

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 26, 2024

Dear Illinois School Counselor:

Congratulations on another successful school year, and thank you for your support of Illinois students. We write to urge you to continue assisting students in submitting the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) this summer and provide additional resources for FAFSA completion.

The *FAFSA Simplification Act*, enacted as part of the *Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2022* (P.L. 117-103), made significant changes to the federal student aid process. The rollout of the new form did not come without challenges. However, your diligent work to help Illinois students, regardless of their background, placed Illinois fourth in the nation for FAFSA completions. Despite Illinois high school seniors' FAFSA completion rate of 63 percent, the completion rate is still 12.9 percent lower than last year.

The FAFSA has the potential to unlock thousands of federal dollars to support students' postsecondary education. Therefore, we write to share resources from the U.S. Department of Education, Illinois Student Assistance Commission (ISAC), and national organizations working to assist with FAFSA improving completion rates.

- **The Better FAFSA Resources:** The U.S. Department of Education compiled several resources to support students in completing the FAFSA, including a completion checklist, instructional videos, and a calculator to estimate a student's federal student aid. These resources are available at <https://www.ed.gov/better-fafsa>.
- **ISAC College Q&A:** The ISAC Q&A allows students to text questions about the FAFSA and student financial aid. Students can sign up at <https://www.isac.org/connect>, or by sending their first and last name to the text messaging service at (847) 243-6470 for assistance in English and (773) 823-0570 for assistance in Spanish.
- **Illinois Student Assistance Corps (ISACorps):** The ISACorps are young professionals trained to help students and their families navigate the process of applying to and entering college. Students and families can search for Local Corps members using the ZIP Code search at studentportal.isac.org/isacorps to receive one-on-one support.
- **Free FAFSA Completion Workshops:** ISAC is offering a variety of workshops throughout Illinois this summer to provide additional information to school counselors, students, and parents about FAFSA completion. Participants can register at studentportal.isac.org/events.
- **FAFSA Events:** If your school or organization would like to host an ISAC representative who can provide a FAFSA completion workshop or another financial aid event at no cost, counselors may submit an outreach request form, available at <https://www.isac.org/OutreachRequestForm>.

- **ISACconnection:** ISACconnection is a text messaging service that connects counselors with a member of the ISAC professional development team who can answer questions about college and financial aid. Counselors may join the service by texting your name to (847) 250-2384.
- **Illinois College Access Network (ICAN) Listserv:** ICAN’s listserv connects counselors to college access professionals and community-based organizations to share information and professional development opportunities: <https://www.illinoiscan.org/join-illinoiscan/>
- **ISAC E-messaging:** This service provides updates and professional development opportunities tailored to various audiences, including school counselors and financial aid administrators. Counselors can sign-up at <https://www.isac.org/emessaging/>
- **Federal Student Aid (FSA) ID Resource in Spanish for applicants without social security numbers:** The National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators developed a guide for obtaining an FSA ID for applicants without a social security number: https://www.nasfaa.org/uploads/documents/Spanish_FSA_ID_without_SSN.pdf.
- **Summer Supports:** The National College Attainment Network collected a variety of resources to provide college access support to students over the summer: <https://www.ncan.org/news/671885/How-to-Offer-Summer-Supports-to-Students-to-Drive-FAFSA-Combat-Melt.html>.

Every year, an estimated 10 to 40 percent of high school seniors that intend to go to college do not arrive on college campuses in the fall following high school graduation. This trend, known as ‘summer melt,’ disproportionately impacts first-generation college students and students from low-income backgrounds. It can be attributed, in part, to students no longer having access to advising services from their high school after graduation.

We appreciate your tireless work to prepare students for their postsecondary education and career. This summer, we urge you to work with students and their families to prevent ‘summer melt’ and ensure students arrive on college campuses this fall. Together, we can make sure students do not leave federal financial aid dollars on the table and instead, turn them into possibilities.

Sincerely,



Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator



Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator