

# Understanding & Advocating for Students in Foster Care & Experiencing Homelessness

May 20, 2025 | 10:30 -11:15am & 1:00-1:45pm  
IL HOUSE Summit

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**Illinois Student Assistance Commission (ISAC)**

# Agenda

1. Unaccompanied & Homeless Youth
2. Illinois Youth in Care
3. The Retention of Illinois Students and Equity (RISE) Act
4. Resources

# Unaccompanied & Homeless Youth

# Students Experiencing Homelessness

May not consider themselves homeless or at risk of being homeless

Often unaware of available support services during high school

Face many educational challenges due to high mobility

May be confused about their postsecondary options and accessing financial aid for college

Require additional support as they transition into their postsecondary option

# Students Experiencing Homelessness in Illinois

- According to the School House Connection Child and Youth Homelessness Data Profile for the 2022-2023 school year:
  - 56,005 or 3% of PreK – 12<sup>th</sup> grade students were identified as experiencing homelessness
  - Chronic absenteeism rate was 53.6% compared with 28.5% for the state average
  - High school graduation rate was 69.4% compared with 87.6% for the state average
  - Where students reported staying when identified as homeless:
    - Staying with others: 78.3%
    - Staying in a shelter: 7.9%
    - Staying in a hotel/motel: 5.5%

# Definitions for FAFSA

- **Homeless:** Means lacking fixed, regular, and adequate housing, which includes living in shelters, parks, motels, hotels, public spaces, camping grounds, cars, abandoned buildings, or temporary living with other people because you had no where else to go. Also, living in any of these situations and fleeing an abusive parent, maybe considered homeless even if the parent would otherwise provide a place to live
- **Unaccompanied:** Means not living in the physical custody of a parent or guardian

**Note:** homelessness, on its own, does not qualify a student as being independent for federal student aid purposes

# Providing a Mailing Address

- The mailing address on the FAFSA will be prefilled
- Students don't need to provide a home address, but they must provide a mailing address where you can reliably receive mail
- Their mailing address can be the address of a relative or friend or it can be their college's address

## Student Identity Information

Review the information below and verify that it's correct before moving forward.

Name

Jenny E Price

Date of Birth

12/20/2005

Social Security Number

•••••-8061

Email Address

599888061test@testcod.edu

Mobile Phone Number

(555) 557-6022

To update this information for all U.S. Department of Education communications, go to [Account Settings](#).

Permanent Mailing Address

*Include apartment number.*

123 fake street

City

city

State

GA

Zip Code

30024

Country 

United States (US)

# Student Homelessness and the FAFSA

FAFSA<sup>®</sup> FORM 2025-26 Student Raya Tran Save FAFSA Menu

1 Personal Circumstances 2 Demographics 3 Financials 4 Colleges 5 Signature

### Student Homelessness

At any time on or after July 1, 2024, was the student unaccompanied and either (1) homeless or (2) self-supporting and at risk of being homeless? ⓘ

Yes  No

Did any of the following determine the student was homeless or at risk of becoming homeless?

Select all that apply.

Director or designee of an emergency or transitional shelter, street outreach program, homeless youth drop-in center, or other program serving those experiencing homelessness

The student's high school or school district homeless liaison or designee

Director or designee of a project supported by a federal TRIO or GEAR UP program grant

Financial aid administrator

None of these apply.

# Receiving Homeless Youth Determination

- The list of people who can provide a determination has been expanded
- The following sources are:
  - Homeless District Liaison
  - Financial aid office from a different school that for the same or prior award year
  - Director or designee of a:
    - Transitional or emergency shelter
    - Street outreach program
    - Homeless youth drop-in center
    - Program serving individuals experiencing homelessness
    - Program supported by federal TRIO or GEAR UP grant

# High School Homeless District Liaison

SCHOOL WELLNESS

## HOMELESS LIAISON CONTACT INFORMATION

Public school districts must enter the name and contact information of their appointed McKinney-Vento Homeless Liaison. This information may be used to contact the District Homeless Liaison to assist with immediate enrollment into the district and identification of McKinney-Vento eligibility. McKinney-Vento eligible students must be immediately enrolled and fully participating in school.

