



ISAC  
FAFSA  
SYMPOSIUM

# Engaging Students and Parents in the Financial Aid Process

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# Overview

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- **Setting the stage:** Belvidere High School; District 100; Belvidere, IL
- **Introducing key players:** Who made our efforts possible?
- **Last year's process:** What did we do? What worked? What didn't?
- **This year's action plan:** What are our goals?

***Mission: making an effort to communicate, understand needs,  
and break down barriers***

# BHS, D100, and Belvidere, IL

- **Belvidere, IL: City of Murals**
  - Close to Rockford and WI
  - Population ~25,000
  - Agriculture and business
- **District 100**
  - Serves just until 7,500 students
  - Three high schools, two middle, six elementary
- **Belvidere High School**
  - Enrollment: 1,237 students
    - Hispanic (49.1%); White (43.5%)
    - Low income: 41%
  - Postsecondary plans
    - 71% - 2-yr or 4-yr college
    - 29% - trades, workforce, military



# Our Team

## COUNSELORS

- Individual meetings with each senior
- Small group for first gen college students
- Weekly team meetings
- Organize events for students and families
- Track financial application completion
- Attend trainings, webinars, etc.

## ISAC REP

- Presented and cohosted events
- Held office hours
- Helped track completion rates
- Provided resources to families and students

## LOCAL CC

- Presented and cohosted events
- Bilingual support

## ADMIN

- Approved time and space for events
- Helped market events
- Sent postcards home

## OFFICE PROS

- Managed student passes
- Monthly family newsletter
- Fielded phone calls and emails

## TEACHERS

- Grade level classroom presentations given by counselors
- Ensured students made it to meetings and events

