



# Helping Homeless Youth Access Financial Aid: **Practical FAFSA Completion Strategies**

**May 8, 2025 | 1:45-3:00 PM**



5 Minute Survey on FAFSA  
[bit.ly/SHC-FAFSA](https://bit.ly/SHC-FAFSA)



# About SchoolHouse Connection

SchoolHouse Connection works to overcome homelessness through early care and education.

We provide strategic advocacy and practical assistance in partnership with schools, early childhood programs, institutions of higher education, service providers, families, and youth.

## WEBSITE:

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

## NEWSLETTER:

[schoolhouseconnection.org/sign-up](https://schoolhouseconnection.org/sign-up)

- Federal and state policy advocacy
- Q&A from our inbox
- Webinars and implementation tools
- Youth leadership and scholarships



# John Burton Advocates for Youth

John Burton Advocates for Youth improves the quality of life for youth in California who have been in foster care or homeless by advocating for better laws, training communities to strengthen local practices and conducting research to inform policy solutions.

WEBSITE:  
[jbay.org](http://jbay.org)



# Today's Learning Objectives:

1. Understand who is considered an “unaccompanied homeless youth” (UHY) and the responsibilities of McKinney-Vento liaisons
2. Summarize UHY provisions from FAFSA Simplification Act
3. Learn about the FAFSA/CADAA Challenge for Students Experiencing Homelessness and best practices for supporting students completing the FAFSA



# Today's Agenda:

- Homeless Overview
  - Definitions
  - Numbers
- Responsibilities of Liaisons
- FAFSA Simplification Updates
  - Homeless Changes
- FAFSA/CADAA Challenge
- FAFSA Best Practices
- Resources
- Q&A



# Homeless Overview



# Who is Considered Homeless on the FAFSA?

## → Unaccompanied

- Not living in the physical custody of a parent or legal guardian

## → Homeless

- Lacking fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence

## → Unaccompanied

- Not living in the physical custody of a parent or legal guardian

## → Self-Supporting

- Pays for their own expenses, including fixed, regular, and adequate housing

## → At Risk of Homelessness

- Housing may cease to be fixed, regular, and adequate



# Why Do Youth Experience Homelessness on Their Own, as Unaccompanied Youth?

- **Youth flee abuse or neglect.**
  - 40-60% of unaccompanied youth were abused physically at home.
  - 17-25% of unaccompanied youth were abused sexually at home.
  - Connection between parental substance use and abuse and youth leaving home
- **Parents force youth out of the home due to conflicts.**
  - Sexual orientation and gender identity
  - Pregnancy
- **Families separated through death, incarcerations, lack of shelter space, parental deportation.**



# What Does Homelessness Look Like?

There isn't always a "sign."



Sharing the housing of others due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or similar reason.



Living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to lack of alternative adequate accommodations.



