

STAY WARM, STAY FOCUSED



As the year winds down and the snow begins to fall, it's the perfect time to pause, reflect, and prepare for what's ahead. Whether you're a junior mapping out your college path, or a senior putting the finishing touches on applications, winter offers a valuable opportunity to stay focused and move forward with confidence. Use these quieter months to get organized, make a plan, and ask the right questions. Your counselor is here to help you every step of the way!

One Click College Admit

One Click College Admit is a brand new initiative in the State of Illinois and is the state's free, quick, and stress-free direct admissions program into most state public universities and all community colleges. For general admission, there are no application fees, no essays, and no letters of recommendation required! The only requirement to be considered for admission is your GPA. If you meet the GPA requirement, you're in! To learn more and access the opt-in form, visit:

<https://oneclickadmit.org/>

Juniors: Sign the Opt-in Form Now

If you are 18 or older, you may complete the form on your own. If you are under 18, a parent or guardian must provide consent for you to participate. In this case, both you and your parent/guardian will create an ISAC Student Portal account, and the parent/guardian will enter the required information.

You will also need to create your Common App account **before** your senior year so you can review and accept your admission offers in Fall 2026.

Seniors: Be Part of the First Class!

This year only, seniors will have the chance to be pioneers in the launch of the One Click College Admit program. All you need to do is create your Common App account and profile, enter required information such as your GPA and permanent Illinois address, and then wait to receive your direct admissions offers from participating colleges. It's that easy! No extra applications, no essays, just opportunities coming straight to your inbox.

JUNIOR YEAR FOCUS

Winter College Deep Dive

If you've started building college your list using the resources from the Fall newsletter, now is the perfect time to explore your options in a more meaningful way. Consider attending college fairs, joining virtual tours or student panels, participating in sessions with college admissions representatives, and visiting campuses in person if possible. Many schools offer online events and resources as well.

If you've never been on a tour, attended a college fair, or met with an admissions representative, it's normal to feel a little unsure about what to ask. Here are some helpful questions to bring to any of these events:

- What majors or programs is your school best known for?
- What does student life look like?
- Are there special scholarships or application deadlines I should know about?
- How does your school support first-generation students?
- What internship or career opportunities are available for my major?
- What clubs, organizations, or activities can students join?
- How flexible is the curriculum if I want to double major or switch majors?
- What career services are available to students?
- What should I do to strengthen my application?
- Are there resources for student wellness, mental health, or academic support?
- What clubs, organizations, or leadership opportunities are popular?

Be sure to check with your counselor about college visits, virtual opportunities, or one-on-one support as they can help you plan, prepare, and make the most of each experience as you work toward finding the college that's the right fit for you.

College-Level Courses: Dual Enrollment, Dual Credit, IB, and AP

Thinking about taking college-level courses next year? Talk with your counselor to learn about dual enrollment, dual credit, International Baccalaureate (IB), or Advanced Placement (AP) courses, including requirements, placement tests, and important deadlines.

Challenging yourself with these courses can help you earn college credit while in high school, strengthen your high school transcript, build skills that will help you succeed in college, and explore subjects you might want to pursue in the future. Some helpful questions to consider:

- Which courses are offered next year?
- How do these courses earn college credit?
- Are there placement tests or prerequisites I need?
- How do credits transfer to the colleges I'm interested in?
- Are there additional fees for dual enrollment or exams?

Get Ready for the ACT

Spring ACT dates will be here before you know it! Use the winter months to review practice questions, build a study plan, and register early so you can get your preferred test date and location. A little preparation each week adds up. Take advantage of free prep tools like:

- **Khan Academy**
<https://www.khanacademy.org>
- **ACT Official**
<https://www.act.org/content/act/en/products-and-services/the-act/test-preparation.html>

If you need **testing accommodations**, you can find more information and request at:

<https://www.act.org/content/act/en/products-and-services/the-act/registration/accommodations.html>

SENIOR YEAR FOCUS

FAFSA &
Alt App

Verification

Compare
Costs

Search for
Scholarships!

