

# SUPPORTING POSTSECONDARY OPPORTUNITIES FOR NEGLECTED AND DELINQUENT YOUTH

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U.S. Department of Education  
Federal Student Aid  
February 13, 2025

# PRESENTER

*Heather Hall Lewis, Ed.D.*

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- U.S. Department of Education, Office of Federal Student Aid
  - Policy Implementation and Oversight Group



# AGENDA

1. Filing the FAFSA® Form
2. Dependency Considerations
  - Independent vs Dependent
  - Orphan, Ward of the Court, and Foster Youth
  - Unaccompanied Homeless Youth
  - Unusual Circumstances
3. Special Financial Circumstances
4. Resources



# FREE APPLICATION FOR FEDERAL STUDENT AID

Filing the FAFSA® Form

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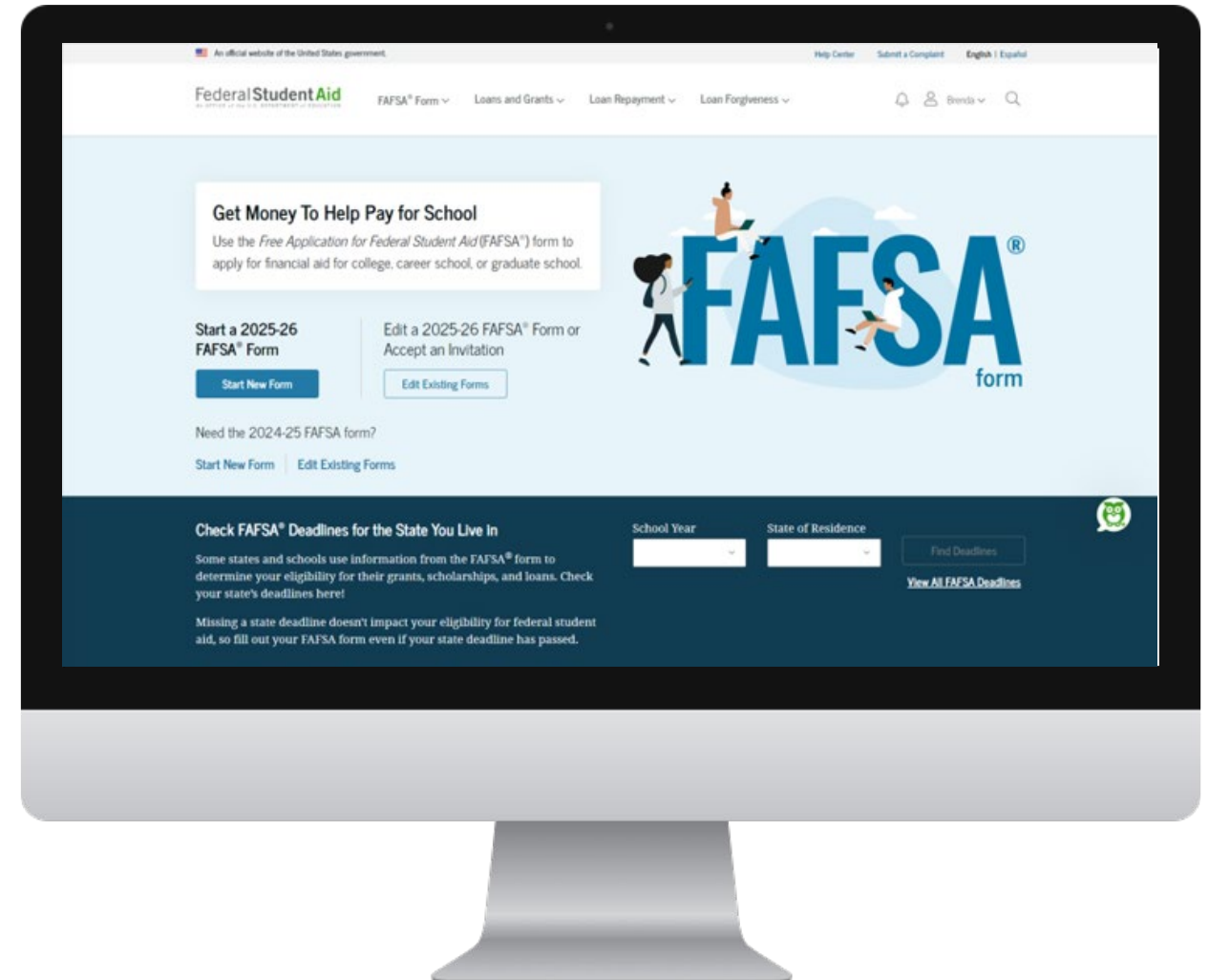
# ONLINE APPLICATION

