

FAFSA Applicants – In Foster Care, Orphan, or Dependent or Ward of the Court Important Information

Because the FAFSA only collects limited data on applicants in the foster care system, we release this information with a detailed explanation. If you include this information in writing or in a presentation, please ensure that you provide a clear understanding of what the data mean. Data on applicants who are, or have been, in the foster care system collected on the FAFSA should not be construed to be representative of the entire population of such applicants.

Limited Population of Applicants Included in this Report

The FAFSA does not collect foster care information for the purpose of determining the population of students attending postsecondary institutions. There are two questions on the FAFSA that collect foster care information for different purposes.

Foster Question 1. To determine dependency status for Federal Student Aid

A question about foster care on the FAFSA is part of a series of questions asked to determine the dependency status for Federal Student Aid and is presented only to a subset of the applicant population. The question is:

At any time since you turned age 13, were both your parents deceased, were you in foster care or were you a dependent or ward of the court?

Applicants who answer “Yes” are considered independent for the purposes of Federal Student Aid and do not need to report parents’ financial and other information on the FAFSA.

This question is offered only to students not already been determined independent by an earlier question on the FAFSA on the Web. There are thirteen questions on the FAFSA that are used to determine dependency status. The Foster Care/Orphan/Dependent-Ward of the Court question is the eighth question. Once an applicant provides a positive response on FAFSA on the Web for any of the dependency determinant questions, most of the additional subsequent questions are not presented (skipped). (Note that similar logic does not exist on applications or corrections submitted via paper or from a school.)

Based on the priority of questions on FAFSA on the Web, counts of applicants in this report do not include most applicants who, at the time, were 24 years or older, married, or who answered “Yes” to the any of the questions: in a graduate program, in active duty, or veteran, as well as those who provided more than half of the support for their children or other dependents.

Foster Question 2. To provide additional information to those who have been in foster care

In application cycle 2015-16, the question "Are you a foster youth or were you at any time in the foster care system?" was added to FAFSA on the Web. It is asked in order to provide additional information on assistance through Federal programs for applicants who are, or have been, in the foster care system. The question is offered to all students who apply online but is not a required field. Responses do not influence dependency status.

Trending Analysis Limitations

Year to year changes in applications reported here do not necessarily represent trends in populations. Federal Student Aid requirements, including skip logic on the FAFSA, could impact counts of foster care applicants between cycles. Additionally, changes in other applicant characteristics between cycles could impact the numbers of applicants presented with foster care questions, and, because of skip logic, mask or falsely indicate underlying changes in these populations.

Note: Data retrieved from CPS on 1/16/25. The counts in this report include only a portion of applicants who might have been in foster care and should not be construed to be representative of the entire population of foster care applicants. Additionally, year to year changes in foster care applications reported here do not necessarily represent trends in foster care populations.

Table 1. Applicants who at any time since age 13, both parents deceased, in foster care or was a dependent or ward of the court

State	Application Cycle		
	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024
AK	217	206	215
AL	1,550	1,614	1,741
AR	876	852	970
AZ	2,440	2,370	2,521
CA	14,849	15,184	16,836
CO	1,012	974	1109
CT	966	938	915
DC	167	152	175
DE	232	189	249
FL	4,791	4,726	5,012
GA	2,601	2,539	2,742
HI	282	242	301
IA	797	783	819
ID	300	316	357
IL	2,484	2,424	2,760
IN	1,988	1,902	2,020
KS	1,338	1,290	1,379
KY	2,110	2,354	2,539
LA	1,348	1,318	1,379
MA	1,897	1,862	2,082
MD	1,303	1,178	1,259
ME	262	272	325
MI	2,540	2,486	2,620
MN	1,134	1,194	1,342
MO	1,769	1,829	2,086
MS	947	1,000	1,147
MT	275	291	320
NC	2,117	2,028	2,223
ND	253	231	245
NE	632	673	762

Note: Data retrieved from CPS on 1/16/25. The counts in this report include only a portion of applicants who might have been in foster care and should not be construed to be representative of the entire population of foster care applicants. Additionally, year to year changes in foster care applications reported here do not necessarily represent trends in foster care populations.

