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Trust Talks Episode #25: Transforming College Transfer Pathways in Illinois

Sonianne Lozada: Welcome to *Trust Talks* episode 25, Transforming College Transfer Pathways in Illinois. I'm Sonianne Lozada, the program manager of income and small business at The Chicago Community Trust. I'm excited for today's conversation, which will be centered around work that is meant to improve the lives of college students in the Chicago region. In February of 2025, The Chicago Community Trust in collaboration with Bridges to Brighter Futures launched a Transfer Innovation Impact Model RFP. A first of its kind, the purpose of this funding program was to improve transfer pathways for community college students in the Chicago region. This RFP would be done in phases with phase one being a planning grant that would highlight ways each institution would improve the transfer pathways on their campuses.

While this may seem like something that has been done before, what made it different was the spirit of collaboration attached to the successful outcomes of this RFP. Each university that applied had to apply in partnership with a community college and a nonprofit or community partner. Yes, we want to see more transfer students earn a bachelor's degree within two or three years of transfer with as little debt or credit loss as possible, but we also know that students need support systems that are ready to implement innovative and impactful approaches that support the path to successful completion. The successful completion of a post-secondary pathway is a steppingstone to a journey of wealth building. We know that this pathway has a higher guarantee of accessibility to a good or quality job. Yet, even with this knowledge, we see students struggle in their post-secondary journeys and stop out or take more time to complete their degree, which not only can dampen their post-secondary journey, but oftentimes creates a financial barrier as more time to degree leads to more money spent on tuition.

During today's conversation, you will learn about how student supports can truly transform the student experience in both community colleges and universities. Our guests today will discuss the various pathways that lead to both degree completion and access to quality jobs. We will learn about what kind of policies are being implemented or should be to ensure successful post-secondary pathways in the Chicago region and Illinois, and how these pathways impact workforce development. Let's get started. Please take a moment to introduce yourself and your organization.

Meg Bates: Hi, I'm Meg Bates. I'm the director of IWERC, which is the Illinois Workforce and Education Research Collaborative at University of Illinois. We really study any issues that are very timely and urgent in education and workforce in the state. And of course, transfer is one of those issues, so delighted to be here.

Sonianne Lozada: Welcome. Thank you.

Mike Abrahamson: Hi, I'm Mike Abrahamson. I'm the director of policy and research for the Partnership for College Completion. We're a nonprofit focusing on getting more students to and through college in Illinois. Through institutional partnerships, and through working on statewide policy issues, we're trying to knock down barriers and support more equitable resource allocation to get more students to and through.

Juan Salgado: Hi, I'm Juan Salgado. I'm the chancellor of City Colleges of Chicago. I have the honor and privilege of serving 73,000 students across seven campuses in the City of Chicago. We are our city's most accessible engine for upward mobility and economic wellbeing for residents across our city.

Sonianne Lozada: Welcome. Thank you. The first question is about how is your current work trying to improve transfer pathways in the Chicago region?

Juan Salgado: I'll jump in. Since we're at the place of actual practice with our students on a day-to-day basis, the most important thing that we believe we can do is number one, grow programs that are in demand in the marketplace. Understanding where those pathways will lead to economic prosperity for our students, both through their journey at city colleges, but also beyond their journey. Number two, what we need to do is work with our K through 12 system and work with our four-year university partners, so that whole experience of college going, which increasingly begins at the high school level, right? Because we have now up to 9,000 students to take early college courses that are getting college credit while they're in high school, making sure that those articulations are very well known. Then I think the third thing that's really important is supporting our students, making sure that it's not just about the academics, it's about everything else that our students need in order to just make it through life, quite frankly.

We have students that are food insecure, housing insecure. We have students that are in need of technology and sometimes financial supports. We've got to be there with them when they have a mental health challenge too. We've got to be there in many different ways in order for them to thrive through their college experience. So those are three things that I think we are doing at City Colleges. We can do more, we will do more.

Mike Abrahamson: Yeah. Building on that, I'll say the Partnership is looking at this from two angles. One from a learning perspective. I'll talk more, I'm sure, about the report that we released and have been on a tour presenting and also listening to experts and practitioners about what can we do so that we can take statewide action that can help more students and also partner with institutions that can help more students transfer more seamlessly. I will say in the action front, we just can only do so much more with less resources. So, we are and have been for years at the state level advocating for more resources to our colleges and universities and to our students. We know that every year we calculate what community colleges need, and then we funded, I think, less than 29 percent of that last year.

