

IECA⁺ INSIGHTS

THE JOURNAL OF THE INDEPENDENT EDUCATIONAL CONSULTANTS ASSOCIATION

Winter 2024

Guiding Student-Athletes Understanding Verbal Commitments in College Athletics

INSIDE



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Seven gap year trends



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Helping families assess
right-fit schools



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President's Letter

2024 Initiatives and Priorities

As we embark on a remarkable journey into 2024, it is my pleasure to share with you the specific priorities and initiatives that will shape the future of both IECA and our esteemed profession of independent educational consulting.

One Conference: Bigger, Better, and More Impactful

Our commitment to delivering exceptional value and relevance to our members has led us to make a pivotal decision: hosting one annual conference in the spring. This single, larger, and more impactful event will allow for increased in-depth sessions and enhanced opportunities for learning, networking, and professional development. Changes to our conference will be developed over the coming years and implemented as contractual restraints give way to newly booked cities.

New Website and Association Management System (AMS) Implementation

By summer 2024, we will unveil our new AMS with improved usability for our members and college, school, and therapeutic colleagues; we are pleased to announce that beta versions are currently undergoing testing. Our dedicated IECA staff has been working in close collaboration with a team of web designers to create a revamped website in conjunction with the launch of the new AMS. This redesign includes improved organization and an updated, user-friendly design. To ensure the effectiveness of these endeavors, we have also formed a **Tech Working Group** within our membership. This group comprises individuals with relevant expertise who will provide guidance to our board and staff during and after implementation.



Ibrahim Firat

AICEP Integration: Elevating Our Profession

The integration of AICEP (American Institute of Certified Educational Planners) into IECA signifies a monumental step forward. (See page 35 for details.) This integration unifies our profession under the IECA brand and establishes a clear path to professional excellence.

If you currently hold the CEP designation, you can rest assured that your credential remains valid through the integration process. If you are considering pursuing the CEP designation, we encourage you to do so, as it will continue to hold value once integration is complete. For those who wish to wait until integration is finalized, that option will be available to accommodate your preferences.

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In Focus

2023 IECA Making a Difference Award Honorees

Congratulations to the 2023 IECA Making a Difference Award recipients: **Michele Evard**, **Jeanne Gunsolus**, **Jennie Kent**, **Penny Klein**, **Gina Lee**, **Jennifer McKenzie**, and **Barbara Rapaport**. The award recognizes their selfless volunteer efforts benefiting the association's 2,800 members during the year. The awards were presented during the closing event of the IECA 2023 Fall Conference.



Michele Evard



Jeanne Gunsolus



Jennie Kent



Penny Klein



Gina Lee



Jennifer McKenzie



Barbara Rapaport

Featured IECA Upcoming Events

Regional Symposium

February 22-23 • Madrid, Spain



Sold Out! This two-day event, to be attended by IECA members and non-member IEC colleagues, focuses on university admissions in the EU and includes educational sessions, networking opportunities, an EU University & Gap Programs Fair, and pre-symposium tours. link.IECAonline.com/symposia

Advocacy Days

March 4-6 • Washington, DC

A group of 16 IECA members, led by IECA's Government Relations Committee and Advocacy Chair Steven Mercer, and with the support of our legislative counsel, will meet with legislators on Capitol Hill in our second annual advocacy event for IECA. We will share more information about their advocacy efforts later this spring. link.IECAonline.com/advocacy

Spring College Tour: Country, Blues, & BBQ

March 18-22 • Nashville, TN to St. Louis, MO

Sold Out! The IECA College Committee and IECA staff are excited to offer this five-day spring tour of nine colleges (Sewanee, Middle Tennessee State University, Fisk University, Vanderbilt University, Belmont University, Southern Illinois University, University of Missouri, Saint Louis University, and Washington University) in Tennessee, Illinois, and Missouri, to be attended by current IECA Professional and Associate members. link.IECAonline.com/campus-tours

Annual Conference

May 6-8 • Mohegan Sun Resort, Connecticut

Don't miss out as we transition to one larger, more impactful Annual Conference this year! Highlights of our Annual Conference include:

- Seven pre- and post-conference tours featuring 24 colleges in Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island
- Pre-conference workshops, offering deep dives into specific subject areas
- 80+ educational sessions on diverse topics impacting the IEC profession
- Advanced topic discussions in small-group settings
- Tuesday College Fair featuring dozens of four-year colleges and universities
- Monday Therapeutic Info Swap featuring networking opportunities with dozens of therapeutic schools and programs
- Wednesday Exchange featuring LD/ND and traditional schools, gap year programs, and postsecondary programs
- And much more!

Registration will open in late February. link.IECAonline.com/conference-info

Summer Training Institute

July 22-26 • Online

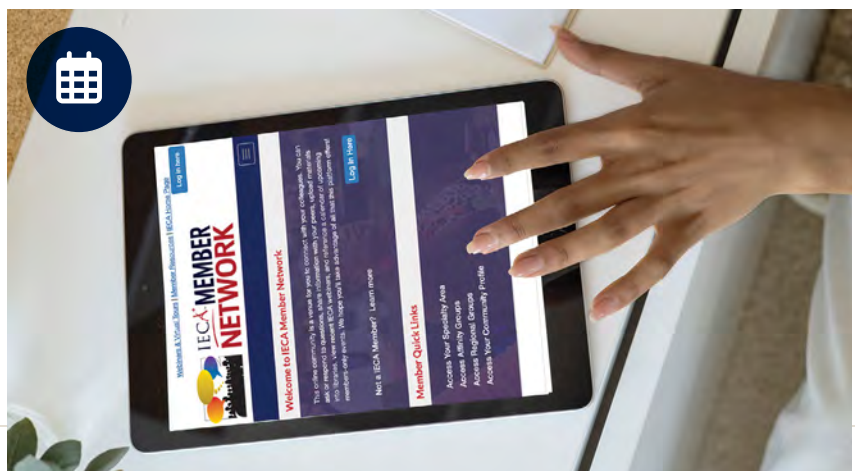


Whether you are just beginning to think about joining the independent educational consulting profession or have been in business for a year or two and seeing clients on a limited basis, the IECA Summer Training Institute will set you up for success. Learn about managing and promoting a business, working effectively with students and families, building a knowledge of the wide range of options available to students, and establishing a professional, competent, and ethical practice—all while building connections with our expert faculty and fellow attendees. Registration will open in February. link.IECAonline.com/STI

IECA Events Calendar

For the most up-to-date calendar of upcoming events, visit the IECA Member Network: network.IECAonline.com

To watch recordings of College Conversations and other webinars, visit the IECA website: link.IECAonline.com/webinars



Connections and Learning at Our Fall Conference



Left: Shanterra McBride and Rosalind Wiseman kicked off the conference with their keynote on how to have respectful, meaningful conversations even when the topic is difficult or fraught.



Left: The conference provided opportunities to connect one-on-one with fellow IECA members and other participants.



IEC roundtables gave attendees the chance to exchange ideas on a specific topic.



The IECA Networking Reception, open to all conference participants, was inspired by Tampa's Cuban culture.

Left: Dedicated time to visit the Vendor Hall allowed for information sharing and networking.



Meeting with friends and colleagues is always a highlight of IECA conferences!

Left: During the Tuesday Networking Lunch, Katherine Reynolds Lewis discussed how to help students thrive in the all-new, high-anxiety school environment.



Left: The College & Postsecondary Fair, K-12 School Exchange, and Therapeutic Info Swap were excellent opportunities to learn and connect.



Left: We kept everyone energized and caffeinated with IECA mugs and numerous coffee breaks!

Forging Partnerships

Inspired by the AICEP integration, our leadership has initiated or resurrected previous discussions and collaborations with other organizations vital to our members' practices. These endeavors are designed to enhance the credibility of our advocacy efforts and solidify our position as the standard of professional excellence. While certain concrete outcomes may extend beyond 2024, we anticipate witnessing the fruition of some of these efforts in the upcoming year. Through these partnerships, we seek to:

Establish Industry Standards: Collaborations with key organizations allow us to work collectively on setting and maintaining industry standards. By doing so, we ensure that our members meet and exceed these standards in their practices.

Foster Continuing Education: Partnering with organizations involved in professional development and education allows us to offer our members access to a wider range of learning opportunities. This commitment to ongoing education is crucial in a field as dynamic as independent educational consulting.

Expand Networking Opportunities: By connecting with organizations in related sectors, we broaden our members' networking opportunities. These connections can lead to new professional relationships, collaborations, and opportunities for growth.

