



# Helping Homeless Youth Fill Out the 26-27 FAFSA

March 24, 2026 • ISAC FAFSA Symposium





# SchoolHouse Connection



SchoolHouse Connection works to overcome homelessness, from prenatal to postsecondary, through strategic advocacy and practical assistance in partnership with youth, families, schools, early childhood programs, institutions of higher education, and service providers.

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**[schoolhouseconnection.org](https://schoolhouseconnection.org)**

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## Agenda

- 1. Definitions**
- 2. Responsibilities of Liaisons and Counselors**
- 3. 2026-27 FAFSA**
- 4. UHY Documentation**
- 5. FAFSA Policies**
- 6. Best Practices and Resources**





# Definitions

# Federal Definitions: McKinney-Vento Act

## Unaccompanied & Homeless

**Unaccompanied:** Not living in the physical custody of a parent or legal guardian

**Homeless:** Lacking a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence

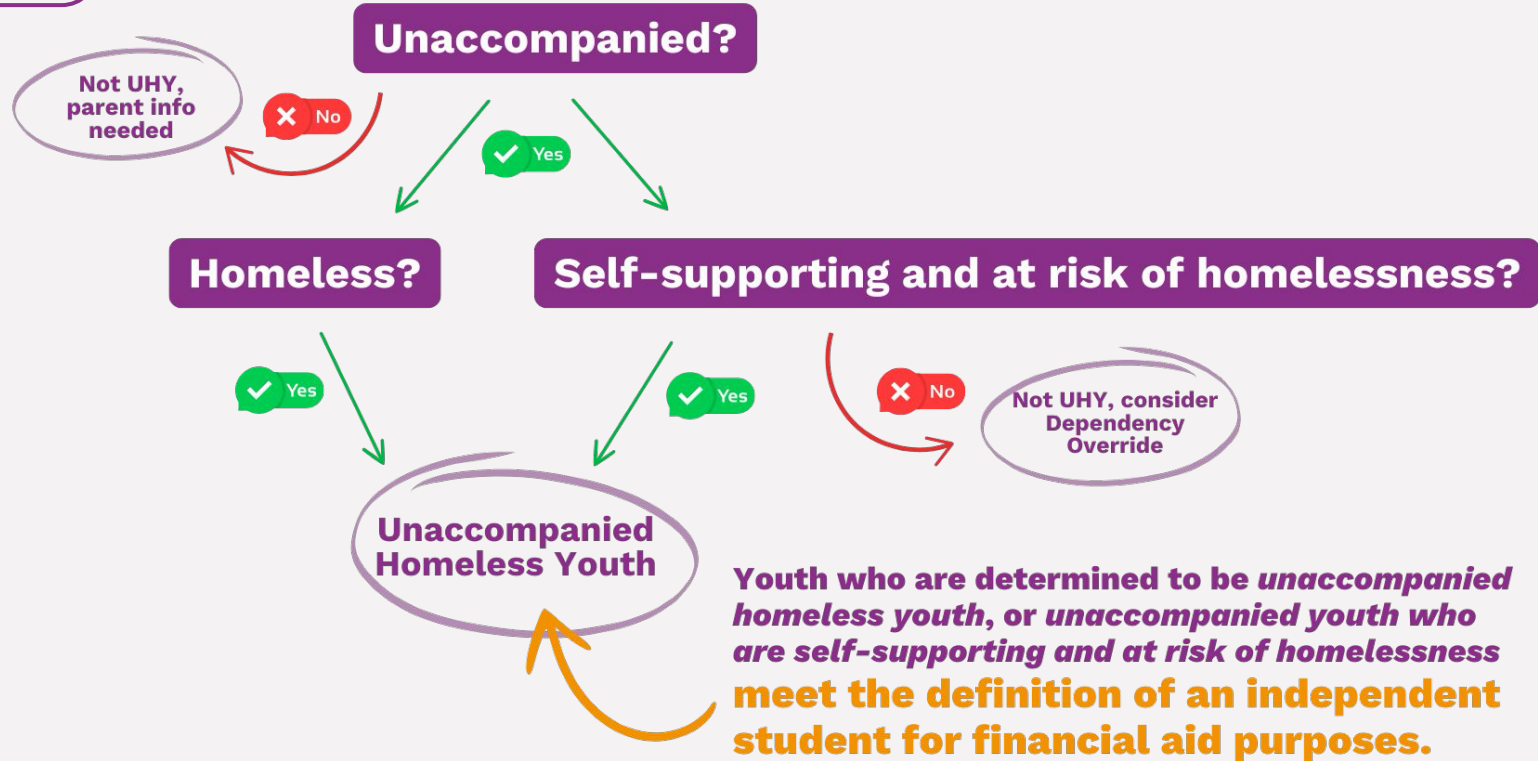
## Unaccompanied, Self-Supporting, & At Risk