Same thing with our universities who are accepting transfer students. I think 11 of 12 get less than 63 percent of what they need to adequately serve their students. And our MAP grant, we've seen great investments in that, but ultimately tens of thousands of students who are eligible and apply won't receive it this year. And that's critical for students getting to and through college. So, we're advocating for those resources while we listen to and learn about what we can do more at the policy level.

Meg Bates: Yeah. And I'll just add, so we're a research organization, so the approach we take on any issue is what else do we need to know to make solid evidence-based actions from that knowledge? We got interested in transfer really because of our long-term partnership with Latino Policy Forum, which is a statewide advocacy organization for Latinos. We did a study with them, the Latino College Landscape Study, looking at the factors that influence Latino college access, success, persistence, all of those things. Transfer really came out as a big piece there, particularly for Latinos because they do start in two-year institutions more often than other populations. It checks many of the boxes for that particular population, like being close to home and an institution that they trust because other Latinos have gone

there. So, we wanted to look at this issue, this disconnect between Latinos who intend to transfer after community college and those who actually do.

That led us with the Forum after the landscape study to do a white paper looking at all of the policies and other states that have supported transfer and what we have in Illinois around policy and where there might be a disconnect there. The interesting thing that we found is that there is quite a bit of policy in Illinois that is also reflective of research on policy that supports transfer, but there hasn't been really the progress on this issue that people would like.

So, when you see that disconnect between a lot of activity and policy around an issue and a lack of progress, from a research perspective, it can be two things. The first thing it can be is that we're not measuring the outcomes correctly, and that's a possibility here. We may not be truly measuring the success that students are having at the community college level and measuring transfer appropriately. So that's one thing we're looking at. But the other piece when you see this kind of disconnect is that there's some sort of devil in the details, so barriers in the implementation of the policy or the actual practices. And so that's the piece that we're embarking on now at the ground level. We're working with the Forum to look at specific two-year, four-year partnerships that support transfer.

Sonianne Lozada: Thank you for that. I think that this is a wonderful segue into the next question because it has to do with impact. Barriers were mentioned, insecurities were mentioned, issues with lack of funding for the state and for the community college system and just for the higher education system in the state. Can you speak more on how does student experience affect college completion? Because I heard issues with housing, issues with policy. Progress is a big component of how impact is made to these students. So how does that experience affect the college completion?

Meg Bates: So, I can just start from a research perspective that student experience is so much of the success and the outcomes. I think we know that students who have prior experience with college settings come in with social capital and navigational capital that first generation students or students with less experience do not. Those things make a huge difference in just knowing that you can go to your advisor, knowing how the system works at a college. That's very important. I also want to make the point that I think traditionally we might think of two-year institutions as commuter schools that people are not particularly attached to. That's really not true anymore.

Just as an example, I was at Kennedy King about a month ago and I had the pleasure of talking with a lot of students there and they were students who were a little older, some young moms, people that were coming back to college after that 18 to 22-year-old period, but they were very attached and had very warm feelings about Kennedy King. They had developed a group of friends and their own kind of capital, and they were nervous about that transition to a four-year space. I was wondering, are the four-year institutions ready for them and ready to recreate that with them, the quote, unquote, "non-traditional students"?

Juan Salgado: Yeah, I could build upon that because of course Kennedy King is one of our colleges. We've worked very hard to make sure that every one of our students has a true sense of belonging, institution. And belonging comes with care too. It's not just care that comes from the institution, but care that comes from the community, students caring for each other and having evidence of real, true care. We just opened up a healthy market that looks like a Trader Joe's for any one of our students. Those are signals, right? 10,000 individual counseling sessions for mental health across our system last year, 10,000 students, 18,000 counseling sessions. Those are evidence of true care. I think to the point, we've got to make sure that when they make the transition to the four-year university, those things are evident in some places within that four-year university, enough so they belong there too.

I was a transfer student. You have to quickly make a transition to an entirely new and different place. We can and should do a better job across our institutions. And increasingly we are at City Colleges working with our four-year partners to make sure that those handoffs are done appropriately and are done well. It's not just a transaction of transferring, it's an experience of transferring, and we've got to make sure that we do that well. Critical to that, I will say, is respect for the students' work. What I mean is that our students work very hard to obtain the credits that they gain. These are hard-fought courses that our students have passed, and they should, in all instances, get that transfer credit from the four-year university, and they should get it in their field of study.

