ISAC
Illinois Student Assistance Commission

education matters illinois

2026 Education Matters Campaign Tool Kit

Tips and Resources for Counselors and Mentors Hosting College Application and Financial Aid Application Completion Workshops

Table of Contents

Introduction 4

Recommendations and Requirements for Participating Schools/Organizations 5

Student Preparation 9

Volunteer Coordination 12

The Day of The Event(s) 15

Making the Campaign Special 17

Basic Timeline With Checklist 19

Sample Parent Communication - College Applications 22

Sample Parent Communication - Financial Aid Application Workshop 23

Sample Volunteer Recruitment Letter - College Applications 24

Sample Volunteer Recruitment Letter - Financial Aid Application Workshop 25

Sample Media Communication 26

Sample Student Preparation Checklist 27

Optional Activities 28

Introduction

The Illinois Student Assistance Commission (ISAC) is pleased to sponsor the Education Matters Campaign. ISAC can provide support through resource materials and the ISACorps members.

Materials are available for ordering or download on the ISAC website by going to the Order ISAC Materials page. The ISACorps are available for support in-person, via phone and online for questions and for presentations. Planning, scheduling, marketing, and implementing any or all the suggestions in this guide are the responsibility of the host school or organization.

We hope that you will find the information contained in this guide useful as you implement a program in your school or organization.

Some additional websites that may be helpful include:

www.studentaid.gov

www.appily.com/ISAC

Last updated: October 15th, 2026

Recommendations and Requirements for Participating Schools/Organizations

1. **Identify a site coordinator.**

   Every school or organization participating in the Education Matters Campaign must identify a site coordinator. This can be a counselor, advisor, coach, or other professional who will be responsible for planning and implementing the event. It is also recommended that you designate a back-up coordinator.

2. **Host <u>both</u> a College Application and Financial Aid Application Completion Workshop.**

   Every school or organization participating in the Education Matters Campaign must host a college application workshop and financial aid application completion workshop between Labor Day and Thanksgiving. It is recommended that partnering schools and organizations conduct college application events during school hours, to create and promote a college-going culture at the institution and amongst the students. In addition, we recommend that the financial aid application completion workshop, where a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) or an Alternative Application for Illinois Financial Aid (Alt App), is held in the evening or weekends, considering that these are usually times at which parents are available and most high school students will need to provide parental information.

3. **Build a school/organization-wide team.**

   Recruit counselors, teachers, and other staff to help plan and implement the events. Forming a team will help share the work and help ensure the entire school or organization supports the events. Students could also be identified as volunteers to help and earn community service hours.

4. **Encourage school/organization-wide involvement.**

   Get the entire school or organization excited about the events and completing the admissions and financial aid processes. Activities, such as holding daily trivia contests, wearing college

shirts, sharing college stories, or decorating classroom doors with college logos, photos and other mementos are all great ways to get students excited about college.

5. **Advertise.**

   Use the following to publicize your event and alert students and parents of the date, time, and location.

   - Social Media
   - Banners
   - Posters
   - Stickers/Buttons that read “I helped” or “I applied to college” or “I completed the FAFSA”
   - College pennants
   - Volunteers

6. **Reserve your event location.**

   Make sure the location you’ll use for an event has good cell phone reception and is equipped with plenty of networked computers, well in advance of the event. Typical event locations include the school or organization’s media center, library, computer labs and classrooms with computers.

   - Ensure that enough computers are available to allow adequate time for each student to participate. Typically, each student requires 45 minutes to an hour to complete a college application. To complete the FAFSA or Alternative Application for Illinois Financial Aid students and parents may take approximately 30 to 45 minutes, depending on the family situation.
   - Work with technology support staff to ensure that firewalls or other access restrictions will not prevent students from accessing online applications the day of the event.
   - Consider reserving computer lab space for multiple days, depending on the size of the senior class.
   - Notify other staff in the building about the event.

7. **Hold the college application event during the day.**

   Holding the event during the day, if possible, will ensure the participation of students who may not typically attend an evening event or who may not typically submit an application for college admission in a timely fashion.

8. **Hold the financial aid application completion workshop during the evening.**

   Holding the workshop during the evening or weekend, if possible, will ensure the participation of parents who may not typically attend a day event due to conflicts with their work schedule. Considering that most high school students will need to provide parental information, it is important to encourage parents to attend.