Living in emergency or transitional shelters

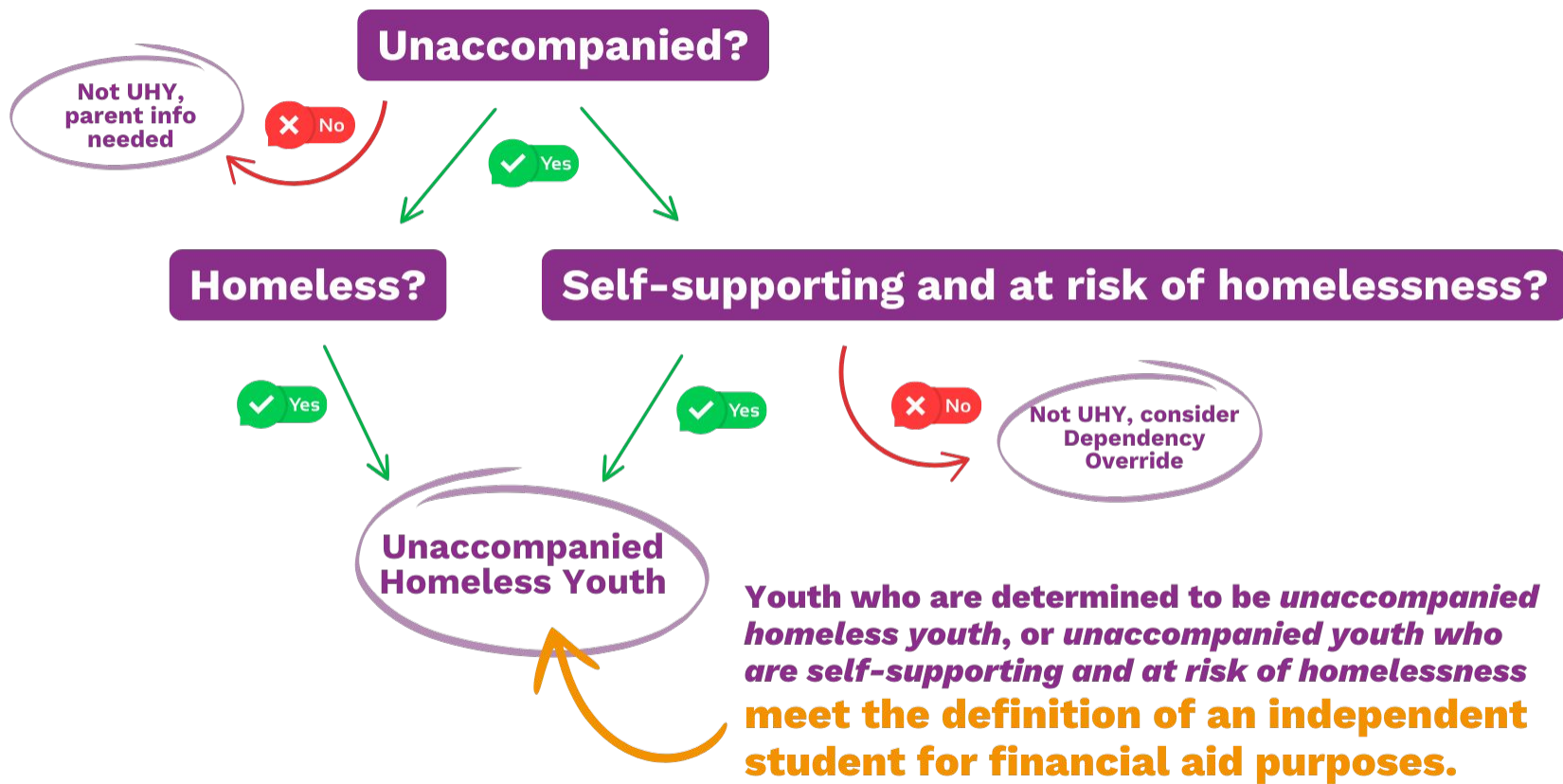


Living in cars, parks, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings.



Living in a residence hall/dorm but otherwise would have no place to go.





# Dependency Status

- Either Dependent or Independent
  - ◆ Dependent = parent information on FAFSA
  - ◆ Independent = no parent information on FAFSA
- Unaccompanied Homeless Youth = Independent
- Unaccompanied, Self-Supporting, and At-Risk of Homelessness = Independent
- Accompanied Homeless Youth = Dependent