Continued Global Presence and Impact

Our commitment to a global presence and impact remains unwavering. In January 2024, IECA spearheaded targeted programming for over 40 universities and colleges in Europe. This initiative, titled "Elevate Your European University Prospects with IECA Member Partnerships," underscored the distinctive value IECA members offer compared to paid agents. We showcased how our personalized, ethical, and comprehensive services ensure that educational choices align with individual aspirations and capabilities. In addition, we conducted an interactive discussion on how universities can ensure that IECs adhere to the standards set by IECA.

Our now-annual Regional Symposium in Europe for 2024 will be held in Madrid, Spain in February. This event, marking the largest-ever global gathering of IECA members, reaffirms our commitment to serving members worldwide, regardless of their location.

CEO Succession: Honoring Mark Sklarow's Legacy

As was announced in the Member Network in late 2023, our esteemed CEO, Mark Sklarow, will retire at the end of his contract term in December 2024. Mark has dedicated an incredible 30 years to IECA, leading us from a small organization to a global association with almost 3,000 members. His visionary leadership and unwavering commitment have been instrumental to our growth.

The CEO succession process is well underway:

Establishment of Hiring Committee: On January 30, 2024, the Board of Directors established a Hiring Committee to oversee the CEO succession process.

Quarterly Updates: We are committed to providing quarterly updates to the membership from both myself and Mark throughout 2024, detailing our progress and plans for the transition.

Executive Search Firm: As of April 1, 2024, we will have contracted and hired an Executive Search Firm to begin its work in close coordination with the Hiring Committee.

The remaining timeline for the CEO succession process will be continually updated by the Hiring Committee and the Executive Search Firm once their work commences. Your engagement and input during this transition are essential, and we will keep you informed every step of the way.

Closing Thoughts: IECA's National and Global Impact

In conclusion, IECA is now more powerful than ever, poised to not only elevate but continue to define the profession of independent educational consulting. As we move forward, let us remember our shared commitment to excellence, professional growth, and the welfare of our members. Together, we will make a lasting impact, both nationally and globally.

Thank you for your unwavering support and dedication to IECA. I look forward to an extraordinary year ahead and the collective achievements that await us.



Ibrahim Firat, MBA
IECA President





Guiding Student-Athletes: Understanding Verbal Commitments in College Athletics

By Amy Bryant, MS, IECA (GA); Reid Meyer, CEP, IECA (TX); Katie Andersen, IECA Associate (CA); and Joe Slater, MA, IECA Associate (CA)

To many independent educational consultants (IECs), the athletic recruiting world can be both opaque and intimidating. The NCAA and college coaches alike have done nothing in recent decades to mitigate the confusion surrounding the process. In fact, it seems to get more and more complex every year. However, one aspect of college recruiting can be especially frustrating for families, counselors, and student-athletes: the introduction of the “verbal commitment.”

A verbal commitment is a spoken agreement between a student-athlete and a college coach in which the coach offers a roster spot, admissions support, and sometimes athletics aid to a student-athlete in exchange for the student-athlete’s commitment to join the team. This type of commitment is technically a declaration of intent rather than a formal contract, but it is still a serious pledge that should not be made lightly. Since nearly every collegiate student-athlete will verbally commit to a college coach prior to signing any type of formal agreement, it is important for IECs to have a base understanding of the process in order to ethically counsel their clients about the nuances of making such a decision.

The guiding principle for making a verbal commitment is that the student-athlete must have a full and sincere intention to play for that program. This approach fosters a culture of respect and reliability in the

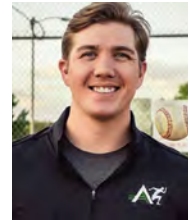
recruiting process, ensuring that both parties—the student-athlete and the coach—can trust that their respective expectations will come to fruition. Once a student-athlete verbally commits, it effectively ends their recruiting process; they shouldn’t talk to other coaches without telling them they have already verbally committed elsewhere. Additionally, they shouldn’t continue to entertain other offers: a commitment is a commitment after all, and by definition entails a duty to fulfill a promised obligation.

Unfortunately, because verbal commitments aren’t contractually binding, it is common practice for student-athletes to use them as placeholders, securing a spot in a program while keeping options open for better opportunities. This tactic is particularly prevalent in sports with high visibility and recruitment competition like football and basketball. The counseling an IEC can provide here is similar to the guidance one might provide a job seeker through their process. In the early stages of a job search, a candidate is seeking and evaluating offers. Then there’s the stage when the candidate has committed to a job, but hasn’t yet started work. If the candidate continues to interview elsewhere at that commitment stage, they could hurt their professional reputation. In both cases, there are bridges burned when a commitment is reneged, as

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Guiding Student-Athletes, from page 9

well as a negative impact on other prospective employees—or student-athletes—whose search is either paused or terminated because of the top candidate's verbal commitment to move forward. Those who initially accept a job—or spot on a team—and then take a “better offer” are demonstrating a lack of integrity.

Conversely, IECs also have the responsibility to educate student-athletes about the potential pitfalls and changes that can affect verbal commitments. Events out of a student-athlete's control, such as coaching changes, injuries, changes in team composition, and other unforeseen circumstances, can alter their verbal commitment drastically. For example, a coach who offered the spot might leave, or a current player might gain an extra year of eligibility, thus filling the spot intended for the recruit. In both cases, the new or current coach can withdraw their verbal commitment to the student-athlete at any time for any reason with no penalty. IECs must prepare student-athletes for these eventualities, advising them to have contingency plans, such as applying to more than one school. There is also no obligation for a student-athlete to outright accept or deny a verbal offer from a coach if a deadline is not given. Thanking a coach for a verbal commitment is NOT the same thing as accepting a verbal commitment, and the former option keeps the recruiting window open for student-athletes. This guidance helps student-athletes navigate the uncertainties inherent in verbal commitments, ensuring they are not left without options should their initial plans fall through.

It is also important for IECs to understand when a student-athlete's commitment becomes binding. Student-athletes receiving athletics aid in NCAA Division I and II will sign a National Letter of Intent (NLI) agreeing

to attend the institution for at least one academic year in exchange for the institution's promise of athletic financial aid. The NLI signing period opens in November of senior year and lasts throughout the year (with exact periods dependent on the sport). There are penalties for not fulfilling the terms of an NLI agreement, which include losing a year of eligibility. On the other hand, NCAA Division III athletes—along with Division I and II athletes not receiving athletic aid—enter into a formalized agreement when they pay their enrollment deposit for college or apply Early Decision. This agreement also applies to all other governing bodies. The penalties for renegeing on an Early Decision agreement or housing/enrollment deposit include financial forfeiture and damaged reputation.

In conclusion, IECs play a pivotal role in guiding student-athletes through the landscape of verbal commitments in college athletics. Specifically, IECs should emphasize the weight and significance of making a verbal commitment while pointing out the potential consequences of breaking that agreement. IECs should also prepare student-athletes for the possibility that the verbal agreement may fall through. It is a delicate balance to maneuver, but we encourage clients to act with integrity while remaining vigilant so they can navigate this fundamental piece of the recruiting process responsibly. Good ethical counseling not only benefits the student-athletes in their immediate decisions, but also instills values of honor and responsibility that transcend the realm of sports to impact their broader lives. 

Amy Bryant, Reid Meyer, Katie Andersen, and Joe Slater team together as the Student-Athlete Advisors to help IECs better support their student-athletes. For information on the Student-Athlete Advisors, visit TheStudentAthleteAdvisors.com.



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Seven Gap Year Trends to Know for 2024

By Katherine Stievater, IECA (MA)

Part of my mission as a gap year consultant is to help educate students, parents, school counselors, and independent educational consultants (IECs) about the benefits of gap years. Over the last decade, gap years have now fully entered the discussion regarding postsecondary options, assisted by Malia Obama's widely publicized 2016 experience. The COVID-19 pandemic brought more attention, as thousands of graduating high school seniors (and many already in college) elected to take time off from academics to avoid online classes. As the gap year field continues to evolve, here are the top trends that we see looking ahead in 2024.

1. Increasing Student Awareness of the Gap Year Option

Based on the huge volume of gap year information available online today, it's a good guess that awareness of gap years is up. However, it helps to see some data. In fall 2023, Gap Year Solutions surveyed US high school counselors to learn more about gap year

participation and attitudes.¹ The survey indicated that 45 percent of school counselors said that students are either somewhat or significantly more aware of gap years compared to three years ago.

2. Gap Year Numbers Have Returned to Pre-COVID Levels

Despite rising awareness of gap years and a COVID-induced surge in gap years, the number of high school students taking a gap year before enrolling in college has returned to pre-pandemic levels. We know this from two different sources. One is our high school survey data. The public high schools we surveyed last fall told us that 2.6 percent of their Class of 2023 graduates planned to take a gap year. This number is unchanged from the Class of 2019 data we collected in a previous high school survey.

