



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March 3, 2022

Contact: Lynne Baker, ISAC
847.831.8024
Lynne.Baker@illinois.gov

PRITZKER ADMINISTRATION RECOGNIZES ILLINOIS HIGH SCHOOLS HONORED FOR CLASS OF 2021 FINANCIAL AID APPLICATION COMPLETIONS
Joins Winter/Spring Rock the FAFSA Campaign to Increase Statewide Financial Aid Applications

CHICAGO – Governor Pritzker joined the [Illinois Student Assistance Commission \(ISAC\)](#) in commending high schools across the state that received a [Recognition of Excellence designation](#) for their efforts in supporting students and families through the financial aid process. More than 400 high schools will receive a *Recognition of Excellence* banner for Class of 2021 financial aid application completions. The schools’ support for their students helped put Illinois in the #6 spot nationally for high school senior FAFSA completion rates last year. While filing was down more than 4 percent nationally, Illinois filing was up by almost 4 percent— ranking first among only three states that actually *increased* their high school FAFSA completion rates year over year.

“I’m proud that Illinois is one of the top states in the nation for FAFSA completion – an achievement that wouldn’t be possible without leaders in our school communities advocating for their students,” **said Governor JB Pritzker**. “I offer my congratulations to all our Recognition of Excellence schools. Completing the FAFSA gives students a full picture of what doors they have to continue their education, and my administration is committed to ensuring our graduating seniors and lifelong learners have access to the support they need to build a good career and a good life.”

Through ISAC’s Financial Aid Application Completion Initiative, the Commission is able to share data with local school districts on a weekly basis to identify students who have not filed a financial aid application (the [Free Application for Federal Student Aid—FAFSA](#)—or, if eligible, the [Alternative Application for Illinois Financial Aid](#)). This information is used to help reach students who might otherwise not complete an application. This data-matching initiative has been so successful that it was used as a model by the U.S. Department of Education for a nationwide program for schools around the country.

“Spending 30 minutes to complete the FAFSA, or for those who are not eligible for federal student aid, the Alternative Application for Illinois Financial Aid, can yield students potentially thousands of dollars in financial aid,” **said Eric Zarnikow, Executive Director of ISAC.** “A student who understands what they might receive in student aid can discover options for their future they might not have thought possible. Kudos to our Class of 2021 Recognition of Excellence honoree schools for their support for their students on the path to a brighter future. ISAC looks forward to continuing to support all our high schools and students with their educational planning and financial aid efforts.”

[Current \(Class of 2022\) financial aid application completion rates](#) for all public high schools and for private schools that elect to participate in the program are updated weekly on the ISAC website. ISAC is currently highlighting high schools each week on its website and on social media that reach designated Platinum, Gold, Silver and Bronze levels for financial aid application completion.

The Governor is also supporting this year’s *Rock the FAFSA* campaign to increase awareness of the importance of completing a financial aid application. While Illinois continues to be among the top states in the nation for FAFSA completion, many students still do not take advantage of the benefits of this free application that determines eligibility for federal, most state, and some institutional aid.

The Illinois FAFSA Mandate, which makes completion of a financial aid application part of an expectation for public high school graduation, recognizes that completing a financial aid application provides a student with critical information about their educational options. A student who is more aware of resources available to help them afford education or training after high school may decide to attempt college when they might not otherwise have done so.

During the winter/spring 2022 *Rock the FAFSA* campaign, high schools are encouraged to communicate to students and families the value of completing a financial aid form, and to host one or more financial aid application completion workshops at school. ISAC can support financial aid application completion workshops in schools or virtually and can also provide learning materials if a school would like to host its own workshop. Schools can request a workshop through ISAC by completing an [Outreach Request](#) and can use the [Rock the FAFSA toolkit](#) to get the word out to students and families.

As always, local ISACorps members--ISAC’s team of near peer mentors trained to support students and families with college planning and financial aid--are also available statewide to provide free one-on-one assistance for students and families in completing their financial aid application, studentportal.isac.org/isacorps.

For more information on the FAFSA Completion Initiative, including Class of 2022 financial aid application completion tracking, a list of 2021 Recognition of Excellence Honorees, and *Rock the FAFSA* information, visit <https://www.isac.org/home/fafsa/>.

About ISAC

The mission of the Illinois Student Assistance Commission (ISAC) is to provide Illinois students with information and assistance to help make education beyond high school accessible and affordable. ISAC provides comprehensive, objective, and timely information about 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 grant and scholarship programs ISAC administers, ISAC can help students make those choices a reality. Find us at isac.org and follow us on Facebook @ILStudentAssistance, Twitter and Instagram @ISACfinaid and on YouTube.

###