



TRIO TURNS



BREAKING BARRIERS • INSPIRING HOPE

**COE ANNUAL
CONFERENCE 2024**

SEPTEMBER 8-11, 2024 • NEW YORK, NY

**2024 ANNUAL CONFERENCE
EDUCATIONAL
OPPORTUNITY DINNER**

COE

STUDENT OPPORTUNITIES

Your support is vital to the Council for Opportunity in Education (COE) as we strive to empower and uplift low-income, first-generation, and underrepresented students. By donating to COE's Educational Opportunity Campaign, you directly invest in transformative programs that open doors to success.

The **National Student Leadership Congress** unites TRIO students nationwide for an immersive experience in leadership development, civic engagement, and college readiness. Through **the Keith Sherin Global Leaders Program**, students explore international cultures and develop global perspectives through study abroad experiences. The **Career Opportunities Initiative** equips students with the skills, networks, and guidance needed to successfully transition from college to career, bridging the gap between education and employment. The **Thomas R. Wolanin Congressional Internship** offers students firsthand experience in public policy and advocacy by working in the halls of Congress. The **Keith Sherin Semester in Washington Internship** allows students to intern in Washington, D.C., gaining valuable insights and experience in federal government operations and public service.

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The Honorable Henry Bonilla

Member of Congress, 1993-2007, and Partner, The Normandy Group

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New York*

Gabriel Reyes

*Founder and Executive Director
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Antjuan Seawright

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DeRionne Pollard

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2024 TRIO LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD RECIPIENT

Henry Bonilla

TRIO TALENT SEARCH, PROJECT STAY, INC., SAN ANTONIO, TX

Member of Congress, 1993-2007, and Partner, The Normandy Group



Henry Bonilla's journey from a housing project in South San Antonio to the halls of Congress is a powerful testament to the life-changing impact of the TRIO Talent Search program. Growing up in a community where nearly half of his schoolmates did not finish high school, Henry found hope and direction through Project Stay, Inc., a TRIO Talent Search initiative that provided him with the academic support and college awareness activities he needed to envision a future beyond his immediate circumstances.

In 1972, Henry graduated from South San Antonio High School, becoming the first in his family to attend college. Four years later, he earned a bachelor's degree in journalism from the University of Texas at Austin, setting the stage for a successful career in television news. His talents eventually took him to New York City, where he produced the 11 p.m. newscast at WABC-TV, the flagship station for the ABC television network.

Returning to San Antonio in 1986, Henry became the executive producer at KENS-TV, but his passion for public service soon led him to a different path. In 1992, he was elected as the Representative for the 23rd District of Texas, becoming the first Hispanic Republican from Texas to serve in the U.S. Congress.

During his 14 years in Congress, Henry Bonilla's dedication to education, particularly for underrepresented communities, never wavered. As a product of TRIO himself, he was a tireless advocate for the program, working to educate his colleagues about its importance and ensuring its continued funding. His efforts were instrumental in increasing the TRIO appropriation by more than 125 percent during his tenure.

Henry's influence extended beyond education. He served on the House Appropriations Committee from his first term and became a key figure in shaping national policies. As Chairman of the Subcommittee on Agriculture, a senior member of the Subcommittee on Defense, and a member of the Subcommittee on Labor, Health, and Human Services, and Education, he played a significant role in securing funding for critical programs across the nation.

Even after leaving Congress, Henry's commitment to serving others continued. As a partner at The Normandy Group, he leverages his extensive experience and connections in Washington, DC, to help clients promote their initiatives on Capitol Hill and within the executive branch.

Henry Bonilla's story is one of perseverance, hard work, and the power of education. His achievements are a direct result of the opportunities provided by the TRIO Talent Search program, and his legacy as a TRIO champion continues to inspire countless others to follow in his footsteps.