Table 1. Applicants who at any time since age 13, both parents deceased, in foster care or was a dependent or ward of the court (Continued)

State	Application Cycle		
	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024
NH	201	186	241
NJ	1,528	1,494	1,499
NM	422	483	503
NV	775	816	812
NY	3,605	3,431	3,615
OH	2,612	2,630	2,872
OK	1,071	1,129	1,192
OR	1,272	1,284	1,474
PA	2,887	2,780	3,052
RI	256	250	268
SC	1,158	1,221	1,291
SD	150	175	175
TN	2,681	2,667	2,890
TX	6,433	6,798	7,408
UT	541	532	608
VA	1,656	1,654	1,782
VT	154	160	163
WA	1,724	1,643	1,815
WI	961	948	1071
WV	963	907	1034
WY	235	216	334
Other	611	581	562
Sum:	85,373	85,402	93,111

Table 2. Web applicants who at any time were in foster care system

State	Application Cycle		
	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024
AK	1,124	1,090	1,100

Note: Data retrieved from CPS on 1/16/25. The counts in this report include only a portion of applicants who might have been in foster care and should not be construed to be representative of the entire population of foster care applicants. Additionally, year to year changes in foster care applications reported here do not necessarily represent trends in foster care populations.

AL	5,340	5,624	6,187
AR	4,173	4,385	4,890
AZ	9,186	9,502	10,343
CA	67,244	68,908	76,682
CO	6,442	6,635	7,467
CT	3,866	3,831	4,050
DC	841	834	869
DE	884	909	1006
FL	20,727	20,641	22,314
GA	13,406	13,658	15,085
HI	1,610	1,514	1,603
IA	4,079	4,190	4,486
ID	1,864	1,839	2,051
IL	11,824	11,867	13,155
IN	8,778	8,887	10,127
KS	4,812	4,870	5,469
KY	8,145	8,925	10,313
LA	4,803	5,028	6,194
MA	7,984	7,766	8,803
MD	6,122	5,784	6,274
ME	1,525	1,608	1,827
MI	12,829	12,498	13,728
MN	6,164	6,253	7,064
MO	8,085	8,217	9,046
MS	3,143	3,020	3,335
MT	1,330	1,326	1,440
NC	10,977	11,091	11,829
ND	998	993	1096
NE	3,209	3,357	3,611

**Table 2. Web applicants who at any time were in foster care system
(Continued)**

State	Application Cycle		
	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024

Note: Data retrieved from CPS on 1/16/25. The counts in this report include only a portion of applicants who might have been in foster care and should not be construed to be representative of the entire population of foster care applicants. Additionally, year to year changes in foster care applications reported here do not necessarily represent trends in foster care populations.

NH	929	956	1053
NJ	6,288	6,285	6,911
NM	2,164	2,379	2,537
NV	4,391	4,694	4,943
NY	15,678	15,345	16,517
OH	13,362	13,806	15,029
OK	5,894	6,254	6,977
OR	6,868	7,176	8,091
PA	11,866	12,206	13,352
RI	1,286	1,244	1,318
SC	5,600	6,158	6,675
SD	902	923	954
TN	9,817	9,815	10,880
TX	28,101	30,647	34,195
UT	2,928	2,833	3,114
VA	7,471	7,644	8,463
VT	704	721	770
WA	10,218	10,132	11,576
WI	5,928	6,053	6,570
WV	2,780	2,888	3,348
WY	842	864	962
Other	1,835	1,372	1,326
Sum:	387,366	395,445	437,005

Table 3. Total applicants by dependency (for reference)

Dependency Status (for Federal Student Aid)	Application Cycle		
	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024
Dependent	8,288,977	8,189,852	8,551,203
Independent	9,241,951	8,854,909	9,377,079
Sum:	17,530,928	17,044,761	17,928,282

Note: Data retrieved from CPS on 1/16/25. The counts in this report include only a portion of applicants who might have been in foster care and should not be construed to be representative of the entire population of foster care applicants. Additionally, year to year changes in foster care applications reported here do not necessarily represent trends in foster care populations.