

COLLEGE ACCESS AND OUTREACH

DIRECT ASSISTANCE TO STUDENTS AND FAMILIES: THE ISACORPS™



A key component of ISAC's outreach efforts is the ISACorps. The ISACorps is a talented group of recent college graduates who are trained to serve as near peer mentors to high school students, helping students and their families navigate the process of applying to and entering college or vocational programs. ISACorps members live and work throughout the state.

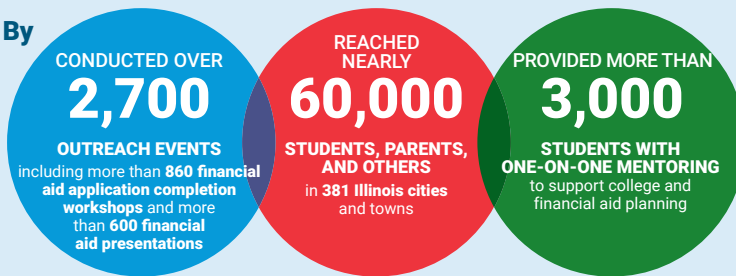
While the services of the ISACorps are available to anyone in Illinois, ISACorps members focus their efforts on working with students who are low income and those whose families have no prior college-going experience. To better connect with students, every effort is made to recruit ISACorps members who are first generation college students

and who come from or went to school in the Illinois community to which they will be assigned.

As part of their outreach efforts, ISACorps members partner with local schools, businesses, and nonprofit organizations to deliver free career and college planning and preparation services. The ISACorps provide workshops, presentations, and one-on-one mentoring for students, assisting them and their families with career exploration, college selection, scholarship searches, application completion, and the financial aid process. ISACorps members host and provide support for college and financial aid events across the state as part of the College Changes Everything® campaign and throughout the year.

ISACorps members also support the ISAC First Generation Scholars Network. The network connects first gen students to help them navigate the challenges of the transition to and first year of college through a network where they can share experiences, information, and advice.

The ISACorps: By the Numbers FY2023



"I was surprised at the ease of completing the FAFSA and I was grateful for the help I received from the ISAC staff. The knowledge they shared was empowering."

GLENBARD EAST PARENT IMELDA GUTIERREZ, after attending a FAFSA Completion Workshop supported by ISAC at her daughter's high school

ISAC's Call Center also assists students and families by email, chat, and phone with questions about college and financial aid, student loans and repayment.

"The ISACorps has been a valuable asset to Evanston Township High School. With over 40% of our students receiving free or reduced lunch, our students, parents and community partners have benefited from having dedicated financial aid assistance services in our building. With the assistance of the Corps, we have been fortunate to be able to add to our financial aid programming and free up time for our counselors to focus on other aspects of the post-secondary process."

BETH A. AREY

College & Career Coordinator | Chair, College Board Midwestern Regional Council | Evanston Township High School, Evanston, IL



College Changes Everything® Month and Campaign

During College Changes Everything® (CCE) Month and the fall campaign, the ISACorps and our partners support students and families completing both college and financial aid applications. ISAC provides workshops and one-on-one assistance for students and families, and toolkits and guides for schools, social media and marketing, and media outreach.

CCE Fall Campaign: By the Numbers

The largest concentration of workshops usually take place in the fall. However, with the delay of the launch of the 2024-25 FAFSA to January 2024, ISAC has adjusted the CCE campaign to extend well into the late spring to ensure that students and families have the support they need to complete financial aid applications. **From mid-August 2023 through February 2024, ISAC and/or its partners conducted:**

MORE THAN **2,200**
OUTREACH EVENTS including **600 financial aid application workshops** and **124 college application workshops**

ATTENDED BY OVER **55,000**
STUDENTS & FAMILIES

WITH SCHOOLS & ORGANIZATIONS IN
364
CITIES AND TOWNS

To find your local ISACorps member, visit studentportal.isac.org/isacorps

CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING

ISAC's Capacity Development and Training Division helps partners and communities increase their ability to support students' postsecondary and career exploration, preparation, and attainment by intentionally building awareness, collaboration, and opportunities at the local level. Training and professional development for school counselors and other college access practitioners helps ensure students and families receive accurate and reliable information about the postsecondary planning and financial aid process. From training on financial aid topics to workshops supporting implementation of the Postsecondary and Career Expectations (PaCE) framework, to events and symposiums to share best practices and improve policy, ISAC's training team serves partners and other education professionals, as well as policymakers. The team also offers up-to-the-minute training and resources on emerging and complex issues such as FAFSA Simplification, Public Service Loan Forgiveness and other student loan-related processes and temporary changes.

College Changes Everything®

COLLEGE CHANGES EVERYTHING®

Over a decade ago, ISAC established College Changes Everything® as a theme to rally partners within the state and nationally, developing a coalition to promote awareness of the impact of a college education on individuals and community.

