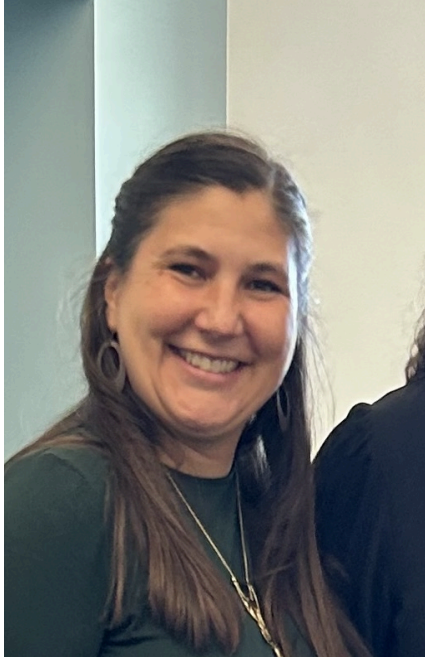


K-12 Counselor Strategy Group

Description: Welcome to the K-12 High School/College Counselor Strategy Group, a collaborative initiative powered by [The Presidents' Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration](#), [The National College Attainment Network \(NCAN\)](#), and [Teach for America](#). This group comprises dedicated high school advisors, college counselors, and college educators, with a focus on building a robust college counseling guide specifically tailored to support, advise, and build community with undocumented high school students.

Our Mission: Our primary goal is to empower college counselors with comprehensive resources that aid in guiding undocumented students through the collegiate application process. By fostering discussions, sharing insights, and collaboratively shaping a valuable guide, we aim to ensure that every undocumented student has access to informed decisions when applying to collegiate institutions.

EDUCATOR'S BIOGRAPHIES



Melissa Dole

Email: dole_melissa@svvsd.org

State: Colorado

School Counselor at St Vrain Valley Schools

Melissa Dole serves as a counselor for [St. Vrain Valley School District's Pathways to Teaching \(P-TEACH\) program](#), where support and concurrent enrollment courses are provided to students pursuing a career in education. One of the primary objectives of the P-TEACH program is to establish a teacher workforce that more closely reflects the demographics of the students. Within this program, there are students who lack documentation paperwork, and although they can gain admission to college, overcoming obstacles in accessing work and the district employment pathway remains a significant challenge. In her role, Melissa has actively assisted students without documentation paperwork through various means. She has facilitated connections to community resources, provided support for their mental health, guided them in college and career navigation, helped them access postsecondary funding, and offered academic support. As a representative advocating for her program, Melissa contributes to the creation of program systems that take into account the specific challenges faced by individuals without documentation paperwork. Through her efforts, she aims to ensure that the voices of these students are heard and considered in the development of effective support structures.



Christian Espinoza

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State: California

Founder at NavigateED Solutions & PhD

Candidate at Claremont Graduate University

Christian Espinoza is a first-generation college student, queer Latino from Michoacán, Mexico, and is the Founder of [NavigateED Solutions](#), a consulting firm in San Bernardino, California that empowers undocumented students and guides educational institutions. Christian is pursuing a Ph.D. in Urban Educational Leadership at Claremont Graduate University, focusing on the intersection of immigration, education policy, and urban leadership. He has a Master's in Higher Education-Student Affairs from the University of Redlands and a Bachelor's in Sociology, specializing in Computing, from the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). While at FWD.us, Christian served as the University Program Intern, working on initiatives to support undocumented students. As a [past Graduate Intern at the Presidents' Alliance](#), he coordinated the K-12 counselor strategy group, supported [communications between partners](#), updated the [private institutions tool](#), and curated [student narratives](#). He has also held roles supporting undocumented students at California State University, San Bernardino, and UCLA's Dream Resource Center. Under Christian's leadership, NavigateED Solutions has worked with institutions like Claremont Graduate University and Pomona College. The firm redesigns websites to make them more user-friendly, and inclusive of undocumented students and conducts workshops on topics from scholarships to writing for personal statements. Christian [co-authored a career guide for FWD.us](#) and delivered empowering keynotes on his immigration and education journeys, and ongoing advocacy. His work has profoundly impacted the lives of students and educators.



