

NASFAA's "Off the Cuff" Podcast – Episode 304 Transcript

OTC Inside the Beltway: Debriefing on Batch Corrections

Allie Arcese:

Hi everyone. Welcome to another special episode of "Off the Cuff." I'm Allie Arcese with our communications team.

Beth Maglione:

Beth Maglione, interim president and CEO of NASFAA.

Karen McCarthy:

I'm Karen McCarthy from NASFAA's Policy Team.

Kristi Jovell:

Hi, Kristi Jovell, Assistant Vice President of Student Financial Services and Enrollment at Middlebury and your national chair.

Heidi Carl:

Hi everybody, it's Heidi Carl from Purdue University, assistant Vice Provost and executive director of Financial Aid, your chair-elect.

Allie Arcese:

Welcome everyone, and thanks for joining us, Kristi and Heidi, we're happy to have you. It was good timing that you guys are in D.C. and in the NASFAA office to join us for this coinciding with some big news that we got this week. So we have a lot to discuss today, so we'll kind of get right into it. I think you would probably be living under a rock if you didn't hear the news that was announced this week from the Department of Education that batch institutional corrections will not be happening for the 24-25 FAFSA cycle. Karen, can you run through exactly what was announced, what everyone needs to know from this news? There was a lot that was dropped, but we're going to focus today on just the batch corrections portion.

Karen McCarthy:

Yeah, thanks, Allie. As you mentioned, there were several EAs that were dropped kind of all at the same time in the same day. So definitely look at all of them, specifically on the batch correction one because I feel like that one had the biggest news in there. And as you mentioned, they will not be enabling batch corrections to FAFSA for the 24-25 year at all, at any time. The announcement did say that they are deferring to 25-26, so I have received that question. Are they going to do it next year? And the announcement does say deferring. So the idea is that they will have it available for 25-26. But I feel like when the news dropped that all of our members immediately understood the impact of this. But if you are not in a financial aid office, you perhaps did not. Again, this kind of gets back to when ISIRs were delayed and the members of the press and people outside of our direct sphere were like, what's an ISIR? What does this mean? I don't know what this means.

And similar with batch corrections, people are asking outside of our sphere, what's a batch correction and what does this mean? What are the implications of this? And so I don't know if perhaps Heidi or

Kristi, if you could explain a little bit more about the difference between doing submitting FAFSA corrections through the batch process versus through the FAFSA partner portal process, which is for 24-25, the only way that you'll be able to do it. Because I feel like some people don't quite understand the difference. To them, it's a correction. You can still submit. It's not like you can't submit a correction. So what is the difference in the process and the workload? Imagine that you're speaking to somebody who does not know financial aid at all. So if you could explain that in a high level, I feel like that would be really helpful.

Kristi Jovell:

Sure, we can.

Heidi Carl:

Yes, definitely.

Kristi Jovell:

I know. Maybe I'll start and Heidi will help me where I trip up, right?

Heidi Carl:

Yeah.

Kristi Jovell:

For me, I think the difference, rather you are a large school or a smaller size school, the idea that when a student... We have the FAFSA data on a student and we need to make some changes. Pretty much all schools have a student information system and they're going in and they're making the corrections right there. They're changing a field, they're changing the household size or they're checking the professional judgment flag and then that information, the student information system will send it out all in one lump to the Department of Education, and then we get the corrections back altogether. So there's a lot of efficiency there.

It's a known system to schools. You know where to find that field, you know what you're correcting, what you're looking for. Versus when schools now are doing an individual correction. You are taking the information that you've already done in your student information system, in your financial aid management system, you're going out to something new, a whole new portal that quite honestly is a little bit glitchy at times. You're finding those fields, you're making those corrections, you're hoping that you've got all the fields and that the new SAI is the one that you thought it was going to be from your financial aid management system and you are hitting submit, one by one, you're doing that. And if Middlebury is smaller, we might be doing 100 corrections. Heidi, how many corrections have you done already?

