



Tuition Assistance - Frequently Asked Questions

SSS and the Parents' Financial Statement (PFS)

When our family applies for tuition assistance, what information will schools require?

The vast majority of tuition assistance is based on financial need. To determine how much financial assistance you need, schools use the School and Student Services (SSS) computations to first figure out how much you can contribute. The school needs to know such information as:

- Family size
- Income from all sources
- Savings, investments, and other assets (including home equity)
- Children's assets
- Indebtedness
- Medical, dental, and unusual expenses.

This information, and much more, is collected on the Parents' Financial Statement (PFS) and shared with all the schools you want to receive it. The PFS is called a common application, or common app, because you only need to complete one application for many schools.

Most schools will require you to submit a copy of your most recently completed federal tax return to verify that the information you used on the application is true and accurate. In certain cases — for example, if you own a farm or business — schools may also ask you for additional documentation.

What is SSS?

SSS is used by more than 2,400 K-12 private schools and other organizations to help determine a family's ability to pay school costs. The service and process helps ensure that all schools use the same methods and objective procedures to evaluate your tuition assistance application.

How does the SSS program calculate my family's "contribution," or ability to pay?

The process starts when you complete and submit the Parents' Financial Statement (PFS) to SSS. Through the PFS, SSS gathers family and financial information that it applies to a formula to estimate the resources your family may have available to pay school costs.

Simply stated, the formula considers your income, what you own (your house and other investments), what you owe (your mortgage and other debts), the size of your family, and how many family members are enrolled in tuition-charging schools or colleges.

You submit the completed PFS to SSS for processing. After making allowances for basic necessities, taxes, and certain other expenses, SSS figures out what portion of your remaining funds is available to pay school costs. Then the service provides the results of the analysis to the school as a recommendation on your ability to pay.

SSS encourages schools to use this estimate, in addition to other information they collect from your family, to make their final determination about your family's contribution. That final determination always comes from the individual school — not from SSS.

Does SSS offer any sort of tuition assistance to families?

No, SSS does not provide money to families in any form.

Who can I ask for help in completing the PFS form?

If you've read our online instructions but still have questions, call the SSS Customer Service Center toll free at (800) 344-8328).

Also, don't hesitate to contact Melinda Madurai, the Chief Financial Officer, at the school. She can help make sure you answer questions on the form in the way that they prefer or expect families to answer.

Can my family receive a waiver so we don't have to pay the Parents' Financial Statement (PFS) processing fee?

Dozens of agencies across the country (known as access organizations) help underprivileged or underrepresented children apply for tuition assistance by supplying their families with "fee waivers" that enable them to submit a PFS through SSS without incurring any cost. To find out more about fee waivers, please ask Melinda Madurai directly.

If all the schools where our family applies use the Parents' Financial Statement, why do they offer us different amounts of financial aid?

Once a school receives the recommendation from SSS, it may revise the SSS calculation based on its specific policies, additional information the school received from you, and other factors. Also, some schools have more money than others for tuition assistance. So even if two schools agreed on the SSS recommendation, one school may not be able to provide aid for all demonstrated need.

Tuition Assistance Terms and Other Basics

Where does tuition assistance come from?

Most is provided directly from the school and distributed on the basis of financial need.

What does "financial need" mean?

Need is the difference between educational expenses — especially tuition and fees — and your family's ability to pay those expenses.

How do schools determine financial need?

When they work with SSS, they ask you to complete a Parents' Financial Statement that gives them an objective picture of how much you can afford to contribute toward education. After calculating the difference between your resources and their tuition and fees, schools weigh the resulting financial need against their available tuition assistance funds and their policies. Keep in mind that applying for tuition assistance does not guarantee that you will be eligible for assistance, and being eligible does not guarantee that tuition assistance will be available.

What is the income level at which a family is no longer eligible for assistance?

There is no specific income limit. If you feel you cannot pay all the costs yourself, it's worth asking whether assistance is available.

If my family returns its tuition assistance application late, is there any chance more funds may be available later in the year?

In most cases, schools give out virtually all their tuition assistance funds in March and April. Very few schools have a rolling process for tuition assistance (as opposed to admission). That said, sometimes in June or July, a school may learn that students who were given assistance are not enrolling after all, and extra dollars become available. It's always worthwhile to call the school's tuition assistance office to ask, just in case.

Does tuition assistance need impact my child's chances of being admitted?

Many schools follow a "need-blind" policy — meaning they won't take your family's financial situation into consideration when weighing your child's application for admission. However, admission is no guarantee that you'll receive tuition assistance. The amount of assistance depends on (1) your family's eligibility and (2) the amount of funds the school has available.