

ACTS and IPEDS: Navigating the Federal Push for Admissions Transparency and the Looming Deadline for Data Submission

March 2, 2026

The federal government, in response to a [presidential memoranda, "Ensuring Transparency in Higher Education Admissions,"](#) and a [corresponding directive from Education Secretary Linda McMahon,](#) dated August 7, 2025, has added a new [IPEDS \(Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System\) reporting requirement,](#) the Admissions and Consumer Transparency Supplement (ACTS). This data must also be reported to the new [ACTS Aggregator Tool,](#) which will provide a college admission comparison interface for families.

Colleges must submit their ACTS data by March 18, 2026.

ACTS comes from a federal push to make college admissions more transparent. The US Department of Education wants more detailed information to better monitor admissions and financial aid decisions, especially regarding fairness and compliance with its interpretation of federal civil rights laws.

Which schools does this apply to?

The new reporting requirements apply to all four-year colleges and universities, including those that offer only graduate programs. A reporting exception applies to non-degree and two-year institutions and otherwise required institutions that accept 100% of applicants and offer no non-need-based aid.

An exemption may also apply to reporting for a specific year, within a dataset, if the open-entry and need-based aid qualifiers are met for that year.

Summary of the reporting qualifiers and exemptions:

Institution type	Applies	Does not apply
Four-year institution (public, nonprofit, for-profit) with or without graduate programs	X	
Graduate institution	X	
Otherwise qualifying four-year or graduate institution that is both open entry and offers no non-need-based aid		X
Community college without a four-year degree		X
Two-year and non-degree institution (public, nonprofit, for-profit)		X

What must be reported?

These institutions must submit [six years of detailed student-level admissions data,](#) covering 2019 – 2020 through 2025 – 2026.

Under ACTS, schools must report much more detailed admissions information than before. This includes data on students' race, ethnicity and sex, as well as GPAs, test scores, family income, Pell Grant eligibility and whether the student is the first in their family to attend college. Schools must also report admissions decisions, waitlist activity, financial aid awards (federal and institutional) and even first-year cumulative GPAs for enrolled students. Graduate program reporting must also include GRE, MCAT and LSAT test scores.

What are next steps?

We encourage you to check with your institutional research office and IPEDS Keyholders to ensure they are aware of this requirement if you believe it applies to your institution.

Since the rollout of this requirement has not been widely publicized, there is growing concern that many institutions remain unaware of it, with less than 30 days until the reporting deadline. This is not an easy lift, because the required data goes back six years and likely will require institutions to pull data from different systems quickly.

If this applies to your institution, leaders need to quickly coordinate teams across admissions, institutional research, the registrar, IT and financial aid to gather and verify the reportable information.

Final thoughts

ACTS greatly increases what colleges must report about admissions and student outcomes in short order. It requires fast action, careful planning and strong data management to meet federal expectations and avoid compliance risks. Because ACTS data may be used in reviews of institutional fairness and compliance and may be subject to public scrutiny, we advise schools to be especially careful to ensure data is complete, accurate and clearly documented.

We do not anticipate a reporting extension since this is a highly desired dataset.

Please reach out to our team if we can be of assistance.

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