

Access to Higher Education

116. Can students experiencing homelessness request waivers of fees for SAT and ACT testing and college applications?

A: Yes. Students should be eligible for waivers for all of those fees, due to their income level and/or their homelessness. School counselors should be familiar with the procedures for fee waivers. More information is also available at <http://www.act.org/aap/pdf/feewaiver.pdf> and <http://www.collegeboard.com/student/testing/sat/calenfees/feewaivers.html>.

117. Can unaccompanied homeless youth apply for federal financial aid (through the FAFSA) without providing information about their parents' income and their parents' signature?

A: Yes. Generally, youth under age 24 must have their parents complete the FAFSA. However, under recent amendments to the Higher Education Act, youth who are both (1) unaccompanied and (2) homeless (or self-supporting and at risk of homelessness) can apply for federal aid independently, without parental information or signature. Their eligibility must be verified, in the year in which the youth completes the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), by (1) a McKinney-Vento liaison; (2) a U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development homeless assistance program director or his/her designee; (3) a Runaway and Homeless Youth Act program director or his/her designee; or (4) a financial aid administrator.

For youth who do not have, and cannot obtain, verification from their liaison or a shelter provider (for example, youth who have graduated from high school, were not identified as homeless in high schools, or did not stay in a shelter), the college financial aid administrator must make a determination of homelessness. In these instances, there is no prescribed method for financial aid administrators to document homeless status; they may make a determination on the basis of a documented interview (U.S. Department of Education, *Federal Student Aid Application and Verification Guide*, 2008-2009). Financial aid administrators, McKinney-Vento liaisons and shelter staff should verify homelessness by consulting with and gathering information from the youth; they should not require the youth to provide extensive documentation "proving" homelessness. The College Cost Reduction and Access Act of 2007 (P.L. 110-84). More information about helping unaccompanied youth apply for financial aid is available at http://www.naehcy.org/higher_ed.html.

118. A student answered "yes" to the questions on the FAFSA about being a homeless unaccompanied youth. Now the financial aid office is asking the student for verification of a student's homeless status from the McKinney-Vento liaison or shelter director. What kind of documentation must the liaison or shelter director (or designee) provide to satisfy this verification requirement?

A: As of this writing, there is no specific documentation that a liaison or a shelter provider must provide to a financial aid office. A sample template for this purpose is available on the NAEHCY web site at http://www.naehcy.org/higher_ed.html. Financial aid administrators, McKinney-Vento liaisons, and shelter directors should meet to establish an expeditious process, including standard forms.

119. Are there other circumstances in which a youth can apply for financial aid without parental signature or financial information?

A: Yes. Youth who meet the federal definition of “independent student” can fill out the FAFSA without their parents. Independent students include orphans, a youth who was in foster care at any time after the age of 13, veterans, graduate students, and youth who are married or have legal dependents. A financial aid administrator at a college can also designate a student as independent for “other unusual circumstances”, through a process known as a dependency override. Youth should contact the financial aid administrator at the college of their choice for more information about this process. 20 U.S.C. 1087vv(d)

120. What address should a youth experiencing homelessness use on the FAFSA and college applications?

A: By definition, students experiencing homelessness are likely to lack a stable address. For the FAFSA, college applications, and similar documents, student should use a safe, reliable mailing address, where they will be able to retrieve mail on an on-going basis with a minimal risk of mail being lost or stolen.

121. A student’s FAFSA has been rejected. What should the student do?

A: There are many reasons a FAFSA may be rejected. The student should contact the federal financial aid office to find out the specific problem with the student’s FAFSA. The college financial aid administrator also may be able to help. FAFSA Corrections can be made on-line via the federal financial aid website, which also contains detailed instructions and answers to Frequently Asked Questions. The site is: <http://www.fafsa.ed.gov/>.

122. Are there other college access programs from which homeless youth might benefit?

A: Yes. The Federal TRIO programs consist of programs that support at-risk junior high and high school students to graduate from high school, enter college, and complete their degrees. These programs include Talent Search, Upward Bound, Student Support Services, Educational Opportunity Centers, Staff Development Activities, and Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR-UP). Students experiencing homelessness are at great risk of academic failure due to their extreme poverty and residential instability, and are now explicitly recognized as eligible populations in these federal programs.

Resources

123. Where can I find information about pending federal legislation related to the education of children and youth in homeless situations?

A: The National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth (NAEHCY) provides updates on pending legislation, as well as many other publications and services geared toward educators specializing in the education of children and youth in homeless situations. Legislative updates are available at <http://www.naehcy.org/>.

124. What is the federal government doing to help schools comply with the McKinney-Vento Act?

A: The U.S. Department of Education (ED) has been very active in its support of states and local school districts as they implement the McKinney-Vento Act. ED has established a technical assistance center on the McKinney-Vento Act and its implementation, at the National Center for