

Guide for High School Counselors: Working with Undocumented Students

Summary

This guide was developed in response to the increasing number of questions received from high school guidance counselors and college access providers regarding undocumented students. Undocumented students include those students born outside the United States, many of whom have lived in this country for a significant portion of their lives, and who reside here without legal permission from the federal government. These students represent a rapidly growing share of the U.S. student population. Every year, an estimated 65,000 undocumented high school graduates face significant barriers to postsecondary education.

There is no federal rule prohibiting undocumented students from enrolling in college. However, they are ineligible for federal and state student financial aid programs. This guide provides basic information to high school guidance counselors based on feedback provided by admission counselors, financial aid staff and legal counsel. Because changes occur in federal and state legislation and college policy, it is important to ensure that information shared with students is most recent. These guidelines have been prepared for the academic year 2011-12.

Challenges to College Access

- ❖ Students are uninformed or misinformed.
- ❖ 13 states allow undocumented students to attend colleges and universities. Those states are California, Connecticut, **Illinois**, **Kansas**, Maryland, **Nebraska**, New Mexico (full state financial aid), New York, Oklahoma (limited state financial aid), Rhode Island, Texas (full state financial aid), Utah, and Washington. Some even offer state funding. Some states have policies under the state Board of Regents (NJ). Other states have introduced/passed laws to deny admissions (MO/VA).
- ❖ Students may not know their residency status and are therefore unaware of how their status limits financial aid possibilities. Encourage students to understand their residency status. If uncertain, students should ask their parents. If the student/parents status is still uncertain encourage them to contact a licensed immigration attorney. Some attorneys may offer free or low cost services.
- ❖ *Please keep in mind that legally, K-12 school personnel cannot inquire about the immigration status of students or their parents.* Undocumented students are likely to hesitate to tell their status to someone unless they trust them or until they have to complete forms which require them to reveal their status. It is advisable not to ask a direct question about immigration status. If you have not gained trust, it may be considered a threat therefore disengaging the student from receiving services.
- ❖ There have been a few concerns regarding students who are legal citizens with undocumented parents. Many are under the impression that if parents are undocumented, they cannot apply for FAFSA or else they will jeopardize their parent's status in this country and will not receive funding. This is FALSE. His or her parents' immigration status has no bearing on the student's eligibility for aid. If one or more

parents are undocumented, the student is still eligible for aid. When filling out the FAFSA, the parents' social security number must be filled out as 000-00-0000.

- ❖ The student that was denied FAFSA because of his parent's immigration status should work with a school official and re-send the FAFSA application. The instructions clearly indicate that as long as s/he is a U.S. citizen or qualified non-citizen, s/he is eligible for aid. Take a look at www.studentaid.ed.gov or call 1-800-433-3243.

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- ❖ Every student applying to college is assigned a student user ID number, regardless of whether they have a Social Security Number (SSN). Please note The ITIN (individual taxpayer identification number) is used for federal tax reporting only. ITINs are not social security numbers; therefore, it cannot be used for applying for admission or financial aid. The IRS issues an ITIN to individuals who are required to have a U.S. taxpayer identification number but who do not have, and are not eligible to obtain a Social Security Number (SSN) from the Social Security Administration (SSA). An ITIN is a tax processing number issued by the Internal Revenue Service. More information about ITINs can be found at: www.irs.gov/individuals/article/0,,id=96287,00.html
- ❖ Students' college choices are largely influenced by finances. Financial concerns largely impact students' college aspirations and choices about where to apply.
- ❖ Financial aid is generally not available for undocumented students. The majority of student aid, including federal student aid, requires the recipient to be a U.S. citizen or permanent resident (green card holder) or an eligible non-citizen.

Applying to college

While we don't know what will happen with money, we can be sure that it won't matter if they don't have a school to go to.

Fee waivers - If a student is on free/reduced lunch, the student can get 2 SAT fee waivers and 1 ACT fee waiver. If the student has taken the SAT using a fee waiver, the student can receive 4 college application fee waivers. Any application submitted with a fee waiver must be sent in by mail.

Encourage students to apply to at least 3 schools: 2-year, 4-year public, and 4-year private just like you would any other student.

2-year state schools: cost less money. Plus, they may give in-state tuition, which really helps. Check for online programs which may cost less than out-of-state tuition.

2-year private schools (there are a few, I learned) often have private scholarships that can be funded.

4-year public schools: If the student has a good academic record and standardized test scores, it doesn't hurt to apply. Some of the smaller colleges who are dying for diversity might make exceptions and could possibly find ways to help with scholarships. Most of these schools have the Goizueta Scholarship available (but you have to ask about it) which does not require citizenship. Likewise, if the school has any other private money coming in, they may be able to use it for the kids.