**Unaccompanied:** Not living in the physical custody of a parent or legal guardian

**Self-Supporting:** Pays for their own expenses, including housing

**At Risk of Homelessness:** Housing may cease to be fixed, regular, and adequate

Definitions



## Definitions

# Interactive Determination Tool

New interactive tool to help students determine how to submit the FAFSA:

- Unaccompanied homeless youth
- Provisional circumstances (dependency override)
- Dependent student

The screenshot shows the title "Interactive Unaccompanied Homeless Youth Determination Tool" with the subtitle "Use this tool to determine if you qualify as independent on the FAFSA as an unaccompanied homeless youth." Below the title is a quote: "I would rather make my own hours." The main text explains that a student's dependency status on the FAFSA determines whether they are required to report parent information. It states that dependent students are required to report parent information, while independent students are not. It also notes that most students under the age of 24 are considered dependent by default, but there are exceptions for unaccompanied and homeless youth, or those who are unaccompanied, self-supporting, and at risk of homelessness. The text prompts the user to answer questions to determine if they qualify as independent on the FAFSA. A question card is shown with the text "Question 1 of 11" and "Are you 24 years or older?". The card has two buttons: "Yes" and "No", and two buttons at the bottom: "Back" and "Restart".

FAFSA (JANUARY 2026)

## Interactive Unaccompanied Homeless Youth Determination Tool

Use this tool to determine if you qualify as independent on the FAFSA as an unaccompanied homeless youth.

*I would rather make my own hours.*

A student's dependency status on the FAFSA determines whether or not they are required to report parent information. Dependent students are required to report parent information, and independent students are not required to report parent information. Most students under the age of 24 are considered dependent by default, but there are a few exceptions, such as students who are unaccompanied and homeless, or who are unaccompanied, self-supporting, and at risk of homelessness.

Answer the questions below to determine if you qualify as independent on the FAFSA as an unaccompanied homeless youth and receive instructions on your next steps to applying for financial aid.

Question 1 of 11

**Are you 24 years or older?**

Yes

No

Back Restart

## Interactive Tool



# Responsibilities of Liaisons & Counselors

# McKinney-Vento Liaisons and the FAFSA

Under McKinney-Vento, liaisons are **required to to inform unaccompanied homeless youth (UHY) of their status of an independent** student on the FAFSA.

McKinney-Vento liaisons are also **required to train school staff** about McKinney-Vento. **All school staff should know how and who to contact** when they learn a student is experiencing homelessness.

# High School Counselors and the FAFSA

- Homeless youth must receive assistance from school counselors to **advise, prepare, and improve their readiness for college.**
- Unaccompanied homeless youth need **determinations** (letter or a documented phone call) for the FAFSA that verify the student meets the definition of an UHY.
- Liaisons may **rely on other school staff members to help students complete the FAFSA.** This makes school counselors important partners.

# High School Counselors and the FAFSA

We created this [referral form](#) to help ease the process between designees and liaisons when coming across UHY on the FAFSA.

Under the FAFSA Simplification Act, McKinney-Vento **liaisons can now designate other people** (counselors, social workers, etc.) **to provide UHY determinations.**



# 2026-27 FAFSA

# 2026-27 FAFSA Updates

## 2026-27 FAFSA beta testing

Phase 1: August 4 (select schools)

Phase 2: September 1 (anyone can apply)

FAFSA fully available Sep. 24, one week ahead of Oct. 1 deadline

## FSA ID will be available immediately

No longer need to wait 1-3 business days to use on FAFSA

# 2026-27 FAFSA Updates

## ID verification

Starting in summer 2025, increased rates of verification until new verification system implemented in the future.

[ID Verification Resource Page](#)

[Webinar recording: \*\*Helping Students Navigate FAFSA Identity Verification\*\*](#)

## Contributor flow

Only need contributor email address.

