

# DREAMING BIG:

## What Community Colleges Can Do to Help Undocumented Immigrant Youth Achieve Their Potential

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### New Hope for Undocumented Students

Community colleges have traditionally served as the gateway into higher education for many undocumented students. They play an increasingly pivotal role in ensuring access to post-secondary educational opportunities for these young people, and particularly those who may be encouraged to further their education under the new Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) policy, announced by the Obama administration this past June. DACA allows eligible undocumented immigrant youth temporary relief from deportation and the potential ability to work legally in the United States, provided they meet certain educational and other requirements. As such, the new deferred action program offers a powerful incentive for high school students to stay in school, and it also means that many will be able to access community colleges with less anxiety and increased optimism for their future. Additionally, those who receive employment authorization will have the ability to work openly to support their educational costs.



The administration's deferred action policy represents only a temporary solution. It does not provide the educational or military service pathway to legal status that the DREAM Act would provide. However, it still represents a major breakthrough for undocumented youth who can, for the first time, obtain a reprieve from deportation *and* work legally. The Migration Policy Institute estimates that as many as 1.76 million unauthorized young immigrants could gain relief from deportation under the new policy.

At this critical juncture, community colleges must better understand the challenges of this growing student population and be prepared to assist them as they learn about college, enroll, and pursue their education. Several colleges that belong to the Community College Consortium for Immigrant Education partner actively with K-12 schools, immigrant youth-led organizations and immigrant advocacy coalitions, community organizations, and four-year colleges to increase educational access and attainment for immigrant students regardless of their status. These practices and experiences can assist community colleges as they respond to the new deferred action policy and improve their ability to serve their growing undocumented student population.

To download the full report "Dreaming Big: What Community Colleges Can Do to Help Undocumented Immigrant Youth Achieve Their Potential" visit: [www.ccie.org](http://www.ccie.org)

This report highlights the latest federal and state measures to increase post-secondary educational access for undocumented students, including in-state tuition and financial aid policies; describes the challenges facing undocumented students in accessing and completing higher education; illustrates the return on investment related to serving undocumented students; and offers community colleges recommendations and promising practices in five critical areas:

- 1) increasing college access
- 2) making college affordable through financial assistance
- 3) supporting college readiness and success
- 4) offering alternatives for adult learners
- 5) improving college retention and completion

Undocumented students have emerged as effective role models, mentors, and advocates for change on college campuses and in their communities. Community colleges are collaborating with student organizations often led by undocumented immigrant youth to raise awareness, build trust, and increase resources for undocumented students. Student-led organizations are playing a key role in organizing information sessions and workshops to help individuals understand the new DACA policy, connect them with legal expertise, and assist eligible students apply for deferred action and work permits.



## The Community College Consortium for Immigrant Education

The Community College Consortium for Immigrant Education (CCCIE) is a national network of 23 community colleges and other professional and research organizations that have joined forces to increase educational and workforce opportunities for immigrant students. CCCIE's mission is to 1) increase national awareness of the role of community colleges in immigrant education and 2) support the work of community colleges to strengthen and expand services for immigrant students including English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction, college readiness, college completion, career readiness, and employment and advancement. We believe that ensuring educational access and success for immigrants and children

of immigrants is critical to increasing U.S. college completion and workforce readiness.

National in scope, CCCIE receives major financial support from the J.M. Kaplan Fund and is hosted by Westchester Community College in Valhalla, New York. CCCIE's work is guided by a Blue Ribbon Panel of community college leaders and experts in the field of immigrant education. Our key activities include: raising national visibility of immigrant education challenges and opportunities, sharing promising practices, and providing advocacy and outreach on critical education and career issues that impact immigrants at all skill levels.

