Greetings, VASFAA!

What a way to start a new year! Though the Department of Education is not directly impacted, ED processes, our students and schools certainly are! As I am sure you all discovered some days ago, database matches are not functioning, and students cannot get tax transcripts. Though the transcript site says something about "unavailable due to system maintenance", the unavailability seemed to parallel the shutdown.

I have been in touch with NASFAA. They are working diligently to get the promised guidance from the Department on the use of tax returns and signed statements instead of letters of non-filing. As of this morning, the word was that guidance would be "coming soon". Considering that this was the same message we received at FSA over a month ago, I'm not about to define "soon". At this point, I have heard no further discussion about the long-awaited 2019-2020 Pell tables either.

In the interim, I know we are all doing our best to assist students! Schools are making decisions based on what seems to be the best approach for them. Some may have to postpone deadlines. Some are collecting signed tax returns and statements of non-filing, in hopes that the guidance will truly come soon. Others are putting protection holds on for current financial aid students caught in the web who are trying to start spring term—without resources.

Above all, communication is key! I just wish we had a definitive answer to share with you and with students! Tax returns and non-filing statements will help with verification but will not resolve database match issues. With no apparent progress toward ending the shutdown, the light at the end of the tunnel is pretty dim.

For NASFAA members, "Today's News" will provide continuous updates. The Department should be issuing notices as well. If anyone doesn't have access to updated information, please let me know or reach out to another colleague. If you have terrific ideas for addressing the issues, please share! We are truly in this together.

Joan Zanders

VASFAA President