<https://studentaid.gov/h/apply-for-aid/fafsa>

Easy

Efficient

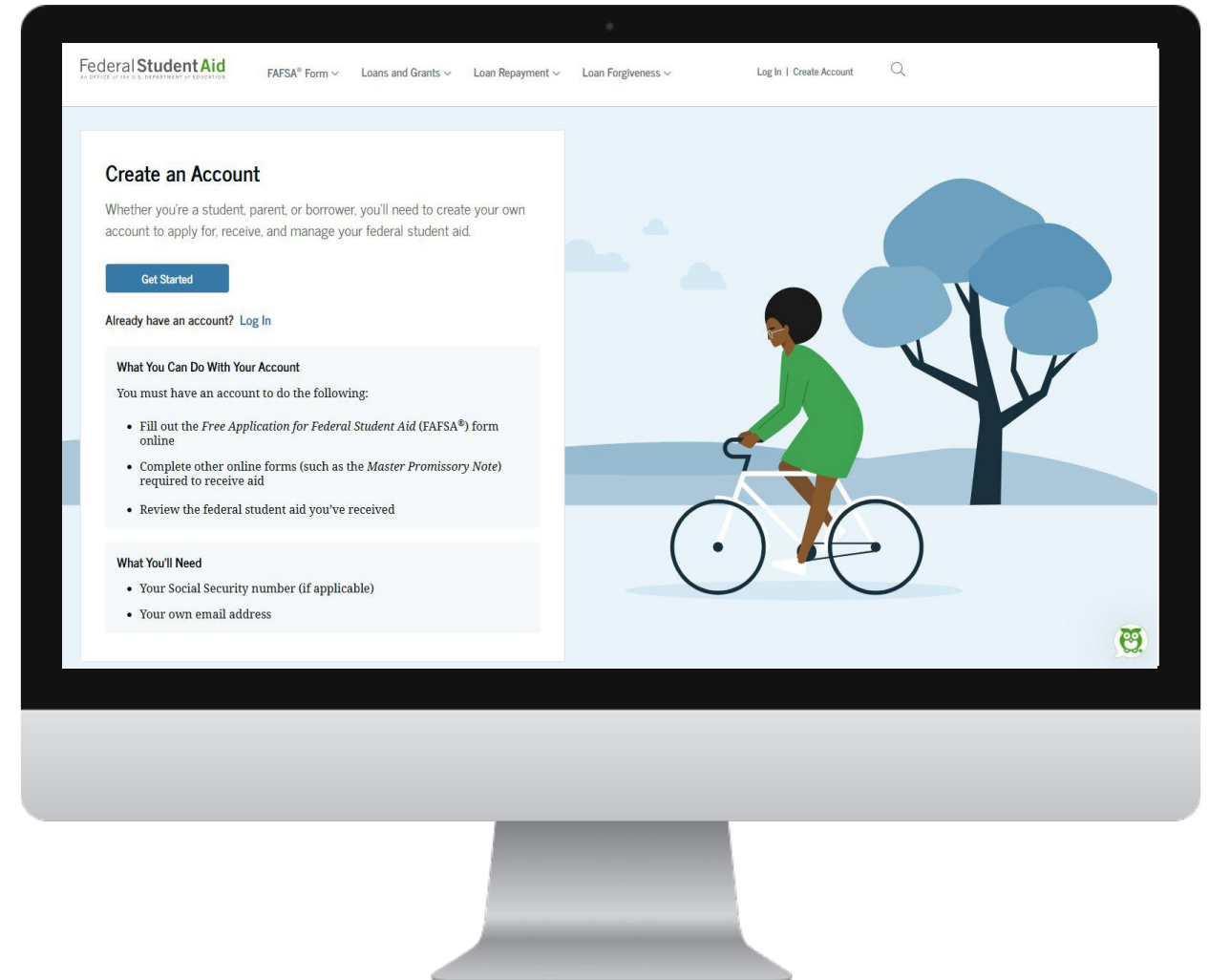
Accurate



# STUDENTAID.GOV ACCOUNT

<https://studentaid.gov/fsa-id/create-account/launch>

- Everyone needs their own
- Create it early
- Students need
  - Social Security number
  - Unique email address or mobile number
- Contributors need
  - Social Security number (if they have one)
  - Unique email address or mobile number
- Don't share it with anyone!



