

Student Scenarios

2024-25 FAFSA/WASFA for Staff – Part 2

Assumption:

All case studies presented in this guide represent either high school seniors or college students completing the new 2024-2025 FAFSA or WASFA (the one being released December 2023).

1. Tony

Tony is a U.S. citizen but one of his parents is undocumented. He's unsure what form to complete, if he is eligible for aid and what information to provide in his financial aid application.

How would you guide him?

Clarification for Tony

Because Tony is a U.S. citizen, he should complete a FAFSA, and he could be eligible for federal and state financial aid regardless of his parents' status.

Tony will need to determine if he needs both parents' information on his FAFSA. If his parents are married or unmarried and living together, Tony will report both on his FAFSA. If his parents are divorced or separated, then Tony will report the parent who provides the most financial support.

Only one parent needs an FSA ID if the parents are married and jointly filed taxes. If the parents are not married and living together OR married and filed separately, then each parent needs an FSA ID.

NOTE: Undocumented parents will now be required to obtain an FSA ID, however, they may be required to submit additional identity verification documentation.

Extra: If Tony is fearful of including his parents' information on FAFSA, he could complete a WASFA instead with the understanding that he would forgo eligibility for federal aid.

2. Desiree

Desiree's parents are divorced; custody was awarded jointly, and Desiree spends about 50% of her time at each parent's residence. She needs help determining which parent's information is required.

Guiding question:

- **What additional information do you need to advise Desiree on how to complete her FAFSA or WASFA?**

Questions for Desiree

- The FAFSA no longer looks at which parent the student lives with the most. Desiree must use the parent who provides the **most financial support**.
- What if financial support is truly 50/50?

Desiree must use the parent who has the higher income.

3. Makaila

A senior in high school, Makaila is 17 years old. You learn that they were legally adopted by their aunt and uncle after spending 4 years in foster care. You are trying to determine if they are independent or dependent.

Guiding questions:

- **What information do you need to confirm their dependency status?**
- **Hint: What dates should you check to confirm their status?**

Questions for Makaila

- Need to confirm at what age Makaila entered foster care.
 - If it was at any time since turning 13 (even if for one day), then Makaila is considered independent even though they were adopted last year. Their adoption will not supersede the foster care dependency question
 - They should answer 'Yes' to the foster care question. They will then qualify for supports and financial aid available to foster youth.
 - They should NOT include their legally adoptive parents
- Need to confirm at what age Makaila was adopted.

4. Hyein

Hyein is a high school senior at Foss HS. She is attending your FAFSA/WASFA night.

You learn that she was born in the United States but moved to Taiwan as a young child with her parents. She returned to the U.S. to attend high school. Her parents stayed in Taiwan. Hyein doesn't know if they file taxes. They visit her for six months at a time. Hyein lives with her aunt.

Guiding questions:

- Which form should she complete?
- Whose financial information should she provide?
- Will she qualify for in-state tuition?

Questions for Hyein

- Hyein should complete a FAFSA form
 - If parents don't have SSNs, they can still get an FSA ID to complete and sign the FAFSA electronically
 - Do parents file U.S. taxes?
 - The parents will still need to consent to have any tax information transferred from the IRS regardless if they filed U.S. tax returns. Hyein will not be eligible for financial aid if the parents do not consent
 - Parents will have to report foreign income on the FAFSA and prepare to have documentation of that income for Hyein's Financial Aid Office to verify. This is now required for all who report foreign income.
 - Make sure to convert their income to dollars.
- She should not provide information about her aunt.
- Confirm how long Hyein has lived in WA state (for in-state tuition/aid eligibility) - **1-year minimum prior to enrolling in college.**

5. Marco

Marco comes to you for support in completing his FAFSA/WASFA. He shares he lives with his mom. Later in the conversation, you find out his mom remarried in April 2023.

Guiding questions:

- Which parent/stepparent should he include?
- Whose tax information will Marco need to secure?
- **What advice would you provide if he was filing a WASFA? what if he was filing a FASFA?**

Questions for Marco

If Marco is completing a WASFA:

- Marco should include his mother and stepparent
- Did mom file taxes in 2022?
 - If yes, then get copies along with all schedules and W2s.
- Did the stepparent file taxes in 2022?
 - If yes, then get copies along with all schedules and W2s.
- If they didn't file taxes, then select "Will not file".
- Only mom will have to obtain a WASFA account and include her spouse's income on the form
- Make sure to add stepparent in the number of household members

Questions for Marco

If Marco is completing a FAFSA:

- Marco should include his mother and stepparent
- Both the parent and step-parent must obtain an FSA ID since they would not have been able to file their taxes jointly as a married couple.
- Both parent and step-parent will have to consent to have their Federal Tax Information (FTI) to be used via the IRS data exchange
- Make sure to report stepparent in the number of household members

6. Kiara

Kiara needs help determining which parent information to include in her FAFSA/WASFA. She lives with both her mother and father, but they are not married and have never filed taxes jointly.

