



## July 16, 2026 | Tinley Park Convention Center

### Ongoing Conference Experiences

8:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.  
*Prefunction South*

Art Exhibit: *Rural Roots & Urban Routes: Illinois Through the Lens*

9:50 a.m. – 3:50 p.m.  
*South Pavilion 1*

Collage Studio: Visualizing Our Work With Students

### Conference Agenda

8:00 a.m.  
*South Entrance*

Registration & Check-in Opens

8:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.  
*Prefunction South*

Art Exhibit: *Rural Roots & Urban Routes: Illinois Through the Lens*

8:00 – 8:30 a.m.  
*Exhibit South*

Continental Breakfast

8:30 – 9:30 a.m.  
*Exhibit South*

Welcome & Morning Plenary Session

9:30 – 9:50 a.m.

Break

9:50 – 10:40 a.m.  
*Breakout Rooms*

Interest Sessions (A)

10:40 – 11:00 a.m.

Break

11:00 – 11:50 a.m.  
*Breakout Rooms*

Interest Sessions (B)

11:50 a.m. – 1:30 p.m.  
*Exhibit South*

Lunch & Program

1:30 – 1:50 p.m.

Break

1:50 – 2:40 p.m.  
*Breakout Rooms*

Interest Sessions (C)

2:40 – 3:00 p.m.

Break

3:00 – 3:50 p.m.  
*Breakout Rooms*

Interest Sessions (D)

## Ongoing Conference Experiences

8:30 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.

### **Art Exhibit: Rural Roots & Urban Routes: Illinois Through the Lens**

*Prefunction South*

*Rural Roots & Urban Routes* is a photographic exploration of Illinois as a place where every student's journey begins and evolves. From quiet rural landscapes to vibrant urban corridors, these images reveal the environments that influence learners across the state. Together, they illustrate how Illinois' diverse communities nurture ambition, support growth, and open pathways toward meaningful futures.

9:50 a.m. – 3:50 p.m.

### **Collage Studio: Visualizing Our Work With Students**

*South Pavilion 2*

A drop-in creative space open after the morning general session, the Collage Studio invites participants to pause, reflect, and visually express the heart of their work with students. In alignment with this year's theme, ***Education Matters***, this studio offers a calming environment where you can explore your role, purpose, and intentions within postsecondary education through the art of collage.

Using images, textures, words, and color, participants will craft a poster that illustrates the impact they strive to make — whether supporting student success, shaping equitable pathways, strengthening community, or advocating for access and opportunity. The Collage Studio encourages you to slow down, recharge, and reconnect with the “why” behind your work, sparking meaningful conversations with colleagues along the way.

Participants will also leave the **Collage Studio** with a practice companion designed to help them carry the experience forward. This resource connects the creative work of the session to everyday practice, offering prompts and tools they can use to spark meaningful conversations with colleagues, students, and partners in their own schools or organizations.

As we gather around the importance and value of education, this space reminds us that understanding and expressing our purpose is just as essential as the work itself.

## Interest Sessions A (9:50 – 10:40 a.m.)

### **Supporting Foster, Homeless, and Undocumented Students in Postsecondary Planning**

*South Pavilion 5*

Students in Foster Care, unaccompanied homeless youth, and undocumented students face unique barriers when it comes to obtaining a postsecondary education. Join us for a scenario-based approach to better understand the specific needs of these student populations and to learn about effective strategies and resources available to help support students in their postsecondary planning journey. Attendees will also receive information about programs & support services offered at ISAC and Illinois 2-year & 4-year institutions. Additionally, attendees will learn about the programs available through IL DCFS and how to access them.

**Presenters:** Nicole Boyd, Training and Development Specialist, Illinois Student Assistance Commission; Laura Gutierrez, Post Secondary Education Specialist, IL Dept of Children and Family Services

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### **Illinois Postsecondary Profiles (IPP) 2026: New Data, New Directions, New Conversations**

*South Pavilion 6*

IPP is the premiere comprehensive postsecondary information portal in Illinois. Join us for a conversation about what we've most recently added (outcome data), where we're headed (statewide postsecondary accountability dashboard reporting), and new opportunities to engage (new stakeholder advisory group)!

