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ILLINOIS STUDENT ASSISTANCE COMMISSION ANNOUNCES GOALS TO EXPAND COLLEGE ACCESS AT WHITE HOUSE SUMMIT

DEERFIELD, IL -- Today, the [Illinois Student Assistance Commission](http://www.isac.illinois.gov) (ISAC) through its Executive Director, Eric Zarnikow, will join President Obama, the First Lady, and Vice President Biden along with hundreds of college presidents and other higher education leaders to announce new actions to help more students prepare for and graduate from college.

The White House College Opportunity Day of Action helps to support the President's commitment to partner with colleges and universities, business leaders, and nonprofits to support students across the country to help our nation reach its goal of leading the world in college attainment.

This fall, ISAC was invited to submit to the White House new goals to support the nation's college completion objectives. Consistent with its mission to make college more accessible and affordable for Illinois families, and with its expertise in FAFSA training and in increasing student FAFSA completion rates, ISAC has submitted several new goals: (1) increasing the college completion rate for full time student recipients of the state's Monetary Award Program grant (MAP) by 25%, reaching 50% by 2020; (2) increasing FAFSA completion rates for all eligible high school students in Illinois to 80%; and (3) enhancing the scope and participation in counselor training by 50%, in part through the launch of a new training module for counselors that will provide a more comprehensive and integrated approach to FAFSA completion.

"Meeting these ambitious goals will take a collective effort with our partners throughout the state," said Zarnikow. "We look forward to continued collaboration with all of our partners on new efforts and those already underway to help students succeed. We are pleased and honored to be invited to participate in this Day of Action to improve life for students and families, particularly those who are low income or the first in their families to go to college."

Today's participants were asked to commit to new action in one of four areas: building networks of colleges around promoting completion, creating K-16 partnerships around college readiness, investing in high school counselors as part of the First Lady's Reach Higher initiative, and increasing the number of college graduates in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.

The President will announce new steps on how his Administration is helping to support these actions, including announcing \$10 million to help promote college completion and a \$30 million AmeriCorps program that will improve low-income students' access to college. Today's event is the second College

Opportunity Day of Action, and will include a progress report on the commitments made at the first day of action on January 14, 2014.

Expanding opportunity for more students to enroll and succeed in college, especially low income and underrepresented students, is vital to building a strong economy and a strong middle class. Today, only 9 percent of those born in the lowest family income quartile attain a bachelor's degree by age 25, compared to 54 percent in the top quartile. Illinois has committed to increasing the proportion of adults with a postsecondary credential to 60 percent by 2025; currently, only about 42 percent of working-age adults (25-64) in Illinois hold a two or four year college degree.

About the Illinois Student Assistance Commission

The Illinois Student Assistance Commission (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's flagship Monetary Award Program and other scholarship and grant programs ISAC administers—totaling more than \$380 million in academic year 2014-15—ISAC can help students make those choices a reality.

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