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Los Angeles

Marking Legal Status:

A High School's Response to Issues of Documentation  
and the Needs of Undocumented Students

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy  
in Education

by

Marco Antonio Murillo

2015

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## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Marking Legal Status:

A High School's Response to Issues of Documentation  
and the Needs of Undocumented Students

by

Marco Antonio Murillo

Doctor of Philosophy in Education

University of California, Los Angeles, 2015

Professor Concepción M. Valadez

While an emerging body of work has highlighted the experiences of undocumented students in higher education (Contreras, 2010; Flores, 2009; Perez, 2009, 2012), the research literature on undocumented youth in the K-12 public education system is limited. Nationwide, approximately 1 million undocumented immigrants are under 18 years of age and about 65,000 undocumented students graduate from high school each year (Passel, 2003; Passel & Cohn, 2011). In recent years, numerous states have passed policies, which provide undocumented students greater access to postsecondary education as well as financial assistance such as the California Dream Act. Many of these policies, however, are rapidly changing and confusing for students and parents (Teranishi, Suárez-Orozco, & Suárez-

Orozco, 2015). Framed within theories of belonging, this study examines undocumented high school students' perceived membership and inclusion within a school community.

Employing ethnographic methods in an urban, high school serving a diverse student body, the study includes the following data: 1) observations in classrooms and the college center, 2) interviews with U.S-born/legally residing students (n=15), undocumented students (n=14), and teachers/administrators (n=13), and 3) school artifacts. Using a multilevel analysis framework the study addresses the impact of federal and state immigration related policies on undocumented students (macro), school-level processes and systems in place to support undocumented students as they prepare to transition out of high school (meso), and the treatment of undocumented students in school (micro).

Findings from this study are presented following the multilevel level framework. Study findings suggest that the California Dream Act and DACA have helped to make strides in supporting undocumented students college enrollment and gaining legal employment. However, increasing college costs and limited access to financial resources threaten undocumented students matriculation into college. Despite creating a supportive school context for undocumented students, teachers and administrators struggled with how to appropriately address the issue of documentation in order to target assistance and protect student privacy. In general, undocumented students felt comfortable disclosing their legal status after developing trusting relationships with adults and peers. At times, peers and adults were surprised to learn an individual was undocumented because it challenged dominant perceptions of undocumented immigrants (i.e., dress, language, or race/ethnicity). Ultimately, undocumented students felt a sense of belonging, suggesting the importance for schools to address issues of documentation in a direct, but respectful manner.

The dissertation of Marco Antonio Murillo is approved.

Carola E. Suárez-Orozco

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University of California, Los Angeles

2015

## Dedication

To my mom. This accomplishment is as much yours as it is mine.

*Para mi mamá. Este logro es tan tuyo como mio.*

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

When Daniela Pelaez, an 18-year-old undocumented<sup>1</sup> high school student living in Miami faced deportation in March 2012, she found an outpour of support from teachers and school friends. During her deportation proceedings, Daniela's classmates created a Facebook group, organized an online petition that quickly collected over 5,000 signatures, and organized more than 2,000 of their peers to protest outside of her school (Huffington Post Miami, 2012). Joining the chorus of supporters was the district's superintendant as well as schoolteachers who noted Daniela's academic accomplishments. Her supporters' actions brought to light immigration laws that have led to an unprecedented increase in the detainment and deportation of undocumented immigrants (Rosenblum & McCabe, 2014). To them, Daniela's academic excellence, as illustrated by the honor of being the school's valedictorian, unequivocally demonstrated that she was "American." A few months after Daniela's story made headlines, and after years of advocacy from immigrant rights advocates and undocumented youth, President Obama announced the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, which grants undocumented youth reprieve from deportation, 2-year work permits, and a temporary Social Security number.

While Daniela's story is notable for shedding light on the United States broken immigration system, it also encourages us to consider how schools are implicated in the education and life of undocumented students. Having been an outstanding student, it was easy for administrators and school peers to validate Daniela's membership in school as well as society. It is important to note that just as there are a countless number of Danielas across the

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<sup>1</sup> In this study, "undocumented" is defined as an individual who resides in the United States without legal documentation. They are not U.S.-citizens, legal permanent residents, or have the legal authority to be in the country through a student visa or work permit (Passel & Cohn, 2011).

country, there are also undocumented students who do not possess a stellar academic record, but who still desire to be viewed as full members of American society and be given the opportunity to succeed. Though seldom talked about, it is important to consider the manner in which immigration laws intersect with the educational system, in particular, schools, which is where students' educational lives are lived out.

### **Background**

Daniela's story exhibits the long and complex history of immigrants and American schooling. The American educational system finds itself at the crux of significant demographic changes. This change, in large part, can be attributed to the growth of an immigrant population descendant from Latin America and Asia (Rumbaut & Portes, 2006). According to 2010 census data, over 40 million people residing in the United States are foreign born. Of these, over half (53 percent) arrived from Latin America or the Caribbean and over a quarter (28 percent) from Asia (Acosta & de la Cruz, 2011). Not surprisingly, the increased presence of an immigrant population has garnered attention in relation to their educational attainment and future societal impact.

As part of the fabric of American society, schools have had to contend with how to best educate a diverse population of immigrant children. At the same time, schools and teachers are under heavy scrutiny to improve academic achievement as current policies have placed stress on educators to do more to improve student performance (Darling-Hammond, 2004). To retain its stature as a leading global competitor the United States is reliant upon a well-educated student population. The increase growth in immigrant students has brought to light, in part, the shortcomings of our educational system in preparing a diverse student body to achieve academically (Olsen, 1997; Patel, 2013; Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2008).

Adding to complexity between immigration and the educational system has been the increased number of undocumented immigrants in the U.S. like Daniela, since the 1990s. Recent estimates place the number of undocumented immigrants at 11.3 million (Passel, Krogstad, & Gonzalez-Barrera, 2014). About 4.4 million are youth and young adults under the age of 30 (Passel & Lopez, 2012), while approximately 1 million are under 18 (Passel & Cohn, 2011). Although undocumented youth are granted a public K-12 education through the Supreme Court's *Plyler v. Doe* (1982) ruling, school demographic data on undocumented students is difficult to obtain. School districts are prohibited from inquiring about immigration status to determine district residency as it may discourage parents from enrolling their children in school (National School Boards Association & National Education System Resolution 1-2, 2009).

Nationwide, about 65,000 undocumented students graduate from high school each year (Passel, 2003). Among those between ages 18-24, only about half (49%) have attained a college degree or are enrolled in college (Passel & Cohn, 2009). While these numbers are lower than that of their U.S.-born and legally residing peers, undocumented students encounter additional challenges in enrolling in college and persisting to degree attainment (Contreras, 2009). Those who manage to traverse the educational pipeline demonstrate a high level of resiliency since they often do so with little support (Pérez et al., 2009; Pérez, 2012).

As a sub-group of the immigrant population, undocumented students are more likely to go unrecognized and/or forgotten. In addition to encountering many of the same challenges immigrant students face such as learning English, students without legal status<sup>2</sup> must also deal with the issue of "illegality" (Chavez, Soriano, & Oliverez, 2007). Unlike their U.S.-born and

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<sup>2</sup> Throughout the dissertation, I use terms such as legal documentation, legal status, and undocumented status to refer to issues relating to the unauthorized presence of immigrants in the country.

legally residing peers, students without proper documentation must contend with the issue of legal status. Labeled as “undocumented,” or often pejoratively as “illegal” by mainstream media and opponents of immigration (Chavez, 2008), these terms are used to refer to persons who are present in the United States without proper authorization because they lack birthright citizenship, a valid visa or other legal documentation; undocumented immigrants either enter the country legally and stay after their visa has expired or cross the border uninspected (Dozier, 2001; Motomura, 2008; Hofer et al., 2009).

Undocumented youth, similar to their parents, reside in the United States with aspirations of a better life. For many undocumented youth, school affords them the opportunity to realize that dream. However, the schools they attend are often underfunded, underperforming, and lack the knowledge to support their needs (Gonzales, 2010; Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2008; Pérez, 2012). Additionally, many undocumented children grow up in poverty and are forced to cope with a stigmatized legal and social identity. As a result, despite states passing laws that increase college access for these students, they are often poorly prepared and supported throughout their public school education to access the resources they will need to succeed in postsecondary education.

### **Statement of The Problem**

The Supreme Court’s *Plyler v. Doe* (1982) decision granted undocumented students the legal right to access a K-12 public education; however, their access to higher education varies across states. This, in large part, is due to the federal government’s inaction on matters of immigration. Currently, only 19 states have passed laws that allow undocumented higher education seekers to qualify for in-state tuition. Though such states have seen an increase number of undocumented students in college (Flores, 2010; Flores & Horn, 2009), the rising

costs of higher education and the exclusion of unauthorized students from qualifying for most types of financial assistance have made college affordability a greater challenge.

Just as some states have passed pro-immigrant laws, other states have passed laws that directly antagonize undocumented immigrants (Dougherty, Nienhusser, & Vega, 2010). For example, in 2011, Alabama passed one of the harshest immigration laws in the country. It included as one of its provisions the requirement for schools to report the number of undocumented students on their campus (Sarlin, 2013). While a federal appeals court rejected this provision of the law, its initial passage led to a growing sense of fear among parents and students. Additionally, regardless of whether undocumented students reside in a state with pro- or anti-immigrant laws, upon graduating from high school and reaching legal adulthood, undocumented youth transition from a protected status (e.g., access to a public education), to an unprotected status, making them increasingly vulnerable to being deported or if not then working in low-wage jobs (Gonzales, 2011).

Immigration and issues of legal documentation continue to be highly contested, politically polarizing, and emotionally charged in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. While on the campaign trail in 2008, then, Senator Obama pledged to the Latina/o community that he would work with Congress to pass a comprehensive immigration reform bill during his first term in office. However, immigration reform was overshadowed by healthcare reform and no bill came to pass. As such, on June 15, 2012, President Obama announced the DACA program as a means to provide temporary relief from deportation and two year work permits to undocumented immigrants who arrived to the United States before the age of 16, were under the age of 31, and had been present in the country for five years (before June 15, 2007) (Passel & Lopez, 2012). Shortly after being reelected into office, President Obama announced his support for passing

comprehensive immigration reform in 2013. While the Senate passed a bipartisan immigration reform bill in summer 2013, talks came to a halt after the House of Representatives refused to pursue the Senate's immigration reform legislation and failed to produce its own bill.

Although the federal government has failed to enact a comprehensive immigration reform bill, the DACA program and state policies that allow undocumented students to qualify for in-state tuition and financial aid are promising steps to support undocumented youth. By July 2014, 55% (681,189) of the 1.2 million undocumented youth eligible for DACA had applied for relief and 587,366 had been approved (Batalova, Hooker, Capps, & Bachmeier, 2014). In November 2014, along with the announcement of Deferred Action for Parental Accountability (DAPA)—which offers similar benefits to parents of U.S-born and legally permanent residents—DACA was expanded by removing age restrictions and granting work permits for three years.

Changes in federal and state policy may expand or restrict access to higher education for undocumented students. As such, they require us to consider the role schools play in facilitating undocumented students' access to resources and supports. Existing state policies and the DACA program require undocumented students to demonstrate they have resided in the state or country for a specific period of time in order to qualify for in-state tuition or a work permit (Huber, Malagon, & Solórzano, 2009; Flores 2010). For example, students are often asked to present their high school transcripts to proof they have attended school in the state for the required time period.

Despite the passage of policies that open opportunities for undocumented immigrants in education, the dissemination of such information has been poorly administered. Studies have found that many undocumented immigrants are unaware of policies that grant them in-state

tuition or access to other social services (Abrego, 2006; Huber, Malagon, Solórzano, 2007). A closer look at schools might help us understand why information is not reaching students.

At the school level, educators are under pressure to raise academic achievement for all students. In considering the goals toward reaching academic excellence, it is important to remain conscious of the needs of marginalized groups. Within the immigrant population, the unique circumstance of undocumented students showcases numerous shortcomings of the educational system. As students, a great number of undocumented immigrants have demonstrated the will and ability to succeed (e.g., learning English and excelling academically) (Pérez et al., 2009; Contreras, 2009; Pérez, 2012). However, they struggle to find the guidance and academic supports they need to pursue higher education. To an extent, this is a result of their complex positionality in the educational pipeline brought forth by their legal status. As gatekeepers of knowledge and opportunities, adults in school play an important role in facilitating the school experience and empowering students. In high immigrant population high schools, it is important to understand how adults respond to the presence of undocumented students on school campuses.

### *Undocumented Immigrants in California*

California is home to the largest number of undocumented immigrants in the country. Of the 10.3 million immigrants living in California, 2.6 million are estimated to be undocumented (Pastor & Marcelli, 2013). Moreover, close to 1 million reside in the Los Angeles metropolitan area. Given its large number of foreign-born residents, California addressed the presence of its large immigrant and unauthorized population. While recent policies in the state have qualified undocumented immigrants pursuing higher education to receive financial aid and to obtain a driver's license, policies in the 1990's reflected anti-immigrant sentiments.

Proposition 187, also known as the Save Our State initiative, was passed by California voters in 1994. Its purpose was to halt “illegal” immigration and restrict undocumented immigrants’ access to social services such as healthcare and education (Martin, 1995). Although the law was deemed unconstitutional, racist and anti-immigrant attitudes permeated across the state (Garcia, 1995). A few years later, California became the first state in the U.S. to pass policy to restrict bilingual education (Gandara & Contreras, 2009). The affront toward undocumented immigrants, masked within racist and nativist attitudes, led to the political mobilization of Latina/o in California (Mehan, 1997; Pantoja, Ramirez, & Segura, 2001).

Having gained political influence and power, in 2001, Latina/o legislators and immigrant advocates helped California become the second state in the U.S. to allow undocumented immigrants to qualify for in-state tuition (AB 540). Ten years later, after multiple vetoes, the legislature approved and Governor Jerry Brown (D-CA) signed the California Dream Act. The policy grants undocumented youth who are eligible to receive in-state tuition access to institutional and state financial aid. Moreover, in January 2015, undocumented immigrants became eligible to obtain driver licenses. In just the first month, over 200,000 undocumented immigrants applied for a license (Olson, 2015).

It is important to note that although California has made favorable strides to support undocumented immigrants, anti-immigrant sentiments are still present. Most notably, in summer 2014, Murrieta, CA made national headlines when anti-immigrant protesters gathered to block the arrival of a bus filled with undocumented women and children from Central America (Perry and Hansen, 2014). Such a display demonstrates the fervor issues related to immigration and documentation continue to incite. It is within this political context—pro-immigrant and anti-immigrant—in which data were collected for this dissertation study.

## **Research Questions and Methods**

This study contributes to the emerging body of work on undocumented youth by highlighting school responses to the growing presence of undocumented students in the public school system. Specifically, it seeks to shed light on the way educators provide academic and social supports to undocumented students as they prepare to transition from high school to higher education and/or work. The following questions guided my dissertation research:

- 1) How do members of a school community make sense of an ambiguous and rapidly shifting federal and state immigration policy landscape?
- 2) How are issues of legal status addressed as high school students prepare to graduate and apply to college?
- 3) How do educators and U.S.-born/legally residing students interact with undocumented students in school?

Employing ethnographic methods during the 2013-2014 academic year in an urban, high school serving a diverse student body, this study utilizes data collected through observations, semi-structured interviews, and school artifacts to address each research question. Through a conceptual framework of belonging and community membership, I utilize a multilevel analysis to address the way educators and students understand federal and state immigration policies meant to support or restrict undocumented students educational and work opportunities (macro), detail the school-level processes and systems in place to support undocumented students as they prepare to transition out of high school (meso), and describe the treatment of undocumented students in school (micro).

## **Significance**

The present study provides multiple contributions to the field of education and undocumented youth. It extends our knowledge on immigrant youth by capturing the daily lives of undocumented high school students, expands our understanding of the racial and ethnic diversity of undocumented immigrants by including the voices of undocumented Asian/Pacific Islander (API) students, and provides insight on school responses to the needs of this population. As such, it addresses a research gap that is sorely in need to be filled given that immigration has been a highly contested political and social issue in recent years.

This study employs in-depth ethnographic methodology to the study of high school age undocumented youth. It aims to capture the lived experience of school age undocumented youth during a pivotal moment in U.S. history relating to immigration policy and triangulates data by considering not only undocumented students, but also administrators, teachers, and legally residing/U.S.-born youth. Lastly, the research findings may offer guidance to educators who work closely with undocumented students in this rapidly changing policy landscape. Implications from the study's findings may help support educators in developing tools and procedures to address issues related to immigration in a sensitive and effective manner.

### **Dissertation Overview**

The dissertation is composed of seven chapters. In chapter 2, I provide a review of the literature and present a conceptual framework for the study. The chapter examines the multiple ways legally residing and undocumented immigrants are incorporated and left out of American society. The methodology used for the study is presented in Chapter 3 and includes a description of the study design, my positionality, the research site, the participants, the data sources, and the analytic process. The next three chapters report findings from the study. In chapter 4, I highlight

the way macro-level policies influence the educational opportunities of undocumented students and how educators and students make sense of these policies. The systems the school created to support students throughout the college application process and the way educators offer guidance to students dealing with issues of documentation are reported in Chapter 5. Findings on the treatment of undocumented students in school and the contexts in which issues related to legal status are discussed are presented in Chapter 6. The final chapter (Chapter 7) reviews key findings from the study, addresses the limitations of the study, provides recommendations for future research, and presents implications relevant to researchers, practitioners, and policymakers.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Literature Review and Conceptual Framework**

Although an emerging body of work has highlighted the experiences of undocumented college students, the literature on undocumented students in the K-12 public education system is limited. Moreover, studies on immigrants seldom examine the experiences of undocumented immigrants. Some of this can be explained by the difficulty of recruiting participants who will share their stories. Nonetheless, the literature on immigrants and the children of immigrants reveal overarching themes that shed light on the challenges of incorporation into the United States, regardless of legal status.

To better situate the literature on undocumented students for this study, I have organized this review into four sections. In the first section I explore the literature on assimilation/incorporation and use it to consider the way the mode of incorporation influences access to opportunity and education. Next, I review the legal and political implications of legal status to assess its impact on the undocumented population. Then, I examine the work on the educational experiences of immigrant students with an emphasis on undocumented students. I conclude with a section on issues of identity in relation to legally residing and undocumented immigrants.

The review of the literature helps to ground my dissertation study within ideas of belonging and membership. Theories of belonging and membership are an appropriate lens to apply to the experience of undocumented students because they traverse an educational environment that both includes and excludes them. At the conclusion of this chapter I describe the tenuous relationship between belonging and undocumented students in the educational system. I also present a multilevel framework for examining how ideas of belonging for

undocumented students take form through policy (macro), school practices and systems (meso), and treatment in school (micro).

### **Immigrant Assimilation/Incorporation**

#### *Theories of Assimilation and Incorporation*

Theories of immigrant assimilation and incorporation provide one way to think about issues of belonging and membership. The growth of the foreign population in the U.S. over the past half-century has yielded renewed interest in the process of incorporation immigrants undergo. Scholars in the field have developed a litany of theories to explicate the varying ways of how groups assimilate into the American mainstream. Traditional frameworks of assimilation have argued that assimilation occurs when a non-dominant group adopts the customs and attitudes of the dominant groups. Gordon (1964) explains that the longer immigrants are present in the host society, the more they come to resemble their native-born peers. Under this model, assimilation is perceived as a straight-line process, wherein subsequent generations experience upward mobility. Moreover, the model was adopted by examining the processes of incorporation of mostly European immigrants. However, the post-1965 immigrant wave has been comprised of individuals from Latin America and Asia, causing scholars to rethink the process of incorporation immigrants and their children experience upon arrival.

