



The student should speak to the school's financial aid office directly if there will be a significant change in the family's income for the present year or other special circumstances that cannot be reported on the FAFSA or SAR.

### Dependency Status and Overrides

Most students entering a postsecondary school straight from high school are considered financially dependent on their parents. This means their parents must provide information on the FAFSA (see Part 3 of this handbook). In unusual circumstances, a student who would normally be considered dependent can be considered independent. The financial aid administrator at a school can make a special determination of independence and override

the student's dependency status on the FAFSA. Students who believe that they have compelling and unique reasons to be considered independent should contact the financial aid office at the school they are planning to attend.

#### NOTE:

*Students should be aware that the school is not required to perform dependency overrides, and if the financial aid administrator determines that an override is not appropriate, the decision cannot be appealed to the U.S. Department of Education.*



## Dependency Overrides and Special Circumstances

Dependency status is determined by specific criteria and can be changed by a financial aid administrator (FAA) only in unusual circumstances. A student cannot be determined to be independent just because

- the parents don't want to provide information on the FAFSA due to privacy concerns;
- the parents don't feel it's their responsibility to provide financial assistance for college;
- the parents no longer claim the student as a dependent on their taxes; or
- the student no longer lives at home.

The student should contact the FAA at his or her college to discuss dependency status if he or she

- has no contact with the parents and does not know where they are (and the student has not been adopted by someone else); or
- has left home due to an abusive situation.

In special circumstances, the FAA may choose to make adjustments to certain items on the FAFSA to account for financial difficulties. The student should contact the FAA at his or her college to discuss special circumstances if

- the family has unusually large medical bills that are not covered by insurance;
- the family is paying unusually high elementary or secondary school tuition; or
- the student or a parent has recently lost his or her job.

The lists above are examples and are not to be taken as complete and definitive. An FAA is required to assess situations on a case-by-case basis and then make a decision whether to make adjustments to the FAFSA based upon special circumstances that the student can appropriately document.

The best thing you can do to help a student who believes he or she should be considered independent or who has special financial circumstances is to encourage the student to gather as much written evidence as possible and to provide it to the financial aid office at the school he or she plans to attend. Documentation to support a request for independent status could include a letter from a third party (such as a member of the clergy) who knows the student's situation. Special financial circumstances might be demonstrated with items such as medical or child care bills or with proof of the loss of employment of a family member.

Please make it clear to students that the FAA is not required to adjust dependency status or financial elements on the FAFSA. The FAA's decision is final and cannot be appealed to the U.S. Department of Education.

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To help students understand dependency status and whose information to report on the FAFSA, give them copies of "Am I Dependent or Independent?" and "Who Is My 'Parent' When I Fill Out the FAFSA?" from Appendix E of this handbook.