# Responsibility of Liaisons



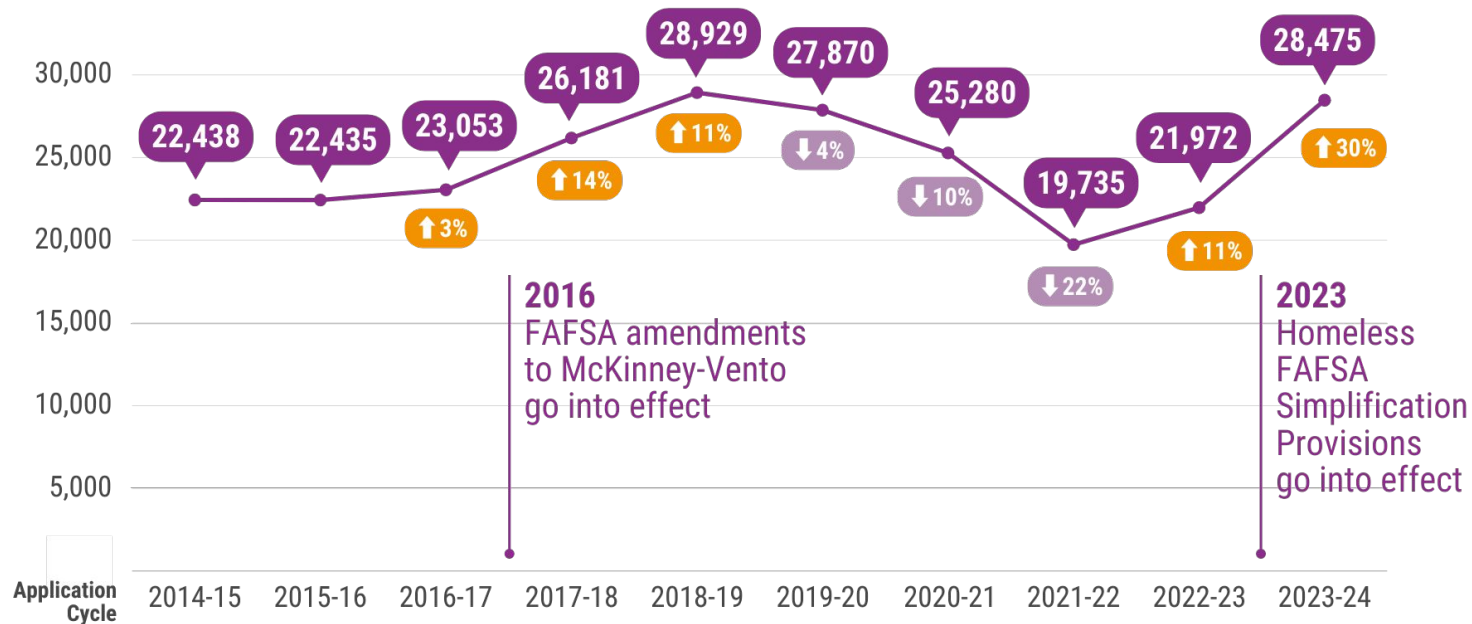
# McKinney-Vento Liaisons and the FAFSA

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

Unaccompanied homeless youth need **determinations** (letter or a documented phone call) for the FAFSA that verify the student meets the definition of an UHY.



# Unaccompanied Homeless Youth Determinations by School District Liaisons



# California UHY FAFSA Determinations

2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
3,697	3,660	3,871	4,585	5,674	5,945	5,381	4,568	5,319	7,332

 **+38%**  
Increase from 2022-23 to 2023-24



# McKinney-Vento Liaisons and 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.

Homeless youth must receive assistance from school counselors to **advise, prepare, and improve** their readiness for college.

Liaisons may rely on other school staff members to help students complete the FAFSA. This makes **school counselors important partners**.



# McKinney-Vento Liaisons and the FAFSA

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

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



# FAFSA Simplification



# FAFSA Simplification Act

- The FAFSA Simplification Act was signed in 2020, and most changes for homeless and foster youth went into effect in the 2023-2024 FAFSA.
- ED released guidance on April 14, 2023, and further guidance on July 19, 2024 declaring the homeless/foster provisions are in effect now and providing instructions to financial aid administrators.
- Last year (2024-2025) was unique and challenging, with some of the new changes from The FAFSA Simplification Act and the issues (multiple delays, glitches, miscommunication from ED, etc.).
- The FAFSA Deadline Act was signed into law in December 2024 which ensures the FAFSA is **fully operational by October 1st** each year.



# What We Know About the 2025-2026 FAFSA So Far

- Students have intersecting identities and may be independent for a variety of reasons, such as having dependents, being former foster youth, being 24 years or older, and also be experiencing homelessness.
  - Changes from The FAFSA Simplification Act have removed skip logic so students can check all circumstances that apply.
  - Per [NASFAA and ED](#), “if the student already qualifies as an independent student, the school is not required to confirm or verify their status as being homelessness or at risk of homeless.”

