

## Independent Students

For the FAFSA, “independent students” not only include unaccompanied homeless youth and unaccompanied, self-supporting youth at risk of homelessness, but also include the following:

- Students born before January 1, 1986;
- Students who are married;
- Students currently on active military duty;
- Veterans;
- Students with a dependent other than a spouse;
- Students who were orphans, foster children, or wards of the court at any time since the age of 13;
- Emancipated minors; and
- Graduate students.

A financial aid administrator can also designate a student as “independent” due to other unusual circumstances.

If you are unsure of how you will pay for college...we can help!



## Want more information?

For more information on filling out the FAFSA, check out any of the following resources:

**The Law Project of the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless**

[www.chicagohomeless.org](http://www.chicagohomeless.org)  
1-800-940-1119

**National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth**

[www.naehcy.org](http://www.naehcy.org)

**College Goal Sunday**

[www.collegegoalsundayusa.org](http://www.collegegoalsundayusa.org)

**National Center for Homeless Education**

[www.serve.org/nche](http://www.serve.org/nche)

**The FAFSA forms can be found at**  
[www.fafsa.ed.gov](http://www.fafsa.ed.gov)

## Paying for College:

A guide to filling out the FAFSA for youth experiencing housing instability



**The Law Project of the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless**

1-800-940-1119

[www.chicagohomeless.org](http://www.chicagohomeless.org)

## What is FAFSA?

“FAFSA” stands for “Free Application for Federal Student Aid.” This is the application that students complete in order to apply for different types of financial aid for college.

Most students applying for financial aid will have to provide financial information and get the signature of a parent or guardian.

**However...**

## Special Provisions for Unaccompanied Homeless Youth

Unaccompanied youth are considered “independent students” for the purpose of the FAFSA. “Independent students” can apply for financial aid for college without a parent’s financial information or signature.

Independent students may also be eligible for a greater amount of financial aid.



## What You Will Need

In order to be considered an “independent student” for the FAFSA, unaccompanied homeless youth will need to receive written verification (i.e. a signed letter) that he/she was homeless and living without a parent or guardian during the school year in which the FAFSA application was submitted. Students should ask for this letter before submitting their FAFSA.

The youth must receive this written verification from one of the following:

- A school district or homeless liaison;
- The director or designee of an emergency shelter or traditional housing program (HUD-funded);
- The director or designee of a runaway or homeless youth basic center; or
- A college financial aid administrator. *20 U.S.C. §1087vv(dd).*

A sample letter can be found on our website at

[www.chicagohomeless.org](http://www.chicagohomeless.org).

## Who are Unaccompanied Homeless Youth”?

For the purposes of the FAFSA, “unaccompanied homeless youth” are students:

- Living without a parent or legal guardian; or
- Lacking a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence

This includes youth who are sharing the housing of extended family (who are not the student’s legal guardians) or friends, as well as students living in shelters, cars, parks, or abandoned buildings.

## Unaccompanied Youth “At Risk of Homelessness”

Youth who are unaccompanied, at risk of homelessness, *and* self-supporting also qualify as independent students for the purposes of the FAFSA.

A youth is unaccompanied, at risk of homelessness, and self-supporting if he or she is:

- Living without a parent or guardian;
- At risk of losing his/her fixed, regular, and adequate housing; and
- Paying for his/her own living expenses.

Youth that fall under this category will also need to get written verification of their circumstances.