

2025 H. KENT WELDON CONFERENCE

INVESTING IN THE **FUTURE**:

OPPORTUNITIES TO AFFORD POSTSECONDARY
EDUCATION AND TRAINING



INDIANA COMMISSION for
HIGHER EDUCATION



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HIGHER EDUCATION

2025 H. Kent Weldon Conference Agenda

April 16, 2025

9:00 a.m. ET

Welcoming Remarks (Ballroom)

Indiana Commissioner for Higher Education Chris Lowery

9:10 a.m. ET

Opening Keynote (Ballroom)

Justin Draeger, Senior Vice President Affordability, Strada Education Foundation

10:05 a.m. ET

Breakout Series 1 (Pick one)

Supporting Indiana's 21st Century Scholars: Tools and Strategies for School Stakeholders (Hart/Shields)

Saving for the Future with Indiana529 (Porter)

11:10 a.m. ET

Breakout Series 2 (Pick one)

Effectively Communicating Affordability to Parents and Guardians: Brainstorming Session (Hart/Shields)

Saving for the Future with Indiana529 (Porter)

12:15 p.m. ET

Lunch (Ballroom)

2:00 p.m. ET

Breakout Series 3 (Pick one)

Effectively Communicating Affordability to Parents and Guardians: Brainstorming Session (Hart/Shields)

Supporting Indiana's 21st Century Scholars: Tools and Strategies for School Stakeholders (Porter)

2025 H. KENT WELDON CONFERENCE PRESENTERS

Chris Lowery

Indiana Commissioner for Higher Education

Chris Lowery was appointed in 2022 to serve as Commissioner for Indiana's Commission for Higher Education, the coordinating agency charged with ensuring the state's postsecondary education system is aligned to meet the needs of students and the state. Prior to joining the Commission, Lowery was senior vice president, workforce, careers, and adult strategy at Ivy Tech Community College where he provided overall leadership of Ivy Tech workforce and career initiatives and organization. Before working in higher education, Lowery led public policy and engagement for Hillenbrand, Inc. and served as an aide to former Indiana Governor Robert D. Orr and then-Senator Dan Quayle.



As Commissioner, Lowery is committed to increasing postsecondary attainment, economic and social mobility and outcomes, and return on investment by increasing the college-going rate, engaging adult learners, improving completion rates, and retaining college graduates. He is focused on ensuring students of all ages understand the value proposition of higher education. He collaborates with policymakers, higher education leaders and community partners to maintain college affordability and guarantee quality higher education is delivered and tied to career relevance as the Commission continues its efforts to realize the state's goal of at least 60 percent of Hoosiers with quality education and training beyond high school.

Currently, Lowery serves on the Boards of the Richard M. Fairbanks Foundation, United Ways of Central Indiana and Executive Committee, Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL), and the Higher Education Working Group of the American Enterprise Institute. In addition, he serves on the Board and Executive Committee of the State Higher Education Executive Organization.

Lowery is a recipient of the Sagamore of the Wabash, the Distinguished Alumni Award of the Indiana University O'Neill School of Public Affairs, and the Distinguished Alumni Award of Indiana Wesleyan University. In addition, he was named to the "Indiana 250" most influential business leader by the Indianapolis Business Journal in 2023 and 2024. He is a regular speaker in Indiana and nationally on topics ranging from the future of higher education, the economy and workforce preparedness to innovation, leadership, and social impact investing. Lowery holds a Bachelor of Science in Public Affairs from Indiana University and a Master of Science in Management from Indiana Wesleyan University.

More information on Chris can be found [here](#).

Justin Draeger

**Senior Vice President for Affordability, Strada Education Foundation
Keynote Speaker**

As Strada's senior vice president, Affordability, Justin Draeger focuses on connecting individuals to opportunity by making postsecondary education more affordable and accessible.

He works to restore trust in higher education by improving price transparency, simplifying financial aid, and promoting efficiencies that lower costs. Draeger champions innovative cost-sharing models that close funding gaps for disadvantaged students, prioritizes need-based aid, and emphasizes fair measures of student and family need, ensuring every student can meaningfully contribute to their education.

Draeger joined Strada in 2024 after spending more than 14 years as president and chief executive officer of the National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators. He served as a prominent advocate and voice for student financial aid issues and was the principal liaison among NASFAA members, the U.S. Congress, federal agencies, and the media.

