



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION
FOR THE EDUCATION OF
HOMELESS CHILDREN
AND YOUTH

Unaccompanied Youth Toolkit for High School Counselors and McKinney-Vento Liaisons

Practical Tips to Help Unaccompanied Homeless Youth Obtain Financial Aid for College

Completing the FAFSA

Q: If I believe a youth in my school is homeless and unaccompanied, how should I counsel him or her to complete the FAFSA?

A: The school counselor should contact the school district's McKinney-Vento liaison to discuss the student's situation and obtain a letter verifying the student's status. The letter is not submitted with the FAFSA. Rather, the liaison, school counselor and student should retain original, signed copies of the letter for use with college Financial Aid Administrators. The youth should check "yes" to the question asking if a "high school or school district homeless liaison determined that you were an unaccompanied youth who was homeless." (This was Question 55 on the 2011-2012 FAFSA).

Q: What if the student does not have a stable address to put on the FAFSA?

A: The student can use the high school address if he or she has no reliable place to receive mail.

Q: Should all homeless students completing the FAFSA check yes to question 55 in the FAFSA?

A: No. Students must be homeless *and* unaccompanied youth.

Q: Does the McKinney-Vento liaison or school counselor need parental consent to discuss a student's homeless situation with the school district's McKinney-Vento liaison?

A: No. Under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), a school counselor and school district liaison can discuss a student's homeless situation without parental consent, because both have a legitimate educational interest in the information and in assisting the student with the FAFSA.ⁱ

Q: Does the McKinney-Vento liaison or school counselor need parental consent to verify a student's homelessness for the FAFSA or with a FAA?

A: No. Under FERPA schools may disclose educational records for financial aid purposes without parental consent.ⁱⁱ This includes verifying that a youth is homeless and unaccompanied.

Q: Are unaccompanied homeless youth considered to be "emancipated minors", as that term is used on the FAFSA?

A: Generally, no. A homeless youth is considered emancipated only if a state court has issued a court order granting emancipation.

Q: Are unaccompanied homeless youth who are sharing the housing of others considered to be in "legal guardianship", as that term is used on the FAFSA?

A: Generally, no. A homeless youth who is sharing housing is in legal guardianship only if a state court has issued a court order establishing guardianship.

Facilitating communication with Financial Aid Administrators (FAAs)

- Prior to approaching FAAs about a particular student, develop relationships with local FAAs to inform them about unaccompanied homeless youth, the role of the school district in identifying, verifying and assisting these young people, and their ability to complete the FAFSA as independent students. Such relationships may ease the process for future unaccompanied homeless youth who wish to go to these colleges.
- Work with the McKinney-Vento liaison to provide clear verification letters for unaccompanied homeless youth. A sample is available at http://www.naehcy.org/higher_ed.html.
- If a FAA disputes a student's homelessness, provide information about the law and the definition of homelessness. Information is available at http://www.naehcy.org/higher_ed.html.
- If a FAA disputes a student's homelessness and is not responsive to the information you provide, contact the National Center for Homeless Education for assistance at 1-800-308-2145 or <http://center.serve.org/nche/>.

Supporting access to additional funds for college

- Support unaccompanied homeless youth throughout the financial aid process, including by connecting them to College Access organizations and events such as College Goal Sunday (<http://www.collegegoalsundayusa.org>). Navigating the financial aid system can be difficult for students with parents - young people who are homeless and trying to survive on their own will need caring adults to help guide them and encourage their persistence.
- Help youth find scholarships for which they are eligible. <http://www.FinAid.org> and <http://www.studentaid.ed.gov> are two excellent places to begin a search for scholarships. The LeTendre Education Fund is a scholarship program for students who have experienced homelessness (http://www.naehcy.org/about_letendre.html).
- Consider approaching local service clubs, philanthropists, faith based organizations or local colleges and universities to consider setting up a yearly scholarship for a local unaccompanied youth.
- Locate and develop a relationship with a state or local college access organization in your community (<http://www.collegeaccess.org/NCAN>). College access organizations provide counseling, advice and financial assistance.
- Help students access other helpful resources to prepare them for college and the costs, such as www.knowhow2go.index.php.

ⁱ 34 CFR §99.31(a)(1).

ⁱⁱ 34 C.F.R. §99.31(4).