

UNDERSTANDING ACCESS TO COLLEGE FINANCIAL AID FOR FORMER FOSTER YOUTH



Fostering Adoption to Further Student Achievement Act

- This federal legislation became law on January 1, 2008, as an amendment to the College Cost Reduction and Access Act (Public Law 110-84).
- The law expanded the definition of independent student, and goes into effect July 2009, for applications for financial aid for the 2009-2010 school year.
- The provision applies to youth whose adoptions were finalized before the law was passed in 2007.
- Youth who meet the new definition should indicate their status as an independent student when they fill out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) form for college financial aid.

Visit www.voice-for-adoption.org/downloads/FAFSA%20factsheet.pdf for more information.

Federal Financial Aid

Public Law 110-84 is a federal law which addresses a financial disincentive to adopting older children and youth in foster care. This federal law amended the definition of who can qualify as an independent student, without parental income being considered in evaluating the student's eligibility for financial aid. This 2008 law states that independent student status can be claimed for an individual who was in foster care, or a ward of the court, at any time after the date of their 13th birthday. Prior to this legislation, an individual had to be in foster care at age 16 or older in order to claim independent student status.

Independent Student Status:

Students are classified as dependent or independent because federal student aid programs are based on the principle that students are primarily supported by their parents for postsecondary education. If a student was in foster care any time after their 13th birthday, parental income can not be considered in determining eligibility for financial aid and they are eligible for independent student status.

Visit <http://www.ecampustours.com/payingforcollege/financialaidandfafsa/fosteryouthtipsfafsa.htm> for tips on completing the FAFSA.

State Financial Aid

There are different types of Cal Grants. You must meet financial and academic requirements to be eligible. Competitive awards take into consideration if the student is a former foster youth. Cal Grants do not have to be repaid. Federal eligibility guidelines for independent student status apply (youth must be in foster care through their 13th birthdays).

Visit <http://www.csac.ca.gov/doc.asp?id=568> for more information.

Chafee Grants

Chafee Grants offer up to \$5000 per year in aid for current or former foster youth. Grant amounts vary. Chafee grants do not have to be paid back. Chafee is federally and state funded and each year is subject to availability of funds. To qualify, youth must have been Juvenile Court Dependents in foster care placement between the ages of 16 and 18.

Visit www.chafee.csac.ca.gov for more information.

See reverse for Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) regarding Financial Aid and Permanency Options for Youth. More detailed information regarding youth permanency and financial issues is available in Alameda County Social Services Agency's

A Guide to Permanency Options for Youth.

Supplemental Handout 2 5/09

FAQs: Financial Aid and Permanency Options for Youth



1. Q: Is it ever in the best interest of youth to remain in foster care in order to obtain financial support for college?

A: For youth who are planning to attend college or vocational school, financial concerns are important to consider when exploring a plan of legal guardianship or adoption. For some youth and families, expanded access to college funding does not outweigh the importance and value of exiting the foster care system and achieving legal permanence. For others, many factors, including the family's ability to save and plan for college may be considerations. Depending on the adopted family's income, their potential access to funds for college, the child's age, and what assistance will be accessible, some youth and families may decide that it is in the youth's best interest to remain temporarily in a foster care status. In these cases, delaying permanency in order to access all possible types of financial aid may be in the youth's best interest.

2. Q: Specifically, how does adoption or legal guardianship affect a youth's eligibility for state and/or federal funding for higher education?

A: Previously, federal and state financial aid programs for college and vocational school were designed to provide benefits for youth who emancipated from foster youth on or after their 18th birthday. Current legislation now allows youth who exit foster care anytime after their 13th birthday expanded access to 'free' federal and state financial aid. 'Free' money, which comes in the form of grants, awards and scholarships are not loans and do not have to be paid back. Youth who are court dependents and exit care through adoption, legal guardianship, or from the family maintenance program are now all eligible for 'independent student' status when completing the FAFSA application for financial aid. Parental income is not considered. Given this status, youth may qualify for grants and other awards that their family income may have otherwise disqualified them for. This 2008 legislation supports permanency for older youth by expanding access to financial assistance for college. Note that some aid is purely based on exceptional financial need, while other aid is competitive and also considers academic performance.

3. Q: What are Chafee funds, and who is eligible?

A: The California Chafee Grant Program offers up to \$5000 annually in free money to current or former foster youth to use for vocational school training or college. The Chafee Program is federally and state funded. Each year it is subject to availability of funds. The grant amount is dependent on financial need, including the cost of the program. The money is 'free', and differs from a loan in that it does not have to be paid back. To be eligible, one must be at least a half time student, and maintain satisfactory academic progress. Receipt of the award may affect other financial aid, so this must be explored with each school's financial aid office. All youth that were in foster care placement for any amount of time between their 16th and 18th birthdays, and have not yet reached their 22nd birthday are eligible for these funds. Information and applications for the Chafee Grant Program are available at the California Student Aid Commission Website at www.csac.ca.gov when you click on 'Commission Programs'.

4. Q: Since Chafee funds are only available to youth who exit foster care after their 16th birthday, should youth and families wait to age 16 to complete adoption or legal guardianship?

A: Some youth and families may opt to wait to proceed with permanency planning in order to be able to access every possible form of college financial aid available. Others may feel that they do not need to delay permanency as the funding that a Chafee grant may offer may be limited in scope, depending on tuition expenses at the college the youth may plan to attend.