The refinement of conceptual frameworks regarding immigrant incorporation has led to the development of models that either attempt to expand classical frameworks of assimilation (Alba & Nee, 2003) or contest its linearity and upward mobility (Portes & Zhou, 1993). Though I do not argue in favor of either approach in framing how immigrants are incorporated in the U.S., both models provide insight on how the context of reception impacts the levels of opportunities available to immigrant groups.

Portes and Zhou's (1993) segmented assimilation theory has turned classic assimilation theories on their head. From this perspective, the question presented is not whether the immigrant population will assimilate into American society, but rather to what sector of society will they be incorporated into (Portes, Fernández-Kelly, & Haller, 2005). According to these scholars, the social context in which individuals arrive will play a role in their future economic prospects. As such, human capital, mode of incorporation, and family structure are critical components in the economic path they will follow. Moreover, race, the labor market, and drugs and gangs are presented as potential barriers for the upward mobility of the second generation. In particular, they argue that when children of immigrants are in close proximity to native minority groups (e.g., Blacks and third generation Latina/os), they are more likely to underperform in school and work (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). This last claim has come under heavy scrutiny for its deficit view of minority racial groups because it constructs them as being oppositional to education and success (Warikoo & Carter, 2009). Further, the segmented assimilation model pays little attention to the way institutions such as schools reify societal norms and structures (Warikoo & Carter, 2009) that support certain groups over others. Although segmented assimilation allows us to recognize the diversity among today's first and second-generation immigrant population, caution should be taken to avoid essentializing the experiences of different groups.

In contrast, Alba and Nee (2003) argue that immigrants change American society just as much as the host society changes them. Their model differs from Gordon's by showing that the reduction of ethnic differences is a directional process, wherein the cultures of both the dominant and non-dominant group converge. They note that because immigrants are driven by the search for the good life, in an environment with decreased discrimination, their attempts to incorporate

into the dominant society will become feasible (Alba & Nee, 2003). Although there are benefits to living in coethnic communities, Alba and Nee claim there are limits to the types of capital available to immigrants living in insulated communities. They hold that opportunities available to the foreign born and their children outside of the coethnic community will lead immigrants to move out in search of greater economic benefits.

Other scholars, building on Alba and Nee's ideas, claim that the process of assimilation is not all that different from the process experienced by immigrants of earlier waves (Perlman & Waldinger, 1997; Waldinger & Feliciano, 2004). In a study on the immigrant second generation in New York, researchers found that the children of immigrants were successfully incorporating into U.S. society while avoiding some of the pitfalls their native-born counterparts encounter (Kasinitz, Water, Mollenkopf, & Holdaway, 2008). They reason that the relative success of the second generation can be attributed to having exceptional parents, being well positioned to benefit from civil rights policies, and being strategic about living their lives. Although the authors recognize that some groups experience lateral or even downward mobility (e.g., Dominican second generation men), most are finding success integrating into American society (Alba, Kasinitz, & Water, 2011). These scholars have also come under critique for over generalizing progress across generations. Because "progress" is measured in comparison to the very low education and income levels of immigrant parents, critics point to the unlikelihood of lower educational and economic attainment among the second generation (Haller, Porters, & Lynch, 2011). Moreover, even though groups, such as Mexicans or Central Americans, may show economic progress, some scholars argue their progress is far behind from that of native whites.

Scholars of assimilation provide a lens to understand the variegated experiences of recent immigrants. As previously stated, among the sources that influence incorporation are parental socioeconomic status, the context of incorporation, and family structure (Alba et al., 2011). In essence, immigrants who possess high human capital upon arrival, defined by Haller et al. (2011) as being of legal status, are more positively received by the native-born population. However, despite briefly connecting legal status to mode of incorporation, few studies have analytically considered the impact of legal status.

### *Legal Status and Incorporation*

The process of incorporation into the host society for undocumented immigrants differs from that of legally residing immigrants. In a recent study, Bean et al., (2011) compare Mexican and Asian origin groups with respect to how combinations of entry status, legalization, and naturalization trajectories relate to educational attainment among their children. Through phone interviews with close to 5,000 adults who are the children of immigrants, the authors found that the legal entry of highly educated, Asian immigrants results in higher levels of educational attainment for their children. Conversely, alongside issues of socioeconomic status, the multiple and complex pathways of entry for Mexican immigrants reflect few positive outcomes. Moreover, using latent class models and regression analysis, the authors note that legalization adds 1.24 years to the schooling of children. They conclude that undocumented immigrants may experience delayed incorporation into the host country as a result of their legal status.

The social context and legal consciousness experienced by those who migrated as children is different from those who migrated as adults. Whereas fear predominates the lives of undocumented adults, social stigma, associated with ideas of “illegality,” is more present among undocumented youth (1.5 generation) (Abrego, 2011). However, as a result of undocumented

students' presence in the educational system they may "internalize many U.S. social norms and can use their socialization to fit in" (p.358). Despite encountering multiple barriers, undocumented students are more optimistic about overcoming them than undocumented adults. Unfortunately, upon graduating from high school, the supports undocumented students need to continue onto higher education erode. Since only a few states allow them to qualify to pay in-state tuition, and even less grant financial aid, accessing higher education becomes more difficult for them than their legally residing and U.S-born peers (Abrego, 2006; Greenman & Hall, 2013).

## **Legal Status**

### *The Intersection Between Legal Status and Education*

Legal policy and immigration have an extensive history of coming to head with one another. In this section, I present prominent legal cases and policies relating to undocumented immigrants. In Table 2.1, I provide a comprehensive overview of the relevant cases and policies pertinent to this study.

U.S. legal cases and policy pertaining to undocumented immigrants often demarcate boundaries of legal belonging. Yet, the issue is not as black or white as it is often perceived. Although undocumented immigrants are barred from most social programs accessible to citizens and legal residents (Olivas, 2004), undocumented youth are granted certain rights not available to undocumented adults. This is most apparent in public education, as undocumented children have the legal right to enroll in K-12 public schools. A result of such a circumstance has been what researchers have termed "liminal legality," where undocumented immigrants straddle the line between being included (e.g., schools and church) and excluded (e.g., federal financial aid and Medicaid) (Menjívar, 2006, 2008; Abrego, 2008). Abrego (2008) explains that, "Because many arrived in the United States as young children, they were able to learn the language, absorb

the customs, and make the culture their own in ways that are not available to those who migrate as adults” (p. 714). In this sense, undocumented youth exhibit cultural and social markers of belonging, but their legal status may result in their exclusion from certain aspects of American society.

Table 2.1. Immigration Policies and Educational Access

Federal, State, and Judicial Actions	Purpose
Plyler v. Doe (1982)	The Supreme Court overruled the state of Texas decision to bar children without legal residency access to its public schools.
Leticia A. V. UC Regents and CSU Board of Trustees (1985)	The California Superior Court ruled that undocumented students should be treated as residents for the purposes of paying in-state tuition.
The Immigration Reform and Control Act (1986)	A federal law that legalized undocumented immigrants who could provide U.S. residence prior to January 1, 1982. It also included sanctions on employers who knowingly hired undocumented immigrants.
Bradford v. UC Regents (1990)	A California law that overturned the Leticia A. ruling. It rescinded undocumented students' ability to pay in-state tuition.
Proposition 187 (1994)	A California voter supported law that denied medical, social, and educational services to undocumented immigrants. The U.S. Supreme Court overturned it in 1995.
The Illegal Reform and Immigration Responsibility Act (1996)	Restricted states from granting in-state tuition to a person if the benefit was not also available to U.S. citizens or legal residents.
Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (1996)	Restricted low-income immigrants' access to programs targeted at the working poor.
Assembly Bill 540 (2001)	A California bill that allows a person to file for state residency for in-state college tuition purposes. Recipients must have attended a California high school for at least three years, graduated from a California high school or obtained the equivalent of a high school diploma, registered or be enrolled in one of the states' institutions of higher education, and filed affidavit with their college or university stating that the individual has filed or will be file when eligible to legalize their status.
Assembly Bill 130 and 131 (2011)	A set of California laws that permit students who qualify for AB 540 to be eligible for grants and scholarships that are privately (AB 130) and publicly (AB 131) funded.

Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (2012)	Grants reprieve from deportation, 2-year work permits, and a Social Security number to undocumented immigrants who arrived to the United States before the age of 16 .
Deferred Action for Parental Accountability (2014)	Announced in November 2014 by President Obama, DAPA grants reprieve from deportation, a work permit, and a Social Security number to parents of citizenship or permanent legally residing children.

In 1982, the Supreme Court ruled in *Plyler v. Doe* that undocumented children have the right to a K-12 public education. This landmark case overruled the state of Texas decision to bar children without legal residency access to its public schools. The court reasoned under the 14<sup>th</sup> amendment’s equal protection clause that a state could not enact a discriminatory classification by identifying a “disfavored” group as non-resident (Drachman, 2006; Olivas, 2012). Moreover, Justice Brennan concluded that children were not responsible for their citizenship status, and, while education may not be a fundamental right, an uneducated populace would be a burden to society in the future. At the time, the victory in *Plyler* gave undocumented children the ability to access public education. However, the ruling did not extend to higher education (Yates, 2004). Since the court’s ruling, attempts have been made by states and members of Congress to overrule and circumvent the rights granted by *Plyler* through policies that restrict access to public education.

Despite a clear delineation of undocumented children’s right to education, schools with high immigrant populations (i.e., undocumented students) have been the targets of immigrant raids by police officials. In such cases, “Mexican” features have been sufficient reason for authorities to apprehend students (Lopez & Lopez, 2010; Olivas, 2012). More recent, the presence of Immigration Customs Enforcement (ICE) has been so prominent in some areas that school officials have felt the need to notify parents. The notices, while commendable, have led parents to withdraw their children from school out of a justified fear from being apprehended

(Olivas, 2012). To an extent, targeting parents who are dropping off or picking up children from school, as well as older students, has become the new way to restrict access to schools.

State policies have also been used to restrict access to K-12 educational services. The now infamous proposition 187, passed by California voters in 1994, sought to restrict undocumented immigrants access to services such as health care and education (Martin, 1995). This was a direct affront to the Plyler decision. Though a federal court later deemed the law unconstitutional, it sent a clear message to undocumented immigrants that they were not wanted in the state. The court reasoned that the California law was preempted by the federal government, which in 1996 passed two laws relating to immigrants: the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) and the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA). The PRWORA restricted low-income immigrants access to programs targeted at the working poor, while IIRIRA restricted states from granting in-state tuition to a person if the benefit was not also available to U.S citizens or legal residents. An amendment proposed by Congressman Gallegly (R-CA) to charge undocumented students school tuition or exclude them completely was never included in the final bills (Olivas, 2012). Since then, other states have passed laws that require students to report their legal status and that of their parents (Preston, 2011). Although aspects of the law were repealed, the policy caused fear among undocumented parents and led them to withdraw their children from school. In early, 2015, New York's State Education Department found that school districts were asking families to provide a Social Security number when enrolling their children in school (Mueller, 2014).

#### *Undocumented Students and Higher Education*

The Plyler decision made no claims on undocumented students' access to higher education. As a result, many undocumented students have had to put a hold on their plans to

attend college because they do not qualify for financial assistance, and in most states, are treated as international students and must pay higher tuition fees (Latino Policy Institute, 2011).

California has had a tortuous history in relation to undocumented immigrants and higher education. From *Leticia A. v. UC Regents and CSU Board of Trustees* (1985) and *Bradford v. UC Regents* (1990), where, in the former, the court ruled that undocumented students should be treated as residents for the purposes of paying in-state tuition only to be overturned by the latter, to the passage of Assembly Bill 540 in 2001, where undocumented students could once again qualify for in-state tuition, the positionality of undocumented students in relation to higher education has been cumbersome.

After Texas became the first state to allow undocumented students to qualify for in-state tuition, California followed suit. As part of the qualifying provisions of AB 540, students are required to have attended a California high school for at least three years, graduated from a California high school or attained a GED, and demonstrate intent to file for residency as soon as possible (Huber, Malagon, & Solórzano, 2009). Since then, a total of 19 states have passed similar laws, while 9 states have passed restrictive tuition policies (as cited in Teranishi, Suárez-Orozco, & Suárez-Orozco, 2015). In the summer and fall of 2011, California took a step further and passed AB 130 and 131, collectively known as the California Dream Act. These two laws allow students who meet the requirements of AB 540 to be considered for grants and scholarships funded through private sources (AB 130) as well as public grants and scholarships (AB 131) such as the CAL grant.

For now, state laws allow a limited number of undocumented students to access higher education. However, these laws do not provide a pathway to citizenship. As a result, undocumented students who graduate from college are unable to find jobs that reflect their

educational attainment. For over a decade, federal lawmakers have considered the Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors Act (DREAM Act). If passed, the piece of legislation would provide conditional legal permanent residence to undocumented students who graduate from high school and possess good moral character. During a six year time period, a person would have to obtain a postsecondary degree or serve two years in the military to retain legal status. Unfortunately, Congress has failed to pass such a law. Its closest attempt came in December 2010, where the DREAM Act passed the House of Representatives, but stalled in the Senate. Without federal action, the road to higher education or finding work is more burdensome for undocumented immigrants.

### **K-12 Education: The Immigrant Experience**

#### *Immigrant Students*

Schools are being transformed by the increase presence of immigrant students on their campuses. For immigrant youth, attending school in the United States is both a meaningful step toward social and economic advancement and an entry point into the cultural norms of the host society (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). Still, the schooling of immigrant youth is filled with challenges. A significant number of immigrants reside in urban areas and attend underperforming schools that are resource deficient (Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2008). High school presents a unique challenge. These formative years are a time for immigrant youth to develop their identity in relation to their host society. For many of these students, learning English is a gateway toward inclusion. However, many quickly realize the complexity of living in the United States (Olsen, 1997). A lack of attention to their unique needs makes it difficult for immigrant youth to feel valued within the school setting.

In school, immigrant groups may encounter similar challenges their native-born Latina/o and Black peers face. Students of color with a longer trajectory in the U.S. are typically assigned to low academic tracks with scarce access to institutional agents who will support them throughout their high school years (Oakes, 2005; Stanton-Salazar, 1997). Latina/o immigrants often join their U.S.-born peers in schools that perpetuate the academic underperformance of students of color. Administrators and teachers at these schools, most of whom are white, have a tendency to devalue the culture, language, and previous knowledge of Latina/o students (Valdes, 1996; Valenzuela, 1999). When schools fail to provide the social supports necessary to succeed academically, many students disengage and develop adversarial attitudes toward schooling.

Often relegated to lower track curriculum, many immigrant youth are also bound to classes that keep them separated from their U.S.-born peers. As such, they are often overlooked and forgotten within the educational system. Despite facing immense challenges upon arriving to the U.S., many immigrants feel they are better off than in their home country. While they continue to experience poverty and are disadvantaged in comparison to the standards of the host country, most immigrants do not internalize the negative aspects of their new life. Scholars have labeled this orientation as the immigrants' dual frame of reference (Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco, 1995; Valenzuela, 1999). Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco (1995) explain that during the earliest phases of immigration, they may idealize the new country as a place with endless opportunities. As a result, many recently arrived immigrants are labeled as "good" students because they exhibit behavioral qualities endorsed by the educators.

Unfortunately, the pervasive struggles take a toll on students. Many struggle to learn English and lose motivation as they encounter uncaring and supportive academic environments (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008). Because schools fail to recognize the needs of immigrant youth,

they fail to provide these students the scaffolds necessary to succeed academically. Moreover, little is done to help students grapple with the challenges of becoming “American” (Olsen, 1997).

### *Undocumented Students in the Public School System*

Undocumented students face similar challenges when they enter the American school system. However, their legal status precludes them from accessing resources and opportunities available to their peers. They also face additional developmental challenges such as access to the labor market, health care, and mental health (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2011). Further, their presence on school campus is seldom acknowledged; this predicament keeps them at the margins of an already marginalized group.

An emerging body of literature focuses on undocumented youth and young adults. Much of this literature has argued that legal status influences the educational attainment for these students (Abrego, 2006; Abrego & Gonzales, 2010). A significant number of undocumented children arrived to the United States as infants; they have little recollection of their previous home, and in many cases, are unaware of their undocumented status. Eager to transition into adulthood, they feel stunted because they are unable to obtain driver licenses, obtain a work permit, or take advantage of opportunities that require a Social Security number (Pérez, 2012). Moreover, undocumented youth are more likely to attend underperforming schools, which offer little recourse to their predicament.

Despite less than optimal learning environments, a substantial number of undocumented youth excel academically. Even with the presence of structural, legal, and social barriers, many exhibit high levels of resiliency in school and have branched out as ambassadors, advocates, and activists for the immigrant cause among other issues (Gonzales, 2008; Perez et al., 2009; Rogers,

2008; Seif, 2004). Many undocumented students uphold ideas of meritocracy and the American Dream (Abrego, 2008). They recognize the struggle of their parents and work hard to make them proud (Suárez-Orozco, 1991, Pérez, 2012). Further, undocumented students strive to achieve academically in hopes of one day being able to contribute to their community and American society.

The path toward adulthood and academic excellence is filled with obstacles. Similar to other students, school structures impact the educational pursuit of undocumented students. Gonzales (2010) examined two groups of undocumented students: (1) early exiters; students who dropped out of high school and, (2) college-goers; student who enrolled in college. Through in-depth interviews and observations, Gonzales concluded that while college-goers were placed in supportive learning environments and able to develop meaningful relationships with school staff, the early exiters were often shut out because they were enrolled in low-academic classes where access to important information was seldom offered. College-goers were able to develop trusting relationships and disclose their status to trusted individuals while the early exiters lacked similar opportunities.

#### *Undocumented Students Access to Higher Education*

Upon graduating from high school many undocumented students aspire to attend college. However, their legal predicament creates additional barriers to achieve this goal. Using quantitative measures from a survey administered to Latina/o high school students between the ages of 14 and 19, McWhirter et al., (2013) concluded that students who anticipated future problems with their immigration status were more likely to expect lower vocational outcomes and to anticipate external barriers (e.g., working while going to school, family problems, pregnancy, and school expenses). Moreover, examining the influence of being undocumented on

college enrollment, Greenman and Hall (2013) found that documented immigrants are four times more likely to enroll in college than undocumented immigrants.

As noted above, a number of states have passed laws that allow undocumented students to pay in-state tuition. These policies have helped undocumented students enroll in college. However, because they still do not qualify for most forms of financial aid, including scholarships, many students feel discouraged by the limited reach of these laws (Martinez, 2014). These policies are not a panacea to the barriers undocumented immigrants encounter since they provide a pathway to citizenship. Moreover, access to these resources is limited for some undocumented students. Whereas schools with high population of immigrant may be proactive in disseminating information and have counselors and teachers who are informed about the issues of documentation, schools with smaller immigrant population may be less active and knowledgeable (Nienhuser, 2013). As such, while highly dependent on the support from teachers and counselors, undocumented students also rely on personal networks to create “patchworks” of information regarding access to college (Enriquez, 2011). It is through this level of support and resiliency that many of them are able to continue onto postsecondary education. It is important to note that enrolling in college is not indicative of future stability for these students. Once in college, undocumented students struggle to finance their education and find social supports (Contreras, 2009; Perez, 2009; Huber & Malagon, 2007; Teranishi et al., 2015). Moreover, undocumented students remain in peril as their legal status remains in limbo.

### **Immigrant Identity**

Identity development for immigrants is a complex and challenging process. The perception of immigrants as outsiders conflated with views on race impact the way immigrant children come to view themselves. In a study on the children of immigrants, Suárez-Orozco and

Suárez-Orozco (2001) found that participants from a Caribbean and Latino background were more likely to discuss issues of discrimination and racism than Chinese participants. For example, during a sentence completion exercise, these children were more likely to say that Americans view them as “bad.” Moreover, despite Chinese respondents being less likely to give a negative response to their perception of what others thought about people in their country, like their other immigrant peers, they develop a “keen eye for discerning the place of race and color in the U.S. status hierarchy (p. 98).”

Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco introduce the idea of social mirroring to illustrate how the way an individual views themselves is influenced by reflections mirrored through “significant others.” They argue that when an image is positive, the individual will have a better sense of self. In contrast, when the image is negative, it is more difficult to maintain a sense of self-worth. As a result, some immigrant students may benefit from positive views, while others may be disenfranchised. The authors claim that students’ responses are influenced by both the social and the personal. These findings support previous studies on the adaptation of immigrants into the host society. Olsen's *Made in America* (1997) provides an in-depth look at how school personnel manage the growth of immigrant students in high school campuses. Having spent two years at Madison High School, the author concludes that immigrant students must grapple with the challenges of becoming "American." Olsen finds that the Americanization process takes form in three ways: learning English, taking one's place in American racial hierarchy, and being pressured to pick one national identity and language.

Undocumented youth, many of whom were brought to the U.S. as babies or small children, struggle with their identity. Their immigration status influences their perceptions of themselves. Although they have grown up partaking in the same social and cultural customs as

their peers, not having the full of rights of citizens or legally residing immigrants prevents them from fully embracing an “American” identity (Gonzales, 2012). However, because they left their home country as children and have not been able to return, they also struggle with fully embracing the national identity of their home country.

Undocumented students must contend with a negative social stigma attached to unauthorized status. Because of this, they may observe caution when deciding to disclose their legal status (Pérez, 2012). This is a difficult decision to make as many of them feel perplexed by their predicament. Having gone to school in the U.S., many undocumented youth believe their situation is unfair. Moreover, some distinguish themselves from undocumented adults by exhibiting acceptable social norms of belonging (Abrego, 2008). They also recognize that their immigration status is embedded within racialized notions where Latina/os, regardless of legal status, are perceived to be undocumented (King & Puntí, 2012).

Lacking legal status brings forth new challenges as undocumented students must learn to be “illegal” as they transition into adulthood (Gonzales, 2011). Studies note undocumented students’ construction of acceptable labels to downplay their stigmatized social identity while also underscoring their merits (Seif, 2004; Abrego, 2008). Nonetheless, undocumented students must be careful when revealing their legal status. As Pérez (2012) notes, an undocumented students’ decision to reveal their identity is usually dependent upon whether they feel the context is favorable or hostile. For an undocumented student to reveal their legal status requires a high level of trust, which is something that many of them may not develop with their teachers, counselors, or peers.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this study draws from literature on belonging, membership and community. The review of the literature has demonstrated the tenuous relationship between undocumented immigrants, specifically, youth, and membership in the U.S. Grounding the study within ideas of belonging helps create a more nuanced understanding of how undocumented students are both members and outsiders of their school environment. It is important to note that while most of these frameworks do not specifically consider the role of legal status, they provide a needed lens for understanding how legal status affects people's perceptions of who is allowed to belong to a community and to what extent they are granted membership.

### *Undocumented Students and Belonging*

Ideas of belonging and membership are multilayered and complex. Definitions of school belongingness and membership consider the extent students feel they are supported, accepted, included, and respected by school personnel and peers (Goodenow & Grady, 1993; Osterman, 2000; Pooley, Breen, Pike, Cohen, & Drew, 2010). Moreover, constructs of belonging have been most often tied to concepts of community. In an extensive review of the literature, Osterman (2000) rationalizes that reciprocity must exist among members within a community, wherein members feel the group is important to them and they are important to the group. In educational contexts, she finds research grounded in psychological perspectives of belonging to be tied to five outcomes: (1) the development of basic psychological processes important to student success, (2) academic attitudes and motives, (3) social and personal attitudes, (4) engagement and participation, and (5) academic achievement. Though these studies conceptualize belonging in broad terms, they nonetheless show the role of schools in fostering students engagement.

The Plyler case established undocumented students' right to a public education. As a result of this right, students may derive a sense of belonging to their respective school community. Gleeson and Gonzales (2012) indicate that entrance into public schools affords undocumented students the same constitutional rights as their U.S.-born and legally residing peers. They note that the educational system is plagued with "exclusionary practices." Most notable is the use of performance tracking, which disproportionately affects the foreign-born and ethnic minorities (Oakes, 2005). However, they claim that immigration status does not serve to differentiate students. Therefore, high-tracked undocumented students may enjoy positive relationships with school personnel while undocumented students assigned to low performing tracks may get lost in a system that offers inadequate academic preparation (Gonzales, 2011).

Although the argument made by Gleeson and Gonzales holds merit, other research indicates that undocumented students may underperform, not only because they enroll in underperforming schools, but also because of health risks and anticipated barriers associated with living with an undocumented status (Gonzales et al; 2013; McWhirter et al., 2013; Pérez, 2012; Pérez et al., 2010). Further, undocumented students require additional supports and resources than their peers throughout the college application and enrollment process (Abrego, 2006; Gonzales, 2010). While high performing students may develop strong relationships with school personnel and disclose their legal status to them, they do so at the risk of being ridiculed and negatively stigmatized. Other students, most notably those in low ability tracks might not even have the opportunity to develop similar relationships. Interestingly, when schools treat undocumented students just like every other student (i.e., that they belong), they may be inadvertently failing to provide vital resources for this population. Although students' legal status should not be a reason to subject them to differential treatment in school, there is a need to

target support to these students about access to higher education and prepare them for the world of work. In this sense, offering a student a safe space in school to disclose their legal status, should they choose to, is pivotal in making information available to them in a supportive and caring manner.

Undocumented students' perceived membership to the school community regardless of their legal status complicates the idea of belonging. An abundant body of work has established that, for immigrant students, entrance into the American educational system serves as a means of social and cultural incorporation (Olsen, 1997; Portes and Rumbaut, 2001; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). Multiple points of contact in school serve to develop students' sense of belonging. At times, these points of contact may also serve as an unwelcomed reminder of their outsider status, due in large part, to their physical appearance and limited English language proficiency (Gibson, Benjinez, Hidalgo, & Rolón, 2004). Undocumented students also experience similar points of contact. However, their legal status becomes more salient as they prepare to exit high school. To alleviate some of the challenge, schools should be equipped to respond to the needs of these students.

If undocumented students are truly part of the school community then the school must respond to their respective needs. Etzioni (1996) adds to the definition of community by proposing that communities embody a relative high level of responsiveness (p.5). A more responsive community is one that responds to the "true needs" of all its members. He explains that a true need can be empirically determined by whether the wants expressed by people reflect "their true nature or have been falsely implanted." For example, a "true need" for an undocumented student may be to attend college or find work after high school. Regardless of whether the student's legal status changes in the future, the need to go to college, and especially,

the need to find work will remain. Etzioni refers to a community that attempts to respond to such needs as an “authentic community” and to those who don’t as a “partial or distorted community.” Within this definition of a community, then, for a school to be consider an authentic community, it must respond to the needs of undocumented students on their campus.

Being able to incorporate into the host nation is also dependent upon multiple meanings of community. Hall (2004) suggests that immigrants ability to assimilate is dependent upon the symbolic creation of the nation as an “imagined community.” This imagined community is informed by ideologically constructions through discourse and political practices (El-Haj, 2007). Therefore, boundaries of belonging are set and are often used to differentiate people and create multiple social divisions (Yuval-Davis, 2005). El-haj (2007) notes that racially and/or ethnically oppressed groups have a contentious relationship with the imagined community because they are perpetually framed as “less than the ideal citizen or as perpetual foreigners.” (p. 288). For example, citizen children of undocumented immigrants are readily referred to as “anchor babies,” a derogatory termed used by conservative media outlets and organizations to devalue the citizenship of this group. As a result, efforts have been made to revoke birthright citizenship rights to children born to undocumented parents (Rubin, 2011). The relationship of undocumented students to the imagined community is even more tenuous because they lack birthright citizenship or legal residence. As such, nativists, individuals who oppose immigration or the presence of immigrants in the U.S., often contest efforts to help undocumented immigrants by claiming they are underserving of such help and that they are diverting resources from the native born.

The debate on access to higher education for the undocumented also involves conversations on belonging and membership. In response, Perry (2006) interviewed multiple

stakeholders and used their responses to identify their basic beliefs on membership and determine whether their definition justified efforts to grant in-state tuition benefits to undocumented students. He concludes that substantive membership entails living in particular spatial boundaries; attaining community knowledge, skills, and resources; receiving communal provisions through exchange with significant community institutions; investing communal provisions for membership; accepting the community's identity and fate; and accepting the political community's basic moral philosophy (p. 37). Given this definition, he argues that many undocumented students meet the criteria of substantive membership and reasons that not all substantive members are citizens and that not all citizens are substantive members.

*A Multilevel Approach to Understanding Ideas of Belonging and Legal Status*

Undocumented youth's presence in school complicates matters of inclusion and exclusion. They can enroll in school just like their documented peers. Their academic success is often determined by school structures in place to support students (i.e., bilingual education, high track curriculum, and a positive school culture) rather than their legal status (Gleeson & Gonzales, 2011). However, undocumented students' legal status creates additional barriers as they prepare to graduate from high school. For this reason, it is important to understand how macro-level policies intersect with schools to help address the needs of undocumented high school students.

Gilda Ochoa's (2010) multilevel framework for studying race and ethnicity provides an appropriate lens to examine issues of documentation and educational opportunities. To move beyond binary conceptions of race and to allow for a more complex analysis, Ochoa (2010) argues that it is necessary to consider its "dynamics" at the macro-, meso-, and micro-levels. At the macro-level, she suggests considering the "historical and structural factors influencing

schools and relationships,” as well as the way racist ideologies support divisions that establish hierarchies in society and in school. At the meso-level, Ochoa recommends examining school practices and policies (e.g., curriculum, extra-curricular activities, and school supports) to help us better understand the way schools structure and create access to opportunities or impede success. At the micro-level, she highlights the need to consider how students’ backgrounds influence the way they construct relationships with educators and peers, “through their everyday attitudes and actions.” (p. 144). It is important to note that while each level of analysis may be examined independently, all three levels may interact and intersect with one another.

Ochoa’s framework is helpful to examine the experience of undocumented students in school as influenced by policies, school systems, and day-to-day interactions. As outlined at the beginning of the chapter, macro-level policies and practices help shape immigrants’ incorporation in the country. The Plyler decision created a way for undocumented youth to belong in U.S. society and in schools by guaranteeing them access to a public education. However, upon graduating from high school many undocumented students encounter a blocked path to college because they are often labeled as international students for tuition purposes and have limited access to financial supports (Abrego, 2006; Gonzales, 2010). As a result, some states have passed laws to allow undocumented students to qualify for in-state tuition. Moreover, since 2011, undocumented students in California became eligible to receive financial aid. This benefit, alongside the implementation of DACA, has increased their likelihood to obtain the financial resources they need to afford college. While policies changes intended to increase undocumented students access to higher education and/or work may increase their sense of belonging, they still do not have the same opportunities their peers have (e.g., federal financial aid and citizenship).

The treatment and support for undocumented immigrants varies across states. For example, while one state may grant undocumented students access to in-state tuition, its neighboring state may restrict access to higher education all together. Undocumented immigrants must also contend with the possibility of being deported. Since schools come in direct contact with undocumented students and their families, it is important to consider how educators and students make sense of these macro-level policies, understand the way they utilize the policies as a tool to foster access to support and resources, and identify continued areas for support.

Given the existence of state policies meant to increase access to higher education, it is important to consider the way institutional agents (e.g., teachers and counselors) support undocumented students as they prepare to graduate from high school and transition to college and/or or work (meso-level). Counselors, in particular, play a critical role in advising students about their college opportunities (McDonough, 2005). Using a social capital framework, Pérez and McDonough (2008) note that underserved student populations, such as Latina/os, may require different considerations when making college plans. For example, Latina/o students tend to be the first in their family to attend college and rely on their parents, extended family members, and trusted individuals for information about college. As such, institutional agents must be aware of the way students negotiate the information they receive from different sources and how it influences their college decisions (Pérez & McDonough, 2008). This model may also apply to undocumented students whose sources for information are even more limited (Enriquez, 2011). And, due to the changing political context related to immigration, it is especially important for educators to be knowledgeable about the policies that promote access to higher education for undocumented students as well as be inclusive of their needs when providing

college information (Nienhusser, 2013). In addition, a level of trust is necessary to reduce the anxiety undocumented students may feel about discussing their legal status with adults in school. Therefore educators must display facets of trust that include benevolence, reliability, competence, honesty and openness (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999). Doing so might also help determine undocumented students' sense of belonging and community in school.

A micro-level examination of the day-to-day experiences in which legal status becomes a salient aspect of a student's identity may shed light to the way educators and school peers foster relationships with undocumented students. Relationships between teachers and students as well as amongst peers also shape students sense of belonging. For example, teachers who demonstrate a high level of efficacy when working with traditionally underserved communities help students cope with "secondary stressors" or challenges they face in their lives (Sosa & Gomez, 2012). Secondary stressors may include issues of legal documentation. Rather than view a student's lack of legal documentation in a deficit way, teachers may provide words of encouragement and support. In this way, they create caring relationships that acknowledge the struggles students may be dealing with. These actions also contrast the deficit and subtractive views many educators exhibit when working with urban and immigrant youth (Valenzuela, 1999). In addition, students' relationship with one another shape their schooling experience. At times, peer relationships among different racial groups might be strained because of misconceptions derived from limited cross-racial interactions (Ochoa, 2013). However, even among students from the same racial group (e.g., Latina/o) tensions may arise. In an ethnography of a high school in Texas, Valenzuela (1999) found that curriculum tracking separated Mexican American students from Mexican immigrants and helped fuel divisions that fostered anti-immigrant sentiments. As such, when schools fail to foster positive interactions,

tension may arise. For undocumented students, such experiences might make them hesitant to share their legal status for fear of being negatively stigmatized and be viewed as criminals or social pariahs.

Throughout the literature review and conceptual framework I have shown the multiple ways undocumented immigrants are included and excluded from American society. Undocumented youth hold a peculiar place in society because they have the right to a public education, many have been able to obtain a work permit under DACA, and in a number of states, they qualify for in-state tuition and financial aid. However, they are also excluded in many ways. They are barred from voting, the Social Security number they obtain through DACA does not make them eligible to receive financial aid, and they continue to carry the negative stigma of being undocumented (Abrego, 2011; Martinez, 2014). As such, undocumented youth might feel a sense of belonging and exclusion in different contexts and at different points in their lives.

#### *Studying Ideas of Belonging, Membership, and Community in Schools*

High levels of immigration in recent decades have complicated ideas of belonging and membership. Despite having allegiance to the United States, immigrants, including those who are unauthorized, may feel excluded from certain aspects of society because of their physical appearance and cultural practices (El-Haj, 2007; Abrego, 2011). Concurrently, changes at the global stage have created a need for researchers to rethink how we approach ideas of belonging (Suárez-Orozco, 2009). This is a poignant point to consider when working with undocumented students whose ability to belong and be full members of society is often murky and convoluted. For this reason, schools provide an ideal context to study ideas of belonging.

### **Chapter 3 Methodology**

The literature review summarized the emergent body of work on undocumented immigrants and the lives of youth in the educational system. It is important to note that the majority of these studies have utilized interviews to capture the experiences of undocumented students (Gonzales, 2010; Contreras, 2009; Perez, 2009). In some cases, ethnographic methods have been employed to supplement in-depth interviews (Seif, 2004; Abrego, 2006; Rodriguez, 2010). To my knowledge, given the scarcity of studies, there is yet to be a study conducted in a high school where legal status is considered extensively from an administrative and student point of view. In this chapter, I illustrate the utility of ethnographic methods for this study, address my positionality, identify the research site, overview the recruitment process of participants, and detail my observation and interview protocols. I conclude the chapter by noting my coding and analytic process of the data

#### **Study Design**

The use of ethnographic methods illuminated the processes one high immigrant, urban high school undertook to address issues of documentation on its campus. Policy changes in recent years have created a need to examine the way school resources are made available to undocumented students, specifically, whether adults choose to mark legal status as an important student attribute. The decision to include legal status as a factor to consider when supporting students to pursue their postsecondary plans is a feature of the school culture. Merriam (2009) conceptualizes culture as the “beliefs, values and attitudes that structure the behavior patterns of a specific group people” (p.27). Therefore, observing and interviewing adults and students in a school context is vital to develop an understanding of how members of a school community make sense of legal status and their attempts to directly tackle the issue.

An in-depth study of a high immigrant, urban high school provides insight on administrators, teachers, and staff efforts toward meeting the needs of undocumented students. According to Anderson-Levitt (2006), ethnography serves three main purposes for researchers: (1) discovering what meanings individuals make of a situation; (2) developing an understanding of local situations in all their complexity; and (3) providing the opportunity to observe and understand processes as they happen (p. 282). In ethnographic work, the researcher gathers data from a range of sources, data collection is relatively unstructured, and the focus is usually on a few cases (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). As such, my presence at the research site throughout the 2013-14 academic year allowed me to gain a deep understanding of how educators and students understood and gave meaning to legal status. It also permitted me to observe the processes and systems the school created to support undocumented students as they prepared to transition out of high school and into postsecondary education and/or work.

The study's research questions center on the way policy shapes educational opportunities for undocumented students as well as the types of supports school personnel offer these students while in high school. As such, extensive time in the field was necessary to identify the various ways undocumented students are supported in school as they prepare to graduate from high school. Moreover, undocumented immigrants are a vulnerable population who are at risk of deportation. While this concern has been temporarily addressed for youth who have been granted reprieve from deportation through Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), many of them still fear the possible deportation of family members or friends who do not qualify under the program's requirements (Martinez, 2014). For this reason, undocumented immigrants might hesitate to speak openly about their legal status. Keeping their precarious life

circumstance in mind, it was important to develop a good rapport with students. Extensive time at the research site allowed me to develop relationships with students based on trust.

The use of ethnographic methods allowed me to gain deep insight and develop vivid details on the lives of undocumented students. After months of visiting the college center and sitting in classrooms, students learned about my work and research interests. At times they were encouraged by a teacher or counselor to talk to me about their legal status in order to get answers to questions about their college opportunities and documentation. Additionally, I developed strong rapport with students and gained their trust by having conversations with them about their lives inside and outside of school. In particular for undocumented students, extensive time at the school allowed them to see me as someone who was genuinely interested in their stories and not as a threat to their well being. The many visits and conversations I had with students and teachers helped me understand the complexities in the way City School was addressing issues of documentation as well as the level of sensitivity they demonstrated toward the issue. In sum, the use of ethnographic methods proved to be essential in capturing the multiple perspectives and nuances pertaining to students' legal status.

### **Research Site**

All data were collected at City School, a K-12 public school. Located in an urban, high immigrant population area, the school served as an ideal setting for investigating how school personnel work toward addressing the needs of undocumented student on campus. The neighborhood is comprised mostly of Latina/o and Korean residents. A mixture of Latina/o and Korean shops surround the school, and, while the Latina/o population has surged in recent decades, surpassing the number of Koreans, the presence of both groups is apparent through numerous Spanish and Korean billboards and signs in the neighborhood.

The school is located in a two-story building. The first floor is reserved for grades K-6, while the second floor is home to students in grades 7-12. The hallways on the second floor are adorned with lockers and banners reminding students of upcoming events. Students swarm the halls each passing period as they head to their next class. A number of teachers greet their students at the door and make small talk before beginning the day's lesson. Classrooms are decorated with students' work and posters that reflect social justice themes or embrace ideas of inclusivity (e.g., creating a welcoming space for women, immigrants, or individuals who might identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender).