9. **Promote the event early and often.**

   Publicize it through e-mails, letters, conversations, school announcements, newsletters, posters, press releases and social media such as Facebook, Twitter/X, and Instagram. Make sure parents are aware of the Education Matters Campaign as well. As the event approaches, consider announcing the event on the school sign. Also, be sure to include the event in the school or organization's calendar. Remember to invite local media to attend the event. Please see the sample messages for students, parents, and the media (pages 15, 16, & 19).

10. **Recruit volunteers.**

    Ask community leaders from the local area to help with the event. Here are some examples of volunteers:

    - Local colleges and universities, including representatives from the admissions and financial aid offices
    - Chambers of commerce
    - Local library staff
    - Parents/PTA
    - Board of Education staff and school board members
    - After-school programs
    - Local professional associations

11. **Provide ALL high school seniors access to the event.**

    Develop a schedule for your event (see sample schedule on pages 11-12) which will provide all seniors with the opportunity to participate (e.g., dedicated time during specific class times). Requiring that seniors sign up beforehand is strongly discouraged as often those who could benefit the most from the event will not sign up.

12. Allow for adequate student preparation prior to the event.

Help students make the most of their college application experience. Meet with seniors early in the school year to allow adequate time for students to research the various colleges in which they may be interested in attending.

The ISACorps can also provide workshops and presentations to help students prepare their college applications and get them ready to complete their financial aid application. The ISACorps can provide presentations such as College 101, which introduces students to the basics of searching and applying to colleges, as well as essay-writing assistance workshops. At the same time, the "Financial Aid Process" presentation helps parents and students alike understand financial aid terms and concepts, while discussing some of the documents needed to fill out a FAFSA or Alternative Application.

To complete an outreach request form, or to see a listing of events being offered, please visit studentportal.isac.org/events.

13. Encourage students to attend one of the Illinois Regional College Fairs in your area.

You may even consider making arrangements for them to attend a college fair if your school or organization does not already do this. This will be a great opportunity for them to gather information and do some preliminary research.

For more information, visit the Illinois Association for College Admission Counseling (IACAC) website at www.iacac.org/college-fairs.

Student Preparation

Encourage students to complete college and financial aid research prior to the workshop.

To help ensure students are able to make the most of their Education Matters Campaign experience, students should arrive to the event with a list of colleges that they have determined would be a good match for them and to which they would like to apply and include on their FAFSA or Alternative Application.

If your school has an advisory program, advisors should incorporate college research into their interactions with seniors. Additionally, consider developing a worksheet or online activity to help guide students through the process of researching colleges. College characteristics students should be encouraged to consider include:

- Location
- Size
- Available majors
- Available financial aid, as well as the average net price
- Admissions requirements
- Characteristics of incoming freshman class
- Graduation rate

To help students and parents understand the financial aid process, we encourage the site coordinator to provide a list of the information needed to complete their financial aid application. Providing students and/or parents with a physical checklist would be beneficial. You can order postcards with the needed information from our website at no cost at www.isac.org/ordermaterials. This postcard details all the documents the family needs for the day of the workshop. Encourage families to gather all needed information prior to workshop.

Encourage families to gather all needed information prior to workshop.
The information students should be encouraged to gather to complete an application for college admission, as well as the FAFSA, includes the following:

College Application Workshop

- Student's full legal name
- Test information such as SAT/ACT test dates and scores, if college is not test optional
- College essays and/or personal statements (even if these are not "required" they are almost always recommended)
- Fee waivers, if applicable

Financial Aid Application Workshop

- Studentaid.gov account for student and parent(s)
- Student's Alien Registration Number, if US permanent resident
- Parent(s) email address
- Most recent federal income tax returns and/or W-2 forms
- Bank statements and records of investments

Encourage teachers to incorporate college essay assignments into their classes.
This will help ensure that students applying to colleges requiring essays will be prepared. Students applying to colleges requiring an essay and/or personal statement should be encouraged to save their essay to a thumb/flash drive or in the cloud so they can quickly and easily copy and paste it into the admission application during the event.

