



Equity Summit

Speakers and Biographies



Mike Abrahamson | Mike Abrahamson is the senior manager of Research and Policy for the Partnership for College Completion, where he works on policy and practice that can improve equitable college access, affordability and accountability in Illinois. Mike joined the partnership in 2018 after earning a master's degree from the University of Chicago Harris School of Public Policy. Before starting at PCC, Mike worked as a fellow for the Chicago mayor's office and for One Million Degrees.



Dr. Nour Al Naber | Dr. Nour Al Naber is the business instructor at Waubensee Community College. She has taught business, marketing and management classes in various formats and many of her classes have met Quality Matters standards. Dr. Al Naber holds a doctorate in leadership, and enjoys researching and educating students on workplace preparation skills, international relations and cultural behaviors essential for business. In the classroom, she fosters a fun, engaging learning experience and helps students create targeted marketing strategies.



Dr. Lorenzo Baber | Dr. Baber is a professor of higher education in the Department of Education, Organization, Policy, and Leadership at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. He also serves as the director of the OCCRL. Dr. Baber's research focuses on equity and social justice in postsecondary education, including leadership in community colleges, the experiences of minoritized students in STEM fields, and the application of critical theory to higher education policies and practices. Dr. Baber is past president of the Council for the Study of Community Colleges (CSCC), the largest scholarly organization explicitly dedicated to community college research. He holds a Ph.D. in education policy studies from Pennsylvania State University.



Jay Brooks | Jay Brooks brings over two decades of experience in the community college system, both at the local community college and state agency level, to his role as the associate deputy director for Research and Analytics (RA) at the Illinois Community College Board. In his role at the ICCB, he currently works closely with the team that handles data collection and reporting for the community colleges, and manages federal and state reporting requirements, such as IPEDS, Perkins and Adult Education and Literacy. Additionally, his team plays a critical role in producing a host of reports and products of interest to the system and various stakeholders. Prior to his experience in postsecondary education, he spent years in community and residential mental health as a counselor and therapist. As a first-generation college student, Jay has a deep appreciation for the power of education to alter an individual's life trajectory and uses his experience and current role to help expand this opportunity to others.



Dr. Brian Durham | Dr. Brian Durham is the executive director of the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB), holding that post since 2018. As the executive director, Dr. Durham works with the ICCB to provide coordination and oversight of the state's 39 community college districts. He works in close partnership with Gov. Pritzker's Education Team, the Board of Higher Education, the State Board of Education and members of the Illinois General Assembly, as well as the Council of Community College Presidents and the Illinois Community College Trustees Association. Dr. Durham holds an Ed.D. in education policy, organization and leadership from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.



Chadd Engel | Chadd Engel is the senior outcomes assessment coordinator at Waubensee Community College, where they focus on enhancing faculty support and student success through the coordination of course and program outcomes, assessment design and data collection. Chadd holds a Master of Science in data science with a concentration in machine learning and a Master of Arts in teaching (2015). Chadd is dedicated to creating inclusive and equitable learning environments, drawing from extensive experience in classroom instruction, educational technology leadership and program coordination.



Jennifer Foster | Jennifer K. Foster is the deputy executive director for the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB) and oversees all programs including Workforce, Adult Education, High School Equivalency (HSE) postsecondary Perkins/Career Technical Education (CTE), Academic and Student Support Service, and Strategic Initiatives. She is the past state director for Adult Education and serves as the state administrator for High School Equivalency Testing in Illinois. Jennifer is also the agency's EEO officer, and as the chief diversity officer leads the diversity, equity and inclusion efforts. She oversees the agency grant efforts, including the Lumina Foundation funded - Employment Connection Project and the ICCB Workforce Equity Initiative. Jennifer has been with the ICCB for over 24 years and has worked with WIOA Title II of adult education for approximately 35 years. Over the past few years, Jennifer has served in many capacities, including the past chair of the National Association of State Directors of Adult Education (NASDAE), federal and national projects related to adult education and workforce, team lead for the Illinois Accelerating Opportunity Project, and currently serves on both the Illinois State Workforce Board and the Cook County Workforce Partnership Board.



Dr. Jesse Ivory | When it comes to thinking outside the box, Dr. Jesse Wade Ivory asserts, 'There is no box,' a philosophy that has shaped her 17-year career in higher education. As the assistant vice president for Workforce Innovation and College Partnerships at Oakton College, she informs strategy for programmatic design, policy, workforce development initiatives and partnerships. Dr. Ivory's work is driven by her commitment to human-centered design, advancing racial equity and promoting upward economic mobility, and addressing unemployment/underemployment and labor shortages in business and industry. By challenging conventions, she creates pathways that drive meaningful change for students and the broader community.



Dawn Koeltzow | Dawn Koeltzow serves as senior director for Workforce Equity Management at Illinois Central College. She works closely with the Illinois Community College Board and the leadership at Illinois Central College to guide the success of the statewide Workforce Equity Initiative (WEI). Dawn administers consortium services for the 20 Illinois colleges participating on the WEI Grant. Projects include coaching, evaluation, advocacy, community of practice, equity trainings, consortium meetings/symposium, marketing and general support. Dawn is an active member and servant leader for organizations in her community. She has a master's in human services administration from Bradley University.



