

College Is For Everyone!

A California Financial Aid Guide for Youth with Juvenile Justice Involvement



Welcome!

Before we get started, let's get two things out of the way:

- 1) Yes, youth with juvenile justice system involvement can and do go to college!
- 2) Yes, youth with juvenile justice involvement are, generally, eligible for financial aid!

This guide is meant to help youth who are about to graduate from high school and/or who are under the age of 26 with juvenile justice involvement maximize the amount of financial aid they receive. We'll cover what financial aid is and how to get it, and we'll offer tips for troubleshooting common issues. We'll also provide links to resources that cover in-depth financial aid questions for foster youth, homeless youth, and youth who are undocumented or DACA recipients.

You can use this guide to apply for aid on your own, or you can bring it to your high school counselor, college financial aid staff, or other trusted adult so that they can help you.

We at Youth Law Center and the California Student Aid Commission know that financial aid can be complicated! If you have questions about the information in this guide or would like to adapt it for your community, please email info@ylc.org.

This guide was last updated in March 2021. We may continue to update this guide to provide the most current information. You can always find the most recent version of this guide at <https://ylc.org/resource/financial-aid-for-jj-youth>.

Quick Tips

- ! Most youth who are currently or formerly involved in the juvenile justice system are eligible for financial aid.
- ! There are sources of financial aid for undocumented and DACA students. U.S. citizens or permanent residents whose parents are not citizens or permanent residents can still apply for financial aid.
- ! Youth in juvenile halls and camps have the right to access a computer for educational purposes, such as applying for financial aid.
- ! Parental information is usually required to fill out financial aid paperwork, but there are some exceptions for foster youth, homeless youth, and youth with other special circumstances.
- ! Youth with juvenile justice involvement are not automatically considered wards of the court or foster youth for financial aid purposes. Make sure you qualify before checking those boxes on applications. See page 11 for more information.
- ! Consult the experts! If you have a question and your school doesn't know the answer, contact the California Student Aid Commission at (888) 224-7268, or have your counselor, teacher, probation officer, social worker, or other staff email schoolsupport@csac.ca.gov. You can also call the college you are planning to apply to for assistance; many colleges in California have programs specifically for helping youth with juvenile justice involvement go to college.

Table of Contents

Overview of Financial Aid	3
What is Financial Aid?	4
Who is eligible?	4
How do I apply?	4
How do I apply for Cal Grant or Chafee Grants?	7
Financial Aid & Juvenile Justice	8
Students with juvenile or criminal justice system involvement are generally eligible for financial aid.	9
Can I apply for college and financial aid while I'm in juvenile hall?	9
Troubleshooting Financial Aid	10
Do I need to provide parent information on the FAFSA or CADAA?	11
How do I know if I'm a ward of the court?	11
What does "guardianship" mean?	12
What's the definition of homeless?	13
My parent is worried about sharing their information on the financial aid application—what can I tell them?	14
I can't get my parent's info for the FAFSA or CADAA. What can I do?	14
Can I get financial aid without filling out the FAFSA or CADAA?	15
Why should I fill out the FAFSA or CADAA if I can get free community college tuition through the CA College Promise Grant?	15
What information do I need to provide for the CA College Promise Grant?	16
FAFSA Walkthrough	17
Resources	22

Can I apply for Financial Aid?

Can I apply for financial aid if I've been arrested before?

Yes!

Can I apply for financial aid if I've spent time in a juvenile hall, camp, ranch, or the Division of Juvenile Justice (DJJ)?

Yes!

Can I apply for financial aid if I'm currently in a juvenile hall, camp, ranch, or DJJ?

Yes!

Can I apply for financial aid if I have been or am currently on adult or juvenile probation?

Yes!

Can I apply for financial aid if I have a juvenile adjudication related to drugs?

Yes!

As a general matter, the juvenile justice system and the adult criminal justice system are separate systems that are governed by different laws and regulations. In the juvenile justice system, people are *adjudicated* for offenses. In the adult criminal justice system, people are *convicted* for offenses. Adjudications and convictions are not the same thing. There are a couple of rules that say that people with certain kinds of convictions have limited eligibility for financial aid, but those rules don't apply to juvenile adjudications.

Overview of Financial Aid

Fast Facts:

- 1) Financial aid is money a student can get to help pay for college.
- 2) California has many different financial aid options to help make college affordable for ALL Californians, whether at a California Community College, California State University (CSU), or the University of California (UC). Private universities may be affordable with financial aid as well.
- 3) You can apply for aid for FREE through the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) or the CADAA (CA Dream Act Application).
- 4) You can apply for aid even if your parent does not have a social security number. See page 19 for more information.

Overview of Financial Aid

What is Financial Aid?

Financial aid is money a student can receive to help pay for college. **Grants and scholarships** are types of financial aid a student does not have to pay back, while **student loans** are paid back over time once the student is no longer in school and is working. The most common grants are **Federal Pell Grants, Cal Grants, Chafee Foster Youth Grants**, and **California College Promise Grants**, but there are other kinds, too. The most common loans are Federal student loans, which could be **Stafford loans** or **Perkins loans**.

Financial aid can be used to cover costs associated with going to college, such as **tuition and fees** and **books and supplies**. Financial aid can also help students cover living expenses while they are in college—this is usually referred to as **room and board**. The total cost of going to college, including tuition, books, supplies, health insurance, and living expenses, is referred to as **cost of attendance** or **COA**.

Who is eligible?

Just about all U.S. citizens and permanent residents qualify for some form of financial aid through the federal government if they have completed high school or obtained an equivalent credential. This includes youth who are currently or formerly involved in the juvenile justice system. Youth in juvenile halls and camps, as well as youth on probation, are eligible for state and federal grant money.

While undocumented students and DACA recipients are not eligible for federal aid, they are eligible for California state financial aid and in-state tuition at California public and private

colleges if they have attended a California high school for three years and graduated, or by meeting other requirements. The full list of requirements is available here at <https://www.csac.ca.gov/post/resources-california-dream-act-application>.

Students who are currently incarcerated in federal or state prisons (which are not the same as juvenile facilities), or people with certain drug-related convictions in adult court, are ineligible for federal and state financial aid (covered on page 9). **Students are *not* eligible to receive loans while confined in any federal or state prison, jail, or juvenile facility.**

How do I apply?