Heidi Carl:

Thousands.

Kristi Jovell:

Thousands. So it's the difference between I'm going to do all my work in my system and I'm going to send out a batch versus, okay, I'm going to do this one by one. And so that, I mean... Would you add anything there, Heidi?

Heidi Carl:

I think the only thing I would say is now we have to do double the work because with batch corrections, we do the work one time. As Kristi said in our student information system, you do 10 students a day or 100 students a day and you batch them up and send them in and then they come back. Now we have to do it in our system and we have to go into the partner portal and enter it. And Kristi mentioned you have to make sure that the SAIs calculate accurately, one slip of the finger, one number different, and you have to go back through. It's very cumbersome. It's very labor-intensive for us to be able to go in and enter field by field. And it isn't a system that we had until just a month ago. So we didn't get a preview or testing time or time to really get a look at it to be well versed and prepared. So it definitely takes some extra time to get those all put in.

Kristi Jovell:

And a point that's particularly lovely is it's right before the start of this fall semester. So instead of getting batch corrections that schools have been expecting, instead we get the notification there will be no, and therefore make a plan for doing these individual corrections that many schools have been waiting on and not doing waiting on for batch. And now in the busiest time, you're needing to go and start that process. So it felt very overwhelming for many financial aid administrators.

Allie Arcese:

Yeah, that's sort of the other side of it is there are schools that had not started doing their corrections because they were told that the batch correction functionality would become available, and now they're sort of caught off guard and weeks behind even more so than they already were.

Karen McCarthy:

Yeah. And the other piece of that is that, yeah, there were a lot of schools that were waiting for batch corrections and had been making all their changes. They're all being stored in their system. And when the batch corrections comes up, we're going to send all these off and we'll be done with those. But Heidi, you mentioned that the FAFSA partner portal is a new system this year. We did in the past have a way to do individual one by one corrections. It wasn't through the FAFSA partner portal because this is all brand new. But there are some financial aid administrators who didn't use that. They never learned how to do the FAFSA partner portal. They don't really do these one-off corrections because they send their batches. They have that all programmed through their system to go pretty frequently over to the Department of Ed.

So not only are some financial aid administrators really behind the eight-ball in terms of time, they're also really behind the eight-ball in terms of the learning curve. Not only do they have to do all of these, but they don't know how to do it because they never had to know how to do it in the past. So now there's a little bit of... I wouldn't say a little bit, a lot of anxiety from those folks particularly like, oh my gosh, how do I even do this? I don't even know how to send these corrections through the FAFSA partner portal.

Allie Arcese:

So this isn't a year when they've already had to learn a lot of other new things.

Karen McCarthy:

I know. I know. And we can talk some more about the reaction to that and the implications and all of that, but to make up supposedly for the extra burden that you'll all have because you will not have these batch corrections. In the same announcement, the department of Ed did offer some flexibilities, and basically what they did was extend flexibilities that they had offered earlier on in the season. So there was one that they were suspending routine program reviews, so they extended that out a little bit farther through September, I believe it was. There was an extension of a deadline if your school is up for recertification. Typically, you would've had to have all of your materials in 90 days before your recertification date. And they're now waiving that 90 days and that will go a little bit farther than what they had originally said.

And they are also extending the disbursement reporting deadline, which really in this case, they basically had to do because they had previously extended the requirements for you to submit disbursement records because the corrections were not available. And then they said, well, you will be required to send in your reporting records 30 days after batch corrections are available. So now we won't have batch corrections. So they kind of had to tackle that one. And so what they said is that you will be required to send in your reporting records by November 30th or 15 days after you make your disbursement, whichever is later. I mean, that was kind of a required extension on their part. I am kind of interested... If this is okay, Allie, I'm kind of interested in Kristi and Heidi, your reactions to those offered flexibilities, if you feel like that makes you feel any better.

Heidi Carl:

Well, we forgot to bring our pompoms and noisemakers here to be like woohoo, right? I think that's kind of where I am. But Kristi, what about you?