Michael Cashman

TRIO STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES AT SUNY PLATTSBURGH

Town Supervisor of Plattsburgh, New York



Michael Cashman is a trailblazing leader, dedicated public servant, and passionate advocate for first-generation college students. His remarkable journey from a blue-collar upbringing to positions of significant influence and leadership exemplifies the transformative power of education, determination, and a deep commitment to community.

Cashman's story began at SUNY Plattsburgh, where he quickly distinguished himself as a dynamic leader with a fierce dedication to serving others. From the moment he walked through the doors as a TRIO student, he fully embraced the opportunities. Pioneering achievements marked Cashman's time at SUNY Plattsburgh. He founded a new chapter of Alpha Phi Omega, a national service fraternity dedicated to community service. He rose to national leadership within Omicron Delta Kappa, a prestigious national leadership society. His influence on campus peaked when he became the only two-term president of the SUNY Plattsburgh Student Association, where he managed a budget of over \$1 million—all while never missing an opportunity to advocate for TRIO and its impact on his life.

Cashman's leadership on campus was a prelude to his broader public service. In 2014, he was elected as a Councilperson for the Town of Plattsburgh, where he quickly established himself as a diligent and effective public servant. His tenure as Councilperson was marked by his active involvement in numerous committees and his unwavering commitment to improving the lives of his constituents. His hard work and dedication did not go unnoticed, and in 2016, he was resoundingly elected as Supervisor of the Town of Plattsburgh, a role in which he is now serving his third term. As Town Supervisor, Cashman represents over 12,000 residents and manages an \$18 million annual budget, navigating the complex challenges of local governance with the same passion and determination that have always defined his career.

Cashman's leadership extends beyond the local level. He is one of only 23 Certified Town Officials in New York State, further proving his commitment to excellence in public service. Appointed by the Governor, Cashman also serves on the SUNY Plattsburgh University Council and chairs the New York State Commission on National and Community Service, where he continues to advocate for policies that promote diversity, equity, and inclusion. His dedication to fostering leadership and professional growth is further demonstrated by his role as a founding member of the Adirondack Young Professionals, which provides support and networking opportunities for emerging leaders in the region.

2024 NATIONAL TRIO ACHIEVERS

DeRionne Pollard

TRIO STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES AT IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY

President, Nevada State University



DeRionne P. Pollard is a distinguished leader, educator, and TRIO Student Support Services alumna who currently serves as the president of Nevada State University. Her journey from humble beginnings, relying on food stamps, to becoming the first-ever African American university president in Nevada's history is a testament to the transformative power of education and the Federal TRIO Programs.

Born and raised on the South Side of Chicago, Pollard was encouraged by her single father to pursue higher education. She attended Iowa State University, where TRIO provided the support she needed to succeed. Despite working three jobs and nearly dropping out of college multiple times, she persevered, guided by caring mentors and a deep love for learning.

Throughout her illustrious career, Pollard has been a tireless advocate for TRIO, championing the programs that supported her ascent in academia. Her leadership at Nevada State University is marked by significant strides for TRIO, including integrating TRIO and GEAR UP grants into the Division of Student Affairs, elevating TRIO in her public addresses, and securing additional funding and resources for TRIO students. Pollard's unwavering commitment to TRIO reflects her belief that leadership is an active responsibility, not just a title.

Beyond her work with TRIO, Pollard has led transformational initiatives at Nevada State University, including developing over 300 acres of university land, spearheading capital campaigns, and supporting community projects totaling nearly \$1 billion. Her visionary leadership and dedication have earned her numerous accolades, including emeritus status, a gold medallion, and the honor of having a building named after her at Montgomery College, where she previously served as president.

Pollard's accomplishments extend beyond the academic sphere. Recognized for her work with formerly justice-impacted individuals, she has received awards such as the Distinguished Alumna Award and the White House Champion of Change: Reentry and Employment Award. In 2023, she was named one of Nevada Business Magazine's "Women to Watch," further cementing her status as an exemplary TRIO alumna and a powerful force for change.



