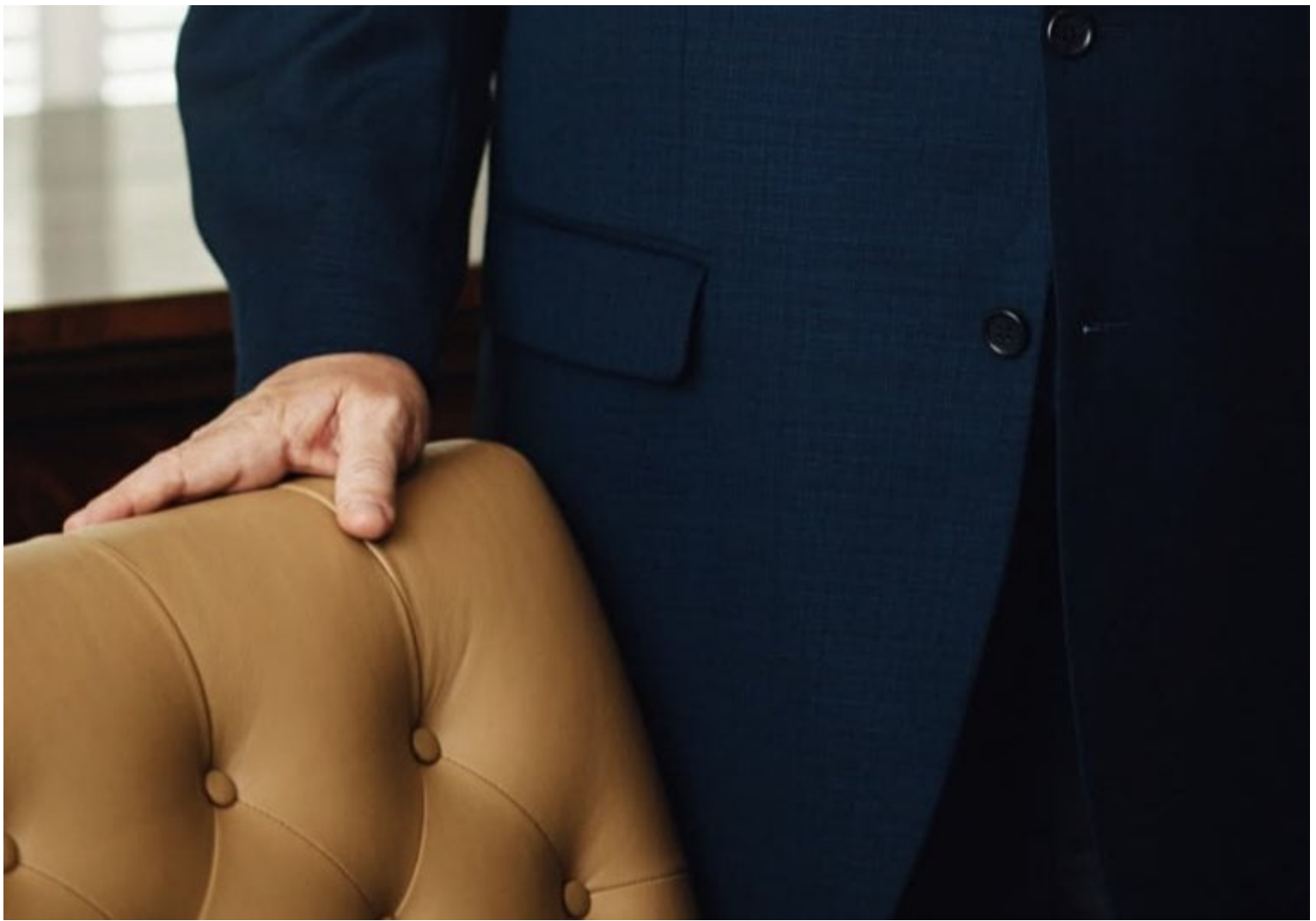


Illinois Ranks #2 in the Country for FAFSA Completions

by Lynn Baker, Illinois Student Assistance Commission Communications
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CHICAGO — The National College Attainment Network (NCAN) released their [Free Application for Federal Student Aid \(FAFSA®\) Tracker](#) for the Class of 2026, and Illinois is now ranked second in the nation and first in the Midwest for completion of the FAFSA — the highest position and the highest rate (71.4%) ever for an Illinois high school graduating class.