Too oftentimes, our universities are accepting the credit, but not for their field of study. And that's the devil in the detail that you were talking about where the system's not working. Because of course, we take the credit, but we don't take the credit for the engineering school. We don't take the credit for the business school, for the nursing school. Those are the agreements that we are working on now to make sure that our students aren't caught up in institutional practices that are not outcomes oriented, that are not good for our students. And that's a big part of the challenge that we have moving forward for the student experience itself.

Mike Abrahamson: I'll say this resonates totally with what we've heard. I'm a data guy, but the transfer report we wrote was qualitative and quantitative, and it's the stories that stick with me. I'll say one of the things that we heard a lot was students feeling like it's unfair when an articulation agreement, for example, doesn't include a course that they took. And they'll say, "I had to take this marketing course. They told me it was different. I'm using the same book. We're doing tests like it's the same test." Or, "I specifically took this coding course, and then when I got to my transfer institution, it was a different coding language. They didn't even say that. I looked at all the materials. I learned Python, now they're telling me it's something else." That really resonates.

On the flip side, we heard some amazingly positive things about, for example, counselors who absolutely change students' lives by working with them. And they probably have humongous caseloads and a lot of cases, but still working with those students to see them to their transfer destination and sometimes through, following up with them, it really has had life-changing effects on students. And that's what resonates with me from hearing from them.

Sonianne Lozada: Thank you. I feel very seen as a former transfer student with everything that was just said. This next question is really about everything that you've discussed so far. With all the work that has been done to enhance support systems, student experiences and successes, and even to highlight what post-secondary pathways lead to wealth building, because that's really important. We want to make sure that they're completing and they're not stopping out, but that they're thriving after they're done with their quality of life. What type of successes would you like to see in the next five years?

Juan Salgado: Transfer is a focal point in our next five years, and we've done some very specific things to make sure that we realize a much stronger, more vibrant transfer experience for our students. First thing we've done is making sure that over 90 percent of our students get advising employments off the bat when they're in their first semester and then get a follow-up appointment when they get to 30 credit hours on their way to a four-year university when that is their interest. The other thing we're doing is making sure that we add a transfer specialist at each one of our colleges so that we can have even more touchpoints and more specified touchpoints so that when a student changes their mind or a journey or a life situation needs adaptation, we have someone there to help that student along that new choice point or that differentiated choice point because life happens and students may have one idea when they come in that may shift over time. We need to be there for those students in those instances.

And then the other thing we're doing is we're prioritizing, quite frankly, a set of institutions that are already receiving our students and we'd like for them to receive more of our students because if we can concentrate our transfers in a set of local institutions like Chicago State, like UIC, like Northeastern, like DePaul, like National Lewis, these are places that have traditionally taken our students. We can work with them more intensively. We can have greater handoffs in that regard. And then we are creating these maps, these very specific maps for engineering, for business, for IT, for different career paths, nursing. And guess who's going to have those maps? Ninth graders are going to have those maps. The parents of ninth graders are going to have those maps because we're also working with Chicago Public Schools.

So as we get this curricular alignment, this no credit loss curricular alignment, we will be delivering that to the doorsteps of school children that are in eighth grade, entering ninth grade, so they come armed with the information they need to have an affordable education because every one of those classes they can take in high school, every one of those credits that they took in community college that transfers means they've accelerated their education as all.

Mike Abrahamson: I think we're looking at a lot of similar change over the next five years, but at the state level, because that's where our organization operates. We know that 80 percent of community college students intend to transfer and less than a quarter currently do, and that's inequitable. We know students of color and students from low-income backgrounds transfer at a lower rate than that 24 percent. We want to see more transfer students successfully transfer and then complete, but specifically, I think our public community colleges to our public universities, we want to see those numbers and success rates grow. We know, for example, that 44 percent of our community college students are Black or Latinx, but only 31 percent of our public university transfers from community college are Black or Latinx students.

And so, they're underrepresented. They're far overrepresented as students of color in terms of transfer to for profit colleges, which is concerning for a number of reasons. It's the most expensive sector. It ends up with the most questionable outcomes. But what we do know about for-profit colleges is they signal where our lack of access is. They're very efficient at finding where there's a gap in the market and then targeting those students. We want to see us retain more of our students within our public system and have more community college, university transfer.

Meg Bates: So, I'll just echo some things. I think number one, that kind of specific two-year, four-year partnership is really research aligned. Those kinds of partnerships move transfer more than overall statewide policy. I will also say that for us, a goal is to scale successful practices. We know in Illinois there's a robust group of transfer coordinators. There's no lack of passion and intentionality around this issue. People really care. And the transfer coordinators are coming together to figure out and share best practices. We want to build on that. We want to investigate student experiences with those practices that are most successful and eliminate barriers for students.