Invite code created for contributor to use.

# Dependency Status on the FAFSA

- **Dependent - Parent Information Included**
  - Most students under 24
  - Includes accompanied and homeless
- **Independent - Parent Information Not Included**
  - Unaccompanied Homeless Youth
  - Foster Care After age 13
  - Unusual Circumstances
  - More

# General FAFSA Timeline

- **Student submits the FAFSA**
  - If dependent: invite code used for parent to enter their information
  - If independent: no parent information
- **FAFSA data is checked through various databases**
- **Financial aid office receives FAFSA data**
  - Additional requirements (ID verification, taxes, documents, statements, etc.)
- **Financial aid office packages award**

# UHY FAFSA Question: Authorized Entities

## Student Homelessness

At any time on or after July 1, 2025, was the student unaccompanied and either (1) homeless or (2) self-supporting and at risk of being homeless?

Yes

No

Did any of the following determine the student was homeless or at risk of becoming homeless?

Select all that apply or "None of these apply."

Director or designee of an emergency or transitional shelter, street outreach program, homeless youth drop-in center, or other program serving those experiencing homelessness

The student's high school or school district homeless liaison or designee

Director or designee of a project supported by a federal TRIO or GEAR UP program grant

Financial aid administrator

None of these apply.

Previous

Continue

# Entity Selected - Bumper Screen



## Your Dependency Status



### Independent Student

Based on your answers, you're an independent student. This means you don't need to answer financial questions about your parents to complete your FAFSA® form.

Previous

Continue

# No Entity Selected Bumper Screen

## Your Dependency Status



Provisionally Independent Student or **Unaccompanied Homeless Youth**

You Can Proceed Without Parent Information

Based on your answers, you can submit your application without answering questions about your parent(s).

To complete the financial aid process, you'll need to contact the financial aid office at the college or career school you wish to attend.

If you are not in contact with a parent or contacting a parent would pose a risk to you, you are considered a provisionally independent student. You will need to speak with the financial aid office at your school about your circumstances.

If you have indicated that you are unaccompanied and either (1) homeless or (2) self-supporting and at risk of being homeless, the financial aid office at your school is required to make a determination of your status based on a written statement from you or a documented interview with you. Contact your school's financial aid office to complete this process.

We can't make an accurate calculation of your federal student aid eligibility until you discuss this with your financial aid office. Until then, we will provide only an estimate of your federal student aid eligibility as an independent student.

Previous

Continue



# Unusual Circumstances Question



## Student Unusual Circumstances

*This information will help us evaluate the student's ability to pay for school.*

**Do unusual circumstances prevent the student from contacting their parents or would contacting their parents pose a risk to the student?**

*A student may be experiencing unusual circumstances if they*

- *left home due to an abusive or threatening environment;*
- *are abandoned by or estranged from their parents;*
- *have refugee or asylee status and are separated from their parents, or their parents are displaced in a foreign country;*
- *are a victim of human trafficking;*
- *are incarcerated, or their parents are incarcerated, and contact with the parents would pose a risk to the student; or*
- *are otherwise unable to contact or locate their parents.*

*If the student's circumstances resulted in not having a safe and stable place to live, they may be considered a homeless youth and should review the answer to the previous question about being unaccompanied and homeless.*

Yes

No

# Unusual Circumstances Bumper Screen

## Your Dependency Status



### Provisionally Independent Student or Unaccompanied Homeless Youth

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Based on your answers, you can submit your application without answering questions about your parent(s).

**To complete the financial aid process, you'll need to contact the financial aid office at the college or career school you wish to attend.**

If you are not in contact with a parent or contacting a parent would pose a risk to you, you are considered a provisionally independent student. You will need to speak with the financial aid office at your school about your circumstances.

If you have indicated that you are unaccompanied and either (1) homeless or (2) self-supporting and at risk of being homeless, the financial aid office at your school is required to make a determination of your status based on a written statement from you or a documented interview with you. Contact your school's financial aid office to complete this process.

We can't make an accurate calculation of your federal student aid eligibility until you discuss this with your financial aid office. Until then, we will provide only an estimate of your federal student aid eligibility as an independent student.

