

COLLEGE ACCESS SERVICES



The Illinois Student Assistance Commission (ISAC) is focused on offering supports and resources to every student in the state so they can identify and reach their education and career goals.

ISAC serves aspiring students in two key areas to help them meet their goals, providing **money** and **knowledge**. These supports are particularly important to address the obstacles facing students with lower incomes and those whose families lack experience with college. Supporting our students and families will mean a brighter future for them and for our state.

ISAC's outreach, capacity development, and training efforts include four primary components:



Direct assistance to students and families statewide navigating the college and financial aid process.



Free online resources, information, and tools to help students and families make informed decisions about education after high school and financial aid.



Professional development for financial aid administrators, teachers, school counselors, and other professionals who support students with postsecondary access and financial aid.



External partnerships to increase community supports for postsecondary exploration and attainment.

COLLEGE ACCESS AND OUTREACH

Direct Assistance to Students and Families: The ISACorps™

A key component of ISAC's outreach efforts is the Illinois Student Assistance Corps (ISACorps).



Who is the ISACorps?

ISACorps members are recent college graduates trained as near peer mentors to high school students. They live and work throughout the state, and many grew up in the community to which they are assigned.

- 55% of 2025-26 ISACorps members were first generation college students

How does the ISACorps support students and families?

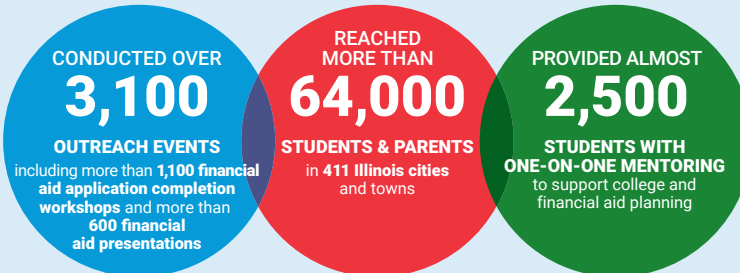
The ISACorps partner with local schools, businesses, and nonprofit organizations to deliver free statewide career and college/vocational school planning and preparation services, including support navigating the financial aid process.

- Services tailored to the needs of first generation students, but available to all
- Workshops, presentations, and one-on-one mentoring for students and families

How do I find my local ISACorps member and workshops?

- Find your local ISACorps member at studentportal.isac.org/isacorps
- Book a one-on-one virtual meeting with an ISACorps member at isac.org/booking
- Find a workshop in your community at studentportal.isac.org/events or check out ISACorps-supported events in your high school calendar.

ISACorps Activities FY2025



"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

The ISACorps also offer free virtual meetings statewide to provide assistance with the college planning and financial aid process.

In addition, ISAC's Call Center can assist students and families by email, chat, and phone with questions about college and financial aid, student loans and repayment.

"The words 'Thank You' cannot nearly cover the gratitude I feel for the impact you made on our students today. You literally changed lives! This year has been challenging, but for these families in particular it has certainly felt hopeless. You brought 'magic' (their words!) to us today!"

ANDREA RUSK

College Counselor | Mundelein High School



College Changes Everything® Campaign

During the College Changes Everything® (CCE) 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, toolkits and guides for schools, social media and marketing, and media outreach.

CCE Fall 2025 Campaign

From Labor Day through Thanksgiving 2025, ISAC and/or its partners statewide conducted:

MORE THAN **1,900** OUTREACH EVENTS including more than **680** financial aid application workshops

ATTENDED BY MORE THAN **41,000** STUDENTS & FAMILIES

WITH SCHOOLS & ORGANIZATIONS IN **381** CITIES AND TOWNS

ONE-ON-ONE INTERACTIONS with more than **1,100** STUDENTS and **395** virtual meetings scheduled through ISAC's online booking tool

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

CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING

Professional Development and Training

ISAC offers professional development and training for school counselors, financial aid administrators, and other college access professionals on topics including financial aid applications, ISAC gift assistance programs, the Postsecondary and Career Expectations (PaCE) framework, student loan repayment, and more. The team also offers up-to-the-minute training and resources on emerging and complex issues such as FAFSA Simplification. Participants can earn Continuing Education (CE) and Professional Development (PD) credits. isac.org/pd



ISAC leads the professional training in the state to support Illinois middle and high schools in meeting the state's requirement to adopt and implement a PaCE framework.. The framework 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

Professional Development: FY2025



Events and Collaborative Networks

ISAC's staff 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.

COLLEGE CHANGES EVERYTHING®



*First Gen
Symposium*



ILLINOIS EDUCATION AND CAREER
SUCCESS NETWORK



ISAC
FAFSA
SYMPOSIUM



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. Illinois CAN leverages the expertise and knowledge of its

members to provide tools and information to college access professionals to improve the quality of higher education access and retention support services for students. illinoiscan.org

TOOLS AND OTHER SUPPORTS FOR STUDENTS AND PROFESSIONALS

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



As part of the ISAC Financial Aid Application Completion Initiative, ISAC 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 -- either a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA®) or the Alternative Application for Illinois Financial Aid. This information is used by district counselors (or ISACCorps 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.

These initiatives help support 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. 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.

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. isac.org/fafsa-completion

In 2025, ISAC also led two successful legislative initiatives to support financial aid application completion. These require that high schools designate a point of contact for FAFSA-related communications and resources, and that high schools make assistance available during the school day for students to complete their financial aid applications. ISAC is providing supports to schools in implementing these new requirements.

ISAC Student Portal: College Planning Made Easy



ISAC's award-winning Student Portal offers free resources for college and scholarship search, money management, and career and job search. It also offers tools to keep track of college planning and admissions deadlines, help calculate potential financial aid, and compare financial aid offers. Short videos, including recordings of ISAC's YouTube livestream events and more than 30 of ISAC's *College Minute*® videos in English and Spanish, provide tips and important information on college planning and financial aid. Students can find their local ISACCorps member for one-on-one assistance, and find college planning and financial aid events. In addition, students can find applications for ISAC gift assistance programs on the Portal. studentportal.isac.org



First Generation Scholars Network



The First Generation Scholars Network offers students who will be the first in their family to graduate from college a way to connect and collaborate with and learn from other first generation students. ISAC also provides workshops and resources specifically for first generation students and their parents. studentportal.isac.org/FirstGen

First Up Podcast



Hosted by ISAC staff who were first generation 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. Now in its second season with 43 episodes! ***Find us on your favorite podcast streaming platform.***

Updated March 2026