City School opened in 2009 with students in kindergarten through 5<sup>th</sup> grade. The following year the school expanded to include grades K-11. In Spring 2012, it graduated its first senior class. The school enrolls close to 1,000 students. The student body reflects the eclectic composition of the community. During the 2013-14 academic year, the student population was predominantly Latina/o (80%) and Asian (14%). Moreover, 87% of students were low-income and 55% were classified as Limited English Proficient (LPE). A diverse group of teachers and administrators comprised the faculty. Just under half of teachers (45%) identified as Latina/o, 31% identified as Asian, 22% identified as White, and 2% identified as Black. It is important to note that these numbers differ from the district's teaching demographics, which is 43% White, 32% Latino, 12% Black, and 9% Asian. The school principal, Sofia, is Latina, who joined the faculty in Fall 2012, while the assistant principal, Angela, is Asian, and served as a founding teacher of the school before she transitioned into her administrative role. The high school academic counselor, Amanda, is white, with many years of experience working in the district. Finally, the college counselor, Emily, is white and joined City School in 2012 as part of the AmeriCorps Vista program. Her time with the school concluded in January 2014.

### *School Vision and Practice*

City School is deeply committed to preparing students to be global citizens and take on the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The school embraces a holistic approach to learning. Students are encouraged to take ownership of their learning and develop their knowledge with the guidance of supportive and caring adults. As a new school, located in a large, urban center, City School is learning how to model itself as a community school to best meet the needs of its student population (Meier, 1995). At the community level, the school has formed partnerships with local organizations to provide students with innovative, out of class learning opportunities and resources. Teachers and administrators are also diligent about connecting with families to foster a welcoming environment on campus.

The school promotes multi-age learning across all grades. In grades 7 through 12, students participate in a multi-age advisory program, where they stay with the same teacher for two years. During advisory, students receive tutoring, learn about college, and discuss issues relevant to their lives. This intimate space is meant to provide students an opportunity to develop personal and trusting relationships with teachers. In addition, City School educators are committed to social justice values in their teaching practice and interactions with students and their families. The school embraces students' cultural, racial/ethnic, and linguistic diversity and works to offer an enriching, culturally relevant curriculum.

As a school committed to social justice, City School educators appear to embrace the opportunity to create an environment where students feel safe and respected. Both teachers and students describe the school as a place where respect and care permeates across the campus. Many participants mentioned the school felt like a caring community and a family. For teachers, the K-12 structure allows them to develop meaningful relationships with students that endure for

many years. As such, many students feel there is at least one person who they can talk to about academic or personal issues.

Many of the adults exhibit a pro-immigrant attitude and hold a positive view of their immigrant students. City School educators are aware that among its immigrant population, a number of students are undocumented. Through a school experience and college preparation survey administered in grades 7-12 at the end of the year, students were asked, among other questions (e.g., grades, finances, about being the first in the family to attend college), how concerned they were about their legal status (“Not having papers/Undocumented”) making it difficult for them to attend the college of their choice. It is important to note that all responses were anonymous and that seniors were asked a slightly modified question to reflect their concern about *committing* to the college of their choice in relation to their legal status. Of the students who responded to this survey item in grades 9-12, over one-third (35%) indicated at least some concern, which suggests a high number of likely undocumented students at City School. The findings from the survey reified the need to address students’ legal status on campus. This school level action makes City School a unique place to study issues of documentation. At a time when school reform efforts prioritize raising academic performance and holding schools accountable through high-stakes testing and accountability measures, City School has also prioritized the need to create a school culture where students’ multiple identities are acknowledged and honored.

City School served as an ideal setting for the study because it is confronting challenges similar to those other schools are facing. Some of the challenges include operating with limited funds, feeling the pressure to meet yearly academic achievement goals, and developing a college-going identity. Its diverse student body and teaching faculty provided a rich source of

information. Its high number of immigrant students and emphasis on social justice and civic engagement offered a fruitful setting for understanding the role legal status plays in the school. The high number of Latina/o and Asian students on campus was also ideal given that both pan-ethnic groups comprise the majority of new immigrants in the United States.

### **Researcher's Positionality**

#### *School Site*

Before beginning data collection at City School, I served as a graduate student researcher at the school for three years. In this role, I assisted the school in developing and implementing an internship program as well as collaborated on a research study aimed at understanding how students learn to be self-directed learners and critically reflect as part of an internship program. I also collaborated with a group of teachers to help assess and understand how students are supported to explore their interests and passions within a school-sponsored program. These activities allowed me to develop professional relationships with teachers and school personnel, which helped facilitate my entrance into the school for my dissertation study.

During the 2012-13 academic year I helped facilitate a series of workshops for undocumented students. In collaboration with the academic high school counselor we arranged the meetings in the fall semester. Throughout the semester I assisted seniors with the college application process and provided juniors information about California laws related to undocumented students and higher education. Due to scheduling conflicts, the group was unable to find a meeting time during the spring semester.

#### *Connection to Issues of Immigration*

As the son of Mexican immigrant parents, immigration and legal status is a personal issue. While I was born in the United States, my mother and my older brother did not possess

legal papers upon arrival. Because of my brother's unauthorized presence in the country, the opportunities offered to him drastically differed from those available to me. When he graduated from high school, laws that granted in-state tuition for undocumented students did not exist. As a result, access to a four-year university was out of reach for him. My mother's predicament differed, as the breadwinner of our family, and because of her undocumented status, a sense of fear permeated our household. Although I was born in the U.S., as a child, I internalized the fear of being deported. While both my mother and brother are now legal residents, millions remain with an undocumented status. I still have friends and family whose lives are affected on a daily basis by their legal status. It is from this frame of reference that I sought to better understand how undocumented students lives play out in high school.

### **Recruitment and Description of Study Participants**

As part of the research design, I observed and interviewed educators, undocumented students, and legally residing/U.S.-born students in the study. In the following section, I explain the recruitment process of participants for each group.

#### *Recruitment of Educators*

Before data collection commenced at City School, a research review board at the school examined the proposal and granted access to the school site for me. Upon receiving approval to conduct the research study I began recruiting school adults and solicited the support of teachers and individuals who I had met and previously worked with at the school. I e-mailed one of the school's English teachers, Raul, who I had work with the previous year on a research project. I requested an in-person meeting to overview the goals of the research study and formally solicit his approval to allow me to observe his English classes. During the meeting we also determined the best times for me to observe his class. I sent similar e-mails and held meetings with the

Senior Internship and AP Spanish teachers. Since I planned to spend the majority of my time in the college and career center I also e-mailed and met with Emily, the college counselor. During my meeting with the Emily we agreed on a tentative schedule for my visits to the center.

Although we developed a schedule, once the college application season intensified, I was at the center whenever my schedule allowed.

For individuals whose classes I did not observe, I scheduled in person meetings with them once I began collecting data. Because there were moments in which teachers, especially those working with seniors met as a group to discuss their progress, I asked if they would allow me to sit in and make observations during those meetings. All of the teachers agreed to be observed and interviewed throughout the year.

#### *Recruitment of Undocumented Students*

Recruiting undocumented students posed an initial challenge. Being undocumented is not a student trait that is easily identifiable or that most students want to advertise. Therefore, it was important to maintain a visible presence at City School and develop good rapport with students. My time observing classes, and in particular, my time at the college and career center helped me achieve this goal. The majority of undocumented students who I met was through the center. Student visits to the center steadily increased between September and October as they worked on their college applications. While at the center many of them talked openly with the college counselor about their legal status. Before discussing their legal status, the counselor asked the student if they felt comfortable if I was present in the room. By then, students knew I was a graduate student who was at the school doing research and “helping out.” Other students revealed their legal status to me when I went into greater detail about my research interests,

while others approached me after the college counselor or another adult recommended that they talk to me.

After I identified students who were undocumented, I asked to talk with them in private. These conversations were held at the college and career center or in a classroom. During the meeting I asked students if they were willing to participate in the research study. I reviewed with them an assent form that detailed the purpose of the study. I also asked them if they agreed to be observed and interviewed during the academic year. Together we reviewed the assent form and I asked for their verbal assent. I requested and received approval from the university's institution review board (IRB) to only require students' verbal assent to avoid collecting any personal information and protect their privacy. As such, student records do not include real names or any contact information. I also requested and was granted to waive parental permission to minimize a paper trail, which might jeopardize those families. After ensuring that the student understood what their participation in the research study entailed and any potential risks associated, I informed them that they could withdraw from the study at any moment.

#### *Recruitment of U.S.-born and Legally Residing Students*

The third group in the study, U.S.-born and legally resident students, were recruited through my interactions with them in class and the college and career center. Students were asked to participate in the research study because they made multiple comments related to immigration and documentation during our interactions. I also made sure to include a mix of Latina/o and Asian/Pacific Islander students in the sample. Similar to undocumented students, I met with U.S.-born and legally residing students to review the purpose of the study and the role of their participation. To avoid distinctions between undocumented and documented students,

they were also asked to provide verbal assent. As such, I do not possess any personal information from them.

### *Participant Observer*

As part of my data collection strategy, I was at City School multiple days a week. When I was not conducting a classroom observation, I was in the college and career center. This approach allowed me to interact with students in a “participant” rather than “observer” capacity (Merriam, 2009). Throughout the college application process, students asked me to read their college application essays, review their college application, and help them with their financial aid application.

After a couple of months at City School, I developed friendly relationships with several students. As such, some undocumented students sought me out for advice and assistance; sometimes upon the recommendation of the college counselor or a teacher. I consulted with the college counselor and together we offered advice to the student. While my direct support of undocumented students may be perceived as interfering with the data collection, these moments speak to the pressing needs undocumented students have as well as educators inability to answer all of their questions. I made notes of these moments and considered the broader meaning of the school’s need to offer adequate and effective support to undocumented students.

### **Procedures and Data Collection**

Throughout the research study I employed multiple ethnographic tools. They include observations in the college and career center, classroom observations, interviews with educators and with students, and the collection of artifacts. In what follows, I detail the settings where I conducted observations, the individuals who I interviewed, and the types of artifacts I collected.

#### *Observations: College and Career Center*

The school hosts a college and career center students can visit to receive guidance on college access, academic preparation, and college applications. The type of information students receive about college and careers helps them make decisions about college and their future. It was important to be at the center because research has shown that undocumented students require specific help and many of them find little utility in traditional college information sessions (Huber & Malagon, 2007). Further, traditional forms of social capital in school are often out of reach for minority students (Stanton-Salazar, 1997). As a result, undocumented students experience to be college ready is difficult as they struggle to piece together information they have gathered from different sources (Enriquez, 2011).

From August 2013 to May 2014 I conducted observations in the college and career center. During the 2013-14 academic year, the center was relocated to the first floor of the school. The move was meant to provide a larger space for students to work on college applications and be able to host college information sessions for students and parents. College pennants and poster adorned the walls of the center and multiple tables served as a large workspace at the center of the room. During my visits, I took a seat at the center table. Throughout the fall semester, mostly seniors trickled in and out of the center to receive help signing up for the SAT or ACT and to receive support on their college applications. All seniors were also summoned for a one-on-one interview with the college counselor or a volunteer to review their postsecondary plans. During the spring semester, students focused on completing financial aid applications and making preparations for college enrollment.

Since students utilized the center as a resource of support, issues pertaining to documentation and legal status readily arose. Undocumented students commonly asked for support on completing application forms and accessing resources available to them. Throughout

my observations, I gave particular attention to the activities the college and career center made available to students (e.g., information sessions, college visits, and support on college applications) and how it incorporated resources important for undocumented students.

*Observations: Senior English Class*

All students are required to enroll in an English course. I conducted observations in two of the three senior English classes between August 2013 and December 2013. Before the official kickoff of the college application season, seniors were assigned work to help them draft their college essays in a personal and compelling manner. Some students wrote about being an immigrant and learning to speak English. In addition, at the beginning of each class, the English teacher, Raul, facilitated “warm ups” where students analyzed and discussed political cartoons, quotes, and literature related to class, race, ethnicity, gender, and immigration. Observations in the English class also exposed the way, Raul, facilitated complex and personal discussions pertaining to students’ lives. Being present in the two classes also allowed me to build a friendly rapport with students. I was able to assist them during class assignments, review some of their writing, and listen to their thoughts on issues pertaining to race and immigration.

*Observations: Senior Internship Class*

City School offers seniors the opportunity to enroll in an internship class. Students who enroll in the course are required to be present at their internship site for at least 5 hours each week. Each student researches potential sites, prepares a resume, and interviews with multiple organizations. Among the host sites were organizations that advocate for immigrants’ rights and provide direct services. Classroom observations allowed me to witness instances in which issues of immigration and documentation arose. Moreover, the internship program culminated in a showcase, where students presented what they learned at their internship site, and when possible,

critically examined the role of the organization in supporting the local community and its residents. Throughout the semester, students reflected on their experience and discussed the meaning of work. These discussions provided a rich source for understanding how students made sense of work and whether there were opportunities for the teacher to facilitate discussions on immigrants and legal status.

*Observations: AP Spanish Class*

After meeting with Raul to develop an observation schedule for his class, he recommended that I meet with Maricel, the school's Spanish teacher. I met with Maricel to discuss my research study and she agreed that many of the topics I was interested in were often discussed in class. As part of the AP Spanish curriculum, she was required to address multiple themes throughout the school year that included family, globalization, work, and assimilation. Given that the class was comprised entirely of students who were immigrants or the children immigrants, she was confident that issues relating to immigration and documentation would be discussed. As such, I visited the AP Spanish class once a week between August 2013 and May 2014. My observations focused on the way issues of immigration and legal status were brought up in class. I paid close attention to the way Maricel facilitated class discussions as well as students comments and interpretations relating to immigration, immigrants, and legal status.

*Peer Relations*

Peer relations play an important role in the high school experience of students. However, the negative stigma attached with being undocumented discourages undocumented students from disclosing their status to their friends (Pérez, 2012). Moreover, in some schools, immigrant students are often segregated from their U.S.-born peers (Olsen, 1997; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008). With little known about the interactions between undocumented students and their U.S.-

born and legally residing school peers, focusing on these interactions imparted insight on the way students make sense of an undocumented status and how students discuss the issue among one another.

### *Artifacts*

Throughout the school year I collected multiple artifacts pertaining to college access, and immigration/legal status. For example, the college and career center produced informational flyers pertaining to college applications and financial aid as well as a college handbook. I examined these artifacts for mention of resources pertaining to undocumented students. As part of the internship showcase, student created a powerpoint presentation to share their learning and experience. I collected the powerpoint presentation of one group who discussed issues of immigration to closely examine students' exposure to the issue and their opinion about it. Finally, a school newspaper was published four times during the year. Three out of the four publications contained articles and opinion pieces about immigration. I collected copies of the newspapers to develop a deeper understanding of how students across the school perceive issues of immigration and legal status.

### *Semi-Structured Interviews*

To complement observations, I conducted 42 semi-structured interviews with educators and students at the school. Interviews are an important aspect of qualitative work because they allow the researcher to understand how informants make meaning of their lives. They are conversations with a purpose, in which the researcher employs various techniques, including probes such as “who, when, where, and how” to obtain information that will allow him or her to understand the lives, experiences, and cognitive processes of the informants (Brenner, 2006). All interviews were conducted between February 2014 and May 2014.

The sample of interviews with educators includes thirteen adults at City School (Table 3.1) who worked closely with senior students (e.g., school counselors and teachers whose classrooms I observed). I also interviewed teachers who served as advisors for senior students as part of the school’s advisory program. The advisory program divided students into three divisions according to grade level. For example, Division 1 was comprised of 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders, Division 2 was made up of 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> graders, and Division 3 consisted of 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> graders. Throughout the year, the teacher offered students academic and social supports. Interviews were also conducted with the school principal and assistant principal. As the top two administrators at City School, both individuals play a significant role in determining the supports the school should invest in students. Interview questions with educators focused on five general categories: 1) school context, 2) college and work resources, 3) conceptions of belonging in school, 4) perceptions for undocumented students, and 5) comprehensive immigration reform (See Appendix A).

Table 3.1. Interviews with Educators

<b>Name</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Years as an Educator</b>
Amanda Collins	Female	White	Academic counselor	27
Ana Ramirez	Female	Latina/o	History teacher	7
Angela Lee	Female	Asian	Assistant principal	11
Daniel Lopez	Male	Latina/o	Math teacher	14
Elizabeth Aberman	Female	White	History teacher	15
Emily Sanders	Female	White	College counselor	15
Eva Buros	Female	White	Math teacher	11
Francisco Rivera	Male	Latina/o	Science teacher	22
Lisa Martin	Female	White	English teacher	11
Maricel Diaz	Female	Latina/o	Spanish teacher	14
Olivia Hill	Female	White	Behavior support counselor	20
Raul Gonzales	Male	Latina/o	English teacher	10
Sofia Rios	Female	Latina/o	Principal	18

The sample of undocumented students includes 14 Latina/o and Asian/Pacific Islander students (Table 3.2). Ten students identified as Latina/o while four identified as Asian/Pacific Islander. With the exception of two students, all of the interview participants were in the 12<sup>th</sup> grade. Interviews with undocumented students focused on their perception of the school’s campus climate and sense of belonging (See Appendix B). Most interviews were conducted in English, with the exception of 2, which were conducted in Spanish to accommodate for students’ language preference. Particular attention was given to the types of conversations they had with adults regarding their legal status, their college and career aspirations, whether they felt the school was providing them the resources they needed to understand how their legal status affected them, and whether they discussed their legal status with friends and family.

Table 3.2. Interviews with Undocumented Students

<b>Name</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Country of Origin</b>	<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	<b>Age of U.S. arrival</b>	<b>School Grade</b>
Clarissa	Female	Mexico	Latina/o	>5	12th (Continuation School)
Danilo	Male	Philippines	Filipino	9	12th
David	Male	Mexico	Latina/o	>1	10th
Esteban	Male	El Salvador	Latina/o	>5	12th
Gabriela	Female	Mexico	Latina/o	>1	12th
Gan	Female	Mongolia	Asian	10	12th
Isabel	Female	El Salvador	Latina/o	7	12th
Itzel	Female	Mexico	Latina/o	8	12th
Keong	Male	South Korea	Asian	9	12th
Oscar	Male	Honduras	Latina/o	10	10th
Pablo	Male	El Salvador	Latina/o	14	12th
Rafael	Male	Mexico	Latina/o	14	12th
Rey	Male	Philippines	Filipino	6	12th
Victor	Male	Mexico	Latina/o	3	12th

The sample of U.S-born and legally residing students includes Latina/o and Asian/Pacific Islander students. Nine of the students identified as Latina/o, while six students

identified as Asian/Pacific Islander. All of the students were seniors. While the interview sample included a mix of U.S.-born and legally residing immigrant students, all were the children of immigrants. All interviews were conducted in English with the exception of one interview in Spanish to accommodate the student’s language preference. Interviews with this student group focused on their school experience, the support they have received to prepare for college, and thoughts on the way City School made resources available for undocumented students (See Appendix C). Interview questions also asked students to share their thoughts regarding undocumented immigrants, their interactions with undocumented immigrant inside and outside of school, and whether they ever discussed issues pertaining to legal status with family or friends.

