



Illinois  
State Board of  
Education

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## Pritzker Administration Joins Statewide Campaign to Increase Awareness Around College Financial Aid Application

**CHICAGO** – The [Illinois State Board of Education \(ISBE\)](#) and the [Illinois Student Assistance Commission \(ISAC\)](#) are collaborating with Governor Pritzker on the new *Rock the FAFSA Illinois* Campaign. Designed to reach students, parents, schools and communities, the campaign is focused on increasing awareness of the importance of completing a financial aid application, and offers free statewide assistance to students and families in completing their applications. High schools are encouraged to host one or more financial aid application completion workshops for their students and families during *Rock the FAFSA Illinois Week*, March 15-19, either virtually through ISAC or on their own.

Schools or community organizations that would like to hold a virtual financial aid completion workshop with ISAC for *Rock the FAFSA Illinois Week* should schedule with ISAC now by emailing [Abel.Montoya@Illinois.gov](mailto:Abel.Montoya@Illinois.gov). If a school would like to host its own financial aid completion workshop, ISAC can provide learning materials. Local ISACorps members are also available to provide free one-on-one virtual assistance for students and families in completing their financial aid application, [studentportal.isac.org/isacorps](http://studentportal.isac.org/isacorps).

“The number one way to create a stronger future for our state is investing in our young people, giving them the tools they need to believe in themselves and the opportunities to make their dreams possible,” said **Governor JB Pritzker**. “Working with the General Assembly, I passed a law to build FAFSA completion into Illinois’ high school graduation requirements so that our graduating seniors have the freedom to choose the pathway that’s best for them with a full understanding of available resources. The Rock the FAFSA Illinois campaign has the potential to make higher education possible for students who might otherwise have assumed the door wasn’t open for them. In this initiative and beyond, my administration is committed to giving our young people robust and affordable access to the post-graduate opportunity of their choosing – whether that’s a four-year or two-year institution, technical or

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vocational training, or direct-to-workforce job – so they can build a good life that works for them right here in Illinois.”

Illinois continues to rank among the top states for completion of the [Free Application for Federal Student Aid, or FAFSA®](#), the form that determines eligibility for federal, most state, and some institutional financial aid. But the vast challenges families have faced as a result of the pandemic have upended post-secondary education plans for some students, and remote learning has made it more difficult to reach many students to ensure they have adequate information about postsecondary options and financial aid. Yet for most students, completing a financial aid form is a critical component on the path to postsecondary education.

This is the first year of the state’s new FAFSA Mandate, which requires Illinois public high school seniors to complete a financial aid application as a prerequisite to receiving a high school diploma. Most students should complete the FAFSA; eligible students who do not qualify for federal student aid can apply for state and/or school-funded assistance through the [Alternative Application for Illinois Financial Aid](#). (A parent, guardian, or the student – if 18 or emancipated – may opt out of the Mandate by filing a nonparticipation form.)

“Most students will be eligible for some form of financial aid, but you can’t get financial aid if you don’t apply,” **said Eric Zarnikow, Executive Director of ISAC**. “Completing a FAFSA or Alternative Application gives a student *options*. Whether you are considering a two- or four-year degree or technical or vocational training—knowing what kind of financial aid you can get for your education will allow you to make more informed choices about school—and may open up options you didn’t think would be possible.”

Making completion of a financial aid application part of an expectation for high school graduation can increase awareness of resources available to help students afford education or training after high school, perhaps helping some decide to attempt college when they might not otherwise have done so.

“We want to do everything we can to empower students with the support and resources they need to follow their dreams,” **said State Superintendent of Education Dr. Carmen I. Ayala**. “For the majority of our students, getting financial aid to pursue secondary education – whether that’s university, community college, or trade school – is crucial to the pursuit of a successful future. The FAFSA helps bring our students’ dreams within reach. I encourage every single high school in Illinois to partner with ISAC to host FAFSA completion events for their graduating students. Our partners at ISAC are very eager to provide their expert assistance so that every student can Rock the FAFSA!”

The FAFSA or Alternative Application takes most students about 30 minutes to complete. ISAC continues to offer one-on-one assistance as well as free virtual statewide financial aid application completion workshops, [studentportal.isac.org/events](http://studentportal.isac.org/events), in addition to workshops it hosts for individual schools and school districts.

"We don't want our students to take themselves out of contention for vital student aid by not even applying. With this "Rock the FAFSA" campaign to encourage students to apply for assistance, we can ensure that our students can make their college decisions aided by all the help they are entitled to," **said Sen. Scott Bennett (D-Champaign).**

"As we approach the end of the school year, I encourage schools to begin working with students on their FAFSA applications if they haven't already. FAFSA plays a huge role in getting students the aid they need to attend college, so it is important to maximize that every student who is even just considering college fills out the application," **said Sen. Cristiana Castro (D-Elgin).**

"Sticker shock" stops some families from even considering college attendance, but there is so much assistance available to make college more affordable. Completing the FAFSA is an essential first step to learning about possible scholarship and grant opportunities available to students," **said Rep. Katie Stuart (D-Edwardsville).** "Many merit-based awards require the completion of the FAFSA for eligibility, even for families who aren't eligible for other financial aid. I was proud to pass legislation to ensure every high school senior understands the importance of the FAFSA, and I encourage students and families to take advantage of the valuable resources offered by ISAC. I look forward to celebrating Rock the FAFSA Week along with Governor Pritzker."

High schools are encouraged to participate in their own friendly FAFSA completion competitions amongst themselves during the *Rock the FAFSA* campaign. Public high schools in Illinois, as well as participating private high schools, can see their weekly FAFSA completion rankings on the ISAC website at <https://www.isac.org/home/fafsa/index.html>. Beginning on March 8, ISAC will be highlighting high schools that reach certain milestones in FAFSA completions.

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