

I'm First Project Launches to Celebrate and Support First-Generation College Students

BETHESDA, Md., Oct. 2, 2013 (SEND2PRESS NEWSWIRE) – Nonprofit Center for Student Opportunity (CSO) thinks it's time to celebrate first-generation college students and help build the next generation students who will be the first in their families to attend and graduate from college. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan agrees and will help launch CSO's I'm First campaign on October 2 with his own video message.

"There is nothing more important you can do for your future than graduating from high school and then going on to graduate from college," says Duncan. "We're going to make sure that if you work hard and want to go to college, you're going to have that opportunity."

It is estimated that 30 percent of students enrolled in postsecondary institutions today are low income, first-generation college students. But 89 percent of these students will not earn a bachelor's degree six years out from high school. They drop out of college at four times the rate of their peers whose parents have a postsecondary education.

"First-generation college students beat tremendous odds to make it to and through college," said Center for Student Opportunity's Executive Director Matt Rubinoff. "We know that the opportunity for college exists for these students, but we need to make sure that they have access to good information and support in planning for and applying to college."

In February, CSO won the College Knowledge Challenge, a grant competition sponsored by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Facebook, College Summit, and King Center Charter School, to develop I'm First (<http://www.imfirst.org/>), an online community for first-generation college students and their supporters.

Inspired by Dan Savage's It Gets Better project, I'm First is collecting YouTube video stories from first-generation college graduates to inspire and offer advice to the next generation of students who will be first.

"Seeing others who have done what you dream of doing is so important in motivating and encouraging students who would be among the first in their family to go to college," said Kevin Jennings, the former Assistant Deputy Secretary of Education and first-generation college graduate who is advising the project. "We want to put a face to those who are first-generation college students and are calling upon college students, deans and professors, business leaders, doctors and lawyers, politicians and celebrities alike to share their stories and offer some encouragement to future first-generation college students."

I'm First also helps aspiring first-generation college students, and those who advise them, to research and connect with colleges that care about first-generation college students, get answers to their questions about college, attend live Google+ Hangouts, and follow a blog written by current first-generation college students who have won the I'm First Scholarship and are chronicling their college experiences and offering advice.

I'm First officially launches on October 2 with 18 other teams who have built web and mobile applications that support college access and completion as part of the College Knowledge Challenge.

About Center for Student Opportunity (CSO):

Center for Student Opportunity (CSO) is a national nonprofit based in Bethesda, Md. that empowers first-generation college students on the path to and through college. Since its inception in 2005, CSO has created tools and resources to help first-generation college students and their supporters—parents, counselors, and mentors – on the road to and through college. In addition to operating <http://www.imfirst.org/> CSO publishes the “I'm First Guide to College” and maintains partnerships with colleges and universities across the country to strengthen and build awareness of their campus efforts supporting first-generation college students.

About the College Knowledge Challenge:

College Summit and the King Center Charter School joined the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to launch the College Knowledge Challenge, a \$2.5 million fund to develop innovative web and mobile applications that utilize Facebook and help students apply to, attend, and stay in college. 19 teams who won the grant and successfully completed development will launch their apps in October 2013.

Video: <http://youtu.be/6zE8WzS9C7c> .

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