Sonianne Lozada: This next question is for Chancellor Salgado and Mike, and it has to do with cost because it's a big issue in just post-secondary pathways or in higher education. So how do costs influence how students navigate their post-secondary process? And I would say, do you think that the transfer process complicates those costs or does it make it a little bit easier for students to navigate that process?

Mike Abrahamson: We know that the number one reason that students don't complete is money, and the number two reason is time, and those two things are absolutely related to each other. And

unfortunately, in our report, we found that the average transfer graduate took 29 more credits than they need to in order to graduate. That ends up taking a lot more time and money for students that translates to less wealth over their lifetimes. We need to improve those pathways so that students can graduate at higher rates with less debt. I'll also say that we need to make sure that we're supporting those students throughout the journey. The average student not living at home at community college pays about \$11,000 a year to go to school, including their out-of-school expenses, and that's really expensive for the average community college students, we need to make sure that we're supporting them, goes back to making sure that MAP grants are available, but also that they are significant enough to defray those costs.

Juan Salgado: I would just say that when you're thinking about cost, our students are working. In fact, the interesting fact is our students are, if you're a food insecure student, you're more likely to be working. So, what does that tell you? That tells you that our students are balancing these choices of, how much do I study? How much do I work in order to afford living today, but also getting ahead tomorrow? So, you have a large number of students that go from full-time to part-time. They're swinging back and forth. That is more and more the traditional student, if you will. I think we have to be cognizant that journey is not that linear four-year two plus two path. We also have to be cognizant that our students don't always off the bat know exactly what career they're interested in going into. There's got to be a little bit of room for exploration, for discovery.

One of the things we learned with the Star Scholarship is it took some pressure off of our students that got the Star Scholarship sufficient that they can spend time what they call on themselves. Think about that for a minute. The student that's working all the time while they're going to school, that was me, eight hours a day, go to school, come back. I got a degree in economics because I didn't want to go to school anymore and I couldn't afford it, but it wasn't actually my career choice. Here I am doing something very different. But what I'm saying to you is that built into this student experience has to be an understanding of the holistic life of our students and increasingly the fact that they're not going full-time all the time.

Sonianne Lozada:

Thank you. So shifting gears a little bit, talking a little bit more about economic development, I want to turn to you, Meg, and ask the question of why is improving the transfer process in the Chicago region from a two-year or four-year institution of higher education important to economic development?

Meg Bates:

Yeah. So, I'll talk first why it's important for the students. IWERC released a couple studies this past year looking at the economic outcomes of Illinois high school seniors. What we found was that the bachelor's degree in particular is the surest route to economic stability. It's also the surest route for economic mobility for students who come from lower income families. So, we just know, the data states that the bachelor's degree really is the path to a good job, more stable life. So why should we care about that on a societal level? I think some people might ask. And when we have more people in good jobs, of course it leads to innovation, it leads to other good jobs for other people. It also leads to more people not making use of social services, contributions to the tax base, which allows our state to flourish, and more entrepreneurship.

So, I think we can support on a human and personal level that we want more people to reach that bachelor's degree, but it also supports our state and our society. But we need to get transfer to work because we know two-year institutions are really a viable and important path for many populations.

Sonianne Lozada:

Mike, is there anything you would add to that?

Mike Abrahamson:

Yeah. So, we don't have a formula for how we give out funding to our public universities. We give out about half of what we gave out a couple decades ago. Why am I talking about that in a transfer conversation? That has led to our, especially our regional universities having to raise their prices, pricing out thousands of students. And that's probably changed the populations of students that go to our community colleges. We have, among all of the states, we are the third highest in the percentage of our public students, public higher ed students that go to community colleges. So, we are sending a lot of students to community colleges in Illinois that in other states would likely probably go right to four-year universities. That makes these transfer pathways all the more important, right?

But also, not having a formula means that we aren't supporting students in the way that we need to when they do transfer. That might be one of the factors driving this under enrollment, that 31 percent of students of color who are transferring as opposed to 44 percent that are in the community college system, because universities are under-enrolling transfer students, not knowing exactly how they'll support them. What we need to do is turn this around. We need a funding formula that will adequately support institutions that can then pass those supports onto students and defray the costs so that we can have transfer move smoother. That's important to all the communities in the state because we have 12 public universities all across the state that are driving the economic development for those different regions. It's critical that those universities can thrive and the transfer student populations that they're under enrolling are the key to probably doing that. We just need to turn the supports around, and that's one thing that we're working to do.