“Illinois’ increase in FAFSA completion is a testament to the hard work of students, families and educators – and a clear demonstration that the state’s continued efforts to expand awareness, remove barriers, and connect students with financial aid are making a real difference,” said **Governor JB Pritzker**. “Every completed FAFSA represents a world of opportunity opened and brings Illinois a step closer to making educational attainment a reality for every student in every corner of our state.”

Completing the [FAFSA](#) or, if eligible, the [Alternative Application for Illinois Financial Aid \(Alternative Application\)](#), helps ensure that students have critical information about the financial aid they might be eligible to receive to attend postsecondary education. For many students and families, especially those with lower incomes or who might be first

in their family to go to college, completing a financial aid application can show them a pathway to education and career they might not otherwise have thought possible.

Led by the [Illinois Student Assistance Commission \(ISAC\)](#) in collaboration with high schools, sister agencies, and other partners across the state, this year saw record support for students and families completing their financial aid applications.

- ISAC and partners conducted almost 3,400 FAFSA outreach events attended by more than 52,000 students and 19,000 parents. Students and families statewide were also able to meet with ISAC in more than 1,280 confidential one-on-one virtual meetings, most scheduled using a [simple online tool](#).

- ISAC and partners offered more than 1,230 financial aid workshops -- the highest ever offered.

Illinois is an Innovator in Supporting FAFSA Completion

Illinois has long been recognized as a leader in supporting students, families, and partners in financial aid application completion. Innovations like the [ISAC Financial Aid Application Completion Initiative](#), a data-matching initiative that helps school counselors identify and provide support to students who have not completed a financial aid application, have become a national model.

The [Illinois FAFSA Mandate](#), an initiative that Governor Pritzker championed in his first term, requires every Illinois public high school student to complete a financial aid application or submit a waiver as part of their graduation requirements. The mandate has surely helped increase completions. Indeed, the year the mandate was implemented, which also coincided with the first year of the Covid pandemic, *Illinois experienced the largest increase in FAFSA completion in the country* and was one of only three states to see an increase while every other state experienced a decline.

Legislation that Governor Pritzker signed into law last year also requires public high schools to [designate a point of contact](#) at their school who can direct students to financial aid-related resources, and requires schools to offer support during the school day for students to complete their portion of financial aid applications. These new and simple changes may be moving the needle, especially for students who might not otherwise be inclined or able to take advantage of supports outside the school day.

In this first year of implementation of the new in-school requirements, ISAC more than doubled the number of financial aid application completion workshops it provides in schools during the school day. Illinois increased its overall FAFSA completion rate by two percentage points over last year.

From the inception of the FAFSA Mandate and in-school requirements, schools have been offered the full partnership of ISAC to help them successfully implement these initiatives, including ISAC staff support and expertise, and materials.

“Helping to ensure that Illinois students and families have access to the information they need to make important decisions about education and career is part of ISAC’s mission, but it is the collective action and commitment of policymakers, agencies, and partners statewide that makes the difference for our students,” said **ISAC Executive Director Eric Zarnikow**. “We are grateful for the Governor and General Assembly’s ongoing commitment to and investment in education and access for all Illinois students. We celebrate the tremendous dedication of our partners - high schools, sister agencies, and community partners – who work tirelessly to support students in finding their path to postsecondary education and careers.”

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 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 or on [Facebook](#) (@ILStudentAssistance), [X](#) and on [Instagram](#) @ISACfinaid and watch our videos on [YouTube](#).