Encourage students to ask teachers and staff about their college experience.
This will help students get a personal perspective about the colleges the teachers and other personnel attended. This will also help create a buzz about the program. Teachers and staff can place "Ask me" signs on their door to help engage students and to drive attendance at the event.

Encourage students to become familiar with application fee payment options prior to the event.
If the colleges to which they plan to apply require an application fee:

- Students should be encouraged to meet with their high school counselor to determine if they are eligible for a fee waiver. Students should investigate if the colleges they are interested in potentially attending accept fee waivers and how to go about providing that waiver with their application.

- Students not eligible for a fee waiver should conduct research to determine the amount of the required application fee for the college to which they plan to apply.
    - For colleges that require payment information to be entered online to complete the application submission process, students should be made aware of the following options which may be available to them:
        - Save the application and submit it at home later when they have access to a payment method
        - Purchase a prepaid credit card in the amount of the application fee so credit card information can be entered into the online application
        - Students should bring the appropriate payment information to the event

Provide students with information about the Common Application.

Make sure they know if a college they are considering accepts or requires the Common Application instead of a school-specific application. If students plan to complete the Common Application during the event, they will need to do their research and prepare for it ahead of time because it is typically longer and more detailed than other applications. For more information, visit www.commonapp.org.

Let ISAC Help.

The ISACorps works one-on-one with students to help them search and apply to colleges. We can help your students by setting up office hours at your school or organization to help students apply to reach and match colleges. If you would like to the ISACorps to work with your students on planning and applying to college, please contact your local ISACorps member at studentportal.isac.org/ISACorps.

Volunteer Coordination

Never underestimate students' need for help!
Exit surveys of similar events have shown overwhelmingly that students considered the event a major factor in their decision to apply to college. Volunteer support is crucial to holding an event that will positively impact the students.

Use a volunteer registration form.
Consider using a volunteer registration form to help keep track and to communicate with volunteers. Alternatively, you may want to set up an online volunteer registration form. Many free online survey tools are available to help with this task. It can be helpful to collect the following information on the volunteer registration form:

- Volunteer name
- E-mail
- Phone number(s)
- Affiliation (name of postsecondary institution, company, nonprofit or government agency)
- Area of expertise
- Hours they are available
- How they heard about the Education Matters Campaign

As a partner, ISAC offers free webinars and in-person trainings that volunteers in your area can attend to become familiar with some of the terms and concepts needed to help students through college and financial aid applications.

Follow your school or organization's security policy.
Once you have received your volunteer sign-ups, remember to allow for enough time to conduct any necessary background checks, if required by your school or organization's policy.

Utilize students and other leadership in the school as volunteers for the event.

- **School/Organization Planning Team:** Student ambassadors from all grade levels can be used to share ideas, distribute materials, decorate the school, and promote the Education Matters Campaign event through Facebook, Twitter/X, Instagram, and other forms of social media.
- **School/Organization leadership:** Involve administrators, counselors, and personnel, and school board and PTA members in the planning and logistical details.
- **Peer mentors:** Consider using seniors who have already completed the college application process to help other students during the event
- **ISACorps:** Connect with your local ISACorps members, who are experienced helping students apply for college and financial aid, and that can bring extra resources. To identify your local ISACorps member(s), enter your zip code at www.isac.org/ISACorps

Enlist teachers.

They can volunteer during a planning period and/or dedicated class time for college-related activities, such as writing college essays, researching earning potential of college graduates, and helping student research colleges online.

Identify contacts in the community.

Civic groups and community organizations may be interested in helping make the event a success by donating time and/or resources. Be sure to use any press releases or publicity to promote the need for volunteers.

Stress that the Education Matters Campaign events are NOT a recruitment opportunity for colleges.

Representatives from local colleges and universities are highly encouraged to attend, but they should not use the event as a recruiting tool. Volunteers should help students during the application process and should not simply communicate information solely about their respective colleges.

Have plenty of volunteers.

It is recommended that you plan to have one volunteer for every four or five computers in use during the event. Extras may be needed to assist with sign-ins, printers, etc., and to provide the opportunity for volunteers to take breaks.

Communicate with volunteers early and often.

Create a system such as an e-mail distribution list or regular updates via text message. Be sure to contact all

volunteers ahead of time to provide them with logistics, such as parking, when to arrive, where the event will be held, options for meals, etc.