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District / ROE Name ▾	Type	District / ROE Address	District / ROE Phone	Homeless Liaison / Email Link
A-C Central CUSD 262	District	PO Box 260 Ashland, IL 62612-0260	217-476-8112	<a href="#">Mr. Dan Williams</a>
Abingdon-Avon CUSD 276	District	507 N Monroe St Ste 3 Abingdon, IL 61410-1285	309-462-2301	<a href="#">Tina Stier</a>
ACE Amandla Charter School	District	6820 S Washtenaw Ave Chicago, IL 60629-1826	773-535-7150	<a href="#">Shawnda Sullivan</a>
Addison SD 4	District	222 N JF Kennedy Dr Addison, IL 60101-6602	630-458-2425	<a href="#">Charles Wartman</a>
Adlai E Stevenson HSD 125	District	2 Stevenson Dr Lincolnshire, IL 60069-2824	847-415-4000	<a href="#">Sarah LaFrancis</a>
Akin CCSD 91	District	21962 Akin Blacktop Akin, IL 62890-1304	618-627-2180	<a href="#">Terri Dean</a>
Albers SD 63	District	PO Box 104 Albers, IL 62215-0104	618-248-5146	<a href="#">Mike Toeben</a>

# Illinois Homeless Youth Provider Agencies list

## Homeless Youth Provider Agencies List

(24-Hour National Runaway Hotline - 1-800-RUNAWAY or [www.1800RUNAWAY.org](http://www.1800RUNAWAY.org))

Provider Name	Address	City, State, Zip	Phone Number	Website
360 Youth Services	1305 Oswego Rd.	Naperville, IL 60540	630-961-2992	<a href="http://www.360youthservices.org">www.360youthservices.org</a>
Children's Home & Aid Society of Illinois	2133 Johnson Road	Granite City, IL 62040	618-452-8900	<a href="http://www.childrenshomeandaid.org">www.childrenshomeandaid.org</a>
Connections for the Homeless, Inc	2121 Dewey Ave.	Evanston, IL 60201	847-475-7070	<a href="http://www.connect2home.org">www.connect2home.org</a>
Cunningham Children's Home	1301 N Cunningham Ave.	Urbana, IL 61802	217-367-3728; 217-337-9003	<a href="http://www.cunninghamhome.org">www.cunninghamhome.org</a>
Heartland Human Care Services	208 S. LaSalle Suite 1300	Chicago, IL 60604	773-433-1290	<a href="http://www.heartlandalliance.org">www.heartlandalliance.org</a>

# Not Having a Homeless Youth Determination

- If you answer “Yes” to the general unaccompanied and do not have a homeless youth determination from one of the individuals at an eligible agency from the previous slide, you may still submit the FAFSA form without parent information
- You will need to complete additional steps with the financial aid office before your eligibility for financial aid can be finalized

# Homeless Youth Determinations and FAFSA Renewals

- Not to be confused with an unusual circumstance
- If the student does not have a determination, the FAA may make a case-by-case determination
- Renewal applicants with an eligible unaccompanied homeless youth determination on their 2024-2025 FAFSA, will have their answers to these questions carried over and pre-populated
  - Renewal applicants must still affirm that their previous answers to the dependency questions are still applicable

# Student Unusual Circumstances

- If a student does not have a determination or meet the definition of experiencing homelessness and unaccompanied, but has an unusual circumstance, they can identify that here
- By answering yes, a student is considered a provisional independent student

## Student Unusual Circumstances

This information will help us evaluate the student's ability to pay for school.

Do unusual circumstances prevent the student from contacting their parents or would contacting their parents pose a risk to the student?

A student may be experiencing unusual circumstances if they

- left home due to an abusive or threatening environment;
- are abandoned by or estranged from their parents;
- have refugee or asylee status and are separated from their parents, or their parents are displaced in a foreign country;
- are a victim of human trafficking;
- are incarcerated, or their parents are incarcerated and contact with the parents would pose a risk to the student; or
- are otherwise unable to contact or locate their parents.

If the student's circumstances resulted in not having a safe and stable place to live, they may be considered a homeless youth and should review the answer to the previous question about being unaccompanied and homeless.

Yes

No

# Provisionally Independent Student

- Designation for students who believe they may qualify as an independent student based on an unusual circumstance
- These students will:
  - Be able to submit the FAFSA
  - Receive an estimate SAI and Pell Grant
- A school's financial aid office will make the final determination based on documentation submitted
- These students will not be required to answer to answer information about their parent(s)

# Updates for Institutions

- Schools can accept documentation of independent student status from another financial aid administrator at a different institution
- Students who are deemed independent for financial aid purposes, can be considered independent for the subsequent award year(s) **only if** the student attended the same institution – the student no longer must submit documentation every year to meet the criteria

