

Middle Class Scholarship for Foster Youth FAQ

The 2023/2024 budget bill included increased funding for financial aid for foster youth through the Middle Class Scholarship (MCS). Language governing this funding was included in SB 117, the higher education budget trailer bill.

1. HOW DOES THE MIDDLE CLASS SCHOLARSHIP (MCS) WORK?

The [MCS](#) is a state financial aid program managed by the California Student Aid Commission (CSAC) that provides low- to middle-income undergraduate students, including students pursuing a teaching credential, with a scholarship if they are enrolled in a University of California (UC) or California State University (CSU), or enrolled in a bachelor's program at a California Community College. Students are awarded for up to four years depending on their educational level when first awarded (or five years for a teaching credential).

To qualify, students must be enrolled at least part time, submit a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) or California Dream Act Application (CADAA) by March 2nd (or April 2nd for the 2024-25 academic school year), be a California resident, and a U.S. Citizen, permanent resident or meet the requirements for a non-resident tuition exemption. Students must also meet Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) standards.

Individual award amounts are based on the Cost of Attendance (COA) set by each college and vary by college and by student. For *independent non-foster youth students*, the MCS provides roughly 24% of the remaining unmet need after accounting for other federal, state, and institutionally administered grants, scholarships, and fee waivers and a "self-help" student contribution of \$7,898.

2. WHAT CHANGES WERE MADE TO THE MCS FOR FOSTER YOUTH?

SB 117 requires that 100% of the remaining COA is covered for current and former foster youth, after accounting for the "self-help" student contribution of \$7,898 and any other federal, state, and institutionally administered grants, scholarships, and fee waivers.

3. WHAT DOES A "SELF-HELP" CONTRIBUTION MEAN?

A "self-help" student contribution is the amount of funding towards the total Cost of Attendance that the student is responsible for.

4. WHAT TYPES OF RESOURCES COUNT TOWARD THE "SELF-HELP" STUDENT CONTRIBUTION?

In addition to resources from work and/or savings, private scholarships and institutionally awarded emergency housing funds or emergency basic needs assistance is counted toward the "self-help" student contribution. It is up to each institution to determine and classify which funds count as emergency housing funds or emergency basic needs assistance. This can include funding

provided by a campus based foster youth support program for emergency housing needs or emergency basic needs.

5. HOW IS “FOSTER YOUTH” DEFINED?

Current and former foster youth are defined as those whose dependency was established or continued on or after the age of 13.

6. IS THERE AN AGE CAP TO RECEIVE THIS FUNDING?

No, there is no age cap.

7. HOW IS ELIGIBILITY DETERMINED?

The California Student Aid Commission (CSAC) identifies and awards eligible foster youth students through an automated data match with the California Department of Social Services (CDSS). This match only identifies students who were in foster care in California. Students who were in foster care in another state must provide manual verification. Students must be California residents to qualify. Please see Question #8 for more information on manual verification.

8. WHAT SHOULD A STUDENT DO IF THEY ARE NOT VERIFIED THROUGH THE AUTOMATED DATA MATCH BUT OTHERWISE ELIGIBLE?

If the student believes that they meet the eligibility criteria as a current or former foster youth, but there is an error with the data match or they were in foster care in another state, they must provide manual verification by completing this form:

https://www.csac.ca.gov/sites/main/files/file-attachments/chafee_foster_care_verification_form.pdf. For more information about the data matching process, [see here](#).

9. DOES A STUDENT NEED TO COMPLETE AN ADDITIONAL APPLICATION TO RECEIVE THIS FUNDING?

No additional application is necessary. Students only need to submit their FAFSA or CADAA by the March 2nd priority deadline (or April 2nd for the 2024-2025 academic school year). Please see Question #7 for information on how eligibility is determined.

10. DOES THIS MEAN THAT COLLEGE IS FREE FOR ALL FOSTER YOUTH AT A CSU OR UC?

No. The MCS will now cover 100% of the remaining COA after accounting for both a student contribution of \$7,898 and other federal, state, and institutionally administered aid.

If a student’s unmet need is less than \$7,898 after accounting for federal, state and institutional aid, they will not be eligible for an MCS award.

11. WHEN DOES THIS FUNDING GO INTO EFFECT?

Funding was made available for the 2023-24 academic year. All eligible foster youth should have received their base allocation of the MCS prior to the start of the fall term. CSAC released an alert, [GSA 2023-58](#), notifying institutions that they deployed system updates on **October 27, 2023** to reflect the updated supplemental awards for eligible foster youth.