



Pathways to Partnership: Higher Education

Some form of education beyond high school is increasingly necessary to obtain jobs that pay a living wage and achieve housing stability. For youth experiencing homelessness, postsecondary education provides the opportunity to break cycles of poverty and exit homelessness permanently; at the same time, homelessness creates barriers to accessing and completing higher education.

In recognition of these barriers and the importance of postsecondary education, the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA) amended the McKinney-Vento Act to assist youth experiencing homelessness to transition successfully to postsecondary education. School district homeless liaisons are required to ensure that unaccompanied homeless youth are informed of their status as independent students for college financial aid, and obtain assistance to receive verification for the FAFSA. Additionally, state McKinney-Vento plans must describe how homeless youth will receive assistance from school counselors to advise, prepare, and improve their readiness for college.

This guide is designed to help local educational agency (LEA) liaisons and homeless service providers to 1) gain a basic understanding of some important higher education programs, including those programs that have specific requirements on homelessness; and 2) create and sustain higher education partnerships. Connecting youth and young adults who experience homelessness with the appropriate resources will help pave a smoother transition to and through postsecondary education.

>>>> Download the Higher Education Contact Sheet [here](#) to keep track of the contacts. <<<<<

ACT Fee Waiver

Resources: <https://www.act.org/content/dam/act/unsecured/documents/FeeWaiver.pdf>

Services Provided:

ACT makes fee waivers for the ACT test available to economically disadvantaged high school juniors and seniors. Funds are limited, and once they have been exhausted, requests for waivers will be denied. They are valid through August 31 of each year.

The fee covers the registration fee for either the ACT (no writing) or the ACT with writing. The fee includes one report to the high school and up to four college choices.

Eligible students may use a maximum of two separate ACT fee waivers. The waiver is used once the student registers or submits a standby request, even if the student does not test on the requested test date.

Access to ACT Kaplan Online Prep Live - full access to [ACT Online Prep](#)

A Request for Waiver or Deferral of College Admission Application Fee form for students that qualify. Complete the form [here](#) as part of their application process. There is no limit to how many times a student can use this form when applying to schools.

Eligibility:

Be enrolled in high school in the 11th or 12th grade.

Be a US citizen or testing in the US, US territories, or Puerto Rico.

Meet one or more of the indicators of economic need listed below:

- Enrolled in a federal free or reduced-price lunch program at a school, based on US Department of Agriculture income levels (see [table](#)).
- Enrolled in a program for the economically disadvantaged (for example, a federally funded program like GEAR UP or Upward Bound).
- Resides in a foster home, is a ward of the state, or is homeless.
- Family receives low-income public assistance or lives in federally subsidized public housing.

Role of Liaisons/Service Providers:

ACT ships fee waiver forms to high schools that had students who used fee waivers during the preceding academic year. The number of fee waiver forms mailed to each school is based on the number of waivers students at that school used the prior year. To order or reorder fee waivers, visit [here](#).

Encourage students who are experiencing homelessness to register well enough in advance to allow for maximum prep time, especially since students will have access to features in ACT Kaplan Online Prep.

Emphasize to students who register with a fee waiver the importance of sitting for the ACT. ACT has noted a higher-than-expected number of fee-waiver eligible students who register, but then do not test.

SAT Fee Waiver

Resources: <https://collegereadiness.collegeboard.org/sat/register/fees/fee-waivers>

Services Provided:	Eligibility:	Role of Liaisons/Service Providers:
<p>The SAT fee waiver program expands access to the SAT and its benefits by letting low-income students test for free.</p> <p>Eligible students may use up to a maximum of two registrations for the SAT and up to two registrations for the SAT Subject Tests.</p> <p>It provides four additional score reports, which can be ordered at any time during the students' testing lifetime.</p> <p>Question and Answer Service or the Student Answer Service - A booklet copy of the SAT questions and report showing the student's answers, correct answers and additional scoring instructions, information about the type and difficulty of test questions.</p> <p><i>Request for Waiver of College Application Fee</i> - The College Board provides college application fee waivers directly to students. Eligible seniors get their college application fee waivers when they get their scores. Eligible juniors will receive them in the fall of their senior year. Up to four Request for Waiver of College Application Fee forms are provided. More information can be found here.</p>	<p>SAT fee waivers are available to low-income 11th and 12th grade students in the U.S. or U.S. territories. U.S. citizens living outside the country may be able to have test fees waived. SAT Subject Test fee waivers are available for students in grades 9-12.</p> <p>A student is eligible for fee waivers if he or she meets any of the following criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Enrolled in or eligible to participate in National School Lunch Program. ● Annual family income falls within the Income Eligibility Guidelines set by the USDA Food and Nutrition Service. ● Enrolled in a federal, state, or local program that aids students from low-income families (e.g., Federal TRIO programs.) ● Family receives public assistance. ● Live in federally subsidized public housing or a foster home, or are homeless. ● Are a ward of the state or an orphan. 	<p>Encourage students who are experiencing homelessness to take the SAT, even if they are not considering postsecondary education at the time. Explain the fee waiver process and the additional benefits, such as the waiver of college application fees that are available.</p> <p>Help school counselors to identify first-time fee waiver-eligible students at their school and distribute the fee waivers to them.</p> <p>Starting in the 2018-2019 school year, schools will automatically receive SAT fee waivers based on how many students used them for the first time during the previous testing year. To request additional fee waivers for your school, call the SAT Educator Helpline at 888-SAT-HELP</p>

Financial Aid

Resources: <https://fafsa.ed.gov/>

Services Provided:	Eligibility:	Role of Liaisons/Service Providers:
<p>Federal Student Aid is administered by the U.S. Department of Education. It is the largest provider of student financial aid in the country and includes federal grants, loans, and work-study.</p> <p><i>The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) form is available online or in paper form. This form is utilized to apply for federal student aid. The application is available starting on October 1st of the preceding year. Many states and colleges have earlier deadlines for applying for financial aid. State deadlines are available here. Students should check with their institution about its deadline. Students must fill out the FAFSA form every year that they are in school in order to stay eligible for federal student aid.</i></p>	<p>Be a citizen or eligible noncitizen of the United States.</p> <p>Have a valid Social Security Number.</p> <p>Have a high school diploma, General Education Development (GED) certificate, or have completed homeschooling.</p> <p>Be enrolled in an eligible program as a regular student seeking a degree or certificate.</p> <p>Maintain satisfactory academic progress.</p> <p>Not owe a refund on a federal student grant or be in default on a federal student loan.</p> <p>Register (or already be registered) with the Selective Service System, if you are a male and not currently on active duty in the U.S. Armed Forces.</p>	<p>Unaccompanied homeless status may be determined by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● A high school or school district homeless liaison ● Director of an emergency shelter or transitional housing program funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) ● Director of a Runaway or homeless youth basic center or transitional living program (RHYA) ● Financial aid officer <p>Questions on the FAFSA ask if a youth has a determination by a liaison, or a HUD or RHYA provider. If an applicant does not have, and cannot get, a determination from one of these three sources, he or she can request consideration for determination by a financial aid administrator from the school they wish to attend. Financial aid</p>

Federal Pell Grants are awarded only to undergraduate students by filling out the FAFSA. Amounts can change yearly and depends on a student's financial need (difference between cost of attendance at a school and the student's expected family contribution), cost of attendance, status as a full-time or part-time student, and plans to attend school for a full academic year or less. A Federal Pell Grant does not have to be repaid, except under certain circumstances. A student can receive the Federal Pell Grant for no more than 12 semesters (roughly six years).

The Financial Aid Office at a student's institution is a key partner. They should be able to answer specific questions about financial aid packages and deadlines.

Not have a conviction for the possession or sale of illegal drugs for an offense that occurred while you were receiving federal student aid.

Other requirements may apply, contact the financial aid office at specific institutions for further clarification.

Dependent vs independent students:

- A dependent student is someone who is younger than 24 years old. Dependent students must provide parental income and signature on the FAFSA form.
- An independent student does not require parental income or signature. Independent students include those who are:
 - 24 years old or older
 - Married
 - Graduate/professional students
 - Veterans, or members of the armed forces
 - Orphans, or wards of the court, including being in foster care any time after the age of 13
 - Have legal dependents other than a spouse
 - Emancipated minors
 - Youth who are determined to be homeless and unaccompanied in the year in which they are submitting the application, or unaccompanied, self-supporting, and at risk of being homeless in the year in which they are submitting the application.

administrators must make determinations based on the McKinney-Vento definition of homeless and unaccompanied.

School district liaisons are required to inform unaccompanied homeless youth of their status as independent students for the FAFSA, and help them obtain verification of that status. Additionally, local liaisons and other school/district personnel should work with school counselors so that they also may help youth complete the FAFSA.

HUD and RHYA service providers should inform unaccompanied homeless youth about their status as independent students for financial aid, and help them obtain verification.

See SchoolHouse Connection's [website](#) for a sample letter to determine the independent student status of unaccompanied homeless youth. An updated template will be available for the upcoming FAFSA.

GEAR UP

Resources: <https://www.grants.gov/>

Services Provided:

The GEAR UP grant program is designed to increase the number of low-income students who are prepared to enter and succeed in postsecondary education. GEAR UP provides six-seven year grants to states and partnerships to provide services at high-poverty middle and high schools.

GEAR UP provides critical early college awareness and support activities like tutoring, mentoring, academic preparation, financial education, and college scholarships to improve access to education for low income, minority and disadvantaged first-generation students and their families.

Application packages are downloaded from [here](#). Grantees are selected through a rigorous peer review process.

Eligibility:

Institutions of higher education (IHE), local education agencies (LEA), state education agencies (SEA), and any state agency designated by the governor of the state may apply.

The cohort model involves providing services to all students in the participating grade level. The cohort must start no later than the 7th grade and services must be provided through the 12th grade. Each cohort must include either:

- All of the students in a particular grade level at a participating school that has a 7th grade and in which at least 50% of the students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch
- All of the students in a particular grade level, who reside in public housing

Role of Liaisons/Service Providers:

Conduct outreach to priority students, who are defined in the law as any student in secondary school who is eligible for assistance under subtitle B of title VII of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act.

Encourage students to enroll in college prep courses and programs available through GEAR UP.

TRIO Programs

Resources: <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ope/trio/index.html>, <https://www.grants.gov/>

Services Provided:

The Federal Trio Programs (TRIO) are federal outreach and student service programs designed to identify and provide services to individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds. While there are eight TRIO programs, this document focuses specifically on Student Support Services and Upward Bound. Please note that some program participants have an age limit, like Upward Bound.

Upward Bound provides fundamental support to participants in their preparation for college entrance. The goal is to increase the rate at which participants complete secondary education and enroll in and graduate from institutions of postsecondary education.

Student Support Services (SSS) awards funds to institutions of higher education to provide opportunities for academic development, assist students with basic college requirements, and to motivate students toward the successful completion of their postsecondary education. Colleges may have TRIO SSS offices which offer these resources to students.

Upward Bound, Student Support Services, Talent Search, and Educational Opportunity Center funds may be used to provide programs and activities specially designed for homeless children and youth and foster youth.

SSS funds can be used to secure temporary housing during breaks in the academic year for homeless children and youth and foster youth.

Eligibility:

Institutions of higher education (IHE), local education agencies (LEAs), state education agencies (SEAs), and any state agency designated by the governor of the state may apply for TRIO funding.

Homeless students are automatically eligible to participate in Upward Bound, Student Support Services, Talent Search, and Educational Opportunity Centers.