The most important form to fill out for financial aid is the **FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid)**, which determines whether youth are eligible for a Pell Grant, other forms of federal student aid, and student loans. State financial aid sources, like Chafee and CalGrant, use the information provided on the FAFSA, in addition to other information (discussed on page 7) to evaluate whether youth are eligible. **For youth who are not U.S. citizens or permanent residents, fill out the CA Dream Act Application (CAADA) at <https://dream.csac.ca.gov/> instead.**

Apply Online at FAFSA.gov

In order to qualify for the most financial aid possible, U.S. citizens and permanent residents should fill out the FAFSA at fafsa.gov. While there is a paper version of the FAFSA, the online version is easier to use because it automatically checks for mistakes as you fill out the form and it can auto-fill student and parent tax information by linking with the IRS. If you fill out

the paper version, you should log into the FAFSA website later to double-check that your information is correct. **We strongly recommend using the online form, not the paper form.**

If there is some reason that you cannot fill out the FAFSA, you may still be able to go to community college tuition-free through the California College Promise Grant. This is discussed in-depth on page 16.

Applying for financial aid is **always** free! There are scam websites that try to charge students money for applying for financial aid, so always double check that you are using the official FAFSA or CADAA website.

Create FSA ID at fsaid.ed.gov

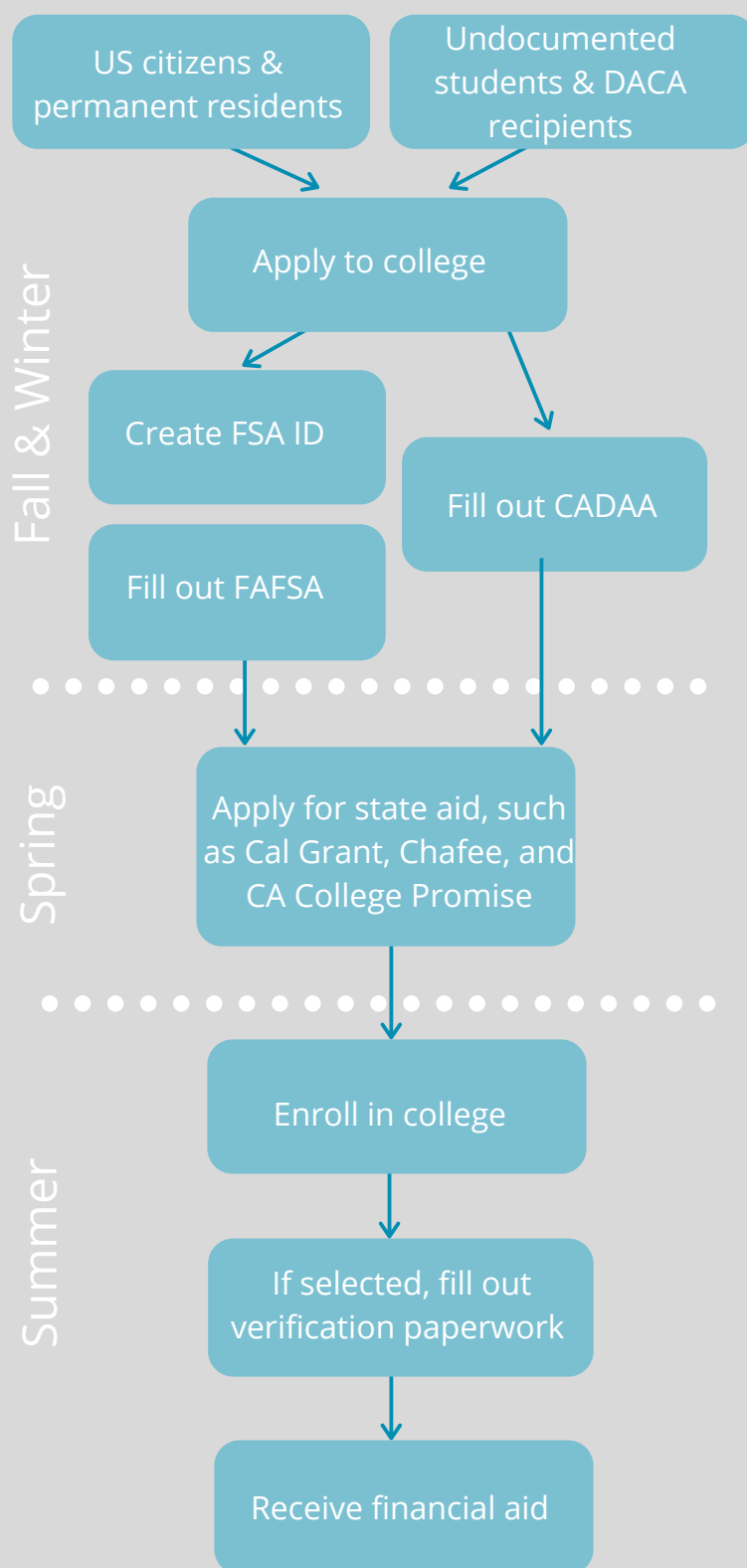
In order to fill out the FAFSA, you will need to create an FSA ID at fsaid.ed.gov. If you are a dependent student, one of your parents will need to create an FSA ID as well. If you are an independent student, you will not need a parent FSA ID to complete the FAFSA. Information about independent students is available on page 11. Foster youth, homeless youth, and parenting youth are usually considered independent.

The FSA ID is used to sign the FAFSA, and in order to create one, you need a social security number. If your parent does not have a social security number, they do not have to create an FSA ID; they can print, sign, and mail in a signature page instead.

Student and Parent Tax Information

The FAFSA usually requires student and parent tax information to complete it, but if you are an independent student you do not have to submit parent information. Information about who is considered an independent student is on page 11.

Financial Aid Roadmap



There is no deadline to apply for financial aid to help pay for community college. This roadmap is a *suggested* timeline to help you maximize your financial aid. You may miss some aid opportunities, but you can still qualify for some aid if you start later.

Overview of Financial Aid

If you and your parents have filed taxes, you may be able to use the IRS data retrieval tool to automatically import your tax information. There may be circumstances where the IRS data retrieval tool doesn't work, in which case you can fill out the FAFSA by inputting the information on your tax returns. The FAFSA uses prior-prior year taxes, meaning that if you're filing a FAFSA to start school in Fall 2021, you will use your 2019 taxes.

If your parent does not have a social security number, they will not be able to use the IRS data retrieval tool, but they can still submit the FAFSA. Go to page 19 for more information.

Remember that not all families are required to file taxes, depending on how much money your family makes.

Students who work may worry about whether or not they were supposed to file or pay taxes. Most students do not have to file taxes, because a single person does not have to file taxes if they make less than a certain amount. In 2020, that amount was \$12,000.

DACA Recipients and Undocumented Students: Apply Online at dream.csac.ca.gov

Undocumented students and DACA recipients do not have to fill out the FAFSA. If you are undocumented or a DACA recipient, you may be able to receive state aid through the CA Dream Act (CADAA). You do not have to be eligible for DACA in order to receive CADAA funding. It is also possible to be eligible for DACA but not CADAA since the requirements are different.

