



June 9, 2021 #EquityChat
Traci Kirtley (@TraciKirtley),
Executive Director of Believe in Students (@BelieveStudents)

[@SDMesaPrez](#) Welcome to #EquityChat sponsored by @CollegeFutures w/ your @equityavengers @iamkeithcurry & @SDMesaPrez -tonight we are excited to host @TraciKirtley @BelieveStudents ! Welcome Traci!

[@TraciKirtley](#) Hi everyone! Thanks @SDMesaPrez, @iamkeithcurry -- so happy to be joining #EquityChat!

[@SDMesaPrez](#) Q1. @TraciKirtley. Our education, background, and experiences make us who we are. Please tell us about the non-resume you. We want to know what's not on your resume. #EquityChat @iamkeithcurry @CollegeFutures @BelieveStudents

[@TraciKirtley](#) A1. I was born to teenage parents, & my dad worked through college while raising me in a small town in central Iowa (a #RealCollege OG!). By the time I went to college my family was financially stable but not wealthy. (1/4) @iamkeithcurry @SDMesaPrez @BelieveStudents #EquityChat

[@TraciKirtley](#) I went to school in the days where you could pay for a public college by working full-time (no longer possible!), so that's what I did. I was lucky to attend grad school at Harvard, but my background was so different than everyone else there. (2/4) #EquityChat

[@TraciKirtley](#) I remember sitting in my studio apartment, crying on my bed and thinking I should quit, because I was so out of place. I thought everyone there was so much smarter and more sophisticated than me. (3/4) #EquityChat

[@TraciKirtley](#) Today, my husband & I are licensed foster parents. Those experiences & history are what drives my work. When I'm not at my day job, I'm gardening or hanging out with my husband, our teenage son, & my extended family. We're also rabid sports fans (Go Cyclones!). (4/4) #EquityChat

[@SDMesaPrez](#) Q2. @TraciKirtley. What is your definition of Equity? How is equity-minded practice embedded in your work? #EquityChat @iamkeithcurry @BelieveStudents @CollegeFutures

[@TraciKirtley](#) A2. To me, equity is about everyone getting the resources, support, & structures they need to be successful. We know this is fundamentally not the way our society works, despite what so many of us learned as kids. (1/8) @iamkeithcurry @SDMesaPrez @BelieveStudents #EquityChat

[@TraciKirtley](#) Creating equitable situations for all humans is work that must be pursued between individuals, within communities, and within our systems and government itself. Like all of us, I'm constantly learning and trying to do better in each of these ways. (2/8) #EquityChat

[@TraciKirtley](#) The fundamental work of @BelieveStudents is to create a more equitable situation for #RealCollege students. We can look at data and see that we have inequitable systems and structures of supports, and our primary goal is to upend that. (3/8) #EquityChat

[@TraciKirtley](#) This plays out in our work in two ways. First, our core approach to supporting students is that when students tell us what they need, we believe them. We need to get away from a system where students have to repeatedly prove they need and deserve help. (4/8) #EquityChat

[@TraciKirtley](#) Oftentimes this means being asked to display and relive their most painful moments for strangers, to get a fraction of what they need. We need to work as hard as possible to make sure all students have the chance to express their need. (5/8) #EquityChat

[@TraciKirtley](#) This means creating more open platforms for students to tell us what they need; and it means professionals need to work harder to hear what students say and to find new and creative ways to meet them where they are. ex: #RealCollege Blog: (5/8) #EquityChat <https://t.co/UhXZGEWmy7?amp=1>

[@TraciKirtley](#) Second, I believe equity-minded practice must be applied internally. Nonprofits have historically been very good at focusing on their clientele, at the expense of their staff. I'll admit, I've fallen short on this at times, too. (7/8) #EquityChat

[@TraciKirtley](#) But I am committed to constant examination and improvement of how we equitably support and uplift all of those who join us in this work, as employees, volunteers, and in leadership. (8/8) #EquityChat

[@SDMesaPrez](#) Q3. [@TraciKirtley](#). Please tell us about [@BelieveStudents](#) and your role as Executive Director of [@BelieveStudents](#). #EquityChat [@iamkeithcurry](#) [@CollegeFutures](#)

[@TraciKirtley](#) A3: I came on board as the first Executive Director of [@BelieveStudents](#) in April 2020. Prior to that, we were led by our founder and #RealCollege hero, [@saragoldrickrab](#), who continues to serve on our board. (1/5) [@iamkeithcurry](#) [@SDMesaPrez](#) [@BelieveStudents](#) #EquityChat

