

Understanding the FAFSA & financial aid

Insights, tools and best practices to help
you along the way.

Today's agenda

- College search process
- Getting started
- Naming conventions and considerations
- Financial aid programs
- Free tools & resources



Getting started

FSA Account (often called an FSA ID) and Multi-factor authentication (MFA)

FSA Account for the student and parent(s)



- This acts as an electronic signature for Federal Student Aid documents, including the FAFSA®
- Apply for your FSA Account at studentaid.gov
- Full name, social security number, and date of birth are needed.

New! Users can now create an FSA Account and complete the FAFSA® in the same session!

Multi-factor authentication (MFA)



- Also referred to as two-step verification
- Users will need to provide a secure code obtained via text, email, or an authentication app
- Once MFA is set up, user will be presented with a backup code

Alert: Backup code will only be given once!

Sources: <https://studentaid.gov/help/info-needed> and <https://studentaid.gov/help-center/answers/article/choose-between-an-authenticator-app-text-email>

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Frequently used terms and formula considerations



Student Aid Index (SAI) number

- This number reflects the output of the FAFSA® formula, not a reflection of what a family can or will pay
- SAI can be reflected as a negative number as low as -1500

Key considerations

- Family size is based on the number of people claimed on the federal tax return
- The number of family members enrolled in college is no longer part of the federal formula

Additional information needed from student and parent

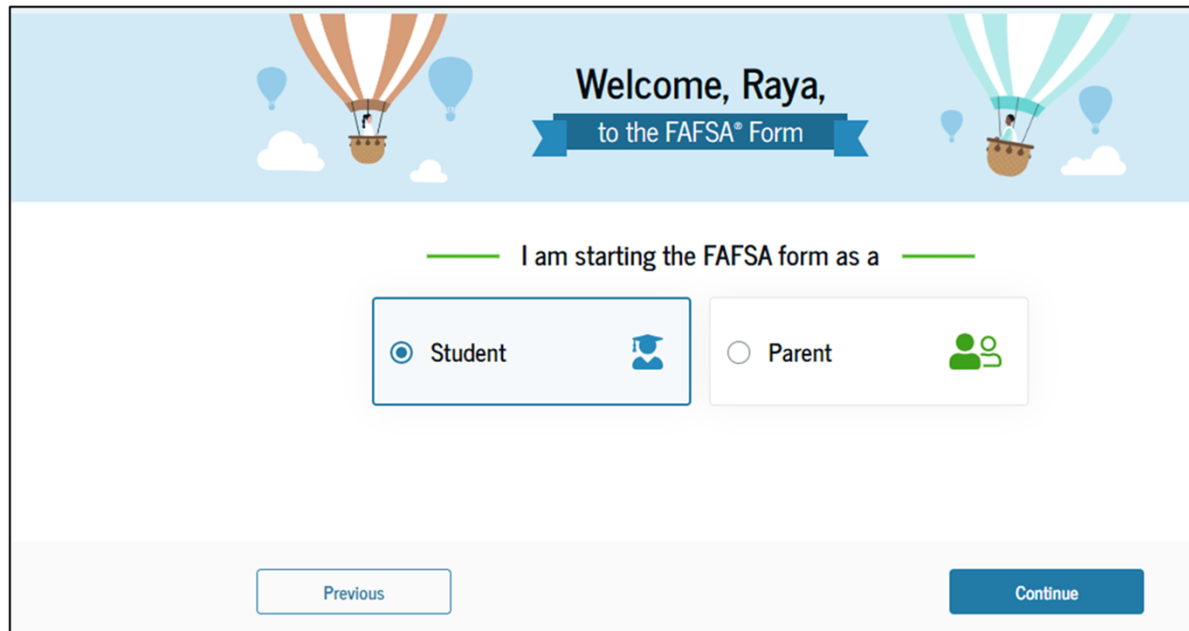
- Social Security Numbers or Alien Registration Number (if you aren't a US Citizen)
- Records of money earned if you are a non-tax filer
- Current bank statements and investment records (if applicable)
- Records of untaxed income (if applicable)
- Email address and/or mobile phone number
- List of colleges to receive the FAFSA® information (up to 20 schools)

What's no longer needed? Student and parent tax returns. All of this information will automatically be accessed from the IRS through the FUTURE Act Direct Data Exchange (FA-DDX)

Sources: <https://www.salliemae.com/college-planning/financial-aid/fafsa/> ,
<https://studentaid.gov/help/info-needed> and
<https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/5363/text>

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Identify your role



The screenshot shows the FAFSA login interface. At the top, a light blue banner features two hot air balloons and the text "Welcome, Raya, to the FAFSA® Form". Below this, a green line is followed by the text "I am starting the FAFSA form as a". There are two selection options: "Student" with a blue radio button and a graduation cap icon, and "Parent" with a grey radio button and a family icon. At the bottom, there are "Previous" and "Continue" buttons.