# STARTING THE FORM

**FAFSA**<sup>®</sup> FORM  
2025–26

Welcome, Brenda,  
to the FAFSA<sup>®</sup> Form

———— I am starting the FAFSA form as a ————



Student

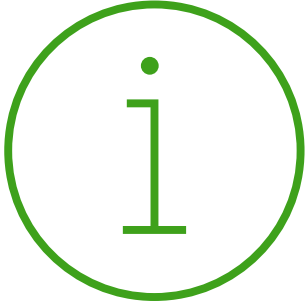


Parent



# COMPLETION TIPS

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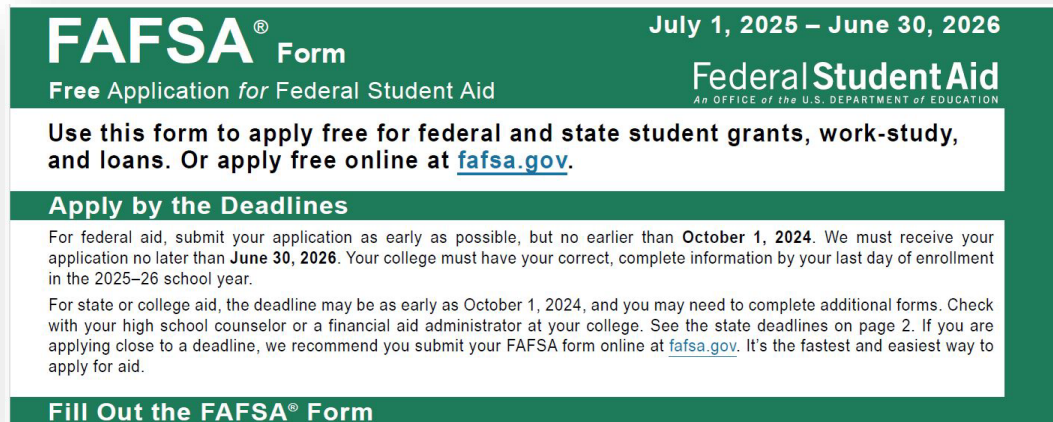


- Create your StudentAid.gov before beginning your FAFSA form.
- The student should start their own form and invite any contributors identified along the way.
- Read the questions and answers carefully.
- When in doubt, click the “information” or “?” symbols next to the question or answer options.



# PAPER APPLICATION

## Regular



**FAFSA® Form** July 1, 2025 – June 30, 2026  
Free Application for Federal Student Aid Federal Student Aid  
An OFFICE of the U.S. DEPARTMENT of EDUCATION

Use this form to apply free for federal and state student grants, work-study, and loans. Or apply free online at [fafsa.gov](https://fafsa.gov).

**Apply by the Deadlines**

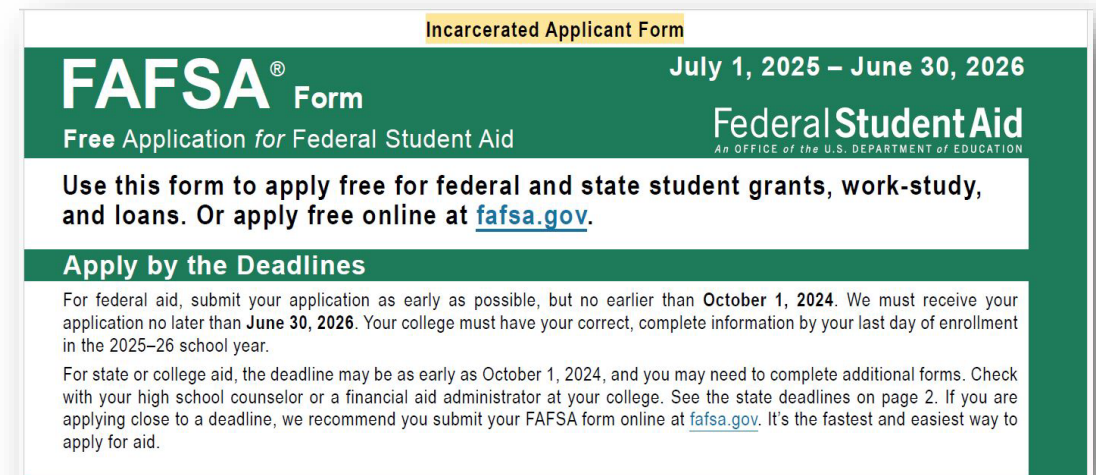
For federal aid, submit your application as early as possible, but no earlier than **October 1, 2024**. We must receive your application no later than **June 30, 2026**. Your college must have your correct, complete information by your last day of enrollment in the 2025–26 school year.

