

October Is College Changes Everything Month In Illinois

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CHICAGO – The [Illinois Student Assistance Commission \(ISAC\)](#) kicks off October with its annual College Changes Everything® (CCE) Campaign. For the past eight years, during CCE Month and the fall CCE Campaign, ISAC has partnered with schools and community-based organizations to provide free college and financial aid application completion workshops statewide. This year, however, CCE campaign activities will extend through the winter to better support students and families in light of the transition to and later launch date of the new Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA®). The U.S. Department of Education has announced that the new, simplified 2024-25 FAFSA will not be available until December 2023, rather than in October. To

align with the launch of the FAFSA, the 2024-25 Alternative Application for Illinois Financial Aid (Alternative Application) for qualifying undocumented students will also launch in December 2023.

During October and November, ISAC and partners will continue to offer free college application workshops, as well as college planning and financial aid presentations. Because everyone (student or parent) who plans to complete the FAFSA will need to get an FSA ID (username and password), and the process may involve multiple steps, ISAC is offering free FSA ID workshops to encourage everyone to get their FSA ID now, so they will be ready to complete the FAFSA once it is available. Once the FAFSA launches in December, ISAC and partners will offer free financial aid application completion workshops statewide throughout the winter to help students and families complete the new form.

“With all the changes this year, our goal is help ensure that Illinois students and families have accurate and timely information, and the support they need to access all the financial aid for which they are eligible,” **said Executive Director of ISAC Eric Zarnikow.** “We are proud to collaborate with our school and community partners in making the transition to this new FAFSA and in supporting students on a path to meet their education and career goals.”

The [FAFSA](#) opens the door to most financial aid—including grants, scholarships, and loans—to help pay for education after high school. It determines eligibility for federal, most state, and some institutional aid for college, vocational school, or graduate school. Students should complete the FAFSA as soon as possible after it becomes available in December 2023. Students and parents of dependent students will each need a separate FSA ID to complete the FAFSA; visit <https://studentaid.gov/fsa-id> to create an FSA ID if you don’t already have one.

The [Alternative Application](#) allows qualifying undocumented students (who are not eligible for federal financial aid) to apply for the Illinois Monetary Award Program (MAP) grant, the state's largest need-based grant program for college students. It’s important to note that most students will complete the FAFSA, rather than the Alternative Application, to determine their eligibility for federal and state financial aid. If a student is unsure which application to complete, they can contact the financial aid office of the college or university they plan on attending, or an [ISACorps member](#), for assistance. Pre-screening questions on the Alternative Application itself can also assist a student in determining which application to complete.

Activities and resources available to help with college planning and financial aid

- **Free college and financial aid workshops.** Free college application and financial aid planning workshops are currently available statewide from ISAC and partners. After the launch of the FAFSA in December, ISAC and partners will offer financial aid application completion workshops throughout the state, where students and families can get direct assistance in completing the FAFSA or Alternative Application from college and financial aid experts. Workshops in Spanish are available. To find a college application or financial aid workshop, students and parents can check directly with their high school counselors for events within or sponsored by their own school. For a continuously updated list of ISAC-supported events that are open to the public, visit studentportal.isac.org/events.
- **Free one-on-one assistance from your local ISACorps member.** The ISACorps are recent college graduates who are extensively trained to serve as near peer mentors to high school students navigating the college and financial aid process. Find your local ISACorps member at studentportal.isac.org/isacorps.
- **Free text-messaging service to answer college and financial aid questions.** With the ISAC College Q&A (isac.org/collegeqa) messaging service, students and parents can text their college and financial aid questions and get answers from ISAC experts. Support is available in English and Spanish.
- **The ISAC Student Portal** (isac.org/studentportal) offers online resources for college and career search, scholarship search, financial aid tools and estimators, and more. Get quick tips on college planning and financial aid through *ISAC College Minute*™ and other videos on ISAC's [YouTube](https://isac.org/youtube) page or the [Now Playing](#) section of the Student Portal.
- **The ISAC Call Center**, 800-899-ISAC (4722), and its Online Chat service, available at isac.org, offer information and assistance with college and financial aid questions.
- **First Generation Scholars Network** to support first gen students. Students who will be the first in their family to graduate from college can join a network of first gen students and graduates who share information, experience, and advice on the path to and through education after high school. <https://studentportal.isac.org/FirstGen>
- **CCE Campaign support.** ISAC supports high schools and counselors who would like to participate in the **CCE fall and winter campaign** with a downloadable toolkit, materials, and event support. Counselors can find out more and sign up at collegechangepseverything.org/ccemonth.

- **ISAC's Financial Aid Application Completion Initiative.** High schools that sign up to participate receive data on a weekly basis identifying students who have not filed a financial aid application. They can then use this information to target support to students who might otherwise not complete an application. High schools can track their progress weekly on ISAC's website and receive Recognition of Excellence honors for reaching financial aid application completion milestones. Find out more at isac.org/FAFSA-Completion.

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 on postsecondary 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](#) @ILStudentAssistance, [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#) @ISACfinaid and on [YouTube](#).

About College Changes Everything

College Changes Everything® (CCE) is a college access movement that recognizes that college can be a life changing experience not only for students, but also for families and communities. In Illinois and across the nation, those who obtain education beyond high school not only see a significant impact on their potential career prospects and future salary, but also change levels of poverty, life expectancy, crime, and obesity rates in their communities. CCE is an essential part of helping Illinois reach its goal of increasing the proportion of adults in the state with high quality degrees or credentials to 60% by 2025. Find out more and join the conversation at collegechangeseverything.org.