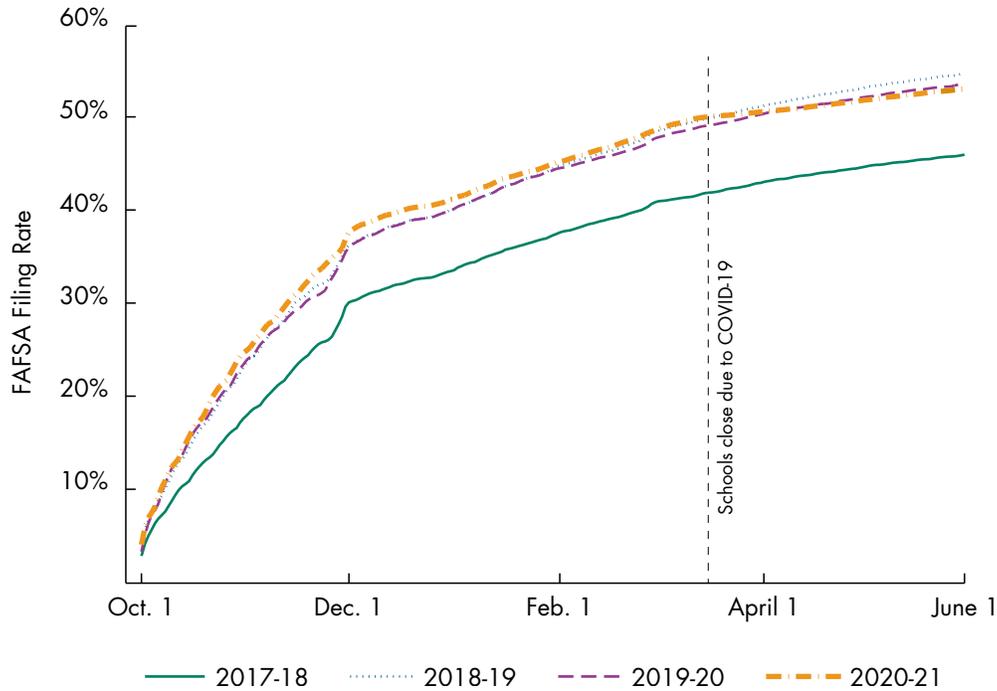


FAFSA FILING RATES BY PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL CHARACTERISTICS

In this section, we pay particular attention to high school senior FAFSA filing rates within Iowa. We are specifically interested in how FAFSA filing rates vary by public high school characteristics to understand where more work is needed to increase filing rates across the state. Figure 2 shows the FAFSA filing rate within Iowa from October 1 through May 31 for the past four FAFSA cycles. The vertical line indicates March 16, 2020, when schools closed due to COVID-19. Iowa experienced a substantial increase in

FAFSA filing rates after the 2017-18 FAFSA cycle. For the past three years, FAFSA filing rates have followed similar patterns. However, the 2020-21 FAFSA cycle deviated from previous years after schools closed as a result of the pandemic. Once schools closed, FAFSA filing flattened, falling below previous years. The 2020-21 FAFSA filing rate as of May 31 was 51 percent, while the 2019-20 FAFSA filing rate was 52 percent.

Figure 2. Iowa Public High School Filing Rate over Time During a Cycle



As of May 31, 2020, approximately 19,000 public high school seniors had filed a FAFSA (see Figure 3). In the previous year, this number was closer to 19,100, indicating a 1 percent decline in FAFSAs filed by seniors between 2019-20 and 2020-21. In contrast, senior enrollment grew by 1 percent in the same time frame.

Part of the slight decline in FAFSAs filed is likely due to COVID-19. Once students began their online high school education as of March 16, it became more difficult for high school counselors to help students file FAFSAs. Additionally, high school seniors might have reconsidered their postsecondary plans given the growing concerns over the pandemic.

Figure 3. Number of FAFSAs Completed by Public High School Seniors over Time

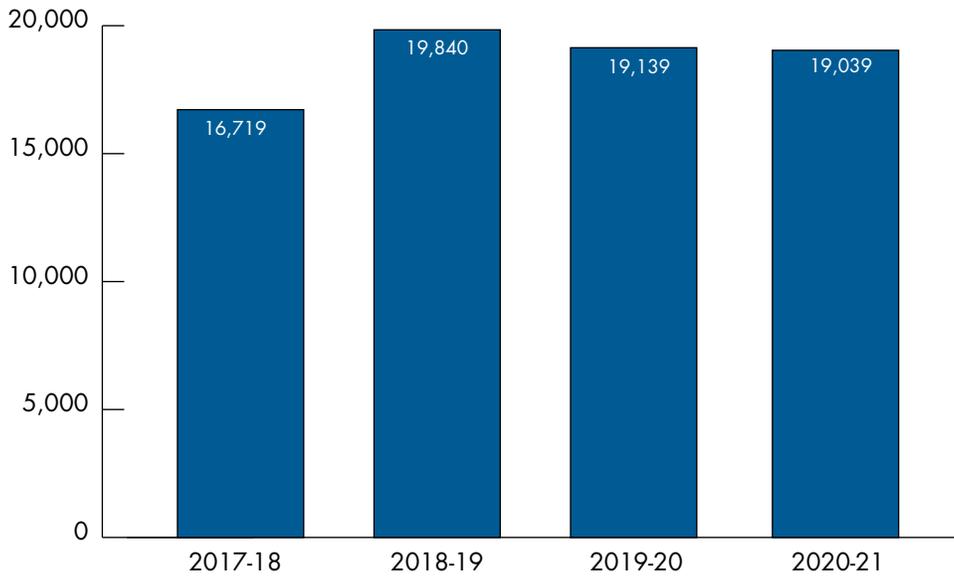


Figure 4 on the next page shows 2020-21 FAFSA cycle filing rates by public school districts. In general, rural school districts have higher FAFSA filing rates than urban school

districts. However, this is likely driven by fewer high school seniors in rural school districts compared to urban school districts.