Previous

Continue



# UHY ≠ Dependency Override

## Unaccompanied Homeless Youth

Documentation:

- Either a determination from an authorized entity or a statement from the student (written statement or documented phone call)
  - **No further documentation**
- **Relationship with parents not required to make determinations**

## Dependency Override

Documentation:

- Per institutional policy
  - Typically includes third-party letters and statements, wet signatures, letterhead, etc.
- May consider relationship with parents

[Section 479D\(a\)\(3\) of HEA](#)

[FSA Electronic Announcement \(GENERAL-24-88\)](#)

# Citizenship Requirements

- Students must be a citizen or [eligible non-citizen](#) to file a FAFSA.
  - Students who are documented, but have parents who are undocumented and don't have a SSN, can still fill out the FAFSA.
- Illinois has an [alternative application](#) for non-eligible non-citizens to apply for state aid.
- [Navigating Financial Aid for Immigrant and Mixed-Status Students Experiencing Homelessness](#)
  - [Presidents' Alliance resource](#) for mixed-status families.



# UHY Documentation

# Documentation: Determination Available

Documentation from one of the authorized entities may include:

- Documented phone call
- Written statement
  - ex: [determination form template](#)
- Verifiable electronic match

## Independent Student Status of Unaccompanied Homeless Youth Determination for the 2026-2027 FAFSA<sup>1</sup>

Student's Name:

Student's SSN [optional]:

Student's DOB:

Student's Mailing Address\*:

\*[if the student does not have a stable address, you may list the name, phone number and mailing address of a friend or relative, or the school]

To Whom It May Concern:

This form conveys my determination that after July 1, 2025, this student was:

- an unaccompanied homeless youth, as defined by the FAFSA Simplification Act (Public Law No: 116-260).
- an unaccompanied, self-supporting youth at risk of homelessness.

Under the FAFSA Simplification Act (Public Law No: 116-260), I am authorized to document this student's living situation and determine his/her independent student status as an unaccompanied homeless youth, or an unaccompanied, self-supporting youth at risk of homelessness. Financial aid administrators must accept this documentation, unless there is specific documented conflicting information. Please address any questions to me at the number or e-mail address listed below.

Signature:	Date:
Print Name:	Phone:
Email:	
Title:	
Agency:	
Role (Check One): <input type="checkbox"/> School district homeless liaison, or designee of the liaison. <i>If you are the designee of the liaison, please list the name of your school district liaison here:</i> _____	

<sup>1</sup> This form is applicable for institutions that are requesting documentation from students who are enrolling in college for the 2026-27 award year who were not previously determined to be an unaccompanied homeless youth, or an unaccompanied youth who is self-supporting and at risk of homelessness. Students who were determined to be unaccompanied homeless youth, or an unaccompanied youth who is self-supporting, and at risk of homelessness, in the prior award year are presumed to be independent for each subsequent year at the same institution, unless the student informs the institution that circumstances have changed, or the institution has specific conflicting information about the student's independence, and has informed the student of this information.

[Sample form for UHY determinations](#)

# Documentation: Determination Not Available

Financial Aid Administrator must make the determination based on:

- Documented interview with student, or
- Written statement from student

Made without regard to reason why a student is unaccompanied and homeless.

[\(Section 479D\(a\)\(2\) of HEA\)](#)



# FAFSA Policies

# Presumed Independence

UHY are **presumed to be independent in subsequent years**, unless their situation changes or there is conflicting information.

[Section 479A\(c\)\(2\)\(B\)\(iv\) of HEA](#)

[FSA Electronic Announcement \(GENERAL-24-88\)](#)

[NASFAA Ask Regs](#)

# Timeliness of Determinations

UHY determinations must be made as quickly as possible (within 60 days of enrollment or request).

FAAs may deny UHY requests if the student does not provide requested documentation within the 60-day timeframe.

- Provide determination letters to students ahead of time.
- Encourage students to submit documents to the financial aid office in a timely manner. They may need reminders.

