



Undocumented Students and College Access

“[W]hatever savings might be achieved by denying these children an education, they are wholly insubstantial in light of the costs involved to these children, the State, and the Nation.”

- U.S. Supreme Court Justice William J. Brennan, writing the opinion of the court, *Plyler v. Doe*, 1982.

There are approximately 2 million children of undocumented immigrants in the United States today, and the children of immigrants are the fastest-growing sector of the child population (College Board, 2009). Undocumented students face significant barriers to educational attainment, leading them to complete high school, enroll in college, and receive college degrees at drastically lower rates than U.S. born citizens. It has been estimated that only between 5 and 10 percent of undocumented high school graduates go on to enroll in college (College Board, 2009).

Each year undocumented high school students throughout the country meet their education ceiling at graduation. These talented and ambitious students are eager to pursue postsecondary education, but financial and institutional barriers prevent them from enrolling and thereby greatly limit their ability to contribute to the society and economy for which American has prepared them. According to NACAC research, sixty percent of colleges and universities received applications from undocumented students, including over 70 percent of public colleges and universities, 80 percent of medium- to large-sized institutions, and 86 percent of the most selective institutions (2010).

States that have increased postsecondary access for undocumented students have not suffered anticipated damages.

- The College Board (2009) found that “the 10 states that, since 2001, have passed laws allowing undocumented students who graduate from in-state high schools to qualify for in-state college tuition have not experienced a large influx of new immigrant students who have displaced native-born students or added financial burdens to their education systems. In fact, these measures tend to increase school revenues by bringing in tuition from students who otherwise would not be in college.”
- Case studies of California, Texas and Massachusetts revealed that, even with access to in-state tuition, undocumented students represent only a miniscule proportion of the total enrollment at public institutions (College Board, 2009).
- As referenced in the NACAC Journal of College Admission (Winter 2010), “AACRAO survey data found that the majority of colleges spend less than 20 percent of verification time on undocumented students. However, in states like South Carolina where undocumented students are prohibited from attending public universities and colleges, the verification process can be more burdensome because student status must be confirmed to make an adequate admission determination [internal citations omitted].”