

Good afternoon. My name is Donna Thompson and I am a former TRIO director with over 25 years of experience in the field. TRIO refers to US Department of Education programs which empower low income, first generation, college bound and students with disabilities for success in higher education. You may know these programs as Upward Bound, Student Support Services, Talent Search and EOPs or CAP programs.

I am also a former president of CAEOP (Connecticut Association of Educational Opportunity Programs), former president of the New England Educational Opportunity Association (NEOA) and a ten year board member of the national Council for Opportunity in Education. Each of these organizations has a thirty year history of advocating for the needs and interests of first generation college, low income students and students with disabilities in their pursuit of higher education. I also served as a national trainer for thirteen years with the US Department of Education's national TRIO Trainings that focused on innovative best practices, assessment and evaluation.

CAEOP, in particular, is responsible for bringing College Goal Sunday and KhowHow2Go CT to our state along with \$140,000 in Lumina funds to support best practices for TRIO/EOP programs. (You are mostly likely familiar with the social marketing gladiator commercials thanks to KhowHow2Go).

Of the richest states of the union, we in Connecticut continue to possess one of the largest achievement gaps in the country. This problem is exacerbated by the fact that too many of our low income and students of color waste precious time and money in remedial education, which directly impacts retention and graduation rates in our states' colleges.

As we navigate this critical issue, we must be sure to lay hold of all resources to rectify these problems. One relatively unknown fact is that TRIO/EOP programs in the state have been producing extraordinary college readiness results in this state for just under 50 years producing outcomes that double and triple our colleges' retention and graduation rates.

The collective knowledge and expertise of the individuals that have designed, shaped and replicated these successful TRIO models cannot be ignored. We would be foolish as a state not to tap into the wisdom and best practices that have produced such results with data to prove it. We would be foolish as a state not to glean from the insights learned to improve college readiness, retention and success for the most vulnerable in our state.

While we all know that a serious financial investment is critical to address the burgeoning crisis that we face, one lesson learned is that money is not the only challenge to fixing the problem. In fact, national studies tell us that more financial aid and more academic instruction can be a waste of money if not accompanied by the necessary support system needed to empower students for success.

I strongly urge you to include the state wide TRIO/EOP community of professionals of the CAEOP association as we move forward to design and implement strategies and best practices to truly impact student achievement for all students. This should happen in the form of a statewide dialogue with TRIO/EOP professionals or tapping into this rich wealth of experience by using TRIO professionals as trainers and mentors. This could also mean allocating resources to current TRIO/EOP programs to expand and/or replicate current successful programs to serve more students. Most importantly, include TRIO/CAEOP professionals in a dialogue regarding what has worked here in our state. Please include this body of wisdom and experience as we move forward. Thank you.