

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, 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 per year.

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 annual "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 each year.

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 at or after the age of 13.

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

No, there is no age cap.

7. DOES DEPENDENCY NEED TO BE ESTABLISHED IN CALIFORNIA?

No, dependency may have been established by another state, however the student must be a California resident or be [exempt](#) from nonresident tuition.

8. 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.

9. IS THIS FUNDING AVAILABLE TO GRAD STUDENTS?

No. Students must be pursuing their first undergraduate baccalaureate degree with the exception that the funding is also available to a student enrolled in an approved teaching credential program.

10. WHEN DOES THIS FUNDING GO INTO EFFECT?

Funding goes into effect starting in the 2023-24 academic school year. The exact timing of funding disbursement is not yet known. It is anticipated that eligible foster youth will receive their base allocation of the MCS prior to the start of the fall term, and that awards for the augmented increased rate for foster youth will be made by the end of the fall term.

11. IS THERE AN ADDITIONAL APPLICATION REQUIRED?

No, grants will be automatically awarded based on a data match with the California Department of Social Services to determine status as a current or former foster youth. If a student’s status is not successfully confirmed through the data match a student may manually submit a [verification form](#).

12. HAS THERE BEEN ANY FORMAL GUIDANCE ISSUED REGARDING THE PROGRAM?

Yes, the California Student Aid Commission issued [Grants Operation Memo \(GOM\) 2023-25](#).