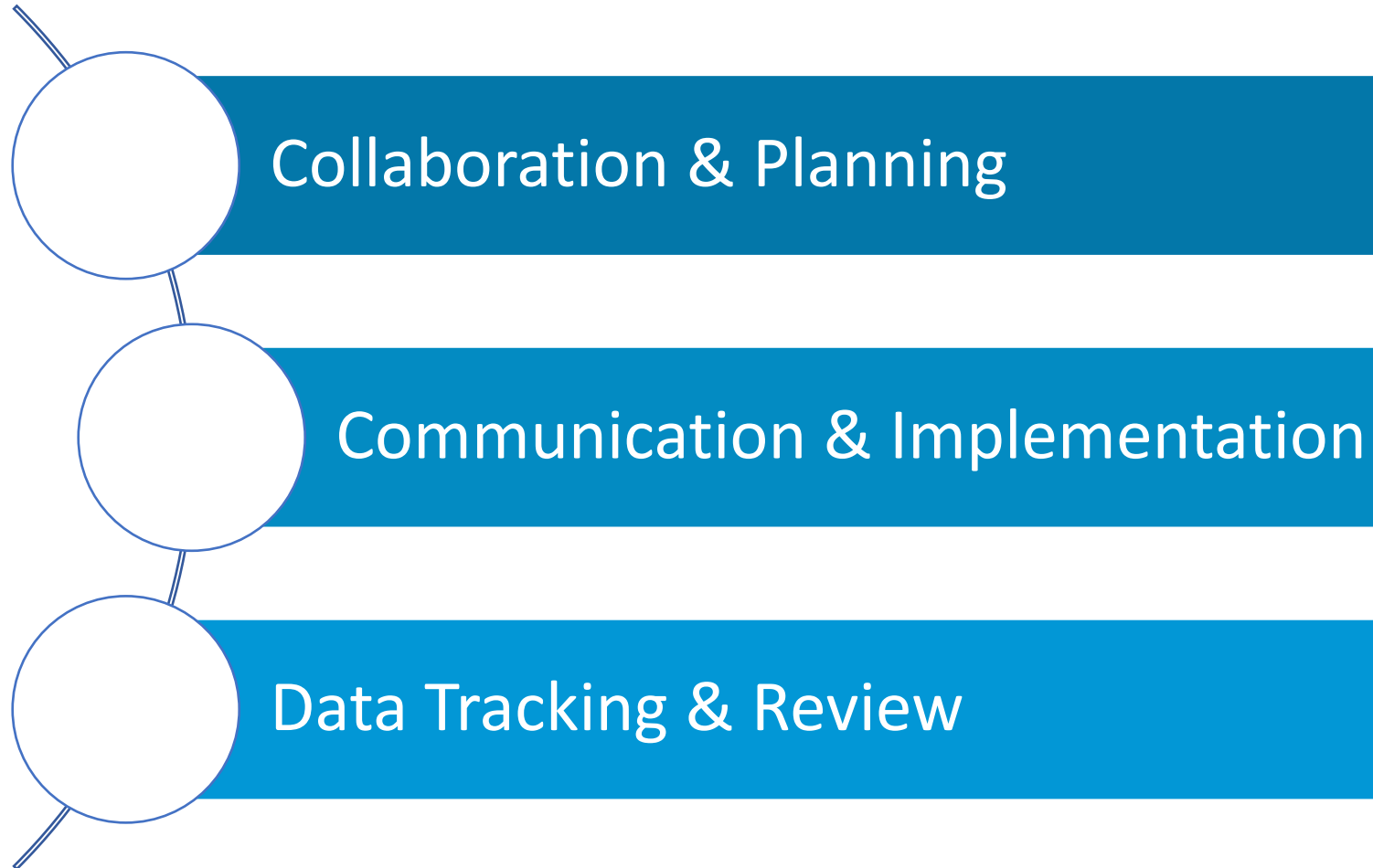
## TECH DEPT

- Tech properly worked for events
- Spare chrome books
- Access to websites

# Year in Review: Efforts & Insights

- What did we do?
- What worked?
- Where is there the most potential for growth?

# What did we do?



# What did we do?

## Collaboration & Planning

- Weekly team meeting
  - Financial aid standing agenda item
- Connected with ISAC
  - Assigned rep
  - School Services support
- Determined curriculum
  - Events, classroom lessons, individual meetings
- Established data tracking methods
  - GAP uploads
  - Completion spreadsheet
  - Google Drive shared folder



# What did we do?

## Collaboration & Planning: 1<sup>st</sup> Semester (Fall 2022)

SEPTEMBER 2022	OCTOBER 2022	NOVEMBER 2022	DECEMBER 2022
Senior grad status letters mailed home	Financial Aid Application Completion Workshops (x2)	ISAC Office Hours (x2)	ISAC Office Hours (x2)
Began individual senior meetings	ISAC Office Hours (x2)	College application workshops (x2)	Scholarship Workshop
Senior College Night	Continued individual senior meetings	Continued Class of 2023 First Gen College Group	Continued individual freshman meetings
Continued Class of 2023 First Gen College Group	Continued Class of 2023 First Gen College Group	Wrapped up individual senior meetings	
		9 <sup>th</sup> Grade Classroom Presentations	
		Began individual freshman meetings	



# What did we do?

## Collaboration & Planning: 2<sup>nd</sup> Semester (Spring 2023)

JANUARY 2023	FEBRUARY 2023	MARCH 2023	APRIL/MAY 2023
Wrapped up individual freshman meetings  ISAC Office Hours (x1)	ISAC Office Hours (x2)  11 <sup>th</sup> Grade Classroom Presentations  Began individual junior meetings	ISAC Office Hours (x2)  Wrapped up individual junior meetings	ISAC Office Hours (1/1)  Individual sophomore meetings  Junior Financial Aid Process Presentation  Targeted intervention for seniors who had not fulfilled FAFSA requirement

# What did we do?

## Communication & Implementation

- Frequent, flexible, and honest communication
  - **Frequent:** systemic process; relevant
  - **Flexible:** in-person meetings; phone calls; emails; social media; parent newsletter; classroom and group lessons; website
  - **Honest:** postsecondary plan; concerns
- Following through on our curriculum and offering resources
  - Bilingual support
  - Extra Chromebooks
  - Team accountability



# What did we do?

## Data Tracking and Review

- **Quantitative**
  - Financial aid application completion spreadsheet
  - Data providing by ISAC
  - Registration form vs. attendance
  - Individual meetings with juniors and seniors
  - First gen college group data
- **Qualitative**
  - Reflection amongst BHS team
  - Feedback from students and families



# What worked?

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## Adding a “Financial Aid” standing agenda item to our weekly counselor meetings

- Review the financial aid application completion data, and create a game plan on how to address gaps
- Review upcoming events
- Discuss our experience/findings with engaging students and families in the financial aid process