Since 2002, Draeger has played pivotal roles in administering, interpreting, communicating, and shaping student financial aid policy. His experience includes positions as a director of financial aid, regulatory and policy analyst, and spokesperson, along with senior roles in government relations, communications, and policy development. He serves on several boards dedicated to advancing health and education.

Draeger earned his bachelor's degree from Brigham Young University and a Master of Business Administration in finance from Baker College.



Zachary Cullum

Assistant Director for K-12 Outreach, Indiana Commission for Higher Education

Supporting Indiana's 21st Century Scholars: Tools and Strategies for School Stakeholders

Zachary Cullum serves as the Assistant Director for K-12 Outreach at the Indiana Commission for Higher Education and Outreach Coordinator for the Southwest Region. With over 8 years with the Commission, he is passionate about working with students to help them meet their educational goals. In his free time, he enjoys drinking tea, travelling, and hiking with his wife Christine and daughter Ruby. Zachary holds an MBA from Murray State University and a B.S. in Business Administration from the University of Evansville.



Kate Marling

Postsecondary Transitions Manager, Indiana Commission for Higher Education

Supporting Indiana's 21st Century Scholars: Tools and Strategies for School Stakeholders

Kate Marling serves as the Postsecondary Transitions Manager at the Indiana Commission for Higher Education. Kate first began working with 21st Century Scholars at Indiana University East in 2019 and joined the Financial Aid Team at the Indiana Commission for Higher Education in 2021 before transitioning to the K-12 Team in 2024. She has a lifelong passion for education, both personally and professionally. Kate holds an MPH from Queen Mary University of London and a B.A. in Biology from Randolph Macon College.



Allison Foxen

Outreach Manager, Indiana Education Savings Authority Saving for the Future with Indiana529

Allison Foxen has been with the Indiana Education Savings Authority (IESA) since late October 2022. In her role with the IESA, she spends time around the state helping Hoosiers understand the benefits of saving for education with Indiana529. She previously served as a Lecturer in the Department of Kinesiology at IU Indianapolis. During her time at IU Indianapolis, she worked with undergraduate students for almost 12 years.



Brooke Kile

Senior Associate Commissioner for Business Solutions, Indiana Commission for Higher Education Saving for the Future with Indiana529

Brooke Kile oversees the Commission's efforts to leverage data in the measurement and assessment of strategic initiatives related to Indiana's college-going rate and enrollment, completion, and retention of college graduates in Indiana. She leads the Finance, Business Intelligence, and Information Technology teams. Brooke is responsible for the strategic use of related data and analyses across the Commission staff, university partners, inter-agency partners, and industry leaders.

Prior to joining the Commission, Kile held various positions in the offices of Institutional Research and Financial Aid at postsecondary institutions located in the Midwest.

Kile holds a B.A. in English from Butler University and a M.S. in Management from the University of St. Francis in Illinois.



Allison Kuehr

Associate Commissioner for Marketing and Communications, Indiana Commission for Higher Education

Effectively Communicating Affordability to Parents and Guardians: Brainstorming Session

Allison Kuehr leads marketing and communications at the Indiana Commission for Higher Education. In her role, she oversees internal and external strategic communications, public relations, media relations, and marketing strategies.

Most recently, Kuehr served as communications director for the Commission and previously worked for Work and Learn Indiana which is a program of the Institute for Workforce Excellence. She earned a bachelor's degree in journalism with a concentration in public relations at Indiana University Indianapolis.



Emily Price

Communications Director, Indiana Commission for Higher Education

Effectively Communicating Affordability to Parents and Guardians: Brainstorming Session

Emily Price earned her BA in telecommunications with concentrations in industry and management (media law and policy) and media and society (media psychology) from Indiana University Bloomington in 2016. She began her career in communications by working for a public relations and public affairs firm as well as co-founding a start-up design and production company while completing her undergraduate degree. Upon graduation, Emily worked as a pre-K teacher for two years before transitioning to the Indiana Latino Institute (ILI) as an education program specialist (2018). In 2021, she transitioned to the position of manager of leadership & marketing. Emily also contributed to grant-writing for the organization that brought in over \$3.5 million in funding towards education programming. In July 2023, Emily transitioned to the Indiana Commission for Higher Education to serve as their communications director where she leads media strategy, oversees external and internal communications, and ensures all communication aligns with the Commission's vision.