Luis González Mendoza

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State: Illinois

DREAMer Supports Manager at Noble Schools

Luis González Mendoza, a first-generation college graduate and formerly undocumented individual, is from Mexico and was raised in rural Indiana. Throughout his life, Luis has harbored a deep-seated passion for serving immigrant communities and youth. During his college years, he adeptly managed his time, juggling work, academics, and community organizing endeavors. In these roles, he emerged as a key figure in leading local, state, and national initiatives aimed at securing justice for Indiana's undocumented populations. Following his graduation from [Indiana University South Bend](#), Luis dedicated six years to serving the City of South Bend's Department of Diversity & Inclusion, working under the leadership of Mayor Pete Buttigieg. In more recent years, he contributed his skills and expertise to the [National Immigrant Justice Center in Chicago](#). Presently, Luis holds the position of DREAMer Supports Manager at [Noble Schools](#). In this role, he oversees the [Pritzker Access Scholarship](#) and provides comprehensive support to Noble's undocumented populations and their families, guiding them through the challenges of high school and supporting their journey through college.



Frida Hernandez

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State: Nebraska

**Bilingual College Planning Specialist at
Education Quest Foundation**

Frida Hernandez, a bilingual college planning specialist, dedicates her efforts to assisting undocumented students in navigating the college admissions process. With a focus on first-generation students, she recognizes that many are unfamiliar with the initial steps involved. Observing an increasing level of parental involvement

and anticipating the impact of forthcoming changes to the FAFSA, Frida is committed to ensuring that families, particularly those with U.S.-born children, are well-informed. Her goal is to raise awareness within the community, transcending geographical limitations, even as she operates within the confines of [EducationQuest](#), exclusively serving the state of Nebraska.



Carlos Jimenez

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State: Colorado

CEO at Peak Education

Carlos Jimenez worked in College Admission for 15 years, holding leadership positions at [Colorado State University Fort Collins](#) and [Colorado College](#). Currently, he serves as the CEO of [Peak Education](#), a community-based organization dedicated to closing educational opportunity gaps for youth from low-income backgrounds. Throughout his tenure in admissions, Carlos actively contributed to improving admission policies and practices for undocumented/DACA students. Notably, he collaborated with Colorado College leadership to admit and secure full financial aid resources for undocumented students for the first time. Additionally, he played a pivotal role in developing admission practices and financial policies for in-state tuition at Colorado State University. Carlos also organized and hosted the Colorado DREAMER conference in Colorado Springs. Carlos has taken on various leadership roles, including serving as the President of RMACAC and co-chairing the NACAC Hispanic/Latino Special Interest Group. He has been a founding and ongoing board member of Atlas Preparatory School, an innovative charter school in Colorado Springs. He earned his B.A. in History and Political Science from Colorado College in 2004, completed an M.A. in Student Affairs and Higher Education at the University of Colorado, Colorado Springs in 2008, and is currently pursuing an Education Doctorate in Organizational Leadership and Change at the University of Southern California.



Cynthia Ling

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State: New York

College Access Advisor at [The Double Discovery Center at Columbia University](#)

Since joining the field, Cynthia Ling has collaborated with nonprofits dedicated to advocating for and facilitating educational equity in college access and success. Within that scope, she has also worked with undocumented students and students from mixed status families. Cynthia is committed to persistently supporting their success by offering transparency and guidance throughout the stressful and somewhat opaque processes of college and career exploration.



Daniel Lopez

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State: Massachusetts

Managing Director of Program at [OneGoal Massachusetts](#)

As the Managing Director of Program, Daniel Lopez assumes the responsibility of overseeing the program and partnership experience for [OneGoal](#) schools throughout Massachusetts. In this capacity, he is dedicated to ensuring that non-citizen OneGoal fellows have an equitable opportunity to realize their college dreams through strategic partnerships and resource curation. In his previous role, Daniel served as the senior manager of the EMERGE program in Houston ISD. Leading a team of 12th-grade advisors, he directed efforts to support first-generation, low-income students across 45 high schools in Houston. Daniel and his team customized advising and support for non-citizen students, resulting in increased matriculation to institutions that are friendly to non-citizen individuals. With a decade of experience in college access, Daniel

remains steadfast in his commitment to opening doors for non-citizen students, ensuring they have the necessary resources and support to thrive in college and beyond.