Table 3.3. Interviews with Legally Residing and U.S.-born students

<b>Name</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Country of Origin</b>	<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	<b>Age of U.S. arrival</b>	<b>School Grade</b>
Andrés	Male	Mexico	Latina/o	13	12th
Arturo	Male	U.S.	Latina/o	N/A	12th
Dana	Female	U.S.	Asian	N/A	12th
Diana	Female	U.S.	Latina/o	N/A	12th
Efren	Male	U.S.	Latina/o	N/A	12th
Jimin	Female	South Korea	Asian	12	12th
Joseph	Male	South Korea	Asian	4	12th
Karla	Female	U.S.	Latina/o	N/A	12th
Liu Yang	Female	China	Asian	13	12th
Minsuh	Female	South Korea	Asian	7	12th
Noe	Male	U.S.	Latina/o	N/A	12th
Ramiro	Male	Mexico	Latina/o	11	12th
Sergio	Male	U.S.	Latina/o	N/A	12th
Sylvia	Female	U.S.	Latina/o	N/A	12th
Yejoon	Male	U.S.	Asian	N/A	12th

### **Data Analysis**

*Field notes*

Throughout fieldwork I kept field notes to help me organize the activities observed during each site visit. At the conclusion of each visit, I reviewed, typed the field notes, and created narratives of each day's events. Within the narrative I added analytic notes to ascertain developing hypotheses and identify evolving questions (Anderson-Levitt, 2006). This method allowed me to consider new areas of inquiry and to further explore concepts and ideas that emerged pertaining to legal status and the types of supports City School displayed for its undocumented students as they were preparing for college. As recommended by Anderson-Levitt (2006) I kept an ongoing inventory of the data I collected, specifically from whom I collected the data, during what types of activities the data were collected, and in what places the data were collected (p. 289).

At the end of each month I reviewed all of my field notes. I examined the analytic notes that I wrote and the reflections that I made. After reviewing my field notes for the month, I wrote analytic memos. The memos reflected my experience in the field and the general observations that I made. I also utilized the memos to develop inquiries, connect my observations to existing literature, and determine emerging patterns pertaining to the resources undocumented students access in school. The memos also helped me consider the way adults and students made sense of issues relating to immigration and documentation. Below is an excerpt from one analytic memo:

Discussion in the AP Spanish class consistently provides students the opportunity to talk about issues relating to immigration. When they discussed the educational system, the students and the teacher made comparisons between education in Latin America and the United States. Many of the students' comments reflected the findings of previous literature (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 1995; Valenzuela, 1999), specifically, the opportunities that were available to them in comparison to their parents and/or their personal experience in their home country. Some of the students comments focused on the school structures and resources available, for example, school materials and food. (Analytic Memo, September 2013)

Writing and reviewing the memos allowed me to reflect on my observations and produce initial analytic codes. When I saw patterns in my observations I noted them and asked participants about the accuracy of the emerging themes (i.e., member checks) (see Creswell, 2009).

### *Interviews*

I conducted my first semi-structured interview in February 2014. Having been in the field for six months, I used my field notes to help structure the interview protocol and probe about the emerging themes I had begun to see. After each interview, I reviewed the audio and jotted notes about comments that stood out from the informant. All interview data were transcribed verbatim. Before transferring interview transcripts to MaxQDA, a computer program used for qualitative analysis, I read each participant's interview to obtain a general sense of the information (Creswell, 2009). I created a summary of key points for each participant and noted recurring themes across interviews. Keeping in mind my research questions and conceptual framework, I then selected a random set of interviews from each participant group to develop initial codes. I printed each interview transcript, made notes in the margins, and brainstormed initial codes (Saldaña, 2013). I also kept in mind the emerging themes I had noted in my field notes. This method allowed me to align some of my findings to existing literature. It also helped me develop a multi-level analysis. As I made notes and developed themes, I determined whether each piece of data should be considered at a macro-, meso-, or micro-level of analysis. Moreover, while reading each transcript, I inductively produced new codes and began to identify patterns across the data. After creating an initial set of codes, I defined their meaning and used them to help guide a more detailed analysis of the data.

After creating a set of initial codes, I uploaded my field notes and interview transcripts into MaxQDA. I then employed focused coding to develop additional categories and

subcategories (i.e., codes) within developing themes (see Saldaña, 2013). Throughout the focused coding process I made notes and considered themes and categories I had not previously seen. After I concluded a round of focused coding, I ran a query in MaxQDA to create excel files of all my themes, categories, and subcategories. Conducting the query allowed me to visualize the data in matrices (Miles and Huberman, 1994). It also allowed me to view each theme according to its level of analysis (see Table 3.4 for an example). And, I was able to run specific queries that linked a theme to a quote from an individual participant or overall study group (e.g., undocumented students or educators). Visualizing the data in this way made it possible for me to make comparisons and note differences between educators, undocumented students, and documented students. It also helped me identify patterns within each theme and category (Merriam, 2009) that I might have missed during initial and focused coding rounds since the data had been significantly reduced. Overall, the coding process and multiple data sources allowed me to develop thick descriptions of the research setting and participants.

Table 3.4. Multilevel Analysis

Level	Theme	Category	Code	Definition
Macro	Bipolar Political Context	Supports	CA Dream Act	Reference to the CA Dream Act as a positive support for undocumented students
Macro	Bipolar Political Context	Deportations	Fear	Reference to the fear undocumented immigrants have because of the possibility of being deported
Macro	Immigration Reform	Congress	Action	An individual makes a reference to what Congress has or has not done to pass Immigration Reform
Meso	College-Going Culture	Systems	School Efforts	Participant talks about the efforts the school has made to create/improve the college-going culture (e.g., workshops, fieldtrips, and support to complete college applications.)

Meso	Ways of Knowing about Undocumented Status	Reasons for Disclosure	Longstanding Relationship	Reason for disclosing status is based from a longstanding relationship
Meso	Supports for Undocumented Students	College Applications	Navigating	Reference to the process undocumented/F-2 visa holders embark on to navigate the college and financial aid process
Micro	Class Discussion	Spanish	Legal Status	Issues relating to legal status are discussed
Micro	Undocumented Students in School	Treatment	Friendly	The treatment of undocumented students is described as being friendly
Micro	Coping Mechanism	Humor	Jokes	Immigrant/undocumented students joke among themselves or with close friends about their legal status

### *Artifacts*

Throughout the coding process I kept in mind the artifacts I collected throughout the academic year. After I developed initial codes I reviewed each artifact and made notes related to its intent (i.e., informational or an opinion), its message, and its relation to issues of immigration and documentation. I noted the setting of where the artifact was collected to the context and looked for examples in the data where it either complemented the data or presented a different perspective of how participants discussed issues of legal status.

### *Validity and Reliability*

Multiple methods were used to ensure validity and reliability of the study findings. First, findings were triangulated using observations, interviews, and review of artifacts (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2009). To determine the accuracy of my analyses I used member checks by soliciting feedback from participants on the accuracy of my interpretations gathered from observations and interview (Merriam, 2009). I shared with participants my interpretations of what I was observing and learning through interviews. Participants provided comments on the

accuracy of my interpretations. Finally, as recommended by Cresswell (2009), I used the analytic codes to create thick description and give readers a more vivid perspective of the data (p. 192). Throughout the data I let the voices of my participants' guide the narrative. As such, I was intentional about including multiple quotes from participants and utilizing vignettes to create descriptive and rich stories. Finally, throughout the process I was cognizant about my potential biases (i.e., positionality)—as noted above—and made a concerted effort to minimize preconceived ideas I held about the school and participants to guide my data collection and analysis.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Legal Status and Educational Opportunities**

Undocumented students have the right to a public K-12 education. However, access to higher education has been largely left to the discretion of individual states. The data presented in this chapter illustrates the way immigration policies play a role in the educational experience and opportunities of undocumented students. It addresses the following question:

How do members of a school community make sense of an ambiguous and rapidly shifting federal and state immigration policy landscape?

#### **The Benefits of the California Dream Act and DACA**

The passage of AB 540 in 2001 increased college accessibility by granting in-state tuition to undocumented students who met California residence criteria. However, a steep increase in tuition throughout the decade made college, especially four-year universities, difficult to afford. After years of statewide advocacy, multiple vetoes, and relentless organizing, the California legislature passed, and Governor Jerry Brown signed, both parts of the California Dream Act in 2011. For the first time since overruling *Leticia A v. UC Board of Regents* and *CSU Board of Trustees*, undocumented students were eligible to receive institutional and state financial aid in California. Undocumented youth alongside immigration advocates rejoiced in the victory, while critics decried the decision because they felt undocumented immigrants were being rewarded after breaking the law.

#### *The California Dream Act: Increasing Awareness Undocumented Students' College Access*

When the California Dream Act passed, the majority of students in the study were entering their sophomore year. The new law generated massive media attention and it created a beacon of opportunity for undocumented students and educators. As a result, the majority spoke

about the California Dream Act when discussing the resources available to undocumented students. Its predecessor, AB 540, was seldom mentioned.

*A Welcomed Resource for Educators*

Most educators and students at City School view the passage of the California Dream Act as a victory for undocumented youth. As one of only a few states to offer financial assistance to undocumented students, it made many participants proud to reside in a state that recognized the potential of all its students. Lisa, an English senior teacher shared the sentiment, “With the Dream Act there are more opportunities for undocumented students to access four-year colleges. I feel very fortunate to live in California because I feel like California is on the national scale much more progressive around this topic.” Lisa is pleased that California has chosen to take an additional step toward supporting undocumented students. She also notes that California is more progressive, and therefore, more inclusive on the issue of immigration than other states.

The new law also emboldened educators to better serve undocumented students. Angela, the school’s assistant principal recalls, “I think the Dream Act was a big victory...I saw lot of articles and people emailing about now having something that we can use.” Angela’s comment suggests that the California Dream Act was more than a symbolic gesture of support; it gave educators a tool to inform and assist undocumented students about financial resources for college. The act also facilitated the school’s ability to openly discuss the needs of its undocumented population. Raul, an English teacher and senior advisor comments, “I think what’s powerful since the government passed the Dream Act, is that it helped schools speak more publicly to undocumented students.” Rather than circumvent the issue of documentation and higher education, Raul believes the California Dream Act allows schools to better address college opportunities for undocumented students. He expands on his ideas:

Where at my prior school students were definitely much more, sort of in the closet about being undocumented and I think what's really helped too is to redirect the rhetoric of the Dream Act that they use the word dream as a positive. This phrase, "I am a Dreamer" has sort of rebranded the idea of what it means to be undocumented and has really helped schools to systematically provide workshops for dreamers and to educate people about what the Dream Act is. [Raul, English teacher and Division 3 advisor]

Raul notes a change in the manner in which legal status is discussed. For example, terms such as, "Dreamer" have helped to create a positive shift in the way issues of documentation and legal status are discussed. Moreover, it has served as a tool to educate people about the immigration movement.

#### *Educating Undocumented Students About the California Dream Act*

Since the enactment of the California Dream Act teachers and counselors at City School have educated students about financial aid opportunities. Despite the media attention surrounding the act, many students and parents remain unaware of its existence. Therefore, it has been the school's responsibility to educate students about the law; in particular, students who still believe that college remains inaccessible. Amanda, the academic counselor recalls talking to middle school students:

I have 7th and 8th graders that I've talked to and they're crying, they don't think that college is an option for them because they're undocumented. It's just a matter of getting them the right information. There are Cal Grants, there is money available for you. There are scholarships available for you. You can get money in California to go to college. [Amanda, Academic counselor]

Amanda's comments show there is a persistent need to educate and inform undocumented students about college access and funding opportunities. While the need to disseminate information about college applies to all students, having an undocumented status complicates matters. Despite being aware about the California Dream Act, few students understood how a person qualifies to receive financial aid as well as the procedural steps they needed to take to complete the application. For this reason, the school was a vital source for determining student

eligibility and increasing awareness about the California Dream Act. Eva, a math teacher and senior advisor comments:

I do know that Amanda does a lot of work making sure that undocumented kids are taken care of in terms of college, and that there is a lot of awareness felt around the dream act. I know there've been a couple of after-school assemblies about the dream act. [Eva, Math teacher and Division 3 advisor]

The school assemblies were instrumental in helping students understand the multiple facets of the law. Students learned the differences between funding sources and how to apply for aid.

Keong, an undocumented senior student shares his experience learning about financial resources:

I was able to receive a lot of information [about] how all these undocumented people can get financial aid because I didn't know anything about FAFSA or Dream Act. I didn't know that I am not eligible for FAFSA. There were a lot of scholarship programs for college, but there were a lot that we are not available for. So, from Ms. Collins [Amanda], and other counselors I was able to learn more about the opportunities that we undocumented people can get. [Keong, 12<sup>th</sup> grade]

Although Keong knew he was eligible to receive financial aid, he did not know there was a difference between the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and the California Dream Act application. He was thankful his counselor helped him differentiate between the two applications. Isabel corroborates Keong's comment, "They're informing us about college, how to deal with the Dream Act, how to get our financial aid, we're not eligible for loans, but we do get Cal Grant. They're doing a pretty good job." As a senior, Isabel learned the nuances of the law by attending school-sponsored workshops. She also had individual conversations with Amanda and Emily when she needed help. Developing an understanding of the law helped Isabel make sense of the financial support she was receiving and where else she needed to look for support.

The passage and enactment of the California Dream Act encouraged educators at City School to directly address the issues most pertinent to undocumented students. Despite the high-

level media attention the law garnered, the school continued to educate students and parents about its existence. In particular, major efforts were made to increase awareness about the California Dream Act in order for students to understand its impact.

*DACA: Preparing and Submitting an Application*

Less than a year after California passed its version of the Dream Act, President Obama announced DACA on June 15, 2012. As I detailed in Chapter 1, DACA grants undocumented youth who meet the eligibility requirements reprieve from deportation, a Social Security number, and a work permit. Beginning in Fall 2012, the first wave of DACA recipients were approved under the program’s guidelines. Seven out of the fourteen undocumented students who I talked to had applied and received a Social Security number. Out of the seven students who did not have DACA, two students had not met the age requirements to apply, two students did not meet the five-year residency requirement, one student submitted an application towards the end of their senior year, one student was in the process of getting a green card, and one student was ineligible because they had a student visa at the time DACA was announced. See Table 4.1.

Table 4.1. Undocumented students DACA application (N = 14)

	N
Application approved	7
Application being processed	1
Did not meet age requirement	2
Did not meet five year residency requirement	2
Became undocumented after DACA announcement	1
Anticipated change in their legal status	1

As part of DACA’s prerequisites, applicants have to provide proof they have resided in the country for a specific time period. One-way applicants can provide proof is through documentation of their school attendance. Documents such as enrollment records, certificates, and transcripts may be included in the individual’s application. In this way, schools are

implicated in students' application preparation process. At City School, teachers, counselors, and administrators played an active role in supporting students who were applying for DACA.

Lisa recalls:

I know our school, the last couple of years, has supported students doing the DACA. I remember when DACA came out our counselor was helping students and their families with whatever paperwork they needed with DACA. [Lisa, English teacher]

Even after submitting the paperwork, staff at City School found there was confusion regarding DACA among students and parents. Sofia, City School's principal, recalls assisting parents in order to make sense of the information they received:

Even with DACA – we had several students talking about appointments and I remember reading letters to the parents and explaining, “okay what does it say here.” Understanding the risks, what they were giving up by putting themselves through the process and how its not a straight pathway, there's nothing there that guarantees, and in fact it says, there is no guarantee that you will ever be able to adjust your status really. [Sofia, Principal]

Sofia's comments suggest that DACA applicants required additional assistance after submitting their application. As the school principal, her interactions with parents, at times, required her to provide clarification on the effect DACA would have on their children's work opportunities and legal status. For example, she clarified that the Social Security number they received was only to work and that DACA did not provide a pathway to citizenship.

Students returned to their elementary and middle school to retrieve enrollment records as part of the application process. Isabel prepared her paperwork soon after DACA was announced.

She comments:

I had to take my diplomas from elementary. I remembered I even went to my middle school to print out, I don't know, they needed something. And I came here too. They also needed the day I started school here, high school, and that I was still a student here, that I was still in high school, I had not graduated. [Isabel, 12<sup>th</sup> grade]

Isabel visited her previous schools and found it relatively easy to retrieve the appropriate documents. By the time Isabel was ready to ask for her school records, the administrative assistants she met had already assisted other students and parents. They were happy to assist in completing her request. This made the process less onerous and daunting.

The majority of students who I spoke with claimed the process of filing for DACA was relatively simple. Some solicited the assistance of local organizations, while others hired lawyers to revise the paperwork and ensure they had on hand all of the required documents.

Reflecting on the process, Victor shares:

You find a lawyer and they help you with it. So then you don't have to deal with it. You just turn in documents that you need or requirements. Say for example, you need your grades, you have to show proof that you were here from this certain year to this certain year. And you need proof that you were in school all those years. [Victor, 12<sup>th</sup> grade]

Like Isabel, Victor collected school documents to show proof of DACA's residency requirement. It was also a relatively easy process for him. Because his family found a lawyer to help with the application, Victor only had to compile documents from his elementary and middle school.

### *Developing a Sense of Belonging*

Once undocumented youth were approved for DACA they felt a sense of excitement. Students were eager to show their teachers their newly minted identifications. Maricel, City School's Spanish teacher and Division 3 advisor recalls:

They've been learning how to put their documents in line and I have had some successful stories where the students come and show me their ID, "Hey Miss Diaz, I got my ID because I filled the papers." So there are many students who've been getting their [work] permits and their Social Security numbers. Something is working. [Maricel, Spanish teacher and Division 3 advisor]

Students' ability to receive a work permit and Social Security number had a positive effect on their sense of belonging. Rey was initially apprehensive about filing the paperwork for DACA. His mother first heard about DACA through friends and the media. However, Rey questioned its

viability, he shares, “Honestly at first I didn’t trust the program...I was also scared for [my parents] because it’s putting our name out there, putting our status out there.” In this case, Rey was more concerned about his parents’ wellbeing. Per the DACA solicitation, undocumented immigrants who submit an application are essentially notifying the government of their presence in their country. Although President Obama assured DACA recipients they would not be targeted for deportation, an air of uneasiness lingered. Rey’s trepidation to submit an application also stemmed from his parents’ DACA ineligibility. He worried that submitting an application would place them at risk of deportation. With the support from his parents Rey filed his application immediately after it became available. Within a couple of weeks Rey’s DACA application was approved and he obtained his Social Security number. When I asked him how having DACA has helped him, Rey responded, “It feels like you’re no different than anyone else ‘cause you can have the same ability as other people, other students.” With a work permit in hand, Rey, like many of his friends, was offered his first job. He felt fortunate to be able to work. As a result of Rey’s positive experience, his family began to prepare the paperwork for his younger sister, “I feel lucky because now we’re ready for my sister to get it soon.” Although Rey’s concern about his parents’ legal standing remained, he was happy his younger sister would soon have DACA as well.

Students who applied and received DACA felt a sense of pride and relief. Despite not being granted a pathway to citizenship, having DACA allowed undocumented youth to feel they had access to the same opportunities as their U.S-born/legally residing peers. For example, they were able to gain lawful employment and get a driver’s license. Victor obtained his Social Security number during his senior year of high school. Before DACA, Victor sometimes felt like an outsider when he saw his friends working or applying to summer internships he was

ineligible for because they required a Social Security number. DACA ameliorated some of those challenges for Victor, “I think it’s much easier. You feel like you fit in now in a way because you relate to other people. I can apply to this job and this job. And you don’t have to feel left out or work at a minimum wage job and stuff like that.” In addition to fitting in among his friends, having a Social Security number also meant that Victor was not permanently destined to a low-wage job by bureaucratic constraints.

Qualifying and being approved for DACA was also a victory for students’ parents. Although their parents did not qualify for DACA because of the age restrictions, they were excited for their children. Isabel explains:

I was excited. My mom was more excited than me. ‘Cause she didn’t want me to work yet, but then she’s like it doesn’t matter...you’re an immigrant, but you still have...the *permiso de trabajo* (work permit)... After that I went to get my California ID. So I have a California ID. So everywhere I go I show it. Now since I started working, I use it. It has helped us. DACA is something good. [Isabel, 12<sup>th</sup> grade]

As the excerpt suggests, while Isabel’s legal status did not change, possessing a work permit and Social Security number was a source of pride, created a sense of belonging, and provided a level of protection.

