On behalf of Ferris State University, it is my pleasure to welcome you to the 2012 Advocates for Latino Student Advancement in Michigan Education Conference. I’m Dave Eisler, president of Ferris State University. I hope that you enjoy your time here in Big Rapids and that this year’s conference helps encourage you to attend college.

There are many, many reasons why a college education is important. With a 4-year college degree you are far more likely to enjoy career success than someone with just a high school diploma. On average young adults with a college degree earn twice as much as those with only a high school education.

Or think about it this way. The state of Michigan is expected to have 1.3 million job vacancies through the year 2018; 836,000 of them will require a college education. A college education is even more important for jobs in emerging technology and related fields.

Michigan is expected to create 138,000 new jobs by 2018; 116,000 of them will require a college degree. The future belongs to those who are educated, which is why I am very excited that Ferris State University is the host site and providing resources for today’s events.

I want to extend my thanks to everyone here at Ferris and in our audience this morning that has worked to organize this opportunity for you. This ALSAME conference is one of many ways we at Ferris State University are actively working to help young people understand the importance of education to their lives. If you are from the Grand Rapids area, I am very excited about our partnership with the Hispanic Center of Western Michigan to engage students in a Stop Summer Learning Loss program, which provides career-focused educational activities and encourages participation in higher education.

Please know our concern for your future. We want to encourage you in every way to set your goals high, to graduate from high school and to enroll at college. This is our hope for each of you and we want to assist you and encourage your success in every way possible. Please understand that most importantly the goal is not to attend college, but to graduate from it.

I am honored to introduce this morning’s speaker, Roy Juarez Jr.

In education we talk a lot about the importance of making good decisions. This involves everything from the decision to pursue a degree, to what college or university to attend, to decisions about study and social habits. I can’t think of a better person to speak to the power of making those good decisions than Mr. Juarez.

At 14 he was a homeless teenager who was also caring for his 9-year-old sister and 2-year-old brother. Today he is president and founder of America’s Business Leaders - a human development company and, most importantly for much of the focus of today’s events, a college graduate. He has been travelling the country sharing his story, which has much to do with the good decisions he made in the midst of a bad situation.

In addition to his many speaking appearances, his inspiring story has also been featured in the book, Chicken Soup for the Soul: Extraordinary Teens, as well as on a CNN segment leading up to its documentary “Latinos in America.” It is a pleasure to have him here in person this morning.

Please join me in welcoming Roy Juarez Jr.