

# High School Counselor Foster Youth FAFSA Challenge Toolkit

Counselors are a vital part of every student's school experience. As students begin to seek guidance on post-secondary opportunities and how to pay for college, it is imperative that school counselors meet with them to provide that information. A recent study suggests that juniors who met 1-on-1 with counselors were 6.8 times more likely to complete the FAFSA. Given the inequitable college outcomes that most students in foster care experience, counselors can be particularly instrumental in identifying their needs and ensuring that they receive targeted college and career guidance.

## COLLEGE OUTCOMES FOR FOSTER YOUTH



Nearly all foster youth report that they want to go to college, but only 8% will actually receive a 2- or 4-year degree by the age of 26.



Only 50% of foster youth attending community college actually receive the Pell grant, even though nearly 90% are eligible.



A 2016 survey of 19-year-old youth in California found that roughly half of foster youth reported they did not receive enough assistance with college planning.

Foster youth, by definition and by no fault of their own, have endured abandonment, abuse or neglect. Those experiences can profoundly impact a young person's emotional, physical and psycho-social development. In most schools, foster youth only make up a small percentage of the student population. These students often lack adequate support from counselors as well as a lack of familiar support outside of school. Below are just a few unique challenges that foster youth may face that can contribute to their college outcomes and underscore the importance of providing more individual college and career counseling for foster youth:

## UNIQUE CHALLENGES FOSTER YOUTH FACE

- Foster youth often lack support with filling out the FAFSA and completing the necessary follow-up steps after the FAFSA.
- Foster youth are four times more likely to change schools in a given school year.
- Foster youth are less likely to receive the Cal Grant due to their school's GPA verification form not matching with their FAFSA submission.
- School counselors experience challenges identifying foster youth on their caseloads.

## HOW CAN YOU HELP?

Although foster youth often face an array of challenges, high school counselors can play a significant role in helping these students successfully matriculate into college. For foster youth, there are grants and scholarships designed to make college very affordable ranging from very low-cost to no-cost tuition fees. To ensure equal access and equity for all students, including youth in foster care, counselors should work with their school or district's foster youth liaison to determine the needs of foster youth and make sure they are aware of the resources and opportunities available to them through the FAFSA and other grants and scholarships. John Burton's Advocates for Youth (JBAY) and the local County Office of Education are excellent resources for counselors in need of assistance on how to help foster youth complete the FAFSA. For additional information, please visit [jbay.org/fafsachallenge](http://jbay.org/fafsachallenge) or contact your local County Office of Education's Foster Youth Services Coordinating Program (FYSCP).

### ASCA School Counselor Professional Standards & Competency B-SS 2:

Provide appraisal and advisement in large-group, classroom, small-group and individual setting, g. Help students and families navigate postsecondary awareness, exploration, admissions and financial aid processes

# Foster Youth FAFSA Tip Sheet for High School Counselors:

## You can help foster youth succeed in college!



Take the time to help foster youth receive maximize financial aid. Individualized assistance is most effective. Keep in mind these specific considerations:

### Foster Youth Financial Aid Updates for 2019-2020

- The Chafee Grant has been expanded. Eligible foster youth can now receive funding for up to 5 years (whether or not consecutive) and until age of 26!
- Foster youth no longer need to provide documentation to verify their foster care status for the purposes of independent status on the FAFSA. This is now verified through an automated match with California Department of Social Services (CDSS) data.
- Access to the Entitlement Cal Grant has been expanded for foster youth students in care after age 13. These students can now apply up until the age of 26, can receive the grant for up to 8 years and can submit up until September 2nd if they are attending community college.

### DID YOU KNOW?

Nearly all foster youth report wanting to go to college, but only 8% actually receive a 2- or 4-year degree.

Only 50% of foster youth attending community college actually receive the Pell grant, even though nearly 90% are eligible.

### ⌚ Timing Your Support:

1. FAFSA/CA Dream Act Application: **30-45** minutes
2. Chafee Grant Application: **10-15** minutes
3. Creating a WebGrants Account: **10** minutes
4. Verifying GPA has been received: **5** minutes

Total: **55 - 75** minutes

## BEFORE THE FAFSA

- Ensure that FAFSA workshop materials are inclusive of foster youth. Students in foster care will not need to report their parent's financial information.
- Ask students if they have access to their social security number. If not, direct them to their social worker or probation officer for help.
- Make sure students have a personal email address (not a school-based email).

## DURING THE FAFSA

- Be mindful that answering the challenge questions to create a FSA ID can be triggering and stressful for some students.
- Foster youth often lack home stability. Assist students to create a system to store their passwords and usernames in a safe location.
- Foster youth may qualify as an independent student on their FAFSA if they were in foster care as a dependent or ward of the court on or after their 13th birthday. Students who can answer yes to this question do not need to report information about their biological parents, foster parents (Resource Parents) or adoptive parents. Make sure eligible students qualify for independent status.
- Encourage foster youth to check off the box on the FAFSA that asks, "Are you a foster youth or were you at any time in the foster care system?" Answering yes may give students more access to on-campus resources and supports.
- Extended Foster Care (AB 12) benefits, such as Supervised Independent Living Placement (SILP) benefits, do not need to be reported as income on the FAFSA.

## AFTER THE FAFSA

- Complete the Chafee Grant Application at [www.chafee.csac.ca.gov](http://www.chafee.csac.ca.gov)
- Create a WebGrants 4 Students Account at <https://mygrantinfo.csac.ca.gov/>
- Verify that their GPA has been received and matched to their account to receive the Cal Grant
- Remind students to update their accounts if their address/phone number changes (e.g. WebGrants, FAFSA, etc.)
- Link students to campus-based foster youth support programs. Learn more at: [student.cacollegepathways.org](http://student.cacollegepathways.org)
- If verification of foster youth status is requested for financial aid or other resources, students should contact their social worker, probation officer or Independent Living Program (ILP) Coordinator

Visit [www.jbay.org/fafsachallenge](http://www.jbay.org/fafsachallenge) for a comprehensive list of resources, tools and trainings to help foster youth navigate college and financial aid!







# Frequently Asked Questions

## High School Counselor Edition

<p>1. There is a question within the Student Eligibility section of the FAFSA that asks: "Are you a foster youth or were you at any time in the foster care system?" Why should students check off this box?</p>	<p>A. Answering this question, even if they were in care for one day, may give them access to more support and resources on their campus.</p>
<p>2. What if a student's case closed?</p>	<p>A. As long as the student's case closed at least one day after 13 years of age, they are eligible for Independent status on their FAFSA/CA Dream Act (CADAA).</p>
<p>3. How do counselors identify foster youth on their caseload?</p>	<p>A. There are three (3) possible ways to identify foster youth on your case load:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Contact your district's Foster Youth Liaison (aka AB 490 Liaison).</li> <li>2. Contact your County Office of Education Foster Youth Services Coordinating Program (FYSCP).</li> <li>3. View your Student Information System (SIS), if applicable.</li> </ol>
<p>4. What if a new student arrives or leaves my school?</p>	<p>A. If the student is awarded a Cal Grant, the high school that first submitted the GPA will be required to verify the student's high school graduation date. If the school that submitted the GPA is different from the school from which the student graduated, it may require contacting the California Student Aid Commission to ensure that the student's information is updated, including their high school graduation information and address.</p>
<p>5. What if a student says he/she is a foster youth, but it's not showing up in our Student Information System (SIS)?</p>	<p>A. Contact your county Foster Youth Services Coordinating Program (FYSCP) office during these cases.</p>
<p>6. Do foster youth need to report the income of their biological parents or caregivers on the FAFSA/CADAA?</p>	<p>A. As long as the youth was a dependent or ward of the court at least one day after their 13<sup>th</sup> birthday, they are eligible for Independent Status on the FAFSA/CADAA and do not need to report the income of their biological parents or caregivers. Youth that were a dependent or ward of the court, but remained under the legal custody of their parent, do not qualify for Independent Status.</p>
<p>7. Is the student's household size still "1" if the youth is placed with a relative or in a group home?</p>	<p>A. Yes. The FAFSA now automatically populates household size based on if the student indicates in a prior screen if they are married. If they indicated that they have children, they will need to indicate the number of children. Students should enter "1" for number in college unless they have a spouse attending college at least half-time.</p>



<p>13. What if I'm not sure if the student completed their FAFSA?</p>	<p>A. There are multiple options:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1). Assist the student to log into their FAFSA to verify that their FAFSA has been successfully completed and processed.</li> <li>2). Verify completion via WebGrants. <i>If you do not have access to WebGrants</i> you can reach out to the following offices to verify completion: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Your school's WebGrants Administrator.</li> <li>• Your district's WebGrants Administrator</li> <li>• The County Office of Education, Foster Youth Services Coordinating Program (FYSCP), WebGrants Administrator.</li> </ul> </li> <li>3) Verify the student in the WebGrants administrator account within the "Student Summary" report. Each district has their own account.</li> <li>4) Encourage the student to create and sign into their WebGrants for Students account to check on the status of their application. A WebGrants for Students account can be created at <a href="http://mygrantinfo.csac.ca.gov">mygrantinfo.csac.ca.gov</a>.</li> </ol>
<p>14. There are changes to Cal Grant eligibility for foster youth. What should I know to maximize their eligibility and how is CSAC defining foster youth?</p>	<p>A. In 2018, California expanded eligibility requirements to the Cal Grant entitlement program for foster youth. This expansion includes three key provisions:</p> <p><b>Application window:</b> The first provision extends the time to apply for an entitlement Cal Grant. Instead of having to apply within a year after high school graduation, foster youth are able to apply for an entitlement Cal Grant if they meet other eligibility criteria and have not reached their 26th birthday as of July 1 of the award year.</p> <p><b>Time limit:</b> The second provision extends the maximum length of time a foster youth is eligible for a Cal Grant from 4 years to 8 years of full-time status enrollment.</p> <p><b>Application deadline:</b> The third provision extends the deadline for the Cal Grant entitlement application from March 2nd to September 2nd for foster youth attending community college.</p> <p>The law defines foster youth as students who were a dependent or ward of the court at least one day after the age of 13.</p>