The second source is higher ed data. We surveyed colleges about gap year deferral rates in 2017-18, 2021, and 2022. We estimated before COVID that

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¹ Data available at [GapYearSolutions.com/resources](https://www.gapyearsolutions.com/resources) and [GapYearSolutions.com/Gap-Year-Solutions-blog-2](https://www.gapyearsolutions.com/Gap-Year-Solutions-blog-2)

Gap Year Trends, from page 13

1.8 percent of admitted students deferred matriculation for a gap year. This spiked to 4.9 percent during COVID and settled back to 1.9 percent in the second year of the pandemic. (This data excludes the Ivies and Stanford.)

3. College Readiness Emerging as Key Purpose of Gap Time

When I entered the gap year field, many students and counselors were focused on traveling abroad, global citizenship, volunteering, and social responsibility as the goal of gap years. Based on what I am seeing throughout the industry—from colleagues, online sources, webinar Q&A, and elsewhere—the focus has shifted in the past couple of years to making sure students are prepared for the independent living, decision-making, and other requirements of college life. Many students don't want to travel during a gap year, which is perfectly fine. My approach to gap year planning has always focused on building life skills to help students increase college success. I'm glad to see the rest of the industry appreciates this too.

4. Students Are Focusing on Personal Well-Being

Increasingly, students want to work on themselves during their gap time. Sometimes, this entails addressing mental health challenges—anxiety, depression, ADHD, learning differences—which is driving interest in more “soft” therapeutic programs.

Other times, students just want to take a break and recharge, especially after their experience during COVID and the crazy treadmill of high school life. These teens are often looking to learn in new ways, have fun, and avoid the stress of traditional academics. Other students want to improve themselves by serving others and better appreciate their own circumstances.

5. Growing Demand for Internships

Internship demand continues to grow so steadily that I began offering gap year internship placements last year. The driving factor is that—consistent with the focus on college readiness—students are looking for what we like to call “real-world learning.” An internship exposes students to potential careers, provides them with some professional skills and a resume, and equips them with more life skills and problem-solving abilities that are important for college success.

As an aside, one IEC in a recent Gap Year Roundtable reminded us that “plain old minimum-wage jobs—at their favorite pizza place, theme park, game store, etc.—give students the experience of doing humble work, and help them appreciate the opportunity to go to college so much more.” I love this and agree 100 percent!

6. Students Are Looking for More Independent Experiences (but Still Need Structure and Guidance!)

This one is tricky! Right now, I am seeing more students looking for gap year programs that are not so structured. Students want the opportunity to explore on their own, without being on the same itinerary with the same cohort of students 24/7. Students enjoy being around peers but want more “alone” time (or at least unscheduled time). Some traditional

structured programs have seen lower enrollment for this spring's dates. They may have to adapt their approach to attract more students. There are also opportunities such as World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms (WWOOF) or Workaway², and other options for the student who prefers and can handle more independence.³




Photo credit: Gap Year Solutions

7. More Students Are Waiting until Their Gap Year to Apply to College

I don't suggest that students wait to apply to college until their gap year, as there are advantages to students going through the process while still enrolled in high

school. However, as my Boston-area IEC colleague told me recently, “I don't want students to go through the college process if they don't have the motivation to do the applications. If they are not researching college options or doing their best academically in high school classes, then they should wait and apply the following year.”

(Bonus!) 8. More Homeschooled Students Are Interested in Gap Years

One IEC on our December 2023 Gap Year Roundtable told us that she is finding that her “homeschooled students are more informed and interested in the option of a gap year.” I have personally seen an increase in homeschooled students in my business as well. We will keep an eye on this trend, since according to the *Washington Post*, “Homeschooling has become—by a wide margin—America's fastest-growing form of education.”⁴ 

² [WWOOF.net](https://www.wwoof.net) and [Workaway.info](https://www.workaway.info)

³ GapYearSolutions.com/blog/gap-years-according-to-a-college-counselor

⁴ WashingtonPost.com/education/interactive/2023/homeschooling-growth-data-by-district



Helping Families Assess Right-Fit Schools for Their Children

By Dina Glasofer, MBA, IECA Associate (NJ) and Peter Braverman, EdM, IECA Associate (MD)

What to Focus on and Questions to Ask

One of the most rewarding aspects of working as an independent educational consultant (IEC) is helping families discover schools where children will thrive and develop strong foundations for success in the future. We invest time in learning about K–12 schools by visiting campuses, meeting with school employees, and speaking to students and graduates, among other efforts.

However, it's not always easy for families to really get to know a school and determine where their children will flourish and find a sense of belonging. If we do our very best work, ultimately, we don't make decisions for families—rather, we help parents and students learn how to make the best decisions for themselves.

In this article, we seek to provide strategies and questions IECs can use to help families assess schools on a deeper level. No one could possibly produce a complete list of helpful strategies, but we hope some of our ideas and questions prove useful. At the end we've provided a link to a more extensive set of online questions that families might find helpful.

Engage in Authentic Conversations

One of the best ways to learn about a school is through conversations with current students, alumni, employees, and parents. While families often meet school

community members through the admission process, engaging in conversations in more natural settings often allows for deeper connections and opportunities to get to the heart of a school. If a school permits visitors to attend on-campus events, we encourage families to explore some of these on their own.

Many schools publish athletics and arts schedules online, so prospective families can attend games, performances, or other events. (Be sure to verify that a school allows this!) Many spectators are happy to talk with prospective families. For other sources of valuable information, seek out student newspapers, especially opinion pieces, which are written by students and reflect genuine, sometimes unfiltered, perspectives.

Also, encourage families to reach out to current school parents through PeerPal (found on many schools' admission pages) or to other parents they know on their own, as these can also be valuable sources of information. And remind families that every school has blind adherents and angry detractors, so it's probably best to assume that no single piece of data is definitive.

Observe Everything!

One of the simplest ways to learn more about a school is by paying attention and taking a careful look around. We encourage families to attend school events and spend time observing how students interact with one

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Peter Braverman, School Counseling and Placement, can be reached at Peter@PeterBraverman.com.

Right-Fit Schools, from page 15

another, their teachers, coaches, even referees! At athletic events, notice the behavior and interactions of players on the bench or spectators on the sidelines. Consider how they react when something doesn't go their way, or the ways players interact after a loss as well as a win. [We have a saying in our house: "The only thing worse than a bad loser ..." —PB]

After attending a performance or speaker event, families can linger briefly to notice how community members engage with one another. At some schools, there are lots of teachers on the sidelines cheering on students (and sometimes even a high presence of dogs and other unofficial mascots).

These simple observations can provide a window into what ordinary school life and interactions among community members are like, and families can get a better sense of whether a particular school resonates with their own priorities for their children.

Learn About School Leadership

The culture of a school is often deeply affected by the Head of School (HOS) and other senior administrators. While some school leaders are more hands-on than others, and it often takes time for an HOS to make a major splash, a head can still play a major role in a student's overall experience, even indirectly.

Well-liked and competent heads (and other senior leaders) often have a trickle-down, positive effect on others, usually linked to higher employee retention, commitment to students, and overall job satisfaction. A simple open-ended question like, "Tell me about your Head of School," can lead

Well-liked and competent heads ... often have a trickle-down, positive effect on others, usually linked to higher employee retention, commitment to students, and overall job satisfaction.

to useful insights into the morale of a school community. Encourage families to learn more about the professional backgrounds of senior administrators, their tenure at the school, and their plans for their schools' futures. Additionally, look into schools' strategic plans (often posted online) and take notice of schools' priorities.

Discuss Employee Satisfaction and Retention

Any organization's retention rate is usually a strong indicator of how well it functions. While some annual employee turnover is expected, occasionally we'll notice higher turnover rates that might indicate a larger concern. In addition to asking about retention, families can peruse school yearbooks and magazines (often, new and/or departing employees are highlighted), check the employment section of a school's website (open positions are often posted, especially in the spring), and scroll through online employee directories. (Many schools list employees' start dates.) To dig even deeper, explore *GlassDoor.com*, which posts voluntary employee reviews at different organizations. Take these with a grain of salt—disgruntled people are more likely to air their disagreements online—but if similar comments are repeated, this could be an insight into a school's culture. For example,



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some schools enjoy a number of the same kind of positive employee reviews, such as, “Everyone is willing to help and cover for one another; it’s a true sense of belonging.” It’s hard to read that as anything but positive.

Pay Attention to a School’s Messaging

What a school chooses to write or say about itself (on websites, videos, panel events) can be an indication of what the school values, so take notice! Families should think about whether these priorities align with their own. At one school, a majority of online student profiles highlighted prestigious achievements and selective college placements, while another school’s marketing videos spotlighted deep connections between students and teachers, and how people take care of each other. The essay questions a school poses in its application can also indicate its priorities and values.

