



To ensure that Illinois develops a workforce that is prepared for the jobs of the future, the state has established a goal that 60% of Illinois adults will have a degree or credential of value by 2025. The Illinois Student Assistance Commission (ISAC) serves aspiring students in two key areas to help reach that goal, providing **money** and **knowledge**. These supports are essential in helping to level the playing field for low-income students and those whose families lack experience with college. Without these students' success, the state cannot reach its goals.

ISAC's Outreach efforts include four primary components:

-  Direct assistance to students and families in navigating the college-going process, offered statewide by the Illinois Student Assistance Corps (ISACorps)
-  Free online resources, information and tools to help students and families make informed college and financial aid decisions.
-  Professional development for financial aid administrators, teachers and high school guidance counselors on college access and financial aid
-  Partnerships with community organizations, non-profits, sister agencies and others to advance college access and affordability

The ISACorps: By the Numbers—FY 2016

- Over **4,300** Outreach events, including almost **800** FAFSA® Completion Workshops and over **750** financial aid presentations
- Almost **130,000** participants (students, parents, and others) in **416** Illinois cities and towns

ISAC also offers a fully staffed **Call Center** to assist students and families with questions about college and financial aid, student loans and repayment.

To find your local ISACorps member, visit [http://www.isac.org/isacorps.about ISAC](http://www.isac.org/isacorps.about%20ISAC)

Direct Assistance to 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.



ISACorps members focus their efforts on working with students who are low-income and those whose families have no prior college-going experience. As a way to equitably serve the entire state, each ISACorps member is assigned to a community college district in Illinois, although they are not affiliated with the community college system. ISACorps members have a goal to spend approximately half of their time working in the highest need high schools in their district and half of their time in other community-based organizations and locations. In order 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.

“ In my three years, I have absolutely loved the “buzz” that epitomizes our college and career center each Thursday as a member of your team has worked diligently to support students in all facets of the transition process. I have observed each ISAC rep meet our students with encouragement, a friendly demeanor, and knowledge. Your reps have serviced families at after school events and the service has truly complimented our efforts. ”

Chris Columbaro
Associate Principal for Curriculum and Instruction
Dundee-Crown High School
Carpentersville, IL

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

“ The Corps 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

Professional Development

ISAC offers a host of professional development opportunities for financial aid administrators, high school guidance 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.

Partnerships

ISAC Data Sharing Initiative Helps Improve FAFSA Completion

Among ISAC's proudest accomplishments is the success of its efforts to increase the number of students who file the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA®). The application is the key to federal, state, and often institutional aid—which means that for some students, it can also be the key to attending college. Delivered in partnership with high schools, colleges, and community organizations, ISAC's FAFSA completion efforts include partner training on the FAFSA and how to file it; direct assistance to students and parents in filing the FAFSA; and a data-sharing program that allows schools to focus their limited resources on helping students who have not yet filed the application.

This package of ISAC initiatives 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. Evidence suggests that the programs have also improved first-year college access: among students **of the Chicago Public Schools (CPS), which was first to partner with ISAC on this initiative**, notably more graduates are attempting college in the fall after high school. **With help from ISAC's Outreach and Research divisions, FAFSA filing rates in CPS rose from just 45% of seniors in June 2006 to over 77% in June 2015—and that has translated into about 1,000 more CPS graduates attempting college.**

Professional Development: By the Numbers—FY 2016

- ISAC conducted **58** professional development sessions which were attended by more than **1,000** professionals.

FAFSA Data-Sharing: By the Numbers—as of February 24, 2017

- **463** high schools are signed up to participate in the program.

ISAC Student Portal: College Planning Made Easy

First launched in late 2014, ISAC has now redesigned its Student Portal, which 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 College Greenlight™ for college and scholarship search; SALT™ to help students learn about money management, student loans and repayment; 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 awards. A Summer Internship/Job Board was recently added, with over 3000 regularly updated job postings, and a new Student Portal Blog offers quick tips and important information on college planning and financial aid. Students can also use the Portal to find their local ISACorps member for one-on-one assistance, and to find college access and financial aid events in their area.



ISAC College Q&A: College Planning Answers On-the-Go



ISAC College Q&A is a new, free text messaging service that allows students to text questions to ISAC college counselors about the college going and financial aid process and get answers sent directly to their phones. With almost 5000 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.

College Changes Everything Promotes Awareness/Builds Partnerships

COLLEGE CHANGES EVERYTHING

Originally funded as part of a Lumina Grant, ISAC launched College Changes Everything® as a college access movement focused on developing a coalition of partners both within the state and nationally 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.

College Changes Everything® Month 2016

In October, 2017, ISAC launched and the Governor proclaimed October "College Changes Everything Month" (CCE Month), to address the change to "early FAFSA"* and assist students who will be completing college applications at the same time they are filing financial aid forms.

CCE Month by the numbers:

During the month of October, 2016 alone, ISAC and its partners statewide conducted

- **1300** Outreach events attended by **42,000** students and families, including
- over **800** FAFSA completion workshops and financial aid presentations
- **250** college application workshops in **109** high schools in **95** cities and towns as part of the American College Application Campaign

**Beginning in fall 2017, the 2017-18 FAFSA became available October 1, 2017, instead of on January 1, 2018.*

www.isac.org

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