

Getting smart about college planning

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College commencements are just weeks away, and many graduates will leave with significant student loan debt. According to the Institute for College Access and Success, graduates of Illinois colleges and universities in 2015 who borrowed to finance their education had an average student loan debt of about \$29,000.

Student loan debt can mean the delay of important life milestones like home ownership and marriage. Parents can help reduce or even eliminate the burden of student loan debt for their child by planning early for the cost of college.

Our mission at the Illinois Student Assistance Commission is to help make college more accessible and affordable, so we are offering a few college planning ideas for parents as part of Money Smart Week® (April 22–29):

- **Start early:** If you are a parent of young children, you might still be paying off college debt. So your child's college education may seem light years away. But it will come up before you know it, so begin putting away money now. Every little bit helps.
- **Recruit some help:** Grandparents, for example, can play a vital role, as studies show many of them are helping their children by pitching in on their grandchildren's educational costs. Also, if friends and relatives are looking for birthday and holiday gifts for your child, consider having them give to your college savings or prepaid plan.
- **Enjoy the tax benefits of a 529 plan:** state-administered 529 college savings and prepaid plans can offer significant tax advantages, so consider these options as you begin your planning. Illinois offers both types of plans. Planning now for the cost of college can help set your children up for success, minimize their future student loan debt and save you money in the long run.

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Link: http://herald-review.com/blogs/letters/getting-smart-about-college-planning/article_f313da14-d385-570b-851e-4c574c3c4371.html