Dig Deep into Course Offerings


Encourage families to delve into curriculum guides and specific course offerings to get a sense of the nuances between classes offered at different schools. Some schools tend towards traditional courses, while others offer progressive curricula that are updated regularly to keep pace with timely issues and evolving student interests. (One school helps students make sense of world news through a new course, “Breaking News, Making News, and Faking News: How do we view world events through the lens of our own values and biases, and/or core American values?”)

Encouraging students to read through course descriptions is also a great way to see what excites them, and to help them choose schools that align with their academic interests.

Evaluate a School’s Commitment to Mental Health

We’re all aware of the increase in students’ mental health challenges, which schools have addressed in a variety of ways. Some have made great strides in destigmatizing mental illness through talking about the topic openly, inviting guest speakers, and encouraging students to seek support offered by schools. Families can ask about how student and employee well-being is evaluated in schools, whether ongoing surveys are conducted, and whether results are shared with the community.

Ask not only about ways in which schools respond to mental health needs, but how they’re implementing preventative measures and promoting student well-being. A few admirable examples we’ve seen include later school start times (allowing for more sleep), formalized peer support programming, affinity groups, grief-informed school initiatives, mindfulness programs, built-in breaks during the day, required mental health first-aid courses, and discussions during advisory sessions. Also, ask about what kinds of mental health training take place with employees and how often training is offered.

This article barely skims the surface of what many IECs do every day. And one thing we know is that families seek our counsel because they are unsure, confused, or intimidated by what we know reflexively. Our purpose is not to tell IECs how to do their jobs, but to provide resources that may help families meet our services more capably. For additional suggestions on that topic, and an extensive list of questions, see link.IECAonline.com/Insights-Helping-Families. 



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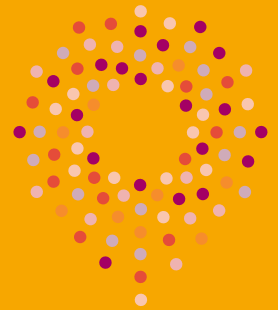
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Working with Transgender and Nonbinary Students

By Shannon Bergeron, CEP, MEd, IECA (TX)

In my work as a school counselor over the last two decades, I've worked with all kinds of students with all kinds of challenges. But when students started coming out to me as transgender, I didn't have anything in my toolbox to help.

I got resourceful and started learning. Quickly. When my team and I started digging deeper into what these students needed at school, we realized that they needed a safe place to exist and learn. I created a resource list (linktr.ee/shannon.bergeron) to make sure everyone had access to the information they needed to be safe and learn at school. Here's what we did.

Know Your Rights

Many students don't even know their basic rights at school: to be called by the name and pronouns that match their gender identity, to use the restroom that matches their gender identity, to have the right to privacy, and more. Federal and state laws and the US Constitution prohibit discrimination, bullying, and harassment against transgender students. This includes Title IX, the federal law that bans sex discrimination in schools.

What if a school isn't playing nice? What can students/caregivers do?

- Encourage them to start with their school and find advocates in the building (start with the school counselor), even though this can still be a challenge.
- Parents can file a complaint with the US Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights: www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/complaintintro.html (Generally, if a principal knows a parent will file a complaint, this can encourage some positive action to avoid that process.)

Understand Student Information Systems at School

The ONLY school documents that have to match a student's legal name are legal documents (social security records, transcript). Regardless of what the school staff tell you, things like a student ID, diploma, awards ceremonies, graduation programs, etc. are NOT legal documents that require legal names.



Shannon Bergeron, Core College Consulting, can be reached at Shannon@CoreCollegeConsulting.com.

Find all of the resources mentioned in this article using the QR code below.



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Transgender and Nonbinary Students, from page 19

Think about it this way—two students could have the identical legal name, so the unique identifier is the student ID number. Not the name. This is a great opportunity to help students advocate for themselves.

Access to Facilities

It's critical that students are able to use the restrooms and locker rooms that they are most comfortable in.

Put yourself in their shoes—if you're in school for seven or eight hours a day, inevitably you're going to need to use the restroom. I have known far too many trans students who simply chose to forgo using school restrooms unless it was an absolute emergency, which resulted in those students struggling to stay focused in class.

You can help by asking your students to talk to their school counselor. They will advocate for students, with the administration, or help students file a complaint with the Department of Education.

Help Students Find Safe and Affirming Spaces

For many of these students, their homes are not safe spaces—so they need to know that they have somewhere to go when they need to vent, cry, or get support services. Reassure students that there are virtually always allies around them, even if they don't see them at first. And if their school doesn't already have a student group dedicated to LGBTQ+ students, this is the perfect time to create one!

Other tips:

- Identify “safe” faculty and staff through visible identification such as Safe Space stickers on office/classroom doors, lanyards, window clings, etc.
- Find a physical safe space like a “panic room” where students can go when they are in crisis mode without being penalized for being outside of class.
- If the school doesn't offer trans-specific counseling, they can ask their counselor for referrals to local trans-friendly or trans-specific care centers.
- And most importantly, if they're struggling with bullying or harassment at school, they can talk to counselors or any other trusted adults in the building.

Transition Support/Mental Health Counseling

For these students, particularly if they are struggling deeply with mental health, transitioning is a huge factor in their ability to stay happy and safe. If you are in a state that has recently banned trans healthcare for minors, your main goal should be to support these students to graduation, so that they can (ideally) move off to college in a safer state.

This is where affordable (or free) counseling and mental health resources are vital. Connect with local LGBTQ+ resources to refer students and their families who need additional support.

The advertisement features a central graphic with the text "Find Your Learning ABILITY" in a mix of green, pink, and blue. Below the text is a lightbulb icon with a yellow arrow pointing towards it from the left. To the right of the lightbulb is a green zigzag line and a blue molecular structure. At the bottom center is the Landmark College logo, which includes a shield with a sun and the text "LANDMARK COLLEGE". Below the logo is a list of conditions: "DYSLEXIA • ADHD • AUTISM • EXECUTIVE FUNCTION CHALLENGES". The background of the graphic shows various people's legs and feet in different poses, some holding books or papers, suggesting a diverse group of students.

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Conversation Starters

When working with LGBTQ+ students, ask appropriate questions. Ask them how “out” they are and who knows about their identities. I’ve gotten used to using one name and pronoun with the student and a different one with the parent. Privacy is key, and the student gets to determine who to tell and when. Ask them if they have found community with other LGBTQ+ students, and if not, what that could look like for them.

You’ll make mistakes. Own it—without making a big deal out of it—and keep moving forward. Say things like “I’m still learning.” If the student knows you’re trying, they likely won’t be upset with you.

Researching Colleges

When working with transgender and nonbinary students, you’ll want to make sure you are searching for supportive colleges. Students should start by researching various state laws concerning trans adults.

Figure out which states are going to be the safest, especially if they hope to begin their physical transition while in college.


Ultimately, the most supportive school in the world can only do so much if the laws in that state are restrictive about transitioning.

Once you have your list of states, start researching schools in those states that are well known for being LGBTQ+ friendly.

When working with transgender and nonbinary students, you’ll want to make sure you are searching for supportive colleges.

- The Campus Pride Index website (CampusPrideIndex.org) is a great place to start. You can search by state, region, index rating (1-5 stars), and/or institution type to start building the student’s list of schools.
- Once you’ve built the list, encourage the student to get in contact with the LGBTQ+ centers at the schools to get a better sense of the resources and programming they offer and to figure out which schools will not only accept them, but celebrate them.
- Encourage the student to also explore LGBTQ+ social activities in the area (local clubs, bars, restaurants, pride festivals, etc.).
- Find current students to speak with them about how the school’s resources, policies, and programming actually look in the day-to-day experience.

And lastly, another great option when building their college list is to search for schools whose student health insurance plans will cover some or all of their transition costs.

If your student is hoping to start their physical transition while in college and they don’t have family financial support, this can be a life-changer! The Campus Pride Index has a list of over 150 schools in the US who offer this kind of health insurance, separated by state (CampusPride.org/TPC/student-health-insurance). 



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A Dialectical Approach: Messiness vs. Structure

The Importance of Attunement and Connection in Relating to Young People

By Cynthia Cohen, MSPH, IECA (CO)

The prevalence of mental health issues among young adults remains disturbingly high. But in our profession, we find great success by referring these clients to experiential therapeutic programs. These programs help clients develop a sense of well-being and the ability to handle challenges using positive coping mechanisms, find meaningful ways to be productive, and establish satisfying social relationships.

I interviewed several leaders in therapeutic programs to discuss their approaches for working with young adults, including Greg Burnham, MS, LMFT, program director at Gemba Gap, Boise, Idaho; Josh Altschule, PsyD, co-founder and director of Cornerstones of Maine; Josh White, MA, LPC, LCMHC, CGP, WPA, founder and executive director of Red Mountain Sedona, Arizona; and Sean Fievet, owner and founder of Cascade Crest Transitions, Bend, Oregon.