For state or college aid, the deadline may be as early as October 1, 2024, and you may need to complete additional forms. Check with your high school counselor or a financial aid administrator at your college. See the state deadlines on page 2. If you are applying close to a deadline, we recommend you submit your FAFSA form online at [fafsa.gov](https://fafsa.gov). It's the fastest and easiest way to apply for aid.

**Fill Out the FAFSA® Form**

- Any non-incarcerated individual should complete the “regular” form.
- Students exiting incarceration should also complete the “regular” form.
- <https://studentaid.gov/sites/default/files/2025-26-fafsa.pdf>

## Incarcerated



**Incarcerated Applicant Form**  
**FAFSA® Form** July 1, 2025 – June 30, 2026  
Free Application for Federal Student Aid Federal Student Aid  
An OFFICE of the U.S. DEPARTMENT of EDUCATION

Use this form to apply free for federal and state student grants, work-study, and loans. Or apply free online at [fafsa.gov](https://fafsa.gov).

**Apply by the Deadlines**

For federal aid, submit your application as early as possible, but no earlier than **October 1, 2024**. We must receive your application no later than **June 30, 2026**. Your college must have your correct, complete information by your last day of enrollment in the 2025–26 school year.

For state or college aid, the deadline may be as early as October 1, 2024, and you may need to complete additional forms. Check with your high school counselor or a financial aid administrator at your college. See the state deadlines on page 2. If you are applying close to a deadline, we recommend you submit your FAFSA form online at [fafsa.gov](https://fafsa.gov). It's the fastest and easiest way to apply for aid.

- Any student who expects to be incarcerated during any part of the award year should complete the “Incarcerated” form.
- <https://fsapartners.ed.gov/sites/default/files/attachments/2024-11/FAFSA2526Incarcen20241104.pdf>

# PAPER APPLICATION – TIPS AND TRICKS

- READ THE INSTRUCTIONS!
- Write legibly.
- Answer all required questions.
- Sign the form and complete the “Consent and approval” bubble.

## 24 Student Consent, Approval, and Signature

[See page 6.]

Refer to the terms on page 6. By filling in the answer circle below and signing this form, you (the student) agree to the terms set forth on page 6. **If you do not provide consent and approval by filling in the circle below and providing your signature, you will not be eligible for federal student aid.**

☐ Consent and approval to transfer federal tax information from the Internal Revenue Service (IRS)

Student signature

Date signed

MM		DD		YYYY					

# DEPENDENCY CONSIDERATIONS

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# DEPENDENT OR INDEPENDENT?

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# WHO IS CONSIDERED INDEPENDENT?

- Is the student at least 24 years old?
- Is the student married?
- Is the student on active duty in the U.S. military?
- Is the student a veteran?
- Does the student have children or other dependents they support?
- Is or was the student an orphan, ward of the court, or in foster care (after turning 13)?
- Is or was the student a legally emancipated minor?
- Is or was the student in a legal guardianship?
- Is the student unaccompanied and (1) homeless or (2) self-supporting and at risk of homelessness?

# ORPHAN, WARD OF THE COURT, OR FOSTER CARE

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# ORPHAN, WARD OF THE COURT, OR FOSTER CARE

- 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.





# DOCUMENTING FOSTER CARE YOUTH

## *Examples*

- Court order/official State documentation that student received Federal or State support in foster care;
- Documented phone call/written statement from a state, county, or tribal agency; state Medicaid agency, or foster care facility placing agency.
- Documented phone call/written statement from attorney, guardian ad litem, or Court Appointed Special Advocate;
- Verification of student's eligibility for education and training voucher; or
- Documented phone call/written statement from FAA who documented student's circumstance in the same or a prior award year.



# UNACCOMPANIED HOMELESS YOUTH

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# UNACCOMPANIED HOMELESS YOUTH DEFINITIONS

A homeless youth determination refers to a determination of eligibility for services under the *McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act*.

McKinney-Vento establishes the definitions for homelessness that are referenced on the FAFSA® form.



“Couch surfing” or temporarily sharing housing with others



Emergency housing, emergency or transitional shelters (e.g., FEMA trailers provided after disasters)



Motels, campgrounds, parks, cars, bus or train station, abandoned buildings, or substandard housing



School dorm, when the dormitory is the student’s only housing

# UNACCOMPANIED HOMELESS YOUTH



At any time on or after July 1 was the student unaccompanied and either

- (1) Homeless or
- (2) Self-supporting and at risk of being homeless?