[@TraciKirtley](#) [@BelieveStudents](#) was founded to get resources into the hands of students and our mission today is still to focus on supporting college students' living expenses, so they can meet their basic needs and focus on school. <https://believeinstudents.org> (2/5) #EquityChat

[@TraciKirtley](#) We develop and support innovative, sustainable, and effective solutions to meet the need that exists all over the country. Since our founding, we've been doing this work through the FAST Fund, a faculty led emergency aid program on over 30 campuses nationwide. (3/5) #EquityChat

[@TraciKirtley](#) FAST is both an adjective – when students need emergency aid they need it quickly, a historical challenge for attempts to provide aid – and an acronym: “Faculty and Students Together.” As a former teacher myself, I love engaging an important campus community. (4/5) #EquityChat

[@TraciKirtley](#) We are continually identifying new ideas, too – recently, we worked with [@LittleGiantCreative](#) in Philly to develop [@GatherFoodHall](#), a pay-as-you-can space with delicious, affordable food where college students who need it can get a voucher for a free meal. (5/5) #EquityChat

[@SDMesaPrez](#) Q4. [@TraciKirtley](#). Can you tell us more about [@BelieveInStudents](#)' partnerships and projects, and how the pandemic has impacted or shaped your work around supporting students' basic needs? #EquityChat [@iamkeithcurry](#) [@BelieveStudents](#) [@CollegeFutures](#)

[@TraciKirtley](#) A4: I love talking about partnerships, because the strongest, most lasting solutions occur when we work together! The pandemic highlighted challenges of basic needs and created an urgency that we rushed to respond to. (1/6) [@iamkeithcurry](#) [@SDMesaPrez](#) [@BelieveStudents](#) #EquityChat

[@TraciKirtley](#) It also forced a lot of folks to pay attention to these unacceptable challenges faced by #RealCollege students where they had previously been able to ignore it or sweep it under the rug. (2/6) #EquityChat

[@TraciKirtley](#) Our most important partner is the team at @hope4college, well known to the #EquityChat community! Sharing a founder has created a tight relationship in our missions and allows us to bridge the gap between academic research and direct service in a unique way. (3/6) #EquityChat

[@TraciKirtley](#) One of the ways we are doing that is by co-facilitating the RealCollege blog, which tells the stories of both practitioners and students. <https://hope4college.medium.com> (4/6) #EquityChat

[@TraciKirtley](#) Last year, we worked with @Edquityapp to help prove out their approach to administer large-scale emergency aid equitably & aligned with the best principles in the space, & together we administered over \$1 million in emergency aid (including at @ComptonCollege!). (5/6) #EquityChat

[@TraciKirtley](#) Now, they are one hot ticket as they've had a chance to prove their model and gain data to demonstrate their impact just as every institution in the country is determining how best to administer first CARES Act, and now, HEERF funds. (6/6) #EquityChat <https://t.co/wzEEFhbzXH?amp=1>

[@SDMesaPrez](#) Q5. @TraciKirtley @BelieveStudents has supported research by @hope4college's #RealCollege surveys. What are 2-3 of the biggest takeaways from their most recent March 2021 report? #EquityChat @IamKeithCurry @CollegeFutures

[@TraciKirtley](#) A5. By far the biggest takeaway for me is the ongoing, staggering rate of basic needs insecurity faced by so many students today. <https://hope4college.com/rc2021-bni-during-the-ongoing-pandemic/> (1/5) @SDMesaPrez @IamKeithCurry @BelieveStudents #EquityChat

[@TraciKirtley](#) Roughly 3 out of every 5 college students are struggling to ensure they have food to eat, a consistent place to sleep, someone to care for their children, a way to get to school, etc. That's just a very difficult setup for college success. (2/5) #EquityChat

[@TraciKirtley](#) The #RealCollege survey also highlights another way college students got walloped by #COVID19 – 40% reported losing a job, internship, or job offer, while 1 in 4 reported lower hours/pay. This makes sense, because the jobs college students typically work- (3/5) #EquityChat

[@TraciKirtley](#) -in restaurants, hospitality, or other services - tended to be those hit hardest. Finally, @BelieveStudents is focused on how many students who really could have used emergency aid or other basic needs supports, that just didn't get them. (4/5) #EquityChat

[@TraciKirtley](#) 52% of those struggling to meet their needs didn't get help because they didn't know it was available; they didn't know how to access it; or, most heartbreaking, they just thought someone else might need it more. (5/5) #EquityChat

[@dchometownboy](#) (Jun 10) Both heart-breaking and heart-warming. Over my many years of working w/people and communities in need, I have seen so much charitable spirit from people who are themselves in a difficult place.