Guiding question:

What information do you need to confirm with Kiara in order to guide her on whose information to enter in her financial aid application?

Questions for Kiara

- Are both parents biological and living in together?
 - If yes, she will select “Unmarried but Living Together” as their marital status.
 - Kiara will report both parents’ financial information on her FAFSA/WASFA.
 - If completing the FAFSA, both parents must obtain an FSA ID, and both must provide consent to use their Federal Tax Information (FTI) through the IRS data exchange
- If only one parent is biological and the other “parent” is the biological parent’s significant other
 - Only the biological parent will need to provide their information on the FAFSA/WASFA and obtain an FSA ID/WASFA user account.

7. The Harper Family

The Harpers have taken in a friend of their daughter who fled home because it was no longer safe. The friend, Stella, still has contact with her mom. Mom claims Stella is on her taxes, but the Harper family has been paying for most of her living expenses.

Guiding questions:

Can the Harpers count Stella towards the number of family members in the household when completing their daughter's FAFSA?

Extra credit: how will Stella complete her FAFSA?

Questions & Advise for Stella and the Harper Family

- It's a tricky situation, but not impossible to deal with.
- It's important to find out how long she's been gone from her family of origin's home (is her situation temporary or permanent?; chance of going back?)
- Does she live with the Harpers 50 percent of the time or more?
- Do the Harpers provide at least 50 percent of Stella's support?
 - If both answers are 'Yes', then the Harpers can definitely include Stella in the number of household members.
 - If the answer is "No", then they cannot.

Bonus: Reminder: students should only report information about biological or adoptive parents.

Strategy #1: If Stella's mom is willing to provide information, this would make things much 'cleaner' and simpler.

Strategy #2: If mom refuses, Stella will answer "yes" to "Do unusual circumstances prevent the student from contacting their parents or would contacting their parents pose a risk to the student?". Stella will be given a **provisional independent status** and will have to pursue a dependency override with supporting documentation to her Financial Aid Office

8. Andy

Andy's biological parents divorced when he was 6 and his mother was awarded full custody.

His mom remarried when he was 10; after 4 years of marriage, she divorced his stepdad and left the state.

Andy, who is now 17, never had contact with her again.

Andy still lives with his stepdad and has ever since the divorce.

Guiding question:

How do you determine whose information is entered into the FAFSA/WASFA?

Questions for Andy

- Did Andy's stepdad ever adopt Andy after the divorce?
- When was the last time he had contact with his mother?
- Is the biological father in the picture at all?
 - If yes, does he provide any financial support?
 - If yes, what percentage of Andy's expenses does he cover?

Unfortunately, even though in remarriage situations stepparent information is required on the FAFSA/WASFA, in this circumstance (unless Andy's stepdad adopted him) his stepdad is not considered a parent on the FAFSA/WASFA (because of the divorce). Andy will either need to obtain his biological mother's or biological dad's tax information or pursue a dependency override.

9. Antonio

Antonio attends a FAFSA/WASFA Completion event at your school, but he is not a student you know. He is in attendance with his father to complete the FAFSA. As you complete the FAFSA with Antonio, you learn that Antonio's parents are divorced, and he lives with his mom most of the time. He thought that his dad should help him with the FAFSA since his dad claimed him on the taxes.

Guiding question:

➤ **Whose information should Antonio provide on his FAFSA/WASFA?**

Clarification for Antonio

- Confirm which parent provides the most financial support
- Explain that it doesn't matter who claims the student on their tax return. What matters instead is:
 - who provides the most financial support then, if equal
 - which parent has the higher income
- Families should pay close attention to the family size question since it is automated based on the parent's tax return. Parents may need to update this if they did not claim the student and/or sibling on their tax return.

10. Patricia

Patricia is 18 years old and lives with her mother. She has a 2-year-old son. As you work with her to complete her FAFSA/WASFA, she indicates that because she has a child, she is an independent student. You know that having a child does not automatically make a student independent.

Guiding question:

- **What information do you need from Patricia to determine if she is truly an independent student?**

Questions for Patricia

- Does she provide more than 50% of the financial support for her child?
- Does she earn an income from a job?
- Does she receive any federal benefits to support herself and her child (WIC, TANF, etc.)?

If Patricia has no earned income from working and is not receiving benefits, she likely does not have sufficient means to provide more than 50% of the financial support for her child. In this case, she is considered dependent and will have to provide parent(s) information.

