

The Individual Career and Academic Plan: Addition of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid

Introduction

Legislation was passed during the 2022 legislative session under [SF2382 Division II](#) which adds a new component to the Individual Career and Academic Planning (ICAP) process under Iowa Code section 279.61, [HF2392](#), requiring school districts to advise students through the Individual Career and Academic Planning (ICAP) process on how to successfully complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).

What does this mean?

Districts will need to incorporate information, activities and experiences surrounding the entire financial aid process and the connection between student postsecondary opportunities and FAFSA into each year of ICAP. The inclusion should be developmentally appropriate to support a scaffolding approach for students and families to move towards graduation with a career and postsecondary decision that includes the opportunity to access financial aid to support additional training and education beyond high school.

For a full overview of ICAP, please refer to the released [ICAP guidance](#).

Common Questions:

What does “advise students through ICAP” mean?

While the FAFSA is a form that is completed in federally outlined steps, the process of “advise or advisement” is broader in scope and includes an understanding of the financial aid process as a whole. The ICAP requirements are designed to provide students and their families with tools, information and experiences that allow them to make informed decisions for their individual path moving beyond high school each year in grades 8-12. Financial aid opportunities and FAFSA completion must be included in ICAP to fully provide students and families with an awareness of how to apply an understanding of financial aid to their postsecondary decision making process.

Where should districts start with including FAFSA advisement in the ICAP process?

Districts should start with reviewing and revising their district career and academic plan (DCAP). Each school district in Iowa is required to have an established DCAP that details how the district will provide support for each student’s work surrounding their individual career and academic plan (ICAP). The district plan is reviewed, revised and updated internally on a regular basis to ensure individual student planning (ICAP) is implemented by the established district career and academic planning team. For this initial year, district teams should evaluate what is currently being done to support students and families to understand and complete the FAFSA and provide this information in their yearly DCAP updates and revision. As the district team updates and revises their DCAP moving forward, a broader implementation of financial aid and FAFSA advisement should be included 8-12 in ICAP activities.

What is developmentally appropriate to support a scaffolding approach?

The financial aid process is a broad category of understanding to include 100s of terms and acronyms as well as steps and individual considerations towards making informed decisions on a postsecondary path. Due to the robust needs for understanding, districts should consider what each student and their family needs to know, understand and be able to apply to their decision making process each year in grades 8-12 as well as resources, tools and supportive organizations including Iowa College Aid and Iowa College Access Network

(ICAN) that support students and families in the understanding and application of financial aid and the process as a whole. As part of the connection to ICAP, districts should develop activities, experiences and knowledge sharing opportunities based upon student and family understanding needs that break down and build upon the prior year information to create a comprehensive platform. The information and delivery should be woven into the student's ICAP and should include a connection to the essential elements of ICAP, course planning and delivery of information to both students and parents/guardians.

Additional Information

To fully support the integration of financial planning and FAFSA into ICAP, the Department has released the [FAFSA Advisement Toolkit](#). The toolkit was developed to support districts in connecting financial planning into the ICAP process, helping students better understand the financial aspects of postsecondary pathways. By embedding FAFSA advisement into students' academic and career planning, the toolkit supports students in making more informed decisions about their future education and career options. A key feature of the toolkit is the scaffolding approach, which gradually builds students' understanding of the financial process as they progress through their academic careers. The toolkit also encourages districts to assess their current FAFSA advising practices, identify areas for improvement, and develop action plans within their DCAP that align financial aid advising with the ICAP process, ultimately empowering students to make well-informed decisions about their postsecondary choices.

Questions

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