# Illinois Youth in Care

# Students in Foster Care

Often hesitant to share their living situations

Often lack adult support

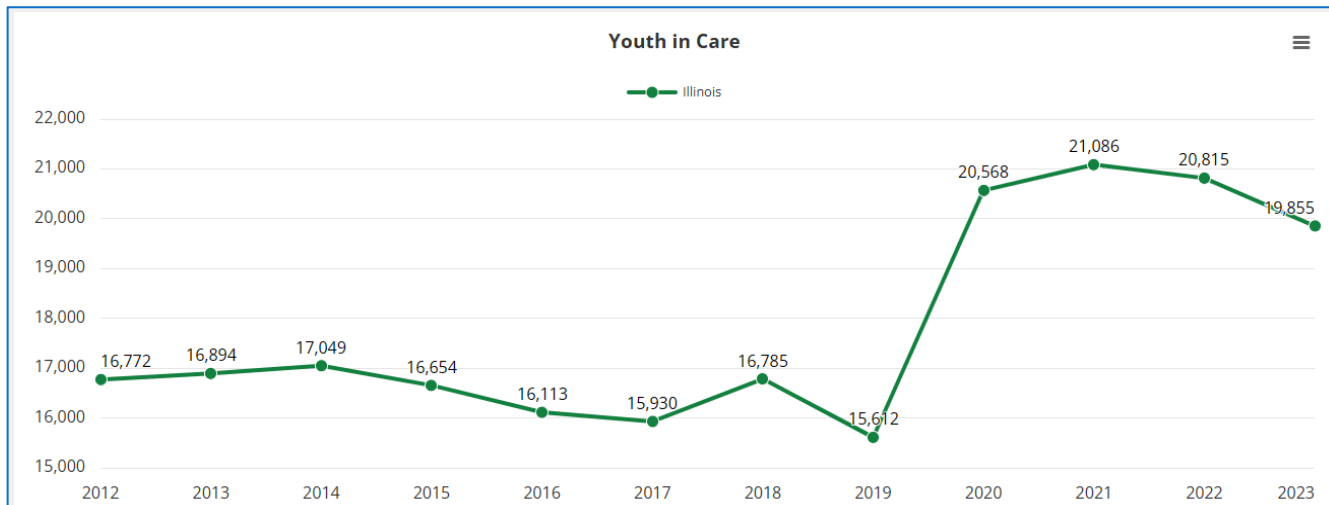
Require additional support as they transition into their postsecondary option

Lower rates of high school completion and employment

Less likely to earn a college degree

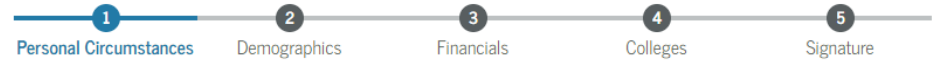
# Illinois Data on Students in Foster Care

- According to the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), as of April 30, 2025, there are **17,741** total youth in foster care
  - 1,537 are over the age of 18
  - 3,611 are between the ages of 13-17
  - 5,750 are between the ages 6-12



# Foster Care Question on FAFSA

- Students are asked if at any time since they turned 13 if they were in the foster care system
  - If yes, they are independent and will not be required to enter parent information
  - Foster care parents are **NOT** considered parents for purposes of financial aid