Gabriel Reyes

TRIO UPWARD BOUND AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW MEXICO

Founder and Executive Director, FLiSci



Gabriel Reyes is a distinguished TRIO alumnus whose career exemplifies resilience, intellectual curiosity, and a deep commitment to community-building. Gabriel's academic journey began as a first-generation student at the University of New Mexico. It led him to earn degrees from Brown University, Columbia University, and Stanford University as a Knight-Hennessy Scholar, one of the most prestigious academic honors in the world. However, Gabriel's impact extends far beyond his academic achievements.

Throughout his career, Gabriel has remained deeply connected to TRIO, giving back to the program that helped shape his future. His efforts to expand opportunities for students from underserved communities have been nothing short of transformative. Gabriel has mentored and advised countless students, helping them secure prestigious scholarships like QuestBridge and the Gates Millennium Scholarship. His dedication to education and equity culminated in the founding of FLi Sci, a national nonprofit organization established in 2020 to address the lack of diversity in STEM fields. Through FLi Sci, Gabriel has raised nearly half a million dollars to support underrepresented students pursuing STEM graduate degrees.

Gabriel's passion, intelligence, and unwavering commitment to creating opportunities for others make him a powerful advocate for TRIO students and a role model for future generations. His work is a testament to the extraordinary impact of TRIO programs and the potential that can be realized when opportunity meets dedication.

Pierina Ana Sanchez

TRIO UPWARD BOUND AT BRONX COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Councilwoman, New York City Council



Born and raised in the Bronx, Sanchez's early life was shaped by the challenges faced by many first-generation Dominican immigrant families, including economic hardships and limited access to opportunities. However, her life took a significant turn at 13 when she entered the Bronx Community College Upward Bound program, a decision that set the stage for her future successes.

The Upward Bound program, discovered serendipitously by her aunt, who worked as a custodian at Bronx Community College, became a beacon of hope for Sanchez and her family. With the support of Upward Bound's Saturday and summer sessions, she excelled academically in high school. She developed essential life skills such as time management and self-organization—tools that continue to serve her as an elected official. The program's college visits helped Sanchez visualize a future beyond the Bronx, where she could pursue higher education and a meaningful career. Moreover, being led by first-generation women of color in Upward Bound provided Sanchez with invaluable role models for excellence in public service.

Sanchez's journey continued as she graduated with honors from Harvard University with a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology and earned a Master's in Public Administration from Princeton University. These academic achievements were not just personal milestones; they were a testament to the foundation laid by TRIO programs. Her educational journey equipped her to fight for immigrant families, racial justice, affordable housing, and good jobs—causes she champions with a "lift-as-you-climb" mindset.

2024 NATIONAL TRIO ACHIEVERS

Today, as a New York City council member representing District 14, Sanchez has made significant strides in improving her community. During her first two years in office, she has served 6,000 constituents, secured over \$250 million in investments for schools and community centers, and led critical policy-making efforts as the Chair of the Committee on Housing and Buildings. Her dedication to her community is rooted in the belief that investing in young people through programs like TRIO can create professionals and leaders who elevate their communities and contribute to the broader economy.

As a proud mother of a two-year-old with another child on the way, Sanchez continues to advocate for educational equity and social justice, always striving to create a future where opportunities are bountiful and accessible for all.

Antjuan Seawright

TRIO UPWARD BOUND AT MIDLANDS TECHNICAL COLLEGE

CEO, *Blueprint Strategy*



Antjuan Seawright's journey from the small rural town of Swansea, South Carolina, to becoming a respected political strategist and commentator is a powerful testament to the transformative impact of TRIO Upward Bound. Growing up as the grandson of sharecroppers in a community where poverty was the norm and educational attainment was far from guaranteed, Seawright was acutely aware of the challenges ahead. In a town where more than 40 percent of students did not graduate on time, if at all, and where race, class, and circumstance often dictated one's future, the odds were stacked against him.