Figure 4. FAFSA Filing Rates by Public School District

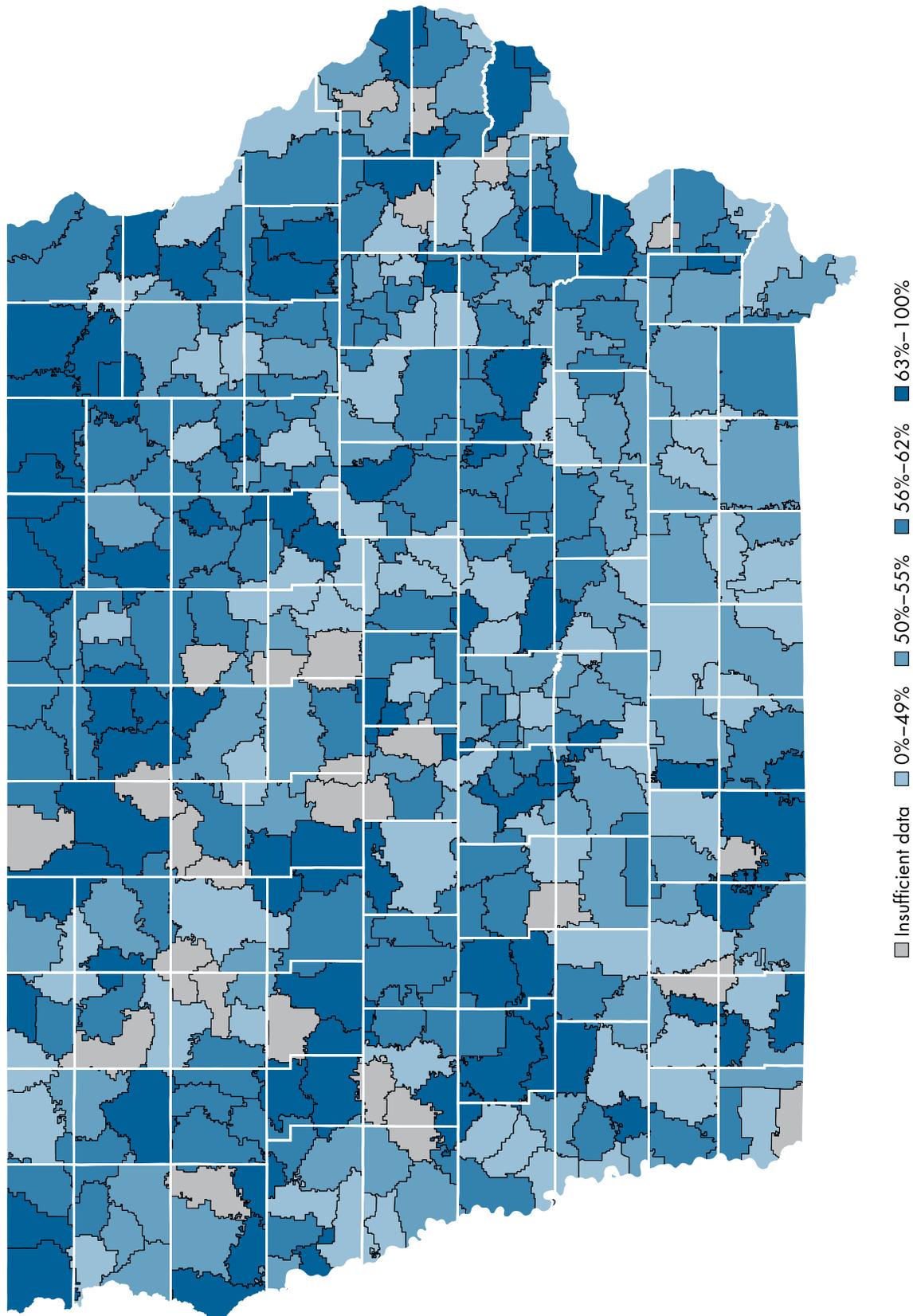


Figure 5 illustrates FAFSA filing rates by the percentage of students in the school building who qualify for free and reduced priced lunch. The circle size indicates enrollment within the school building. The larger the circle, the larger

the school building population. Overall, we find that as the percentage of students in the building who qualify for free and reduced priced lunch increases, the FAFSA filing rate declines.