**Presenters:** Alan Clemens, Director of Illinois Interactive Report Cards, Northern Illinois University

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### **Understanding Young People's Perceptions of College**

*North Pavilion 1*

Join us as we share new research from the Illinois Center for Education Equity at Chicago State University exploring what drives, and deters, the next generation of college students. Discover what today's students think about the value and accessibility of higher education, their ambitions for the future, and how institutions can better support those who feel uncertain or disengaged about attending college.

**Presenters:** Meghan McShan, Research Assistant, Chicago State University; Erin Steva, EVP of External Affairs, Chicago State University

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### **Reframing Masculinity: Supporting Boys and Men in a Changing World**

*North Pavilion 2*

Across education, employment, mental health, and family life, many boys and men are feeling left behind yet these challenges often go unnoticed or remain politically polarized. This workshop explores modern masculinity and outlines the systemic and cultural shifts contributing to its impact on social and academic life. Crucially, the workshop does not advocate for a return to traditional gender roles. Instead, it emphasizes practical, inclusive, and evidence-based strategies to support boys and men, reframing masculinity in a way that is both empowering and modern. Through interactive activities, group discussion, and scenario analysis, participants will leave equipped with concrete tools to apply in schools, organizations, and communities. The session aims to foster nuanced dialogue and develop practitioner-led solutions without falling into ideological traps or cultural war framing.

**Presenters:** Ethan Richter, Training and Development Specialist, Illinois Student Assistance Commission; Brandon Perez, Youth Outreach Specialist, Illinois Student Assistance Commission

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### **Black Student Success in Illinois: An Exploration of the Data**

*North Pavilion 3*

This session will engage participants in inquiry about Black student experiences in Illinois educational systems. First, researchers from IWERC and the Institute for Racial Justice at Loyola University Chicago will highlight data from three key points in Black students' trajectories: (1) aligning the early childhood to K-12 transition, (2) supporting Black-serving K12 schools, and (3) ensuring equitable workforce outcomes from similar pathways. Second, participants will discuss and plan actions around each of these inquiry points.

**Presenters:** Malik Henfield, Founding Dean and Professor, Loyola University Chicago, Institute for Racial Justice; Meg Bates, Director of IWERC, University of Illinois; Stephanie Werner IWERC Senior Research Specialist University of Illinois

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### **From Classroom to Career: How Educators and Industry Partners Can Build Meaningful Work-Based Learning Experiences**

*North Pavilion 4*

As employers across industries continue to face workforce shortages and students seek clearer connections between education and career opportunities, partnerships between educators and industry leaders have become more critical than ever. This panel discussion will explore how schools, colleges, workforce organizations, and employers can collaborate to create meaningful, hands-on work-based learning experiences that prepare students for both college and careers. Facilitated by Melinda McIntire, Director of Workforce Development for the Illinois Hotel & Lodging Association, the session will feature educators who have successfully partnered with industry to provide students with meaningful work-based learning opportunities. Panelists will share practical examples of successful partnerships, lessons learned, barriers encountered, and strategies for building sustainable employer-engagement models that directly benefit students. The discussion will focus on how education and industry can move beyond one-time career fairs toward deeper collaborations that create real career pathways and equitable access to opportunity.

**Presenters:** Ericka Kouba, Career Coordinator, Des Plaines Valley Region (DVR); Sahrish Russell, Sr. Director, Corporate Work Study Program (CWSP), Cristo Rey Jesuit High School; Leigh Uhler Dean, Kendall College Kendall College at National Louis University; Bloomfield Career Resource Specialist Adlai E. Stevenson High School

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### **Whose Work? Our Work! Redefining the Journey for Brothers and Hermanos**

*North Pavilion 5*

Moving beyond compliance, this session introduces a liberatory framework to dismantle systemic barriers facing Black and Latine male students. Through the COBALT model and themes, participants will explore the "Mirror and Window" self-audit and student-led data. Attendees will leave with actionable, asset-based strategies to foster authentic belonging, honor students' radical dreams, and transform institutional practices from the ground up to ensure postsecondary persistence and success.