11. Merce

Merce is a senior in high school and has been living with guardians for a few years. Her mom moved to Mexico when she was 13 years old. Her mom does not file federal income taxes and does not have an ITIN. Her guardians filed taxes jointly and have claimed Merce on their taxes.

Guiding questions:

- **Whose tax information should Merce provide in her FAFSA or WASFA?**
- **What additional questions do you have for Merce?**

Questions for Merce

- Have Merce complete the WASFA eligibility questionnaire to determine which form to complete.
- Is she in touch with her father? If yes, does he provide financial support? If yes, what percentage of her expenses?
- Has she been legally adopted by her guardians?

If the answer to the above questions is “No,” it is likely that Merce is in an informal guardianship. This means she needs to provide her biological parent(s) information. If completing the FAFSA, the mother can obtain an FSA ID. If completing the WASFA, the mother can complete the application by creating a WASFA account.

Remember: Students should only enter biological or adopted parent(s) information even if parents are not physically in the U.S.

12. Molly

Molly's mom has passed away and dad has not been in the picture for a few years. She doesn't receive financial support from him.

She has been couch-surfing and staying with friends since 8th grade.

Molly entered her father's demographic information in her FAFSA and has been selected for verification.

Guiding question:
What should be Molly's next steps?

Questions for Molly

Molly should get certified by her school's McKinney Vento liaison as a **homeless unaccompanied minor**. She should also correct her FAFSA/WASFA to state she is unable to provide parental information. For the FAFSA, Molly should answer “yes” under the Student Other Circumstances” which asks if the student is unaccompanied and experiencing homelessness or self-supporting and at risk of becoming homeless.

In the case that she cannot be certified as such, she should get a letter of support from someone who can confirm her circumstances and gather supporting documentation. She should follow up with the financial aid office to submit a **dependency override appeal** with documentation supporting her situation.

New: Students no longer have to resubmit documentation for as a **homeless unaccompanied minor** each year.

13. Maite

Maite lives with both her parents, her younger sister, and her aunt with her son. When completing her FAFSA, they report six family members in the household although her aunt and son are not reported as exemptions in the parents' federal tax returns. Her aunt works full-time and pays her portion of the rent, food, and all other expenses for herself and her son.

Guiding question:

➤ **Are the number of household members reported on her FAFSA correct?**

Clarification for Maite

Since her aunt works full-time and pays her share, she and her son cannot be counted in the number of family members living in the household.

In order to count members in the household, the parent(s) has/have to provide 50% or more of the household's members' support.

Also remember that from next year and on, number of household members will be transferred from tax returns (# of exemptions). BUT if the aunt didn't work and Maite's parents supported the aunt and her son, the two would be manually added to the question of # in the household (effectively overriding information transferred from the IRS).

14. Miranda

Miranda is concerned about her ability to file her FAFSA/WASFA application as her parents did not file the federal taxes required for her application.

Guiding question:
How would you advise Miranda?

Guidance for Miranda

Scenario 1: Parents worked, but did not earn enough to file taxes

- **Miranda will need to enter her parents' financial information using their W-2s or 1099s**

Scenario 2: Parents did not work at all

- **Parents are not required to file taxes and Miranda does not need parent taxes in order to fill out a FAFSA**

Scenario 3: Parents worked and made enough to have to file their taxes, but did not file

- **Miranda (with your help) needs to explain how important it is for her parents to file their taxes promptly so that she can file her FAFSA. Miranda's financial aid application will not be considered complete, and Miranda will not be eligible to receive financial aid.**

Note: For those completing a FAFSA, contributors are still required to consent for the use of their FTI regardless of whether they filed taxes filing status

15. Alex

Alex and his family have been admitted into the U.S. and awaiting to hear the results of their refugee status petition. He is anxious to get his financial aid application started.

Guiding questions:

- How would you advice Alex?
- What form should he complete?

Guidance for Alex

- Find out how long he's been enrolled in a Washington state high school (for in-state tuition and state aid eligibility)
- Alex would be considered **an eligible non-citizen, and one who can fill out a FAFSA if he has an unexpired arrival/departure document (I-94)**. In this case, he should fill out a FAFSA.

Students with the following documentation are considered eligible non-citizens:

- ✓ Conditional permanent resident (I-551C)
 - ✓ Other eligible noncitizens with an **unexpired** Arrival-Departure Record (I-94) from the Department of Homeland Security showing any one of the following designations: "Refugee," "Asylum Granted," "Indefinite Parole," "Humanitarian Parole," or "Cuban-Haitian Entrant"
 - ✓ A citizen of the Republic of Palau, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, or the Federated States of Micronesia.
- If Alex doesn't have an I-94 or if it's expired, then he should fill out a WASFA.

16. Linda and Kevin

Linda and Kevin are siblings preparing to file the 2024-25 FAFSA/WASFA. They are dependent students and their families had additional financial expenses this year. They had to purchase two computers and upgrade their WIFI. In addition, one of their parents got sick and had large medical bills to pay.

