



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **College Changes Everything Conference Highlights Collaborative Efforts to Get Illinois Students To and Through College**

**DEERFIELD, IL** – On Thursday, July 17, Illinois education, government and non-profit leaders converged in Tinley Park near Chicago to address challenges and identify solutions in helping Illinoisans get to college and graduate. The fourth annual College Changes Everything™ Conference drew a capacity crowd of over 500 people for the one-day event. [College Changes Everything™](#) is a college access movement initiated by the [Illinois Student Assistance Commission](#) (ISAC), in part to help the state achieve its goal of increasing the proportion of adults in Illinois with high quality postsecondary credentials or degrees to 60% by the year 2025 (Goal 2025). Currently, the state is not on track to meet that goal.

“We need to remodel education,” said James Applegate, Ph.D., executive director of the Illinois Board of Higher Education. Achievement gaps are growing for low income and minority students, and 70% of college students are balancing jobs and families, yet the system doesn’t effectively support these students, he said. “Remodeling education isn’t about heroes and miracles,” said Applegate, “it’s about us.”

The primary theme of the conference this year focused on using *collective impact*—truly collaborative efforts among communities, local government, non-profits and state agencies—to advance towards Goal 2025. Keynote Nancy Zimpher, Ph.D., chancellor of the State University of New York, focused much of her presentation on her work with [StriveTogether](#), a national network that utilizes a collective impact approach to help support education from cradle to career.

Zimpher, Applegate, and a panel of business and government experts highlighted the importance of partnerships between business and educational institutions that build education to career pathways and align academic content with real world applications. These partnerships also provide opportunities for applied learning and work experience during college, which may increase persistence in college, and lead to higher employment rates post-college.

Other conference topics included, among others, sessions on STEM learning exchanges, innovative ways to improve college and career readiness, and the impact of afterschool programs on truancy and college readiness. See the full conference agenda [here](#).

The conference, sponsored by ISAC, is a collaborative effort in itself. ISAC, the Office of the Lieutenant Governor, Illinois Board of Higher Education, Illinois Community College Board, Illinois State Board of Education, Women Employed, Illinois College Access Network, Federation of

Independent Illinois Colleges and Universities, Voices for Illinois Children, and Advance Illinois work together each year to produce the important event.

ISAC executive director Eric Zarnikow presented the College Changes Everything™ champion award to former state senator Miguel del Valle, recognizing del Valle for his decades of work as a champion for education and for the disenfranchised in the state. Del Valle, who served in the Illinois General Assembly for twenty years and also as Chicago city clerk, is now the chair of the Illinois P-20 Council and vice-chair of the Illinois Student Assistance Commission, among his many roles.

“While Illinois does face challenges in college readiness, access, persistence, and heavy student loan debt,” said del Valle, “the good news is that we have passionate communities and a diverse group of committed and experienced leaders who are already collaborating to build solutions.”

### 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. 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](http://www.collegechangeseverything.org).

### About the Illinois Student Assistance Commission

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’s flagship Monetary Award Program and other scholarship and grant programs ISAC administers—totaling more than \$380 million in academic year 2013-14—ISAC can help students make those choices a reality. [www.isac.org](http://www.isac.org)

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Dr. James Applegate, executive director, Illinois Board of Higher Education and Dr. Nancy Zimpher, chancellor, State University of New York, were among the panelists discussing education and workforce needs at the College Changes Everything Conference held in Tinley Park, Illinois on July 17<sup>th</sup>.



Eric Zarnikow, executive director of the Illinois Student Assistance Commission, presents the College Changes Everything Champion Award to former state senator Miguel del Valle, at the College Changes Everything Conference in Tinley Park, Illinois on July 17<sup>th</sup>