However, in 2000, as a freshman at Swansea High School, Seawright's life took a pivotal turn when he entered the Midlands Technical College Upward Bound Program. Through Upward Bound, Seawright received the preparation, mentoring, and encouragement he needed to succeed. The program provided him with role models who had faced similar challenges and obstacles and had overcome them. They showed him that college was a possibility and instilled in him the belief that with hard work and the right support, it could be a reality.

This newfound belief in his potential opened up a world of opportunities Seawright had never imagined. He earned a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration and Marketing from Winthrop University in 2008, followed by a Master of Business Administration from Webster University. Seawright furthered his education at the Governor Dick Riley Institute at Furman University and the Congressional Black Caucus Institute for Political Education and Leadership Training in Washington, DC.

Significant achievements have marked Seawright's career. He has advised local, state, and national campaigns across America, including the 2008 and 2016 Presidential campaigns for Hillary Clinton. His insights and expertise have contributed to national publications and appearances as a political analyst on major news outlets such as CBS and *The Washington Post*. By any measure, Seawright has found success, both professionally and personally.

At the heart of his journey is the foundational support he received from Upward Bound. The program not only changed the trajectory of his life but also equipped him with the tools to create opportunities for others. Seawright's story is a compelling example of how TRIO can transform the lives of students from disadvantaged backgrounds, empowering them to achieve their dreams and make meaningful contributions to society.



SCOTT WINTON

TRIO RONALD E. MCNAIR POST-BACCALAUREATE ACHIEVEMENT PROGRAM AT THE UNIVERSITY
OF MISSOURI

U.S. Foreign Service Officer



Growing up in Branson, Missouri, a rural community nestled along Lake Taneycomo in the Ozark hills, Scott was the first in his family to attend college, unaware at the time of the unique challenges and disadvantages that come with being a first-generation student. His journey from a socioeconomically disadvantaged background to the forefront of U.S. diplomacy is a powerful testament to the impact of the TRIO Ronald E. McNair Post-Baccalaureate Achievement Program.

When Scott applied to the McNair program, he accepted his identity and the implications of being a first-generation college student. Little did he know that this identity would later become central to his work advocating diversity and inclusion within the U.S. Department of State. As a McNair Scholar, Scott was encouraged to apply for the prestigious Thomas R. Pickering Fellowship, a program to prepare students for a career in the U.S. Foreign Service. Though he initially didn't know what he wanted to do, Scott's international business major hinted at his desire to work on a global stage.

Following his graduation, he interned with the U.S. Embassy in Uruguay, an experience that reinforced his ambition to work in the Foreign Service. Scott's experience as a McNair Scholar did not end with his graduate education. He remained deeply connected to the program, consistently contacting his McNair mentors for advice and support. His time as a Pickering Fellow and subsequent career in the U.S. Foreign Service, with assignments in countries like Spain, North Macedonia, Guatemala, and Jamaica, are testaments to the doors that the McNair Program helped open.

Recognizing the lack of socioeconomic diversity in the Foreign Service, Scott founded FirstGens@State, an organization within the U.S. Department of State dedicated to supporting first-generation college graduates. Through this organization, he has championed initiatives to recruit and retain individuals from similar backgrounds, working tirelessly to create a more inclusive and welcoming environment within the Department. His efforts have expanded beyond the State Department, inspiring similar initiatives at USAID and the Department of Homeland Security.

Scott's work promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion in the Foreign Service is directly influenced by his experience as a McNair Scholar. The program shaped his future and instilled in him a commitment to giving back and helping others navigate the challenges of being a first-generation student. Now, as special advisor for the western hemisphere to Vice President Kamala Harris, Scott continues to draw on the lessons and values he learned through McNair, advocating for opportunities for all and exemplifying the program's enduring impact on his life and career.

ABOUT COE

MISSION

COE's mission is to achieve college access and success for low-income, first-generation students and students with disabilities.

