

# 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:

### Recent Foster Youth Financial Aid Updates

- 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!

# DEFINITION OF CHILD WELFARE TERMS

TERM	ACRONYM COMMONLY USED	DEFINITION
Case		An open court case with dependency court or juvenile court. It may also refer to a case that has no court involvement but only voluntary supervision by the child welfare agency (e.g. Voluntary Family Maintenance (VFM) or Voluntary Family Reunification (VFR))
Child and Family Team Meetings	CFT	Meetings that the child welfare agency provides for the families for any open dependency case. The purpose of a CFT is to identify the family's strengths, needs, and collaborative case planning. School representatives may be invited to attend, and some meetings may be requested to occur at school sites.
Children's Social Worker	CSW	The representative who works with the family who is receiving services from the child welfare agency.
Court Appointed Special Advocate	CASA	A non-profit organization that pairs children and youth in the dependency system with trained volunteer advocates. Not every youth in the dependency system has a CASA.
Child Welfare Agency		This agency is the child protection agency, or child welfare agency, in the county. Each county may use a different name for their department.
Dependency Court		The court system that handles child abuse cases.
Dependent or Ward of the Court		For the purposes of the FAFSA, these terms are synonyms to mean a youth who has an open court case. This does not include students who are involved in the child welfare system but remain in the legal custody of their parents. For example, youth that are involved with the child welfare system but do not have an open court case, such as Voluntary Family Maintenance or Voluntary Family Reunification, are not considered a Dependent or Ward of the Court.
Dual Supervision/ Crossover Youth		A student that is under the supervision of child welfare (as a child victim of abuse or neglect) and probation (for committing an offense).
Emergency Response Children's Social Worker	ER CSW or ER Worker	A children's social worker who is tasked with investigating any allegations of child abuse.
Extended Foster Care	AB12	A program which allows eligible youth in the child welfare and probation systems to voluntarily remain in the foster care system between the ages of 18-21. Court also retains the case open.

Family Maintenance	FM	A court case that has the goal of maintaining the child(ren) at home with at least one parent. These cases are meant to only last 6 months while at home but have been extended at times. These youth may be considered a Dependent or Ward of the Court for the purposes of Independent Status on the FAFSA/CADAA depending on the nature of their court case. Contact your County Office of Education FYSCP for further information.
Family Preservation	FP	A 3 <sup>rd</sup> party contracted service for families. FP workers may reach out to the school on behalf of the student. This only applies to families with children that have not been removed from the home.
Family Reunification	FR	A court case that has the goal of returning the child back home after family compliance has been achieved. These cases can last up to 18 months (only 6 months for children under 5). <i>These youth are considered a Dependent or Ward of the Court for the purposes of Independent Status on the FAFSA/CADAA.</i>
Foster Family Agency	FFA	Contracted foster homes that the county child welfare agency refers children to for placement with certified and trained Resource Parents.
Foster Youth Services Coordinating Program	FYSCP	FYSCPs are located within the county office of education. They have the ability and authority to ensure that health and school records are obtained to establish appropriate placements and coordinate instruction, counseling, tutoring, mentoring, vocational training, emancipation services, training for independent living, and other related services. Support services can vary county to county.
Independent Living Program	ILP	A program within the child welfare agency that offers financial assistance and services for eligible foster youth 16-20 years of age.
Juvenile Court		The court system that handles youth probation cases.
Legal Guardian		Not to be confused with "Foster Parent" or "Resource Parent." The term "Legal Guardian" is a legal assignment by a court order naming a person other than the biological parents the legal party over medical and educational decisions and other decisions related to a child's wellbeing.
Permanent Placement	PP	A court case where neither parent successfully re-unified with their child(ren) and a more permanent plan is being sought, such as legal guardianship or adoption. <i>These youth are considered a Dependent or Ward of the Court for the purposes of Independent Status on the FAFSA/CADAA.</i>
Resource Parent		Trained and certified caregivers, which can include foster parents, foster-to-adopt families and kinship/relative caregivers.
Short Term Residential Therapeutic Program	STRTP	Formerly known as group homes, these are residential congregate care facilities that are more therapeutic in nature and time limited.
Supervised Independent Living Placement	SILP	Youth who participate in Extended Foster Care must live in an approved placement. That can include a SILP, which is housing such as a room for rent, apartment or college dorm, that the youth finds and is approved by the CSW or probation officer. If a student has a SILP they are also eligible for a set monthly payment for living expenses (does not exceed \$1000 per month).

