



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**ILLINOIS STUDENT ASSISTANCE COMMISSION LAUNCHES
2024-25 COLLEGE CHANGES EVERYTHING® CAMPAIGN
ISAC and Partners Offer Free Help Completing College and Financial Aid Applications**

CHICAGO – The [Illinois Student Assistance Commission \(ISAC\)](#) teams up with schools and community-based organizations to kick off its 9th annual College Changes Everything® (CCE) Campaign this fall. ISAC and school and community partners provide extra supports for students and families each year at this time, offering free college application and financial aid application completion workshops statewide. While the CCE Campaign generally spans the fall and early winter, this year it will extend later into the season to accommodate the later launch of the 2025-26 Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA®). According to the U.S. Department of Education, the 2025-2026 FAFSA will launch in December. To align with the launch of the FAFSA, the 2025-26 Alternative Application for Illinois Financial Aid (Alternative Application) for qualifying undocumented students will also launch in December 2024.

“As always, ISAC and our statewide partners are prepped and ready to support students and families in achieving their postsecondary goals—whether that means a 2- or 4- year college degree, or a certificate program,” said **Executive Director of ISAC Eric Zarnikow**. “We are hopeful that the technical issues students in Illinois and across the country experienced last year with the launch of the new FAFSA have been addressed by the Department of Education. ISAC and CCE Campaign partners are ready to work with all students and families and help them navigate any potential issues so they can access all the financial aid for which they are eligible.”

The [FAFSA](#) is the key to unlocking federal, state, and some institutional student financial aid to help pay for college, vocational school, or graduate school. The FAFSA is not just an application for student loans, but also for aid that students *don't* have to pay back. That includes scholarships as well as federal grants such as the [Pell grant](#), and state grants like the [Illinois Monetary Award Program \(MAP\) grant](#), which is the state's largest need-

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based grant program for low-income college students. Students should complete the 2025-26 FAFSA as soon as possible when it becomes available in December 2024.

While most students will complete the FAFSA to determine if they qualify for federal, state, and some institutional financial aid, the [Alternative Application](#) provides a pathway for qualified undocumented students (who are not eligible for federal financial aid) to apply for the MAP Grant. If a student is unsure whether to complete the FAFSA or Alternative Application, they should contact the financial aid office of the college or university they plan on attending, or ISAC for free assistance. Pre-screening questions on the Alternative Application itself can also assist in determining which application to complete.

CCE activities and resources available to help with college planning and financial aid

- Prior to the December launch of the 2025-26 FAFSA, ISAC and partners are offering a host of workshops, including **college application workshops** and free assistance to help students and parents who are new to the process to **set up their Studentaid.gov account**. To complete the 2025-26 FAFSA, dependent students and parents must each have their own Studentaid.gov account (FSA ID). Visit studentaid.gov/fsa-id/create-account/ to create an account if you don't already have one. For assistance setting up an account, ISAC encourages students and families to attend a free FSA ID workshop now so you will be ready to complete the FAFSA when it becomes available. studentportal.isac.org/events
- After the FAFSA becomes available in December, ISAC and partners will offer **free financial aid application completion workshops**, where Illinois students and families can complete their FAFSA or Alternative Application with direct assistance from college and financial aid experts. Students and parents can check directly with their high schools for college application or financial aid workshops within or sponsored by their own school. For a continuously updated list of ISAC-supported events that are open to the public, visit studentportal.isac.org/events. Workshops in Spanish are available.
- Students and families can get **free one-on-one assistance virtually or in person from an ISACorps™ member in their community**. The ISACorps are recent college graduates who are extensively trained to serve as near peer mentors to high school students navigating the college planning and financial aid process. Find your local ISACorps member at studentportal.isac.org/isacorps. To set up a free virtual appointment, visit isac.org/booking.
- **ISAC College Q&A** (isac.org/collegeqa) is a **free text messaging service** for students and families to get their college and financial aid questions answered by ISAC experts. Support is available in English and Spanish.
- **The ISAC Student Portal** (isac.org/studentportal) offers free online tools and resources to help students with college preparation, financial aid, and more. Students and parents can also check out ISAC's [YouTube](#) page or the [Now Playing section](#) of the ISAC Student Portal for quick **College Minute™** videos that answer your questions about financial aid, transitioning to college, and more.

- Students can also get answers to questions about financial aid and ISAC gift assistance programs by contacting **ISAC's Student Engagement and Support Services**, 800-899-ISAC (4722).
- Students who will be the first in their family to earn a college degree should check out the **First Generation Scholars Network**, a network of first gen students and graduates who share information, experience, and advice on the path to and through education after high school.
studentportal.isac.org/FirstGen
- High schools participating in the CCE Campaign get free **CCE Campaign support** from ISAC, including a downloadable toolkit, materials and swag, and event support. Counselors can find out more and sign up at <https://www.collegechangeseverything.org/campaign/>.
- **ISAC's Financial Aid Application Completion Initiative** helps high schools to both help their students and meet the Illinois financial aid application completion requirement. Through this free service to districts and schools, ISAC shares data with local school districts daily to identify students who have not filed a financial aid application. This information is used by district counselors to help reach students who might otherwise not complete an application. High schools can track their progress weekly on ISAC's website and receive Recognition of Excellence honors for reaching financial aid application completion milestones. Find out more at isac.org/FAFSA-Completion.

About ISAC

The mission of the Illinois Student Assistance Commission (ISAC) is to provide Illinois students with information and assistance to help make education beyond high school accessible and affordable. ISAC provides comprehensive, objective, and timely information on education and financial aid for students and their families—giving them access to the tools they need to make the educational choices that are right for them. Then, through the state scholarship and grant programs ISAC administers, ISAC can help students make those choices a reality. Find us at isac.org and follow us on [Facebook](#) @ILStudentAssistance, [X](#), [Instagram](#) @ISACfinaid, and on [YouTube](#).

About College Changes Everything

College Changes Everything® (CCE) is a college access movement that recognizes that college can be a life changing experience not only for students, but also for families and communities. In Illinois and across the nation, those who obtain education beyond high school not only see a significant impact on their potential career prospects and future salary, but also change levels of poverty, life expectancy, crime, and obesity rates in their communities. CCE is an essential part of helping Illinois reach its goal of increasing the proportion of adults in the state with high quality degrees or credentials to 60% by 2025. Find out more and join the conversation at collegechangeseverything.org.

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