The eligibility requirements and instructions for how to fill out the CADAA are available on the CSAC website. **Note that CSAC, which runs the CA Dream Act program, does not share applicant information with immigration authorities.**

Enroll in College

In order to actually receive financial aid, a student must enroll in college or an eligible technical or trade school. If you are planning to go to community college, you can find more information about the application process at <https://home.cccapply.org/en/>.

After a student has applied to and enrolled in college, the college will apply the student's financial aid to their college bill to cover costs like tuition and fees. Sometimes there will be money left over after aid has been applied—remember that the cost of attendance for college includes tuition and fees, living expenses, books and supplies, and other costs. If there is money left over after the aid has been applied, the college will send the rest to the student. This is referred to as “disbursement.”

Verification

Sometimes, as part of the application and enrollment process, students receive a letter to verify the information provided on their FAFSA. Getting a letter doesn't mean that you've done anything wrong; a certain number of students every year are randomly selected for verification. You **MUST** complete the verification paperwork if you want to get financial aid, so it's very important to check your mail and/or college email address to make sure you don't miss any notifications. Usually, verification emails or letters come sometime between March and July (this can depend on when you filled out the FAFSA), so be on the lookout! Call your college financial aid office if you have any questions.

Students may be asked to verify things like their income, foster youth status, or status as a homeless youth—check pages 11-13 for more information about how to verify your status.

Overview of Financial Aid

How do I apply for Cal Grant or Chafee Grants?

Cal Grant

Cal Grant is a state financial aid program that provides money to go to college. To maximize the likelihood of being awarded a Cal Grant, students should apply every year starting with the year they graduate high school. The full eligibility requirements for Cal Grant are available at csac.ca.gov/cal-grants. Current and former foster youth under the age of 26 may have extended eligibility for Cal Grant, so foster youth should check the John Burton Advocates' for Youth (JBAY) financial aid guide for more detailed information, at <https://www.jbaforyouth.org/ca-fy-financial-aid-guide>.

Remember, for purposes of Cal Grant, youth in juvenile halls, camps, ranches, or DJJ are not considered to be “incarcerated” and are therefore eligible to receive aid.

To apply for a Cal Grant, fill out the FAFSA or CA Dream Act application by March 2nd of the year you want to start college (so, if you will graduate from high school in 2021, you will need to submit your FAFSA or Dream Act application by March 2nd of 2021). If you are attending a CA Community College, you can apply until Sept 2nd, but it is best to apply by March 2nd to maximize award consideration.

You must also submit a high school GPA to the California Student Aid Commission by March 2nd. Your high school is responsible for providing this information to CSAC, which they can do online through the WebGrants Portal or on a paper form. Most high schools do this automatically, but you should double-check that they did by logging into your WebGrants account at mygrantinfo.csac.ca.gov.

If your school does not submit GPAs automatically, use the paper GPA verification form. If your high school is not sure how to submit your GPA, they can get help [here](#). If you are not sure who to contact about submitting your GPA, you can ask for help from your counselor, social worker, probation officer, or the foster youth liaison at your school district.

Chafee Grant

The [Chafee Grant](#) provides additional financial support for current and former foster youth under the age of 26 who want to go to college. To qualify for the Chafee Grant, you must:

- Be a current or former foster youth who was a ward of the court, living in foster care, at least one day between the ages of 16 and 18.
- If you are/were in a legal guardianship with a relative (sometimes referred to as KIN-GAP) or a non-relative, or were adopted, you are eligible only if you were a dependent or ward of the court, living in foster care, at least one day between the ages of 16 and 18.
- Have not reached your 26th birthday as of July 1st of the award year.
- Have not participated in the Chafee Grant program for more than 5 years total (whether consecutive or not).

Remember, probation and child welfare agencies can both supervise and place youth in foster care. Probation-supervised foster youth are eligible for Chafee Grants if they meet the eligibility requirements.

You can apply for the Chafee Grant by filling out a FAFSA or CA Dream Act application, as well as the Chafee application. The application opens in October of each year. The FAFSA and CADAA need to be filled out every year, but the Chafee application only needs to be filled out once for first-time applicants. You can email chafee@csac.ca.gov with questions.

Financial Aid & Juvenile Justice

Fast Facts:

- 1) Students with juvenile justice system involvement are, generally, eligible to apply for financial aid.
- 2) Many youth in the juvenile justice system are foster youth and are eligible for financial aid, campus support, and benefits programs for foster youth. These youth may be referred to as "crossover youth" or "probation-supervised foster youth." This does not mean that they are on probation, but rather that a probation agency is in charge of providing services instead of a child welfare agency. Some youth who are in extended foster care may also be supervised through probation.
- 3) The juvenile justice system and the adult criminal justice system are two different systems, run by different entities, with different rules and regulations. Juvenile adjudications are not the same as adult convictions.
- 4) Some students with juvenile justice system involvement may also have later involvement with the adult criminal justice system. Students with adult criminal justice system involvement are also, generally, eligible for financial aid if they are living in the community.
- 5) Youth with juvenile justice system involvement can and do go to college. Many are involved in campus programs like Rising Scholars, Underground Scholars, or Project Rebound.
- 6) Youth with juvenile justice system involvement may or may not be considered "wards of the court" on the FAFSA. See page 11 for more information.

Financial Aid & Juvenile Justice

Students with juvenile or criminal justice system involvement are, generally, eligible for financial aid!

Many students who are or have been in juvenile hall or on probation go on to college each year, and some are enrolled in online or in-person college classes while they are still in juvenile hall. There are very limited circumstances in which someone who is a U.S. citizen or permanent resident would be disqualified from receiving financial aid.

There is one restriction on what kind of aid you can get while you are in a juvenile hall, camp, ranch, or the Division of Juvenile Justice (DJJ)—you can't get federal loans while you are detained. This rule applies to adults in prisons and jails as well. However, youth in juvenile halls, camps, ranches, or DJJ facilities can still get other kinds of aid, like Pell Grants and Cal Grant.

There are two reasons that people might be confused about this. First, people who are incarcerated in adult state or federal prisons are not currently eligible to receive Federal Pell Grants (this rule will change in 2023). Juvenile hall, camps, ranches, and DJJ are not an adult state or federal prison, so that rule does not apply. Jails are also not considered adult state or federal prisons, so that rule does not apply to people incarcerated in jails.

