Ohio College Access Network Named Top Organization of its Kind in the U.S.

Houston, Texas – Yesterday the National College Access Network (NCAN) concluded its annual conference by presenting the Ohio College Access Network (OCAN) the College Access Organization Award of Excellence, recognizing OCAN’s work to improve access to and success in postsecondary education for first-generation, underrepresented and low-income students.

“We did a tremendous amount of work researching the impact an organization is making before we honor it with this distinction and I can assure you OCAN is truly deserving,” pronounced Willis J. Hulings, III, NCAN Board Vice President and President and CEO of The Education Resources Institute.

Founded by the KnowledgeWorks Foundation in cooperation with the Ohio Board of Regents, Ohio Department of Education and Ohio Business Roundtable, OCAN offers program development, sustainability and advocacy for college access programs across the state. Since 1999, OCAN has provided organized infrastructure as the first statewide coordinating body of its kind in the nation and is now revered as a national model for college access.

“We love what this organization represents but more importantly we love providing opportunities for students to access and succeed in college…by creating talent through human capital we increase global competitiveness and positively impact the U.S.,” said Dr. Reginald Wilkinson, OCAN President and CEO, as he accepted the award.

OCAN was selected to receive the College Access Organization Award of Excellence based on its outstanding achievement and the accomplishments of its members. Today, 35 OCAN member college access programs serve 205 of Ohio’s 612 school districts, touching 173,000 students annually. Evidence of OCAN’s efforts and student success can be seen in an average college-going rate increase of 3.8 percent among high schools who implement OCAN college access services, and a 4.5 percent increase in high school graduation rates with OCAN member programs. Additionally, more than 5,000 students received scholarships from OCAN member programs that totaled nearly $6.5 million for the 2005-2006 school year and, in other forms of financial aid, OCAN and its members helped secure $84.5 million for Ohio students.

Ultimately, those who carry out OCAN’s mission are clearly driven by student success. OCAN’s recent Student Summit essay contest winner, Denzel Palmer, articulates why OCAN members continue to passionately and effectively make a difference in the lives of students by answering, “What does college means to me?”

“When I picture college I see a long hallway that never ends crowded with distractions and fortuity. Hanging from the ceiling is a flashing neon sign, and on that sign is the word “SUCCESS”. As I look down the hallway, I can see beautiful carved doors with shiny brass knobs. Mounted on the front of all the doors are shiny brass plates that are marked “OPPORTUNITY”. I walk past the first door and move down the hallway to the next door. I place my hand on the knob and try turning it only to find that this door is locked. I go from one door to the next, but I see that I have to take this endless arduous journey from door one, High School. Now to answer your question, what does college mean to me? College means everything.” ~ Denzel Palmer, Class of 2011.

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