

Wasted Talent and Broken Dreams: The Lost Potential of Undocumented Students

The current political debate over undocumented immigrants in the United States has largely ignored the plight of undocumented children. Yet children account for 1.8 million, or 15 percent, of the undocumented immigrants now living in this country. These children have, for the most part, grown up in the United States and received much of their primary and secondary educations here. But without a means to legalize their status, they are seldom able to go on to college and cannot work legally in this country. Moreover, at any time, they can be deported to countries they barely know. This wasted talent imposes economic and emotional costs on undocumented students themselves and on U.S. society as a whole. Denying undocumented students, most of whom are Hispanic, the opportunity to go to college and join the skilled workforce sends the wrong message to Hispanics about the value of a college education-and the value that U.S. society places on their education-at a time when raising the educational attainment of the Hispanic population is increasingly important to the nation's economic health.

Among the findings of this report:

- About 65,000 undocumented children who have lived in the United States for five years or longer graduate from high school each year. Although they can legally attend most colleges, they are not eligible for most forms of financial aid.
- Because of the barriers to their continued education and their exclusion from the legal workforce, only between 5 and 10 percent of undocumented high-school graduates go to college.
- Given the opportunity to receive additional education and move into better paying jobs, undocumented students would pay more in taxes and have more money to spend and invest in the U.S. economy.
- The ten states which, 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 that "displaces" native-born students or added financial burdens on their educational systems. In fact, these measures tend to increase school revenues by bringing in tuition from students who otherwise would not be in college.
- The bipartisan Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act, first introduced in Congress in 2001, would provide a solution to the current dilemma by allowing undocumented students to apply for legal permanent resident status.
- The DREAM Act would provide 360,000 undocumented high-school graduates with a legal

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means to work, and could provide incentives for another 715,000 youngsters between the ages of 5 and 17 to finish high school and pursue post-secondary education.

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