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CONTACT:

Bill Barker

Senior Director of External Relations & Policy

bbarker@naspa.org

(202) 719-1188

FirstGen Forward announces new Network Leader institutions

Twenty new schools selected for commitment to advancing the success of first-generation students

WASHINGTON, DC (December 9, 2024)—[FirstGen Forward](#) today announced the selection of twenty new higher education institutions to advance to the Network Leader phase of the FirstGen Forward Network. These colleges and universities were chosen based on their demonstrated commitment to advancing the outcomes of first-generation students through effective, sustainable student success initiatives and institution-wide approaches.

“FirstGen Forward is delighted to announce our newest Network Leader institutions,” said Maurice A. Jones, CEO of FirstGen Forward. “It is evident that these institutions not only invest in serving first-generation students but are prepared to make a long-term commitment to achieving and sustaining a standard of excellence in the way first-generation students are served. We are excited to continue our collaboration with these leaders.”

The FirstGen Forward Network is a three-phase approach that assists institutions of higher education in advancing outcomes for first-generation students through establishing communities of practice, gaining knowledge of resources, and establishing peer networks. To date, 429 institutions of higher education have been accepted to the Network, representing 49 states and the District of Columbia.

“Eighty-five institutions across six cohorts have successfully reached the Network Leader phase of the Network and are actively working to establish an environment where relevant and innovative direct student supports for first-generation students can be established, scaled, and sustained,” said Dr. Stephanie Bannister, Vice President of the FirstGen Forward Network. “It’s through the great work of institutions like these that we will improve the completion rate and broaden post-college opportunities for first-generation students.”

FirstGen Forward recognizes the following institutions for their advancement to the Network Leader phase:

- Agnes Scott College
- Chattanooga State Community College
- Dyersburg State Community College
- East Stroudsburg University of Pennsylvania
- Iowa State University
- Jackson State Community College
- Jackson State University
- Jacksonville State University
- Lamar University
- Massachusetts College of Art and Design
- Mississippi State Community College
- Ramapo College of New Jersey
- Roane State Community College
- Sam Houston State University
- Southwest Tennessee Community College
- St. Petersburg College
- The University of Texas at San Antonio
- University of Alabama at Birmingham
- University of North Texas at Dallas
- Western Carolina University

“The collective diversity of our FirstGen Network institutions is one of its great strengths,” added Bannister. “This community consists of higher education institutions of different types, MSI status, size, and locations, allowing us to tailor a personalized approach to achieve first-generation student success and build best practices for other institutions to employ.”

The new Network Leader class includes:

- Institution type: thirteen (13) public, 4-year; six (6) public 2-year; and one (1) private, 4-year institution
- Enrollment: four (4) over 20,000; four (4) from 10,000-20,000; and twelve (12) below 10,000 students
- MSI status: three (3) HSIs (Hispanic-Serving Institutions), one (1) HBCU (Historically Black College and University), one (1) PBI (Predominantly Black Institution) and thirteen (13) PWIs (Predominantly White Institutions)

“Six years after starting college, only 24% of first-generation students earn a bachelor’s degree, compared to 59% of their continuing-generation peers,” Jones said. “Through their role as Network Leaders, these institutions adopt tailored strategies to transform their infrastructure, aiming to close this achievement gap, improve enrollment and retention, and enhance the overall success of their first-generation students.”

To help meet their goals, Network Leaders gain access to diagnostic tools providing critical institutional insight, customized solutions, and turnkey toolkits, robust data reporting, and one-to-one expert guidance throughout the process. This phase offers institutions the flexibility

to shape their knowledge to meet specific needs while aligning with evidence-based outcomes essential for advancing the success of first-generation students.

The FirstGen Forward Network benefits from significant investment and support from external partners who help offset the costs of its initiatives. Key supporters include TIAA, Ascendium Education Group, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, T.L.L. Temple Foundation, and ECMC Foundation.

“I want to thank these supporters and all those who have invested and partnered with us, helping FirstGen Forward to build a multi-sector movement working to ensure the necessary support and ecosystem for first-generation students to thrive in college and beyond,” said Jones. “There are 8.2 million first-generation undergraduate students, 54% of all undergraduates in our country. America’s success is intertwined with their success. Working with these Network Leaders and other partners, we’ll continue to build the necessary resources, programs, strategies, and policies to catalyze broad scale progress throughout our communities.”

For more on the FirstGen Forward Network, or to learn more about the organization, visit firstgenforward.org.

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ABOUT FIRSTGEN FORWARD

FirstGen Forward™, formerly the Center for First-generation Student Success, accelerates success for first-generation students in education, career, and life through our collaborations with higher education, philanthropy, business, government, and individuals to eliminate the completion gap and broaden post-college opportunities. Our vision: A future in which first-generation students obtain postsecondary credentials; access opportunities commensurate with their skills, education, and training; and maximize their service to people and communities throughout the world.