Julissa Loza Mendez

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State: California

Assistant Director of [Network Engagement at Growing Inland Achievement \(GIA\)](#)

Julissa Loza Mendez, a graduate from [California State Polytechnic University, Pomona](#), holds a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology and Spanish. Dedicated to enhancing educational opportunities, she is committed to improving the financial aid completion rate in the Inland Empire. Julissa collaborates closely with the [California Student Aid Commission \(CSAC\)](#) in her efforts, particularly in supporting undocumented students through the [CA Dream Act Application \(CADAA\)](#). Her work reflects a lifelong passion for fostering inclusive education within the community.



Alexa Maqueo Toledo

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State: Tennessee

College Access Fellow at [The Education Trust - Tennessee](#)

Alexa Maqueo Toledo, a DACA recipient originally from Mexico City, spent her formative years in East Tennessee. Her path to academic achievement and that of her peers ignited a passion for education advocacy and equity. Throughout her undergraduate studies at Maryville College, Alexa played a crucial role in identifying and addressing the challenges faced by undocumented students in higher education. Upon completing her degree, Alexa transitioned into the role of a College & Career Coach at a local high school, notable for its

significant population of immigrant and undocumented students. In this capacity, she dedicated herself to guiding students towards suitable post-graduation opportunities. Her responsibilities included exploring various post-secondary options, facilitating scholarship applications, and providing mentorship. Recently, Alexa held the position of [The Education Trust - Tennessee's](#) College Access Fellow. In this role, she extended support to the [EmpowerEd Network](#), a group of youth advocates in education. Simultaneously, she worked on developing a comprehensive resource hub tailored for Tennessee undocumented youth pursuing higher education, educators in search of resources and tools, undocumented families, and allies of the undocumented community. Alexa Maqueo Toledo continues to make impactful contributions to the field of education, driven by her commitment to fostering accessibility and equity for all students.

Isabel Hernandez Marsh

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State: Georgia

Multilingual College and Career Readiness Coordinator at [Atlanta Public Schools](#)

Isabel Hernandez Marsh has accumulated over 13 years of extensive educational experience, characterized by a steadfast commitment to assisting undocumented students in diverse learning environments. Her academic journey encompasses various settings, from ESOL and dual language classrooms to her multilingual college and career readiness coordinator role. Isabel has actively empowered multilingual learners throughout her career through a self-reliant and empathetic approach. Her dedication revolves around nurturing academic growth and the overall success of students, extending well into their post-graduation pursuits. At the core of her philosophy is establishing a collaborative culture that embraces the participation and contributions of all stakeholders, ensuring inclusivity and unity. A crucial aspect of Isabel's work focuses on enhancing the instructional capabilities of faculty and staff. She firmly believes in instructional leadership grounded in inclusivity, advocating for culturally responsive practices tailored to the distinctive needs of diverse learners. Her primary emphasis remains on ensuring the success of all students, irrespective of their backgrounds or circumstances. Isabel's profound experience in the ESOL classroom, dual language education, and her role as a multilingual college and career readiness coordinator have significantly influenced her

perspective on education. This background has honed her ability to create an environment that educates, supports, and nurtures the multifaceted needs of students, particularly those from undocumented backgrounds. Isabel aspires to continue spearheading educational initiatives that educate and uplift, ensuring students have the resources and support necessary to thrive academically and beyond.



Yolanda Martinez-Pineda

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State: Minnesota

Program/Supervisor Manager at [Achieve Twin Cities \(Minneapolis School District\)](#)

Yolanda Martinez-Pineda brings over 17 years of dedicated experience in supporting undocumented students in college and career access. With a robust background spanning from high school to community college settings, she has held various roles, including college coach, case manager, after-school program coordinator, and school counselor, and currently serves as a College and Career Center (CCC) supervisor. Throughout each of these roles, Yolanda's unwavering dedication to youth facing significant barriers has remained consistent. As a first-generation college graduate from migrant parents, Yolanda intimately understands the challenges that new-to-country youth encounter in educational settings. Since the inception of her professional career in 2005, she has stayed abreast of national and state programs impacting undocumented youth, whether opening up or closing down. From 2017 to 2021, Yolanda led the college and career program at [El Colegio Charter School](#), catering to a predominantly Latinx student population.



