Raising Our Voices: Bold Innovations That Empower Students
11th Annual NPEA Conference, April 3-5, 2019
A Look Inside the NPEA 2019 Conference

On April 3-5, 2019 the National Partnership for Educational Access (NPEA) held its 11th annual conference, Raising Our Voices: Bold Innovations That Empower Students, in Chicago, Illinois. The conference focused on bold innovations with proven results designed to empower students on their unique educational journeys, and provided opportunities for attendees to engage in open and frank discussions on topics such as college affordability, student mental health and well-being, identity and character development, youth voice, college and career readiness, measuring impact, and diversity, equity, and inclusion issues across the field. Attendees joined in conversations around eliminating barriers to ensure success for students and ways to collectively raise our voices for positive change. There were 430 attendees from 33 states across the country, with NPEA members comprising 70 percent of the audience.

The 2019 conference included three keynotes: Donnell Butler, Senior Associate Dean for Planning and Analysis of Student Outcomes, Franklin & Marshall College; Eve L. Ewing, Assistant Professor in the School of Social Service Administration, The University of Chicago, and Author, Electric Arches (2017) and Ghosts in the Schoolyard: Racism and School Closings on Chicago’s South Side (2018); and Na’ilah Suad Nasir, President, Spencer Foundation; and Author, Racialized Identities: Race and Achievement for African-American Youth (2011). Other events included two site visits, a pre-conference session, a screening of an episode of the documentary series America to Me, 40 workshops, several breakfast roundtable sessions, welcome and networking receptions, and an Alumni and Young Professionals panel.

The conference kicked off on Wednesday, April 3, with a pre-conference on parent engagement led by representatives from Waukegan to College. Attendees also attended site visits to the 2018 NPEA/Cooke Award for Excellence in Educational Access recipient, Chicago Scholars, and The University of Chicago. The conference officially kicked off Wednesday evening with the Empower Each Other Welcome Reception, sponsored by Schuler Scholar Program, followed by the screening of an America to Me episode.

On Thursday, April 4, attendees were invited to attend breakfast roundtable discussions on a variety of topics including college student satisfaction and persistence, program expansion, mental resilience and self-care, and making the most of your NPEA membership and the conference. Immediately following, the morning opening session featured a panel of alumni and young professionals from area NPEA member programs and schools.

Attendees had the option of choosing from 24 different workshop sessions across three workshop times on Thursday, ranging from supporting undocumented students to career readiness, supporting students through difficult conversations, measuring program
effectiveness, and race and inclusion in the educational landscape. Na’ilah Suad Nasir from the Spencer Foundation provided the afternoon keynote. The winner of the 2019 NPEA/Cooke Award for Excellence in Educational Access was also announced on Thursday, recognizing Leadership Enterprise for a Diverse America (LEDA) as this year’s distinguished recipient. The day wrapped up with a lively Network With Purpose networking reception, followed by optional Dine-Arounds where attendees enjoyed local Chicago cuisine and the company of their fellow attendees.

The final day of the conference provided opportunities to hear from keynotes Donnell Butler from Franklin & Marshall College and Eve L. Ewing from The University of Chicago. Attendees choose from an additional 20 workshop and breakfast roundtable sessions, as well as attended an afternoon book signing with closing keynote speaker Eve L. Ewing.

NPEA looks forward to welcoming attendees to Boston for the 2020 conference taking place on April 15-17 at the Royal Sonesta in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The call for workshop proposals will be released in August 2019 and registration for the conference will open in December 2019.

From 2019 Conference Attendees:

“I attend a lot of conferences each year and I left this conference inspired. Every conversation I had was extremely valuable and I enjoyed all of the sessions I attended.”

“I LOVED that all the workshops had an interactive component! Not only did it break up the session but allowed me to meet more people than I otherwise would have.”

“I am new to my role and the conference helped me to better understand the field, but also the work and conversations that need to happen over the next 1-3 years to move my program forward.”

“This was the most inspiring conference I have ever attended. Not only was the programming excellent, the entire culture was positive and motivating.”

“I loved the opportunity to learn best practices and be able to walk away with tangible tools.”