

Fall 2023 Legislative Advisory Committee Meeting

Speaker Biographies

Akil Bello



Akil Bello is an educational access expert with three decades of experience working with underserved students and the organizations that support them.

Beginning as a proctor in 1990, Bello has worked in every level of test preparation from proctor to CEO; he has launched two companies, consulted with universities, developed dozens of preparation programs for more than ten different high-stakes tests, trained hundreds of instructors, and helped thousands of students achieve success.

Bello was founding partner and CEO for Bell Curves, a test preparation company where he worked extensively to improve outcomes for low-income and under-represented students. After successfully selling Bell Curves, he worked as the Director of Equity and Access at one of the largest test prep and publishing companies, where his focus was on helping public schools, non-profit organizations, and community-based organizations understand standardized tests and develop affordable solutions for their students.

He continues to research, write, and speak extensively about access and policies that act as gate-keepers to educational opportunities. He has contributed to reports in a wide array of media outlets from MSNBC's "Morning Joe" to the *Chronicle of Higher Education* to *Forbes*.

Currently, Bello serves as Senior Director of Advocacy and Advancement at FairTest, where he works to build resources and tools to ensure that large scale assessment tests are used in a more limited, transparent, and responsible way to benefit students. He resides in New York City with his wife and two sons.

Dean Libutti



Over the past 25 years, Dean Libutti has worked in a variety of areas within higher education administration including student affairs, admission, new student programs, career development, service learning, financial aid, advising and enrollment management.

Since joining the University of Rhode Island (URI) in 1999, Libutti has served in a variety of capacities, all centered on fostering student success through collaboration and the use of data. In his current role as Associate Vice President for Enrollment Management & Student Success, he provides leadership in enrollment and student success. He has been involved with the design and implementation of various initiatives, including Finish What You Started Adult Degree Completion Program, URIs Winter J Term, URI's Grand Challenge Program, and the University's 60+ member cross-divisional Student Success Team.

Under Libutti's collaborative leadership, URI was recognized as a two-time national finalist for APLU's Degree Completion Award for increasing degree completion and total degrees awarded, while working to improve educational access, quality, and equity. With a passion and commitment for student success, access, equity, and timely degree attainment, he enjoys working with faculty, staff and the community to foster changes within higher education.

CJ Powell



CJ Powell serves as the Director of Advocacy at the National Association for College Admissions Counseling where he leads the advocacy efforts for the association's 26,000-plus membership on the state and federal level on all issues related to college access.

Most recently he served as a Biden-Harris appointee at the U.S. Department of Education beginning as a special assistant to the Assistant Secretary for Postsecondary Education before his promotion to the Chief of Staff role in the same office. While at the Department, Powell worked on a wide range of topics including the Higher Education Emergency Relief Funds, student basic needs, college access programs, college completion programs, and affirmative action.

Prior to his federal service, he served as the inaugural higher education program analyst at The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights and The Leadership Conference Education Fund. In this role, he led the higher education civil rights coalition, a table of more than 50 national civil rights and policy organizations and led the development of the first full higher education policy agenda from the civil rights community.

Powell began his career in education equity as a college adviser in the College Advising Corps, assisting students in rural North Carolina in planning their postsecondary lives. Following graduate school, he served as the founding director of college preparation for a new high school in Nashville, Tennessee. He earned a bachelor's degree in religious studies from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and a master's in higher education from the University of Pennsylvania.

Twink Williams Burns



Twink Williams Burns serves as Williams College's first Strategic Adviser for Admission and Student Financial Services Community Engagement, where she designs and implements innovative policies and programs that push forward the national conversation on college access, affordability, and persistence, especially for students from historically disinvested communities.

Previously, she served as the founding director of college counseling at a Boston-based 6-12 school, then designed and scaled the first college counseling program at the largest and most rapidly growing public charter school network in New York City.

Both programs continue to boast 100% college acceptance rates annually, and primarily serve low-income, first-generation, Black and Latine students. Between building these programs, she spent two years as Director of Diversity Recruitment at Williams; applications from Black students increased by 30%.

Twink contributes broadly to the national college access field. A seasoned public speaker, she's delivered nearly two dozen professional development sessions at conferences across the U.S. for high school counselors, college admission officers, and financial aid personnel. She has been published in media outlets like the *Huffington Post* and NACAC's *College Admission Decoded* podcast.

She's extensively involved in New England-based educational organizations. Currently an elected Executive Board member of the New England Association for College Admission Counseling (NEACAC), which supports and develops 3,500+ K12 counselors, community-based organizations, and enrollment personnel, Twink's prior service includes a three-year Faculty term for the Summer Institute, a residential summer program that trains new college access professionals. She's an Executive Board member of the Berkshire County School Counselor Association for public school counselors, and a Selection Committee member for the Chang Chavkin Scholarship. At Williams, Twink sits on the presidentially-appointed Anti-Racist Task Force and is elected to represent the colleges' 900+ staff on Williams College Staff Committee.

Twink is currently pursuing her masters in higher education leadership from Harvard University and holds her bachelor's degree from Williams College. She is the first in her Black, Chickasaw Freedman, low-income family to earn her BA and MA, but she won't be the last.