Additional Upward Bound Eligibility - Students must have completed the 8th grade, be between the ages of 13 and 19, and have a need for academic support in order to pursue a program of postsecondary education.

Role of Liaisons/Service Providers:

Encourage students to enroll in college prep courses and programs available through TRIO programs. Additionally, make students familiar with TRIO Student Support Services office at their college, if available.

Student Affairs Professionals

Resources: School's website

Services Provided:

Role of Liaisons/Service Providers:

There are many offices on college campuses who are dedicated to supporting all students to succeed. While some institutions may have a liaison dedicated to foster and homeless youth, there are a plethora of other student affairs professionals committed to helping students transition and be successful in college. Below is a list of offices (names may vary from institution) that can serve as great resources and advocates for students experiencing homelessness.

Academic Advisor: An academic advisor is someone who helps plan out the student's courses for the year and ensure that they are on the path towards graduation. Students typically meet with their advisor once a semester.

Academic Resource Center/Learning Center: This office assists students with academic assistance ranging from helpful study tips, paper reviews, tutoring services, and individual consultation. This office may also provide accommodations for students with disabilities.

Basic Needs Office/Homeless Higher Education Liaison: Some campuses might have basic needs offices that serve as a one-stop shop for comprehensive student needs: housing, food, mental health, financial assistance, etc. This office might also have a homeless higher education liaison who serves as the point of contact for students experiencing homelessness that mimic the role of K-12 liaisons.

Bursar Office: This office is responsible for billing of student tuition accounts. Checks and bills may be picked up at this office. However, questions related to financial aid should be directed towards the Financial Aid Office.

Career Center: This office is a resource for students preparing for jobs or internships. Services include resume review, interview prep, and internship/job fairs.

Attending college might have seemed out-of-reach for many youth experiencing homelessness. Once they overcome the obstacle of applying and being accepted, they must now navigate a different world of college life. Unlike many of their peers, this journey might not seem intuitive for them. In your role, encourage your students to seek resources and be engaged and active on campus. Student development theorists note that students who are [involved](#), [believe they matter](#), and feel [supported](#) is crucial for student growth and development.

Diversity and Inclusion/Multicultural Center/LGBTQ/First-Generation Office: This office is dedicated to supporting students of typically marginalized backgrounds. Popular services include a mentor program, organizations, initiatives, and heritage month events. In understanding the multiple identities students may hold, these offices often work together to support students' needs.

Financial Aid: This office, as previously mentioned, is especially important for youth experiencing homelessness. The financial aid administrator can help students obtain unaccompanied homeless youth determinations every year.

Health Education/Counseling: This office is available for students whenever they are sick or need medical attention. Additionally, some offices may host programs around de-stressing, sleeping tips, and cooking food. Counseling services may also be available for students.

Residential Living/Housing: This office is responsible for housing students on-campus. Important people to know include your Resident Assistant/Advisor (RA), who is a student designated to your floor/area. They host programs and will be your first contact if you have questions or concerns. Some residence halls also have a professional staff member living in the building (Hall Director/Community Director) and they are also available. This office is dedicated to creating a safe, inclusive environment for students.

Student Engagement/Student Activities: This office oversees student organizations on campus. They typically host large-scale events like Orientation, Homecoming, Alumni Weekend, Parents Weekend, or other big events. This office is a resource to get involved and active on campus.

TRIO/Student Support Services: This office, as previously mentioned, provides services like tutoring, advising, financial aid assistance, education/counseling services, and enrollment to graduate/professional schools or a four-year college. Some SSS offices may be able to secure temporary housing during breaks in the academic year for homeless and foster youth.

Liaisons and service providers can search on college websites to identify the homeless higher education liaison or best point of contact. Use the search bar and type in "basic needs office," "homeless higher education liaison," "food pantry," or other support services. If this office doesn't exist, reach out to the Dean of Students to find the best contact on campus.