DACA along with the California Dream Act have forged new opportunities for undocumented students. With new work and financial opportunities, the differences that students at City School once felt began to slowly erode. DACA recipients were able to gain legal employment, help their family with finances, partake in social activities with friends, and open a bank account to save money for college. Moreover, qualifying for financial aid also created better prospects for students’ college plans. However, the California Dream Act and DACA did not eliminate some of the barriers undocumented students encounter (See Figure 4.1 and Figure 4.2).

Figure 4.1. Benefits and Limitations of the California Dream Act

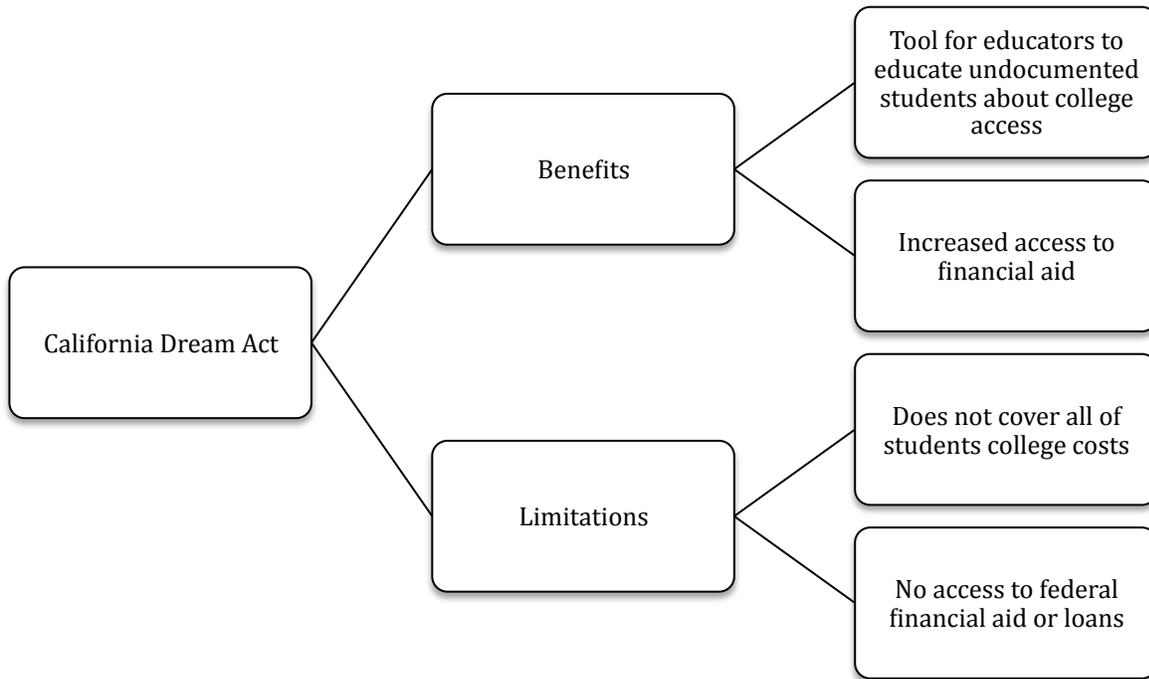
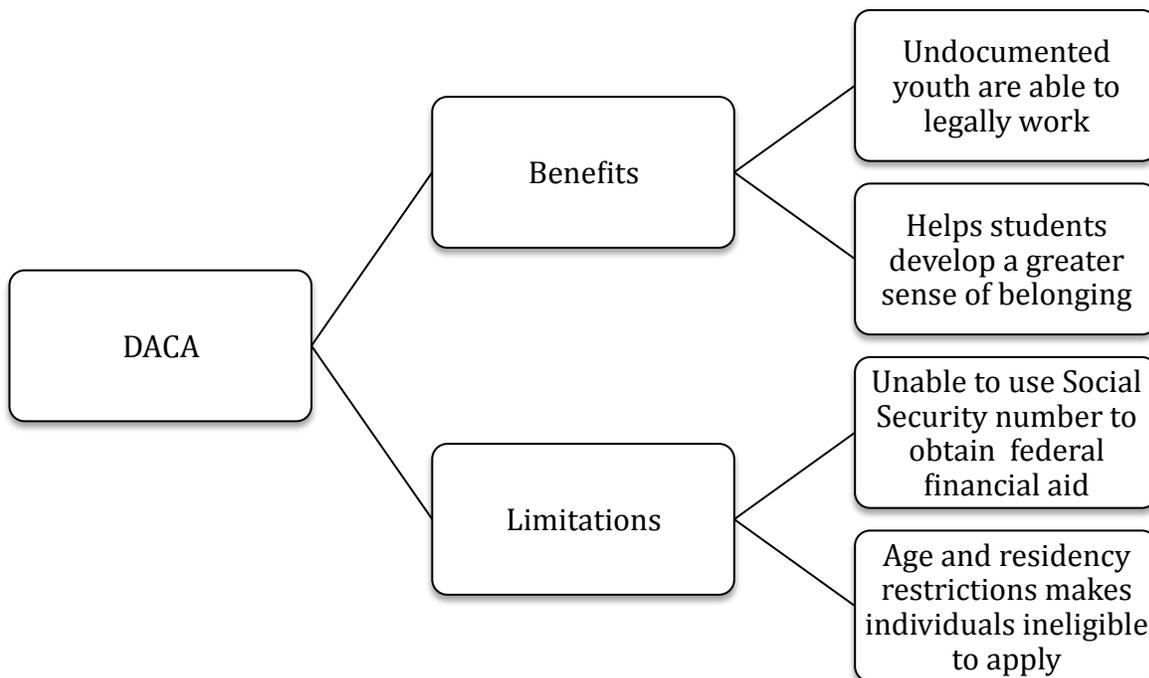


Figure 4.2. Benefits and Limitations of DACA



## **Limited Policy Reach**

The California Dream Act and DACA are not panaceas to the obstacles undocumented youth encounter as they transition from high school to college and/or work. In the following sections, I explore the limited reach of the California Dream Act and DACA. I then focus on the challenges students who do not have DACA deal with on a daily basis.

### *Unmet Dreams: The Limitations of the California Dream Act*

The California Dream Act was a welcome resource of support for undocumented students' college aspirations. Unfortunately, despite being eligible for financial assistance in California, undocumented students' financial aid packages do not meet all of their financial needs. It is important to note that U.S-born and legally residing students also experience financial difficulties. However, unlike their peers, undocumented students do not qualify for loans and are ineligible to apply for many scholarships. In this section, I present the financial obstacles undocumented students continue to face as they prepare for college. I begin by presenting an encounter I had with a recent graduate from City School. The student was visiting the college center to inquire about her financial aid awards.

On a hot August day, I make my way to the college center after completing a class observation in AP Spanish. Emily is at her desk next to a female student named Irma who I had not yet met. A few students shuffle in and out of the college center until Emily, Irma, and I are the only ones in the room. Emily explains to me that Irma is a graduate from the class of 2013. Irma came to see Emily about her financial aid because she has been having trouble logging into her California Dream Act application and her financial aid has not been sent to the university she plans to attend. With classes starting in a week, Irma wants to make sure she will have the money to cover tuition. They are on the phone with the California Student Aid Commission, but

are currently on hold. While they wait for assistance Emily asks Irma, “Were you working over the summer?” Irma explains that she applied for DACA around May, but has yet to hear back about a decision. She is completely reliant on financial aid to meet the registration fees for the fall semester.

Irma tells me that when she first submitted her California Dream Act application she was told to resubmit a paper version by the commission because of problems with the online system. She is worried it was not properly processed. A few minutes later a representative picks up the phone. Irma and Emily explain her situation and ask what they need to do. After they hang up, Emily shares with me that Irma has been awarded a Cal Grant B, which typically only covers books and living expenses during the first year of college. After the first year it can be renewed to cover tuition. Despite being a better long-term package, Irma was hoping to get the Cal Grant A because it covers tuition during the first year in addition to books and living expenses. With no other source of income at the moment, Irma fears she will have to enroll at a community college. She thanks Emily for her help and leaves. After Irma is gone, Emily tells me that she feels bad for her. According to Emily, Irma had been diligent about filling out her paperwork and preparing what she needed to qualify for financial aid.

Irma’s story is indicative of the challenges undocumented students encounter as they plan their college finances. As the college counselor, Emily worked closely with students to help them make sense of their financial aid packages. At the start of the study, only the graduating class of 2013 had gone through the California Dream Act process, however, Emily had already witnessed some of the law’s limitations:

So I think the biggest obstacle is getting into the schools they want to get into and not being able to have the money to get there. Last year we had two students, one went to UC Merced and one went to UCLA, somehow with parent help and with working were able to actually go, but I don’t think in general the packages that are offered to undocumented

students are enough to actually go to a school, [cover] room and board, and pay tuition. I think it covers the tuition for them, but then they're stuck with the other piece. So they have to be creative figuring out who's going to pay for it, how they're going to pay for it. [Emily, College counselor]

While some undocumented students were able to finance college costs with the help from parents and work, other students were not as fortunate. Emily recalls, "One in particular had to go to community college because he couldn't afford, even with the Dream Act application couldn't afford to go to a UC or Cal State." Despite being accepted into a prestigious university and qualifying for financial aid, the student was left with only the choice of attending a community college.

Amanda, who has also worked closely with undocumented students, explains how City School has supported them when their financial aid awards are not enough:

They're a group of students who need even more because sometimes their financial aid, even though they're getting the Cal Grants now, their financial aid packages still are not meeting all of their needs. So, we're working on the college level...calling the colleges and trying to see if the college can give more money. [Amanda, Academic Counselor]

Amanda reiterates the sentiment that the financial aid packages do not cover the majority of students' expenses. With the help from school volunteers, she has made calls to individual colleges to inquire about increasing students financial aid award. Unfortunately, they have not had much success.

### *Submitting a California Dream Act Application*

Between January 1<sup>st</sup> and March 2<sup>nd</sup> students across the country prepare and submit their FAFSA in order to qualify for financial assistance to attend college. Beginning in 2013, undocumented students in California were able to submit a financial aid application. However, unlike their U.S-born/legally residing peers, undocumented students complete a different form. Modeled after the FAFSA, undocumented students apply through the California Student Aid

Commission. Undocumented students appreciated qualifying to receive financial aid, but they were disappointed their financial support was limited in comparison to their peers. Gan expresses the sentiment:

I feel it was very unfair for me because like, I couldn't get a job as the other students did. I couldn't apply to FAFSA and get money from the government as much as they did just because I wasn't born here. And it wasn't my choice to be born in Mongolia or here. I thought it was unfair. [Gan, 12<sup>th</sup> grade]

Gan believed it was unfair she did not qualify for federal financial aid. Completing a different form also reminded her that she was unlike other students. Isabel also notes the difference, "I think I am going to get less money than others because they were born here. I think they're able to get more money." Initially, she was surprised to learn there were still differences in financial aid opportunities:

We don't get loans and all that. We don't get as much benefits as them. And I was just like, wow. I mean we still get the chance to go to college. I am hoping to get more information about that when I start going to see how it works. Maybe get involved in programs and stuff like that so it helps me. [Isabel, 12<sup>th</sup> grade]

Isabel worried that her Cal Grant would not cover her college costs. Because her family had plans to move after her high school graduation, Isabel hoped that her financial aid and new job would help her offset the costs. Although Isabel appreciated being able to attend college, she planned to search for additional information about how the system works in hopes of finding other financial resources.

For any student, receiving a financial aid package that fails to meet their financial need is a cause for concern. For undocumented students who find themselves in this predicament, the situation is even more cumbersome because their access to other resources is restricted. Upon learning that their financial award does not cover the majority of their college expenses students become disillusioned, and, like Irma, begin to consider attending a community college instead.

The following field note captures the moment when Gan first saw her preliminary financial aid award:

Gan takes a couple of minutes to create an additional account with the California Students Aid Commission. After she logs in to her account she looks for her financial aid award. When Gan sees that she was been awarded the Cal Grant B (\$1,473) she seems disappointed. She wonders how much tuition will cost for a CSU and is unsure if she will be able to afford the costs. I let her know that this is just a preliminary award and that the campus has yet to award her the full financial aid packet. Gan seems a bit relieved and comments that she was, “about to say goodbye to Cal State.” (Field note, April 25)

Without enough financial support from the state, Gan felt she would be unable to attend college. Since it was already April, securing other financial supports was limited. To supplement state aid, Gan inquired about scholarships, but she worried that she would not be awarded any money. Despite more scholarship applications being available for undocumented student, these opportunities are limited because many continue to require proof of U.S. citizenship or legal residency. Keong comments on his experience searching for scholarships, “I looked for many scholarships, even in the Korean community, there are Korean communities that offer scholarships, but many of them require citizenship or a green card.” In addition to searching for national and statewide scholarships, Keong inquired about scholarships within the Korean community. To his surprise, he found that his legal status made him ineligible to scholarships he believed he had a high probability of being awarded. As a result, Keong, like many of his undocumented peers, depended on his financial award package to cover the majority of his college costs.

#### *DACA: A Limited Reach*

Undocumented students at City School were excited to have a Social Security number and be able to work. Having DACA allowed them to join their friends in numerous coming of age rituals such as working part-time, opening a bank account or getting their driver’s license.

However, even with DACA, they encountered social and financial limitations. At one level there are undocumented youth who did not have DACA because they had not submitted an application or did not meet eligibility criteria. On a second level, students who submitted an application and were approved realized there were limits to its benefits. For example, the Social Security number undocumented immigrants receive through DACA is limited to legal employment. Undocumented youth with DACA are not eligible to receive federal financial aid and, while possible, there are risks attached to traveling outside of the country. This limitation works to perpetuate a limited sense of belonging for undocumented students.

#### *Students Without DACA: Delayed Applications & Ineligibility*

Some undocumented youth waited to apply for DACA because they lacked awareness, failed to see the urgency of having a Social Security number, or had financial constraints. Although failing to submit an application is not a limitation of DACA itself, some undocumented youth did not apply because they did not understand the benefits of submitting an application. In other words, information about DACA is not reaching undocumented high school students who could benefit from having a Social Security number. Many students indicated they did not apply until the end of their junior year or beginning of their senior year because they did not realize having a Social Security number expands opportunities. Emily comments on her experience working with undocumented students, “They don’t know enough about DACA and enough about the California Dream Act application to actually know that there’s a way to help them.” As a result, many students did not begin the necessary steps to apply for DACA until it became urgent. The urgency usually revolved around the need to find a job that would help them save for college. Emily explains:

I don’t think freshman, sophomores, and juniors know that being AB 540, undocumented, affects them going to college until it’s crunch time. So, maybe if they knew earlier on,

they could get the DACA earlier and get jobs and have ways to kind of help them get through it. But I don't think they, I really think they just don't know about it till too late. [Emily, College Counselor]

My interactions with two sophomore students in this study corroborate Emily's sentiments.

When I asked each student if they had DACA or whether they had heard of it, both commented that they unaware of it existence and purpose. Moreover, with little information targeted to 10<sup>th</sup> grade students at City School about documentation and college access, the likelihood that students in their early high school years heard and learned about DACA through school-sponsored workshops was unlikely to occur.

Some students did not apply for DACA until they felt it mattered. For example, Victor realized he was undocumented when he asked his mother for a California ID in order to attend a camping trip. Despite being disappointed about not having legal documents, Victor began high school with little concern about his legal status. Even after hearing about DACA at the end of his sophomore year, he saw little value in submitting an application. It was not until the end of his junior year that Victor felt disadvantaged because he did not have a Social Security number:

I guess, in 11th grade everybody was talking about this internship, we needed our Social Security and at that time I didn't have one, so then I felt left out because I couldn't apply to it 'cause I didn't have a Social Security. And it was like at [name of college]. So then I felt like I couldn't apply to it. And then I guess I felt left out in a way. [Victor, 12<sup>th</sup> grade]

Had Victor received the appropriate information about DACA and the importance of having a Social Security number he might have submitted an application earlier. Similarly, Gan first realized the need to have a Social Security number when she searched for a job as a junior:

Everywhere you go and I ask if you're hiring, they would answer, "yeah, yeah, we're hiring". And then you're like, "ok, then when can I come for an interview or get the application?" And all of them say you need a social. I am like "ok, never mind, thank you," and you just walk out. But like, getting a job and earning, it's really hard for undocumented people it's really unfair 'cause they have no rights. [Gan, 12<sup>th</sup> grade]

Although Gan knew of DACA, she lacked information about its purpose. In addition, she lived with an aunt and uncle who did not have legal guardianship. This made the process even more daunting. In my initial conversations with Gan she was confused about how DACA worked. She was under the impression that DACA could provide a pathway to citizenship and confused it with the California Dream Act application, believing she would receive more financial aid if she had DACA. In working with Emily and I, Gan began to understand how DACA worked. With the help of her aunt and uncle she was able to hire a lawyer to review and submit her application. By the spring semester Gan had submitted a DACA application. However, she was still waiting on a response after graduating from City School.

Application costs cause some students to delay applying for DACA. Clarissa waited over a year to file an application because she could not afford it. She says, “The money...It’s like \$800 for everything.” Clarissa’s parents were unable to help pay for her application. She waited until her older brother, who had DACA, secured a loan from a friend to cover the costs. While Clarissa was the only student who I spoke with who delayed submitting a DACA application because of financial constraints, it is important to note the way procedural costs may become barriers for undocumented youth who hope to apply for DACA.

The eligibility criteria set by DACA disqualifies or delays some undocumented students from applying. There were two reasons undocumented students at City School did not qualify for DACA: 1) the student had not resided in the U.S. for at least five years, and 2) they became undocumented after the June 2012. Rafael arrived in 2010 from Mexico. At 18 years old, he did not apply for DACA because he had not been present in the country for at least five years when the program was announced. His family looked into applying for DACA, but were unsuccessful:

*Aplique, quisimos hacer eso pero no pudimos porque necesitaba, el requisito era de tener 5 años viviendo aquí o mas y nosotros teníamos apenas como 3 años, íbamos a cumplir 4 entonces no aplicamos para eso. [Rafael, 12th grade]*

I applied, we wanted to do that, but we weren't able to because we needed to meet the requirement to be living here for 5 years and we had only been here for about 3 years, it was going to be 4 so we didn't apply for that. [Rafael, 12th grade]

Rafael and his family inquired about DACA, but learned they could not submit an application because of the residency requirement. In the meantime, Rafael took a job as a dishwasher in the restaurant where his father worked. His girlfriend, Isabel, notes the differences between herself and Rafael:

It is a big difference because he started working already, you can work with a fake ID. So it is a big difference because he has no sort of identification, just like the school ID and that's about it.... He tells me, "you're from here already, blah blah," I am like, "you're dumb, it's just a freaking ID." I don't take it as, "oh, I am like a gringa already," you know, I have an ID...It helps me to work 'cause in some places you can't work without an ID, being a citizen or resident. [Isabel, 12<sup>th</sup> grade]

Isabel notes the disparity in work opportunities between Rafael and herself. As a DACA recipient she was able to get a job at a boutique. In contrast, her boyfriend was not afforded the same privilege. He had to use false documentation to get a job. Isabel also mentions that Rafael teases her about being American because she possesses a California ID. She takes his teasing as a joke, but her comment makes apparent that qualifying for DACA and obtaining a work permit creates a difference among undocumented immigrants in relation to being members of U.S. society. From Rafael's perspective, having an ID made Isabel part of the U.S. Although Isabel did not view herself as a typical American, she recognized the rights she had gained through DACA. For this reason, Isabel was in the process of inquiring at a local organization about Rafael's case.