If yes, did any of the following make that determination?

- (a) Director/designee of a shelter, outreach program, or drop-in center
- (b) School homeless liaison or designee
- (c) Director/designee of a TRIO or GEAR UP program
- (d) Financial aid administrator
- (e) None of these apply

# DOCUMENTING HOMELESSNESS (1 OF 2)

## *Sources*

- ✓ Homeless liaison for local educational agency
- ✓ Director/designee
  - Emergency/transitional shelter
  - Street outreach program
  - Homeless youth drop-in center
  - Other program serving homeless individuals
  - Program supported by Federal TRIO or GEAR-UP grant
- ✓ Financial aid administrator (FAA) from different school that documented student circumstance for same/prior award year



# DOCUMENTING HOMELESSNESS (2 OF 2)

## *Additional Sources*

- ✓ Written statement/documented interview with student confirming status
  - Unaccompanied homeless youth
  - Unaccompanied, at risk of homelessness, and self-supporting



Note: Reasons for status not a factor in determination

# UNUSUAL CIRCUMSTANCES

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Provisionally Independent Students

# UNUSUAL CIRCUMSTANCES

*Conditions leading to changes to student's dependency status (dependency override)*

- Human trafficking
- Legal refugee or asylee status
- Parental abandonment, incarceration, etc.
- Unable to contact parents
- Contact with parents poses risk



FAFSA applicants who indicate they have unusual circumstances that prevent them from providing parental data will receive provisional independent status and a provisional SAI.

# STUDENT UNUSUAL CIRCUMSTANCES

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





# DOCUMENTING UNUSUAL CIRCUMSTANCES

- Interview between applicant and FAA
- Official Federal or State court order of parents/legal guardian(s) incarceration
- Phone call/written statement from:
  - attorney
  - guardian ad litem
  - court-appointed special advocate (or similar)
  - representative of TRIO
  - GEAR UP confirming applicant's circumstances and person's relationship to student
- An FAA's determination of independence from another school in same or prior award year

# WHAT IS NOT AN UNUSUAL CIRCUMSTANCE?

- Parents refuse to contribute to student's education
- Parents will not provide information for the FAFSA form or verification
- Parents do not claim student as a dependent for income tax purposes
- Student incarceration
- Student demonstrates total self-sufficiency



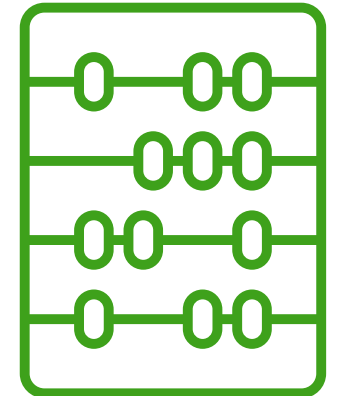
# SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES



# SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES

*Financial situations that may qualify for an adjustment*

- Change in employment status, income, or assets;
- Change in housing status (e.g., homelessness);
- Tuition expenses at an elementary or secondary school;
- Additional family members enrolled in college;
- Medical, dental, or nursing home expenses not covered by insurance;
- Child or dependent care expenses;
- Severe disability of the student or other member of the student's household; and
- Other changes or adjustments that impact the student's costs or ability to pay for college.



# DOCUMENTING SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES

## *Examples*

- Documented interview between student and FAA
- Statements from students, parents, spouses, or third parties
- Court/legal documents
- Financial statements, such as tax returns, W2s, or unemployment paperwork
- Other supplementary information on applicant's financial status or personal circumstances



# RESOURCES



# RESOURCES (1 OF 2)

- [StudentAid.gov](https://studentaid.gov) – Create an account, start a new FAFSA form, correct or update an existing FAFSA form, check the status of a FAFSA form, and more.
- Navigating the 2025-26 FAFSA® Form Presentations (YouTube videos)
  - [Independent Students](#)
  - [Dependent Students](#)
- PDF FAFSA® Forms
  - [2025-26 FAFSA Form \(English\)](#)
  - [2025-26 FAFSA Form \(Spanish\)](#)
  - [2025-26 FAFSA Form for Incarcerated Applicants](#)

# RESOURCES (2 OF 2)

- Help Articles
  - [Confined in Adult Correction or Juvenile Justice Facility](#)
  - [Eligibility for Students With Criminal Convictions](#)
  - [Dependency Status](#)
  - [FAFSA Tips for Unaccompanied Homeless Youth](#)
  - [Can't Provide Parent Information Due to an Unusual Circumstance](#)





**THANK  
YOU!**

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