



## SWAG on 6: Undocumented Student Katherine Almendarez Is an Example for Others

By [Ari Odzer](#)

Katherine Almendarez is a straight-A student. She also works to inspire others around her to pursue successful education. NBC 6's Ari Odzer reports.

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Katherine Almendarez stands out at a school full of standout students.

"Because there's a lot of kids here that are just naturally gifted and smart, whereas her, she's smart but she puts in such an effort and she's positive and she's always happy. It's a joy to teach her every day," said social studies teacher Stepen Pereira.

Katherine is a straight-A kid at the School for Advanced Studies, a public school in which all the students are juniors and seniors who graduate with high school diplomas and AA degrees from Miami-Dade College. It's an intense academic environment which regularly feeds its top performers to the Ivy League and the nation's best colleges.

In this mix of brilliance, Katherine is a Questbridge Scholar with designs on attending Princeton University. She volunteers with several organizations, including Americans for Immigrant Justice, a non-profit immigrant advocacy law firm, and here's why: Katherine is an undocumented immigrant from Honduras. Her parents left her behind when they came to the United States in 2001.

So Katherine grew up without parents. To reunite the family, she endured a harrowing journey through Central America and smuggled herself across the border just three years ago, at age 15.

"I remember the climax of my journey was being right in front of the Rio Grande and thinking, like, the other side is where my opportunities are gonna be," she said, in near-perfect English.

Katherine turned herself in to Border Patrol agents immediately, and because her parents were already here, under an Obama-era rule, she was allowed to stay. Now, the threat of deportation looms over her.

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"My status is just hanging in the hands of the government now," Katherine said. "It's one of my biggest fears."

Her teachers and friends say you'd never know Katherine had any hardship issues going on.

"Because she just looks for no excuses," Pereira said.

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Among her classmates who know her background, Katherine is an inspiration.

"I mean, surely if she had those challenges and kind of just came to school every day, but no, it's more than that. She comes with a smile and she's always ready," said Lynsey Rumbaut, also a senior at S.A.S.

"She's able to outperform the rest of the classmates while she has struggled way more than the rest and, to me, that's like, mind-blowing," said another classmate, Danelis Lopez.

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Katherine realizes that because she came to the U.S. illegally, some people won't have any sympathy for her situation, and that's fine with her.

"I understand I wanna be a lawyer. I understand what it is to respect the law and want to uphold the law, so it's like an ethical dilemma that I've had to face – wanting to study law and enforce it, but at the same time having come here illegally," Katherine acknowledges.

A judge will eventually decide whether Katherine gets to live out her dreams in the U.S. In the meantime, she'll do what she does best, which is excel in school, help others, and set an example.

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"For just everyone who looks up to me, I can tell them: 'Yes, with hard work everything is attainable,'" Katherine said.

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