Sonianne Lozada: Shifting gears again, as we're talking about transfer, and the transfer pathway falls under, I would say the umbrella or the tree of post-secondary pathways in general. We know that post-secondary pathways are not just a bachelor's degree. There are many ways that students from high school in that transition process can be successful in obtaining some type of pathway that can get them to a good job, that can get them to a better quality of life. I think that this question can be answered by all three of you, and it's a two-part question, so I'll take my time. I'm just reading it to you so that you can have some time to think about what you want to say.

But how do post-secondary pathways impact the economic development in general? So not just thinking about transfer, but just with city colleges, there's so many different opportunities that are offered outside of just the opportunity to transfer to a four-year institution. How do those pathways impact the economic development of the Chicago region, even of the state, and of the communities that these students are coming from? And what kind of impact do they have for students from under-invested or low-income communities?

Juan Salgado: This is the value proposition of an institution like City Colleges of Chicago. Our students are from those very communities, by and large, that have been disinvested in. Our students are oftentimes first generation. They're parent students, they're working parents, they're making ends meet at the end of the day and trying to get ahead in life, if you will. And when you think about the value proposition of, can I get some education that leads me into an occupation in the field of my study for the future, and then work my way up. So, it doesn't have to be a linear path. You can get a degree, a certification from city colleges. You can get into the world of work in your area of focus. And while you're doing that, you can go back to school. And so increasingly, we see our students doing that.

And what are the benefits of that kind of a pathway, by the way? Number one is our students are able to get their employers to help support on their college journeys. Number two, they're able to get work experience and the networks that you need oftentimes that they don't have while they're doing that. So we want to be supportive of those pathways that lead to jobs earlier in the cycle of their education.

I think the other thing that we want to make sure is occurring is that our students know the marketplace. They understand what are the trends, right? What are the areas in the economy where there's the greatest number of jobs and the greatest level of economic opportunity? They may not choose to go into those fields, but they should at least know that those are the in demand occupations, that these are the wage levels, that these are the opportunities for upward mobility, that when you get this particular associate's degree or certification, you can level up to the next by going and getting your bachelor's degree. So, we've got to do more in terms of getting students that economic information upfront as they're making life choices.

Mike Abrahamson:

I think that too often now we're hearing backlash against bachelor's degrees, this idea often coming from places where I'm a little bit skeptical that they're saying the same things maybe to their children, that people don't want bachelor's degrees anymore. I'm a millennial. People said the same thing about us in home buying. They said, "Oh, they just want avocado toast. They don't want to buy a house." No, millennials just couldn't afford to buy a house. I don't want the same conversation to happen around college degrees. I think that getting a degree is an enduring value and aspirational point for all Americans. I think there are credentials of value in associate's degrees and certificates, absolutely. What we do want to do is, like the chancellor said, make sure that students have the opportunities that are accessible, affordable, seamless in order to earn whatever degree they aspire to.

Meg Bates: Yeah, I'll echo what's been said. I think that the pathway to economic success, like I mentioned earlier, is the bachelor's degree and in particular industries as well, and getting more students from more backgrounds into those pathways is super important to economic stability for individuals in our society. I will also say that education leads to innovation, and I feel the US and Illinois are known for innovation and entrepreneurship. And I think we've been playing with one hand tied behind our back in the sense that we have so many students who have great ideas and talent and aren't accessing the pathways that can lead to that innovation ecosystem.

Sonianne Lozada: Thank you for that. I think with what you just said, Meg, how do you think that these pathways create more access in the workforce? So how do they impact the success of students in the workforce? And I think with your work, what have you seen or learned about in terms of those students' experiences when they complete a pathway and enter the workforce and how those successes have impacted not just their lives, but even the lives of their families and their communities?

Meg Bates: Yeah, absolutely. So, I think one thing, going back to the Kennedy King example I used earlier, it's not just about students having access, it's what students bring to any setting they're in. I think students who are more traditional at four-year institutions can learn from being around students who are coming back into college at a later point. That leads to creativity, it leads to relationships that would otherwise be happening. The same is true for the workplace. I think we're not talking about it as much now for various kind of national shifts, but I think more diversity in the workplace does lead to innovation. It does lead to reaching new audiences and it leads to more money and there's been studies on that. And so I think getting more diverse folks into different pathways is really important.

Sonianne Lozada: Chancellor, Mike, anything you want to add to that?

