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

ILLINOIS STUDENT ASSISTANCE COMMISSION Announces 2025-26 ILLINOIS STATE SCHOLARS More than 16,500 Students from 684 Schools Recognized for their Exceptional Academic Accomplishments

CHICAGO – The Illinois Student Assistance Commission (ISAC), the state's college access and financial aid agency, is pleased to announce the 2025-26* Illinois State Scholars. State scholars are chosen each year based on their ACT or SAT test scores and sixth semester class rank and are honored for their remarkable academic achievements. These talented students rank in approximately the top ten percent of graduates from Illinois high schools. More than 16,500 students from 684 high schools have been designated for this honor.

"On behalf of ISAC, congratulations to all our Illinois State Scholars for their hard work and persistence in achieving this academic honor," said **ISAC Executive Director Eric Zarnikow**. "The efforts and engagement of these students can pay off not only as they embark on their postsecondary journeys, but also later in their approach to a job and career. As we recognize our honorees, we also acknowledge the invaluable support of families, counselors, teachers, principals, and communities in helping our students succeed."

Each State Scholar designee receives a congratulatory letter from ISAC and can download an official Illinois State Scholar badge to display on their online profiles and social media platforms, as well as share with their high school counselors, colleges, employers, family members, and others. Beginning this year, schools can download and print Certificates of Achievement for their students. The Illinois State Scholar recognition does not include a monetary award. High schools receive names of their respective State Scholars for their individual use and ceremonies. In deference to the variability of policies among high schools regarding publishing student information online, ISAC will not post the names of the Illinois State Scholar finalists on its website.

***Note that the Illinois State Scholar Program designates honorees based on the *year they would begin any postsecondary education*, not based on the year they graduate from high school.**

To help ensure that a student can receive all the financial aid for postsecondary education for which they are eligible, high school seniors and their parents should complete the 2025-26 Free Application for

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Federal Student Aid (FAFSA®), or in some cases, the Alternative Application for Illinois Financial Aid (Alternative Application) when the applications become available early this December. The FAFSA is the application for federal and most state and institutional financial aid for any type of postsecondary education, including career and technical education, certificates, and two- or four-year degree programs.

ISAC provides free assistance year-round to students and families, assisting them with the college-going and financial aid process. Students can attend college application, financial aid, and financial aid application completion workshops hosted by ISAC and/or our partners, or they can get one-on-one assistance from an ISACorps™ member in their community. The ISACorps are recent college graduates who are trained to serve as near peer mentors to middle and high school students and their families in Illinois, helping them navigate the higher education planning and financial aid process. Students can connect with their local ISACorps member at https://studentportal.isac.org/isacorps, or attend a free workshop in their area, https://studentportal.isac.org/Events. They can also make a one-on-one virtual appointment with an ISACorps member to assist with postsecondary planning and financial aid applications, by visiting isac.org/booking.

First generation college students who will be the first in their families to earn a college degree can join ISAC's First Generation Scholars Network to get support and resources from ISAC, peers at their college, and through first generation programs at colleges across the state. Students can join the network at https://studentportal.isac.org/FirstGen, check out our Going to College series and video tips for first-gen students, and listen to our First Up podcast about the experiences of Illinois first generation college students on their journeys before, during, and after college.

Visit the ISAC Student Portal, https://studentportal.isac.org/ for applications for ISAC financial aid programs; free tools and resources to help with college and scholarship search and career exploration; to compare financial aid offers so you can make more informed decisions about college; to get quick tips about college planning and financial aid from our College Minute™ videos, and more. Students can sign up for the ISAC College Q&A free text messaging service and get answers to their college and financial aid questions sent directly to their phones from ISAC experts. ISAC also offers free assistance through Student Engagement and Support Services, 800- 899-4722 (ISAC).

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 scholarship and grant programs ISAC administers, ISAC can help students make those choices a reality. Find us at isac.org and follow us on Facebook, X, formerly Twitter, Instagram, and on YouTube.

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