Are you a financial aid professional? If so, more guidance about Pell Grants and incarcerated students is available at <https://ifap.ed.gov/dear-colleague-letters/12-08-2014-gen-14-21-subject-federal-pell-grant-eligibility-students>

Second, certain adult drug convictions can affect eligibility for financial aid. Adults who are convicted of possession or sale of illegal drugs WHILE they are receiving federal financial aid are barred from getting federal financial aid (but can be reinstated). **Juvenile drug offenses don't count**, nor do adult offenses committed at a time when the adult was NOT receiving financial aid.

Can I apply for college and financial aid while I am in juvenile hall?

Yes, absolutely! California law says that young people in a county juvenile hall, camp, ranch, or forestry ranch must have access to computers and the Internet “for the purposes of education.” The law also says that county probation can limit or deny that access for safety, security, or staffing reasons. But barring those exceptions, young people in county juvenile facilities should be able to use computers and the Internet to complete their high school and college coursework and apply for financial aid.

Additionally, two new laws, SB 716 and AB 1354, say that youth in juvenile hall should have access to college resources. SB 716 requires probation to offer access to online community college classes to high school graduates in the juvenile halls and camps. AB 1354 requires the county office of education to provide information about college, financial aid, and careers to youth in juvenile hall.

The laws are a little different for youth in facilities run by the Division of Juvenile Justice and don't have the same requirements for computer and internet access. However, DJJ facilities provide access to college classes as part of their rehabilitative mission.

Troubleshooting Financial Aid

Fast Facts:

- 1) Students with juvenile justice system involvement are, generally, eligible to apply for financial aid.
- 2) Not all students with juvenile justice system involvement are considered "wards of the court" for the purposes of financial aid.
- 3) Some students with juvenile justice system involvement may be experiencing special circumstances that allow them to fill out the FAFSA or CADAA without parental information. The most common circumstances are foster youth status, being homeless or self-supporting and at risk of homelessness, and being a parent supporting a child, but there may be others.
- 4) Students who are experiencing special circumstances may need help from a counselor, teacher, probation officer, social worker, or other trusted adult in order to work with their college's financial aid office to qualify for aid.
- 5) Students and supportive adults should always ask for help if they are unsure how to fill out an application or if they are not sure if they qualify to fill out the FAFSA or CADAA without parental information. Good places to ask for help are the college's financial aid office and the California Student Aid Commission (CSAC). You can reach CSAC at 888-224-7268 or at studentsupport@csac.ca.gov.
- 6) Students should make sure to create a [WebGrants 4 Students](#) account so they can track their financial aid application status.

Troubleshooting Financial Aid

Do I need to provide parent information on the FAFSA or CADAA?

Some groups of students do not have to submit parental information on the FAFSA because they are considered **independent students**. Here are some common reasons why you would not have to submit parental information:

- You were in foster care or were a dependent or ward of the court at age 13 or older.
- You are an emancipated minor, or someone other than a parent or step-parent had legal guardianship of you. (Note that guardianship and custody are not the same thing.)
- You are an unaccompanied youth age 21 or younger who is homeless or self-supporting and at risk of being homeless.*
- You have children who receive more than half of their support from you.
- You are providing more than half of the support for another dependent, for instance, a sibling, parent, or grandparent.
- You are married.
- You are a veteran.
- You are 24 years old or older.

*Note that if you are a homeless youth age 22-24 you may still qualify as independent through the dependency override process.

Remember, "ward of the court" and "guardianship" have a specific meanings; not all youth who have been in juvenile hall are "wards of the court" for FAFSA purposes, and not all youth who have had someone other than a parent as a guardian have been "in guardianship." These issues are covered in depth in the next sections.

If you are unsure if you fall into any of these categories, talk to your counselor, social worker, probation officer, lawyer, or financial aid officer.

How do I know if I am or was a dependent or ward of the court?

For FAFSA purposes, you are a dependent or ward of the court if, after the age of 13, you had a foster care placement order. This placement order could be through the child welfare system or through probation. If you were placed outside of your parent's or guardian's home in a place other than a juvenile detention setting—such as in a group home, treatment program, or other family member's home—you are a ward of the court for the FAFSA. If you were in a foster care placement before entering the juvenile justice system, you qualify as a dependent or ward of the court as long as you were in foster care, even only for a day, after turning 13.

Remember, probation-supervised foster youth are foster youth and have the same rights and eligibility for supportive programming, benefits, and financial aid as child welfare-supervised foster youth. Involvement with the juvenile justice system does not "erase" or "reset" prior involvement with the child welfare system. Note that this is different from the way the law worked prior to 2009, before they changed the "ward of the court" definition.

In the juvenile justice system, "ward of the court" means something different than it does on the FAFSA, which can lead to confusion. Sometimes people think that anyone who has been in juvenile hall or on probation qualifies as a ward of the court for FAFSA. This is incorrect. On the other hand, sometimes people get confused and think that anyone who has been in juvenile hall or on probation is definitely not a ward of the court for FAFSA. This is also incorrect; many youth who have been involved in the juvenile justice system have also been in foster care.

Troubleshooting Financial Aid

If you are not sure if you ever had a foster care placement order, contact probation or the Foster Care Ombudsperson's office to check.

It's better to check before filling out the FAFSA, but if you fill out the FAFSA and select the wrong option, you can always log back in and correct your answer.

If you are or were a ward of the court, your financial aid office will try to automatically verify your data. If they are unable to verify, you will need to provide them with a verification letter to prove that you are or were a ward of the court. If you are currently a ward of the court, you can get a letter from your county social worker, Independent Living Program, or probation officer. If you are a former ward of the court, you can call the State Foster Care Ombudsperson's Office at 877-846-1602.

Remember, if it turns out that you are not a ward of the court, make sure to check whether you qualify as an independent student under one of the other categories, or whether you might qualify for a dependency override (see pages 14-15).

Do you need a letter from probation verifying your foster youth status?

According to WIC 607.5, probation is obligated to provide probation-supervised foster youth with a verification of their foster youth status. For financial aid purposes, probation should write a letter to the financial aid office confirming that the youth was a ward of the court. A sample letter is available here:

<https://www.cdss.ca.gov/lettersnotices/entres/getinfo/acl07/pdf/07-33E.pdf>

What does "guardianship" mean on the FAFSA?

For the FAFSA, a guardianship is when someone other than a youth's parents has a court order that says that they have full legal and physical custody of the youth and the parents' rights have been terminated. This order has to be made by a judge in court. In this situation, the youth's parents may still be able to contact the youth, but they don't have the right to make decisions for the youth because their parental rights have been terminated.

There are many situations in which a youth might live with someone who isn't their parent, but not all of those situations are guardianships for the purpose of the FAFSA. If you are living with a grandparent, but there is no legal paperwork saying that your grandparent is your legal guardian, that is not considered to be a guardianship for the FAFSA.

There are also other kinds of legal documents that authorize someone other than a youth's parents to make decisions about their healthcare or education without establishing a legal guardianship. While these documents may be prepared by a lawyer, they are not a court order. For example, in California, parents can sign a form called a "Caregiver Authorization Affidavit," which allows someone else to make certain kinds of decisions about a youth's life. This is not a legal guardianship for the purposes of the FAFSA because the parents' rights have not been terminated. Sometimes parents may also give someone else "power of attorney" so that they can make certain decisions about a youth's life. This is also not a legal guardianship for the purposes of the FAFSA, because the parents' rights have not been terminated.

Troubleshooting Financial Aid

What's the definition of homeless for financial aid purposes?

On the FAFSA, an unaccompanied youth who is 21 or younger and is homeless or self-supporting and at risk of being homeless is an independent student and does not have to provide parental information. If you are an unaccompanied youth who is between 22-24, you can still qualify as an independent student through the dependency override process (see pages 14-15).

- A youth is unaccompanied if they are not in the physical custody of a parent or legal guardian.
- A youth is homeless if they do not have fixed, regular, and adequate housing.
- A youth is self-supporting and at risk of being homeless if they are currently paying for their own living expenses, including housing, but that housing may cease to be fixed, regular, and adequate.

A youth who is fleeing an abusive parent may be considered homeless even if the parent says they would provide support and a place to live. For instance, if a youth who identifies as LGBTQ has left their parent's home because their parent does not accept them, but the parent says that they would allow the youth to live at home if the youth stopped identifying as LGBTQ, that youth could still be considered homeless.

In order to be considered homeless for purposes of the FAFSA, a student must provide a documentation letter from a local homeless educational liaison, who is usually a person who works at the school district, a shelter or transitional living program that is funded by the Runaway & Homeless Youth Act, or a shelter or transitional living program funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). If a student can't provide documentation,

they can have an interview with the college financial aid staff, who will determine whether or not the student qualifies as homeless. It's important to contact your counselor, probation officer, social worker, shelter director or other homeless youth provider, or other supportive adult if you think that you qualify as homeless, so that they can help get you your letter or provide supporting evidence to a financial aid officer.

Are you a homeless youth who needs help navigating financial aid?

The National Center for Homeless Education (NCHE) has a hotline you can call at 1-800-308-2145. You can also find resources through Schoolhouse Connection at <https://www.schoolhouseconnection.org> and the National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth at <https://naehcy.org>.

I don't have a house or apartment, but sometimes I stay with friends, family members, or at motels—could I be considered homeless?

Possibly. A student is considered homeless if they don't have fixed, regular, and adequate housing. Children and youth who are sharing housing with other people due to loss of housing or economic hardship can be considered homeless. Likewise, children and youth living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds can be considered homeless. Living in a car, park, public place, abandoned building, or substandard housing could also be considered homelessness.

Troubleshooting Financial Aid

I am a dependent student and my parent is worried about sharing their information with the government. What can I tell them?

There are many reasons that a parent might be worried about sharing their personal information on the FAFSA or California Dream Act Application. In some cases, parents may worry that filling out the FAFSA will draw attention to their immigration status. Others may think that sharing their information will lead to them being audited, or that filing out the FAFSA means that they are agreeing to pay their child's tuition. Note that in cases where parents are separated or divorced, the parent who the student has lived with the most over the past year fills out the FAFSA. If that parent has remarried, both the parent and step-parent income is reported on the FAFSA.

Here are a few quick facts to share with a parent, step-parent, or guardian who is concerned about filling out the FAFSA or CADAA:

1) The FAFSA does not currently and has not previously shared information with Immigration and Customs Enforcement, though they are not prohibited from doing so in the future. There is some risk that the federal government could use the FAFSA to find out a parent's immigration status. If you are an undocumented student or DACA recipient filling out the CADAA, it is very unlikely that your CADAA information would be shared with ICE, because CADAA is run by the state of California, and they have said that they will not share CADAA info with federal authorities.

2) If the parent has filed taxes, the information they are supplying on the FAFSA is information that the government already has; the IRS data retrieval tool pulls information from prior tax filings and fills it out on the FAFSA.

3) The government is the entity that issues social security numbers. When the government asks for your social security number on the FAFSA, they are using it to verify your identity, because the government already knows what your social security number is.

4) When a parent fills out the FAFSA, they are not promising to pay for college costs. Filling out the FAFSA does not mean that the parent has to pay any bills or take out any loans. Parents who want to may have the option of taking out a loan to pay their child's tuition, but unless they do so, the parent is not responsible for the student's bills.

5) If a parent did not file taxes when they were supposed to, the student cannot receive financial aid until the parent files their taxes, or until the student becomes independent. Parents who do not have social security numbers can file taxes using an Individual Taxpayer ID Number or (ITIN).

Remember, not all students have to provide parent information on the FAFSA. Some students are considered "independent" for purposes of the FAFSA. More information about independent student status is on page 11, above.

I can't get my parent's info for the FAFSA or CADAA. What can I do?

If you don't automatically qualify for independent student status but you have another reason that you cannot get your parent's information for the FAFSA or CADAA, you could be eligible for a **dependency override** through your college financial aid office. Dependency overrides are for students who are experiencing special circumstances not covered under independent student status. For instance, if you cannot locate your parents, if both of your parents are institutionalized or incarcerated, if your parents are physically or emotionally abusive, if your

Troubleshooting Financial Aid

parents kicked you out of your home, or your parents lack the physical or mental capacity to act as parents, you may qualify for a dependency override. If you are a homeless youth age 22-24 you may also qualify for a dependency override.

Dependency overrides are given on a case-by-case basis and are authorized by the financial aid office at your school. It is usually easier to qualify for an override if you do not live with or are not in contact with your parents, but it is a case-by-case determination. If you think that you might qualify, you should contact the financial aid office and ask them about what kind of information you need to provide to them. You may need to provide letters or documents from your social worker, counselor, therapist, probation officer, or other people who are familiar with your life circumstances, such as a teacher or mentor. It is important to be proactive when you are asking for a dependency override; colleges are very unlikely to reach out to you to ask if you need one.

Remember, you cannot qualify for a dependency override just because your parent or guardian does not want to fill out the FAFSA; colleges are prohibited from giving out dependency overrides without special circumstances.

Can I get financial aid without filling out the FAFSA or CADAA?

If you do not fall into any of the special categories and do not qualify for a dependency override, you unfortunately will not be able to qualify for most financial aid without providing your parent's information on the FAFSA or CADAA. You may still qualify for the California College Promise Grant. If you are a citizen or permanent resident, and you are not currently detained in a juvenile hall, you can still qualify for an Unsubsidized Stafford Loan.