Vance Laine | Vance Laine serves as director of Student Support Grants at Heartland Community College where he directs the Workforce Equity Initiative (WEI) and handles grant administration duties for the Pipeline for the Advancement of the Healthcare Workforce (PATH). He has worked in higher education since the 1980s across five states and diverse departments, including student affairs, noncredit continuing education, academic advising, branch campus management and student recruitment. Vance earned a bachelor's degree in accounting and finance from the University of Wisconsin - Madison and a Master of Arts in higher and adult education from the University of Missouri.



Dr. Candice Maxwell | Dr. Candice Maxwell serves as the associate vice president of Diversity, Equity, Belonging, and Inclusion for McHenry County College. As a social change consultant and strategist, she provides professional learning opportunities, strategic equity planning, and cultural assessment analysis to organizations and businesses across various industries and educational institutions. Dr. Maxwell presents nationally and internationally on building equity ecosystems within organizations, equity and inclusive leadership, cultural humility and civility in the workplace, and developing cross-cultural alliances for organizational change. She has authored multiple books and other publications on DEI and equity leadership related topics.



Giselle Palacios | Giselle Palacios is a dedicated research and data associate at Partnership for College Completion, passionately contributing to the organization's mission to advance equity in higher education in Illinois. She holds a master's degree in mathematics from Governors State University, and with a background in statistics and research methodology, Giselle brings expertise in analyzing educational data to uncover disparities and inform evidence-based policies. She is a strong advocate for leveraging data-driven insights to drive meaningful change in educational outcomes for underrepresented students.



Dr. Avis Proctor | Dr. Avis Proctor became the sixth president of William Rainey Harper College in July 2019. Dr. Proctor has more than 25 years of experience working in multicultural environments as an innovative mathematics educator and academic administrator with a focus on teaching, service and research. As a higher education scholar and an Aspen Presidential Fellow, she contributes to the professional discourse from local to global levels on progressive leadership in higher education, research-based instructional strategies, strategic community engagement, economic development and the STEM pipeline for underrepresented groups.



Dr. Anthony Ramos | Dr. Anthony Ramos (he/him) is unapologetically committed to the mission of the community college. He currently serves as the vice president for Talent and Culture/chief diversity officer at Waubensee Community College. Prior to this he served for three years as the inaugural chief equity, diversity, inclusion and belonging officer at Elgin Community College. A focus of his work is to strengthen the foundations of equity work that had been done at the college and create systems and structures that accelerate innovation and lead to institutionalization of tactics that increase student success, close equity gaps, and increase the sense of belonging for students and employees. Prior to this he served in leadership roles in academic affairs as an interim dean for the Arts, Communication and Hospitality Division, and assistant dean for Adjunct Faculty Support at College of DuPage. He also has served as adjunct faculty in sociology at a few institutions in the Chicagoland area.



James Reed, Jr. | James “Jim” Reed, Jr. became the Illinois Community College Trustees Association’s sixth executive director in 2019. Since joining ICCTA, Reed has guided the association to develop a strategic plan and secured the membership of all 48 community colleges. His focus has been to facilitate board retreats on topics ranging from board roles and responsibilities, executive transitioning, DEI (Diversity, Equity & Inclusion) and dispute resolution. Under his leadership, the association has strengthened the relationship between the Illinois Council of Community College Presidents and the ICCB. Before joining ICCTA, Jim was director of Government Relations for the Illinois Education Association, which represents 131,000 teachers and education support professionals across Illinois. Jim attended the United States Military Academy at West Point, New York, and earned his Juris Doctor from the Hamline University School of Law in St. Paul, Minnesota.



Dr. Lisa Richmond | Lisa Castillo Richmond, Ph.D., is an entrepreneurial higher education leader committed to collaborative approaches to addressing longstanding racial and socioeconomic inequities in colleges, universities and higher education systems. With experience managing nonprofit education organizations and initiatives, local and national program teams, policy initiatives, and fundraising and development efforts, her work has focused on organizations in launch and growth phases, working within and alongside K-12 schools and systems, colleges and universities, and government agencies. Lisa currently serves as the executive director of the Partnership for College Completion, a nonprofit organization launched in 2016 to advance racial and socioeconomic equity in Illinois higher education through data and research, state policy and advocacy, and direct support to colleges and universities in their equity change efforts. She recently completed a Ph.D. in the Higher Education Program at Loyola University Chicago.



Candace Silas | Candace Silas serves as the director of the Workforce Equity Initiative (WEI) and the Pipeline for the Advancement of the Healthcare Workforce Program (PATH) at Lincoln Land Community College. She also holds the position of co-chair for the Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Justice Committee. Bringing over 25 years of experience to her current role, Candace previously administered programs in the Workforce Development & Training Division and the Education & School Age Youth Division for the Springfield Urban League. She possesses numerous certifications at the local, state and national levels, specializing in advocacy for racial justice, economic equity and community advocacy. Additionally, she is a certified executive coach in organizational leadership.