



OUR POLICY
& RESEARCH
TEAM





CRISTEN
MOORE

Cristen Moore has more than a decade of experience in public policy and community engagement. She provides strategic guidance across stakeholder groups to advance impact through equitable policies for communities of color with an expertise in increasing educational attainment. A trusted thought partner and committed collaborator, Moore works to bridge the gap between public policy and the communities it affects, prioritizing an intentional commitment to social justice, diversity, racial equity and inclusion.

Most recently, Moore served as the Director of Equity and Change Management at HCM Strategists, a public policy and advocacy firm, and provided a portfolio of services including strategic planning and support, and the development of equity-minded leadership and coalitions. Her work spans higher education systems, state-level government agencies, community-based organizations, the workforce sector and educational institutions with a focus on community colleges, MSIs and HBCUs. She supports this work for nonprofits such as Ascendium Education Foundation, ECMC Foundation, Strada Education Network and Lumina Foundation. Prior to joining HCM, Cristen worked on Capitol Hill as a Barbara Jordan Scholar in the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee and served as a Legislative Fellow in the House of Representatives. A proud graduate of a historical black college, Moore received her bachelor's from Howard University and also earned her master's of public administration from George Washington University. She currently resides in Indianapolis, Indiana.



KRISTIN
HULTQUIST

Kristin D. Hultquist is a founding partner of HCM Strategists (HCM), an impact-driven consulting firm that believes in the transformative power of education and work-based learning to improve social and economic mobility. Her firm's expertise in postsecondary policy and strategy development at the state and federal levels is sought by major US philanthropies, national higher education associations, regional higher education compacts, state higher education agencies and systems and non-profit student, parent, and business organizations. A veteran of the National Governors Association and the George W. Bush Administration, Hultquist's expert testimony has been sought by the U.S. House of Representatives and U.S. Senate.

In 2019, Colorado Governor Jared Polis appointed Hultquist to serve on the Metropolitan State University of Denver board of trustees, where she currently serves as vice chair. She also is vice chair of the board for the Institute for Higher Education Policy and a board member of Generation Hope, which elevates the needs of teen parents in college as well as their children through policy advocacy and holistic, two-generation programming. A Pell Grant recipient and the first college graduate in her family, Hultquist earned her bachelor's degree in political science from California Polytechnic State University in San Luis Obispo and a master's degree from Georgetown University's McCourt School of Public Policy. She and her husband share four children and reside in Parker, Colorado and Alexandria, Virginia.



KELLEY
DITZEL

Dr. Kelley Ditzel is a thought leader, educator and applied researcher who, through her multifaceted work experiences, utilizes research to drive equitable solutions and work with communities to enact positive change. Currently an Assistant Professor of Public Administration at Georgia College & State University, Dr. Ditzel teaches undergraduate and graduate courses in public administration. She considers herself a "pracademic" who thoroughly enjoys experiential learning with students and remains connected to the public sector through local nonprofit partnerships and consulting work within the local middle Georgia community and nationally.

Prior to joining Georgia College, Dr. Ditzel worked in nonprofits and philanthropy for 15 years where she created programs, led research efforts, and developed strategies to measure impact and drive change. As Director of Research Policy at Southern Education Foundation (SEF), Dr. Ditzel developed and executed research and advocacy efforts for advancing equity and educational excellence in the South. Prior to joining SEF, Dr. Ditzel was a Director on the Planning & Measurement Team at Boys Girls Clubs of America where she evaluated youth development outcomes for approximately 4 million young people. Other experience includes developing a comprehensive data system to support early literacy and learning, creating and directing the state of Georgia's Education Policy Fellowship Program (EPFP), and analysis of statewide public education data to provide recommendations and future implementation considerations for a state education agency.

Dr. Ditzel received a Ph.D. in Public Policy from a joint program with Georgia State University and the Georgia Institute of Technology and a B.A. in Political Science from Wake Forest University. Other educational experiences include classroom teaching through Teach for America and a CORO Fellowship in public affairs. Originally from Shaker Heights, Ohio, Dr. Ditzel relocated from Atlanta to middle Georgia with her husband and two young sons.



Martha Snyder is an education policy specialist with high-level experience supporting federal and state policymakers. As Managing Director of Postsecondary Education Transformation at HCM Strategists, she provides policy expertise and strategic counsel on a wide range of areas from finance to accountability to college readiness and affordability. Snyder is a primary lead for Lumina Foundation's Strategy Labs, where she provides non-partisan expertise and facilitation on affordability, outcomes-based funding and other finance policies to improve higher education attainment. She also serves as the key strategist on state postsecondary policy work for the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

A believer in the link between higher education and economic success, she has worked both personally and professionally to improve educational outcomes for disadvantaged students. Before her tenure at HCM, Snyder worked as a senior policy advisor at the United States Department of Education, focusing on K-12 accountability, high school reform and special education. She also served as an associate director for The White House Domestic Policy Council, developing budget priorities and providing analysis and counsel on all federal education issues. Her legislative branch experience includes a stint as a legislative assistant to Rep. Jim Gerlach of Pennsylvania.

Snyder earned a bachelor's degree at Villanova University and a master's degree in public administration from Syracuse University. She lives with her husband and four children in upstate New York, where she has put her passion for creative educational approaches to work on the board of directors for two local charter schools.

As a project administrator with HCM's postsecondary team, **Katie Lynne Morton** provides writing and data collection support for multiple clients, including the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and Lumina Foundation. Morton also provides administrative and operations assistance to senior-level team members on the postsecondary team.

Morton developed her passion for education over years spent working with children in various capacities. Prior to joining HCM, she worked as a coordinator of several youth programs before pursuing an elementary teaching certification. She earned both her bachelor's and master's degrees in education from the College of St. Rose in Albany, New York. She currently resides in Delmar, New York.