Assign each volunteer a specific responsibility.
Consider collecting areas of expertise or interest during volunteer registration process to facilitate the volunteer assignment (e.g., greeting students, helping students complete their application, answering financial aid questions, etc.).

Provide volunteers with a printed schedule.
Include meal and break times when no students will be in the lab/media center/classroom, or in a separate location. The best way to keep volunteers happy is to make sure they are well fed.

Follow up with a thank-you letter.
Write to all volunteers who participated, thanking them for their dedication and support in making the event a success. This is a great way to leave volunteers with a positive feeling and to increase the chances they will volunteer to help at another event.

The Day of The Event(s)

Make sure students are prepared.

On the day or days during your Education Matters Campaign event(s) when students will be completing applications, follow the suggestions in the Student Preparation section (pages 6-8) to make sure students arrive with everything they need to apply. You can't remind students what to bring too often.

Welcome volunteers.

- Thank them for their participation
- Inform them of the game plan for the day including:
  - Their assigned location, if multiple locations will be in use during the day
  - Break times
  - Mealtime. If no food will be available, consider providing all volunteers a list or map of local restaurants (providing food, if possible, is a nice way to say "thank you")
  - The location of restrooms

Welcome each group of students and explain the events for the day.

Explain:

- The importance of applying to college/financial aid
- That the goal for the day is for them to complete and submit at least one application for admission and/or complete the FAFSA or Alternative Application.
- That they should feel free to ask a volunteer if they need help while working on their application or if they have any questions about applying to or attending college
- What they should do once they have completed an application
  - Make sure students know how to complete an application either online or by mailing in their documents
- Remind students of what they need to do after applying, such as making sure high school transcripts are sent to the college

Provide proper oversight.
Staff should remain available throughout the event and should not expect volunteers to ensure students stay on task. Remember, the volunteers are there to help students complete the admission and/or financial process, not to discipline students.

Evaluations
Feedback can be provided by students and staff online or by completing a paper survey. Time should be allotted at the end of each workshop for students to complete an evaluation. Survey should ask students to give their opinion of the event to generate quotes to use for and help promote future events.

Making the Campaign Special

Invite educational and community leaders.
Include school board members, district administrators, local and state elected representatives to speak to students before the event about the importance of attending college and to motivate them to participate.

Contact local media (print, television, radio).
Invite them to cover your event. Encourage them to attend with cameras and reporters to fuel student excitement.

Contact local businesses.
They may agree to donate snacks for participating students and/or volunteers or even meals. Finding a local business willing to provide pizza for participating students can be a fun and exciting way to wrap up a month of applying to college! Providing food for participating volunteers is a nice way to say “thank you” for their assistance. Remember, well fed volunteers are happy volunteers.

Give away stuff.
Ask local colleges and universities to consider providing college gear and giveaways for students participating in the event. You can have a drawing of student participants or make rewards for students who apply to the most colleges, have the best essays, or some other criteria.

Set goals.
Consider setting a goal for the number of applications submitted. This goal can be a huge collective motivator, whether that is college applications and/or FAFSA completion.

Hold a senior assembly or pep rally.
Having a rally to celebrate applying to college helps to build excitement and communicate expectations

for the event. Throw a party at the end of the month to celebrate academic achievements and college aspirations.

Dress the part!

Make “casual” meaningful by encouraging faculty and staff to wear clothing from their colleges in the days and weeks leading up to your Education Matters Campaign event(s). Students should be encouraged to ask all faculty and staff about their college experiences.

Follow up.

Check with students after the event(s) to be sure they take the necessary steps to complete the application process:

- If they were unable to submit their application during the event, be sure they submit it.
- Be sure all students send the appropriate supporting documentation to the college:
    - Fee waiver forms
    - High school transcripts
    - Official test scores