Mid-Year
GPA

FAFSA® and Alternative Application Reminder

If you haven't already, complete your FAFSA® (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) or the Alternative Application for Illinois Financial Aid (for students ineligible for the FAFSA) as soon as possible. In Illinois, completing a financial aid application is a graduation requirement. Submitting your application also helps you see what financial aid options are available, including money you don't have to pay back like grants. Before submitting, double-check that your Social Security number, address, tax information, and parent details are correct. If you need help, reach out to your school counselor or ISACorps™ member, or attend a financial aid application workshop.

Verification

After submitting your financial aid application, you may be selected for something called verification. Don't worry though, this is a normal step in the financial aid process where schools double-check the information you provided by asking for additional documentation. Being selected does not mean you did anything wrong, and some schools decide at random whom to select for verification.

If chosen, your school will request additional documents varying from tax return transcripts, W-2s, identity verification forms, and more. Be sure to submit only the forms they requested promptly, and stay in touch with your school's financial aid office for any other pending paperwork. Completing verification quickly helps ensure you receive your financial aid offers on time and can plan your college costs.

Compare College Costs: ISAC's Financial Aid Comparison Tool

Over the next few months, seniors who submitted applications in the fall will begin receiving financial aid offer letters. These letters can be confusing, since they're not standardized across schools. To make comparing costs easier, use the Financial Aid Comparison Tool on the ISAC Student Portal. This tool allows you to compare estimated costs for multiple schools in one place, helping you make a more informed decision about where to attend. To find this tool, visit the ISAC Student Portal at:

<https://studentportal.isac.org>

Scholarship Search Tips

Start with local opportunities first, like community organizations and local businesses. Your high school counseling office often has a list of smaller, local scholarships that come with less competition. Less competition = more likely to win! Aim to apply for at least one scholarship each week. Scholarships = free money, so every application counts! To find additional scholarships online, check out Appily at:

<https://www.appily.com>

Mid-Year Transcripts and GPA

Your mid-year grades matter! Colleges often review them before making final admissions decisions. Keep working hard through winter term, and make sure that your mid-year transcripts are sent to the colleges that request them.



Photo by Allison Shelley/Complete College Photo Library

First Generation Scholars Network (FGSN)

If you will be the first in your family to earn a college degree, ISAC's First Generation Scholars Network is designed to provide guidance and support every step of the way. First-generation students often face unique challenges such as navigating college applications, financial aid, and campus resources without family experience to rely on.



This network connects you with mentors, events, and helpful tools so you can make informed decisions, build confidence, and feel supported throughout your college journey. You can sign up for the First Generation Scholars Network by visiting the ISAC Student Portal at:

<https://studentportal.isac.org>

Caregiver Corner

If your student is a junior in high school, encourage them to prepare for the ACT, explore colleges that match their interests, and look into early college credit courses if they're available. Ask questions, offer guidance, and check in on their progress regularly. Your support now sets the foundation for a strong senior year.

If your student is a senior, they are in the home stretch! Stay involved by providing support in completing the FAFSA or Alternative Application, gathering and submitting any required verification items if selected, reviewing financial aid offer letters, and tracking scholarship deadlines. A few regular check-ins can reduce stress and help your student feel confident as they make big decisions about what comes next.

Find out more about ISAC and all of ISAC's programs and services by visiting:

<https://www.isac.org>

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

First Up: Brought to You by ISAC

Tune in to this podcast for real talk about the college-going journey from the perspective of first-generation students and their families. Hosted by Brian White and Jasmine Jetton-Gonzales, most episodes feature special guests who dive into the things we all wish we knew before, during, and after college. Explore more than 40 episodes at:



<https://isacfirstgen.podbean.com>

ISACorps™ Mentors

Need one-on-one virtual assistance with financial aid and all things college? Students can book sessions up to seven days in advance, including options with Spanish-speaking mentors, at:

<https://www.isac.org/booking>

ISAC Student Portal

Planning for college can feel overwhelming, but it's much easier with the right free tools just a click away. Use Student Portal to choose a college, explore careers, find scholarships, and simplify the financial aid process.

<https://studentportal.isac.org>