Kristi Jovell:

I think it fell flat for many people, right? If you wanted to offer some real concessions, there were others that could have helped our community, that could have helped students. I think, yeah, there would be some emojis that I could use to explain this, but maybe they would've been the most professional ones.

Allie Arcese:

Yeah, so it's like a thanks question mark.

Kristi Jovell:

Yeah, exactly.

Allie Arcese:

We'll get to some of those other concessions that could have been made in a little bit. But I wanted to touch back on something that you brought up, Karen, about the disbursement reporting deadline that sort of, I think feeds in a little bit to how we at NASFAA were thinking about how to respond to this. Like you mentioned also if you don't know financial aid or even if you do, but you've never worked in an aid office, how do you understand why batch corrections are important? I pretty quickly got questions from reporters reaching out, this seems like a big deal, but what does this mean? Is this bad? And I responded and said, it is really bad.

Most people don't understand how bad it is. So we were spending some time thinking about how do we explain why batch corrections are important and what the ripple effect is for students. And I think in some cases, it is... I think it's fair to say, and correct me if I'm wrong here. It is fair to say that

disbursements will be late for some students, many students, maybe. I want to turn it over to Beth to talk a little bit more about our response and just the pickup that we've seen in the news over the last couple of days.

Beth Maglione:

Yeah, thanks, Allie. Well, when we got a very short heads up that this was about to land, it was instantly clear that this would be another gut punch to our membership. And I think there is a nuanced message around this in that all the things we just talked about and explained are known to everybody in the financial aid office, but they're not well known to, certainly to members of the public and even other people on campus, right? Other groups on campus. So we knew that we had sort of a communications challenge in front of us trying to help policymakers and news outlets understand why this is potentially really, really bad for students. Because we often find ourselves in these sort of nuanced, explanatory positions. So yeah, we sort of circled the wagons and decided to get a statement out the door. And actually the pickup was really good.

So I think we were in a variety of outlets, including The Chronicle and IHE where we are frequently mentioned. We were in Newsweek, NBC News, The Washington Post. And I think what people heard was the student piece of the message, which something has to give. We heard that loud and clear from our membership. Would any NASFAA member on earth ever voluntarily delay a disbursement to a student who needed it? The answer is obviously no. But how is this going to play out with all of the other pressures that are on the financial aid office right now? So I think that's sort of how we wanted to explain it.

We've even heard from members, right? That if I had to not do something, it would be reporting. It wouldn't be not handing dollars to a student who needed them. We're a bunch of rule followers. I do know this about NASA members, so the problem is they're going to all kill themselves trying to get it all done. But yeah, I mean that's what we were trying to convey. And I think it landed, but even to our... Karen, you can weigh in on this, but even to our community members at other organizations, it was like, why is this a big deal? I'm hoping that that message has landed both with the public and very most especially with institutional leadership.

Karen McCarthy:

Yeah, similar to Allie, how you said, I was thinking that, Allie, when you were saying that the reporters were calling you and say, well, what is this? It seems big, but I don't really know what it is. When the Department of Ed was briefing various higher ed associations about this announcement. They presented it very cut and dry, what was in the announcement only. And a lot of people who represent other parts of the institution are kind of staring blankly. Yeah.

Beth Maglione:

They're like okay.

Karen McCarthy:

Yeah. Okay, I don't really know what I just heard here. So then I had jumped in and said, "Just so everybody knows, this will impact student disbursements for the fall at many institutions." And then everybody's ears kind of perked up, wait, wait, wait, wait. What do you mean? Who gets these corrections? How many are there? And what do you mean disbursements? And that was the approach that we took was the impact on students here. Because it's not totally obvious if you just read the announcement for a lot of people.

Allie Arcese:

And it's not just like a delayed disbursement to any student is awful, but the students... I think the idea of corrections on FAFSAs is also a pretty foreign concept to a lot of people. And the students who often need corrections are those in dire financial circumstances. Like someone lost a job or something else-

Karen McCarthy:

Dependency, override, all of those things. Yes.

