

UNDOCUMENTED STUDENTS: POST-HIGH SCHOOL FACT SHEET

Myth: It is easy for school personnel to determine the immigration status of students.

Fact: The term “undocumented students” refers to children who were born abroad and who are not United States (U.S.) citizens or legal residents, or are in the U.S. on a current valid visa. School personnel are not permitted to inquire about the immigration status of students or their parents and must wait for students and parents to share this information if they so choose.

Myth: Undocumented students cannot legally attend college in the U.S.

Fact: Upon graduation, undocumented students may face barriers to higher education which can be both legal and financial, varying from one institution to the next; indeed, some colleges require students to provide proof of citizenship. However, there is no federal or state law prohibiting undocumented students from being admitted to U.S. institutions of higher learning; public or private (College Board, 2008).

Myth: Undocumented students need a social security number to apply to college.

Fact: Students do not need a social security number to apply to college, but may be required to provide one for financial aid consideration.

Myth: Undocumented students are ineligible for financial aid to help pay for college.

Fact: While it is true that undocumented students cannot legally receive any federally funded financial aid, and that in most states they are not eligible for state financial aid (College Board, 2008), there are other sources of aid available to undocumented students, including such organizations as the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (www.maldef.org), the Salvadoran American Leadership and Educational Fund (www.salef.org), and the United Negro College Fund (www.uncf.org). Private institutions of higher learning are able to set their own financial aid policies, and some offer financial aid to undocumented students (College Board, 2008). Some public institutions also award aid; undocumented students are eligible to apply for Board grants at Montgomery College.

Myth: Undocumented students are treated as “foreign students” and are not eligible for in-state tuition.

Fact: While institutional policies regarding tuition vary, some states have passed laws that enable undocumented students to pay in-state tuition rates if they meet specific criteria. As of now, Maryland has not passed such a law. However, undocumented students who have graduated from a Montgomery County Public Schools high school and continue to reside in Montgomery County are eligible for in-county tuition if they attend Montgomery College.

Myth: Undocumented students cannot attend college if they have not graduated from high school.

Fact: Montgomery College will permit any student aged 16 or above who resides in Montgomery County to enroll in classes up to a total of 6 credits. Students may continue courses as long as they demonstrate success in these classes.

Myth: School personnel may help a student become documented.

Fact: Although school personnel cannot officially play a role in the documentation process, they may help families determine where they are in the process, if citizenship papers have already been filed. In addition, they can reach out to undocumented students early in their high school career to let them know that immigration status is not a legal bar to attending college and that some scholarship opportunities are available.

Myth: Undocumented students cannot obtain a General Educational Development (GED) diploma.

Fact: While undocumented students may enroll in GED classes in Maryland, in order to take the GED Test, they must provide a social security number or a letter from the Social Security Administration stating that they are ineligible for a social security number.