**Presenters:** Jamie Enge, College and Career Equity Specialist, Chicago Public Schools; Miguel Saucedo, Director, Postsecondary Scholarships and Interventions, Chicago Public Schools

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### **Wellness as a Persistence Strategy: Supporting Mental Health to Improve Post-Secondary Outcomes**

*North Pavilion 6*

Mental health and wellness are critical to students' long-term success. In this session, UtmostU and OpenSeat will share how a collaborative, technology-enabled wellness partnership helps postsecondary students navigate barriers to persistence. Attendees will explore how strategic partnerships and embedded wellness monitoring can strengthen student support systems, particularly for first-generation and low-income students, while empowering students to build ecosystems of support that increase connection, confidence, and persistence toward their goals.

**Presenters:** Amanda Bates-Kravitz, Director of Programs, UtmostU; , ; Bridget Leduc-Holiday, Senior Director of Operations and Partner Success, OpenSeat;; Gabriella Pierre Louis Manager of Partnerships UtmostU

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## **Interest Sessions B (11:00 – 11:50 a.m.)**

### **Fixing the Formula: Targeting Wealth in State Financial Aid Policy**

*South Pavilion 4*

State financial aid formulas mostly do not consider students' wealth, and PCC will present its new research showing how this leaves low-income, low-wealth students underfunded, in debt, and far less likely to graduate. For example, 20% of students from low-income, low-wealth households are

predicted to go on to complete a bachelor's degree, compared to 59% of students from low-income, higher-wealth households. In this interactive session we'll co-create real policy solutions to target aid for greatest impact.

**Presenters:** Mike Abrahamson, Director of Policy and Research, The Partnership for College Completion; Giselle Palacios, Research and Data Associate, The Partnership for College Completion

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### **Beyond Orientation: Building a First Year Experience That Actually Works**

*South Pavilion 5*

Many institutions rely on orientation and disconnected programs, but one-time efforts are not enough for first-year students. This session shares how National Louis University built a connected first-year [academic] experience through the Student Success Summit, our Student Success Seminar course, academic intervention workshops and early major exploration. Attendees will learn how to embed consistent, relationship-centered support across the student journey and leave with strategies to move from scattered programs to a scalable system.

**Presenters:** Tatiana L. Roberts, Director & Assistant Professor, First Year Academic Experience, National Louis University

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### **An Introduction to the Illinois PaCE Curriculum for 6th-8th Grade**

*South Pavilion 6*

This session will present the newly designed Illinois PaCE curriculum tailored for students in grades 6 through 8. Participants will explore how the curriculum supports student progress toward key PaCE framework benchmarks through engaging, age-appropriate activities. Highlighting effective implementation strategies and showcase selected lessons to illustrate the curriculum's structure and content. Additionally, attendees will learn about opportunities to access the full curriculum by joining a comprehensive training session facilitated by ISAC staff

**Presenters:** Kelly Koepfel, Rural Outreach Specialist, Illinois Student Assistance Commission; Paul Oliver III, Adult Outreach Specialist, Illinois Student Assistance Commission

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### **The Three E's: Undecided Student Success at Joliet Junior College**

*North Pavilion 1*

Learn about the three "E's" used to engage undecided students during their transition into college: Early, Expert, and Experiential. Data reveals how 1:1 meetings, events, and initiatives, designed to lead students through common challenges and barriers, impact student persistence. Hear directly from Career Services staff on the ground as participants are guided through how to support undecided students navigating the career decision-making process, regardless of the resources available.