Allie Arcese:

So it's not just students in general. It's already students who are struggling who are going to be impacted.

Heidi Carl:

Yeah, I think Allie, that's a really important point because I think with the Department of Ed, they're kind of trying to balance the news cycle, right? By saying, well, we've decreased verification, so this shouldn't be as big of a deal. But what you just talked about, and Karen mentioned those dependency overrides, those special circumstances like death of a parent or loss of income, those are our most vulnerable populations and we do still need to correct their FAFSAs. I think the other important thing to mention is just the timing of everything. Beth talked about we're rule followers in the financial aid profession.

We're also planners and organizers. That's what makes us so good at the jobs that we do across the country, is being able to look ahead and plan for what we need to do. And I think that's probably the double part about this that's even so much harder is the timing of this from the department. Some schools are starting two and three weeks, or maybe they were a summer, is a header school.

We are at Purdue and I know many colleagues across the country that are, and so we had to hit the ground running in making those corrections when it opened, the partner portal opened at the beginning of July. I'm super thankful for the amazing team that I work with because they have already been hard at work because we knew we had to get through the summer people that were being held up because disbursements, talk about disbursements being held. Some of those students started classes back in May, so they were already delayed. And now to have to do that for fall, but for a lot of us fall is our main start.

And so we have a lot of corrections to get done in very little time. And the other thing, Karen, you mentioned about some schools had already made the corrections and their student information systems and just waiting to be able to batch them. Part of this is the fiasco of trying to figure out where you are, what you have to do with who, hoping you don't miss anybody, and trying to keep everything organized because again, we thought those batch corrections were coming up, right? And so we were down one path and now we have to pivot and go a different way and we can do it. I'm confident we'll get it done because we are committed to students. But it sure is a lot in this year when we've already been through quite a bit.

Kristi Jovell:

Yeah, Heidi, that's well said. And I know earlier in the week when the NASFAA board met, you shared what you've done so far on your campus at Purdue. And I think that might be helpful for other members because like you said, you're partway through, but you didn't get there with concessions. And maybe it might be helpful to those who are just starting to think about this, if you wouldn't mind sharing.

Heidi Carl:

Yeah. And I think Kristi, one of the things for me obviously is that we are a larger team, so we've been able to continually meet as a team and repurpose resources. So maybe we didn't process additional loans for students so we could get corrections done for all students, or maybe we were holding off on making budget appeal adjustments. So again, we could just get the basic corrections done. And so the team has consistently learned and relearned, I'm so proud of the effort that they've given, and I know we'll all have to do that because we kind of joke in my office, they don't let me too close to touching student records, and that's okay. Because we all have jobs to do, but I even had them set me up in the partner portal and just yesterday I logged in and I was working with somebody. Now walk me through what I need to do because when I get back from this meeting here with NASFAA, I'm hoping to jump in and help because it is going to take all of us to do that.

So I'm happy to tell you I logged in there and I can make corrections. So we'll see. Maybe they'll let me help. I don't know. But y'all help somewhere. I'll read special circumstances, dependency appeals, whatever. And I think that's part of it. We've had to just kind of come together. But I know if you're somebody listening and you're like, well, there's only three of us in our shop or there's only four of us, it probably does look like a mountain that it's going to be hard to get over, but lean on your peers. Beth talked about the entire campus doesn't really understand. I think hopefully you can convey that message that it's about getting the money out to students and then they'll jump in and help, for sure.

Allie Arcese:

That's an important distinction. And I think another comparison that came to mind was when we talked about delays earlier on in this process when ISIR delivery was delayed, it was about financial aid offers being delayed, money in the abstract. This is literal money that's being delayed. And that's the point that we need to drive home to help others on campus really grasp what's at stake. I mean, I think there's so much to touch on when you say that this is a headache for schools and for students. I don't think it really even comes close to the reality.