1 Personal Circumstances 2 Demographics 3 Financials 4 Colleges 5 Signature

### Student Personal Circumstances

Select all that apply.

☐ The student is currently serving on active duty in the U.S. armed forces for purposes other than training.

☐ The student is a veteran of the U.S. armed forces.

☐ The student has children or other people (excluding their spouse) who live with them and receive more than half of their support from the student now and between July 1, 2024 and June 30, 2025.

☐ At any time since the student turned 13, they were an orphan (no living biological or adoptive parent).

☐ At any time since the student turned 13, they were a ward of the court.

☐ At any time since the student turned 13, they were in foster care.

☐ The student is or was a legally emancipated minor, as determined by a court in their state of residence.

☐ The student is or was in a legal guardianship with someone other than their parent or stepparent, as determined by a court in their state of residence.

☐ None of these apply.



# What We Know About the 2025-2026 FAFSA So Far

- Students who are documented, but have parents who are undocumented and don't have a SSN, can still fill out the FAFSA.
- In California, the CADAA is also available for mixed status families.
- Check out this [resource](#) from Presidents' Alliance for mixed-status families and [NASFAA's resource](#) on FAFSA information for students from families of mixed immigration statuses.
- SchoolHouse Connection hosted a [webinar](#) with HIAS PA on filling out the FAFSA for various immigration statuses for eligible non-citizens and the appropriate documentation needed.



# Key FAFSA Policies for UHY

1. UHY are **presumed to be independent in subsequent years**, unless their situation changes or there is conflicting information.
2. UHY **determinations must be made as quickly as possible** (within 60 days of enrollment).
3. **Certain programs and entities are authorized to verify UHY status**, including school district homeless liaisons **and their designees**, homeless service providers/programs serving individuals experiencing homelessness and their designees, TRIO and GEAR UP programs, and financial aid administrators at previous institutions.
4. **FAA must accept UHY determinations** from these authorized entities.
5. **FAA must make UHY determinations** from youth who cannot get determinations.
6. UHY and provisional independent students are **two separate and distinct processes**.



# UHY FAFSA Question

Form  
2025–26



## Student Homelessness

At any time on or after July 1, 2024, was the student unaccompanied and either (1) homeless or (2) self-supporting and at risk of being homeless?

☐ Yes

☐ No



# UHY FAFSA Question

## Key Policy #3

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

Select all that 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 (FAA)

☐ None of these apply.

Previous

Continue



# Homeless Youth Determination Form

[INSERT ORGANIZATION LETTERHEAD]

**Independent Student Status of  
Unaccompanied Homeless Youth Determination for the 2024-2025 FAFSA<sup>1</sup>**

**To Whom It May Concern:**  
This form conveys my determination that after July 1, 2023, [INSERT NAME OF 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.

**Student's SSN:**  
**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]

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):**  
☐ School district homeless liaison, or designee of the liaison.  
*If you are the designee of the liaison, please list the name of your school district liaison here:*  
\_\_\_\_\_

☐ Director or a designee of a director of an emergency or transitional shelter, street outreach program, homeless youth drop-in center, or other program serving individuals who are experiencing homelessness.  
☐ Director or a designee of a director of a program funded under TRIO or GEAR UP.  
☐ A financial aid administrator at the same or another institution who previously made a determination.

<sup>1</sup> This form is applicable for institutions that are requesting documentation from students who are enrolling in college for the 2024-25 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 at 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.



## Role (Check One):

- ☐ School district homeless liaison, or designee of the liaison.

*If you are the designee of the liaison, please list the name of your school district liaison here:*

\_\_\_\_\_



# UHY FAFSA Question

## 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.



# UHY FAFSA Question

## Key Policy #5

☒ Yes ☐ No

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

Select all that 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 (FAA)

☒ None of these apply.

Previous Continue



# UHY FAFSA Question

## Key Policy #5



### Provisionally Independent 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 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. Please contact your school's financial aid office to complete this process.

We won't be able to calculate your Student Aid Index (SAI) until your financial aid office confirms your circumstances. Until then, we will provide only an estimate of your federal student aid eligibility as an independent student.