Figure 5. 2020-21 FAFSA Filing Rates by Free and Reduced Priced Lunch Status

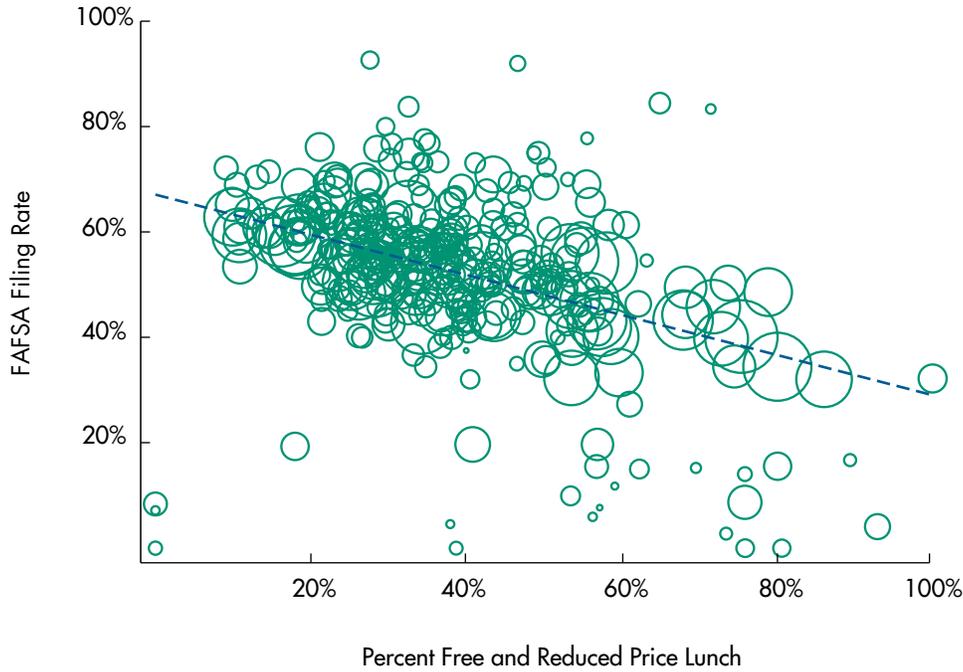


Figure 6 on the next page displays the FAFSA filing rate by the percentage of White students in the school building. Circle size indicates the total enrollment within the school building. First, many schools are clustered on the right side of the graph, indicating that many schools within Iowa have a high percentage of White students. Second, as the percentage of White students increases, so does the percentage of FAFSA filers.

High school counselors are critical to developing a college-

going culture. Counselors often help students determine their post-high school plans, complete applications, and apply for financial aid. Therefore, we examine the relationship between school counselor presence and the FAFSA filing rate. Figure 7 on the next page shows a slight negative, nonsignificant relationship between the number of high school students per counselor and FAFSA filing rates. For this analysis, we consider only schools that have at least one full-time counselor; 63 high school buildings have no counselors, and three high school buildings have only a part-time counselor.

Figure 6. 2020-21 FAFSA Filing Rates by High School Racial Composition

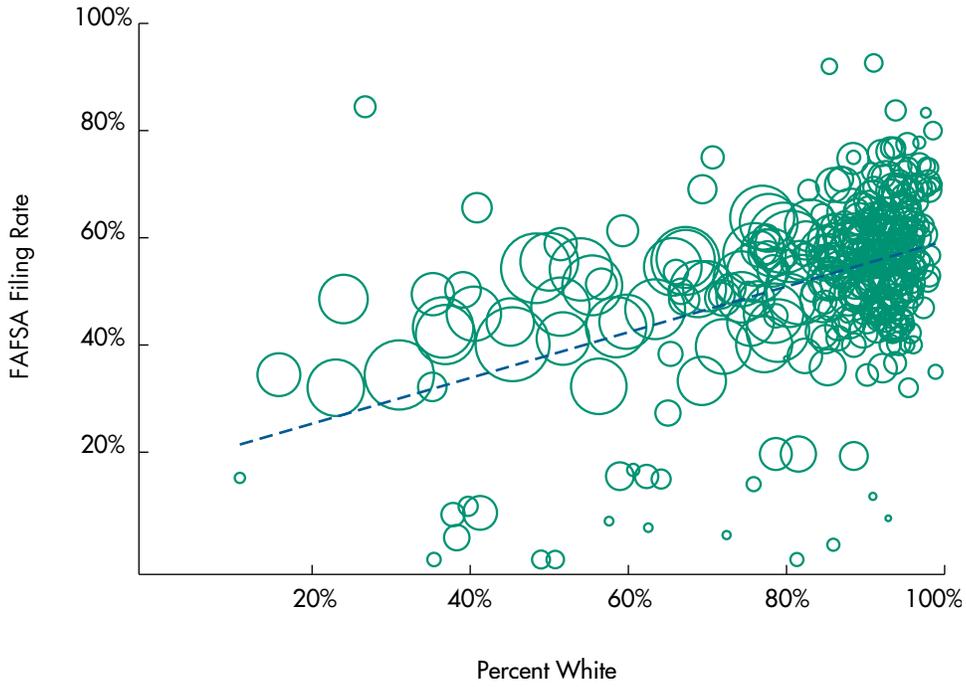
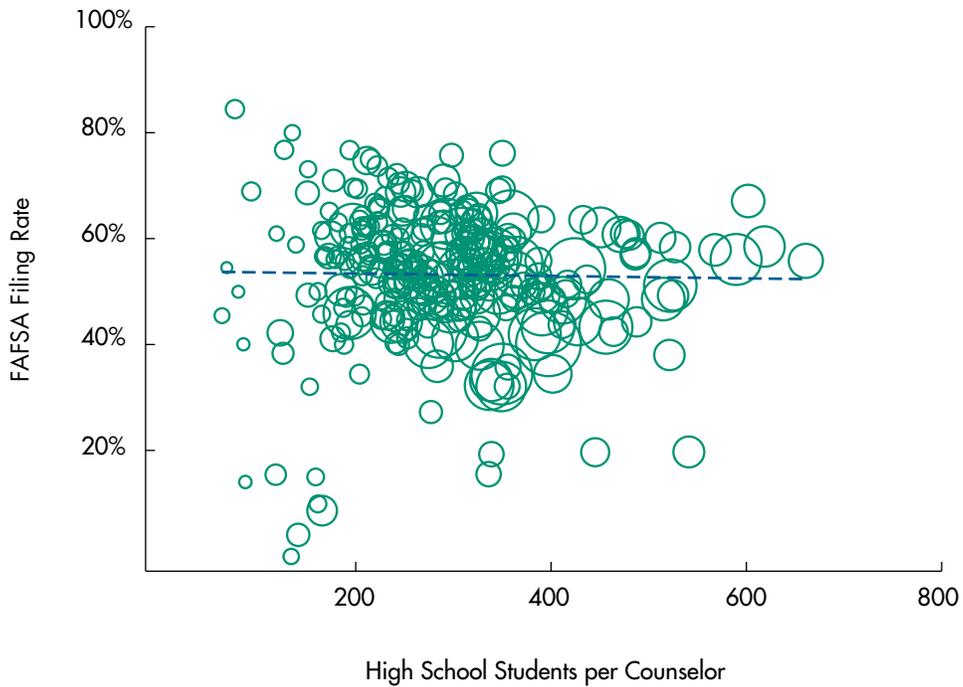