Kristi Jovell:

Yeah. Thanks, Allie. And one thing I would add to what Heidi said about how it's feeling for many schools, many of you know, I really like Michelle Obama's book, *The Light We Carry: Overcoming in Uncertain Times*, and she wrote it about the pandemic. But boy, I feel like as financial aid administrators, we might be living in those uncertain times a little bit. And one of the tools that she talks about in her toolkit is starting small. So like Heidi said, even though her office is larger, they had to sit and think about, okay, how do we rethink and what's the first small thing that we need to do to get through this, right?

So I think for those offices that are smaller, starting to think about, okay, what's the first step? Are there some areas that we can look to stop doing one thing for a minute to do something? Are there other areas, other employees at the institution that we might be able to have us help in some capacity? I know FAFSA partner portal is pretty secure, but I just think it's about staking that first small step now that we have this new information.

Allie Arcese:

Yeah, it's a lot. So I mean, any other advice that you might have for your fellow financial aid professionals?

Heidi Carl:

Well, I think one of the things that I would say, Allie, is we are dedicated to the students that we serve. And so I can't remember if it was Beth or Karen who said, we'll get it done. We'll go to the ends of the earth to make it happen. And I hope that your school recognizes that about you. That's what makes us very unique. But we do know that our profession was already hurting with the number of people doing the work that we do. So I know that's one thing as a board. We plan to talk about this year, and there was a task force this past year under Helen's board. I had the honor of chairing that group, and there was a wonderful group of members who came up with a lot of suggestions.

And hopefully we'll see some of those things become action items this next year to really bolster the belief in the faith in the work that we do. I know sometimes it's hard to keep that, but I do love what Kristi said about starting small and remembering that we're all in this together. I think our resources too, all the great NASFAA, the Slack channels and the communities that we have are wonderful ways to reach out. And if you're not sure how to do something, ask a friend, phone a friend as they say and be able to share, now is the time to come together and support each other, for sure.

Kristi Jovell:

One of the things that-

Beth Maglione:

Heidi, I saw in the communities, something just to that effect, which was several people who were saying, I've been in this profession for six months, I've been in this profession for eight months. What on earth must it feel like to an individual who's just coming into this? I mean, we know there are ups and downs in financial aid. We also know that over the years there's been enough ups, enough rewarding pieces to this profession, to this career to keep a lot of great people in it. What do you think we could say to somebody who's six months in and going, what am I doing? What have I done with my life? I feel like right now that might be a valid question.

Kristi Jovell:

I think the most important thing is just using the resources around you, right? That NASFAA puts out, getting involved, whether it's the Slack communities, your state associations, your regional associations, staying connected. As we've said, we're all in this together. And one of, for me, the bright spots, if we can call any of this week's announcements a bright spot, I really thought Beth and NASFAA team, the response, the quickness, you all have engaged so quickly at every turn. When we talk about being fatigued as financial aid administrators, I know that could be for the NASFAA leadership team and staff too, but boy, if there's anything that supports us, it's all of you. Karen, all of your good work and connections and relationships that you've built. And Beth, your letter was really spot on. I felt like you understand us as financial aid administrators. You accurately conveyed our tone and frustration with ED and just recognizing that this is a fail.

We were waiting on a product, the batch corrections, a feature that was promised to us mid-August, right? Beginning to mid-August, and in two days before, we're told you're not going to get it at all, right? So your letter did such a great job of conveying the frustration that's felt by many. So thank you to all of you. We feel supported as a financial aid community. I'm really grateful that the board is engaged. We convened the board really quickly. We will continue to keep FAFSA 24-25, but also 25-26 top of mind. And I feel like financial aid administrators are so well represented by NASFAA and also the board this year. That makes me really proud and keeps me motivated as I'm thinking of how we can continue to be working to get disbursements to students and navigate this year.

Beth Maglione:

Well said, Kristi. And also your check is in the mail, so thanks for that.

Kristi Jovell:

Not needed. I'm here in the NASFAA offices with good friends and my Starbucks coffee, so you all know that's all that's needed.