**Presenters:** Hannah Preston-Miles, Career Coach, Joliet Junior College; Christopher Clendenen, Manager, Career Services, Joliet Junior College; Abigail Camacho, Student Employee, Joliet Junior College

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### **Centering their Stories: Post-secondary recommendations from immigrant families and students**

*North Pavilion 2*

We will be highlighting stories of CPS parents and alumni on the immigration spectrum as they pursue their college dreams. Centering the supports, challenges and lessons learned along the way. We will highlight both student and parent recommendations on how institutions and practitioners can better support them to achieve their college goals. Also offering resources on how you can bring Student & Family Stories into your classroom to help spark conversations around post-secondary planning.

**Presenters:** Priscilla Monsivais, Crown MSW Fellows, the To&Through Project; Yessica Guadalupe Vargas, Qualitative Data Strategist, the To&Through Project

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### **Economic Impact Study Findings**

*North Pavilion 3*

The Illinois Community College Board published an Economic Impact Study in April 2026. Join this session to learn about community colleges' impact on the state economy and the return on investment community colleges provide to students, taxpayers, and society.

**Presenters:** Cecilia Elhaddad, Senior Director for Data Analytics and Visualization, Illinois Community College Board

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### **Making the Case: Building Business Need Proposals in Financial Aid When Resources Are Limited**

*North Pavilion 4*

Financial Aid Offices are often asked to do more with less while responding to growing student needs, increased compliance demands, and competing institutional priorities. This session will explore how to build a clear, compelling business case for financial aid initiatives when resources are limited, and requests must compete for institutional attention and funding. Using two real-world case studies, participants will examine how one Financial Aid Office developed a dedicated outreach team and implemented a last-dollar scholarship model to address student access, persistence, and affordability. The session will highlight how to define the problem, connect the need to institutional priorities, use data effectively, identify anticipated outcomes, and communicate the return on investment in ways that resonate with campus leadership. Participants will leave with practical strategies for framing financial aid needs as student success, enrollment, equity, and institutional sustainability initiatives.

**Presenters:** Mary Greenwood, Director of Student Financial Aid Services, Waubensee Community College

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## **From Policy to Practice: State Guidance for Institutional Success**

*North Pavilion 5*

With the development and implementation of the Student Success Strategy Division, IBHE is reexamining how to best support institutions in implementing legislation. Utilizing the Communities of Practice model, the team aims to foster collaboration, increase communication, and further facilitate an environment of guidance. This presentation will examine the benefits of an online shared space, research-driven practices surrounding best practices, and the future goals of the Student Success Strategy Division for supporting institutions.

**Presenters:** Hannah Church-Caldwell, Student Success Specialist, Illinois Board of Higher Education; Lauryn Lucas, Student Success Specialist, Illinois Board of Higher Education; Jill Gebke Director of Student Success Strategy Illinois Board of Higher Education

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## **Beyond the Mandate: Practical Strategies for Bias-Aware Student Support and Postsecondary Readiness**

*North Pavilion 6*

This interactive session explores how implicit bias can quietly shape student belonging, opportunity, confidence, and postsecondary readiness. Participants will experience practical reflection protocols, collaborative discussion structures, and facilitation strategies designed to help educators examine perspectives, strengthen relationships, and create more inclusive learning environments. Through real school-based examples and interactive activities, attendees will leave with practical reflection protocols, discussion structures, facilitation strategies, and student-centered conversation tools they can immediately implement within classrooms, staff teams, and student support settings.

**Presenters:** Vickie Trotter, Assistant Regional Superintendent, DuPage Regional Office of Education

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## **Interest Sessions C (1:50 – 2:40 p.m.)**

### **First and Foremost: Using Storytelling to Go Beyond the Numbers**

*South Pavilion 1*

This session features a 35-minute documentary highlighting first-generation students and professionals across Illinois. The film explores how storytelling can illuminate data and research by revealing the lived experiences behind statewide college-access trends. After the screening, attendees will reflect on how these narratives can strengthen counseling, admission, and outreach practices, with an emphasis on reducing bias, elevating student voice, and supporting equitable postsecondary pathways.