Figure 7. 2020-21 FAFSA Filing Rates by High School Student-to-Counselor Ratio



Note: For schools that have at least one full-time counselor.

Table 1 examines the relationship between FAFSA filing rates and participation in Iowa College Aid’s Community Engagement programs. Iowa’s overall FAFSA filing rate for 2020-21 as of May 31 was 51 percent. Schools located in LCAN communities had a slightly lower average FAFSA filing rate than schools located in areas without an LCAN (52 percent versus 53 percent). The average 2020-21 FAFSA filing rate for Course to College Partner Schools was 50 percent, whereas the average FAFSA filing rate for schools that were not Partner schools was

53 percent. Schools in GEAR UP Iowa districts had a FAFSA filing rate of 42 percent, compared to 53 percent for non-GEAR UP schools.

It is worth noting that one reason some schools opt into or are targeted for these programs is that they have historically low FAFSA filing rates. More time is needed to determine whether our Community Engagement programs result in higher filing rates. On a positive note, we find that GEAR UP Iowa schools are outpacing non-GEAR UP schools in increasing their FAFSA rates.

Table 1. 2020-21 Average FAFSA Rates by Community Engagement Program Participation

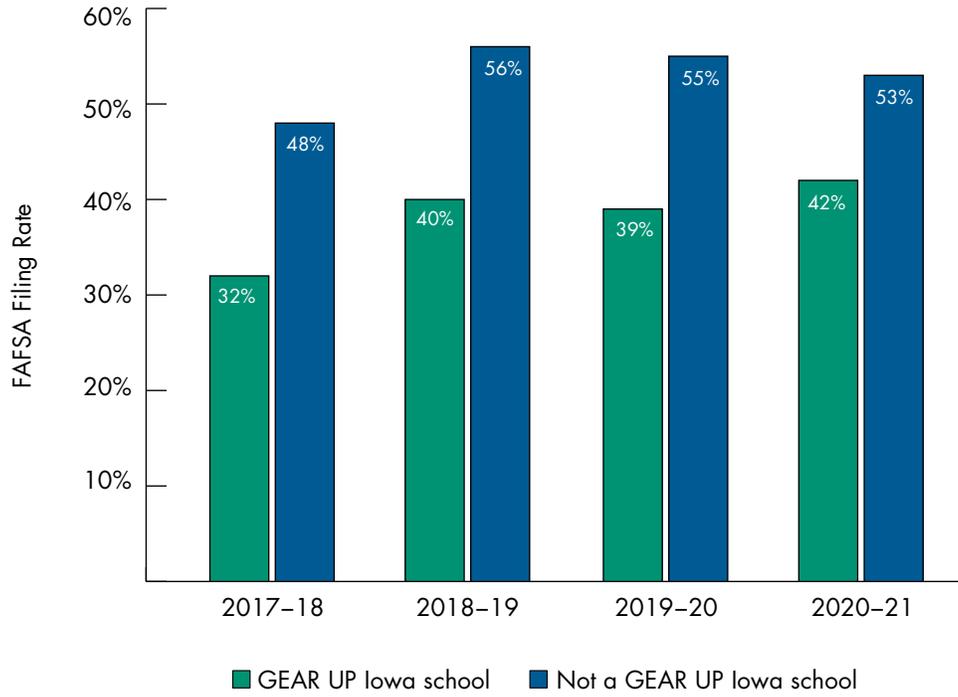
Community Engagement Program	No		Yes	
	Number of Schools	FAFSA Rate	Number of Schools	FAFSA Rate
Local College Access Network	306	53%	36	52%
Course to College Partner	290	53%	52	50%
GEAR UP Iowa	317	53%	25	42%

Note: This is the unweighted average.