4-year private schools: private schools have private money. They can admit who they want and help who they want. Of course, they're not going to advertise it. In this area you might also think about whether the student could handle the pressure of living out of state. The farther north you go, the more open admissions we get. That might take a bit more finesse, but I've talked to some admissions people out of state. I usually indicate that I have a question about students who may apply to their school and want to gauge the situation. You can quickly tell by tone who will be helpful and who won't. Some religious-based institutions are helpful; others are not.

Consider the Midwest Student Exchange Program. The Midwest Student Exchange Program, or MSEP, is a multi-state tuition reciprocity program. Through the MSEP, public institutions agree to charge students no more than 150% of the in-state resident tuition rate for specific programs; private institutions offer a 10% reduction on their tuition rates. Participating states include **Illinois**, Indiana, **Kansas**, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, **Nebraska**, North Dakota, Wisconsin.

***The sooner students apply, the more money is available. Students with strong academic records should be approaching schools in the early fall for the best shot.

Early Exposure

- ❖ Like other first-generation college students, undocumented students should be exposed to college information early (middle school, early high school). Their parents should also be exposed to the importance of attending college.
- ❖ Sometimes, parents need the economic help of their child so students are expected to work during high school and upon graduation. The message to parents has to include information on the long-term benefits of a college education.
- ❖ The parents of English-speaking students might not speak English. Seek opportunities to reach out to parents in their native language.
- ❖ ESL/ELL students should be encouraged to attend college (note: not all ESL students are undocumented).
- ❖ When students complete their college certificate and/or degree program, they may still be ineligible to work in the U.S.

Financial aid for undocumented students:

- ❖ If the student has a “green card” or social security number, they are eligible to complete the FAFSA as Residents.
- ❖ Undocumented students should not complete the FAFSA.
- ❖ If a student is documented and parent is undocumented, that student is eligible to apply for financial aid.
- ❖ A common strategy is for students to "market themselves" with a cover letter/funding request letter, resume, unofficial transcripts, letter of admission and a letter of support. Have students brainstorm area businesses and organizations that might be supportive. Make sure to have copies of the portfolio in English and Spanish printed on resume paper and in a nice folder. You never know when an opportunity may become available.

Useful resources to review include:

1. Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF) (www.maldef.org)
2. Hispanic Scholarship Fund (HSF) (www.hsf.net)
3. Hispanic Associate of Colleges and Universities www.hacu.net/hacu/Default_EN.asp
4. Local scholarships available through community-based organizations, churches, and businesses
5. Foundation Scholarships—undocumented students are eligible to apply for some of the school’s Foundation scholarships. Some Foundation Scholarship applications require students to complete and file the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA); others do not. Students do not need to indicate why they are not eligible to file the FAFSA.
6. <https://www.scholarshipaid.net/app/univision/> - “Educate, Es el Momento,” which was launched in 2010, is being hosted in collaboration with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the U.S. Department of Education and civic and community leaders nationwide.
7. <http://vidayfamilia.univision.com/es-el-momento/becas-a-z/>
8. www.latinocollegedollars.org
9. http://www.trpi.org/PDFs/STEM%20Directory_Final.pdf
10. <http://www.meencanta.com/hacer/>
11. http://istillhaveadream.org/AB_540_Student_Guide_2007_-_Spanish.pdf - although it looks like it’s just for California residents, the scholarship information applies nationwide.
12. Scholarships for students of Mexican descent: Becas Program, Hispanic ECS Fund at PO BOX 411872, St. Louis, MO 63141. Interested parties may also ask for applications by calling Mr. Guillermo A. Rodríguez at 314-246-7881 or sending him a message at rodriggu@webster.edu. Another contact is Rafael Nun Marín at 636-447-0255 or via email at rafael.nunmarin@pnc.com.

Email Maria Rebecchi: maria@sfstl.org for additional scholarship information

Additional background information:

<http://www.thebell.org/PUBS/IssBrf/2005/03UndocTuition.pdf> - A Resource Guide for Those Who Counsel Latino Students, Morton College, revised August 2007.

<http://professionals.collegeboard.com/profdownload/young-lives-on-hold-college-board.pdf> - The College dreams of Undocumented Students, College Board, April 2009.

<http://www.labor.ucla.edu/publications/reports/Undocumented-Students.pdf> - Unfulfilled Dreams..., UCLA Center for Labor Research and Education, 2007.