Each of these individuals defines what makes their work with young people effective in slightly different ways, yet they share an emphasis on connection and helping young people to find their own locus of control. Through their various approaches, they aim to help these young adults embrace their strengths and live in healthy ways.

Every program handles structure and expectations somewhat differently. However, programs fairly universally aspire for relationships with staff and

clinicians to be a foundational force in helping participants to grow and thrive.

"Messiness"

Greg Burnham emphasizes the importance of allowing, or even fostering, "messiness" and using it to explore both the relationship with the intervenor, caregiver, or parent and the young person's values, goals, and needs. He feels that too much externally imposed structure impedes the connection between caregiver and young adult. Instead, he strives to help participants find their own structure and their own way to a healthy life. To maintain "messiness" in the relationship between caregiver and client, he provides therapeutic and educational support regarding boundaries, rules, structure, freedom, and autonomy. To foster healthy development, he feels the intervenor must be able to ask potentially challenging questions.

Loving is not the same as developing a strong relationship because love can include imposing or going along with things that have negative effects. To develop a sustainable, positive relationship, intervenors must notice when they "get tied up in knots"—perhaps feeling withdrawn, angry, nagging, or lecturing. Efforts to change someone's choices, for example, can lead that person to feel worse about themselves and feel guilt

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Cynthia Cohen, Pathway Partners, can be reached at Cynthia@PathwayPartners.info.

Messiness vs. Structure, from page 23

and shame rather than to develop healthier choices. Even advocating for something like eating fruits and vegetables, for example, can backfire; a young person with disordered eating or OCD may want to please the intervenor and at the same time not want the food.

To foster a healthy relationship with the young adult, caregivers must embrace the nuance of messiness and honor micro-changes. Structure can relax the nervous system, but it can also cause increased anxiety in the young adult. Intervenors must challenge themselves and remain aware that structure can cause relief for the wrong reasons or even create performance anxiety or OCD. It is important to work with young clients to determine on an individual-by-individual basis whether structure is helpful, and what form of structure the clients want and need to thrive. This is a slow, methodical process. Intervenors need to continually assess whether the client is involved in the process of setting structure that reflects their values—and stay open to their needs.

Attunement

Josh Altschule describes the most effective approach as that based on attunement. He feels this is one of the most essential components in supporting clients—or anyone for that matter. Attunement is based on the ability of the intervenor to set aside one's own beliefs and initiatives and truly understand the other person. This can extend beyond listening. For example, people often refer to their "gut reaction" or "sensing something" when communicating with others. Attunement comes from being "messy" in the sense that we let go of our preconceptions and predeterminations and embrace what comes our way.



Setting limits and establishing structure is essential when creating boundaries and containment, though it can be challenging. We've all been in relationships and environments with too much structure, too little flexibility, and no room for anything outside of the clearly set expectations. We've also been in the exact opposite. Both have their place and time. How does this relate to messiness versus structure? Where does attunement come in? It's through attunement and checking in with the client that we determine how much structure and flexibility are necessary. Like driving in highway traffic, we need to use the brake and gas, look ahead and behind, all while making sure our passengers are safe and secure.

We also want to offer the experience of mastery and ownership to the people we support. None of us are free of self-sabotaging in the name of internal control. So, intervenors sometimes need to engage in what foresters call a prescribed or controlled burn. That is, creating a safe

space where those we support can own their mistakes and experience their own injuries. When this is successful, young adults can own their experiences and come to their own conclusions. They build ownership and investment in wanting something better on their own accord.

Understanding Consequences

Josh White emphasizes the importance of helping people to understand the consequences of their actions. He feels that building a relationship of understanding with the young person is a crucial foundation for this to occur.


Within a program, establishing phases through which participants progress allows them to know what to expect and get into flow. It makes it easier for participants to develop a consistent rhythm and routine, and thus to learn new habits. He also points out the difference between expectations and structure. For example, sleep hygiene and safety motivate the establishment of a curfew and the need to stay sober. Acceding to these expectations enables participants to develop new practices which become internalized. He sees attunement as the ability to empathize and notice what is going on with their students. Staff are given extensive training to help them develop this skill.

Learning Space

Sean Fievet focuses on how to facilitate clients entering and remaining in a learning space—assessing what is necessary to help people stay open, so they can eventually internalize their strengths and growth. There are different approaches to that end; he explains it as a dialectical process with opposing tensions. Connection, attunement, and structure exist together with one another. Initially, he found structure helpful in enhancing the client's ability to learn. This exposed them to new experiences out of their comfort zone, and seemed to help them feel safe while being challenged. Staff listened to what clients tell them directly or indirectly. And clients were encouraged to see the value in what the program offered.

His approach has evolved, and now the client's way of doing and seeing things is more tangibly honored. Structure is created according to what the clients need—scaffolding is developed to support them; attunement determines if their needs are met.

Community is another essential aspect of healing and development. Structure is used to support students' feelings of safety with one another within the community and to foster connections. The question is: if a client is struggling with old behaviors, how much room do we have to give them to get "messy" so they can learn without it damaging others' sense of safety? Ideally, participants connect with one another and form or join in a community; this community is then there for them to lean on later. At the same time, it is important for participants to learn how to develop and practice establishing community outside of the program, on their own.

We have thus delineated a variety of approaches, manifested in different programs—all within the framework of helping young adults to figure out who they are and to thrive in their independence. It is important that all of us do what we can to foster young adults being engaged in the world; this is both the route to and the sign of good mental health. We are fortunate to be part of a diverse community that, together, works toward strengthening the capacity of young adults. 



Why I Belong

The Supportive IECA Network

By Karen Handler Ryan, JD, IECA Associate (NY)

Summer 2020: I spent the day sitting on the floor assembling my new folding desk. Even though I was left with three extra screws at the end of the process (and a genuine concern about whether the desk would fall apart the minute I put something on top of it), I had taken the first step to begin my journey with IECA. I set up my laptop, pulled out the binder full of materials, and was excited to start the virtual Summer Training Institute (STI). I welcomed the opportunity to shut the bedroom door for five full days of sessions to learn how to more effectively work with students and parents as well as how to continue growing my new independent educational consulting (IEC) business.



Exceeded Expectations at the IECA Summer Training Institute

Like many of my fellow attendees, I was in the process of completing the certificate program at UC Irvine and looking for a community to support my “solopreneurship.” What I found exceeded my expectations. First, the IECA materials gave me business resources for everything from drafting my contract to how to sign up for liability insurance. Susan Dabbar taught us how to use resources like Pinterest to market our businesses, while Joan Koven explained the practicalities of running a consulting practice. Every afternoon, I met virtually with the Teal Group, my small cohort of 10 students mentored by Mark Sklarow. We asked questions about the day’s sessions and discussed other topics that were on our minds. I was incredibly impressed that Mark, as the CEO of IECA, was willing to take the time to mentor us. He was an invaluable resource, helping us brainstorm ideas about ethics in independent educational consulting and allowing us to recognize that we do not have to be good at every aspect of the business, encouraging us to understand our strengths and be willing to outsource skills that fell beyond our capabilities. Together, we formed a close group that continued to meet even after STI ended. It was exciting to share our different strategies and timelines for developing our businesses.

Becoming an IECA Member

The week after completing STI, I applied to join IECA as an Associate member. For any new member, I highly recommend spending time on the IECA website. There, I found out about the mentorship program and reached out to my amazing mentor, Hanna Stotland. She agreed to mentor me and generously met with me every time I contacted her with specific questions or general business advice. I also attended IECA conferences in Philadelphia and San Diego, which gave me the opportunity to meet IECs who I had taken


classes with at UCI and many others from all over the country. I also regularly attend the monthly Associate & Student Members Virtual Roundtable and always leave with notes about issues to consider and strategies for improving my services. Lastly, I am a member of the New York Regional Group and value the connections I have made with other IECs in my area. I often reach out to members of my different IECA groups when I have a particular issue with a client or am looking to refer someone to an IEC with specific expertise.

My IECA membership is valuable to my practice almost daily. I distribute a monthly newsletter to subscribers and often refer to articles from the weekly 5 Minute News emails. Just last week, I had a meeting with a potential client from Illinois and consulted the IECA website to get updates on the impact of current Illinois law on billing clients from that state. I also read the daily College Community Digest emails from the Member Network, which often have interesting questions or useful updates.

Deepening My Commitment by Joining a Committee

Last year, I joined the IECA Outreach Committee, which has been a wonderful way to give back to the community that I value so highly. Working with colleagues to increase IECA membership has been both fun and rewarding. One of my favorite events (and there have been many) was talking to attendees at a recent IECA conference who were not yet members. Hearing them talk about how inspired they were by the educational sessions and the sense of camaraderie made it easy to encourage them to join IECA. Membership in IECA sells itself!