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**Contact us! We invite your comments and feedback to this report and encourage you to join our mailing list, connect with an expert, share your resources, or submit a promising practice for review at: [www.cccie.org/community-college-immigration-promising-practices](http://www.cccie.org/community-college-immigration-promising-practices)**

# Community College Recommendations to Support Undocumented Students:

## 1. Increase College Access

- Develop a coordinated outreach plan with immigrant youth-led organizations, immigrant advocacy coalitions, and other community-based organizations to build trust and help undocumented students learn about accessing the community college system
- Strengthen the K-12 pipeline to engage undocumented students, parents, teachers, and counselors and facilitate transition to community colleges
- Recruit undocumented students as community ambassadors and student role models
- Develop online sites that promote programs and resources for undocumented students
- Promote dual enrollment in high school and college courses as a cost-saving college preparation strategy

## 2. Make College Affordable Through Financial Assistance

- Assist in finding and applying for available scholarship resources
- Increase college and private fundraising for scholarship opportunities
- Adopt institutional funding for scholarship-based internships

## 3. Support College Readiness and Success

- Designate staff responsible for advising undocumented students
- Provide professional development to college personnel about unique challenges facing undocumented students and resources to help them
- Engage parents and keep them involved during the college experience

## 4. Offer Alternatives for Adult Learners

- Connect adult education and community college systems through partnerships and case management
- Adopt ABE-ESL bridge courses, career pathways, and online learning to support adult students

## 5. Improve College Retention and Completion

- Promote campus safe zones and empower immigrant students as leaders
- Provide a continuum of support services to promote the academic, social, and emotional well-being of undocumented students
- Organize campus-wide events to build institutional awareness and support for undocumented students
- Facilitate transfer to four-year colleges and the workplace

### Learn how the following community colleges are enhancing services for undocumented students:

#### **Bluegrass Community and Technical College**

Lexington, KY

#### **City College of San Francisco**

San Francisco, CA

#### **Johnson County Community College**

Overland Park, KS

#### **Miami Dade College**

Miami, FL

#### **Palm Beach State College**

Lake Worth, FL

#### **Renton Technical College**

Renton, WA

#### **Rio Hondo College**

Whittier, CA

#### **South Texas College**

McAllen, TX

#### **Westchester Community College**

Valhalla, NY

#### **Wilbur Wright College**

Chicago, IL

## Educational Success of Undocumented Youth is Critical to Reaching College Completion Goals

The Obama administration has set a national goal for increasing the proportion of college graduates by 50 percent over the next decade. Clearly, this will only be achieved if *all* students are given the opportunity to enroll and the support to succeed in college—including the tens of thousands of undocumented students nationwide who aspire to a college education. The Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program represents a historic milestone that raises hopes for eventual passage of DREAM Act legislation and broader immigration reform. The deferred action initiative may also encourage many more undocumented students to access and enroll in community colleges in an open environment, and it represents an opportunity for community colleges to be more proactive in addressing their needs.

Community colleges currently play a key role in promoting increased educational access and attainment for undocumented students. Though they face challenges in the current legal, fiscal, and political environment, community colleges are committed to serving undocumented immigrant youth and recognize their educational success is vital to reaching our national college completion goals and contributes to both economic growth and social vibrancy.

CCCIE, as the national voice for immigrant education, is committed to sharing the promising practices in this report so colleges can be effective in their response to DACA and in promoting the educational success of their growing undocumented student population. The report represents a significant step in profiling the exemplary practices of community colleges that are improving the educational prospects of undocumented students. But, with the college completion agenda as a national imperative, there is more work to be done.



### Additional Resources from the Community College Consortium for Immigrant Education

CCCIE plays a critical role in leveraging the strengths of community colleges and connecting them with one another and with other key stakeholders. A one-page DACA toolkit in the report and on our website at [www.cccie.org](http://www.cccie.org) includes resources and recommendations to help community college educators and their partners assist students who may qualify for the new deferred action program. CCCIE will update this toolkit as new resources become available. Through its efforts to disseminate promising practices, post web resources, provide technical assistance, and forge critical relationships among key stakeholders, CCCIE is building resources that support community colleges as they help undocumented immigrant youth achieve their potential.