Lynda McGee

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State: California

College Counselor at [Downtown Magnets High School](#)

Lynda McGee first encountered the concept of undocumented status through a cherished student who belonged to the Class of 2001. During that period, there were no supportive legislative measures like AB 540 to facilitate her journey to college. Faced with limited options, the student succumbed to a profound sense of despair. Lynda was resolute in ensuring her access to higher education, determined to find a solution. Since that pivotal moment, Lynda has committed herself to staying informed about the current regulations in California and other states, identifying colleges that are considered "undoc friendly," and understanding the available financial resources for these students. The student who initially introduced her to this demographic successfully earned both a bachelor's and a master's degree, subsequently becoming a librarian at a community college in Northern California. Embarking on her counseling career in 2000, Lynda transitioned to a college counselor role in 2005. Throughout the years, she has devoted the majority of her life to aiding first-generation, low-income, and undocumented students, aiming to transform their families' lives through the attainment of a college degree.



Christine Miller

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State: Virginia

Director of College Advising at [The Scholarship Fund of Alexandria](#)

Christine Miller, a seasoned school counselor, has dedicated many years to assisting undocumented students. In her current role, she collaborates with school and community-based organizations, such as the ACHS International Academy, through her agency. The focus is on providing comprehensive support to undocumented students as they navigate their paths beyond high school. This involves guiding them through the application processes for college, trade school, and various training programs. Christine actively engages with students during their time at ACHS and continues to offer assistance after they graduate. A staunch advocate for the aspirations of undocumented students, she

takes pride in seeking opportunities to connect with them at their current stage and facilitating their journey towards their desired destinations.



Alan Miramontes Flores

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State: Tennessee

Position: Post Secondary Access Coordinator at Centro Hispano De East Tennessee

Alan Miramontes Flores began his journey working with undocumented students based on personal experiences. As one of the first DACA recipients to attend and graduate from Maryville College in Maryville, TN, he gained valuable insights to the challenges faced by undocumented students in accessing postsecondary education. After completing his studies, Alan joined Fulton High School in Knoxville, TN, working for [Project GRAD Knoxville](#) as a College & Career Access Coach. In this role, he focused on assisting high school seniors, particularly those from the substantial Latinx student population in Knox County, TN, many of whom were undocumented. Alan then returned to his alma mater and worked as an admissions counselor, with a specific emphasis on recruiting undocumented students. [Maryville College](#), being an undocumented-friendly campus, offered numerous opportunities and resources for immigrant students, initiatives that Alan actively led. Currently, Alan Miramontes Flores is associated with [Centro Hispano de East Tennessee](#), a non-profit organization in Knoxville, TN. In his role, he spearheads all postsecondary access initiatives, overseeing specialized services for students pursuing opportunities after high school. Alan and his team at Centro Hispano de East Tennessee dedicate their resources and expertise to support undocumented students, providing crucial information on local resources and guiding them through the transition from high school to postsecondary opportunities.



Gisselle Molinary

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State: North Carolina

Sr. Program Manager at [Golden Door Scholars](#)

Gisselle Molinary has dedicated more than five years of her professional career to Golden Door Scholar, a program that offers a full ride scholarship to undocumented students. She diligently oversees the provision of college and career support to both active students and alumni within the program.



Christle Nwole

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State: Texas

College Counselor, [YES Prep Northbrook High School](#)

Christle Nwole is a DACA recipient who has dedicated the past seven years to working with undocumented students and their families as a high school college counselor. She possesses extensive experience in guiding her students through the intricacies of the state financial aid program

[TASFA](#), drawing from her personal use of the program during her own educational journey.



Juan Carlos Perez

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State: New York

College Advisor and CDOS Coordinator of International High School at Union Square

Juan Carlos Perez is originally from Mexico and made the journey to the U.S. at the age of eleven.

Having graduated from International High School at LaGuardia, he went on to obtain his B.S. in Mathematics and M.A. in Education from Adelphi University. In his current role as the College Advisory & CDOS Coordinator at the [International High School at Union Square](#), Juan Carlos dedicates himself to supporting students on their academic journeys. As an undocumented immigrant and a DACA recipient, Juan Carlos intimately understands the challenges associated with navigating the college system without a secure immigration status. Throughout the years, he has proactively sought to establish partnerships between his school and various nonprofit organizations, aiming to provide undocumented students and their families with a wide range of essential resources. Juan Carlos's commitment extends beyond coordination responsibilities at his school. He actively engages in creating work-based learning opportunities for undocumented students and has been involved in the [Immigrant Liaison Pilot Program with the NY State Youth Leadership Council](#). Presently, he serves as a Project Researcher for CUNY's Initiative on Immigration and Education, contributing to ongoing efforts in this vital field.