# Unusual Circumstances

## Key Policy #5

### 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

## Key Policy #6



### Provisionally Independent or Unaccompanied Homeless Youth You Can Proceed without Parent Information

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# Questions?



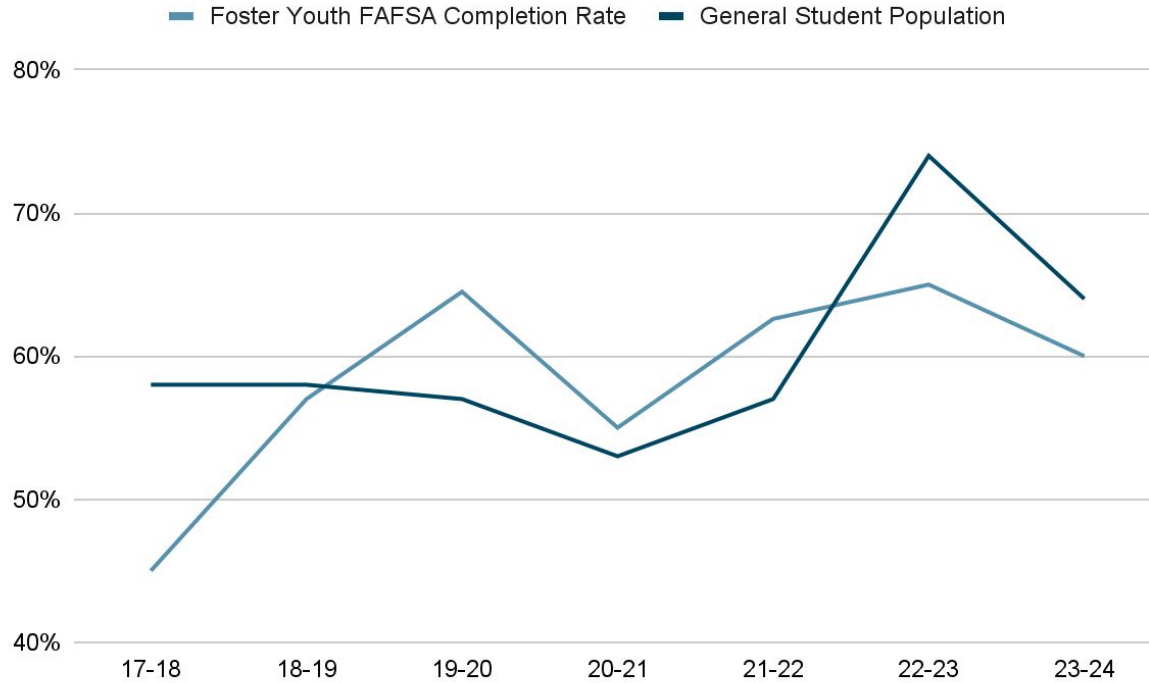
# FAFSA/CADAA Challenge



# FAFSA/CADAA Challenge Overview

1. Homeless education liaisons (homeless youth challenge) serve as central coordinators
2. Use WebGrants to verify completion
3. Coordinate and train partners
4. Develop replicable strategies





**23-24  
FAFSA/CADAA  
Challenge  
Completion Rates:**

Foster Youth  
@ 60%

Youth Experiencing  
Homelessness  
@ 52%



# FAFSA/CADAA Policies and Procedures



## CHALLENGE DATES:

November 18, 2024 – May 16, 2025



## FINAL REPORT DUE:

June 6, 2025



# FAFSA/CADAA Policies and Procedures

Calculating the Baseline	Determining FAFSA/CADAA Completion	Reporting Deadline
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• All 12<sup>th</sup> graders experiencing homelessness regardless of credit count (including non-diploma track).</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Verification through WebGrants is required, either through WebGrants for Institutions <u>OR</u> the secure file transfer folder system (WinSCP)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Only one final report will be required this year.</li><li>• The report should be cumulative and encompass students in your baseline from <b>November 18, 2024 to May 16, 2025.</b></li></ul>



# FAFSA/CADAA Policies and Procedures

## Calculating the Baseline – Students Experiencing Homelessness

- Pull from the CALPADS 1.18 FRPM, 8.1 Student Profile List, 5.4 Homeless Students Enrolled, or 5.5 Homeless Student List OR
- Generate through your local student information system (SIS)
- A cumulative list of high school seniors experiencing homelessness should be compiled. It will be important to routinely re-run the list to capture changes (e.g., new students).



