



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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9th Annual College Changes Everything[®] (CCE) Conference: Communities Address Barriers to Student Success

CHICAGO – How do we get students—especially low-income and first-generation students—to and through postsecondary education? While removing academic and financial barriers is important, it is not sufficient to improve equity. According to Merita Irby, co-founder and executive vice president of The Forum for Youth Investment and chief architect of The Forum’s signature initiative, Ready by 21[®], “Equity has to be linked to readiness. We have to get kids ready to play in the game.”

In “Changing the Odds: Pathways to Young Adult Success,” Irby’s keynote to the almost 500 attendees at the [9th Annual College Changes Everything[®] \(CCE\) Conference](#) on July 18th, she emphasized the significance of support for students in building skills and forming an identity that will make post-secondary education a possibility for each of them individually. Developmental experiences that build four foundational components—self-regulation, knowledge, mindsets and values—are a critical factor in removing barriers to attainment, said Irby.

Flashtalks from Lisa Castillo Richmond, managing director of the Partnership for College Completion, and Zaldwaynaka “Z” Scott, president of Chicago State University, focused on attainment initiatives here in Illinois. Numerous breakout sessions examined collaborative efforts to address both developmental barriers to access and achievement as well as barriers facing specific student populations, including undocumented students and homeless students.

During a lunchtime panel of young adults who had been in foster care, the panelists highlighted some of the topics Irby covered during her keynote address, but also discussed their experiences, challenges, and the various pathways they took to postsecondary education.

Celebrating the ten-year anniversary of the [Illinois Student Assistance Corps \(ISACorps\)](#), the program and all its members—past and present—received the *CCE Champion Award*. The award is presented each year to a person or an organization that has made significant contributions to help the state improve college access and completion efforts for Illinois students. The ISACorps, a group of recent college graduates who are trained to serve for two years as near peer mentors to high school students, assist students and families statewide in navigating the process of planning and preparing for postsecondary success. In the last decade, the ISACorps has interacted with more than one million students and parents, held more than 37,000 college access and financial aid events, and provided direct

assistance to more than 55,000 students. Students who have interacted with the ISACorps are more likely to enroll in college and less likely to enroll out-of-state.

In addition to the *CCE Champion Award*, State Senator Pat McGuire, who is chair of the Senate Higher Education Committee, presented Jacqueline Moreno, ISAC's managing director of College Access Initiatives, with an Illinois State Senate Certificate of Recognition in celebration of a decade of service of the ISACorps.

The annual CCE Conference is the state's premier higher education conference focused on improving efforts to make college possible for all Illinois students. The CCE Conference is sponsored by the [Illinois Student Assistance Commission](#) in collaboration with partners: Illinois Board of Higher Education, Illinois Community College Board, Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, Illinois State Board of Education, Illinois College Access Network, Federation of Independent Illinois Colleges and Universities, Advance Illinois, Center for the Study of Education Policy at Illinois State University, Education Systems Center at Northern Illinois University, Generations Serving Generations, ACT Now and Women Employed.

For more conference highlights, follow the hashtag #CCE4me on Twitter and Instagram.

[PHOTOS AND CAPTIONS ATTACHED IN A SEPARATE DOCUMENT](#)

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.

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. Find us at isac.org or on [Facebook](#) (@ILStudentAssistance), [Twitter](#) and on Instagram @ISACfinaid.

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