Welcome, Raya,
to the FAFSA® Form

I am starting the FAFSA form as a

☒ Student 

☐ Parent 

Previous Continue

All users will be required to provide consent for their financial information to be accessed by the U.S. Department of Education from the IRS – including non-tax filers. No index number will be calculated if authorization is not given.

Dependent or independent?

Students are considered **independent** if they:

- Are married
- Pursuing a graduate or professional degree
- Birthdate (24 years old or older)
- Have dependents who receive their support
- Are active-duty military or veteran
- Are an orphan, in foster care, or a ward of the court
- Emancipated minor (subject to your state's law)
- Are in legal guardianship
- Are homeless or at risk of homelessness

Students are considered **dependent** if they:

- Do not meet any of the independent student criteria

Note: Independent students do not have to report parent data

Who is considered a parent?

- ✓ Biological or adoptive parent(s), and certain step-parents.
- ✓ Include both parents if parents are married or are not married but live together.
- ✓ If separated but living together, select “Married”.
- ✓ In the case of divorce or separation, provide information only about the parent that provided the majority of financial support in the last 12 months, and step-parent if that parent is remarried.

Still need help?

Visit studentaid.gov/fafsa-apply/parents for more guidance



Reporting your assets

Assets not included on the FAFSA®



Primary Home



Retirement Savings
(Pensions, Annuities; 401(k))



Small Business Assets



Personal Possessions
(Car, Furniture, Clothes, etc.)



Family Farm Assets

Assets you must include on the FAFSA®:



Vacation Home and/or
Investment Property



College Savings Accounts



Stocks and Bonds

Source: <https://www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/house-bill/1/text>

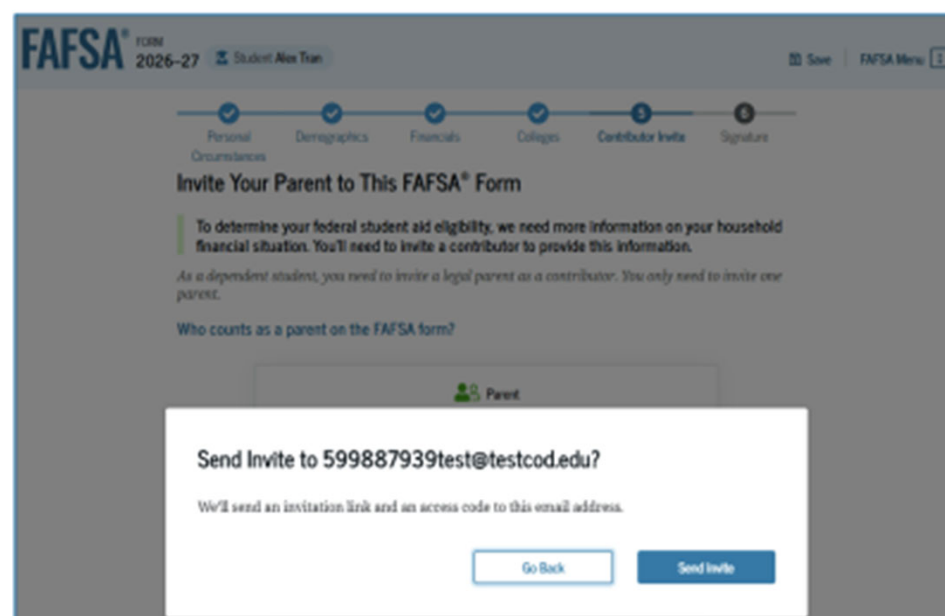
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Contributor Invite Process

Parent email address is now the only parental info needed for invite



The screenshot shows the FAFSA 2026-27 Contributor Invite screen. The progress bar at the top indicates the following steps: Personal Circumstances, Demographics, Financials, Colleges, Contributor Invite (current step), and Signature. The main heading is "Invite Your Parent to This FAFSA® Form". Below this, a green box contains the text: "To determine your federal student aid eligibility, we need more information on your household financial situation. You'll need to invite a contributor to provide this information." Below the green box, it says: "As a dependent student, you need to invite a legal parent as a contributor. You only need to invite one parent." Below this, it asks: "Who counts as a parent on the FAFSA form?". A "Parent" icon is shown. Below the icon, the heading "Invite a Parent Contributor" is displayed. Below the heading, there is a text input field labeled "Email" with the value "599887939test@testcod.edu". Below the input field, there is a "Send Invite" button.



