

# 2026 · WHAT ISSUES SHOULD I CONSIDER TO FUND MY CHILD'S COLLEGE EDUCATION?



FINANCIAL AID ISSUES	YES	NO
<p><b>Do you need help determining which financial aid form to complete (FAFSA, CSS, 568 group)?</b> If so, consider contacting each school to verify which forms must be completed.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p><b>If completing FAFSA, do you need help estimating your Student Aid Index (SAI)?</b> If so, consider the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The income and assets of a child will impact SAI more than the parent's income and assets.</li> <li>■ Income is based on prior, prior year (for 2026, figures will be based on 2024 income). Asset values are based on the day the FAFSA is submitted.</li> <li>■ Qualified distributions from a 529 account owned by a child, parent, or grandparent will not be included in income for purposes of determining the SAI (but may be counted as assets if owned by a parent or child).</li> </ul>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p><b>Are you divorced or separated from your spouse?</b> If so, consider the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Schools that use FAFSA will consider the income and assets of the the parent who provides the most financial support for the student.</li> <li>■ Schools that use the CSS Profile may also require information from the other parent.</li> </ul>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p><b>Has your financial situation changed since the financial aid decision?</b> If so, consider appealing the financial aid decision.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

FUNDING ISSUES	YES	NO
<p><b>Does the cost of college exceed your Student Aid Index as calculated by FAFSA?</b> If so, Federal student aid such as Pell Grants, work-study programs and FSEOG may be awarded.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p><b>Do you hope to find grants, scholarships or awards?</b> If so, consider the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Complete the FAFSA form as it is used by colleges and states to determine need and eligibility. (continue on next column)</li> </ul>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

FUNDING ISSUES (CONTINUED)	YES	NO
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Apply early as many awards are given on a first come first served basis.</li> <li>■ Consider looking for awards either online, at college, affinity groups, professional or civic organizations.</li> </ul>		
<p><b>Are any relatives planning to gift money?</b> If so, consider the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Direct tuition payments are not subject to gift tax and do not use the donor's annual exclusion amount or lifetime exemption.</li> <li>■ Distributions from third-party owned 529 accounts (e.g., grandparents) are no longer treated as income of the child. As a result, they may be used during all school years with no impact on federal need-based financial aid eligibility.</li> </ul>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p><b>Does your child expect to become an elementary or secondary school teacher?</b> If so, your child may be eligible for a TEACH Grant if the school has a TEACH Grant program.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p><b>Did you or your spouse serve (or currently serve) in the military?</b> If so, your child may be eligible for certain benefits.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p><b>Would your child consider military service?</b> If so, the Reserve Officers' Training Corps will cover most college expenses as long as the child serves at least four years in active duty and four years in reserves.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p><b>Do you expect to need a loan to cover additional education related expenses?</b> If so, consider loans with the most favorable terms, which are generally in this order: Federal Direct Subsidized Loans (needs based), Federal Direct Unsubsidized Loans, Federal Direct PLUS Loans, and private loans (banks, colleges, states).</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p><b>Will your child have loans and plan to work in the government or for a nonprofit for 10 years?</b> If so, your child may be eligible for Public Service Loan Forgiveness.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

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TAX-ADVANTAGED ACCOUNT ISSUES	YES	NO
<p><b>Do you have an IRA, Roth IRA, or employer retirement plan?</b> If so, consider the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Distributions from a traditional IRA to pay for qualified education expenses may be subject to ordinary income taxes but there is no 10% penalty.</li> <li>■ Distributions from a Roth IRA to pay for qualified education expenses may be subject to ordinary income taxes on the earnings but there is no 10% penalty.</li> <li>■ Distributions from a traditional IRA or Roth IRA may impact needs-based financial aid eligibility if used more than two years before college graduation.</li> <li>■ Some employer plans, such as a 401(k), allow employees to take loans. There are no tax ramifications for the loan and a loan does not count as income on the FAFSA, however it may count as an asset if not spent.</li> </ul>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p><b>Do you have a 529 account (or are you considering opening one)?</b> If so, consider the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ You can use your gift tax annual exclusion amount to contribute up to \$19,000 per year to a beneficiary's 529 account, gift tax-free.</li> <li>■ Alternatively, you can make a lump sum contribution of up to \$95,000 to a beneficiary's 529 account, and elect to treat it as if it were made evenly over a 5-year period, gift tax-free.</li> <li>■ Unused 529 funds may be transferred (in the future) to the beneficiary's Roth IRA (rules and limitations apply).</li> <li>■ 529 funds may be used for eligible K-12 expenses up to \$20,000 per year, per student.</li> </ul>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p><b>Do you have a Coverdell Education Savings Account?</b> If so, consider rolling it over to a 529 account for more flexibility (so long as the beneficiaries are the same).</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p><b>Do you own Series EE or I Bonds?</b> If so, you may be able to exclude from gross income the interest paid upon the redemption of the bonds to pay for qualified education expenses (subject to income limitations).</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

TAX PLANNING ISSUES	YES	NO
<p><b>Is your MAGI less than \$90,000 (\$180,000 if MFJ)?</b> If so, consider the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ You may be eligible for the American Opportunity Tax Credit for 100% of the first \$2,000 of qualified education expenses and 25% of the next \$2,000 (per eligible student).</li> <li>■ You may be eligible for the Lifetime Learning Tax Credit for 20% of the first \$10,000 of qualified education expenses (per tax return).</li> <li>■ The phaseout range for these credits for a single filer is \$80,000 - \$90,000 (\$160,000 - \$180,000 if MFJ).</li> </ul>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p><b>Does your state offer an income tax deduction or credit for 529 plan contributions?</b> If so, consider an "in-and-out" strategy where deductions or credits may be allowed on contributions that are immediately withdrawn to pay for qualified education expenses.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p><b>Are you eligible for any education tax credits and have a 529 account?</b> If so, be aware that there is no double-dipping. See the "Is The Distribution From My 529 Plan Subject To Federal Income Tax?" flowchart.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p><b>Will you or your child have student loans?</b> If so, consider the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ You can deduct up to \$2,500 of interest on qualifying student loan debt, per tax return. The phaseout range for a single filer is \$85,000 - \$100,000 (\$175,000 - \$205,000 if MFJ).</li> <li>■ If you have a 529 account, up to \$10,000 can be used to pay down student loans. This is a lifetime limit per person. An additional \$10,000 may be distributed to each of the beneficiary's siblings.</li> </ul>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>