



Understanding the FAFSA Process

Why File the FAFSA?

Financing a college education can be stressful for many families because of the high costs associated with college attendance. Fortunately, there are many options available to help pay for the cost of attending college, including:

- Scholarships
- Grants
- Work-study
- Student loans

Many of these options require the completion of the **Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)** for the student to be eligible. Failing to correctly submit the FAFSA form could prevent your student from accessing many types of important financial aid that make college possible.

It is important for every student to file the FAFSA form for each year that they are in college.

In 2015, nearly **\$25 million of financial aid** went unclaimed in Iowa. Ensure that your student has access to as many types of aid as possible by providing your information on the FAFSA form.

We have provided a list of common questions and their answers to help you understand what information will be necessary and how that information will be used.

If you have further questions or would like assistance in filing the FAFSA for your student, please call ICAN at **(877) 272-4692**.

What happens if parents refuse to provide their income information on the FAFSA?

If a student is required to have parental information on the form, but is unable to provide it, the student is no longer qualified for certain types of financial aid including federal and state grants. The only aid a student can access is an unsubsidized student loan.

Why do we need parent information?

Most high school students are considered dependent on the FAFSA form, and are required to include their parents' financial information, regardless of whether or not the parent will provide financial support for the student's education. To determine whether or not they are dependent, the student will answer the series of questions listed here: <https://www.edvisors.com/fafsa/forms/tutorial/dependency-status/>.

If the student answers 'no' to all of the dependency questions, they will be considered dependent, and parental financial information is required. If the student answers 'yes' to any of the dependency questions, they will be considered independent, and no parental information will be required.

However, if the student answers 'yes' to any of the questions, they will likely have to provide documentation to prove their independence (i.e., a letter from the high school's homeless liaison officer, documentation from the foster care system, proof of legal guardianship, etc.).

Reasons why parents may refuse to complete the FAFSA

We would only get loans so what's the point?

Some families feel that based on their income they won't qualify for financial aid outside of student loans so why bother filing the FAFSA. The truth is, no matter your income you should file the FAFSA, because many scholarships require the FAFSA to be completed as part of the scholarship application. Even scholarships based on merit (non-financial criteria such as academics or activities) may require the FAFSA to be completed. By not completing the FAFSA a student may lose out on institutional or private scholarships.

Parents believe they cannot afford college or do not want to pay for college education.

Parents may feel that they are not paying for college therefore they are not providing information on the FAFSA form. Providing information on the FAFSA is the only way a student can apply for all the financial aid they may be eligible for. It does not mean the parents have to pay anything. The FAFSA is the application that calculates what a student is eligible for, not the bill for which a student is responsible. A parent will never be required to pay for any part of a college bill because they provided information on the FAFSA form. It's simply the best way to help the student qualify for financial aid.

Biological parents are divorced and step-parent is unwillingly to help the student.

If a student's custodial parent is remarried when the FAFSA is filed, the stepparent's information must be included on the FAFSA. The FAFSA looks at the household that the student lives in and the stepparent is part of that household. Again, the stepparent will never be required to pay for the college education, but simply asked to provide the financial contribution information for the household to help the student qualify for financial aid.

Concerns about privacy

Some parents feel uncomfortable discussing family finances with their children and since the FAFSA asks about income and assets this can be a sensitive issue for some parents. A federal law, the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA), safeguards the privacy of educational records, including financial aid applications. FERPA prevents the information from being shared and is only accessible to the college financial aid.

Student no longer lives in the household

While many believe 18 to be the age of adulthood and independence, for FAFSA purposes a student is dependent until the age of 24. Parent information is still required if the student moves out or is self-sufficient as long as the student is under the age of 24, unmarried, without children, and not serving in the armed forces. Financial self-sufficiency is not grounds for independence on the FAFSA, nor is turning 18.

Parents are undocumented

If one of both parents are undocumented but the student is a US Citizen, permanent resident or eligible non-citizen, the student is eligible for financial aid and parent information is required. Parents do not have to have a social security number for the student to file the FAFSA. Simply put 000-00-0000 as the parent social security number on the FAFSA form. Information provided on the FAFSA is only used by the US Department of Education.

Parents have not filed income taxes for several years

The FAFSA is based on income information and therefore requires income taxes to be complete. If taxes are not completed the student will not be eligible for federal financial aid.