In order to qualify for a Stafford Loan, you should fill out the FAFSA without parental information and talk to your college financial aid officer; if they find that your parent has ended financial support and refuses to fill out the FAFSA, they can authorize you to take out an Unsubsidized Stafford Loan.

If you are planning on going to community college, you may be able to get free tuition by applying for the California College Promise Grant. You can apply for this grant by filling out the FAFSA, or by filling out a separate application. It still requires a parent's signature and income if you are a dependent student, but it does not require the parent to share as much detailed information as the FAFSA or CADAA.

Why should I fill out the FAFSA or CADAA if I can get free community college tuition through the College Promise Grant?

The FAFSA and CADAA offer more opportunities for financial aid than the College Promise Grant. The College Promise Grant ONLY covers tuition, and college costs are more than just tuition. Filling out the FAFSA and CADAA may allow you to access money for living expenses or books and supplies. Filling out the FAFSA is also required if you want to be considered for on-campus federal work-study jobs. (Note that federal work-study is only available through the FAFSA, not the CADAA, although there may be other on-campus work opportunities for CADAA applicants.)

Students who are currently taking classes through College Promise grants in a hall, camp, or ranch *may* want to wait to fill out the FAFSA until they are preparing for re-entry into the community. Why? The Pell Grant only offers 12 semesters of full-time funding, and it may not

Troubleshooting Financial Aid

make sense to use that money while students are detained, since during that time they are not paying for living expenses. However, this decision will differ case-by-case, as students may also need to consider deadlines to apply for state aid.

What information do I need to provide for the California College Promise Grant?

The College Promise Grant program, formerly the Board of Governor's (BOG) Fee Waiver, is run by individual community colleges, so there may be differences in the application from college to college. In general, applying for this grant requires less parental information than the FAFSA or CADAA, since a parent's social security number or current address is not necessarily required. Students can qualify for the College Promise Grant in three ways. First, they can provide information showing that they or their household receives government benefits like TANF, SSI, or General Assistance. Second, they can meet certain income requirements. Third, they can submit a FAFSA or CADAA application that shows that they have unmet financial need.

If you fill out the FAFSA or CADAA, you don't need to do a separate application in order to get the CA College Promise Grant. But if you are unable to fill out either of those applications, you can contact your college's financial aid department to ask how to apply without filling out the FAFSA. Many colleges offer an online College Promise application through cccapply.org, but others may have different applications. Be sure to check with your local college to make sure that you apply by their deadline.

Remember, the California College Promise Grant is not the same thing as "California Promise" (also referred to as AB 19). The California College Promise Grant requires that students earn below a certain income level and does not require FAFSA or CADAA completion.

We know that this is a lot of information! To summarize, here are three things to remember:

- 1) Youth with juvenile justice involvement generally **are eligible** for some form of financial aid.
- 2) Many youth with juvenile justice involvement may be experiencing **special circumstances** that allow them to fill out the FAFSA or CADAA without parental information.
- 3) **Always ask for help** if you are unsure how to apply for financial aid or of what aid you are eligible for. Good places to ask for help are your **college's financial aid office** and the **California Student Aid Commission**.

You can reach CSAC at **888-224-7268**, or at **studentsupport@csac.ca.gov**.

You can also contact the FAFSA Help Center at **<https://studentaid.gov/help-center/contact>**

FAFSA Walkthrough

We've pulled out a few of the screens on the FAFSA that we think might be confusing for youth and staff in the juvenile justice system when filling out the FAFSA. However, this is not a full FAFSA walkthrough. A list of FAFSA walkthroughs, including resources specifically for foster youth and homeless youth, is in the Resources section on page 21.

Mailing Address

The screenshot shows the 'Student Address' section of the FAFSA application. At the top, there is a navigation bar with tabs: Student Demographics, School Selection, Dependency Status, Parent Demographics, Parent Financials, Student Financials, Sign & Submit, and Confirmation. The 'STUDENT INFORMATION' tab is selected. Below this, there are four input fields, each with a question mark icon to its right:

- Your permanent mailing address (include apt. number)
- Your city (and country if not U.S.)
- Your state (with a dropdown menu showing 'Select')
- Your ZIP code

At the bottom right of the form, there are two buttons: 'PREVIOUS' and 'NEXT'.

Students should provide a mailing address where they will be able to check their mail regularly. This address is where the financial aid office will mail any follow-up paperwork, like verification papers. If a student isn't able to check their mail, it could negatively impact their ability to get financial aid. If a student is currently in a facility and has their mail sent to an address in the community, they should make sure that someone is checking the mail regularly.

If students' addresses change, they should make sure to inform their college. Probation and facility staff should also make sure to pass on any mail they receive after a youth is released.

Colleges may also communicate about follow-up paperwork via email. Colleges will often assign students college email addresses once students are accepted. Regularly checking that email address before school starts is another way to receive important information and reminders.

High School Completion

Student Education

Student Demographics | School Selection | Dependency Status | Parent Demographics | Parent Financials | Student Financials | Sign & Submit | Confirmation

STUDENT INFORMATION

What will your high school completion status be when you begin college in the 2020-2021 school year? ?

Select

What college degree or certificate will you be working on when you begin the 2020-2021 school year? ?

Select

Will you have your first bachelor's degree before you begin the 2020-2021 school year? ?

☐ Yes ☐ No

What will your college grade level be when you begin the 2020-2021 school year? ?

Select

Are you interested in being considered for work-study? ?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Don't know

[< PREVIOUS](#) [NEXT >](#)

Youth in the juvenile justice system might have a diploma under their local graduation requirements, an AB 167/state graduation requirements diploma, or have passed the GED, HiSet, TASC, or California High School Proficiency Exam (CHSPE). All of these things count as having completed high school. Regardless of how you completed high school, you should ask your last high school to send a Cal Grant GPA verification form to the California Student Aid Commission by March 2, or by September 2 if you are a foster youth, in case you are eligible for Cal Grant money.

Driver's License

Student Driver's License

Student Demographics | School Selection | Dependency Status | Parent Demographics | Parent Financials | Student Financials | Sign & Submit | Confirmation

STUDENT INFORMATION

Your driver's license number (if you have one) ?

|

Your driver's license state ?

Select

[< PREVIOUS](#) [NEXT >](#)

You don't have to have a driver's license to submit a FAFSA, and your driving record doesn't affect your eligibility for financial aid. The FAFSA only asks for driver's license information as an additional way to verify your identity.