Nayelli Rico Lopez

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State: Nevada

Coordinator at Undocumented Student Program at University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Nayelli Rico Lopez, a DACA recipient and first-generation college graduate, is dedicated to

providing resources to the immigrant community. In her role as the Coordinator for the [Undocumented Student Program at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas \(UNLV\)](#), Nayelli consistently strives to develop and enhance resources for undocumented students in the Las Vegas valley. Her goal is to make a positive impact on the campus and ensure that UNLV's diverse student population receives adequate support. Additionally, Nayelli serves as the advisor to the [UndocuNetwork](#), UNLV's student-led undocumented organization, and acts as the [Scholar Advisor for TheDream.US Scholarship](#). She obtained her B.A. in Communications from Nevada State University, where she was recognized as a recipient of TheDream.US.



Maria Rodriguez

Email: maria@breakthroughhouston.org

State: Texas

Program Manager at Breakthrough Houston

Maria Rodriguez, a program manager at [Breakthrough Houston](https://breakthroughhouston.org), dedicates herself to supporting all students, including DACAmented and undocumented individuals, on their journey towards college. She is committed to equipping them, along with their families, with the necessary information to make informed decisions about their future education. Maria is well-versed in providing guidance during the financial aid application process, specifically the [TASFA](https://tasfa.org) submission. Her sincere hope is that every student realizes they have viable options irrespective of their immigration status.



Kathy Rose

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State: Texas

Executive Director at CollegeCommunityCareer

Kathy Rose, propelled by a profound conviction in the transformative influence of education, brings a wealth of experience to support undocumented students in flourishing on their academic paths. Through extensive guidance in college admissions, navigating financial aid, and fostering social-emotional skills, Kathy empowers undocumented students to surmount obstacles and attain their maximum potential. By cultivating an inclusive and supportive learning milieu, she ardently champions for the distinctive perspectives and contributions of undocumented students, ensuring they perceive their value and are empowered to succeed.



Daneen Simoneau

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State: Kansas

The College Advantage Coordinator at WSU Tech

Daneen Simoneau is a passionate and dedicated educational advocate who has the privilege of working closely with undocumented students, championing their rights, and striving to create supportive environments for academic growth. Her journey in supporting undocumented students began many years ago when she served as a College and Career Counselor. Today, she continues her advocacy in her role as The College Advantage Coordinator at [WSU Tech](https://www.wsutech.edu). In her capacity, Daneen regularly interacts with and serves undocumented student populations by providing guidance, resources, assistance with financial aid, and support in applying for scholarships for post-secondary educational opportunities. She actively collaborates with community organizations to connect students to critical resources, helping them overcome hurdles and challenges. Daneen firmly believes that education is the gateway to generational transformation, and she is dedicated to ensuring that all students, regardless of their background, have the opportunity to learn and thrive. Her extensive experience working with undocumented students has given her a deep understanding of their unique struggles, fostering a strong commitment to making a positive impact in their lives.



Tenesha Villanueva

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State: Virginia

Founder & CEO at Villanueva Consulting

Tenesha Villanueva, the Founder & CEO of [Villanueva Consulting](https://www.villanuevaconsulting.org), is dedicated to ensuring increased economic mobility for students from marginalized communities. With 17 years of experience in schools,

districts, and nonprofits, she is a first-generation college graduate and a leader in equity-driven college access and completion initiatives.

Having provided direct postsecondary advising support to over 1,000 students from marginalized backgrounds, Tenesha has been instrumental in assisting undocumented students and their families throughout the postsecondary advising process, both in the states of Texas and California. Additionally, she co-developed a comprehensive, nationally recognized college persistence program model that served over 2,000 students, many of whom were undocumented. For Tenesha, her passion for creating equitable pathways of success for all students is more than a job—it's a calling. She is excited to join the President's Alliance Strategy Group to advance support and resources for undocumented students. An alumna of [Old Dominion University](#), Tenesha holds a Bachelor's degree in Elementary Education and a Master's in Educational Leadership. As a proud military spouse and a devoted mom, she loves spending time with her family and actively serves her local church and community.