

2026 Social Justice in Education Conference

Presenter Biographies

Nicole Amato (she/her) is an Assistant Professor of English Language Arts & Literacy Education at CSU Channel Islands. A former ELA teacher, Nicole's work explores youth reading practices, children's and young adult literature, and anti-oppressive pedagogies. She wishes you would come to her office to borrow and discuss books! She can be reached at nicole.amato@csuci.edu.

Theresa Avila was born in Imperial Valley, CA. She earned her Ph.D. in Art History from the University of New Mexico with a focus on Latin American and Latina/o/x/e visual and material. Dr. Avila works as an Associate Professor of non-Western Art History at California State University, Channel Islands. She is also the Director and Chief Curator of Broome Gallery at CSUCI. As a scholar and curator, Dr. Avila agitates the intersections between the visual and political, specifically the impact of settler colonialism, nation-building, and systems of differentiation toward civil rights and equity. Projects currently in development are an edited volume on landscapes of the Americas, a book on the Mexican graphic art collective, Taller de Grafica Popular and their portfolio on the Mexican Revolution, and a Digital Art History Project on U.S. National Parks ephemera and travel albums.

Damaris Muñoz Bello serves as Director of Behavioral Health at Liberty Charter School. She fosters a nurturing, inclusive campus through mindfulness and clinical support. Holding an M.S. in Counseling, she oversees SST meetings, supervises mental health initiatives, and leads inclusive programs. She is dedicated to empowering families and advocating for students' social-emotional success.

Lucero Benitez is a doctoral student in CSUCI's Educational Leadership for Equity and Justice program. An Assistant Principal with 16 years in education, including 12 as a school counselor, her research focuses on implementing comprehensive school counseling programs to advance systemic equity and student success.

Daniela Anais Cortez Bravo (she/her), is a first-generation Latina from the Bay Area and UCLA graduate. Now pursuing a Ph.D. in Education, her work centers on educational justice, HSI initiatives, and transforming higher education to honor Latinx students' community cultural wealth, storytelling, and agency—with a commitment to collective action as essential to institutional transformation.

Jerusalen Davila (she/ella) was born in Mexico and raised in City Heights, San Diego, CA. She is a first-year Education PhD student at UCLA's School of Education. Through her research, she centers and uplifts undocumented students in higher education.

Kate English (they/them) is a community leader and equity strategist with over two decades advancing social justice in Ventura County. They lead the Youth Equity Initiative at Ventura County Probation, centering youth voice and community co-design. Their work is rooted in the belief that liberation is collective and built through trust, repair, and relationship.

Raudel Flores is a LMFT-Oxnard School District Mental Health Manager. For over 26 years, I've worked with individuals and families navigating life's most challenging moments. Raudel Flores provides mental health services, crisis intervention, and clinical leadership, supervises student interns, and supports administrators and staff in implementing tiered, culturally sensitive, strength-based interventions.

Diego A. Castro Gomez is a first-year doctoral student in Education at UCLA's School of Education & Information Studies. His theoretical and empirical work interrogates how immigration influences undocumented students' access and trajectories in higher education. Centering undocumented students through critical frameworks, his research offers a nuanced reimagining of college access and educational preparedness.

Danna Lomax currently serves as a Dual Language Teacher Specialist in Ventura Unified School District and Lecturer at CSUCI. Danna is interested in culturally sustaining pedagogies and Peace Education, both of which encourage students to create peace with themselves, each other, and the planet. Her joys include spending time with family and working in solidarity against fascism.

Denise Lopez-Heredia is an ECS student working toward their BA degree, and who enjoys working with children and families

Maria C. Magana is a School Counselor who has worked for the Oxnard School District for 27 years, 5 of those years as a dedicated school counselor who is passionate about providing social, emotional and academic support for all students in an equitable and culturally responsive school environment. Through advocacy and collaboration, Maria works to build school communities rooted in healing, dignity, and opportunity for all of our students and families.

Alicia Mariscal is an ECS student working toward their BA degree, and who enjoys working with children and families

Yasmina Martinez is an ECS student working toward their BA degree, and who enjoys working with children and families

Joe I. Mendoza retired from Education after 68 years. He taught elementary, middle, high, university, and served as principal, assistant superintendent, superintendent, director. Among the many awards are: Outstanding Leadership in Education Award from California State Assembly; Congress of the United States; OHTLI Award by Vicente Fox, the President of Mexico, highest award from Mexican government; and Honorary Doctor Degree, California State University, Channel Islands

Vanessa Mendoza is a school counselor and doctoral student in Educational Leadership for Equity and Justice whose work is grounded in border communities. Her research and practice center restorative, healing-centered approaches that honor the cultural wealth of Latinx transfronterizo students living within physical borders and the in-between spaces of identity, language, and belonging.

Corine Musgrove is a joy-centered education leader committed to trauma-informed and culturally responsive leadership, with a deep passion for creating safe, inclusive, and equitable learning communities. Holding a master's in education and pursuing a doctorate in Trauma-Informed Education Leadership, Corine brings 15 years of education experience across university and K–12 settings. She currently serves as Assistant Principal of Curriculum and Instruction at Calabasas High School.

Gladys Perez is an ECS student working toward their BA degree, and who enjoys working with children and families

Crystal Pinedo is a current student at Channel Islands in the Early Childhood Studies program. She works as a paraeducator with individuals with disabilities in the county and is currently completing her infant/toddler student teaching.

Charlotte Robles is a CSU Channel Islands Early Childhood Studies alumna. She is currently pursuing her Master's in Education with a focus on Inspired Teaching Practices and Learning, along with a Preliminary Multiple Subject Teaching Credential.

Vanessa Ruiz is a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist with 15 years of clinical experience working with families, children, and adolescents. Proudly serves as a Mental Health Clinician for the Oxnard School District. As a former student of OSD schools and CSUCI, Vanessa is committed to supporting and empowering the next generation and giving back to the community that helped shape her.

Assadullah Sadiq is an Assistant Professor in the School of Education. A former elementary school teacher, his research focuses on early literacy and the language and literacy practices of refugee communities, with a particular emphasis on Afghan refugees.

Cinthya Salazar, PhD (ella/she), is an Assistant Professor of Education at the University of California, Los Angeles. Her research focuses on the mechanisms used by undocumented students to access, persist, and succeed in higher education. She uses participatory action research and engages undocumented students as co-researchers to generate localized student success models that can promote their college retention.

Josefina L. Sierra, MSW, LCSW, is a licensed clinical social worker, therapist, adjunct professor, and international presenter with over 30 years of experience in mental health. Her work centers on trauma, including intergenerational experiences, and culturally responsive care with the Latinx community in clinical, academic, and community spaces.