# FAFSA/CADAA Policies and Procedures

## Determining FAFSA/CADAA Completion

- Verification through WebGrants is required.
- LEAs and individual high schools can work with their COE OR their district WebGrants administrator to verify completion.
- The best method to verify completion will depend on the number of students in your baseline count.



# Determining FAFSA/CADAA Completion

## Method 1: WebGrants for Institutions

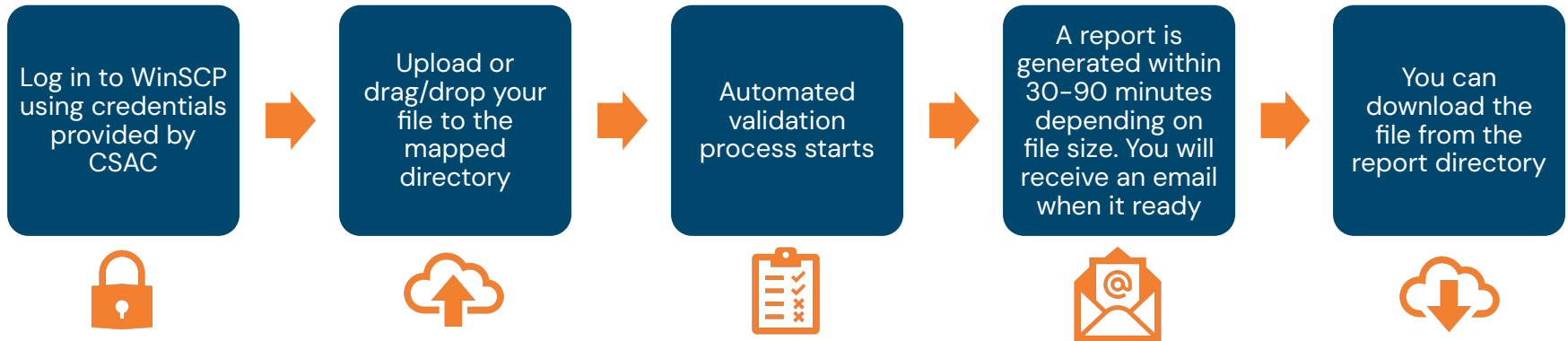
- Requires a login credential granted through submission or renewal of a WebGrants Administrator Access Request
- FAFSA/CADAA completion can be verified by looking up students one by one
- Can be arduous for counties with large numbers of students in the challenges.

## Method 2: WinSCP Secure File Transfer System

- Requires initial configuration but does not require a WebGrants Administrator Access Request
- FAFSA/CADAA completion can be verified by uploading a spreadsheet of challenge students and downloading a “matched” report within a few minutes
- The process is automated and reports can be ran as frequently as needed



# WinSCP Secure File Transfer System



# Determining FAFSA/CADAA Completion



Instructions for verifying FAFSA/CADAA completion using WebGrants can be found here:

- [ibay.org/resources/homeless-youth-fafsa-challenge-policies-and-tools/](https://www.ibay.org/resources/homeless-youth-fafsa-challenge-policies-and-tools/)
- [ibay.org/resources/fafsa-challenge-policies-tools/](https://www.ibay.org/resources/fafsa-challenge-policies-tools/)



# After the FAFSA/CADAA



Complete the Chafee Grant  
Application for Eligible Foster  
Youth Students  
(students was in a foster care  
placement between ages of 16-18)



Create a Webgrants 4  
Students Account



NEW!  
Claim CalKIDS Account



# Claim CalKIDS Account!

There are two types of CalKIDS College Savings Accounts:



## At Birth Account

- \$25 initial deposit for all children born in California between July 1, 2022 – June 30, 2023
- \$100 initial deposit for all children born in California after July 1, 2023



