

COMMENTARY

Nurturing Undocumented Student Talent in Higher Education

AUTHOR

[William Perez](#) | Loyola Marymount University

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An [article published in the LA Times](#) reports that according to a recent poll of likely voters conducted by the Democratic polling firm [Greenberg Quinlan Rosner](#) and the Republican firm [American Viewpoint](#), 48% of Californians said immigrants are a benefit to the state, and 59% said undocumented workers who have held a job here for two years should be allowed to stay. Overall, the poll finds that California voters hold positive views about undocumented immigrants.

As the elections come to term, we need to think again about the laws that would help immigrants continue to benefit California's economy. The [AB540 law](#) allows undocumented California high school graduates to pay in-state tuition in public colleges and universities, and the [California DREAM Act](#) law would allow these same students to be eligible for state financial aid. Similar laws have been in place in Texas and New Mexico for several years. Debates around the implementation of AB540 and the California DREAM Act, mostly emphasize economic concerns and whether or not we can afford such initiatives. Yet a closer look at the enrollment and cost figures suggests that concerns about public costs are greatly exaggerated.

A Sacramento Bee article recently published reports that the percentage of students that qualify for in-state tuition under the AB540 waiver represent less than 1 percent of California college enrollment. As small as this figure is, the actual number of undocumented students may be much smaller than that since both undocumented and out-of-state U.S. citizens are eligible for the AB540 waiver. A [report released by the UC system](#) finds that among all AB540 students in the UC system, only 21% are actually undocumented. That means that the overall number of undocumented students in the UCs, CSU, and Community Colleges is not 39,590 but closer to 8,314 or .23% of the estimated 3.6 million students enrolled in California's public higher education system.

As the leader of a state most impacted by immigration policies, the next governor of California must play an active role advocating for comprehensive immigration reform and the DREAM Act.

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Stanford Graduate School of Education

520 Galvez Mall, Suite 444

Stanford, CA 94305

Phone: 650.576.8484

edpolicyinca.org