There are so many other reasons that I could mention, both big and small, about how I have benefited from being a member of IECA, from the organized in-person campus tours to virtual College Conversations. I was also inspired by the work of IECA members on the AXS Companion to the Common App.

The good news is, despite the extra screws that remain tucked in a drawer, my desk is still standing and holds copies of many of the resources I have collected from IECA. Overall, I am excited to be a member of an organization that makes me a better college IEC and supports the standards and ethics of the entire profession of independent education consulting. Like many of my fellow IECs, I entered this field because I wanted to help students and their families. Being a member of IECA is an invaluable part of supporting me in this mission. 

Karen Handler Ryan, Excelsior Admissions Consulting LLC, can be reached at Karen@ExcelsiorCollegeConsulting.com.

In the News

Jill Madenberg (NY) was interviewed on ABC's *Good Morning America* program on October 7, 2023 for a segment about the college application season.

Ethan Sawyer (CA) was quoted in "After Supreme Court ruling, college applicants still write about race" in the *Washington Post* on November 27, 2023.

Naomi Steinberg (FL) was quoted in "Campus safety now a top priority for Jewish students choosing colleges" in *Jewish Insider* on November 1, 2023. She was also quoted in the *USA Today* article, "Choosing a college is hard. The Israel-Hamas war is making it harder" on November 12, 2023.



Eric Endlich (CA) was quoted in "How to Navigate College Admissions with a Learning Disability" in *US News & World Report* on November 14, 2023. He was also quoted in "Three Admissions Tips for Students with Learning Differences" in *Forbes* on November 29, 2023.

Stacey Cunitz (PA) and **Joan Koven** (PA) were quoted in "Many students applying to colleges are avoiding states that don't support abortion rights" in the November 20, 2023 edition of the *Philadelphia Inquirer*.

Mandee Adler (FL) spoke with WGCU Public Media about the new documentary, "Dream School: A Journey to Higher Ed," on December 18, 2023. Adler is featured in the documentary, which follows six high school students as they navigate college admissions.

Hannah Serota (VA) was quoted in "The Extra Mile: How Extracurricular Activities Impact College Admissions" in *Northern Virginia* magazine's December 2023 issue.

The article "Navigating a Transfer Pathway," written by **Gina Gerrato Greenhaus** (CA), was published in the fall 2023 issue of *LINK for Counselors* magazine.

Vicki Boudin (CT) and **Joan Casey** (CT) were quoted in "UConn ranks as top university in multiple reports. What does it mean?" in the *Hartford Courant* on September 28, 2023.

Belinda Wilkerson (NC) and **Anna Zirkel** (Associate, NC) were quoted in "North Carolina Universities Deal with AI in Admissions Essays" in *Government Technology* on September 22, 2023.

Laurie Kopp Weingarten (NJ) was quoted in "Penn announces early decision results for Class of 2028 amid increase in applications" in the *Daily Pennsylvanian* on December 14, 2023.

Jennie Kent (Colombia) was quoted in "International College Students' Comprehensive Guide to Socializing in the US" in *University Herald* on December 27, 2023.

IECA was referenced in "A new benefit at top companies: college admissions counseling" on WBUR on October 23, 2023 and "How Do I Become an Educational Consultant?" on *Citizenside.com* on November 4, 2023.

Carolyn Gelderman (IL) was featured in a segment about the AXS Companion to Common App on WISN 12 News, an ABC affiliate in Milwaukee, on December 21, 2023.

Randi Heathman (MI) was profiled in the article, "Randi Heathman Guides High School Equestrians on Their College Journeys" in the *Plaid Horse* on December 6, 2023.


Laurie Gordon (Associate, WA), **Sean Hawes** (WA), and **Lindsey Saarie** (Associate, WA) were featured in "Unlocking the Secret of College Admissions" in the September/October 2023 issue of *Seattle* magazine.

Jodi Furman (Associate, FL) was quoted in "'Schools I don't want my kid to set foot on': For some Jewish families, Oct. 7 upended the college application process" in the *Jewish Daily Forward* on December 7, 2023.

Lindsey Ringenbach (Associate, NC) was quoted in *AARP*'s October 2, 2023 article, "Should You Hire a College Admissions Consultant?"

Pierre Huguet (Associate, MA) and **Connie Livingston** (Associate, FL) were quoted in "Can You Reapply to a College After Being Rejected?" in *US News & World Report* on December 14, 2023. Connie Livingston was also quoted in "As more colleges are promising high schoolers guaranteed admission, 'everybody wins,' experts say" on *CBNC.com* on October 10, 2023.

Nicole Kelman (Associate, CT) appeared on FOX61 on October 12, 2023 to share tips for parents navigating the college application process with their teens. She appeared again on November 9, 2023 to discuss how high schoolers can build a college choice list.

The article, "Does the SAT test matter for college-bound students?" written by **Meaghan Rysdale** (Associate, IN) was published in the *Daily Journal* on October 28, 2023. 

IECA members: send us your media appearances to share in a future issue of *Insights* and on the IECA website. Email details to Insights@IECAonline.com.



The IECA Foundation Presents the 2023 Katz Award Winners!

Marcy Beatty and Sarah Rickelman

The IECA Foundation is thrilled to announce IECA Professional members Marcy Beatty and Sarah Rickelman as the 2023 Irvin Katz Memorial Award recipients for their dedicated service on behalf of underserved students through Guilford A Better Chance (ABC). Sarah and Marcy have volunteered their time to assist scholars of the Guilford ABC Program with comprehensive college counseling services. Guilford ABC Co-President Judy Wright notes, "Marcy and Sarah are fantastic and we couldn't do what we do without them!"

Guilford A Better Chance offers intelligent and talented young women of color from under-represented communities the opportunity to attend a high quality public high school and a preparatory college-track program.



IECA Professional members and Irvin Katz Memorial Award recipients Marcy Beatty (left) and Sarah Rickelman (right).



The Irvin Katz Memorial Award

Irvin W. Katz, founding member of IECA, lived his life in service to others as a mentor to many consultants and as a steward of community volunteerism. In 2006, together with the IECA Foundation, his family established The Irvin Katz Memorial Award to honor members of IECA who make extraordinary voluntary contributions of their time and talents to community organizations that benefit the educational needs, health and well-being of students.

Interested in nominating yourself or your IECA colleague(s) to be the next Irvin Katz Memorial Award recipient? Reach out to IECA Foundation Program Director Sarah Swan (SSwan@IECAFoundation.org) for more information and visit our website (IECAFoundation.org/Katz-Award).



Introductions

Please Welcome IECA's New Professional Members



Caitlin Andersen (FL), a former Associate member, has been an IEC for five years. As a practicing management consultant, she has worked with nonprofit and for-profit organizations on a variety

of strategy and operations projects. She holds an MBA from Oxford University in social entrepreneurship and strategy and innovation as well as an undergraduate degree from the University of Texas at San Antonio. Andersen is a member of NACAC and AIGAC.

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Auxilium Education
Ocala, FL 34476
210-418-9908
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Auxilium-Edu.com
Specialty: G (+I)*



Brian Bacon (IL) holds a bachelor's degree in psychology as well as a master's degree in higher education, both from Drexel University. Bacon has spent time in admissions, advising,

and fostering collegiate partnerships. Media such as the *Chicago Tribune* and *NPR News* have interviewed him. He developed CollegeContours, a college transfer tool that helped hundreds of students.

*Brian Bacon, MSED
Brian Bacon Education Consulting
Highland Park, IL 60035
224-507-8291
BrianBaconConsulting@gmail.com
BrianBacon.org
Specialty: C*



Sarah Brown (VA), a former Associate member, served students and families for almost 20 years in various capacities before becoming an IEC in 2020, specializing in helping homeschooled

and military-affiliated students apply to college. She has a BA in psychology from Swarthmore College, an MEd in school counseling from UNC-Chapel Hill, and a certificate in college counseling from UCLA Extension. Brown is a National Certified Counselor, a member of NACAC and PCACAC, and the founder of IECA's Military-Affiliated Students and IECs Affinity Group.

*Sarah Brown, MEd, NCC
Right4U College Counseling
Alexandria, VA 22310
703-653-0002
Sarah@Right4UCollegeCounseling.com
Right4UCollegeCounseling.com
Specialty: C*



Karen Lane DeRosa (OH) launched Class 101-Dayton in 2018 after 25 years in education. With a BS from Boston University and an MA from University of Oklahoma, DeRosa taught

college courses, consulted education clients in strategic communications, and worked as a school district administrator. DeRosa earned Class 101 Franchise of the Year (2021, 2023) and contributes regularly to national training and curriculum. She volunteers with local scholarship programs for the performing arts, NSDAR, and Optimist International.