Beth Maglione:

Yeah. Yeah, that's a joke. They're unpaid volunteers. We don't even buy... She had to buy that Starbucks, actually.

Kristi Jovell:

That is, that's true. Happily.

Allie Arcese:

Can we get Starbucks to sponsor our podcast?

Kristi Jovell:

There you go. Maybe we could.

Allie Arcese:

That'd be the dream, right?

Kristi Jovell:

Especially this chair. We need to work on that for her. My tagline would be fueled by caffeine, preferably Starbucks. So if you're listening, I got a lot of stars, Starbucks.

Allie Arcese:

I think that they are probably avid "Off the Cuff" listeners.

Heidi Carl:

I'm sure.

Allie Arcese:

That's just my guess.

So obviously this news prompted some very strong feelings from our community. We pay attention to what you all are saying in Slack, on social media in response to our articles, in response to our posts on social media. We want to be well-informed about what everyone is feeling and thinking. And I think we're all on the same page that this news was really unacceptable and concessions need to be made. And on that note, we'll ask Karen to kind of sum up some of the things that NASFAA has been doing over the last few months and where we're headed in light of this news and how members can get involved.

Karen McCarthy:

Yeah, I know that we talked a little bit about our statement, our press release after this announcement was made and about what terrible news it was, the implications on disbursements, the potential impacts on millions of students. And if you've made it all the way to the bottom of the letter, we kind of wrapped up that statement by saying that time is short, the school year is starting. Students need their disbursements. We need the Department of Ed to grant more flexibilities and concessions to the aid community so that we can all make the disbursements, get caught up, look forward to 25-26, and so on. And in that statement, it linked to our earlier asks, and I went back to see when was the first time we started asking for flexibilities?

Kristi Jovell:

It was December.

Karen McCarthy:

Yes, it was December of 2023. Yeah, it was a long time ago. And that was back when ISIRs were first going to be delayed. And we sent our first letter up saying, "Hey, here are some things that you could do to help us out since we will have such a shortened awarding cycle." I know this, doesn't this feel like years ago now, it really does. And one of the biggest one that we have heard over and over again is this upcoming gainful employment financial value transparency reporting deadline. That's October 1st. Since we first started advocating for this delay back in last December, we were somewhat successful in that we were able to get the deadline delayed from July to October. And I know that when the Department of Ed in April announced that it would be delayed until October, again, it was a little bit like that's it? Just October? So we really now feel the need to have a further extension.

One of the things that we were talking about here internally is that back in April when they extended three months, I mean we were where we were then with all of the FAFSA delays and all of that. And now it's kind of gotten progressively worse in terms of the delays. So the three-month deadline is no longer sufficient. I mean, it never was to a lot of people, but even some folks along the way. Yeah, with all the stuff that has really gone down over the summer, we really need much longer than October 1st. And so we have officially in many different places. I was kind of summarizing where have we asked for this exactly?

Since December, we have sent up five or signed on to five different official publications, either through public comments, through signing on to community letters. Those were most often coordinated by ACE who represents campus presidents or separate letters that we just sent up on our own to the department and/or to Congress. Our most recent letter that we sent was on June 14th. So even before this announcement, we were still kind of working the advocacy on getting a further extension here.

I think the key things to know about this deadline, in this October 1 deadline is that it is at the discretion of the secretary. There's no statutory requirement. It's not even in the GE regulations when this reporting is due. So theoretically, the Department of Education could choose to delay the deadline again, and they could do that just via an electronic announcement like they did earlier in April. And what we have seen, and the lack of response from the Department of Ed is that they are probably not eager to extend it further. And so we have, in addition to continuing to talk with the Department of Ed about it, we have also turned our attention towards Congress. Because Congress could do several different things to try to force the department's hand here. I would say that the potential for legislation is probably very low from Congress just because of the overall political environment.