## Student Personal Circumstances

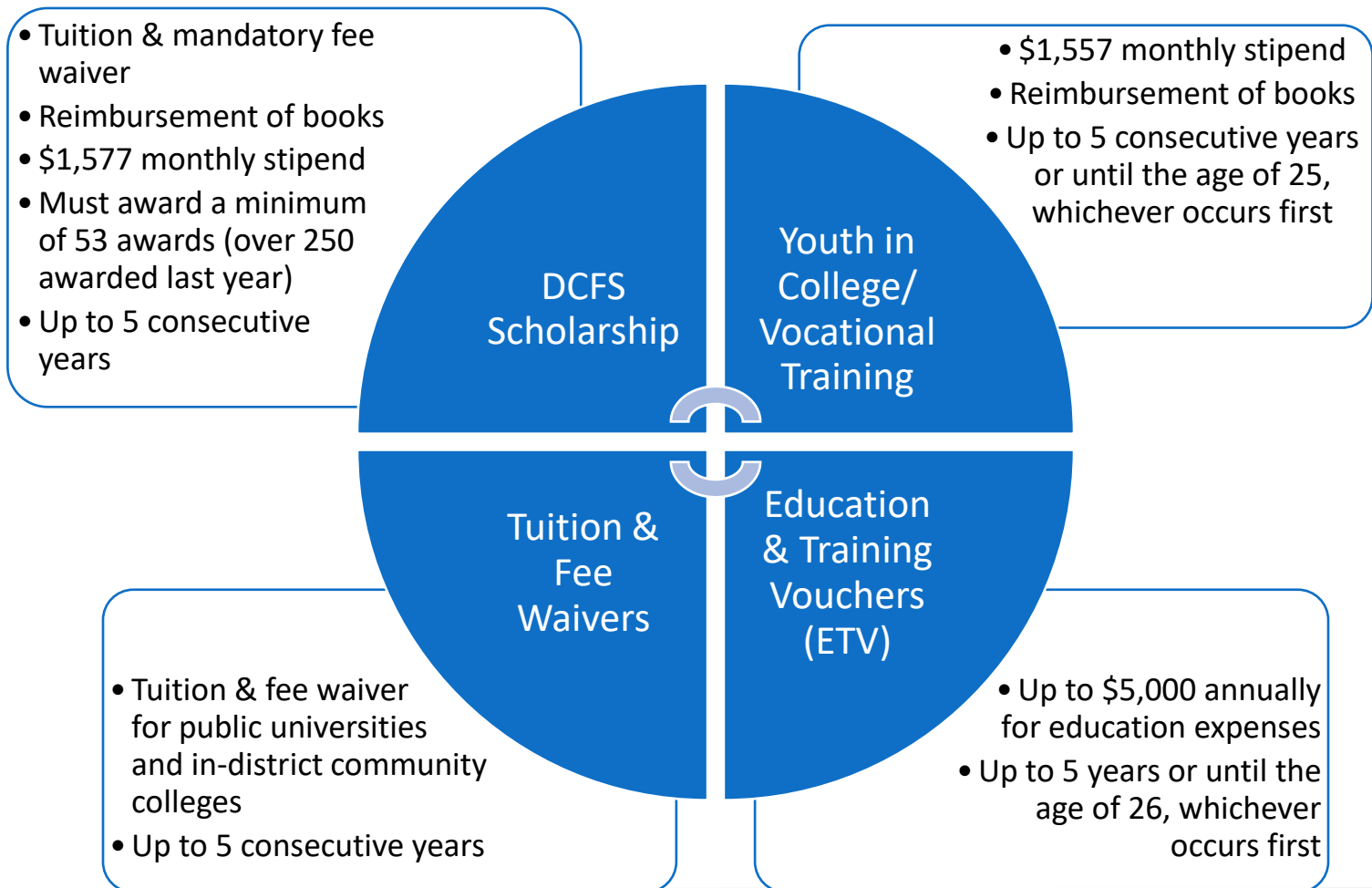
Select all that apply.

- The student is currently serving on active duty in the U.S. armed forces for purposes other than training.
- The student is a veteran of the U.S. armed forces.
- The student has children or other people (excluding their spouse) who live with them and receive more than half of their support from the student now and between July 1, 2024 and June 30, 2025.
- At any time since the student turned 13, they were an orphan (no living biological or adoptive parent).
- At any time since the student turned 13, they were a ward of the court.
- At any time since the student turned 13, they were in foster care.
- The student is or was a legally emancipated minor, as determined by a court in their state of residence.
- The student is or was in a legal guardianship with someone other than their parent or stepparent, as determined by a court in their state of residence.
- None of these apply.

# Illinois DCFS Postsecondary Programs

- The Illinois DCFS provides several programs for students are in or have aged out of the foster care system
- Each program has its own criteria and eligibility requirements
- Students can receive benefits from DCFS and receive a Monetary Award Program (MAP) Grant and/or Pell Grant

# DCFS Postsecondary Programs



<https://dcfs.illinois.gov/brighter-futures/growing-minds/post-secondary-education-services.html>

# Support Services for Homeless and Foster Youth

- Institutions are increasingly collaborating with local housing authorities to address student homelessness
- IL HOUSE Liaisons
  - Each institution of higher education in IL is required to designate a member of staff to serve as a liaison to students experiencing homelessness and students in DCFS foster care
- Creation of on-campus food pantries
  - Open to all students on and off campus
- [Youth in Care - College Advocate Program](#)
  - Provides youth with foster care experience with ongoing support in navigating college life

# RISE Act

# Retention of Illinois Students & Equity (RISE) Act

- Signed into law on June 21, 2019
- Provides a pathway for **eligible undocumented students** who are disqualified from federal student aid to apply for ISAC, and other state funded financial aid programs
  - Including DCFS programs (except ETV program)
  - Relies on criteria already in state law that's used to determine eligibility for in-state tuition at public institutions