Figure 8 on the next page shows FAFSA filing rates over time by GEAR UP Iowa status. The average FAFSA filing rate has been increasing regardless of whether a school participates in GEAR UP. However, GEAR UP schools’ FAFSA filing rate increased by 10 percentage points from the 2017-18 FAFSA cycle (32 percent) to the 2020-21 FAFSA

cycle (42 percent), whereas non-GEAR UP schools’ FAFSA filing rate increased by 5 percentage points (48 percent to 53 percent). While a gap of approximately 10 percentage points remains between non-GEAR UP schools and GEAR UP schools, this gap has been closing over time.

Figure 8. Average FAFSA Filing Rate over Time by GEAR UP Iowa Status



FAFSA FILING RATES BY HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS

Table 2 provides descriptive statistics for all high school seniors (full sample), those who filed the FAFSA for 2020-21, and those who did not file the FAFSA. We find that males, minorities, and students who qualify for free or reduced

priced lunch are underrepresented among FAFSA filers, illustrating equity gaps in FAFSA filing rates for these specific groups.

Table 2. Demographic Statistics of FAFSA Filers and Non-Filers for the 2020-21 FAFSA Cycle (Public High School Seniors Only)

Characteristics	Full Sample	FAFSA Filers	FAFSA Non-Filers
Gender			
Female	48%	56%	40%
Male	52%	45%	60%
Race/ethnicity			
White	77%	82%	71%
Black	6%	4%	8%
Hispanic	11%	8%	14%
Asian	3%	3%	3%
Other	4%	3%	4%
Free/reduced priced lunch			
Free/reduced priced lunch	36%	24%	48%
Neither	64%	76%	52%

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding.

Table 3 on the next page provides overall FAFSA descriptive statistics for students who filed the FAFSA over the past four cycles. For FAFSA filers, the mean head of household’s income increased by approximately \$10,000 from 2019-20 to 2020-21, while the median expected family contribution (EFC) increased by about \$2,000. A higher proportion of students were selected for verification (a process in which students may be required to provide additional information to their postsecondary institutions) and fewer students

qualified for the Pell grant in 2020-21 than the previous year. Students listed about the same number of colleges on the FAFSA, and a similar proportion selected only in-state colleges and universities. Higher family incomes, higher EFCs, a higher rate of selection for verification, and a lower rate of Pell eligibility for 2020-21 suggest that high school students from wealthier families are increasingly more likely to file the FAFSA.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics for Public High School FAFSA Filers over Time

Characteristics	2017-18 FAFSA Cycle	2018-19 FAFSA Cycle	2019-20 FAFSA Cycle	2020-21 FAFSA Cycle
Mean head of household's income	\$97,692	\$94,142	\$93,762	\$105,461
Median expected family contribution	\$9,488	\$8,673	\$9,537	\$11,366
Selected for verification	19%	35%	23%	24%
Pell-eligible	39%	41%	39%	37%
Mean number of colleges indicated on FAFSA	3.1	3.1	3.1	3.1
Percent selecting in-state colleges only	68%	68%	69%	69%

Note: Head of household's income and expected family contribution have been inflated to 2020 dollars.

Table 4 on the next page provides characteristics of institutions where high school seniors sent their FAFSAs over time. On average, students send their FAFSAs to about three institutions, and 1 in 3 send their FAFSA to an out-of-state college. Approximately half of high school seniors send their FAFSA to a two-year institution, and two-thirds send it to a public four-year institution. About 40 percent of high school seniors send their application to a private not-for-profit institution. Only about 4 percent of students

send their FAFSA to a for-profit institution. These findings remain consistent across the four FAFSA cycles examined, suggesting that high school seniors did not change their FAFSA sending behaviors as a result of COVID-19. However, we capture where students sent their FAFSAs only through May 31, 2020. The 2020-21 trend might change as more postsecondary institutions announce their plans for the fall 2020 semester.

Table 4. College Sector Characteristics for Public High School FAFSA Filers over Time

Postsecondary Characteristics	FAFSA Cycle			
	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21
Number of institutions	3.1	3.1	3.1	3.1
Sent FAFSA out of state	32%	32%	31%	31%
Sent to at least one public two-year	53%	55%	54%	53%
Sent to at least one public four-year	65%	64%	63%	63%
Sent to at least one private not-for-profit	40%	41%	40%	40%
Sent to at least one for-profit	4%	4%	4%	4%

Note: Percentages will not add up to 100 because students can send their FAFSAs to multiple institutions.

