Keynote Speaker
Sunday, February 15, 2026

Cole Blalock
Speaker
Magician

Cole Blalock is a professional magician and motivational speaker. He got his start in entertainment at just 7 years old. Through years of growing and developing his sleight of hand and misdirection, he realized something important. He realized that he didn't love magic. He was good at magic, but he didn't love it. What he truly loved was connecting to others and delivering messages of peace, hope, joy, and love. This realization started him on a journey from successful corporate magician to keynote speaker.

During this time of transition and searching for purpose, Cole was introduced to TRIO, and his entire world changed. Now, working exclusively with TRIO programs across the country, Cole inspires students and professionals with his unique blend of magic, comedy, and storytelling.

Contact Information

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Keynote Speaker
Monday, February 16th

Kimberly Jones
President
Council for Opportunity
in Education

Kimberly Jones is the President of the Council for Opportunity in Education. For nearly two decades, she has served as a leading advocate for low-income students, first-generation students, students with disabilities, and other marginalized learners. Previously, Ms. Jones fulfilled several roles at the Council, which represents the interests of its member colleges, universities, and community-based agencies that serve 870,000 students in the Federal TRIO Programs. In her present role, she serves as the chief executive officer of the Council and the primary liaison between the Council and the United States Congress, the Executive Branch, and all governmental agencies as well as all other postsecondary education associations. Additionally, she oversees the organization's professional development offerings for college access and success educators; scholarly and experiential learning opportunities for low-income, first-generation students; and the research agenda of COE's Pell Institute for the Study of Higher Education.

Prior to joining COE, Ms. Jones was an Associate in the Communications Practice Group at the law firm of Dow Lohnes, PLLC (now Cooley LLP), where she advised clients on a variety of broadcast and media law issues.

Ms. Jones has served in leadership roles within various professional and civic organizations, including the Committee for Education Funding, of which she served as President. She is also a Board Member of Marked By COVID, a non-partisan charitable organization that promotes accountability, recognition, and justice for the millions of victims of COVID-19, including her father. Ms. Jones also a member of the Junior League of Washington and volunteers with the DC Family & Youth Initiative, an organization that provides mentorship and support for young people in and aging out of the foster care system in the Washington, DC metro area.

A Harry S. Truman Scholar, Ms. Jones is a graduate of Yale University and the Georgetown University Law Center. In 2016, Ms. Jones was named one of the "40 Under 40 Nation's Best Advocates" by the National Bar Association and also received the organization's Excellence in Activism Award. In 2018, she was selected for the Diversity Executive Leadership Program sponsored by ASAE, the American Society of Association Executives. In 2021, she earned the Certified Association Executive (CAE) credential from ASAE.

Keynote Speaker
Monday, February 16th

Jeff Kahlden
2025-2026 Board Chair
Council for Opportunity in Education

Director
Grant Management Services
Dallas College

Jeff Kahlden currently serves as the Director of Grant Management Services at Dallas College in Dallas, TX. In this role, he supports seven TRIO grants—including Student Support Services, Talent Search, and Upward Bound—as well as Title V HSI grants across the college's seven campuses. Through these initiatives, Jeff is part of a dedicated team that serves over 2,000 students throughout Dallas and its surrounding communities.

Prior to joining Dallas College, Jeff led TRIO programs at Weatherford College for 17 years, University of Arkansas-Fort Smith for 2 years, and Tarleton State University for over 3 years. His professional journey has been marked by increasing leadership responsibilities both within his institutions and across TRIO professional associations. He has held key roles on the state (Texas TRIO), regional (SWASAP), and national (COE) levels and is currently serving as the COE Board Chair for 2025-2026.

A native of Weimar, TX, Jeff is a first-generation college graduate of Tarleton State University, where he earned both his bachelor's degree in Agricultural Services and Development and his master's degree in Agricultural Education. Outside of his professional work, he remains active as a volunteer in a variety of organizations and with his alma mater. He also enjoys a variety of sports, hunting, playing terrible golf, and live music. He resides in Weatherford, TX, with his family.

Keynote Speaker
Wednesday, February 18th

Angela Holley
Director of Student Opportunities
Council for Opportunity in Education

Angela Holley currently holds the position of Director of Student Opportunities at the Council for Opportunity in Education. In this capacity, she bears the responsibility of formulating and delivering a comprehensive array of services and initiatives aimed at bolstering access to higher education for low-income and first-generation students. Before assuming her present role, she amassed 22 years of experience serving as a Director for both Student Support Services and Educational Talent Search.

Angela has consistently demonstrated unwavering dedication to furthering the mission of TRIO throughout her professional tenure. She has notably held the positions of President for WV TRIO and President of the Mid-Eastern Association of Educational Opportunity Program Personnel (MEAEOPP). In addition, Angela has been actively involved in various committees, including Alumni, Student Leadership, and Governmental Relations. She has been honored for her exemplary service, receiving accolades such as the MEAEOPP Outstanding Service Award, the WV TRIO Achiever Award, and the Pathway to Prominence Award.

Mrs. Holley's commitment to TRIO stems from her active participation in the Student Support Services Program at Marshall University. Hailing from a low-income, first-generation background in rural Appalachia, she achieved the milestone of being the first in her family to pursue and obtain a bachelor's degree in psychology, a Master of Arts Degree in Higher Education Counseling, and a second Master's Degree in the Humanities. As a TRIO Alumni, Ms. Holley regards it as a privilege to offer services aimed at enhancing educational opportunities for TRIO-eligible students nationwide.