Guiding questions:

- **How do you advise Linda and Kevin to proceed?**
- **Extra credit: what if they have an unmet need that exceeds the total cost of the additional expenses?**

Guidance for Linda and Kevin

- Confirm that the purchases were made in order to do schooling, and/or work
 - If this is the case, Linda and Kevin can submit a special circumstance appeal asking the financial aid office to increase their Cost of Attendance (COA) in hopes of qualifying for additional aid
 - Make sure Linda and Kevin submit receipts in their appeal
 - Linda and Kevin should also include their parents' medical bills in their appeal.

Guidance for Linda and Kevin

Appeals based on additional expenses

Extra credit: If they have an unmet need that exceeds the total cost of the additional expenses, it wouldn't be recommended that they go through the trouble of filing an appeal. Why? Let's look at the math:



Before appeal:
COA: \$40,000
Unmet need: \$15,000

After appeal:
COA: \$50,000
Unmet need: \$25,000

This appeal would only make the unmet need/gap even larger

However, if the unmet need is zero, then it should be considered:



Before appeal:
COA: \$40,000
Aid: \$40,000
Unmet need: \$0

After appeal:
COA: \$50,000
Aid: \$50,000
Unmet need: \$0

This appeal would increase the amount of aid the student receives or at least make room for private scholarships.

Keep in mind that appeals are not guaranteed to be approved

Guidance for Linda and Kevin

Appeals based on reduced income

Extra credit: If they have an unmet need that exceeds the total cost of the additional expenses, it wouldn't be recommended that they go through the trouble of filing an appeal. Why? Let's look at the math:



Before appeal:

COA: \$40,000
SAI: \$-1500
Aid: \$25,000
Unmet need: \$15,000

After appeal:

COA: \$40,000
SAI: \$-1500
Aid: \$25,000
Unmet need: \$15,000

This appeal would not change the SAI

However, if the SAI is higher than $< -1500 - 0$, then it should be considered:



Before appeal:

COA: \$40,000
SAI: \$ 10,000
Aid: \$30,000
Unmet need: \$0

After appeal:

COA: \$40,000
SAI: \$ 5,000
Aid: \$35,000
Unmet need: \$0

This appeal would increase the amount of aid the student receives or at least make room for private scholarships, if unmet need was above zero.

Keep in mind that appeals are not guaranteed to be approved

17. Ollie

Ollie's parent was laid off at the end of 2022. They were unemployed during 2023.

Guiding questions:

- How do you advise Ollie on how to complete his financial aid application?
- What if the parent received unemployment and the benefits were higher than their 2022 income?
- What if the parent withdrew funds from their 401(k) or IRA account?

Guidance for Ollie

1. How do you advise Ollie on how to complete his financial aid application?

- Ollie will file his financial aid application as normal using 2022 taxes
- Advise Ollie to complete a special circumstance appeal to the financial aid office to reflect 2022 financial information (loss of wages)

2. What if the parent received unemployment and the benefits were higher than their 2022 income?

- His Student Aid Index (SAI) will unfortunately rise and runs the risk of losing eligibility for need-based aid.
- Unemployment benefits are considered taxable income and count towards SAI

3. What if the parent withdrew funds from their 401(k) or IRA account?

- This withdrawal will be considered and reported as income on FAFSA/WASFA and the parent will very likely owe taxes. This and other implications should be considered by family, researched, or seek advice.

18. Carmen

Carmen submitted their FAFSA/WASFA early and school starts in three months. They have not received a Financial Aid Offer or Award Letter. Carmen is getting concerned that they will not be able to pay for school on-time.

Guiding question:

- **What are some of the reasons why Carmen may have not received an offer?**

Guidance for Carmen

1. Confirm application was completed AND submitted by the student and parent/contributor

- Carmen should log into their FAFSA or WASFA to confirm that the application was completed, signed by them and their parents, and submitted.
- Find the confirmation email that the FAFSA/WASFA was submitted
- The FAFSA application times-out after 45 days of no activity from a contributor

2. Have the student check their email

- Financial Aid offices typically communicate by email regarding additional information or forms needed to determine a student's eligibility.

3. Contact the Financial Aid office

- The Financial Aid office processes both FAFSA and WASFA applications. They will have the most current status on when the student will be awarded.

4. Find options for paying for school

- Check with the college to see if tuition and fees can be deferred until Financial Aid is awarded
- Are there any emergency funds through the school or other organizations that can help with educational expenses until Financial Aid is available
- Decide whether a payment plan is needed until Financial Aid can pay

Questions?

Good luck! 😊

Contact us at:

scholarshipservices@collegesuccessfoundation.org