



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

July 8, 2021

Contact: Lynne Baker

847.831.8024

[Lynne.Baker@illinois.gov](mailto:Lynne.Baker@illinois.gov)

**ISAC Hosts 11<sup>th</sup> Annual College Changes Everything® Conference:  
Fostering Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging for the Success of All  
Learners**

*Kicks-off Virtually on July 12-16, 2021*

CHICAGO – In a year where the pandemic has increased challenges for those who are already dealing with existing inequities and barriers to access and success in education and beyond, the [11th Annual College Changes Everything® \(CCE\) Conference, Fostering Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging for the Success of All Learners](#), will bring together education professionals, policymakers, students, the business community, and other professionals to work towards addressing these critical issues. Brought to you by the [Illinois Student Assistance Commission \(ISAC\)](#) in collaboration with statewide partners, the state's preeminent annual college access and success and career readiness event launches virtually July 12-16.

Hosted this year on the interactive Whova platform, conference participants will share information, ideas, and best practices to support college and career readiness for *all* learners, moving the state closer to achieving its goal of increasing the proportion of adults in Illinois with high-quality degrees and credentials to 60% by the year 2025.

“Every Illinoisan deserves access to a high-quality education and an opportunity to reach their full potential, and yet we know that there are consistent and often systemic barriers to access and success for many communities,” said Eric Zarnikow, executive director of the Illinois Student Assistance Commission, the state’s college access and financial aid agency. “It’s imperative that we come together to identify and eliminate obstacles and close the attainment gap for underserved and underrepresented populations to ensure student success in education and beyond.”

To kick off the conference, Deputy Governor Jesse Ruiz will moderate a panel of the state’s education agency leaders, focused on *Educating During the Pandemic*, from 10-11:30 am on July 12.

The conference’s keynote panel: *Fostering Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging for the Success of All Learners*, on Wednesday, July 14 from 1:00 pm – 2:00 pm, will be moderated by Dr. Eboni Zamani-Gallaher Professor of Education Policy, Organization and Leadership, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and will explore the problems that learners from underserved and historically underrepresented populations are experiencing as a direct result of the pandemic and how the pandemic has intensified existing inequities.

The [Illinois Board of Higher Education](#) (IBHE) and university/college leaders will discuss the state's 10-year Strategic Plan for Higher Education during a plenary session on July 13 from 1-2 pm.

The conference will also feature more than 50 livestream sessions with topics ranging from supporting students through food insecurity and housing instability, supporting Illinois' immigrant populations, reducing remediation and accelerating college success, leveraging community-based partnerships to support student success, addressing the state's teacher shortage, and much more.

All events are free, but registration is required. To register for the conference and view the full conference agenda, visit <https://www.collegechangeseverything.org/2021-CCE>. Join the conversation on social media by using #CCE4me.

The College Changes Everything 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, Education Systems Center at Northern Illinois University, Generations Serving Generations, ACT Now and Women Employed.

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

#### About ISAC

The mission of the Illinois Student Assistance Commission (ISAC) is to provide Illinois students with information and assistance to help make education beyond high school accessible and affordable. ISAC provides comprehensive, objective, and timely information about 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](http://isac.org) or on [Facebook](#) (@ILStudentAssistance), [Twitter](#), on Instagram @ISACfinaid, and on [YouTube](#).

###