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Maurice Jones Named as CEO of the Center for First-generation Student Success

A veteran public servant and leader of high-impact organizations, Jones will lead the Center into new growth phase to scale its impact with higher education institutions and better serve FirstGen students

WASHINGTON, DC (April 23, 2024)—The [Center for First-generation Student Success](#) (Center) announced Maurice Jones as its inaugural Chief Executive Officer, effective April 1st. A veteran of the public, private, and nonprofit sectors, Jones brings more than two decades of executive leadership experience to the Center.

Established in 2017 as an initiative of NASPA—Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education and The Suder Foundation, the Center drives transformational change for FirstGen students by partnering with a growing network of colleges and universities, working together to redesign systems, cultures, and actions to better serve the needs of FirstGen students. The Center is leading the FirstGen movement, elevating practice, knowledge, and policy to create a nation where FirstGen students thrive across education, career, and life.

“We are thrilled to welcome a leader like Maurice Jones as the CEO of the Center,” said Dr. Kevin Kruger, President and CEO of NASPA. “Along with the Suder Foundation, we have worked to help institutions better serve and empower FirstGen students. I’m proud of the efforts of the talented Center staff, led by Vice President, Dr. Sarah Whitley. With Maurice’s strong record of fundraising, business development, and community building, I know the Center will achieve new heights and continue this important mission.”

Before joining the Center, Jones founded MJConnects, a professional and business services firm that provides customer acquisition, fundraising, economic mobility and other services to government, nonprofit, and for-profit clients. Prior to launching MJConnects, Jones was the CEO of OneTen, a coalition of leading chief executives and their companies with a mission to upskill, hire, and promote one million Black individuals who do not yet have a four-year college degree into family-sustaining jobs. Under Jones’s leadership, the OneTen coalition grew to more than 70 companies with links to more than 100 talent development organizations. The efforts of OneTen and its member companies led to more than 65,000 people being hired into fulfilling careers with another 19,000 promoted into such positions.

“I understand the decisive power of higher education for a FirstGen student. My journey is living proof of the life-changing opportunities generated when you invest in a student’s future,” said Jones. “As a nation, our strength and prosperity depend on FirstGen students’ being wildly successful. More than half of today’s undergraduates are first-generation, and they will help drive this country forward in the 21st century.”

“The Center is the only organization solely focused on creating transformational change for FirstGen students and their families. Accelerating the success of FirstGen students will also propel the accomplishments of all students. I believe we can expand our reach and impact to unleash the genius and full power of students for decades to come,” Jones said.

Previously, Jones ([full bio](#)) was the President and CEO of the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC), one of the country's largest organizations supporting projects to revitalize communities and catalyze economic opportunity for residents. Under his leadership, LISC doubled its annual community development investments to more than two billion dollars. Earlier in his career, Jones held several distinguished roles in public service, including Secretary of Commerce and Trade for the Commonwealth of Virginia and Deputy Secretary for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development during the Obama Administration.

“With his extraordinary personal story and deep experience at the highest levels of government, for profit, and social impact organizations, we are thrilled to have Maurice lead the Center into the future,” said Eric and Deborah Suder, co-founders of the Center. “Maurice is a movement-minded leader who understands that, if more FirstGen students graduate and succeed in their careers and lives, everyone wins. He is the perfect individual to continue the journey we started with Kevin Kruger, who has been our partner in this work for almost a decade. We are grateful for the dynamic partnership with Kevin and NASPA to grow the Center to where we are today.”

Since its founding, the Center has expanded its First Scholars Network to include 349 institutions of higher education, representing 49 states and the District of Columbia, serving more than 2.5 million FirstGen students. Moving forward, the Center plans to deepen its relationships with institutions and FirstGen students, scaling to reach over 700 institutions serving more than 5 million FirstGen students in the next four years.

Later this year, the Center will become an independent 501(c)(3) organization with a new brand. In June, Maurice will share more about the new organization's future at the 2024 NASPA Conferences on Student Success in Higher Education in Anaheim, CA.

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ABOUT THE CENTER FOR FIRST-GENERATION STUDENT SUCCESS

The Center is transforming higher education to drive first-generation student success effectively and equitably across education, career, and life. We provide data, training, and expertise for a growing network of colleges and universities around the country to scale and sustain the important work of serving first-generation students. The Center aims to acknowledge the intersectional experiences of first-generation college students. It offers an outlet for sharing cutting-edge research and current media conversations, opportunities for engagement through online learning, conferences, and events, and access to a bevy of programs and services intended to improve first-generation initiatives across higher education.

ABOUT NASPA

NASPA is a member-centered association supporting a diverse and passionate network of 15,000 professionals and 1,200 institutions across the globe. It is the professional home for the field of student affairs and is dedicated to cultivating student success in collaboration with the missions of its institutional members—a network of colleges and universities representing every sector of higher education.

ABOUT THE SUDER FOUNDATION

Since 2008, Eric and Deborah Suder have been working to transform higher education by serving the unique needs of first-generation college students. In 2009, the Suders launched a family foundation and created the First Scholars® Program, a holistic network of resources and support to dramatically improve graduation rates and unlock the success of FirstGen students across education, career, and life. Driven by a desire to reach more students and create lasting institutional change, in 2017 The Suder Foundation partnered with NASPA in a joint venture to establish The Center for First-generation Student Success and scale First Scholars nationally.