What would be the legislative vehicle? How would anything actually get passed in the time span that we're working under? Which is another thing, is that we can't wait six months for legislation. The deadline is coming up. We need something fast. And we all know Congress doesn't really move all that

fast. But the other thing that Congress could do would be kind of short of legislation. They could put some pressure on the Department of Ed and help us in that way. So we're kind of working both of those avenues now to try to see if we can get that deadline extended. And I know that from our community's perspective, this is somewhat of a no-brainer. Of course, of course, we can't do that. We cannot meet that October 1 deadline. Why can't they just extend it? And I think my response would be, I mean, some of this is just... And I think there is frustration at the lack of an immediate response from the department.

Why wasn't this in the electronic announcement as one of the flexibilities? And I totally admit, when I saw flexibilities, I was like, oh, is GE reporting in here? And was disappointed along with all of you that it was not. Some of this is particularly with Hill offices, there's a little bit of an education that we're doing with, again, kind of getting back to batch corrections and what does that mean and how bad is that? What are the implications and what does that have to do with GE reporting? So I like having those conversations because there are definitely some folks out there who think, well, isn't GE reporting completely handled by institutional research? Every school has someone to do that for them, don't they? So all of that education and those conversations do take some time. So that's not an immediate thing.

The other thing that's going on, I mentioned just the political atmosphere and the fact that when you think of the timing of all of this and what Ed originally announced for their gainful employment timeline, that we would do the institutions... I say we, I mean institutions, because I'm one of you. Institutions would do their reporting by October 1st, and everybody had in their mind that the metrics and the potential removal of any program's eligibility wouldn't happen for several years until 2026. So in that interim period, the Department of Ed creates its website, runs all of the metrics and does all of that work. But if you look back to when they released their delay to October and the timeline that is in that announcement, they said in that timeline that they plan to publish some of the information that you all are submitting to them in early 2025.

So they're not looking down towards 2026. They had this whole plan that this is going to happen in the winter. And the other... Getting back to the political environment, we also have an election coming up. We know that we will definitely have a turnover in the administration no matter what. Even if it stays, we continue to have a Democratic president. We do not know a theoretical president Harris, what her priorities might be or not be.

So I would imagine that the Department of Ed has that in mind in terms of they... We know that GE is a high priority for this administration and they really want to see something happen. And I would imagine that they're feeling under the gun with the election coming up. And that may have something to do with this kind of a stuck situation where we're telling them what we need and they're in this situation where... And I do honestly believe that we have supporters within the Department of Ed. And they know this is really a rotten place that schools are in right now, but they're not the people who are actually calling the shots there within the administration.

So all of that is just to kind of give you a little bit more of the other things that are going on. The other conversations, because I have heard from several people, this is so easy for them, they can establish more goodwill with our community, just change the deadline. They don't have to change any regulation. It's just an EA. Why can't they do it? And so that's a little bit of the other things that are going on in the environment. And we are continuing to reach out to our sister organizations. Again, I mentioned some of this is connecting the dots for them as to why you can't do all of this, and we need their support to help move this forward. I briefly wanted to mention that right after the Milwaukee conference, we pushed out a call to action to engage all of you to help us with Congress and letting your congressional members know that this is a problem.

And we really do need an extended deadline here. And that was before this recent announcement. So it is not too late in any way for you to reach out to your congressional offices. We do plan as part of that call to action we gave you a template of a letter that kind of explains the background and why you need that extension. We are right now adding some new text in there in light of the recent developments, which really just bolster your argument. So it doesn't... I mean, you can send your own letter, you can use the previous template letter. You can wait till next week when we push out the new one. That's really up to you, but the opportunity is not lost. So we really do encourage those of you who haven't engaged in that way to do that outreach with your Hill offices.

Allie Arcese:

Yeah. Thanks, Karen. Anything else? Where do we go from here? What's next? I'm a little afraid to ask what's next, but...