Keong also did not qualify for DACA, but for a different reason. When Keong arrived from South Korea at age 9 he did so with an F-2 international student visa. The family kept their

visa until Fall 2012. However, by the time the visa had expired, it was too late to qualify for DACA. As part of the DACA guidelines a person may be eligible to apply if they had no lawful presence by June 15, 2012 (USCIS website). Because Keong's visa expired after DACA was announced, he was not eligible to apply. During our conversation, Keong knew little about DACA. As an international visa holder, he had dropped his visa to qualify for financial aid with the hope that the federal government would soon grant a pathway to citizenship to undocumented immigrants. According to Keong, he was not aware of DACA when he first became undocumented. By his senior year of high school, Keong needed a job to cover future college costs so he found one through a friend:

The manager, I got to meet him, so it was my friend's [boss] and then he asked me if I want to work, but I told him I have no Social Security number and then he said, "we don't really require a Social Security number" so I got to work here. [Keong, 12<sup>th</sup> grade]

Despite not having a Social Security number, Keong secured employment in food service. For the time being, he was able to save money for college and other financial obligations. Later in the chapter I detail how students with international student visas are impacted by policy targeted at undocumented immigrants/students.

### *Financial Restraints and Travel*

Once students' DACA application was approved and they received a Social Security number they were excited to put it to use. However, many of them were not aware that DACA is only intended for work. These restrictions became apparent during the college application process. Emily explains, "I think the kids confuse the California Dream Act with DACA, with having a Social Security number. I think they're very confused about the whole system." Perhaps the proximity of the California Dream Act's enactment and implementation of DACA confused students. Despite knowing about the California Dream Act and DACA many

undocumented students did not know they were unrelated. Students such as Danilo first noted the differences when they were applying for college. He shares:

One time the [college] application asked for a Social Security number and I put my Social Security number, but Ms. Sanders [Emily] is all like, “oh, you’re undocumented, there’s no need for you to put your Social Security number,” so I was like, “what’s the point of me having the Social Security number, you know?” [Danilo, 12<sup>th</sup> grade]

Danilo believed the Social Security number he received through DACA could be used for his college applications. He was frustrated about its utility. Despite being able to legally work he was taken aback when he realized there were still differences between himself and his friends. He explains, “I feel like they’re more privileged ‘cause they’re citizens and all that so they’re privileged, not like undocumented people, they have to go through a process and then get a chance.” Even after going through an intensive process to obtain a Social Security number, Danilo felt he did not have the same privileges as his U.S-born friends.

Itzel also realized the limitations of DACA shortly before applying for financial aid. She was surprised to learn that she was still ineligible from submitting the FAFSA. She explains, “I mean the Social Security is only to work. You can’t go use your Social Security for FAFSA ‘cause it’s not like your real Social Security.” Asked how she felt about learning she was unable to receive federal financial support, Itzel says, “Bad ‘cause I was excited to apply to FAFSA.” As with Danilo, it was Emily who explained to Itzel the limitations of her Social Security number. Itzel had hoped to join her friends when preparing and submitting the FAFSA. However, while her friends submitted the FAFSA she worked on the California Dream Act. She recalls the experience, “They were just looking like, “oh, you’re doing the Dream Act.” It’s just like saying, “oh, we’re better ‘cause we’re doing the FAFSA and we’re getting more money.” Itzel felt uneasy and highly conscious that she was not able to submit the same application as her friends. Having a Social Security number with restrictions also raised her questions about her

legal standing in the country, “I mean, you don’t feel like a real resident.” Itzel’s inability to apply for federal financial aid was a stark reminder that while she had gained some benefits such as the ability to work and apply for a driver’s licenses, legally, she was still not considered a full member of society.

Traveling outside of the country was another restriction students encountered even after being approved for DACA. Although DACA recipients can petition to travel outside of the U.S. and be approved for travel through an Advance Parole Petition it is not without risk. When reentering the U.S., the Customs and Border and Patrol (CBP) is able to deny reentry to an individual. Moreover, DACA holders must provide a reason for the need to travel. This may include humanitarian, educational, and employment purposes. A family vacation does not qualify a person to obtain an Advance Parole document. For this reason, high school students are ineligible to travel outside of the country. Many did not know that while limited, travel was possible, as Isabel comments, “We saw that, this is only eligible for the US. If you go out you cannot come back. And I was like, you see mom.” Isabel hoped to visit El Salvador, but understood that her Social Security number and California ID did not make her eligible to do so.

The restrictions on travel created a difference between undocumented youth and their documented peers. While their peers visited family and friends outside of the U.S. during school breaks, undocumented students were unable to do the same and felt left out. The inability to visit grandparents, uncles, aunts, and cousins was upsetting. Danilo comments:

They get to travel. They get to go back to their country and come back. I can’t do that. So I am pretty bummed out. For the past 8 years I’ve been here, I did not come back to my country... I miss my grandparents. So they’re lucky they can go back. [Danilo, 12<sup>th</sup> grade]

Danilo recognized the privilege his peers had to travel outside of the country. He wished he could do the same and share travel stories with his friends, but Danilo knew he would not be able to

return. Listening to their friends' stories reminded undocumented students they had limited legal rights. Although not intentional, some felt discriminated against when their friends shared their vacation stories:

It's hard 'cause I feel like, maybe it's not their intention to discriminate, but when they talk about how they go and visit their families, I just think, "Why can't I go?" And it's because I don't have papers. And when they get their license and how it's so easy for them, and when they get financial aid. [Itzel, 12<sup>th</sup> grade]

According to Itzel, it is easier for her friends to do the same things she wants to do. In addition to her travel restrictions, she feels her peers' process for applying for their driver's license and financial aid was easier. When Itzel's friends talk about their summer vacation, she reminds them how fortunate they are to be able to do so:

They say like how they're going to go visit in the summer or how they did it, and I tell them, like, "You're lucky you have that opportunity and I can't. I have to stay here." If I go back, I mean it's easy to go back, it's just that you can't come in again. [Itzel, 12<sup>th</sup> grade]

Without the guarantee of legal permanent residency or citizenship, undocumented students continue to face barriers as they prepare to transition out of high school. The Social Security number undocumented youth obtain through DACA does not make them eligible for federal financial aid and makes traveling outside of the country difficult. Although undocumented students appreciate the benefits they have gained through DACA, they question the extent to which it makes them feel like everyone else. Moreover, their application is only approved for two years. After the two years, they have to renew DACA. A number of students in the study were beginning the renewal process. It is also important to note that DACA is a temporary solution implemented through the Obama administration. Without comprehensive immigration reform, its existence is dependent upon the support of future presidential administrations.

### *Students Without DACA: Worker Protections & Opportunities*

“How did your skills development plan work this week?” is projected on the screen as seniors walk into their 3<sup>rd</sup> period Internship class. Elizabeth greets the class and begins by asking students to reflect on the progression of the skills they were suppose to work on developing at their internship site. After a few minutes Elizabeth asks for volunteers to share. She goes around the room and selects a few to students to speak. Danilo shares that at his internship site he has been working on his communication skills and organization. One of his classmates asks him what he does. Danilo explains that he helps with data information, makes flyers and then passes them out in the neighborhood. His internship partner, Sergio, adds, “It’s very fun.” A few more students volunteer before they move to the next activity.

Elizabeth hands the class a sheet titled, “Employee Rights Exercise,” and explains that today they will be discussing workers rights. They briefly discuss constitutional rights such as freedom of speech and freedom of religion before Elizabeth asks students to read over the worksheet. The worksheet presents students with multiple scenarios that ask them to decide whether the employer has violated worker protections. In groups, and basing their decision on the constitutional rights discussion they had, students determine whether the employer violated a worker’s constitutional right. After reviewing the scenarios students argue that some examples of work violations include freedom of religion, freedom of speech, illegal search and seizure, and freedom of press. Elizabeth projects the worksheet on the overhead and with a red marker crosses all of the students responses. She tells them they are wrong, and explains that while their constitutional rights don’t apply at work, there are federal laws to help protect them. Elizabeth overviews the seven federal laws meant to protect workers. When discussing workers compensation, wages and hours Esteban asks, “What if you don’t have a social? He adds, “Don’t

you need a social?” Elizabeth responds that it depends on how the employer is paying you.

Under his breath Esteban mentions that if you’re undocumented you can’t really be protected by any of the federal laws. Elizabeth reminds him and the class that most people in the United States have legal documentation. Esteban quietly tells himself, “I have to get legal.” He looks over to a female student and asks, “Are you legal?” She nods her head in agreement.

In this vignette, Esteban is under the impression that as an undocumented immigrant federal law might not protect him at work. This is not surprising because even though undocumented immigrants are protected by workers’ rights, many are unaware of them or do not demand them for fear of employer retaliation (Gleeson, 2010). At the time, Esteban’s legal status was in limbo. Because he was part of the foster care system, upon turning 18 he was eligible to gain legal residency. Nevertheless, Esteban like many of his undocumented peers who did not possess DACA had already experienced the hardship of working without legal documentation. When Esteban started high school, he would accompany his aunt to the local swap meet to sell bread. He shares:

I would work with my aunt selling bread. She would pay me. I guess it wasn’t enough. We would be there up to, let’s see, 8 hours, 6 to 8 hours in the sun, you know, until we sold the bread, probably 40 breads. We would leave to go home, but it’s just a hassle. We would be there for like 8 hours and all I got paid was like 5 bucks, 10 bucks even, if I were lucky. [Esteban, 12<sup>th</sup> grade]

The long hours and small pay led Esteban to consider other options. In school, he began to notice that his friends were getting hired for jobs. However, his legal status prevented him from finding a part-time job. Feeling the need to make his own money to cover expenses Esteban created his own business:

Throughout high school I heard a lot of people had jobs, a part time job right after school and all this and that’s how they were able to get their money. And then, with me on the other hand, I didn’t have papers. I didn’t know what to do. I wanted money so then that’s when I came up with the idea, like, any other Latino would do, which was, you know,

hustle for it. So I started selling burgers at school. I went to Carls Jr, bought them for a dollar every morning. I bought like 10, and then I sold them at school for two dollars, and then my profit was 10 bucks. And at the end of the day I went back with 20 bucks. Ten bucks I started with and 10 bucks profit. And I mean, I did that for around three years and it's something that stuck onto me. Like I said, I guess that's something Latinos have in their blood, in their heart. If something doesn't work out, they'll always find another way to do it. [Esteban, 12<sup>th</sup> grade]

When I met Esteban, he was still selling burgers at school despite being told to stop by school administrators. He risked suspension, but felt he had no other choice but to continue selling at school. Esteban attributed his entrepreneurial spirit to his Latino heritage and believed it was his way of dealing with his legal situation.

Living without a Social Security number also increased undocumented students' risk of exploitation. Adults at City School noted the risks students faced when entering the unregulated world of work. Angela comments, "...students and parents are working in environments where they're not really being paid fairly because of their status and there is complete exploitation happening in this area." U.S.-born/legally residing students also realized the stark differences in work opportunities their undocumented peers faced. Karla, a U.S.-born student shares:

I feel a lot of them get exploited, like they work 12-hour shifts and get paid 50 dollars a day... like one of my neighbors, she doesn't have papers and she works with this daycare. She works from 5 a.m. until 7 pm and she gets paid 50 dollars a day and I just feel that it's hard for them. [Karla,, 12<sup>th</sup> grade]

In the excerpt above, Karla is aware that undocumented immigrants are vulnerable to being exploited. She uses her neighbor as an example to illustrate the low-pay undocumented immigrants generate for their work. This was also the reality of many of her peers who were undocumented and did not possess a work permit through DACA. Given the gravity of the issue, adults at City School seemed more cognizant of the exploitative work environments undocumented students entered. Olivia, the behavior support counselor, shares a story:

There is one young man last year who was trying to support his family because his dad was disabled when he got here and I guess mom wasn't able to find much work. So, this boy was, I think, 17 at that time, and he was catching a ride with a truckload of people to go to El Monte. At the end of the day he would actually ditch school sometimes to go and he worked till 1 in the morning and he was really good at it, he was a cook in this Mexican fast food restaurant and he was really good at it. He had the skills. He knew how to keep things going. So, they wanted him and they gave him more hours and he needed the hours because the family needed money, but the family brought him here to get an education so that he wouldn't have to work like that his whole life. So, it developed into this kind of a crisis for the family like "What do we do?" And he ended up leaving that job and got something closer but all of his jobs are below the bar and he is at risk of not getting paid when he should get paid, the hours exploited and things like that. [Olivia, Behavior Support Counselor]

As the excerpt shows, financial struggles at home may lead undocumented students to become breadwinners for their family. In this instance, the student commuted far from home to work as a cook. Soon after, the students' job interfered with his school performance, placing him in a difficult predicament. His family needed the income from his job, but at the same time, his work responsibilities undermined his responsibilities as a student. Eventually, the student found a job closer to home, but as Olivia comment suggests, he remained vulnerable to being exploited.

Gan shares a similar story. After inquiring about job opportunities at local businesses she realized how difficult it would be for her to be hired without a Social Security number. In contrast, it was much easier for her friends to find work and gain job experience. With no other recourse seemingly available to her, Gan found and accepted a job at a nail salon where she was paid below the minimum wage:

I work under the table. So I get \$5 an hour and it's very unfair...the very first time, you know the first job is always hard getting 'cause they're like, "Oh, what's your experience?" And like, I have no experience, but I am going to try my best. So other friends are getting jobs 'cause they have a social. It's really easy for them to get a job compared to me. I have to look for a job where they don't check social. If somebody comes by, you know, those who's checking social, I am going to be in really big trouble. I might get deported back. So that's one of the really big concerns. [Gan, 12<sup>th</sup> grade]

Gan notes the risk of working without a Social Security number. In addition to being paid below the minimum wage she worked “under the table” and feared being caught at work without proper documentation. Despite worrying about being deported if she was caught, Gan maintained the job during her senior year. The long work hours and long commute took a toll on her academics. Gans’s classmates voted for her as the person most likely to fall asleep in class. Although Gan found humor in the class standout, she felt her friends and classmates didn’t understand her predicament:

I am always tired, you know. I have to work and I have to go to school. So I come from work really at like 10 or 11 or maybe even 12 at home ‘cause I take like 2 buses to get there. So, I come really late and then like, I just go to sleep and I don’t do my homework at home. It’s hard to balance it out. [Gan, 12<sup>th</sup> grade]

As the school year progressed, Gan had difficulty balancing her school and work commitments. After being admitted to a four-year university, Gan worried she would be unable to maintain passing grades and have her admission revoked. However, without the income from her job it was highly unlikely she would be able to pay for college.

Undocumented students who do not qualify for DACA or have yet to submit an application have limited work opportunities. Many of these students enter work environments where they earn below the minimum wage and work long days. They work to help their family make ends meet or to save money for college. Without the protection of a Social Security number they are aware of the risk of deportation. Still, they continue to work, balancing their home and school responsibilities in an attempt to make a living in the same manner their U.S-born/legally residing peers do.

### **The Legal Gray Area**

Among the many students I met at City School was a small group of legally residing students who were living on the margins. These students possessed F-2 visas and were born in

South Korea. The F-2 visa is a nonimmigrant visa that allows dependent spouses or children of F-1 student visa holders to enter the U.S. Most had arrived in the U.S. as preteens and had attended American schools since middle school with no intention of returning to their home country. Like other immigrant students, they learned English and adjusted to the social and cultural norms of the new country (Olsen, 1997). They were highly motivated and eager to start the next phase of their lives in college. However, like their undocumented peers, their transition from high school to college and/or work arose challenges about financial and work opportunities.

At the start of the school year I worked with Amanda to offer a workshop for undocumented students. Through my networks I was able to secure an immigrant youth organization to visit the school on a Saturday to inform students about AB 540 and the California Dream Act. A few weeks before the workshop was to be held in late September, I am sitting in the college center when Amanda walks in. She shares with me her excitement about the workshop and requests that I ask the presenters to address how these laws affect international students. Amanda tells me she is worried that there is, “nothing on how to navigate the system,” for these types of situations. According to Amanda, she knows of a couple of seniors as well as younger students who may encounter this situation. I agree to follow-up on her request.

Two days later, I am sitting at the college center talking with Emily when Jimin walks in with a group of female friends. They talk with Emily about SAT fee waivers and how they are beginning to prepare for their college applications. A few minutes later all of the students with the exception of Jimin take a seat and talk amongst themselves. Jimin begins to talk with Emily about her visa status and college applications. Emily insinuates that Jimin might qualify for some of the benefits available to undocumented students. “I am not undocumented!” Jimin defensively replies. They look at me and Emily explains that Jimin has an F-2 international visa,

but they are not sure whether she qualifies under the AB 540 policy for in-state tuition. Jimin is also unsure about how to fill out her college applications. Emily agrees to follow-up about her situation. Once Jimin and her friends leave the college center Emily remarks how surprise she is to hear Jimin be so defensive after she implied that Jimin might be considered AB 540. Emily tells me that only a few days earlier, while walking to the courtyard during a fire drill, Jimin had casually mentioned she was thinking about becoming undocumented. She suspects that Jimin or her family might be contemplating letting their visas expire so that she may qualify for in-state tuition and financial aid.

In addition to Jimin, I met three other students who were dealing with or had dealt with the issue of being considered international students (Table 4.2). Although they share in common being international students, their legal and college trajectory took multiple paths. In what follows, I describe how each of the four students was affected and handled having an F-2 visa.

Table 4.2: F-2 Visa Holders

	Legal status
Joseph	F-2 visa holder. Expects parents to finance college expenses.
Minsuh	F-2 visa holder at the beginning of the school year. Anticipates receiving a green card by the end of the school year.
Jimin	F-2 visa holder. Considering allowing her visa to expire and become undocumented.
Keong	F-2 visa when he first arrived to the U.S. Dropped visa during his junior of high school after older brother was unable to receive financial support.

*Joseph: Maintaining the F-2 visa*

Joseph, a slim, energetic water polo player arrived with his parents to the U.S. when he was four. During his senior year, he served as a student assistant for one of the school’s administrators. When Joseph’s workload was light, he spent his free time in the college center. One day in mid-September we began talking about the rigor of his classes. Joseph commented that the academics at City School were relatively easy. When I asked if his parents had attended

college, Joseph shared that his mom went to school in South Korea and had moved to the U.S. with an F-1 student visa. He came with her and was given an F-2 visa. Joseph also shared that he could not visit his home country because he would be unable to return to the U.S. As an F-2 visa holder, Joseph understood that colleges would consider him as an international student and charge him higher fees. To assuage the costs, I recommended that he apply for scholarships. However, Joseph was not worried about paying for college because he believed his parents could afford the costs. During a conversation months later he shared:

My family, I believe, can pay for it. We don't need loans or anything. Being F-2 didn't really matter for me as for other people. I mean, F-2 would probably be hard because you have to take out loans and stuff. Some people drop their F-2 to get scholarships....and Cal-Grant and stuff. [Joseph, Senior]

Joseph seemed unaffected by his international student status. He felt strongly that his parents' income from their small business would be enough to meet his financial needs for college. In the excerpt above, he also mentions that unlike other students, he is not considering dropping his F-2 visa to qualify for financial aid or scholarships. However, Joseph and his family did entertain the idea. Later in our conversation, Joseph shared that he and his mother had met with Amanda about his financial prospects: "Ms. Collins and my mom had a conference and she told me 'Oh, yeah, that's what people did,' but it's too late for me now." While Amanda did not sanction dropping the visa, given Joseph's legal status, it was a topic of conversation. By the time Joseph and his mom met with Amanda he had already applied to college. His comment suggests that there was little value in the financial supports becoming undocumented would yield. By the end of the school year, Joseph had been admitted and planned to attend a competitive public university in southern California.