Timeline With Checklist

Time Before Event	List of Tasks/Activities	Checklist
6 weeks prior	Print and review this guide.	☐
	Establish a school/organization team to assist with your Education Matters Campaign planning and preparation.	☐
	Add your Education Matters Campaign event to your school/organization's and district's master calendar.	☐
	Reserve the computer facilities for your event.	☐
	Begin recruiting volunteers for your event.	☐
	Arrange a schedule for your event, including which groups or classes of students will participate.	☐
	Encourage students to begin some college research and to think about what is important to them as a prospective student.	☐
	Encourage teachers to begin connecting lessons (and advisory interactions, if applicable) to your Education Matters Campaign workshop(s).	☐
	Inform parents of your workshops and let them know that their students may need help to prepare. Use or modify our sample Parent Communication (found in the Education Matters Campaign Toolkit). Send parents notifications of documents needed to complete the FAFSA/ Alternative Application.	☐

Timeline With Checklist

5 weeks prior	Confirm computer facilities are reserved and that your technology coordinator is available for troubleshooting on the day(s) of the event.	☐
	Find partners and/or donors to provide meals and snacks for volunteers.	☐
	Provide eligible students with application fee waiver information.	☐
	Confirm that your information is listed correctly on the online ISAC Outreach Activities Calendar.	☐
	Continue recruiting volunteers.	☐
4 weeks prior	Create a schedule for your volunteer coverage, taking into account the availability of your volunteers, as well as some breaks and time for meals.	☐
	Recruit additional volunteers to fill any gaps in your volunteer coverage schedule if needed.	☐
3 weeks prior	Customize a Volunteer Confirmation Communication. Send it to your volunteers to give them the details of your event as well as when and where to meet.	☐
	Remind teachers, counselors, and administrators of the Education Matters Campaign schedule and ensure all seniors will have the opportunity to participate.	☐
2 weeks prior	Be sure you have received any ISAC promotional materials you may need.	☐

Timeline With Checklist

1 week prior	Make an announcement to remind students that the event is next week, and remind them that they will need to: 1) Know where they want to apply. 2) Have a plan for application fees (students w/o payment info may save completed applications and submit from home). 3) Write required essays or personal statements and bring to the event. 4) Gather the information needed to complete applications.	☐
	Send a reminder email to your volunteers confirming their role, the time they have committed to volunteering, as well as where volunteers can park.	☐
Day(s) of your Education Matters Campaign Event(s)!	Welcome volunteers and thank them for their support! Make sure they know what their role is for the day, and provide them with a schedule of the day, as well as meal information and a map of the building. Let them know where they can secure personal items.	☐
	Welcome each group of seniors to your Education Matters Campaign event. Remind them that their goal is to apply for admission and/or complete the FAFSA/ Alternative Application, and that there are volunteers available to help them.	☐
	ENJOY YOUR EVENT!	☐
Week after your event(s)	Designate one or two people to follow up with any students that could not complete their applications and ensure they either have completed or are on track to finish their college applications. Make sure to participate in the FAFSA Completion Initiative through ISAC to maintain track of those students who still need to fill out, or make changes, to the application.	☐

Sample Parent Communication

College Applications

Dear Parent(s)/Guardian(s),

<INSERT THE NAME OF YOUR SCHOOL/ORGANIZATION> is excited to announce that our school will hold an Education Matters Campaign event. Our event will be held on <INSERT YOUR EVENT DATE AND TIMES HERE>.

During our Education Matters Campaign event, all our seniors will be given the opportunity to apply to college in a group setting with school staff and professional volunteers. Volunteers, many of whom will be staff from local colleges, businesses, and community organizations, will be on hand to assist students as they work on their application(s) for college admission.

In preparation for the event, your student will be asked to complete college research to ensure they have at least one college in mind that will be a good match for them. In addition, students will be asked to gather the information that they will need to complete an application for college admission and may need your assistance. This information may include the following:

- Personal essay
- Fee waiver or application fee

Students may either submit their application(s) during the event or save it to submit at a later time. On the day of our event, we will encourage students who do not have access to a payment method at school to save their application to submit at home, if possible. Students who may qualify for an application fee waiver, such as the College Board or ACT fee waiver, should discuss this option with their counselor prior to the event to obtain the necessary paperwork.

If you should have any questions regarding this exciting program, please do not hesitate to contact <INSERT COUNSELOR OR SITE COORDINATOR NAME HERE> at <INSERT COUNSELOR OR SITE COORDINATOR EMAIL/ PHONE NUMBER HERE>. Thank you in advance for your support of this initiative to make college a part of your student's future!