Heidi Carl:

What's next is we get our students to school this fall, Allie, and we do everything that we have to do to make it happen. And I'm going to roll back real quick to Beth's question earlier, that person who's been in the field for 8, 9, 12 months, remember that you have colleagues all across the country that are just a phone call or an email away, like Kristi and I. Reach out, we're there for you. If it's a bad day, we can cheer you up. We can give you that light like Kristi talks about. So remember that we're all in this together. And don't forget to use your resources of the people. Even if you don't know somebody, that's what's wonderful about NASFAA. They connect us. So use those connections to help yourself and help your students.

Kristi Jovell:

Well said, Heidi.

Heidi Carl:

Yeah, thank you.

Allie Arcese:

Thanks, Heidi. So to bring things totally full circle, let's just spend a couple minutes before we wrap up talking about 25-26 FAFSA. Because in this batch corrections announcement, part of what the department was saying was they were choosing to not launch the batch corrections functionality so that they could fully direct resources to launching the 25-26 FAFSA. Can you fill us in a little bit, Karen, on what all is there? What do we know so far and what would we like to see happen in the coming weeks?

Karen McCarthy:

Yeah. We recently sent a letter up to Secretary Cardona around his previous commitment, sort of to an October 1st rollout of the FAFSA to basically let him know that based on the feedback that... We had been hearing from many of our members, that there was kind of a reprioritization, I would say, in that NASFAA members have historically... We have consistently been on record since we moved to prior year in 2016, that we want October 1st to be the date for the FAFSA rollout every year. And we actually have a reauthorization recommendation that we get that into the HEA. However, given everything that is going on and the experience that everybody went through last year with 24-25, we had been hearing consistently from our members that their higher priority this year is that the FAFSA rolls out end to end in terms of functionality and that it works for all populations of students applicants when it rolls out.

So we don't have the soft launch, we don't have the kind of piece by piece rollout with the processing will happen later and schools will get ISIRs later, and all of that. That that was really how our membership wanted to see the 25-26 FAFSA rollout. And in order to get that, we were willing to seed a little bit of time in that the October one day is not the highest priority. If we got all of those other things, then we would be okay with a little bit of a later rollout. And in our letter, we said, as long as it's by December 1st ish, if all of those things kind of fall into place and we get the complete FAFSA by December 1st, we will be okay. And we have been saying... Even last year, we had been clamoring for, we need to know the timeline, the rollout timeline well in advance, and we reiterated all of those wishes.

I guess I would call this our wish list for the 25-26 FAFSA. And we've had several conversations with Ed staff, and I do feel like... And I know Beth, you've been in all of these conversations as well. I feel confident that our wishes have been heard and acknowledged, and in some cases they were presented. Our needs were kind of given to us by Ed staff in that they said, "We really know that you need a timeline."

And I was like, "Oh, gosh, I guess I don't even need to tell you all of that. You already know that." So I am feeling hopeful in terms of the 25-26 FAFSA that our needs have been communicated well and that we may have... I'm hopeful, fingers crossed, that it will be a better rollout for 25-26. How are you feeling about-

Beth Maglione:

Yeah. Well, to Heidi's point about all of you planners out there, I think that that would be so critical as if in the relatively near future we get some kind of detailed timeline about what to expect for this forthcoming year. That was markedly missing from the 24-25 rollout. In fact, we weren't learning about delays until the day the things were supposed to roll out. That just can't happen again. We're trying to convey that, and I think that folks have heard this deep desire on behalf of NASFAA and our members to just tell us what's up.

Allie Arcese:

Better to know than to be left in the dark until the last minute.

Karen McCarthy:

Yeah, right.

Allie Arcese:

Well, we will be on the lookout for any news. And of course, as soon as anything happens, alert the masses with any updates. Thank you everyone for joining us for another episode of "Off the Cuff." As a reminder, just a quick reminder, we are on a little bit of a summer break. Of course, this was an exception. This was sort of an emergency special episode. So of course, should the need arise, we will be back to chat with you all. But in the meantime, send us your thoughts, your comments, your suggestions. Check out the show notes for a link to our GE/FVT advocacy call to action resources, and we will talk to you next time.