



# KHEAA Advisor

Summer 2025: Simplifying the Process



## Financial Aid Office Burnout: Managing Peak Seasons and Prioritizing Self-Care

With the FAFSA simplification rollout, changing federal regulations, and increased student service demands, financial aid professionals across the country - and especially in Kentucky - are feeling the pressure more than ever. Between award processing, compliance, verification, and nonstop questions from students and parents, burnout isn't just a buzzword - it's a serious workplace reality.

As we move through another peak season, now is the time to address burnout head-on, both individually and as teams. Below are practical strategies for managing stress, improving workflow, and prioritizing well-being in your financial aid office.

### Recognizing the Signs of Burnout

Before it can be addressed, burnout needs to be identified. Common signs include:

- Emotional exhaustion or detachment from work
- Feeling overwhelmed, cynical, or unmotivated
- Increased mistakes or difficulty concentrating
- Physical symptoms like headaches, fatigue, or sleep disruption

Left unchecked, burnout can lead to decreased performance, absenteeism, and even turnover—adding more pressure to already understaffed offices.

### Institutional Strategies to Ease the Load

#### 1. Cross-Train for Flexibility and Resilience

Encourage cross-training within your office so team members can step in when others are overwhelmed or out. This reduces bottlenecks and distributes stress more evenly.

#### 2. Automate What You Can

Explore tools like automated email responders, or scheduling apps that reduce back-and-forth communication. Even small automations can free up hours during peak times.

#### 3. Set Reasonable Communication Expectations

Consider setting designated "quiet hours" for processing or encouraging staff to limit checking emails to set times. This protects deep work time and helps manage the feeling of constant urgency.

#### 4. Acknowledge the Workload Publicly

Encourage institutional leadership to recognize the unique challenges financial aid offices face. Public appreciation or flexibility in other areas (such as remote work options or flex time) can go a long way.

### Self-Care Tips for Financial Aid Professionals

#### 1. Take Breaks - Really

Even five minutes away from your desk can help reset your focus. Step outside. Breathe deeply. Stretch. Your mind and body need it.

#### 2. Watch the "Invisible" Overtime

Many staff members log extra hours without formally recording them. This contributes to long-term fatigue. Track your time, and speak up if responsibilities are becoming unsustainable.

#### 3. Set Professional Boundaries

It's okay to say "no" or "not yet." Not every task is urgent, even in peak season. Prioritize by deadline, importance, and impact—and empower your team to do the same.

#### 4. Use Your Support System

Whether it's your supervisor, coworkers, or professional networks like KASFAA or NASFAA, don't hesitate to lean on your community. Chances are, others are feeling the same way—and solutions are often shared informally in these spaces.

### Final Thought: Take Care of the Team, Not Just the Task List

Burnout doesn't have a quick fix, but intentional action by both individuals and institutions can make a meaningful difference. Financial aid offices are the unsung heroes of student success - often working behind the scenes to make college dreams possible.

As you support your students, don't forget to support each other - and yourself.

## Kentucky Legislative Update

During the 2025 Regular Session of the Kentucky General Assembly, KHEAA worked closely with legislators on House Bill 193 and House Bill 263. The passage of these bills allows KHEAA to streamline administration of key student aid programs as we continue our work to support postsecondary educational attainment in the Commonwealth.

House Bill 193 transferred Work Ready Dual Credit language from the Work Ready Kentucky Scholarship statute to the Dual Credit Scholarship statute. This will eliminate confusion among students, parents, high schools, and postsecondary institutions; make administration of the Dual Credit Scholarship more efficient; and align with the way the scholarship is currently funded in the state budget. The bill also eliminated the 50% return of funds language from statute, further simplifying scholarship administration for both KHEAA and participating institutions.

House Bill 263 increased administrative efficiency for the Student Teacher Stipend Program. In particular, the bill eliminated the conflict with federal requirements and provided flexibility for distributing funds by giving KHEAA the option to disburse the funds directly to student teachers. It also expanded the definition of "eligible student" and amended the statute to allow KHEAA to make residency determinations. Finally, to be consistent with federal language, the term "expected family contribution" was deleted from statutory language.

The passage of both House Bill 193 and House Bill 263 demonstrates the General Assembly's commitment to ensuring the state student aid programs administered by KHEAA are structured to best meet the needs of Kentucky students and families.

## Top 5 Quick Self-Care Hacks for Busy Financial Aid Pros

### 1. The 20-20-20 Rule (Eye Strain Relief)

Every 20 minutes, look at something 20 feet away for 20 seconds to reduce screen fatigue.

### 2. Block 15-Minute "Reset Breaks"

Add two 15-minute calendar blocks to your day - use them for stretching, walking, or just stepping away. Treat them like non-negotiable appointments.

### 3. Keep a "Done" List

Instead of focusing on an endless to-do list, jot down what you've accomplished today. It builds momentum and gives perspective during stressful times.

### 4. Hydrate & Fuel Wisely

Keep a water bottle at your desk and stash healthy snacks nearby. Staying hydrated and nourished supports energy and focus.

### 5. Set One Daily Boundary

Whether it's logging off at a set time or skipping non-urgent emails after hours, pick one boundary and honor it.

*"You can't pour from an empty cup. Taking care of yourself isn't selfish - it's strategic."*



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