

2024-2025 Determination of Unaccompanied Homeless Youth

The 2024-2025 Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) stipulates that a student may be considered independent for financial aid purposes if they received a determination at any time on or after July 1, 2023 that they were an unaccompanied youth who was homeless or at risk of being homeless.

According to the Higher Education Act of 1965, as amended (HEA), the definition of independent student includes youth who are 1) unaccompanied and homeless, or 2) unaccompanied, self-supporting, and at-risk of homelessness. The HEA uses the McKinney-Vento Act's definitions of homeless, which includes youth who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence; and unaccompanied, which includes youth not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian. The HEA also uses at-risk of homelessness to refer to students whose housing may cease to be fixed, regular, and adequate.

THIRD-PARTY DOCUMENTATION

A school district homeless liaison or the director or designee of an emergency shelter, basic center, or transitional living program funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) or the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA) is authorized to determine that a student is eligible for independent student status as an unaccompanied homeless youth. In that instance, no further action is required to confirm a student's status as independent.

Does the youth have documentation from any of the following authorized entities that attests that the youth has experienced homelessness as an unaccompanied youth, or was unaccompanied, self-supporting, and at risk of homelessness, any time since July 1, 2023?

- School district homeless liaisons or their designee;
- The 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
- The director or a designee of a director of a program funded under a TRIO or Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for an Undergraduate program ("GEAR UP") grant;
- A financial aid administrator at another institution who previously made a determination.

If yes, please provide a copy of the supporting documentation within **15 days** of receipt to the *Office of Student Financial Aid*. ***Failure to return the requested documentation to the Financial Aid Office before you end your term of enrollment will result in cancellation of your aid.***

If no, please contact the Office of Student Financial Aid for more discussion.

Tip Sheet for Unaccompanied Homeless Youth (UHY)

Unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness, and unaccompanied youth who are self-supporting and at risk of homelessness, face many challenges completing the FAFSA. Under the Higher Education Act, these students are considered independent students, and do not need to include parental information on the FAFSA. [Guidance](#) from the U.S. Department of Education announced changes to financial aid processes for youth experiencing homelessness resulting from the FAFSA Simplification Act. These changes are in effect now, starting with the 2023-2024 FAFSA. This tip sheet is designed to help youth experiencing homelessness with some of the pressing questions they may face while filling out the FAFSA. For more information, see [SchoolHouse Connection’s FAFSA page](#).

Question	Answer
<p>1. How do I know if I meet the definition of an unaccompanied homeless youth, or unaccompanied youth at risk of homelessness and self-supporting?</p>	<p>An unaccompanied homeless youth is a youth under the age of 24 who is not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian and who meets the definition of homelessness outlined by the education subtitle of the McKinney-Vento Act. An unaccompanied youth at risk of homelessness and self-supporting is a youth under the age of 24 who is not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian and is currently paying for his or her own living expenses, which includes paying for fixed, regular, and adequate housing. At risk of homelessness is when a student’s housing may cease to be fixed, regular, and adequate, for example, a student who is being evicted and has been unable to find fixed, regular, and adequate housing</p>
<p>2. I’m staying with friends temporarily because I don’t have a safe or stable place to stay - do I meet the definition of homelessness?</p>	<p>Yes, view this page to read more about the different living situations covered under the definition of homelessness.</p>
<p>3. When would I have needed to experience homelessness to be considered a homeless youth on the FAFSA?</p>	<p>You would have needed to experience homelessness on or after July 1st of the preceding award year. For example if you’re filling out the 2024-2025 FAFSA, you would have needed to experience homelessness on or after July 1, 2023.</p>
<p>4. What if I am experiencing homelessness with my family?</p>	<p>If you are experiencing homelessness with your family, you are not unaccompanied. You would fill out the FAFSA as instructed and include parental information.</p>

Question	Answer
5. What if I'm unaccompanied and experiencing or at risk of homelessness, but still have some contact with my parents?	You can still be in contact with your parents and meet the above definition of an unaccompanied homeless youth, or unaccompanied youth at risk of homelessness and self-supporting. Contact with parents is not part of the legal definition of homelessness or unaccompanied.
6. Who are all the authorized entities that can provide me with a homeless youth determination?	Authorized entities include <u>school district homeless liaisons or their designee</u> ; a director or designee of a director of an emergency or transitional shelter, street outreach program, homeless youth drop-in center, or other programs serving individuals experiencing homelessness; a director or designee of a director of a program funded under a <u>TRIO</u> or <u>GEAR UP</u> grant; and a financial aid administrator at the current institution or at another institution who previously made a determination.
7. What if my institution is asking for more documentation aside from the determination letter I provided?	If you are being asked for additional information, beyond the determination letter, you can share this new federal <u>guidance</u> with the financial aid administrator stating that "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."
8. What do I do if my financial aid administrator won't accept my determination?	Financial aid administrators must accept determinations from the authorized entities described in question 5 above. Share this new federal <u>guidance</u> with the financial aid administrator stating that "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."
9. What do I do if I become homeless while in college?	Reach out to your financial aid administrator using the template <u>here</u> .
10. Do I need to document my unaccompanied homeless youth status every year?	If you were identified as homeless on the FAFSA the prior year, your answer to the homeless question will pre-populate "yes" and you just need to confirm that your situation has not changed. You do not need to provide a new determination nor should the institution require more.

Question	Answer
<p>11. What do I do if my institution is making me do something called a dependency override or provisional independent student status?</p>	<p>If you believe you meet the above definition of an unaccompanied homeless youth, or an unaccompanied youth at risk of homelessness and self-supporting, reach out to the financial aid administrator and explain that you are requesting an unaccompanied homeless youth determination outlined by federal guidance here. Financial aid administrators can provide determinations by using this template.</p>
<p>12. I was identified in high school as homeless and took a gap year. I'm still in the same living situation, how do I fill out the FAFSA now?</p>	<p>If you are still in touch with your school district liaison, reach out and see if they would write another letter for you and send it to your financial aid administrator and they must accept the determination. If you don't have a letter or aren't in touch with your liaison, reach out to the financial aid administrator using the following template here.</p>
<p>13. How do I find out who my school district liaison is?</p>	<p>View this directory here. There is high turnover, so if the entry for the liaison in your school district is not up to date, you can also reach out to your state homeless coordinator.</p>
<p>14. How do I prepare for an interview with a financial aid administrator or write a letter documenting my situation?</p>	<p>See this resource here on how to prepare for an interview with a financial aid administrator. The focus of the interview/letter should be if you meet the definition of an unaccompanied homeless youth, or unaccompanied youth at risk of homelessness and self-supporting, on or after July 1st.</p>
<p>15. What are other resources for students experiencing homelessness?</p>	<p>Reach out to your institution to see if there is a homeless higher education liaison, basic needs center, or student support office that is designated to help support students. There may be additional resources like food pantries, emergency aid, or peer support group systems. Check out SchoolHouse Connection's Youth Connections resources, including the SHC Scholarship Program.</p>