Foster Care

Student Foster Care and Parent Education Completion

Student Demographics | School Selection | Dependency Status | Parent Demographics | Parent Financials | Student Financials | Sign & Submit | Confirmation

STUDENT INFORMATION

Are you a foster youth or were you at any time in the foster care system? ?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Highest school completed by Parent 1 ?

Select

Highest school completed by Parent 2 ?

Select

[< PREVIOUS](#) [NEXT >](#)

Even if you were only in foster care for one day, you should answer "yes" to the question "are you a foster youth or were you at any time in the foster care system?" Remember that youth can be placed in foster care through the child welfare system or through probation.

Eligibility—Prior Conviction

Student Eligibility Worksheet

Student Demographics | School Selection | Dependency Status | Parent Demographics | Parent Financials | Student Financials | Sign & Submit | Confirmation

STUDENT INFORMATION

Have you ever received federal student aid?
☒ Yes ☐ No

Eligibility Worksheet

Have you been convicted for the possession or sale of illegal drugs for an offense that occurred while you were receiving federal student aid (grants, work-study, and/or loans)?
☒ Yes ☐ No

Have all of your federal or state drug-related convictions been removed from your record?
☐ Yes ☒ No

Did the offense for possessing or selling illegal drugs occur during a period of enrollment for which you were receiving federal student aid (grants, work-study, and/or loans)?
☒ Yes ☐ No

Have you completed an acceptable drug rehabilitation program since your last conviction?
☐ Yes ☒ No

PREVIOUS NEXT

This slide may seem scary, but for most youth, it's no big deal. In fact, you may not even see the questions asking about prior convictions if this is your first time applying for student aid. Remember—Adults who are convicted of possession or sale of illegal drugs WHILE they are receiving federal financial aid are barred from getting federal financial aid (but they can speed up their reinstatement by completing a drug rehabilitation program or by passing two unannounced drug tests). Juvenile drug offenses don't count. Adult offenses committed during a time when the adult was NOT receiving financial aid don't count.

Parent Information

Personal Information for Parent

Student Demographics | School Selection | Dependency Status | Parent Demographics | Parent Financials | Student Financials | Sign & Submit | Confirmation

PARENT INFORMATION

Enter Information for your first parent (father/mother/stepparent)

Parent's Social Security Number

Parent's last name

Parent's first initial

Parent's date of birth

Your parents' e-mail address

PREVIOUS NEXT

If your parent does not have a social security number, enter in all zeroes. Do not enter in their taxpayer identification number (TIN). You can still complete the FAFSA without a parent social security number. At the end of the FAFSA, they will print and sign a signature page rather than signing with an FSA ID. For more information on filling out the FAFSA when your parent is undocumented, check the resources on page 23.

If your parent has a social security number but does not want to provide it to you, see the information on page 14.

Dependency

Student Additional Dependency Questions

Student Demographics School Selection **Dependency Status** Parent Demographics Parent Financials Student Financials Sign & Submit Confirmation

STUDENT INFORMATION

Answer the following questions to determine if you are required to provide information about your parents on your FAFSA. Check all that apply or check **None of the above**.

☐ Are you currently serving on active duty in the U.S. Armed Forces for purposes other than training?

☐ Are you a veteran of the U.S. Armed Forces?

☒ At any time since you turned age 13, were both your parents deceased, were you in foster care, or were you a dependent or ward of the court?

☐ As determined by a court in your state of legal residence, are you or were you an emancipated minor?

☐ Does someone other than your parent or stepparent have legal guardianship of you, as determined by a court in your state of legal residence?

☐ None of the above

PREVIOUS NEXT

This is the part of the FAFSA that asks about "ward of the court" and "legal guardianship." For a full explanation of those terms, check page 11. Remember, "ward of the court" is defined differently for financial aid purposes than it is for juvenile justice purposes. To be a ward of the court on the FAFSA, the court must have assumed legal custody of you (which is different from physical custody). Similarly, legal guardianship for the FAFSA requires that a court has made an order that someone other than your parent or step-parent is legally responsible for you; living with someone who is not your parent or step-parent does not necessarily mean that they have legal guardianship of you.

Homeless/Unaccompanied

Student Homelessness Filter Question

Student Demographics School Selection **Dependency Status** Parent Demographics Parent Financials Student Financials Sign & Submit Confirmation

STUDENT INFORMATION

On or after July 1, 2019, were you homeless or were you self-supporting and at risk of being homeless?

☐ Yes ☐ No

PREVIOUS NEXT

Student Homelessness Questions

Student Demographics School Selection **Dependency Status** Parent Demographics Parent Financials Student Financials Sign & Submit Confirmation

STUDENT INFORMATION

At any time on or after July 1, 2019, did you receive a determination from any of the entities listed below that you were an unaccompanied youth who was homeless, or were self-supporting and at risk of being homeless? Check all that apply, or check **None of the above**.

☐ Your high school or school district homeless liaison

☐ The director of an emergency shelter or transitional housing program funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

☐ The director of a runaway or homeless youth basic center or transitional living program

☐ None of the above

PREVIOUS NEXT

Check page 13 for more information about how homelessness is defined. Remember that it's a good idea to talk to your school district, shelter director, or other supportive adult about getting a letter that shows that you have been determined to be an unaccompanied youth who was homeless or self-supporting and at risk of being homeless. If you can't get a letter, you may still be able to qualify as a homeless youth by interviewing with your financial aid officer.

Note: If you are living in student housing but would otherwise be homeless or at risk of being homeless, you still qualify as a homeless youth on the FAFSA. You do not qualify as a homeless youth while you are in the juvenile hall or a DJJ facility, but if you were homeless or at risk of being homeless before entering, or if you become homeless or at risk of being homeless after you are released, you could qualify as a homeless youth on the FAFSA.

Do you help youth with the FAFSA? Get ready—changes are coming in 2023!

In 2020, Congress passed legislation that will greatly simplify the financial aid process by 2023. Changes include:

Shortening and simplifying the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). Filling out the FAFSA can be very intimidating for all students, but it can be particularly difficult for youth in the child welfare or juvenile justice system, who may not have easy access to financial aid professionals to help them. These changes will make it easier for youth and supportive adults to complete the application.

Removing the requirement that students register for Selective Service in order to get financial aid. This can be a barrier for older students who were in foster care or the juvenile justice system during their high school years, which can lead to students not knowing that they have to sign up for Selective Service.

Fighting misconceptions about youth eligibility for the Pell Grant. After many years of work by criminal justice advocates, adults who are incarcerated will once again be eligible to receive financial aid! While youth in the juvenile justice system have always retained eligibility for federal financial aid, it's easy for people to get confused about the difference between the adult and juvenile systems. This change should help fight misconceptions about aid eligibility for youth in the juvenile justice system as well as benefit adults in the criminal justice system, including those who have prior involvement with child welfare or juvenile justice.