Juan Salgado: What if I told you that in 2020 you could come to City Colleges and study in a high demand field, get an apprenticeship, and that by 2025, you would be a homeowner on the West Side of Chicago buying the first home for your family?

Sonianne Lozada: Are you talking about me?

Juan Salgado: I'm not talking about one of my students. I'm talking about you. I'm talking about anyone of those individuals that are out there in community that are thinking, "I want to invest in my community. I want to provide more for my family." So, I'm telling you a real story about a human being that came to us and we have been able to do this. Now, albeit this student doesn't have a bachelor's degree yet, but he's on his way to getting a bachelor's degree. And on the way, he's building wealth because he was able to save money at an affordable education at community college. If you don't know, so it's really important that between Pell and MAP, our tuition more than covers that. In fact, our students get a return on average of about \$2,800 that goes towards life expenses. And so, because you get an affordable tuition, because you get an industry connection, because you actually get a job in the marketplace, because you're making some money while you're going back to school, now you have the possibilities of wealth building.

And our students are doing that where? In the communities that they grew up in. And so this has the effect of reinvesting dollars within community. And I'm a real big believer that community college, city colleges is an engine for upward mobility and economic prosperity, not just for individuals and families, but for entire communities.

Sonianne Lozada: Thank you. I was very excited to hear some very key words of wealth building and home ownership and economic development and all of these close or narrow the wealth gaps in the Chicago region and in the state of Illinois. And that's something that we're really priding ourselves in continuing to do at the trust and that we want to continue to do. We want to continue to support the work that does that. And so, as we wrap up, I wanted to ask this question and it's really about dreaming and wishing and calls to action. So, what needs to be accomplished in the world of policy, in the world of philanthropy and education to ensure that all post-secondary pathways available create true access to wealth building here in the Chicago region and the state, even in this country?

Mike Abrahamson: I'll say three things. First, I mentioned the listening posture. I think we have to listen to students. We have to hear what the issues and we have to tackle those. That leads me into number two, which is we have to not just own the solutions, but own the problems. We have to own the status quo because the status quo is a choice. And while it's difficult to rally around solutions, and when you do, not everyone's going to be happy all the time, we have to look at these issues as being a choice and the rates that we see that we need to improve in terms of college access and completion. And we have to all rally together to work together to improve those.

And the final one, which is maybe the not the most exciting, maybe I shouldn't have saved it for last, is compliance, leave it to a policy wonk to talk about compliance. But Meg is right, we have a lot of laws on the books that were carefully crafted to help students get to and through college. We need to make sure that we're looking at what we need to be doing, what we're obligated to do for students, and that we're honoring that, but also that we're providing the resources to get those things done.

Juan Salgado: We need to see ourselves as a singular system. Higher education, K through 12, right? It's all in silos oftentimes, and not working, if you will, enough as one team with one objective, which is ultimately a strong, vibrant local economy that gets created because we are bringing people up from our communities to fill the talent needs across our region. And this has to be the objective of our institutions on a future forward basis. We have to, yes, have pride in who we are as an institution and promote our institutions as we have traditionally done. But what we need to promote more than our singular institutions is this idea that when we work together in a seamless fashion, we can produce much greater results than we have ever produced singularly.

And I think that's what gives me hope for the future because I see lots of evidence that we are shifting our mindset, that we are collaborating and cooperating in a way that is producing greater value for both students and the economy. And I think that incentives need to be put in order for that to occur more and more within the ecosystem. Too much resource goes into competing in unhealthy ways rather than cooperating for greater good and greater gain.

Meg Bates: So to me, the north star is that everyone is informed about the benefits of different post-secondary pathways and everyone who wants to complete a specific pathway can. That sounds simple and it's so complicated because the next step to that is to understand the barriers that get in the way of students completing their pathway of choice, and the ways that we can facilitate or streamline those experiences and completion for students. So, my goal is that we figure out better ways to understand what's in the way here, and then we work collectively to build policies and practices at the institutional level that help students get to their dream.

Sonianne Lozada:

Thank you. Chancellor Salgado, Mike, and Meg, thank you so much for the work that you're doing, for the passion that you displayed throughout this conversation today, and just for the work in general that is meant to improve the lives of our students here in the state of Illinois and the Chicago region. Not just their lives, but the support that you're bringing to them and the work that you're doing, you're improving the lives with the communities that they come from their households and their families. So, thank you so much for that, for joining us here today.

Meg Bates: Thank you.

Juan Salgado: Thank you.