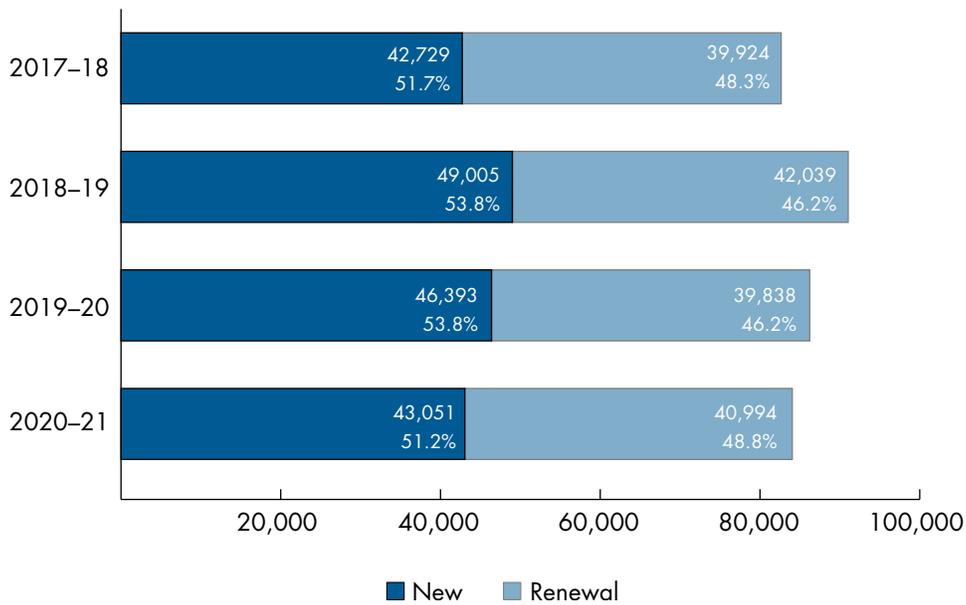
FAFSA FILING RATES BY FAFSA TYPE

Previous sections of this report examine FAFSAs filed only by public high school seniors in Iowa. This section examines all FAFSAs filed in Iowa for undergraduate studies—particularly the characteristics of FAFSA renewals, of increased interest due to COVID-19 and concerns about students returning to college in fall 2020.

When students reapply for federal financial aid, their FAFSAs are classified as renewals. We break down undergraduate FAFSAs into new applications and renewal applications from FAFSA cycle 2017-18 through 2020-21, as of May 31 each year. Figure 9 shows the overall number and percentage of FAFSAs filed by type. Overall, the

number of FAFSAs decreased from the 2019-20 to the 2020-21 FAFSA cycle. This decrease in FAFSAs is driven by a decline of approximately 3 percentage points in new FAFSAs, indicating that there might be fewer new students in the postsecondary education pipeline. (New FAFSAs capture a large portion of high school students but also older individuals who are beginning their postsecondary education.) On the other hand, FAFSA renewals increased from the 2019-20 to 2020-21 cycle by about 1,000 applications (3 percentage points), suggesting that students already enrolled in higher education might not be making drastic changes to their postsecondary plans.

Figure 9. Number and Percentage of Completed Undergraduate FAFSAs by Type: New Versus Renewal over Time



According to work by Bill DeBaun at the National College Attainment Network, a smaller proportion of nationwide FAFSA renewals for 2020-21 were Pell-eligible students compared to 2019-20 (DeBaun, 2020). Figure 10 on the next page shows the number and percentage of renewals by Pell eligibility within Iowa for undergraduate students. From the 2019-20 to 2020-21 FAFSA cycle, the number of FAFSA renewals that were Pell-eligible declined by about 500

applications, whereas the number of renewal applications that were not Pell-eligible increased from about 23,000 to about 25,000 applications. Additionally, the percentage of students renewing FAFSAs who were Pell-eligible has steadily declined since the 2017-18 FAFSA cycle. Most recently, the percentage of Pell-eligible students renewing their FAFSA decreased from 42 percent in the 2019-20 FAFSA cycle to 40 percent in the 2020-21 FAFSA cycle.

Figure 10. Number and Percentage of Completed Undergraduate FAFSA Renewals by Pell Eligibility Status over Time

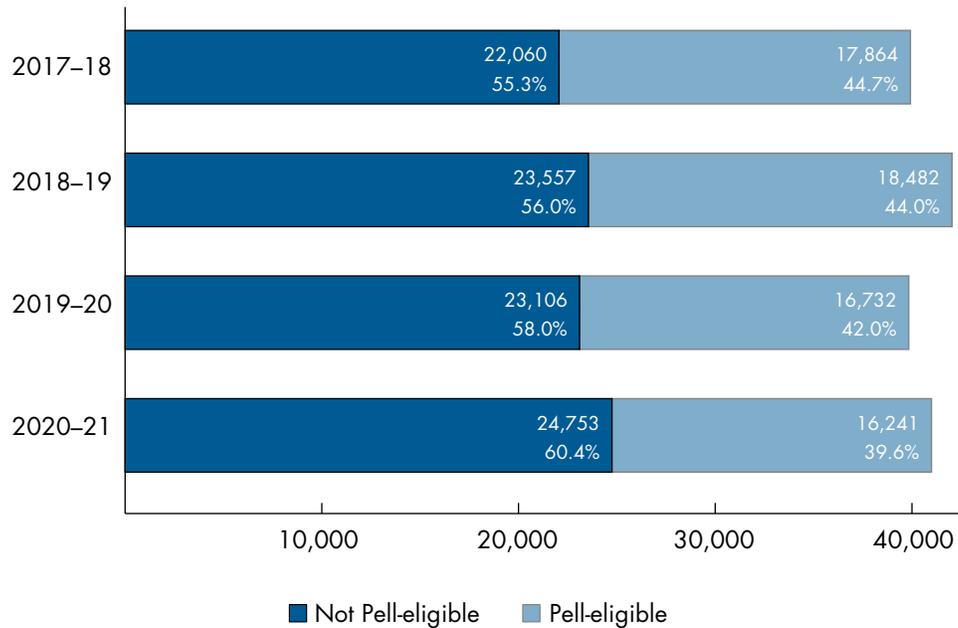


Table 5 illustrates where students sent their FAFSA renewals. On average, renewal applications were sent to about one school. Over time, the percentage of students sending their renewal applications out of state increased from about 23 percent to 35 percent. A third of FAFSA renewals are sent

to public two-year institutions, half are sent to public four-year institutions, a little under 30 percent are sent to private not-for-profit four-year colleges and universities, and about 5 percent are sent to for-profit colleges.