[@SDMesaPrez](#) Q6. [@TraciKirtley](#). How can colleges/university leaders address barriers around basic needs insecurities, and support students' recovery from the pandemic? #EquityChat [@lamkeithcurry](#) [@CollegeFutures](#)

[@TraciKirtley](#) A6: Over the next year, we're in a unique spot where there is actually a lot of help available, both directly through HEERF funding, and in other supports, from SNAP benefits to rental assistance to broadband access. (1/6) [@SDMesaPrez](#) [@iamkeithcurry](#) [@BelieveStudents](#) #EquityChat

[@TraciKirtley](#) We see the clear lane into how to help students: let's make sure they know there is support available, make it as easy as possible for them to access it, and assure them that they should take advantage of the support. (2/6) #EquityChat

[@TraciKirtley](#) We are focusing on how our FAST Fund sites can educate and employ faculty networks to talk to students about the resources available to them. We're also creating student-led campaigns to spread the word where students are (coming soon to your TikTok #fyp!). (3/6) #EquityChat

[@TraciKirtley](#) [@USEDgov](#) is giving guidance that maximizes institutions' ability to support students. We encourage all university leaders to understand what's possible; if you're not a decision-maker yourself, you can use this to advocate for students! (4/6) #EquityChat <https://t.co/SUWceSHw16?amp=1>

[@TraciKirtley](#) And our [@hope4college](#) friends (rock stars [@econroy](#) and [@carriewelton](#) alongside [@saragoldrickrab](#)) developed this fantastic guide for utilizing HEERF funds. (5/6) #EquityChat <https://t.co/FkhwiEr8n2?amp=1>

[@TraciKirtley](#) Finally, they can and should listen to students on their campus, and enlist their help. (An equity mindset to asking students to do this kind of work should include consideration of compensation, as well.) (6/6) #EquityChat

[@SDMesaPrez](#) Q7. [@TraciKirtley](#). What gives you hope? #EquityChat [@lamkeithcurry](#) [@CollegeFutures](#)

[@TraciKirtley](#) A7: Always, our students. As grim as the data is, these students who are facing such fundamental challenges, who are nonetheless working to gain an education and a better future, are the absolute best of our country. (1/3) [@SDMesaPrez](#) [@iamkeithcurry](#) [@BelieveStudents](#) #EquityChat

[@TraciKirtley](#) It is tremendously inspiring to know that we have a generation of students like [@TheMessageLLC](#), [@CollegeShopTalk](#), [@nomatopoeia](#) and others who are telling their stories and demanding change. As I just heard [@AmyLoyd1](#) say today: the stories are what sticks. (2/3) #EquityChat

[@TraciKirtley](#) I also find hope in the reaction we have seen over the last year, whether it is the #AmericanRescuePlan, institutional leaders who stepped forward to make changes in processes, or everyday people who helped provide support for students. (3/3) #EquityChat <https://t.co/PcDjgpQMhT?amp=1>

[@DrGoldsmith777](#) Our students daily demonstration of grit and persistence that has resulted in a record number of degrees awarded. #Graduates

[@TraciKirtley](#) Amazing!! Congratulations!

[@SDMesaPrez](#) Last question & #EquityChat fan favorite-Q8. [@TraciKirtley](#). What are you reading? And what book(s) would you recommend we consider reading? [@lamkeithcurry](#) [@CollegeFutures](#) [@BelieveStudents](#)



[@TraciKirtley](#) A8: I'm currently reading a book called "How to Have a Good Day," which looks at research in neuroscience, psychology, and behavioral economics and applies it to developing healthy and productive daily habits/routines. (1/5)
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[@TraciKirtley](#) Next on my bookshelf is "Pregnant Girl" by [@NicoleLynnLewis](#). I mentioned that my dad was a student parent; he was my hero, and he recently passed away. This book promises to help me learn about the students that we serve, while feeling reconnected with my dad. (2/5) #EquityChat

[@TraciKirtley](#) Once upon a time, I used to read for fun! In this vein I recently read "The Giver of Stars," a fiction version of a true story of women who delivered books on horseback as a traveling library led by Eleanor Roosevelt. (Yes, look how nerdy my "fun" reading is.) (3/5) #EquityChat

[@TraciKirtley](#) Finally, I highly recommend "The Privileged Poor," by [@Tony_Jack](#), and "LowerEd" by [@TressieMcPhD](#), especially whichever one represents the part of higher ed that you don't spend much time thinking about. (4/5)
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[@TraciKirtley](#) Both helped me consider the scope and complexity of our higher ed "system" and how the structures, market forces, and solutions may differ depending on your corner of the world, but the common thread of inequity, and who tends to bear the brunt of it, remains. (5/5) #EquityChat