**Presenters:** Matthew Montez, Assistant Director, Student & Community Engagement, Illinois Student Assistance Commission

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**Beyond the Reminder Email: Advising Strategies That Actually Move Students to Registration**

*South Pavilion 3*

Roosevelt University reimagined registration support by moving beyond reminder emails and passive advising into intentional, student-centered outreach. This session will explore how proactive advising campaigns, one-stop registration events, and strategic campus collaboration helped remove barriers and move students to enrollment earlier. Attendees will leave with practical outreach ideas, event concepts, and student support strategies that can be adapted to strengthen registration completion and persistence.

**Presenters:** Linda Davis, Director of Undergraduate Academic Advising, Roosevelt University

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**High Impact: Creating a Multimodal, Interdisciplinary Global Learning Program for Historically Underrepresented College Students**

*South Pavilion 4*

In this presentation, we will share the National Louis University honors program model for global learning, designed to reduce barriers to travel and cultural engagement for our Pell-eligible, first generation, and historically underrepresented college students. Attendees leave with concrete examples of how to fund global learning initiatives, including faculty-led study away as well as strategies to leverage global partnerships and scaffold learning experiences in a way that meets student needs.

**Presenters:** Natasha Kohl, Director of Undergraduate Honors, National Louis University; Elizabeth Scola, Associate Professor of English, National Louis University

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**Addressing the Financial Capability Needs of College Students**

*South Pavilion 5*

Addressing the financial capability needs of college students involves developing practical skills in budgeting, saving, credit use, and financial decision-making. In this session, you will learn how the Economic Awareness Council improved financial literacy during its third year of collaboration with the City Colleges of Chicago. You will discover the initiatives implemented and some of the results achieved from our third year of hosting financial literacy events to improve college students' overall financial capability.

**Presenters:** Moises Sanchez, Bank On Chicago Manager, Economic Awareness Council; Tracy Frizzell, Executive Director, Economic Awareness Council

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## **Beyond Readiness: The Politics Behind Postsecondary Access**

*South Pavilion 6*

This session explores college readiness as a political process shaped by power, priorities, and decision-making across educational and organizational contexts. Participants will engage in guided reflection to map stakeholders, assess partnerships, and examine how resources and decisions shape their current approach. Attendees will leave with a clearer understanding of their own college readiness strategy and practical ways to more intentionally navigate and strengthen it.

**Presenters:** Chastinee McNeil, Postsecondary Success Coach, Embarc

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## **From Metrics to Meaning: Rethinking Postsecondary Readiness Measurement**

*North Pavilion 1*

Educational teams strengthening college and career readiness often rely on narrow indicators that offer snapshots but not explanations. Without insight into underlying conditions, improvement efforts can be reactive. This workshop introduces a more comprehensive approach to CCR measurement by examining “enabling conditions” for postsecondary success. Participants will learn practical strategies and tools to capture student voice and apply adaptable methods to better understand and improve outcomes across diverse settings.

**Presenters:** Renee Vai, Postsecondary Leadership Coach, OneGoal; Vanessa Lee, Director of Secondary Success, OneGoal

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## **Coaching Emerging Professionals: Building Leadership from the Ground Up**

*North Pavilion 2*

Emerging professionals often step into roles where they are expected to lead, manage, and support others without structured leadership development opportunities. This session highlights a six-session, monthly coaching pilot for ISACorps Regional Coordinators supporting ISACorps members across Illinois. Through this model, coordinators strengthened skills in communication, coaching, delegation, and leadership confidence, especially for first gen professionals. Participants will hear directly from coordinators and engage in a practical self-reflection activity they can apply in their own work.

