

FAFSA Applicants – Homelessness

Important Information

Because the FAFSA only collects limited data on homeless applicants, we release this information with a detailed explanation. If you include this information in writing or in a presentation, please ensure that you provide a clear understanding of what the data mean. Data on unaccompanied homeless youth collected on the FAFSA should not be construed to be representative of the entire population of homeless applicants.

Limited Population of Applicants Included in this Report

The FAFSA does not collect homelessness information for the purpose of determining the population of homeless students attending postsecondary institutions. Rather, homelessness questions on the FAFSA are for the sole purpose of determining an applicant's dependency status for Federal Student Aid, and are presented only to a subset of the applicant population.

The counts below include only a portion of applicants who might be homeless. There are ten other questions on the FAFSA that can determine dependency status and the homelessness questions are the last ones presented. Once an applicant provides a positive response on FAFSA on the Web for any of the questions, most of the additional questions, including those for homelessness, are not presented (skipped). See exception in note below.

Based on the priority of questions on FAFSA on the Web, counts of homeless applicants exclude most applicants who, at the time, were 24 years or older, married, in a graduate program, in active duty, veterans, orphans, in foster care, wards of the court, emancipated minors, or in legal guardianship as well as those who provided more than half of a dependent's support. Additionally, counts exclude applicants who were determined to be independent by a school financial aid administrator for a special circumstance when homelessness was not specified.

Determining Homelessness

There are three questions on the FAFSA that ask an applicant if he/she has been determined by an agency (school, HUD or youth center/program) to be unaccompanied and homeless (reference questions 56-58 on the 2015-16 paper FAFSA). If an applicant cannot provide a positive response to any of the questions, he/she can request consideration for determination of a homelessness status by a school financial aid administrator.

Applicants determined to be (or at risk of becoming) unaccompanied homeless youth, either by an agency (self-reported on the FAFSA) or by a school financial aid administrator are considered independent for the purposes of Federal Student Aid and do not need to report parents' financial and other information on the FAFSA.

The homelessness status remains unknown for applicants who requested consideration by the school for a homelessness determination, but for whom no determination had been made by the end of an application cycle. This could be due to several reasons, including that a student did not follow up with a school financial aid administrator or did not satisfy the requirements for a homelessness determination, or even that an applicant never attended school.

Note:

Although 99% of initial applications were submitted by students via FAFSA on the Web, a similar logic does not exist for skipping questions on applications or corrections submitted via paper or directly from a school. Therefore, in some cases, homelessness might not be the only reason an applicant was determined to be independent.

Table 1. Homelessness determinants. Counts represent unique applicants.

Application Cycle	¹ Unaccompanied Homeless Youth					² Undetermined Requests for Homelessness Consideration
	Agency Determined (Self-reported on FAFSA)			School Financial Aid Administrator Determinant	Sum	
	High School or School District	HUD Program	Youth or Transitional Program			
2013-2014	18,214	4,430	5,686	1,382	29,712	26,452
2014-2015	22,438	4,156	3,872	1,739	32,205	30,010
2015-2016	22,435	3,822	3,506	2,185	31,948	27,243

¹Unaccompanied Homeless Youth

Applicants determined to be (or at risk of becoming) unaccompanied homeless youth, either by an agency (self-reported on the FAFSA) or by a school financial aid administrator

²Undetermined Requests for Homelessness Consideration

Applicants whose homelessness statuses remain unknown because no determination had been made in response their requests for schools to consider their special circumstance of being homeless. Reasons for this are unknown, but could include not attending or following up with school or not being determined to be unaccompanied homeless.

Table 2. Unaccompanied homeless youth by state. Counts represent unique applicants.

State	Application Cycle		
	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016
CA	3,432	3,697	3,660
Sum:	29,712	32,205	31,948

Table 3. Total applicants by dependency (for reference)

Dependency Status (for Federal Student Aid)	Application Cycle		
	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016
Dependent	9,131,781	9,022,795	8,893,669
Independent	12,061,972	11,539,134	10,864,095
Sum:	21,193,753	20,561,929	19,757,764

<https://nche.ed.gov/ibt/fafsa.php>

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