*Karen Lane DeRosa, MA
Class 101- Dayton OH South
Springboro, OH 45066
937-672-3733
KDeRosa@Class101.com
Class101.com/DaytonOHSouth
Specialty: C*



Bruce Epstein (NJ) has been an IEC for more than 10 years, specializing in STEM students and sports recruiting. He has over 35 years of experience in software development, IT, venture capital, and

startups. A member of NACAC, Epstein holds an SB in aeronautical engineering from MIT and served on the MIT Educational Council from 2009-2015.

*Bruce Epstein
First Choice College Counseling
Rocky Hill, NJ 08553
908-705-0288
Bruce@FirstChoiceCollegeCounseling.com
FirstChoiceCollegeCounseling.com
Specialty: C*



Eleanora Ferrante (NY), a former Associate member, has been an IEC for six years, applying her many years of professional work experience in consumer-oriented roles and volunteer work in

civic and cultural organizations. Ferrante received a BA from Cornell University, an MBA from Hofstra University, and an MA from the Seminary of the Immaculate Conception as well as an IEC certificate from UC Irvine Extension. A member of NACAC, Ferrante is a certified Gallup Strengths Coach and an active community volunteer.

*Eleanora Ferrante, MBA, MA
Square Peg Square Hole Coaching, Inc.
South Huntington, NY 11746
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Eleanora@SPSHCoaching.com
SPSHCoaching.com
Specialty: C*



Robyn Giffin (CA), a former elementary school teacher, has been an IEC for six years. She holds a BA in liberal studies from California State University, Northridge and a

certificate in college counseling from UCLA Extension. She is a member of WACAC and a volunteer at her local high school, helping students with their college applications.

Robyn Giffin
Next Step-Educational Consulting
San Jose, CA 95129
408-497-5304
NextStep.EC@gmail.com
Specialty: C



Katherine (Kathy) Hart (FL), a former Associate member, combines over 20 years of experience in teaching, tutoring, and volunteering with her role as an IEC. She's been with JRA Educational

Consulting for four years and served as an essay expert and AP English teacher prior to becoming a full-time IEC. Additionally, she has contributed significantly to the Score Academy team as a college advisor. Hart holds an MA from Antioch University and a BA from the College of the Holy Cross.

Katherine (Kathy) Hart, MA
JRA Educational Consulting/Score at the Top
Learning Centers and Schools
Palm Beach Gardens, FL 33410
561-626-2662
Hart@ScoreAtTheTop.com
JRAEducationalConsulting.com
Specialty: C



Marybeth Hodson (Hong Kong) has been helping international students plan for their experiences at US boarding schools with ARCH Education since 2010. Prior to joining

ARCH, she worked in admissions at a boarding school in Connecticut. Hodson holds a BA from Saint Michael's College and a master's from Catholic University. She is the co-author of *Brand Yourself for Admission to Top US Boarding Schools: Five Key Steps for International Students*, which was published in both English and Chinese.

Marybeth Hodson, MA
ARCH Education
Central, 00000, Hong Kong
85235680406
Marybeth.Hodson@ARCH-Education.com
ARCH-Education.com
Specialty: C (+I)



Mara Fiarman Jacobs (NJ), a former Associate member, has been an IEC for 15 years. She graduated from the Wharton School at UPenn and recently earned her IEC certificate from

UC Irvine Extension. Jacobs participated in the UPenn Alumni Interview Program for over two decades. A member of NACAC and NJACAC, Jacobs is an active volunteer in the Moorestown community.

Mara Fiarman Jacobs
Skybound College & Career Consulting
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MJacobs@SkyboundConsulting.com
SkyboundConsulting.com
Specialty: C



Renee Lurie (Costa Rica), a former Associate member, has been an IEC for four years, following more than eight years as a school counselor. As a Costa Rica-based professional,

she guides globally minded students seeking undergraduate education worldwide based on career interests, academics, and finances. She earned an MA from Arizona State University, a BA from University of Guam, and a college counseling certificate, with distinction, from UCLA Extension. She is a member of IACAC and the co-founder of the Costa Rican Independent Educational Consultants (CRIEC) group.

Renee Lurie, MA
Go Global Education
Pozos de Santa Ana, SJ 10903, Costa Rica
50687089968
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ReneeLurIEC.com
Specialty: C (+I)



Veena Rao (GA), a former Associate member, has been an IEC for five years. She is a civil rights lawyer who previously worked with adults and children to ensure they received

appropriate educational and mental health services. Rao attended IECA's 2021 Summer Training Institute and holds a certificate in college counseling from UCLA Extension. A member of SACAC and WACAC, she works with students through ScholarMatch, Matchlighters, and Service to Schools.

Veena Rao, JD
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661-513-3351
Veena@TheSummitCC.com
TheSummitCC.com
Specialty: C

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Sheryl R. Schreiber (CA), a former Associate member, has more than 20 years of educational leadership experience in admissions, consulting, college counseling, and career resources.

She holds an MBA from the Marshall School of Business as well as a BA from the Annenberg School of Communication, both at the University of Southern California. Schreiber also completed a certificate in college counseling, with distinction, from UCLA Extension. She joined Magellan College Counseling after having been a successful solo practitioner in the college counseling field.

Sheryl R. Schreiber, MBA
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MagellanCounseling.com
Specialty: C



Michele Sweeney (NJ), has been an IEC for 10 years, focusing on liberal arts students. She is passionate about helping students achieve their potential as they reach adulthood. Sweeney

holds an MBA from the University of San Francisco, a BA from Wheaton College, and an IEC certificate from UC Irvine Extension. She attended IECA's 2015 Summer Training Institute and is a member of NACAC.

Michele Sweeney, MBA
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FirstChoiceCollegeCounseling.com
Specialty: C



Candice Sunseri (CA), a former Associate member, has been an IEC for four years. She worked at Admit You to College before starting her own practice with her son in 2023. Prior to her work

in college consulting, she was a high school librarian, where she was able to observe and interact with teenagers in their native habitat! Sunseri holds a BA from the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, attended IECA's 2020 Summer Training Institute, and is member of WACAC.

Candice Sunseri
College Path Consulting
Moorpark, CA 93021
805-292-0688
Candice@CollegePathConsulting.com
CollegePathConsulting.com
Specialty: C



Ariana Williams (VA), a former Associate member, has been an IEC for nearly four years. She attended IECA's 2020 Summer Training Institute and received her certificate in college counseling

through UCSD Extension. Williams earned an MA from Middlebury College in Spanish and taught at the high school and middle school levels. She also earned her MEd/EdS in mental health counseling from the University of Virginia and worked as a bilingual therapist for several years. Williams has served as an active volunteer board member for multiple local nonprofits and has worked with several first-generation students on a pro bono basis.

Ariana Williams, MA, MEd, EdS
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AWCollegeConsulting.com
Specialty: C

Mentor Match

Improve the independent educational consulting profession by serving as a mentor through IECA's signature Mentor Match program! Learn more and enroll as a mentor today on the IECA Member Network: network.IECAonline.com/MentorMatch



Become an IECA Professional Member!

Are you a current Associate member of IECA, ready to work toward becoming a Professional member, demonstrating your professional mastery and years of experience?

Visit link.IECAonline.com/A2P for information and member-to-member tips on how to make this transition. Contact IECA's Membership Manager Caitlin Myers (Caitlin@IECAonline.com) with any questions—we are here to help!

Campus Visits

Visiting and evaluating college, school, and program campuses is an important way for IECA members to stay knowledgeable and up to date. These organized tours also help Associate members reach their campus visits requirements in order to qualify for Professional membership status. We offer several options for IECA members to participate in campus tours.



Upcoming IECA Committee-Organized Tour

Country, Blues, & BBQ: Nashville, TN to St. Louis, MO

March 18–22, 2024

Sold Out! The IECA College Committee and IECA staff are excited to offer this five-day spring tour of nine colleges in Tennessee, Illinois, and Missouri. [See page 5 for more details.]

Upcoming IECA Pre- and Post-Conference Tours

May 2024

We are pleased to offer campus tours for IECA members before and after our 2024 Annual Conference in Connecticut. More information will be announced in February.

Tour Invitations from Colleges/Schools/Programs

Ongoing

Many colleges, schools, and programs routinely invite IECA members for campus visits throughout the year, such as the Western Connecticut Boarding School Association Tour, May 9-10, 2024.

For more information on all campus tours, visit: link.IECAonline.com/campus-tours

Initiatives

In September, **Marilyn O'Toole** gave a presentation about the AXS Companion to Common App as part of the University of Southern California's Counselor Conference for First-Year Admission. She was thrilled to show the large group of high school counselors in attendance how the AXS Companion saves counselors and students time during the college application process. ▼



In October, **Betsy Woolf** moderated "Inside the Admissions Office" at the Jewish Community Center Mid-Westchester for the 15th year! She put together a panel of deans from six US universities who spoke to families about college admissions: American University, New York University, Washington University in St. Louis, Binghamton University, Union College, and University of Richmond.