Table 5. College Sector Characteristics for Undergraduate FAFSA Renewals over Time

Postsecondary Characteristics	FAFSA Cycle			
	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21
Number of institutions	1.3	1.3	1.3	1.2
Sent FAFSA out of state	23%	28%	32%	35%
Sent to at least one public two-year	32%	32%	31%	29%
Sent to at least one public four-year	49%	51%	50%	49%
Sent to at least one private not-for-profit	29%	29%	29%	28%
Sent to at least one for-profit	6%	6%	6%	5%

Note: Percentages will not add up to 100 because students can send their FAFSAs to multiple institutions.

Table 6 illustrates how many students sent their FAFSA application to at least one college in each category from the 2017-18 cycle through the 2020-21 cycle. Overall, we find a 3 percent decline in the total number of FAFSAs filed by May 31 for undergraduate students. Regarding where students sent their FAFSAs, we find a 15 percent decline

for for-profit institutions and an 8 percent decline for two-year institutions. We find that public four-year institutions and private not-for-profit colleges declined by 3 percent and 4 percent, respectively. These findings might indicate that higher education institutions can expect lower enrollments for the fall 2020 semester.

Table 6. College Sector Characteristics for Total Undergraduate FAFSAs over Time

School Type	FAFSA Cycle				Percent Change from 2019-20 to 2020-21
	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	
Sent to at least one public two-year	34,960	39,402	36,293	33,516	-8%
Sent to at least one public four-year	39,221	44,085	41,373	39,936	-3%
Sent to at least one private not-for-profit	25,039	27,852	26,635	25,503	-4%
Sent to at least one for-profit	6,972	7,365	6,408	5,439	-15%
Total number of FAFSAs filed	82,653	91,044	86,231	84,045	-3%

Note: Numbers will not add up to the total because students can send their FAFSAs to multiple institutions.

CONCLUSION

As a key step in the college-going process, FAFSA filing is a major focus of many initiatives to raise the state's higher education attainment rate. Therefore, a drop in the rate or number of FAFSAs filed by high school seniors should be of concern to higher education advocates. Iowa has experienced both.

While the FAFSA filing rate for public high school seniors in Iowa rose substantially between 2017-18 and 2018-19, it has been relatively flat since. An upward trend early in the 2020-21 cycle was erased by a fall-off in the filing rate after most K-12 and higher education institutions closed physical campuses in March due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The total number of FAFSAs filed by public high school seniors also fell in the 2020-21 cycle, even though the number of enrolled seniors increased slightly from the year before. Future efforts to raise Iowa's filing rate will need to offset these losses from the 2020-21 cycle.

When we examine school characteristics, we find that FAFSA filing rates are lower for urban schools, low-income schools, and schools with a higher percentage of minority students. Efforts to raise the FAFSA filing rate must address these gaps by supporting students and families who might be unfamiliar with college-going steps, including the FAFSA.

One such initiative, GEAR UP Iowa, has shown promise, with GEAR UP schools experiencing considerably larger growth in FAFSA filing rates than their non-GEAR UP counterparts.

COVID-19 has sparked new concerns about college enrollment for fall 2020. An examination of all FAFSAs filed in Iowa for 2020-21 (by high school students, current college students, and adults entering college) lends credence to these concerns. While the number of FAFSA renewals rose in 2020-21 from the year before, a drop in the number of new FAFSAs was enough to drive the overall number of FAFSAs down, possibly indicating a drop in enrollment. The percentage of FAFSA renewals filed by Pell-eligible students is also declining, suggesting that a disproportionate number of low-income students might be choosing not to return to college in 2020-21.

This report examines FAFSA filing through May 31, 2020—after most institutions had moved to online-only instruction for the spring term, but before they had announced their plans for the fall term. Therefore, while the data presented here might reflect some effects of COVID-19, only fall 2020 enrollment numbers will capture the effects on higher education in their entirety.

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APPENDIX

Data for Iowa Versus National Analysis

For the first section of this report, we compare Iowa FAFSA filing rates with national FAFSA filing rates. To complete this analysis, we use publicly available data from the U.S. Department of Education (Federal Student Aid, 2020).

These weekly files contain the number of completed FAFSAs at each public and private high school in the country up to the previous Friday. Starting in February 2020, Iowa College Aid staff downloaded and processed the weekly files. Prior to that, we received data from Nicholas Hillman and Ellie Bruecker from University of Wisconsin as they have been downloading these files for the past four years.

To calculate a national rate, we added the numbers of FAFSA filers in all 50 states and divided by the projected 12th-grade enrollment in public and private schools in the country provided by Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education, 2016). To calculate the Iowa rate, we added the numbers of FAFSA filers in Iowa and divided by the 12th-grade enrollment in public and private high schools provided by Iowa Department of Education (Iowa Department of Education, 2020). We completed this process for each year displayed.