**Presenters:** Tiffany Sharp, Alumni Coordinator, Illinois Student Assistance Commission; Jenna Inman, Regional Coordinator, Illinois Student Assistance Commission; Viviana Flores, Regional Coordinator, Illinois Student Assistance Commission; Elizabeth Bird, Regional Coordinator, Illinois Student Assistance Commission

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## **Establishing Illinois Minority Serving Institutions (MSI) Policy**

*North Pavilion 3*

Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs) have had federal resources stripped away for programs that support Black, Latinx, and Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander students. We propose that Illinois needs to establish its own MSI definitions and recognition processes as a first step to securing state resources for future programming. This session invites your input on shaping those definitions and developing advocacy plans to put them in place.

**Presenters:** Christina Warden, Vice President of Policy and Programs, Women Employed

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### **One Next Move: Teaching Students How to Decide in a World That Won't Sit Still**

*North Pavilion 4*

Students today are overwhelmed with how to choose their next steps. This interactive session includes One Next Move™, a practical approach to teaching decision-making through real-world scenarios and a simple, repeatable tool. Participants will learn how to guide students in evaluating options, understanding tradeoffs, and building durable skills. Attendee. Additionally, participants will leave with a ready-to-use tool to help students move from indecision to clear, confident action.

**Presenters:** Amber Bolden, Student Services Coordinator, Evanston Township High School

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### **Supporting Undocumented Student Communities - Practices at City Colleges of Chicago**

*North Pavilion 5*

Supporting undocumented students has been an important part of the work of educators in the state of Illinois, now more than ever before. In this session we will address the work of the undocumented student liaison at a community college and share best practices to provide meaningful and intentional supports while forming a system of support and meaningful community in a bilingual setting. An overview of supporting bilingual student populations will also be provided.

**Presenters:** Pedro Nungaray, Dean of Student Services, Harold Washington College; Luis Narvaez, Vice Chancellor, City Colleges of Chicago; Teresa Guia, Senior Dean, Richard J Daley College; Josiel Marrufo, Director of the Bilingual Learning Program, Harry S Truman College

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### **From Access to Opportunity: How Embedding Career Readiness Inside the Degree Changes What's Possible**

*North Pavilion 6*

A college degree opens the door. For first-generation and low-income students, walking through it into a strong first job is a different challenge entirely. This session looks at what happens when career readiness is built into the university itself, as a credit-bearing course co-owned by faculty and a national nonprofit. Drawing on the Braven and National Louis University partnership, presenters will share what the outcomes data shows and what it takes to sustain this work.

**Presenters:** Uzoma Obidike, PhD, Director and Assistant Professor of Undergraduate Career Development, National Louis University; LaShawn Holloway, Senior Director, National Louis University, Braven

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## Interest Sessions D (3:00 – 3:50 p.m.)

### **The not so invisible barriers facing diverse learners and how to navigate through them.**

*South Pavilion 1*

This session explores systemic and individual barriers diverse learners face in transitioning to college. It examines rigid institutional expectations, the misbelief that admission equals readiness, and disparities in campus mental health support. Participants will unpack students' visible and invisible challenges—including executive functioning, self-advocacy, and stigma, how these intersect with structural inequities and how to navigate through these challenges. The session equips educators and parents with practical strategies to build flexible, culturally responsive supports and shift responsibility from students alone to institutions.

**Presenters:** Ama Appenteng-Milam, President, Center for Companies That Care

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### **Solving for the Right Problem: Targeted Approaches to Increasing College Persistence**

*South Pavilion 3*

Despite nearly 4 in 5 students coming from low-income families, Chicago Public Schools has been able to develop a culture in which more than 70% of graduates enroll and nearly 80% of students persist in college. The key to our widespread success has not been a widespread approach, but rather hyperfocusing on the specific obstacles different groups of students face in reaching their postsecondary aspirations. Join us to learn about some of the approaches that have been successful for specific groups of students, and add your own knowledge to our collective understanding of what approaches have proven to be successful in supporting specific groups of students.