IECA's Career Center

As you look to expand your IEC practice in the new year, post your job opportunities on IECA's Career Center. Many new job seekers join the site each week.

IECA members receive a discount on job postings. Job seekers can create an account, upload their resume, and apply to jobs for free.

Get started today: link.IECAonline.com/careers



IECA Member Chris Andersson Receives UCI Alumni Association Award

Congratulations to IECA member Chris Andersson on receiving the 2023 Distinguished Alumnus Award from the University of California, Irvine Alumni Association. On receiving the award, he commented:

"Being presented with the 2023 Distinguished Alumnus Award by the UC Irvine Alumni Association was thrilling. Each school at the university put forward one alum and I represented the Division of Continuing Education (DCE). I was in incredibly impressive company!

I completed the UCI DCE Independent Educational Consulting certificate program when I decided to expand my business to include college application support in addition to the artistic review support I had already been giving to my theatre, film, and dramatic writing students. The program was fantastic. It was an easy decision for me, especially since the faculty were all friends and colleagues from IECA, and they are a formidable group! The professors showed such dedication to their students and the subjects at hand, providing wisdom, perspective, resources, and access to experts in the field and related disciplines. I highly recommend it! I learned so much!



IECA has been an incredible source of support and professional development for me over the last 10 years. I have grown as an IEC, presenter, leader, business owner, and as a person through my involvement with the IECA community. I owe a lot of my success to the association and continue to learn as a recently appointed IECA board member.

The UCI DCE certificate program is designed for people entering the profession and often serves as a stepping stone to IECA membership. However, it can also benefit those already in practice who are making a change or want to increase their knowledge. As a practicing independent educational consultant, I found opportunities to share my experiences, successes, and failures with my fellow students, as a mentor of sorts. To all those out there who might be considering a move into the field of independent educational consulting, I encourage you to look into certificate programs in the UC system to get yourself started!"

Spotlight on the Black IECs Affinity Group


By April Paris-Joseph, MA, IECA Associate (WA) and Lisa Thomas, EdD, IECA Associate (CA), Co-Chairs

Identity-based Affinity Groups have a special role at IECA in today's world. The Black IECs Affinity Group was founded in June 2000 by Antoinette Battiste, Belinda Wilkerson, and Amy Jasper. Since that time, the group has grown to be over 80 members strong. Our Affinity Group meets on the second Thursday of the month, and focuses on a number of topics. Our purpose is to provide a safe space for Black IECs to share and support each other around our most challenging and unique issues.

Our meetings have an open format where we spend time brainstorming, sharing tips, and generally encouraging each other with ways we can all run successful and thriving businesses while balancing life and the particular issues we face as Black IECs. We engage with special guest speakers and encourage our members to share their expertise with the group

through presentations on special topics around business strategies, essay editing, artificial intelligence (AI), and the recent SCOTUS ruling.

More than just a place to encourage professional growth, we share in our experience of being Black and IECs. From book recommendations in and out of our field to reminders to block regular rest time each week, we encourage each other to maintain healthy boundaries with clients, while we find time to take care of ourselves.

We are honored and proud to co-chair this Affinity Group full of amazing IECs! We invite all of our Black-identifying IECs to sign up for our group and join our next meeting. 

To join the Black IECs Affinity Group, go to: network.IECAonline.com/communities/AffinityGroups



April Paris-Joseph, Paris Educational Solutions, can be reached at April@ParisEducationalSolutions.com.



Lisa Thomas, Educated Mindset Consulting, can be reached at LisaThomas@EdMindset.com.

Connect with Your Colleagues in an Affinity Group

IECA Affinity Groups are run by IECA members with similar interests in a specific topic. We currently have more than 25 groups—and new members and groups are always welcome!

To join an existing Affinity Group on the Member Network, go to: network.IECAonline.com/communities/AffinityGroups

To create a new Affinity Group, contact IECA Membership Experience Manager Tanesha Norman at Tanesha@IECAonline.com.

Business-Focused Groups

Asana Users
Best Notes Users
Cialfo Users
GuidedPath Users
Large IEC Business
Technology for IEC Practices
TestPreppers

Identity-Based Groups

Black IECs
Consultants with Young Children
Jewish IECs
LatinX/Hispanic IECs
LGBTQIA2S+ and Allies
Military-Affiliated Students and IECs
Parents with Struggling Children

Groups Based on Student Populations

College Affordability
Day School Consulting
Gap Year Information and Resources
Homeschooling
IECs Advising College-Bound Student-Athletes
IECs Serving Families of Active Christian
Faith
IECs Who Give Back
Intellectual Disabilities and ASD
Military-Affiliated Students and IECs
Performing and Visual Arts
Rural/Small-Town Students
Supporting Students Crossing Borders
Transfer Students
Working with Chinese Students and Families
Working with Gifted/Talented and Twice-Exceptional Students

Regional Groups

IECA Regional Groups are a great way to connect with fellow members living close to you. Some groups meet in person and others meet virtually—and some do both! We currently have more than 40 Regional Groups and new members (and groups) are always welcome.

To get involved with an existing group, join their community on the Member Network: network.IECAonline.com/communities/RegionalGroups

To start a group in your area, contact IECA Member Experience Manager Tanesha Norman at Tanesha@IECAonline.com.

Members of the **Broward/Palm Beach, Florida Regional Group** had an informative and fun get-together with members of the Florida Regional Admissions Counselors (FRAC) on October 18, 2023. Information was shared about Berry College, Bryant University, Fairfield University, George Mason University, Penn State University, Michigan State University, Montclair State University, Seton Hall University, and Valdosta State University. They also attended the Florida Educators Workshop at Lynn University on December 5.



In early December 2023, the **Raleigh, North Carolina Regional Group** enjoyed an in-person luncheon.



On November 7, 2023, the **Indiana Regional Group** gathered for lunch on Butler University's campus to enjoy professional camaraderie and friendship. They celebrated all the work their students accomplished by submitting their early college applications, and shared tips, insights, and ideas as they support their seniors through the rest of the application season and begin to initiate their college criteria meetings with juniors.

Members based in **Central Texas** met for brunch and in-person conversations in December 2023.



Also in December 2023, the **College Consultants of Colorado Regional Group** enjoyed an incredible holiday party, hosted by Steve Antonoff, at the Denver Art Museum with more than 50 people in attendance.

For Schools, Colleges, and Program Representatives

If you are interested in meeting with IECA members, either virtually or in person, we encourage you to reach out to our Regional Groups. You can find the full list of groups on our website: link.IECAonline.com/regional

IECA to Add Certified Educational Planner (CEP) to Its Portfolio

As part of its commitment to promote the highest quality independent educational consulting for students and families, IECA announced in October 2023 that it will integrate the American Institute of Certified Educational Planners, the nation's leading certifying body which awards the respected Certified Educational Planner designation, into IECA's suite of offerings.

AICEP, founded in 1994, credentials full-time, experienced IECs and school-based college counselors. The Certified Educational Planner (CEP) designation recognizes professionals who have achieved the highest level of competence and knowledge of the independent educational counseling profession. To be awarded the CEP credential, individuals must meet stringent requirements and pass a rigorous board-certifying assessment. To retain the credential, CEPs must continue to conduct evaluative campus or site visits and participate in specified professional development activities to meet recertification requirements every five years.



More than 25 years ago, IECA helped establish the American Institute of Certified Educational Planners to promote raising standards and lifelong learning among independent educational consultants. Today, IECA's growth and leadership have made this consolidation a natural mark of progress and uniting two leading organizations in the profession.

"Ultimately, by bringing the CEP designation into IECA's suite of programming, parents will look to IECA membership and its certification mark as the assurance they need that the IEC they hire is knowledgeable, ethical, and offers exception advising," said IECA's President, Ibrahim Firat (TX).

If you currently hold the CEP designation, your credential will remain valid through the integration process. If you are considering pursuing the CEP designation, you are welcome to do so now or to wait until the integration is complete.

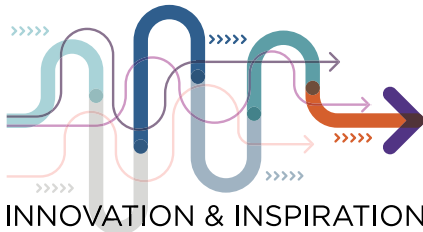
The integration of AICEP and its certification program into IECA is slated for late 2024 as both groups work to ensure a seamless implementation.

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(we have discontinued our fall conference)

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More information can be found at link.iecaonline.com/Conference-Info