Sincerely,

<INSERT SCHOOL COUNSELOR OR SITE COORDINATOR NAME HERE>

Sample Parent Communication

Financial Aid Application Workshop

Dear Parent(s)/Guardian(s),

<INSERT THE NAME OF YOUR SCHOOL/ORGANIZATION> is excited to announce that our school will hold an Education Matters Campaign event. Our event will be held on <INSERT YOUR EVENT DATE AND TIMES HERE>.

During our Education Matters Campaign event, all our seniors will be given the opportunity to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) or the Alternative Application for Illinois Financial Aid (Alternative Application), this is the application students must complete to be considered for federal and/or state financial aid. Students will receive assistance from staff and professional volunteers. Volunteers, many of whom will be staff from local colleges, businesses, and community organizations, will be on hand to assist students as they work on their financial aid application.

In preparation for the event, your student will be asked to gather the information that they will need to complete the FAFSA or Alternative Application and will need your assistance. Parents should attend, if possible, since most students are required to provide parental information in addition to their own information. This information may include the following:

Student Information

1. Social Security Number
2. Date of birth
3. Records of Income
4. Alien registration number, if US permanent resident

Parent(s) Information

1. Email address
2. Records of income
3. such as most recent tax return
4. Bank statements and records of investments
5. Date of most recent change, if any, in marital status

If you should have any questions regarding this exciting program, please do not hesitate to contact [redacted] at [redacted]. Thank you in advance for your support of this initiative to make college a part of your student's future!

Sincerely,

[redacted]

Sample Volunteer Recruitment Letter

College Applications

Dear <Insert Potential Volunteer Name Here>,

<Insert the Name of Your School or Organization Here> is excited to announce that we are participating in the 2026 Illinois Education Matters Campaign. The Education Matters Campaign focuses on providing Illinois high school seniors the opportunity to apply to college and complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) or Alternative Application for Illinois Financial Aid (Alternative Application) while receiving assistance from college and community volunteers.

<Insert the Name of Your School or Organization Here> will be hosting a college completion event on <Insert the Day of Your Education Matters Campaign Event Here> from <Insert Times Here>. In order to make this event a success, we need your help! Volunteers are needed to help our students navigate the college application process with the goal of completing at least one application for admission during the event. This exciting and valuable event will provide you with the opportunity to impact the lives of our students in a meaningful way by:

- Guiding seniors through the college application process
- Answering any questions students have as they work on their application(s)
- Sharing college experiences
- Inspiring seniors to bigger and better things

Please strongly consider this chance to assist our school in this important initiative. This event is not a college recruitment event but is an excellent opportunity for you to assist Illinois high school students as they embark on their college journey. If you are interested in volunteering to help during our event, please contact me directly using my contact information provided below.

Thank you and I hope to see you on <Insert Date of Your Event Here>!

Sincerely,

<Insert Your Name and Contact Information>

Sample Volunteer Recruitment Letter

Financial Aid Application Workshop

Dear <Insert Potential Volunteer Name Here>,

<Insert the Name of Your School or Organization Here> is excited to announce that we are participating in the 2026 Education Matters Campaign. The Education Matters Campaign is focused on providing Illinois high school seniors with the opportunity to apply to college and complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) or Alternative Application for Illinois Financial Aid (Alternative Application) while receiving assistance from college and community volunteers.
<Insert the Name of Your School or Organization Here> will be hosting a financial aid application completion workshop on <Insert the Day of Your Education matters Campaign Event Here> from <Insert Times Here>. In order to make this event a success, we need your help! Volunteers are needed to help our students navigate the FAFSA or Alternative Application. This exciting and valuable event will provide you with the opportunity to impact the lives of our students in a meaningful way by:

- Guiding seniors through the FAFSA or Alternative Application
- Answering any questions students have as they work on their application
- Sharing college experiences relating to financial aid (scholarships, work-study, etc.)

Please strongly consider this chance to assist our school in this important initiative. This event is not a college recruitment event but is an excellent opportunity for you to assist Illinois high school students as they embark on their college journey. If you are interested in volunteering to help during our event, please contact me directly using my contact information provided below.

Thank you and I hope to see you on <Insert Date of Your Event Here>!