Simplifying the process to qualify as an independent student. Financial aid officers will be required to accept a wide range of documentation, including phone calls from agencies, attorneys, CASAs, and others, for foster youth, unaccompanied homeless youth, or other independent student status. In the past, the process for becoming an independent student has been difficult and can vary from college to college. Changes in this legislation will make it easier for students to qualify as independent, and will prevent students from having to reapply for independent status every year. Colleges will also be required to publicize the process for becoming an independent student.

More information about these changes will become available over time. You can follow organizations like Schoolhouse Connection, John Burton Advocates for Youth, and Youth Law Center (that's us!) to continue getting updates.

Resources

As you can probably tell by now, financial aid can be complicated sometimes! Many justice-involved youth may be dealing with issues other than the juvenile justice system that make applying for financial aid more complex, such as immigration status, foster care involvement, homelessness, or strained familial relationships. **It is very important to ask questions and consult resources when you are unsure about how to apply for financial aid.** Unfortunately, not all counselors, social workers, probation officers, or financial aid staff are experienced with helping justice-involved youth go to college. This guide, and the resources listed here, can help them learn more about how to help you.

General Information:

Federal Student Aid:

<https://studentaid.gov> is the most reliable source of information about federal student aid.

California Student Aid:

<https://www.csac.ca.gov> is the website for the California Student Aid Commission (CSAC), which is in charge of all California financial aid programs. They are the most reliable source of information about California-specific student aid.

Webgrants 4 Students Portal:

<https://mygrantinfo.csac.ca.gov> is the Webgrants 4 Students portal. Students must make an account here to manage their CA state financial aid.

Chafee Grant Information:

<https://chafee.csac.ca.gov> has information about and the application for the Chafee Grant for Foster Youth.

CA Dream Act:

<https://dream.csac.ca.gov> has information about and the application for the Dream Act for undocumented youth and DACA recipients.

FAFSA Walkthroughs:

The **California Student Aid Commission (CSAC)** offers trainings on the FAFSA across the state every fall. They also post FAFSA training videos on their website at <https://www.csac.ca.gov/post/cash-college-training-videos-and-electronic-materials>.

Khan Academy has a full FAFSA walkthrough available as well as general information about financial aid at <https://www.khanacademy.org/college-careers-more/college-admissions/paying-for-college/financial-aid-process/a/fafsa-walkthrough?modal=1>.

Resources

Foster Youth:

John Burton Advocates for Youth (JBAY) provides yearly trainings on applying for financial aid as a foster youth and as a homeless youth. They answer questions about the FAFSA, as well as California state aid-specific questions. Slides and videos from past trainings as well as announcements of upcoming trainings are available at their website, <https://www.jbaforyouth.org>. You can also access their financial aid guide for foster youth here: <https://www.jbaforyouth.org/ca-fy-financial-aid-guide>.

The **CA State Ombudsperson's Office** is a resource that can help current and former foster youth get their paperwork to show that they are or were foster youth. If you are currently a foster youth, start by asking your social worker, Independent Living Program coordinator, or probation officer for a verification letter, and call the Ombudsperson if you have issues getting the letter. If you are a former foster youth, start by calling or emailing the Ombudsperson.

Phone: 1-877-846-1602

Email: fosteryouthhelp@dss.ca.gov

Most public colleges also have **on-campus programs** for current and former foster youth, like **CAYFES/NextUp**, **Guardian Scholars**, or **HOPE Scholars**. These programs often have a recruitment or outreach coordinator who can help you navigate the financial aid and/or college application process. A directory of programs is available at

<http://www.cacollegepathways.org/find-campus-support-programs/find-campus-support-programs-for-foster-youth>.

Homeless Youth:

Schoolhouse Connection is a national nonprofit working to overcome homelessness through education. They have many resources to help youth and supportive adults to fill out the FAFSA, including instructional videos, a guide on how to submit documentation to show that you qualify for homeless youth status, sample homeless status verification letters for providers, and more at <https://www.schoolhouseconnection.org/fafsa>.

The **National Center for Homeless Education** (NCHE) has a hotline you can call with questions about financial aid. Their number is 1-800-308-2145.

The **National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth** (NAEHCY) has resources for youth and supportive adults at <https://naehcy.org/higher-education>. NAEHCY also runs a scholarship for homeless youth, for which undocumented homeless youth are eligible.

Resources

Undocumented Students, DACA Recipients, and Mixed-Status Families:

Immigrants Rising has a number of fact sheets that cover California financial aid for Undocumented Students, DACA recipients, and Mixed Status families.

FAFSA/CADAA Info: https://immigrantsrising.org/resources?_sft_topics=higher-education&_sft_geography=california&_sft_keyword=free-application-for-federal-student-aid-fafsa

Facts for Mixed-Status Families: <https://immigrantsrising.org/resource/mixed-status-households-how-to-apply-for-in-state-tuition-and-financial-aid>

University of California Undocumented Student Resource Website:

<https://undoc.universityofcalifornia.edu/financial-aid.html>

California State University Undocumented Student Resource Website:

<https://www2.calstate.edu/attend/student-services/resources-for-undocumented-students>

California Community Colleges Undocumented Student Resource Website:

<https://icanaffordcollege.com/Financial-Aid/Undocumented>

On-Campus Programs for Youth with Juvenile Justice Involvement and Adults with Criminal Justice Involvement:

Many colleges have on-campus programs for people who have been involved in the justice system. These programs may be able to assist with financial aid applications, the application process, and the enrollment process, as well as providing support to students once they start college.

The Rising Scholars Network provides supports to **California Community College** students who have been involved in the juvenile or criminal justice system. Learn more about them at

<https://foundationccc.org/What-We-Do/Equity/Rising-Scholars-Network>.

You can also find out more about California community colleges at <https://home.cccapply.org/en>.

At the **University of California** schools, many campuses have a chapter of **Underground Scholars**.

Every campus program has their own website, so the best way to find information is to Google "Underground Scholars" and the name of the college. You can find out more about University of California campuses at <https://admission.universityofcalifornia.edu>.

At **California State University** schools, many campuses have a **Project Rebound Program**. Every campus program has their own website, so the best way to find information is to Google "Project Rebound" and the name of the college. You can find out more about California State University schools at <https://www2.calstate.edu/attend/admissions>.

Other On-Campus Programs:

The **Educational Opportunity Program** (EOP) provides assistance through mentorship, academic programs, financial assistance, counseling/advising, and other campus support services to students who are first-generation college students and/or from low-income backgrounds. Most public colleges in California have an EOP office. Google "EOP" and the name of the college to find out more.