The screenshot shows the FAFSA 2026-27 Contributor Invite confirmation screen. The progress bar at the top indicates the following steps: Personal Circumstances, Demographics, Financials, Colleges, Contributor Invite (current step), and Signature. The main heading is "Invite Your Parent to This FAFSA® Form". Below this, a green box contains the text: "To determine your federal student aid eligibility, we need more information on your household financial situation. You'll need to invite a contributor to provide this information." Below the green box, it says: "As a dependent student, you need to invite a legal parent as a contributor. You only need to invite one parent." Below this, it asks: "Who counts as a parent on the FAFSA form?". A "Parent" icon is shown. Below the icon, the heading "Send Invite to 599887939test@testcod.edu?" is displayed. Below the heading, it says: "We'll send an invitation link and an access code to this email address." Below this, there are two buttons: "Go Back" and "Send Invite".

<https://fsapartners.ed.gov/sites/default/files/2025-08/2627FAFSAPreviewPresentation.pdf>

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What happens after the FAFSA® is submitted?

- Students will receive a FAFSA® Submission Summary immediately after submission.
 - Gives you basic information about your eligibility for federal financial aid.
 - **Does not** include any financial information.
- Colleges included on your FAFSA® will receive the data electronically.
- Colleges may request additional documentation or information, such as tax data, through a process called Verification.
- Colleges will use the Student Aid Index (SAI) number to determine aid types and amounts, and send out financial aid offers.

Sources: <https://fsapartners.ed.gov/knowledge-center/library/electronic-announcements/2023-03-27/notice-draft-2024-25-federal-student-aid-application-materials> and <https://www.regulations.gov/document/ED-2023-SCC-0053-0003>

Special circumstances



Contact the financial aid office if there are circumstances which affect your ability to pay for college, such as:

- Significant loss or reduction in parent/student income or assets
- Death or serious illness
- Natural disasters affecting parent/student income or assets
- Medical/Dental expenses not covered by insurance
- Financial responsibility for elderly grandparents

What are grants?

Free money, often need based, that do not require repayment.

- Typically awarded annually based on information provided on the FAFSA®.
- Offered by numerous sources, such as federal and state governments, colleges, and independent organizations.

Federal Pell Grant*

- Need based
- Awards up to \$7,395 for 2025-26 and are awarded to all who qualify

Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant (FSEOG)*

- For students with exceptional financial need
- Awards of \$100-\$4,000 on a first come, first served basis

New York State Excelsior Scholarship

- “Last-dollar”, tuition specific scholarship
- Must be a New York state resident and attend a SUNY or CUNY undergrad program.
- Household adjusted gross income must be \$125k or less.
- Attend full time.
- Earn at least 30 credits per year toward your degree.

*Sources: <https://studentaid.gov/understand-aid/types/grants/pell> and <https://studentaid.gov/help-center/answers/article/how-much-money-can-i-get-fseog>

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Scholarship resources

There are many resources for scholarships:

- Local or community-based scholarships
- Federal and state agencies
- College-specific scholarships offered by the colleges your students are interested in attending
- Religious organizations
- Employers
- Libraries
- Private organizations or major companies
- Online search engines that aggregate scholarship offerings and allow users to be matched to scholarships based on a personal profile

Federal Direct Subsidized and Unsubsidized loans for undergraduate students

Loan type	Interest rate (7/1/2026- 6/30/2027)	Fee (10/1/2020- 9/30/2027)
Subsidized	6.52% Fixed	1.057%
Unsubsidized	6.52% Fixed	1.057%

- Undergraduate borrowing limits:
 - \$5,500 first year
 - \$6,500 second year
 - \$7,500 third and final years
 - \$31,000 aggregate maximum
- FAFSA® is required
- Six-month grace period after leaving school, graduating, or dropping to less than half-time enrollment
- Flexible repayment options with terms of up to 10-25 years
- Loan forgiveness options and income-based repayment
- Military members may be eligible for special interest benefits regarding their federal loans

Federal Direct Parent PLUS Loans

Interest rate (7/1/2026-6/30/2027)	Fee (10/1/2020-9/30/2025)
9.07% Fixed	4.228%

Loan that allows the parent of a dependent undergraduate student to borrow funds to cover the remainder of what a student owes after financial aid is applied.

