

## 2025-2026 FINANCIAL AID PROCESS KEY QUESTIONS

### Is completing a financial aid application a requirement for all CPS students?

- Yes. In 2020, the state of Illinois passed [Public Act 101-180](#), making it a requirement for all students in Illinois public schools to complete a financial aid application in order to graduate from high school.

### How do students fulfill their financial aid graduation requirement?

- Students fulfill their financial aid graduation requirement by completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), Alternative Application for Illinois Financial Aid (Alternative App), or [ISBE Non-Participation waiver](#) online.

### How will students know which application to complete?

- All US citizens and [eligible non-citizens](#) are eligible to complete the FAFSA, administered by the US Department of Education.
- All undocumented students who have been Illinois residents for at least 3 years should complete the [Alternative App](#), administered by the Illinois Student Assistance Commission (ISAC).
- All students who are ineligible or unable to complete either application should complete the [ISBE non-participation waiver](#), also administered by the Illinois Student Assistance Commission.

### Are all applications available now?

- Yes. The FAFSA became available for all eligible students on November 18. The ISBE Non-Participation form became available to all students on December 1. The Alternative App became available to eligible students on December 6.

### What information will students and families need in order to complete their financial aid application?

- Students who are dependent students will need to know their Social Security number, provide requisite financial information, and have at least one of their parents provide their financial information.
  - ◆ Dependent students are those who do not meet any of the independent student criteria
- Students who qualify as [independent students](#) will need to know their Social Security number and provide the requisite [financial information](#).
  - ◆ An independent student is one of the following: at least 24 years old, married, a graduate or professional student, a veteran, a member of the armed forces, an orphan, a ward of the court, or someone with legal dependents other than a spouse, an emancipated minor or someone who is homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. [Get additional information to determine your dependency status.](#)

### Are students who are US citizens but whose parents are not US citizens eligible to complete the FAFSA?

- Yes! Financial aid eligibility is based on the status of the student. Parents who do not have Social Security Numbers will still be expected to provide their financial information to financial aid applications when applicable, and that information will be used to determine the student's eligibility for financial aid.

### How will the U.S. Department of Education use the information collected from the FAFSA?

- The United States Department of Education (USDE) may disclose the information on your Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA®) form to several entities under certain conditions. Authorized entities/agencies that contract with USDE must maintain the safeguards required under the Privacy Act.
  - ◆ Entities and agencies may include IRS, Social Security Administration, Department of Veteran Affairs, and Department of Homeland Security and the Department of Justice.
  - ◆ DE may send your information to a foreign, federal, state, or local enforcement agency if the information submitted indicates a violation or potential violation of law.
  - ◆ Learn more [here](#)

### How will the Illinois Student Assistance Commission use the information collected from the Alternative App?

- ISAC does not share information provided on the Alternative App with any entities outside of the colleges and universities the student indicates on the application. The lone exceptions apply **ONLY** if there is a valid subpoena or to investigate fraud.

### What are the benefits of completing the FAFSA and/or Alternative App?

- Students who complete the FAFSA are eligible for **up to \$7,395 in Pell Grant funding** to subsidize the cost of college at virtually all postsecondary institutions across the country. Additionally, students who attend college in the state of Illinois may be eligible for up to **\$8400 in additional MAP Grant funding**. Finally, students may also be eligible for between \$5500 and \$9500 in federal student loans, depending on their dependency status.
- Students who complete the Alternative App are eligible for up to \$8400 in MAP Grant funding to attend a college or university in the state of Illinois.

### What do I do for financial aid if I am unable to complete the FAFSA or the Alternative App

- [The Coalition of Advocates for Undocumented Student's Education \(CAUSE\) website](#) includes information about scholarships and financial aid sources for students across the immigration spectrum.
- [Click here](#) for a list of colleges and universities that meet 100% of demonstrated need for Undocumented and DACA students, which may include resources for students who do not complete a financial aid application.
- All CPS graduates with a 3.0 GPA are eligible for the Star Scholarship at the City Colleges of Chicago, which provides a waiver for all tuition, fees, and books. **Students who are ineligible for the FAFSA or Alternative App may complete a Certification of Ineligibility in order to receive the Star Scholarship without completing the FAFSA or Alternative App.**
- Students can contact the financial aid offices at institutions they are interested in attending to ask about institutional aid that may be available.

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## RESOURCES

- [Summary of Key Changes and Implication for the 2024-2025 FAFSA](#)
- [Mixed Status Family Resources](#)
- [Detailed FAFSA Changes](#)
- [Implementation of FAFSA Simplification Act](#)
- [FAFSA Simplification Web Center](#)

## MORE INFORMATION

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