In the wake of the pandemic, college enrollment and Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) applications have declined: compared to last year, FAFSA numbers are down about 9%. Students experiencing homelessness often face many barriers filling out the FAFSA and the pandemic has exacerbated these problems. Under the McKinney-Vento Act, every local educational agency is required to designate a liaison who is responsible for identifying and coordinating services for children and youth experiencing homelessness. One of the homeless liaison’s responsibilities is informing unaccompanied homeless youth (youth who are not in the physical custody of their parents or guardians) of their status as independent students for the FAFSA, and helping them receive FAFSA determinations. Liaisons can help implement this responsibility - which is even more important in light of the disruption caused by the pandemic - by following these five steps.

1. Let seniors know that they can start the FAFSA process starting on October 1 (when the FAFSA becomes available), and inform them of their status as an independent student for financial aid. As an independent student, unaccompanied homeless youth do not need to include parental information on the FAFSA.
2. Write a determination letter for students. Liaisons can use this form here. Some colleges might have their own verification form, so check the institution’s website.
3. Give the determination letter to youth. Even if youth aren’t sure about whether or not they want to go to college, make sure they have the determination letter in case they decide to apply. Keep a copy so you have it in case you are asked by institutions, and/or in case youth lose it. If students know what school they are going to attend, help them send it to the college via email.
4. Let youth know that they will need another determination letter next year (but new changes are coming to the law starting with the October 2022 FAFSA, so they should not need letters each year after that).
5. Connect youth to college access programs, homeless higher education liaisons, counselors, or other sources of assistance in completing the FAFSA and helping the student transition to higher education. *Click HERE to find the contact information of your local homeless education liaison.*

Additional Resources:
- Five Strategies to Help Homeless Youth Transition to College During COVID-19
- The FAFSA: Four Things You Can Do to Help Homeless and Foster Youth
- FAFSA 101 for Liaisons and Providers Webinar

www.schoolhouseconnection.org/5-quick-fafsa-tips-for-liaisons