Every year, the College Changes Everything Conference draws a capacity crowd of Illinois education, government and non-profit leaders, focused on working together and learning from each other to address challenges and identify solutions in helping Illinoisans get to college and graduate. collegechangeseverything.org

Illinois College Access Network



In 2022, ISAC became the backbone organization for operations of the Illinois College Access Network. For more than 25 years, Illinois CAN has served more than 60 organizations and institutions and many other college access professionals dedicated to college access for all. Its initiatives are targeted at improving the quality of higher education access and retention support services for those most in need of the guidance

necessary for success. Illinois CAN leverages the expertise and knowledge of its members to provide tools and information to access professionals who deal daily with students – inside schools, after school programs, institutions, and organizations. IllinoisCAN.org

ISAC Financial Aid Application Completion Initiative Improves Access to Financial Aid for Illinois Students

The availability of financial aid is a crucial consideration for many students in the decision to attend college or trade school. The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA®) is the application for access to federal, state, and some institutional aid. The Alternative Application for Illinois Financial Aid provides a pathway to state financial aid for eligible undocumented students.

As part of the ISAC Financial Aid Application Completion Initiative, the agency shares data with participating high schools and local districts on a weekly basis through ISAC's secure portal to identify students who have not filed a financial aid application (the FAFSA or the Alternative Application). This information is used by district counselors (or ISACorps members, with permission from schools) to help focus limited resources on assisting students who have not yet filed their financial aid application.

ISAC's data-sharing initiative, along with partner training on financial aid and direct assistance to students and families completing their financial aid applications, has been the foundation for significant

strides in FAFSA completion in Illinois, resulting in so much improvement that the U.S. Department of Education launched a nationwide program based on the Illinois model for schools around the country.

This package of initiatives has been increasingly important in supporting our school partners in implementing the state requirement for public high school seniors to complete a financial aid application as a prerequisite to receiving a high school diploma. ISAC celebrates the efforts of high schools that focus on supporting their students and families through the financial aid process with annual Recognition of Excellence awards.

The FAFSA completion efforts of ISAC and partners statewide have been so successful that Illinois continues to rank among the top states for the highest percentage of FAFSAs completed by high school seniors, according to the National College Attainment Network's FAFSA Tracker.

COLLEGE ACCESS AND OUTREACH CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING

Professional Development, Training, Symposiums

ISAC offers professional development opportunities for financial aid administrators, high school counselors, and other partners on a variety of topics, including its formalized annual certification series that gives professionals a detailed understanding of financial aid programs and systems. Sessions take place each fall, winter, and spring and are offered at no cost to counselors, mentors, and members of the general public. ISAC offers virtual and in-person professional development, and participants can earn Continuing Education (CE) and Professional Development (PD) credits.

ISAC's training and professional development programs continue to grow, both in the types of professionals we serve and in the breadth of subject matter. In addition to our focus on the financial aid process, we offer training on ISAC's gift assistance programs, student loan forgiveness and repayment, and on topical and urgent issues such as FAFSA Simplification. isac.org/pd



In addition, ISAC is leading the professional training to support Illinois middle and high schools as they implement a state requirement to adopt a Postsecondary and Career Expectations (PaCE) framework by July 2025. The Illinois PaCE framework was developed with extensive input gathered from stakeholders and subject matter experts. It provides guidance to families and educators on the types of experiences and information a student should have in middle and high school in order to make the most informed decisions about college and career planning. isac.org/pace

ISAC's staff also hosts and sponsors numerous annual symposiums and conferences throughout the year, including the CCE Conference and the Illinois Education and Career Success Network Conference, and annual symposiums focused on PaCE, the FAFSA, and first generation students.

Professional Development: By the Numbers FY2023



ISAC STUDENT PORTAL: COLLEGE PLANNING MADE EASY



ISAC's award-winning Student Portal offers free college planning, financial aid, and money management tools and resources to help students and families make smart college and money choices. Partner resources include *apply* for college and scholarship search; the Claim Your Future® game to explore education and training after high school, future careers, and money management; and Illinois workNet® for career and job search. In addition, the Portal offers free online tools and calculators to keep track of college planning and admissions deadlines, help calculate potential financial aid, and compare financial aid offers. Students will also find a Summer Internship/Job Board with over 2,000 regularly updated job postings. The Now Playing section of the Portal offers videos providing quick tips and important information on college planning and financial aid, including more than 35 *ISAC College Minute™* videos in English and Spanish, and videos specifically for first generation college students, and for parents. Students can also use the Portal to find their local ISACCorps member for one-on-one assistance, and to find college planning and financial aid events.



ISAC COLLEGE Q&A: COLLEGE PLANNING ANSWERS ON THE GO



ISAC College Q&A is a free text messaging service that allows students to text questions to ISAC college planning professionals about the college-going and financial aid process and get answers sent directly to their phones. With almost 13,000 subscribers since it launched in early 2016, the service also sends students alerts and reminders about important deadlines, and information about college access and financial aid events in their area.

THE FIRST UP PODCAST



Hosted by ISAC staff who were first gen students themselves, the podcast invites guests to share their experiences and offers informative conversation, advice, and stories about the challenges and triumphs of first generation college students and their families. **Find us on your favorite podcast streaming platform.**

Visit the ISAC Student Portal at studentportal.isac.org

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