Supervising Children's Social Worker	SCSW	An individual that supervises Children Social Workers (CSWs).
Transition Independent Living Plan	TILP	A planning document to be completed every 6 months by a CSW or probation officer and the foster youth when a child is 14 years and older. It includes the youth's goals around transitioning into adulthood.
Unaccompanied Refugee Minor Program	URM	Children covered under the URM program (e.g. students in the U.S. who are refugees, asylees, etc.) are entitled to services equivalent to mainstream foster care and emancipation services. They are not included in California's definition of children in foster care under WIC or Ed Code; therefore, this student population is not included in LCFF, LCAP, or other entitlements afforded to children in CA's foster care system.
Voluntary Family Maintenance	VFM	A non-court case that is opened by the county child welfare agency only when there is not enough legal standing to refer a family to court supervision, but enough safety concerns to be involved by assigning a social worker to the case. These cases last a maximum of 6 months. <i>These youth are not considered a Dependent or Ward of the Court for the purposes of Independent Status on the FAFSA/CADAA.</i>
Voluntary Family Re-unification	VFR	A non-court case that is opened by the county child welfare agency only when there is not enough legal standing to refer a family to court supervision, but enough safety concerns to be involved by assigning a social worker to the case and getting the parents' permission to remove a child from their home. These cases last a maximum of 6 months. <i>These youth are not considered a Dependent or Ward of the Court for the purposes of Independent Status on the FAFSA/CADAA.</i>

# 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>8. Where can I direct the student to get verification of their foster youth status?</p>	<p>A. Foster youth no longer need to provide documentation to verify their foster care status for the purposes of independent status on the FAFSA/CADAA. This is now verified through an automated match with California Department of Social Services (CDSS) data.</p> <p>Should a youth still need verification of their foster youth status, you can direct the youth to their ILP worker, social worker or contact the California Foster Youth Ombudsman Office at (877) 846-1602 or via e-mail at <a href="mailto:fosteryouthhelp@dss.ca.gov">fosteryouthhelp@dss.ca.gov</a>.</p>
<p>9. Are there programs and resources to support foster youth in college?</p>	<p>A. Yes. Most colleges have a support program for foster youth; however, programs, services, and resources can vary from campus to campus. Visit <a href="http://student.cacollegepathways.org">student.cacollegepathways.org</a> to find campus specific support programs and contacts.</p>
<p>10. If my student will be living with their foster parent(s) (also known as Resource Parents) or legal guardian when they go to college, should they select, "With Parent" as their housing plan in the School Selection section on the FAFSA?</p>	<p>A. No, they should select "Off-Campus." This may qualify them for additional financial aid to assist with living expenses.</p>
<p>11. What income IS NOT included on the FAFSA/CADAA?</p>	<p>A. Extended Foster Care (AB 12) benefits—including Supervised Independent Living Placement (SILP) payments, the infant supplement or payment from a THP-NMD program, does not need to be reported on the FAFSA/CADAA. Even if the SILP payment is sent directly to the youth, they <u>DO NOT</u> need to report this as income.</p>
<p>12. What if the student's name or address changes after they submit a FAFSA/CADAA and create a Web Grants account?</p>	<p>A. The student's name on WebGrants and the FAFSA must match the student's Social Security Card and the school's official student record. Below is guidance, depending on the nature of the error:</p> <p><b>Mismatched Names</b></p> <p><u>Errors on FAFSA</u> – Assist student to correct their name and resubmit the FAFSA application.</p> <p><u>Errors on WebGrants</u> – If the correction is minor (such as a dash or space removed/added), a counselor can call California Student Aid Commission (CSAC) directly at (888) 294-0153. If the correction is more significant, the student must complete the CSAC form G-10 (located under "student forms" at <a href="http://csac.ca.gov">csac.ca.gov</a>). The student is required to provide 2 forms of ID. <i>NOTE: CSAC will need to verify the student's name on a school record. If the student's name does not match the official student record, the student must correct the school record name first and then submit the G-10 form.</i></p> <p><b>Mismatched Address</b></p> <p>If the youth has recently moved, assist them to update their address in their WebGrants for Students account or call CSAC directly at (888) 224-7268. Additionally, assist the youth to update their address in their FAFSA or CADAA.</p> <p>If the youth's address does not match the GPA submitted by the school <b>and</b> the address on file in WebGrants, this will result in a non-match and they will <b>not</b> be awarded a Cal Grant until the information is corrected.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Need assistance or have questions? Contact CSAC Institutional Support at (888) 294-0153/ <a href="mailto:schoolsupport@csac.ca.gov">schoolsupport@csac.ca.gov</a></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>

This document was created by John Burton Advocates for Youth and the Los Angeles County Office of Education Foster Youth Services Coordinating Program