# What worked?

## ISAC Office Hours

- Allowed for students and families to get individualized help during school hours
- Sign-up process: Google forms, organizing responses, email communication

Signed up	66
Attended	58
Brought parent/guardian	5
Completed a financial aid app	37

# What worked?

## First Generation College Student Group

- Targeted intervention for students who need the most support in the financial aid process
- Addressed financial aid, but also many other topics

Students in our group	28
Completed a financial aid app	25

# What worked?

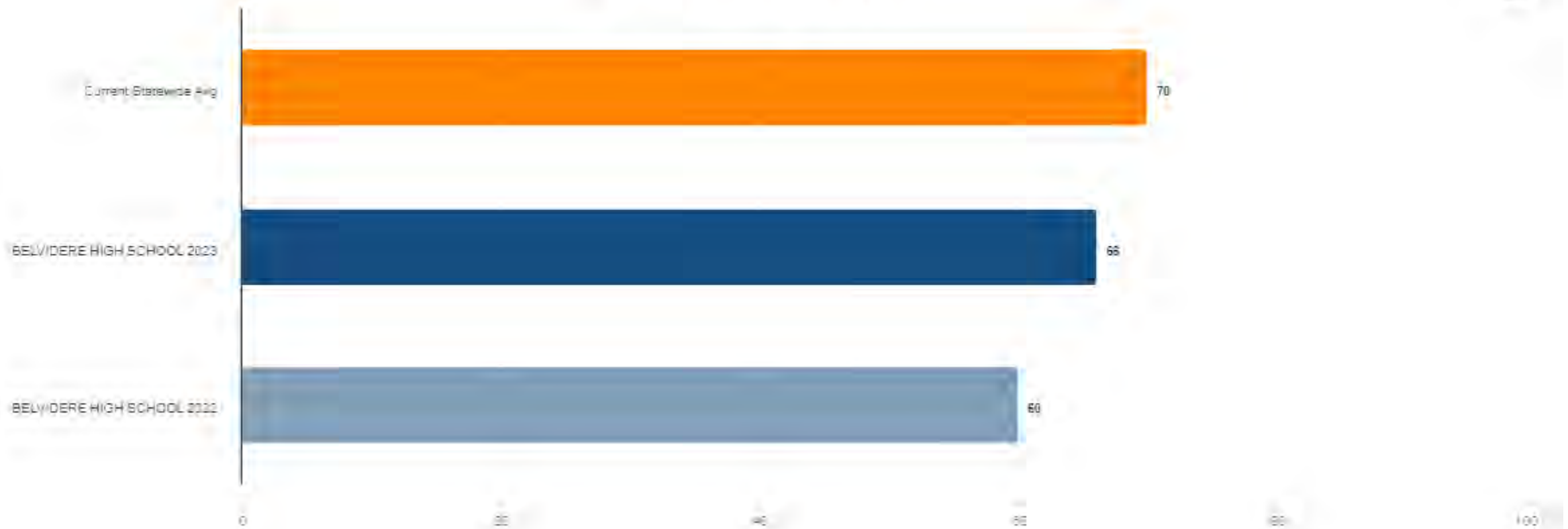
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## Understanding the barriers that some students and families face, and working with them to persevere

- For many families, the financial aid application process can be daunting for many reasons
  - Never went to college/first generation college student
  - Undocumented (student and/or parents)
  - Unique financial situations
- Be sure to create a safe environment, free of judgement
  - RISE Act Application
  - Sensitive information
- Access for Spanish speakers

# Where did we end up?

FAFSA Percentage Completed





# Where can we grow?

- Providing more financial aid literacy opportunities to sophomores
  - Great follow up with 9<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup> grades
- Getting our teachers involved
  - Integrating lessons into curriculum
  - Sharing their stories
- Utilizing our technological/virtual resources better
  - Website



# **Looking Ahead: Action Plan for This Year**

# What are our goals?

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- Trying to take advantage of this year's FAFSA release date
  - Focusing on FSA ID creation early
  - Senior College Night; ISAC office hours
  - Keeping ourselves educated
- Utilizing virtual platforms
  - Canvas
  - SchooLinks
- Taking a closer look at the scholarship side of financial aid
  - Collecting data on the student application process
- Continue what we started last year; continue strengthening the relationships with our community



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# Thank you!

Please feel free to contact me with any questions or collaboration opportunities!

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