

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. For FAFSA cycles 2022-2023 and 2023-2024 there are two questions on the FAFSA that collect foster care information for different purposes. For the 2024-2025 FAFSA cycle, there is a specific question—Student Personal Circumstances (question 5)—that gathers details regarding foster care status. This question offers nine response options, three of which pertain directly to foster care.

FAFSA Cycles 2022-2023 and 2023-2024

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 who have not 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.

Note: Data retrieved from CPS on 1/16/25. Data retrieved from FPS on 3/18/2026. 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.

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. The application cycle 2024-25 does not ask this question.

FAFSA Cycle 2024-2025

Foster Question To determine dependency status for Federal Student Aid

For the 2024-2025 FAFSA the foster care related questions were revised into a single question. This question is part of a multi-selected question to determine the dependency status for Federal Student Aid. The Foster Care/Orphan/Dependent-Ward of the Court selections are part of series of selections consisting of three of nine possible selections in question 5, Student Personal Circumstances, with the relevant selections being:

-At any time since the student turned 13, they were an orphan (no living biological or adoptive parent).

-At any time since the student turned 13, they were a ward of the court.

-At any time since the student turned 13, they were in foster care.

Applicants who select the box(es) stating that any of those apply to them are considered independent for the purposes of Federal Student Aid and do not need to report on parents' financial and other information on the FAFSA. However, if one were to select the "None of these apply" in question 5 and answered "No" in questions 6 and 7 then they could be considered dependent.

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. Data retrieved from FPS on 3/18/2026. 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		
	2022-2023	2023-2024	2024-2025 *
AK	206	215	639
AL	1,614	1,741	4,058
AR	852	970	2,702
AZ	2,370	2,521	7,425
CA	15,184	16,836	52,508
CO	974	1109	4,651
CT	938	915	2,214
DC	152	175	576
DE	189	249	643
FL	4,726	5,012	13,177
GA	2,539	2,742	8,586
HI	242	301	853
IA	783	819	2,681
ID	316	357	1,269
IL	2,424	2,760	8,039
IN	1,902	2,020	6,138
KS	1,290	1,379	3,542
KY	2,354	2,539	7,297
LA	1,318	1,379	3,616
MA	1,862	2,082	5,733
MD	1,178	1,259	4,173
ME	272	325	989
MI	2,486	2,620	8,381
MN	1,194	1,342	4,652
MO	1,829	2,086	5,862
MS	1,000	1,147	2,298
MT	291	320	827
NC	2,028	2,223	6,922
ND	231	245	771
NE	673	762	2,415

Note: Data retrieved from CPS on 1/16/25. Data retrieved from FPS on 3/18/2026. 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		
	2022-2023	2023-2024	2024-2025 *
NH	186	241	695
NJ	1,494	1,499	3,914
NM	483	503	1,548
NV	816	812	3,025
NY	3,431	3,615	10,136
OH	2,630	2,872	9,511
OK	1,129	1,192	3,928
OR	1,284	1,474	4,931
PA	2,780	3,052	8,123
RI	250	268	794
SC	1,221	1,291	3,603
SD	175	175	591
TN	2,667	2,890	7,018
TX	6,798	7,408	20,439
UT	532	608	2,150
VA	1,654	1,782	5,143
VT	160	163	458
WA	1,643	1,815	6,934
WI	948	1071	3,715
WV	907	1034	2,463
WY	216	334	725
Other	581	562	913
Sum:	85,402	93,111	274,394

* For the 2024–2025 application cycle, three personal-circumstance questions were consolidated into a single item to maintain comparability with reported counts from the 2022–2023 and 2023–2024 cycles. The combined question asks whether, at any time since the student turned 13, the student was an orphan, a ward of the court, or in foster care. Beginning in the 2024–2025 application cycle, applicants must complete the student personal-circumstances question (Question 6). Among the nine available response options, three ask whether, at any time since the student turned 13, the student was an orphan (with no living biological or adoptive parents), a ward of the court, or in foster care

Note: Data retrieved from CPS on 1/16/25. Data retrieved from FPS on 3/18/2026. 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 2. Web applicants who at any time were in foster care system

State	Application Cycle	
	2022-2023	2023-2024
AK	1,090	1,100
AL	5,624	6,187
AR	4,385	4,890
AZ	9,502	10,343
CA	68,908	76,682
CO	6,635	7,467
CT	3,831	4,050
DC	834	869
DE	909	1006
FL	20,641	22,314
GA	13,658	15,085
HI	1,514	1,603
IA	4,190	4,486
ID	1,839	2,051
IL	11,867	13,155
IN	8,887	10,127
KS	4,870	5,469
KY	8,925	10,313
LA	5,028	6,194
MA	7,766	8,803
MD	5,784	6,274
ME	1,608	1,827
MI	12,498	13,728
MN	6,253	7,064
MO	8,217	9,046
MS	3,020	3,335
MT	1,326	1,440
NC	11,091	11,829
ND	993	1096
NE	3,357	3,611

Note: Data retrieved from CPS on 1/16/25. Data retrieved from FPS on 3/18/2026. 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 2. Web applicants who at any time were in foster care system (Continued)

State	Application Cycle	
	2022-2023	2023-2024
NH	956	1053
NJ	6,285	6,911
NM	2,379	2,537
NV	4,694	4,943
NY	15,345	16,517
OH	13,806	15,029
OK	6,254	6,977
OR	7,176	8,091
PA	12,206	13,352
RI	1,244	1,318
SC	6,158	6,675
SD	923	954
TN	9,815	10,880
TX	30,647	34,195
UT	2,833	3,114
VA	7,644	8,463
VT	721	770
WA	10,132	11,576
WI	6,053	6,570
WV	2,888	3,348
WY	864	962
Other	1,372	1,326
Sum:	395,445	437,005

Note: The 2024–2025 application cycle does not include this question; therefore, a comparable data point is not available for Table 2.

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Table 3. Total applicants by dependency (for reference)

Dependency Status (for Federal Student Aid)	Application Cycle	Application Cycle	Application Cycle
	2022-2023	2023-2024	2024-2025
Dependent	8,189,852	8,551,203	8,126,367
Independent	8,854,909	9,377,079	9,436,538
⁴ Provisionally Independent	-	-	119,280
⁵ Unknown	-	-	44
Sum:	17,044,761	17,928,282	17,682,229

⁴ For 2024-25, provisionally independent are those applicants who are considered independent but also answer “Yes” **and** “None of these apply” in question 6 (Student Other Circumstances) or answered “Yes” in question 7 (Student Unusual Circumstances).

⁵ For 2024-25, unknown dependency values are processed transactions without a dependency model value recorded; however, this omission did not influence processing outcomes or the accuracy of the SAI calculation. The system derives dependency status during application processing rather than the stored table values.

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