LuminaTM
FOUNDATION



Frank Swanzly Essien Jr., Ph.D. is a strategy officer for research at Lumina Foundation, an independent, private foundation in Indianapolis that is committed to making opportunities for learning beyond high school available to all. He is responsible for identifying and synthesizing existing research and evidence as well as commissioning new research to inform Lumina and the broader field on efforts to increase the nation's level of education attainment. His Lumina work also has included projects related to competency-based education, including the launch of the Competency-Based Education Network (C-BEN), and to the development of new higher education business and finance models.

Before joining Lumina in 2016, Essien served as manager for measurement and evaluation at USA Funds (now Strada Education Network), where he was responsible for assessing the social impact of the organization's philanthropic actions. Prior to that, he worked for a management and marketing consulting firm in New York, helping Fortune 500 companies optimize their business strategies.

Essien holds master's and doctoral degrees from Indiana University's Lilly Family School of Philanthropy and serves on the school's alumni board. He also holds bachelor's degrees in economics and finance with a minor in mathematical science from Westminster College, where he was a Davis United World College (UWC) Scholar and a Bill Emerson Fellow. He currently resides in Indianapolis, Indiana.

EducationCounsel

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ZAKIYA
SMITH
ELLIS

Dr. Zakiya Smith Ellis is a Principal at EducationCounsel, where she helps clients navigate the current education policy climate to develop solutions that improve equitable outcomes for students. Before joining EducationCounsel, Dr. Smith Ellis held the role of chief policy advisor to Governor Phil Murphy (D-NJ) and previously served as New Jersey's Secretary of Higher Education.

Twice named one of Forbes' top 30 under 30 in education earlier in her career, Dr. Smith Ellis is a respected public policy leader with deep expertise in federal and state higher education policy. She has demonstrated success in leading diverse teams to achieve dynamic results leading to tangible improvements in college affordability, enhanced institutional capacity, and more equitable student outcomes. She has led policy development and program implementation at the White House, the U.S. Department of Education, and Lumina Foundation, in addition to her most recent work developing and implementing state policy, she currently chairs the board of the Institute for College Access and Success and serves as a Senate-appointed member of the National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality and Integrity.

Dr. Smith Ellis holds a bachelor's degree in political science and secondary education from Vanderbilt University, a master's degree in education policy and management from the Harvard Graduate School of Education, and a doctorate in higher education management from the University of Pennsylvania, where she earned distinction for both the written dissertation and oral defense. She recently relocated to her hometown of Atlanta, Georgia, where she lives with her husband and young daughter.



BETHANY
LITTLE

Bethany Little is a Principal at EducationCounsel where she supports foundations, districts, states, institutions of higher education, and nonprofit organizations in driving systems change to improve equity and education from early childhood through higher education. Little has spent twenty years working in government and non-profit organizations, including the White House, where she was education advisor to President Clinton and Vice President Gore on the Domestic Policy Council, and the U.S. Department of Education. In the U.S. Senate, she served as Chief Education Counsel to the Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee under two chairmen, Senators Edward Kennedy and Tom Harkin, and as a legislative aide to Senator Patty Murray.

In the non-profit arena, Little was a Managing Partner at America Achieves, where she led their support for state and local superintendents, the Global Learning Network, and the development of a parent engagement initiative. She has also served as an advocate for disadvantaged children as the vice president for policy and advocacy at the Alliance for Excellent Education and the director of government relations for the Children's Defense Fund. She serves on the boards of the National Center for Teacher Residencies, Veterans Education Success, and Cesar Chavez Public Charter Schools for Public Policy. Little earned her bachelor's degree at Georgetown University. She currently resides in Washington, D.C.



VASILISA
SMITH

Vasilisa "Lisa" Smith is a Policy Associate at EducationCounsel. Prior to her role at EducationCounsel, she taught elementary special education in Chicago, IL. Smith has previously served as a press intern for Senator Jeff Merkley and a fellow with Planned Parenthood in her home state of Oregon, as well as a K-12 education intern for the Center for American Progress and research associate for FutureEd in Washington, D.C.

Smith holds a bachelor's degree in political science from University of Oregon, as well as a master's degree in teaching and a master's of public policy degree which she earned at Georgetown University's McCourt School of Public Policy. Her policy experience centers around K-12 education, special education policy and education finance, while her advocacy experience ranges from increasing access to the ballot and protecting reproductive rights. She currently resides in Washington, D.C.

Achieving the Dream



FRANCESCA
CARPENTER

As Achieving the Dream's (ATD) director of equity initiatives, **Francesca I. Carpenter** serves as point of contact for equity related programs and services, helping colleges to align equity-focused change efforts on campuses with ATD's strategic plan and goals. Carpenter has over 20 years of experience in higher education and K-12 working to build cross cultural collaboration, diversity, access to low and no cost textbooks, equitable practices, and bridging the digital divide. Carpenter's portfolio includes leading the organization's equity, diversity, inclusion, and anti-racist programming, the DREAM Scholars program, and Equity Institute.

Prior to joining ATD, Carpenter served as education technology officer at the Qatar Foundation International (QFI), where she led efforts to create and deliver open education tools and platforms as a vehicle to build community and connect cultures. She spearheaded the organization's technology plan including an open source Arabic language and Arab culture resource website, a cross-cultural online youth community focused on breaking down stereotypical barriers. Carpenter also has an extensive background in education technology, instructional design, adult learning theory and online professional development. She is passionate about ensuring equity and a socially just higher education system.

Carpenter holds a bachelor's degree from the University of West Florida and a master's from New York University. She also holds a graduate certificate in diversity and inclusion from Cornell University and a graduate certificate in adult learning from Johns Hopkins University. She currently resides in Beltsville, Maryland.