Sincerely,

<Insert Your Name and Contact Information>

Sample Media Communication

<INSERT YOUR HIGH SCHOOL NAME> to hold Illinois Education Matters® Campaign event.

<INSERT CITY, DATE HERE> -- <INSERT YOUR HIGH SCHOOL NAME> is excited to announce that it has been selected to participate in the 2026 Education Matters Campaign, an annual event sponsored by the <INSERT YOUR HIGH SCHOOL NAME> and the Illinois Student Assistance Commission (ISAC).

<INSERT NAME OF YOUR HIGH SCHOOL>'s event will be held on <INSERT YOUR HIGH SCHOOL EVENT DATE>. During the Education Matters Campaign event, seniors will receive hands-on assistance from volunteers, many of whom are from local colleges and universities, businesses, and community organizations, as they navigate the college application and financial aid processes. Assistance will also be provided by ISAC through the ISACorps, a group of recent college graduates trained in assisting students with planning, applying, and paying for college. The goal for this campaign is for each student to successfully complete at least one college admission application and complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) or Alternative Application for Illinois Financial Aid.

Additional information about the Illinois Education Matters Campaign program can be found online at http://www.collegechangeseverything.org/campaign.

For more information about <INSERT NAME OF YOUR HIGH SCHOOL>'s event, please contact <INSERT SITE COORDINATOR NAME> at <INSERT SITE COORDINATOR TELEPHONE NUMBER/EMAIL ADDRESS>.

Sample Student Preparation Checklist

Student *Education Matters* Campaign Checklist

Student Preparation Checklist		
Explore Postsecondary Schools	Check out colleges and universities you are interested in attending and make a list of schools to which you would like to apply.	☐
Find the Application Deadlines	While you are researching colleges, find out what deadlines, if any, campuses have for admissions and financial aid.	☐
Identify Application Fee(s)	Many colleges require an application fee when you submit an online application.	☐
Admissions Essays	Many colleges require one or more essays in a college application. Bring your essay(s) with you preloaded on a disc or flash/jump drive or have access to the Cloud so you can copy and paste into your online application(s).	☐
Locate Your Social Security Card	You are required to provide your Social Security Number when creating a StudentAid.gov account to complete your Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). Locate your Social Security Card and make sure you know your Social Security Number.	☐

ISAC
Illinois Student Assistance Commission

Optional Activities

Illinois Education Matters Campaign optional activities are a fun way to get your students excited about applying to college. The activities listed below are a way to generate excitement in your school and help foster a college-going culture. We hope you consider one or more of the following optional activities or make up your own!

- **Host an Alumni Panel** – Invite recent graduates of your high school who are currently enrolled in college to share their experiences with selecting a college, completing their applications, and their freshman year experience. Consider inviting multiple students to participate in a panel discussion.

- **Host a Financial Aid Night** – Invite an ISACorps member to prepare students and parents for the FAFSA/Alternative Application prior to your Education Matters Campaign event. This will allow students and parents to understand what information they will need to provide while also giving them the opportunity to gather that information in preparation for the financial aid app completion workshop.

- **Host a College Visit** – Invite local colleges to visit your school, and provide general information including the majors offered, their admission requirements, application process, cost of attendance and financial aid options.

- **Incorporate College Essay Writing into Assignments** – Encourage English teachers to incorporate college essay writing as part of the curriculum or as extra credit. This will allow students to complete a sample college essay and receive feedback from their teacher prior to submitting their college applications.

- **College Wallfiti** – Create a wallfiti (like graffiti) by hanging large pieces of bulletin board paper on a wall in your school. Provide markers in multiple colors and encourage students to write their dreams and goals related to attending college. The College Wallfiti can be displayed throughout

the campaign as a way to increase excitement and awareness of the variety of colleges to which students can apply.

- **College Geography -** Put up a map of Illinois or the US and have students indicate with pins or small paper pennants where they have applied. In the spring, change it into a map of where students will be attending college.

- **College Spirit Day –** Encourage faculty and staff to show off their school spirit. During College Spirit Day faculty and staff should wear their college clothing (jerseys, t-shirts, hats, etc.). Ask teachers to take a couple of minutes before or after class to talk about the college they attended and the benefits of college generally. Encourage students to ask questions, particularly of faculty and staff who attended colleges they are considering attending.