[FSA Electronic Announcement \(GEN-23-06\)](#)

[FSA Handbook, Application Verification Guide Chapter 5, Special Cases](#)

# Authorized Entities

- School district liaisons **or their designee**
- Director or a designee of a director of an emergency or transitional shelter (**does not need to be HUD funded**), street outreach program, homeless youth drop-in center, **or other program serving individuals who are experiencing homelessness**
- Director of a TRIO or GEAR UP program or their designee
- Financial aid administrator at another institution who previously made a determination in same or prior award year (transfer)

[Section 479D\(a\)\(1\) of HEA](#)

[NASFAA Ask Regs](#)

[FSA Electronic Announcement \(GENERAL-24-88\)](#)

# Documentation from Authorities

“The HEA, as amended, provides that **documentation from one of the above authorities is sufficient for establishing a student’s unaccompanied homeless youth status.** Therefore, if the student has received a documented determination from one of these authorities, the **institution must not request additional documentation, proof, or statements unless it has conflicting information about the student’s status.**” ([NASFAA Ask Regs](#)) ([Section 479D\(a\)\(1\) of HEA](#))

Documentation from one of the authorized entities may include:

- Documented phone call
- Written statement
  - ex: [determination form template](#)
- Verifiable electronic match

# FAA Responsibility

Section 479D(a)(2) of HEA:

**“(2) If a student is unable to provide documentation from any individual described in paragraph (1), make a case-by-case determination,** which shall be—

(A) based on a **written statement from, or a documented interview with, the student** that confirms that the student is an unaccompanied homeless youth, or unaccompanied, at risk of homelessness, and self-supporting; and

(B) **made without regard to the reasons that the student is an unaccompanied homeless youth,** or unaccompanied, at risk of homelessness, and self-supporting.”

[Section 479D\(a\)\(2\) of HEA](#)

[FSA Electronic Announcement \(GENERAL-24-88\)](#)

# UHY Is Distinct from Unusual Circumstances

“(3) Consider a determination made under this subsection as distinct from a determination of independence under section 480(d)(9).” [Section 479D\(a\)\(3\) of HEA](#)

“As a reminder, the HEA provides that **unaccompanied homeless youth determinations are separate from professional judgments made under the unusual circumstances provision**. These applicants are also not considered Provisionally Independent students.” [\(GENERAL-24-88\)](#)



# Questions So Far?



# Best Practices and Resources

# ID Verification and Vital Documents

- Check in with students junior year or earlier.
  - Help them apply for IDs and other vital documents.
  - Driver's license or state ID, passport, birth certificate, social security card, I-94 (when applicable)
- Having IDs and documents also helps prove residency for in-state tuition.
- SchoolHouse Connection [ID Verification Resource Page](#)
- Webinar recording: [Helping Students Navigate FAFSA Identity Verification](#)
- [I Am Here: Vital Document Legal Hotline for Youth](#) by [National Network for Youth](#)

# FAFSA Best Practices

- Have students fill out the FAFSA as soon as they can, and **check individual college priority deadlines.**
- Identify UHY and **provide determinations to students** ASAP.
- Remind students the FAFSA needs to be filled out every year.
  - Host financial aid nights and partner with local colleges.
  - Go to these events in person, learn about unique challenges these students face with the FAFSA (password lockouts, mobile friendly apps, etc.).

# FAFSA Best Practices

- Provide devices (like laptop rentals, hotspots, etc.) or partner with libraries to assist students in filling out the online FAFSA.
- Research scholarship and grant opportunities that will help students pay for college.
  - Visit the school's financial aid office's website for scholarships.
- Each institution of higher education in Illinois are required to designate a [Housing and Opportunities that are Useful for Students' Excellence \(HOUSE\) Liaison](#).
  - HOUSE Liaisons can help with transition, accessing resources, and are authorized to confirm students' status as homeless for financial aid.
- Inform students about Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) to continue receiving federal student aid.

# Resources

- [SHC FAFSA Page](#)
- [Top 10 FAFSA Questions from High School Counselors/Liaisons](#)
- [FAFSA Independence Guide for Unaccompanied Homeless Youth](#)
- [Navigating Financial Aid for Immigrant and Mixed-Status Students Experiencing Homelessness](#)
- [SHC Higher Education Page](#)
- [Tips for Helping Homeless Youth Succeed](#)

## Upcoming Webinars:

### **Build Successful High School to College Transitions for Students Experiencing Homelessness**

April 9, 2025, 3:00 Eastern

### **FAFSA and Homeless Youth: Scenarios and Solutions Spring 2026**

April 23, 2026, 2:00 PM Eastern



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*Application closes: June 2, 2026*

*Applicants notified: First week of August 2026*

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or scan the QR code!**



Contact Information



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- Useful resources, including tips, tools, and guides
- Webinar announcements
- News related to education and homelessness



<https://bit.ly/4brxbor>