Data for School and Student Characteristics

High school senior enrollment data: Our analysis of FAFSA filing rates within Iowa begins with high school senior enrollment data from the Iowa Department of Education. These files contain all seniors in Iowa who enrolled at a public high school from academic years 2016-17 through 2019-20. The high school senior enrollment files provide demographic characteristics of the students, including the school where they enrolled during senior year. For this analysis, we use the school where the student was enrolled during the fall semester of senior year. Within this dataset, it is possible for a student to be included in multiple academic years if they did not graduate on time. In total, the data contain 148,901 senior records. This file is unique at the student-year level.

FAFSA data: We match the senior enrollment files to our FAFSA records for a given year. For this analysis, we create

a single, combined FAFSA file for each year up to May 31 of that year (FAFSA cycles 2017-18 through 2020-21). We use data elements from the demographic, entry, Institutional Student Information Record (ISIR), student, parent, and vendor table. We obtain student characteristics (e.g., gender, dependency status) from the demographic table. The entry table lists the student's last transaction, which we use to identify their most recent FAFSA. The ISIR table contains information about Pell eligibility, EFC, and rejection codes. The student table contains tax information for the student, such as adjusted gross income. The parent table provides parent tax information. The vendor table provides information on which institutions received the student's FAFSA. All tables contain the student's Social Security Number, transition number, and name ID. Therefore, these tables are matched using Social Security Number, transaction number, and name ID. For this analysis, we use the last transition in our files as of May 31. A student is considered to have a completed FAFSA if they have a calculated EFC.

Matched FAFSA and high school enrollment file: To create a file that indicates whether a high school senior filed a FAFSA in a given academic year, the public high school senior enrollment file is matched to the FAFSA data described above. To complete this match, we begin with the high school senior enrollment file and then match it to the FAFSA files on first name, last name, and date of birth. Before completing the match on first and last name, we standardize the names by capitalizing all letters and removing hyphens and punctuation. We use the soundex phonetic filing system and the Proc SQL sounds-like function while operating a Statistical Analysis System (SAS) module. The sounds-like function is based on an algorithm for identifying words and names that sound alike. The technique has been used for years to track genealogical data and is very useful when fuzzy matching of character values is needed to account for variations in spelling. Because students can be enrolled multiple times as a senior within our high school enrollment file, we individually match each senior class to the corresponding FAFSA cycle (e.g., class of 2016-17 is matched to the 2017-18 FAFSA cycle). Once matched, we exclude any FAFSA records that do not match a high school senior

record. High school seniors who match to the FAFSA file and have an accepted FAFSA record are considered to have filed a FAFSA in that given year. High school seniors who do not

match to the FAFSA file or whose last FAFSA record is a rejected record are considered to have not filed the FAFSA.

Table 7. Number of Observations by File Type and Year

Dataset		FAFSA Cycle			
		2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21
1	All FAFSAs filed—new and renewals, through May 31	111,072	109,070	103,611	101,134
2	High school senior enrollment file	37,694	37,375	36,814	37,018
3	Number of matches between all FAFSAs (row 1) and high school senior enrollment files (row 2)	16,719	19,840	19,139	19,039
4	FAFSA filing rate (row 3 as a percentage of row 2)	44%	53%	52%	51%

Note: The high school senior enrollment file is from the current academic year (e.g., the 2016–17 public high school enrollment file is matched to the 2017-18 FAFSA cycle file).

Community Engagement Data

In addition to FAFSA records and high school enrollment information, we use internal data that track public high school participation in our various community engagement programs. Specifically, we use data that lists individual high schools and their participation status in Course to College, GEAR UP Iowa, and LCANs.

Course to College is a system of supports that helps high schools build a college-going culture. Schools can choose to be Participants, which gives them access to free materials and data, or Partners, which means they agree to host college-related events and share data with Iowa College Aid and are eligible for mini grants and AmeriCorps members.

The 2020-21 FAFSA cycle marks the second year of the statewide Course to College FAFSA Completion Initiative. In collaboration with the Iowa Department of Education and Iowa Area Education Agencies, we provide high school counselors with weekly updates on which students have

completed the FAFSA. All public high schools in the state, registered in Course to College or not, receive this student-level data that allows them to provide targeted one-on-one assistance to students who have not completed a FAFSA. As the state agency overseeing Iowa’s grants and scholarships, we receive FAFSA records for all Iowans who complete the form, and we combine this information with high school senior enrollment files from the Iowa Department of Education. This report uses the same data that are used to generate those weekly updates.

GEAR UP is a federal college access program, administered by Iowa College Aid, serving 12 Iowa school districts where at least half the students qualify for free and reduced price lunch. Current GEAR UP Iowa students graduated from high school in spring 2020. Local College Access Networks, or LCANs, are community-based collaborations, funded and supported by Iowa College Aid, to increase college attainment levels in specific areas of the state.

For this file, there are 357 records for public high schools. The matched FAFSA and public high school senior file is matched to the community engagement data at the school level by the district and school number.

Data for Renewal Analysis

For the FAFSA renewal analysis, we use data from the four most recent FAFSA cycles up to May 31. We combine data

from the various FAFSA tables described above to create one single file of all FAFSA records from the 2017-18 through 2020-21 FAFSA cycles. In total, there are 454,933 records.

We exclude records after May 31 (n=29,995), graduate students (n=65,713), records with uncalculated EFCs (n=11,410), and rejected ISIRs (n=3,842). Then we flag renewal FAFSAs using Application Source Site Codes 2R, 3R, 7R, and 8R.



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