



HEA RESEARCH & INSIGHTS

The Student Loan *Squeeze*

Half of the Tampa Bay homeowners who came to HEA for help with their mortgage were also paying off federal student loans. With student loan collections set to restart in 2026, these families need help with both debts at once.

RESEARCHED AND WRITTEN BY



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1 in 2

homeowners in HEA's mortgage stability program had federal student loans

\$28,811

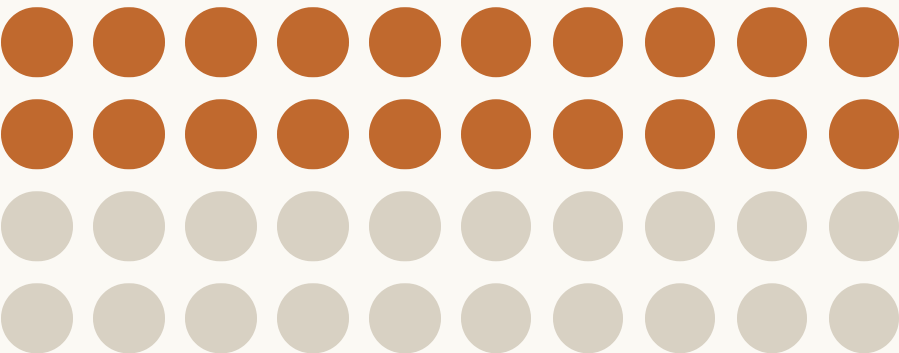
median student loan balance among those homeowners

Up to 15%

of disposable pay can be garnished on defaulted federal loans, expected to resume in fall 2026

TWO DEBTS, ONE PAYCHECK

Half of the homeowners asking for mortgage help also owed on student loans



20 of 40

homeowners in HEA's Housing Stability Counseling Program said they had outstanding federal student loan debt. None had private student loans.

● Has federal student loans ● No student loans

These were not families in freefall. All wanted to keep their home, nearly all owed less than it was worth, and most expected their hardship to last under six months. They came early, which is when counseling works best.

Source: HEA Housing Stability Counseling Program intake questionnaire (RX-Office QA report), homeowner cases opened Oct 2021 – Apr 2022 that answered the student loan question (n = 40). Three test records excluded.

HOW MUCH THEY OWE

Everyday balances, not big professional-school debt

Most balances were under \$60,000, and the typical HEA homeowner owed less than the average Florida borrower. Even a modest student loan payment matters when the mortgage already takes more than 30% of income, as it did for 9 in 10 of these households.

Student loan balance, 20 households



Compared with Florida



Florida: 2.75 million federal borrowers owing \$113.1 billion in total.

Sources: HEA intake questionnaire (n = 20 with balances). Florida figures: Education Data Initiative, based on U.S. Department of Education Federal Student Aid data, updated July 2026.

AN EARLY WARNING SIGN

Homeowners with student loans were five times as likely to be in mortgage forbearance

During the COVID-19 pandemic, a quarter of the homeowners with student loans had paused their mortgage through a forbearance agreement, compared with one in twenty of those without.

In a COVID-19 mortgage forbearance agreement

With student loans

5 of 20 households

25%

Without student loans

1 of 20 households

5%

Read with care: the groups are small (20 households each), so this is a signal worth testing, not a settled finding. It is the question HEA's next round of research is designed to answer.

Source: HEA intake questionnaire, "Have you entered into a Forbearance Agreement during COVID-19 Pandemic?" (n = 40).

WHY 2026 MATTERS

The student loan rules changed this year, and collections are coming back

Nationally, 10.3% of student loan balances were 90 or more days late in early 2026. For homeowners already stretched, a student loan reported 90 days late can cut a strong credit score by well over 100 points and squeeze the money left for the mortgage.



Sources: Federal Reserve Bank of New York, Household Debt and Credit Report, Q1 2026 (May 12, 2026); U.S. Department of Education final regulations, Federal Register (May 1, 2026); The College Investor and Tate Law reporting on RAP, SAVE and wage garnishment timing (2026); NerdWallet on credit score impact. Collection dates may shift; see studentaid.gov for the latest.

WHAT HELPS

Counsel the whole household budget, not one bill at a time



One-on-one counseling at HEA.

For housing counselors

- Ask every homeowner and homebuyer about student loans at intake.
- Help clients pick an income-based plan before missed payments reach default.

For servicers and lenders

- Refer borrowers in mortgage trouble to free, HUD-approved counseling.
- Count an affordable student loan plan when reviewing a loan modification.

For funders and local government

- Fund counseling that covers housing and student debt together, before fall collections begin.

THE NEXT STUDY

From an early signal to a Tampa Bay benchmark

HEA's research plan for 2027

1. Add student loan questions (balance, status, repayment plan) to every counseling and homebuyer-education intake.
2. Follow clients for 12 months: did they keep the home, close on a purchase, or fall behind?
3. Compare households with and without student loans by income, age and county.
4. Publish the results and invite a university research partner to review the method.

ABOUT THE DATA

How to read these numbers

- **Who is counted:** homeowners in HEA's Housing Stability Counseling Program with cases opened Oct 2021 to Apr 2022 who answered the student loan questions (40 households). Answers are self-reported at intake.
- **Small sample:** results describe these households, not all Tampa Bay homeowners. Differences between groups of 20 are signals, not proof.
- **Outlier:** one household reported a balance above \$350,000. It is counted in the "\$60,000 or more" group; the median is used because one large balance does not move it.
- **Privacy:** aggregate counts only. No names, addresses or loan numbers are published.

Sources

1. Housing & Education Alliance, Housing Stability Counseling Program intake questionnaire (RX-Office QA report), run Oct 4, 2026.
2. Federal Reserve Bank of New York, [Household Debt and Credit Report, Q1 2026](#) (May 12, 2026).
3. Education Data Initiative, [Student Loan Debt by State](#), based on U.S. Department of Education Federal Student Aid data (updated July 2026).
4. U.S. Department of Education, [Federal Student Loan Program Final Regulations](#), Federal Register (May 1, 2026).
5. Tate Law, [Student Loan Changes on July 1, 2026](#).
6. The College Investor, [Wage Garnishment on Defaulted Student Loans Restarts This Fall](#).
7. NerdWallet, [How Student Loan Delinquencies Hit Home Buyers' Credit](#).
8. Federal Student Aid, [studentaid.gov](#), for current repayment plans and collection dates.



Behind on your mortgage or student loans?

HEA's HUD-certified counselors help with the whole budget, for free, in English and Spanish.

(813) 932-HOME (4663)

heausa.org

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