VISION

We believe every young person and adult should have an equal opportunity to prepare for, attend, and graduate from college. Graduation from any category of a postsecondary institution should be achievable and must not be limited by economic status, family background, or disability.

OUR APPROACH

COE works to improve educational equity for low-income, first-generation students and students with disabilities by advocating and providing resources and services to support colleges and community agencies around the country. We address this mandate by:

- Implementing evidence-based program improvement and student development services for more than 3,100 college access and success programs nationwide;
- Advocating for federally-funded programs critical to college access and success, including TRIO, GEAR UP, Pell Grants, and other college access and success programs that assist low-income and first-generation students.
- Providing professional development for college access and success professionals--through COE's annual conference, seminars, video conferences, online courses, webinars, communities of practice, and other web-based idea exchanges; and
- Conducting research and policy analysis through COE's Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education to inform policymakers, educators, and the public on issues impacting educational opportunities and outcomes for low-income, first-generation students, and students with disabilities.

INITIATIVES

- Promote leadership development and global citizenry through student leadership programs such as the National Student Leadership Congress, the Thomas R. Wolanin Congressional Internship, and the Keith Sherin Global Leaders Program;
- Develop partnerships with business and government to introduce low-income and first-generation students to 21st-century careers and to better prepare them for the workforce;
- Strengthen the academic preparation of TRIO pre-college students to assure they have the mathematics and writing skills necessary to excel in disciplines of their choice—through curriculum development for STEAM Clubs and Book Clubs available for free to over 4,000 college access and success programs nationwide;
- Through the annual First-Generation College Celebration, uplift and expand the visibility of first-generation students on campuses across the country to increase institutional campus-wide engagement in providing comprehensive support to this student population;
- Biannually publish the Pell Institute’s *Indicators of Higher Education Equity in the United States*, which increases public awareness of disparities in college opportunity for low-income, first-generation students and provides data to help develop educational policies and programs targeting these students, and ensure that state leaders are familiar with this data to inform policy at the state level;
- Cultivate college access and success program alumni to serve as mentors and role models for current program participants, act as advocates for the programs, and serve as ambassadors to the broader community;
- Convene leaders of COE-affiliated state associations for executive leadership training to advance college opportunity efforts at the state and national level through partnerships with institutions such as Cornell University, Johns Hopkins University, Princeton University, the University of Kansas, and Yale University;
- Connect college access and success programs and community partners to COE’s cloud-based data system—empower™—for effective real-time tracking and analysis of student outcomes.

OUR OUTCOMES

College access and retention services are essential to providing true educational opportunities for all Americans, including low-income and first-generation students and students with disabilities. At present, college access and success programs reach only a small fraction of the students and families who could benefit from them. For more than 40 years, COE has worked to make the following outcomes a reality:

- More than 6 million students have graduated from college with the special assistance of TRIO programs.
- Annually, more than 3,000 access and success professionals receive professional development and technical assistance either in-person, virtually, or both.
- Garnered \$1.2 billion in federal appropriations to support TRIO programs (up from \$156.6 million in 1981, the year the Council for Opportunity in Education was founded).
- Nearly 875,000 low-income students and students with disabilities receive college access and retention services annually through our member colleges and agencies.

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2025 ANNUAL CONFERENCE ANNOUNCEMENT SAVE THE DATE

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September 9-12, 2025

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Visit partner.InternetEssentials.com to order complimentary marketing materials to help spread the word.

xfinity



For over four decades, COE has defended educational equity for low-income and first-generation students, veterans, adult learners, and students with disabilities. When you give to COE, you join a movement to ensure student potential is never undervalued.



Join the COE

EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY CAMPAIGN

Your donation, no matter the size, will have a profound impact on the lives of countless students, providing them with the tools and opportunities they need to thrive academically and beyond.



Learn more and make a charitable gift at coenet.org/support-us.



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