**Note:** The RISE Act does not exempt students from meeting existing program eligibility criteria

# Eligibility Criteria for the RISE Act

- Undocumented students may be eligible for ISAC's programs if they meet all of these criteria:
  1. Resided with their parent or guardian while attending a public or private high school in this State;
  2. Graduated from a public or private high school or received the equivalent of a high school diploma in this State;
  3. Attended school in this State for at least 3 years as of the date the individual graduated from high school or received the equivalent of a high school diploma in this State;
  4. Provides an affidavit stating that they will file an application to become a permanent resident of the United States at the earliest opportunity they are eligible to do so;
  5. Has not established a residence outside of Illinois

# The Alternative Application for Illinois Financial Aid

- The application is process for eligible students to apply for the Monetary Award Program (MAP) Grant only
- There are prescreening questions built into the application to determine which application a student should complete, *Free Application for Federal Student Aid* (FAFSA) or Alternative Application
- The application is patterned after the FAFSA:
  - A Student Aid Index (SAI) is calculated
  - Opens the same time as the FAFSA

# Alternative Application Privacy Notice

- The information provided on the Alternative Application is used by ISAC to determine eligibility for state financial aid
- ISAC has strict security and confidentiality policies and procedures in place to protect the integrity of student records
- ISAC only shares student data with your school, for the purposes of awarding financial aid or for research purposes

# Alternative Application Processing

- A completed Alternative App goes through ISAC for processing
- Unlike the FAFSA, the Alternative App is a state form and data elements are not matched with other agencies – eligibility for the Monetary Award Program (MAP) will be determined by the school the student attends

# Resources

# IL DCFS Contacts

Laura Gutierrez

Post-Secondary Education Specialist

[Laura.Gutierrez@illinois.gov](mailto:Laura.Gutierrez@illinois.gov)

Kim Peck

Downstate Education and Transition Services  
Administrator

[Kim.Peck@illinois.gov](mailto:Kim.Peck@illinois.gov)

# ISAC Student Portal

The screenshot shows the ISAC Student Portal website. The top navigation bar includes links for Resources, Toolbox, ISACorps, Program Applications & Status Checks, Now Playing, and Login. The main heading is 'RESOURCES' with a sub-heading: 'Check out resources from ISAC partners to help you with financial aid, and money management.' A red box highlights a link titled 'Student Resources Beyond Financial Aid' with an external link icon. Below this, a section titled 'Student & Parent Quick Links' contains several links: E-Message Archives (for Students & Parents), FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid), Federal Student Aid (StudentAid.gov), My Federal Student Aid, Federal Student Aid (StudentAid.gov for parents), Military Service, Student Resources Beyond Financial Aid, and IRS Tax Benefits for Education Information Center. A red box highlights a link to <https://www.foodpantries.org/st/illinois> with the text 'An expanded list of Illinois food pantries.'

**ISAC Student Portal** Resources Toolbox ISACorps Program Applications & Status Checks Now Playing Login

## RESOURCES

Check out resources from ISAC partners to help you with financial aid, and money management.

[Student Resources Beyond Financial Aid](#)

If you are an Illinois college student looking for help beyond financial aid – including resources for food, housing, medical care, child and dependent care assistance and consideration because of special circumstances – check out this area. You’ll also find a list of food pantries on or near Illinois college campuses.

<https://www.foodpantries.org/st/illinois>  
An expanded list of Illinois food pantries.

**Student & Parent Quick Links**

- E-Message Archives (for Students & Parents)
- FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid)
- Federal Student Aid (StudentAid.gov) (includes former StudentLoans.gov, fsaid.ed.gov, and nslds.ed.gov)
- My Federal Student Aid
- Federal Student Aid (for parents)
- Military Service
- Student Resources Beyond Financial Aid
- IRS Tax Benefits for Education Information Center

# Resources Beyond Financial Aid

- Food resources
  - SNAP benefits for college students - Illinois' community college students enrolled in Perkins-approved CTE programs have access to food security through SNAP
- Housing & utilities
- Medical care
- Illinois college food pantries
- Child and dependent care
- Special circumstances and professional judgment

# Thank You!

Questions? Contact the Professional Development team at [isac.outreachtraining@illinois.gov](mailto:isac.outreachtraining@illinois.gov)!

Sign up for ISAC's e-Messaging service to receive the latest news and updates at [www.isac.org/emessaging](http://www.isac.org/emessaging)