



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
July 27, 2017

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**WHAT IS COLLEGE ACCESS AND OPPORTUNITY? 2017 COLLEGE CHANGES EVERYTHING®
CONFERENCE ADDRESSES EFFORTS TO REMOVE BARRIERS TO EQUITY**

CHICAGO – The data is clear that a college degree or postsecondary credential is a ticket to a brighter economic future for Illinois students and for the state as a whole, but not everyone has an equal chance at getting that ticket. “Equity isn’t just about giving resources; it’s also about removing barriers,” said Dr. Kyle Reyes during his keynote address at the seventh annual [College Changes Everything® \(CCE\) Conference](#) held in Tinley Park on July 20th. Reyes is Special Assistant to the President for Inclusion at Utah Valley University (UVU) and an Assistant Professor of Education at UVU.

This year’s conference saw a record number of registrants—over 500 Illinois educators, government and community leaders, other professionals and students—interested in addressing efforts to improve equity in college and career readiness initiatives. Sponsored by the Illinois Student Assistance Commission (ISAC) in collaboration with partner agencies and organizations, the annual conference is focused on collaborative efforts to increase the number of adults in Illinois who have a high quality postsecondary credential or degree.

Educators can influence and reinforce students’ negative perceptions about their role in society and ability to succeed, said Reyes, especially with respect to those students and parents who may not have college-going experience in the family, or who face other barriers to postsecondary access and success. He shared strategies to remove barriers — to “flip the scripts” for these students by designing classes and measures that address and validate student’s unique identities, making course content and material relevant to the student’s life, and helping to create meaningful connections with peers, mentors and the community. Reyes followed up his keynote with a breakout session on collaborative approaches that K-16 educators can use to engage families and communities in educational access and equity work.

Other interactive breakout sessions focused on topics such as creating safe spaces for undocumented immigrants, equity and access for college students with disabilities, defining microaggressions and types of oppression that impact student success, connecting low income youth with public benefits, and more. A luncheon address by Antoinette Taylor, chairperson of the Illinois Attendance Commission, focused on the Commission’s campaign to improve K-12 attendance statewide.

The Illinois Community College Board (ICCB) received this year’s College Changes Everything® Champion Award, an annual honor presented to a person or organization that has made significant contributions to help the state improve college access and completion efforts for Illinois students. The state’s largest provider of higher education, the Illinois Community College System serves over 800,000 students a year

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with credit, non-credit and community education courses. ICCB has worked tirelessly to create early college models, rethink math pathways, expand dual credit programs, and improve opportunities for adult learners, among its many achievements.

“Community colleges prepare the workforce of today and tomorrow and are the first choice and best choice for millions of students. They are proof positive that College Changes Everything,” said ICCB Executive Director Karen Hunter-Anderson, who accepted the award on behalf of the agency.

The relevance and urgency of the issues addressed during the conference were perhaps most strikingly reflected in a panel moderated by Reyes that focused on how diverse students navigate to and through higher education. Four college students—an adult learner who returned to school, an undocumented student, a student with autism, and a student who grew up in foster care—shared their personal journeys in higher education, each offering their own candid and powerful story. As one conference attendee noted, “these are the real teachers today.”

To learn more about College Changes Everything® visit, www.collegechangeseverything.org.

PHOTOS AND CAPTIONS ATTACHED IN A SEPARATE DOCUMENT

About College Changes Everything

College Changes Everything® 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.

The annual CCE Conference is a collaborative effort of volunteers including its sponsor, ISAC, as well as the Illinois Board of Higher Education, Illinois Community College Board, Illinois State Board of Education, Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, Illinois College Access Network, Federation of Independent Illinois Colleges and Universities, Advance Illinois, Center for the Study of Education Policy at Illinois State University, Council for Adult and Experiential Learning, Education Systems Center at Northern Illinois University, Generations Serving Generations, ACT Now, and Women Employed.

Join the conversation and help make college relevant and possible for everyone by sharing your story about how college changed, is changing or can change everything for you. Find out more and share your story at www.collegechangeseverything.org.

About ISAC

The mission of the Illinois Student Assistance Commission (ISAC) is to help make college accessible and affordable for students throughout Illinois. 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. www.isac.org

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