- FAFSA® required
- The parent is the borrower for the life of the loan
- Students must be enrolled at least half time
- Generally, is paid back over a 10-year period
- If parent applies and is not eligible, a dependent undergraduate student may receive an additional \$4,000 unsubsidized loan
- \$20,000 maximum annual amount (per student)
- \$65,000 maximum lifetime amount (per student)

Private student loans

Private student loan rate example*	
APR	Fee
Variable: 4.37% - 16.99%	0% typically
Fixed: 2.89% - 17.49%	

Loans funded by banks, credit unions, or other financial institutions based on the credit of the applicant and/or cosigner.

- Borrower is the student, and if necessary, cosigner
- FAFSA® not required
- Repayment period can range from 5 – 20 years
- Offer a variety of in-school repayment options that include:
 - Immediate repayment (pay now)
 - Deferred repayment (pay later)
 - Fixed repayment
 - Interest repayment
- Cosigners may help increase the chance of approval and may help the student get a better rate
- Terms and costs vary widely between lenders
- Private student loans may help a student build credit – especially if scheduled to make payments while in school

* Based on an 10/1/2025 review of national private loan programs offered by Sallie Mae and its publicly-traded competitors.

Resources

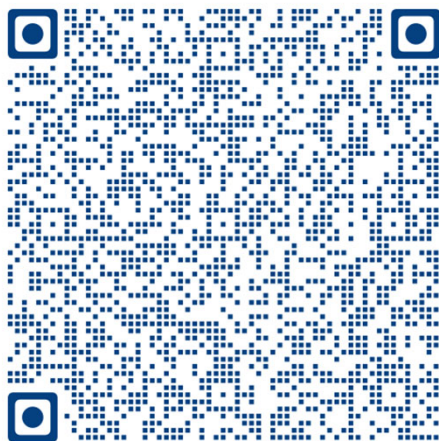


Confiden

To continue your college bound journey

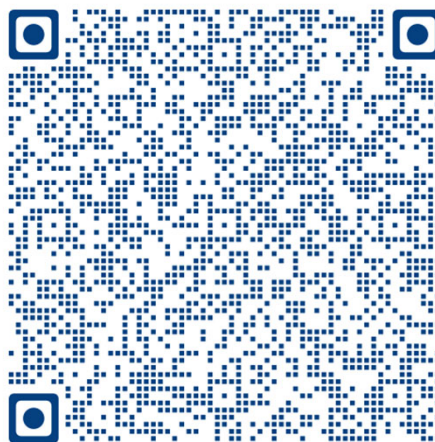


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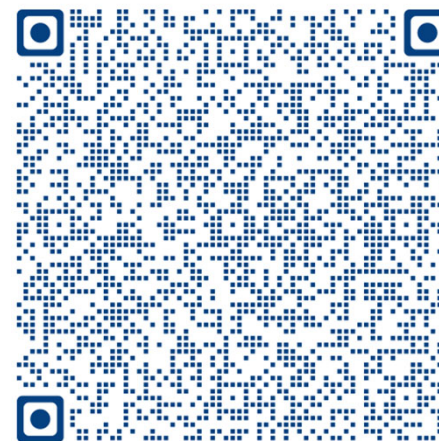
sallie.com

Scholly[®] Scholarships



sallie.com/scholly

FAFSA[®] Guide



sallie.com/fafsaguide



#financial AID uncle



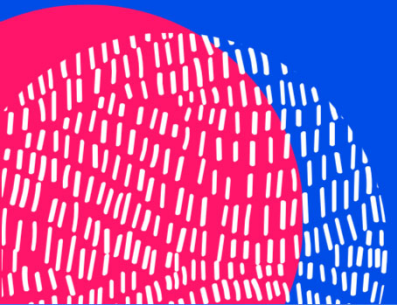
**"Financial aid
is confusing"
– everyone**



✓ *Let's fix that.*



Questions?



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