## School-Age Account

- \$500 for eligible low-income students
- Additional \$500 deposits for foster & homeless children



# Claim CalKIDS Account!

[calkids.org](https://calkids.org)

## School Age Account: Eligible Low-Income Students

Academic Year	Grade	Identified On: (Census Day)
2021- 2022	1 - 12	October 6, 2021
2022 - 2023	1	October 5, 2022
2023 - 2024	1	October 4, 2023
<b>NEW:</b> 2025 - 2026	1 - 12 (foster youth only) 1 (low-income & homeless)	October 1, 2025

**Your students may have at least \$500 in their CalKIDS account!**



# Best Practices



# FAFSA Best Practices

- Create FSA IDs - it can take up to 3 days for the FSA ID to be active.
  - Use an email address that students will have access to after graduating high school.
- Explain the new changes to the 25-26 FAFSA to students and discuss the implications of the delay.
  - [Inform students with this email template](#)
- Identify UHY and provide determinations to students ASAP.
- Have students fill out the FAFSA as soon as they can and check state and college priority deadlines. Remind students to fill out the FAFSA every single year they plan to attend college.
  - California Community College | Sept. 2, 2025

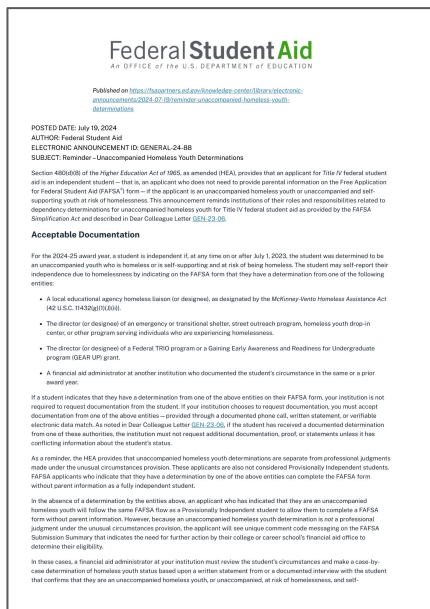


# FAFSA Best Practices

- Host financial aid nights and partner with local colleges.
  - Specific financial aid nights for families and parents with food, translators, and other events.
- Create FAFSA mentors or graduation coaches to provide tailored focus and attention to students.
- Encourage students to reach out to the financial aid office, even if accompanied, to see if there is extra aid or resources available.
  - Homeless higher education liaisons
  - Specific support programs
- Provide devices (like laptop rentals, hotspots, etc.) or partner with libraries to assist students in filling out the online FAFSA.
- Inform students about Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) and the maintenance of keeping federal student aid.



# FAFSA Best Practices Advocacy



- Use [July 2024 guidance](#) if you receive any pushback from financial aid offices and email the financial aid director.
- Reach out to us at SchoolHouse Connection if you continue to have issues with an institution.

○ [caleb@schoolhouseconnection.org](mailto:caleb@schoolhouseconnection.org)





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# Scholarship Program

**Helping students get to and through higher education**

**Includes a \$2,500 Award, 1-on-1 Support from SHC staff and fellow scholars & 3 All-Expenses-Paid Trips!**



*Application opens: January 1, 2025*

*Application closes: June 2, 2025*

*Applicants notified: First week of August 2025*

**To learn more and apply, visit  
[schoolhouseconnection.org/scholarship](https://schoolhouseconnection.org/scholarship)  
or scan the QR code!**



# Questions & Discussion



# Resources

- [SHC FAFSA Page](#)
  - [Sample Form for Determinations](#)
  - [Federal Guidance about UHY July 19, 2024](#)
- [SHC Youth Leadership and Scholarship Program](#)
- [John Burton Advocates for Youth](#)
  - [FAFSA/CADAA Resources](#)
  - [FAFSA/CADAA Policies and Procedures](#)



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**SHC Community on Slack**



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Linkedin: [John Burton Advocates for Youth](#)

YouTube: [@johnburtonadvocatesforyout1186](#)



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5 Minute Survey on FAFSA  
[bit.ly/SHC-FAFSA](https://bit.ly/SHC-FAFSA)