**Presenters:** Brian Harris, Director of Postsecondary Pathways, Chicago Public Schools

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### **When It All Clicks: How Career Readiness Works When the College, the Employer, and the Student Are Aligned**

*South Pavilion 4*

Career readiness programs often operate in silos -- advising in one office, employer connections in another, workforce development somewhere else. This session follows one student's path through a model where all three worked in coordination. Drawing on a real student story and the perspectives of Northern Illinois University and Braven, participants leave with a practical framework for building or

strengthening this kind of alignment at their own institutions.

**Presenters:** Caniya McCray-Brown, Braven Fellow, Northern Illinois University; Melanie Griegoliet, Coordinator of Professional Development and Training, Northern Illinois University

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### **Helping Students Write Better Essays**

*South Pavilion 5*

This session will focus on two important topics. The first is communication—specifically, how to help students better understand and articulate their personal stories, and what questions to ask to guide their reflection. The second topic is providing practical strategies for helping students craft the best possible essays. This includes a breakdown of the four essential elements of a strong essay, followed by the top five tips for effective writing. The insights shared in this session are based on three years of high school experience, during which students have gained admission to competitive institutions such as Northwestern, the University of Chicago, the University of Michigan, and Columbia University.

**Presenters:** Sergio Gutierrez, STLS Advocate, Chicago Public Schools

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### **The Summer Advantage: Preparing Students for College Success**

*North Pavilion 1*

This interactive session explores how higher education and college access professionals can use the summer months to better prepare students for transfer and postsecondary success before the academic year begins. Participants will learn practical, student-centered strategies that support transfer readiness, scholarship planning, engagement, and confidence-building for first-generation and community college students. Attendees will leave with realistic programming ideas, scalable tools, and actionable approaches to reduce student stress and improve transfer outcomes year-round.

**Presenters:** Tyanna McCann Weaver, Director, Transfer Center, Olive-Harvey College; Gabriel Bradley, Transfer Specialist, Olive-Harvey College

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### **It Takes A Community: How Relationships Are at the Core of College Success**

*South Pavilion 6*

Using the framework from Dr. Shawn Ginwright's book *The Four Pivots*, our team will explore how moving from transactional to transformative relationships will promote belonging, increase collaboration, and ultimately lead to greater post-secondary success. Relationship is one of our core values, and we try to live it out in all we do. We will share several examples of how we have built relationships with the school district, developed partnerships with other community-based organizations, and strengthened a sense of belonging amongst staff, students, and families.

**Presenters:** Aaron Arnold, Executive Director, Waukegan to College; Laura Rios, Program Director,

Waukegan to College; Joseph Young, College Persistence Manager Waukegan to College; Jackie Lopez, Team Lead Middle School College Readiness, Waukegan to College

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**100% Club: Because 99 and a half won't do.**

*North Pavilion 3*

This session shares the story and mechanics of what happened when we decided that one-hundred percent of our students would acquire post-secondary education, training, or gainful employment. This session takes you on the journey of how we built the plan, how we executed it, and the way that it exceeds the previous year's results each year.

**Presenters:** Matthew Adkins, Student Success & Belonging Specialist, iCan Dream Center

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**Education Matters for All: Removing Barriers and Building Pathways in Early Childhood Education**

*North Pavilion 2*

In this session, attendees will learn how Illinois Action for Children's Higher Education and Workforce Development Navigators help remove barriers, strengthen and elevate the ECE field, and create accessible educational pathways for the early childhood education workforce. Through shared experiences, proven practices, and real-life examples, Navigators will share how they support workforce members in navigating higher education systems, completing FAFSA and scholarship applications, obtaining Gateways credentials and CDA credentials, exploring degree pathways, and connecting to individualized resources and support services. Participants will gain practical strategies and ideas for building partnerships with community agencies, reducing barriers, increasing educational access and persistence, and strengthening career advancement opportunities for the early childhood workforce within their communities and organizations.

**Presenters:** Stephaine Higareda, Navigator, Higher Education & Workforce Development, Illinois Action for Children; Quiana Reed, Navigator, Higher Education & Workforce Development, Illinois Action for Children

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