*Minsuh: Waiting for the Green Card*

Minsuh was at the top of her class. Highly motivated, focused, and resourceful, she was determined to go to college and study hospitality management. I first met Minsuh in the college center when she stopped by to talk to Emily about her college applications. During the conversation, the issue of documentation was brought up. Minsuh was unsure about her legal status and the legal paperwork (e.g., Social Security number and parent's income) she needed to complete her college applications. Although Minsuh knew she did not have a green card she did not know whether she had an international visa or was undocumented. She agreed to follow-up with her mother to clarify what her legal status was. A couple of weeks later Minsuh returned and shared with Emily and I that her family had recently filed paperwork for her to obtain a green card. Her mother had remarried and was able to file a petition through her stepfather; she expected to have a green card before she graduated from high school. Minsuh later shared with me that she was initially confused about her legal status because at one point her visa had expired. However, her mom quickly renewed it:

I thought I was undocumented but I found out that I have been on an F-2 visa and that it expired. I have been undocumented for some time but I just reapplied for a visa and I found out that I currently have a visa. [Minsuh, 12<sup>th</sup> grade]

As Minsuh navigated the legal system and waited to obtain her green card it was difficult for her to complete and submit her college applications. Although she was no longer categorized as an international student by the time she submitted her college applications she also did not have an Alien Number to include. She explains:

I went in to look at my to-do list and there were a few things that an international student was supposed to submit but I am not technically an international student, I am a temporary resident and I don't need to submit these things and I had to go to the school, e-mailed them and called them. It was annoying. [Minsuh, 12<sup>th</sup> grade]

Minsuh did not anticipate that her legal status would affect her college application process.

Given her nebulous legal standing, she got in touch with potential colleges and explained her

current situation. In the next chapter, I detail the process students and the school undertook to complete and submit applications. For now, it is important to note that Minsuh's temporary resident status created additional work for her. As she notes in the excerpt above, going through the extra steps was "annoying". It also required persistence on her part to ensure that colleges understood her legal situation to provide guidance. Fortunately, before Minsuh's graduation her legal standing had been settled. She received her Alien Number in early winter and by spring had obtained legal permanent residency. As a result, she was able to attend and receive financial aid to a highly respected and competitive public university.

*Jimin: A Legal Dilemma*

I introduced this section with a vignette describing Jimin's legal dilemma. Of the four students who were dealing with or had dealt with being an international student, Jimin had the most difficulty. With no access to financial aid or work opportunities, throughout the school year she debated the merits of allowing her visa to expire and become undocumented. Despite being an outstanding student she considered putting her college aspirations on hold until she found a way to fix her legal standing. Jimin felt isolated and was unsure about where to seek help for her situation. She explains, "No one went through my situation. Even my parents don't know nothing. I only talk to those who went through this situation because they know more than teachers and counselors know." According to Jimin, not even her parents were able to lend support. At times, they made the process more confusing for Jimin by encouraging her to withhold attending college, and, instead, join the army. She explains:

First they said not to go to college, just army first and they found out they take really long, like the process is really long because I don't have a Social Security number and everything. They told me to go to college and then get the Social Security number, then apply to [the] army and then go to [the] army. [Jimin, 12<sup>th</sup> grade]

As the excerpt illustrates, Jimin and her parents struggled to find a path that could potentially lead her to a Social Security number. Of these, the most drastic was to allow their visa to expire in order for Jimin to become undocumented and qualify for financial aid. However, the risks were too high since the family would become legally and financially vulnerable:

I talk to my parents a lot and they said no because it's too risky and I am not even qualified for DACA. So, it's too late and even if I drop my visa, I can go to college cheaper but I can't get a job, I am not guaranteed for a job. [Jimin, 12<sup>th</sup> grade]

Dropping her visa would not yield many benefits for Jimin. She understood that the benefits from becoming undocumented would be temporary because there was no guarantee that she would be able to work after college. Moreover, dropping the visa would prohibit her dad from working as a driver. As the primary breadwinner of the family his income was sorely needed.

Unsurprisingly, Jimin was frustrated about her legal situation. Because she was legally present in the United States, she believed she should be afforded some of the benefits her peers had access to, especially those who were undocumented. She shares, "I was kind of jealous, kind of upset because I have something but they have nothing. How come I have to be mistreated? I am legal but they are not legal. I can report them." In her frustration, she notes that she could report students who were undocumented. Although she had no intention of doing so, her inability to receive support made her feel jealous. For this reason, she sometimes felt that being undocumented was better than having a legal visa. This sentiment became more palpable when Jimin was unable to attend a top public university in California because she could not afford its costs.

#### *Keong: Becoming Undocumented*

When I met Keong, it had almost been a year since he and his family had allowed their visa to expire. I learned that Keong had an older brother who had graduated from City School a

year prior. Keong's older brother had an active student visa at the beginning of his senior year. However, after Keong's family realized that his older brother was ineligible to receive financial assistance or qualify for most scholarships, the family considered dropping their visas. They began the process by consulting and getting the opinion of other individuals:

My dad, he's a tourist guide so he talked to many of the tourist people and he went to a lot of places to find out about it. Their opinions were mostly half and half. Some people said don't drop it. Some people said drop it. So we were really confused too. We talked as a group. And then we met some other families that are in the same position as we are. Same situation as we are in. [Keong, 12<sup>th</sup> grade]

Keong's family received mixed responses about dropping the visa. While Keong's family sought advice from friends and acquaintances, Congress was in the midst of debating a bill that could provide a pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants. It was urgent for the family to make a decision, as Keong recalls, "We heard about the Dream Act, you know it wasn't so sure if it's really coming out, but we talked to the lawyer, and then the lawyer said we should do it. It's better to do it. So we dropped our visa." The family's decision to drop their visa was not made lightly and it remained a cause for worry. Without his student visa, Keong was completely reliant on the passage of the Federal DREAM Act. He comments:

We were really nervous 'cause if the Dream act doesn't work, we don't have anything. We're just going to stay as undocumented forever. But, it's heading more towards having the visa now, right? The Dream Act? I mean there's good stories, good news that it's coming out. Some people say it's not. We're still not sure, so we we're just still nervous, still waiting for it. But we knew that it's going to be better than staying forever as student visa. [Keong, 12<sup>th</sup> grade]

Keong worried that if Congress did not take action he would remain undocumented for the rest of his life. He maintained hope despite not knowing or understanding the fate of the DREAM Act or comprehensive immigration reform in the legislature. At the time of our conversation he firmly believed that being undocumented was a better option, "I think that it's better being

undocumented that staying as a student visa.” Although, he did admit he might not yet fully grasp the consequence of being undocumented because he was still young and in school.

In addition to the advice Keong received about dropping his visa, he felt assured in his decision when he compared his situation with Jimin’s. During the college application process he learned about Jimin’s dilemma. Keong exhibited empathy toward Jimin and listened to her when she needed to talk about her struggles with someone. He shares:

She hasn’t asked me specific things about what she should do, but she tells me like, “I think I have to give up my college life because of my visa status.” She once told me, “my dad didn’t even congratulate me when I first got into [name of college]”... When I heard that it really touched me too. It’s like the more and more I hear about it, like, there are less things to tell her ‘cause no matter how a bad situation I am in, I am still getting more advantages than she does in a way. [Keong, 12<sup>th</sup> grade]

Given the severity and complexity of Jimin’s legal situation, Keong understood that the most he could do was listen to her. In comparison to Jimin, he felt fortunate to be undocumented because it afforded him access to state and institutional aid. For the time being, Keong felt dropping his visa was the right decision. After high school he planned to enroll at a prestigious university in southern California.

Toward the end of high school, students with F-2 visas educational and work prospects become uncertain. Although they are legally present in the U.S. they are categorized as non-immigrants and ineligible for financial aid or employment. However, the international students who I met did not intend to return to their home country. Some were disappointed to learn that they could not access the benefits available to undocumented students. And, while some adjusted their legal status and became legal residents, others were not as fortunate. In the most extreme cases, students such as Keong and their families opted to drop their visa. Despite having no pathway to citizenship they cling on to the hope that Congress will pass comprehensive

immigration reform soon. Meanwhile, they are relegated to the margins of society and are at risk of being deported.

### **Deportations**

In less than the five years, undocumented students in California have witnessed many political gains. From qualifying to receive financial aid to being eligible to apply for a Social Security number, these victories allow them to better integrate into society after graduating from high school. However, undocumented immigrants remain a vulnerable and marginalized group. While undocumented students gained greater access to higher education in some states and qualified to apply for DACA, President Barack Obama oversaw the largest wave of deportations in recent memory. Since taking office in 2009, the Obama administration has been responsible for more than one million deportations (Rosenblum & McCabe, 2014). Massive deportations have disproportionately targeted Latinos and led to family separations that have taken a toll on both U.S. citizens and undocumented immigrants.

The youth in this study grew up at a time when immigration politics polarized the country. At one end of the continuum were states such as California, which granted more legal rights to undocumented immigrants as well as immigration advocates who mobilized to pressure Congress to create a pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants. At the other end, was federal sponsored legislation (e.g., HR 4437) that would increase penalties against undocumented immigrants and individuals who helped them. In addition, the prevalence of work raids, deportations, and the rise of right wing voices demanding to deport anyone who is present without legal documentation have created a sense of fear among immigrant communities.

#### *Participants' Views on Deportations*

Both adults and students were keenly aware of the growth in deportations. Many of the adults associated the issue to the vitriol of current politics related to immigration. Raul's comments capture the sentiment:

I know that there are lots of groups who are pushing the administration to completely halt deportations. And I know that the Obama administration is not doing that. So I know that a lot of this is tied to like the election, that there are elections coming up or whatever, but I'm not sure exactly where the various parties are at, in terms of what their official stands are on immigration right now... [Raul, English teacher and Division 3 advisor]

Despite repeated and ongoing calls to end deportation from immigration advocates he attributed the inaction from the President to the impending mid-term election. In addition, Raul's remarks indicate uncertainty about each political party's stand on immigration. In contrast, Daniel offers a more pointed view on the inaction of policymakers regarding immigration:

Currently, under the Obama administration many more deportations happen than the past... it's just really difficult right now, particularly with a mid-term election going on. The right just keeps moving further to the right about issues on immigration, which is really tough. [Daniel, Math teacher and Division 3 advisor]

According to Daniel, increasing conservative views and the mid-term elections have made it difficult to take action on issues of immigration. The result has been an unprecedented increase in the number of deportations.

Students were cognizant that under the Obama administration there have been more deportations than under any other president. Diana, a U.S.-born student comments, "Instead of keeping more immigrants here, he's deporting more of them. 'Cause with Bush there was a limit per day of immigrants, and now with Obama it's unlimited." As the quote indicates, Diana was well aware of the difference in deportations occurring under President Obama. She feels President Obama has done more to remove immigrants than allowed them to stay. The high numbers of deportations also made Diana believe that there is cap on the number of people being

removed from the country. Similarly to adults, Esteban believed the rise in deportations was due to politics. He explains:

Obama since he was President he's had the most, he's made the most deportation than any other President, and I believe for the fact that maybe the Congress and all the other people are like, you know what, we'll give everyone residency, but only if you kick and clean out the U.S. [Esteban, 12<sup>th</sup> grade]

Esteban speculates that before the president could act on immigration reform and halt deportations, he first needed to remove a certain amount of people. When I asked him what he meant by kicking and cleaning out the U.S., he referenced removing drug traffickers, gang members, and other people who have violated the law. However, Esteban was also aware that people with families who were not criminals were being detained by the system. In his view, this might be the price they had to pay before action was taken by the president. Meanwhile, Esteban and many of his peers, both documented and undocumented worried about the possibility that they, a friend, or a family member could be deported at any moment.

### *Fear of Deportation*

None of the students in the present study reported having a family member who was deported. However, they expressed being fearful and concerned about the possibility of being deported at any moment. Although DACA or having legal papers ameliorated some of these worries for students, they understood that their parents or other family members did not have the same protection. For example, Karla, a U.S-born student, shares her cousin's story:

When there is some branch of immigration that's trying to get rid of people that are undocumented and stuff, I think they just fear that they are going to get taken away. For example, my cousin, he just had his daughter and he says that if he leaves, she is going to foster care and no one is going to be able to take care of her. I think it's things like that we talk about, like them not being able to say, "I am going to stay here with my daughter for the rest of her life," because there is that chance that he might be taken away. [Karla, 12<sup>th</sup> grade]

As the father of an infant daughter, Karla's cousin shared with her that his legal status made him vulnerable to deportation. The conversations Karla had with her cousin made her see the uncertainty many undocumented immigrants live with on a daily basis. Before getting DACA, Isabel also worried about being deported. She comments:

I would like get scared, you know how they say when there's *redadas* (raids), and my mom she would always get scared and I am like, ah mom, don't get scared. At the beginning I would get scared of the police, I was like, "oh my god they're going to come and grab me just like without knowing..." [Isabel, 12<sup>th</sup> grade]

At the time, Isabel's fear was heightened because of the media's work raid coverage. She did not distinguish between ICE agents and police officers, which elevated her fear of being taken away by a cop at any moment.

In an effort to mitigate the risk of deportation, undocumented youth felt they needed to behave and act appropriately at all times. Because undocumented students understood they did not have the same liberties as their peers they were concerned to participate in behavior that could place them or their family at risk of deportation. Danilo shares:

They [undocumented immigrants] have limits to freedom 'cause like I guess I couldn't do this 'cause what if something happens. I get caught and then probably get deported or like if my parents left to work, and we would be left alone, right. I was worried about that. They're worried about us 'cause what if you make a noise and the neighbors have to call the cops and then they'll be like, where's your parents, they're at work, then, you know. [Danilo, 12<sup>th</sup> grade]

The fear of deportation was also present at home. The constant threat of removal worried Danilo when his parents were at work. It was safer for him to follow the rules and do what he was asked from his parents. Rey shares a similar story, "I have sisters so I am trying not to get in trouble. [My parents] are always saying if you're out, if there's trouble try to stay away from it." Undocumented youth such as Rey must also think about how their actions could affect other family members. It was safer for them to avoid situations that could place them at risk.

Unfortunately, there were students and families at City School who were directly affected by the deportation of a family member.

Adults at City School also witnessed the negative impact deportations had on students. Although not common, students who experienced a family separation due to a deportation were deeply troubled. Teachers and administrators struggled to address the issue and support students. Eva recalls teaching a student whose mother had been deported:

Two students have been severely affected by possible or real deportations...and that happened last year and it had a devastating effect on the student. The student just shut down and would not, could not do anything and on one hand, it's my job as her teacher to be able to get her to do things but you have your parent taken away from you and she's angry and you could tell like everyday it poured out of her. And so sometimes you just have to give that kid a safe space to just live and deal with her anger. I mean you're not going to get pass that so, I mean, I definitely have like seen examples of how desperately they can really impact people emotionally even when it's not them, when it's someone they care about. [Eva, Math teacher and Division 3]

In the excerpt, Eva describes how the deportation of her students' parents had a distressing effect on the well being of the student. As a teacher, Eva struggled to engage the student while she mourned the removal of her mother. In working with the student, Eva realized that rather than to reprimand her for withdrawing from school, it was better to provide her with a space where she felt supported and understood. It was clear that the deportation of a loved one might have reaching effects on students. When students disengage from school because of it, they might require additional supports. Without a person equipped with the skills to address the issue, teachers such as Eva have to make individual decisions about how best support students during such a trying time.

### **Immigration Reform**

After months of intense debate, the United States Senate approved its version of immigration reform on June 27, 2013. The close to 1,200-page bill intended to create a pathway

to citizenship for millions of undocumented immigrants currently residing in the country.

However, the bill stalled in the House of the Representatives. By the time I began observations at City School, the momentum that immigration reform had gained had largely dissipated. Still, it was a topic that was on the minds of participants.

It's fall finals week. For their final project, Maricel has asked the students in AP Spanish to find an article on a topic of interest. Students are expected to summarize the article, share their opinion, and answer questions from their classmates. Throughout the week presentations ranged from the legalization of marijuana and the World Cup to gay rights and the war in the Middle East. Luisa, a tenth grade student presents on immigration. She stands in front of the class and begins her presentation by explaining that Obama's uncle, who had been living in the U.S. for decades without legal documentation, had made the news after being arrested for drunk driving and allowed to stay in the country as a legal permanent resident. Luisa raises the question that had it been any other person they would have been deported. She feels that immigration is a timely issue and explains that some of the reasons why immigrants come to the United States is to find economic prosperity, work, and reunite with loved ones. Luisa argues that it is time for the government to create a path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants. As Luisa concludes her presentation a classmate raises her hand and asks whether, "*nuestros recursos se hacen mas agotados* (our resources will be depleted)," if more people are allowed to stay and enter the country. Ana responds that if immigration reform passes than immigrants would be expected to go through an extensive process before being able to become citizens. "*¿En vez de venirse para aca, por que no tratan de arreglar los problemas en su país?* (Instead of coming here, why don't they fix the problems in their country?)" retorts the classmate. Before Luisa is able to answer, Maricel interjects and comments that this is not the time to have a debate. (Field note, December 12)

As the field note illustrates, students hold multiple perspectives on immigration and reform. By and large, the students and adults who I met at City School supported immigration reform that would provide a pathway to citizenship. They noted the importance of the issue and the extent of its impact, as Angela comments, "it affects the economy, it affects schools, it affects healthcare, it affects getting your license." Yet many were concerned that reform had stalled and nothing would be done. Sofia notes, "I worry that it always goes back and forth and then in the end nobody does anything, and kind of election year comes up and then they forget it." It troubled Sofia that politicians' had failed for years to pass a reform bill. The political stalemate

on the issue made some students skeptical about the president's ability to bring about change.

Some expected little action:

I just know last year the president tried to put in an act where it would help people that were here for a certain amount of years get their residency but I don't know, personally I think that it's just all a lie. Presidents say a lot when they want to get reelected and I feel like at the end they are not going to end up helping immigrants. They are going to give everyone false hope... [Karla, 12<sup>th</sup> grade]

The excerpt illustrates Karla's frustration over the false promises made on immigration reform.

Even after a strong Latino turnout in the 2012 Presidential election, many students felt President Obama had not done enough to address one of the most important issues to Latino voters.

Meanwhile, undocumented youth and their parents grew disillusioned about the possibility of any major changes. Gabriela shares:

So, like, 'cause Obama keeps saying that they were going to finally give us the paper. My mom was just like, "I think they just keep playing." She was just like, "They may lose hope. They just keep playing games with us." [Gabriela, 12<sup>th</sup> grade]

Although Gabriela's mom was eager to get legal documents she questioned whether they would be able to get them at all. Across interviews, participants voiced their concern about the way politics has precluded immigration reform. Some felt that because politicians are not marginalized in the same way undocumented immigrants are, they have little incentives to move quickly. Despite setbacks, undocumented youth still held remnants of hope that immigration reform would occur as it meant greater opportunities for them.

### *Creating a Pathway to Citizenship*

A pathway to citizenship meant full integration into American society for many of the study participants. Undocumented youth believed barriers they now face would be gone if they were given access to legal documents. Simply put, they would no longer feel different from any other person in the country.

[Immigration reform] would mean a lot. I mean, that would mean I would feel no different than a person who was born here. That would mean I have something. I have nothing different, so I would stand up to them, be like, no, I am a citizen. [Gan, 12<sup>th</sup> grade]

Among the differences Gan is referring to is the ability to gain legal employment, travel outside of the country, and attend college. Undocumented youth yearned to have the same privileges as their peers. Citizenship meant they and their parents would no longer be assigned to a life in low-wage jobs. For students, in particular, college would become attainable and allow them to reach their life goals. And, for the youth who arrived in the country at an older age, it meant they would be able to visit family members who they had not seen since leaving their home country. Oscar captures the sentiment:

For me it would be, it would be to actually go to college and do the things that I want to do. Visit my family who I haven't seen in quite some years. Be able to do the things that I haven't been able to do. Travel and all that stuff. For my family, my mom, I wouldn't really know, I believe it would mean a better thing for her. Maybe she can get a better job. [Oscar, 10<sup>th</sup> grade]

As the excerpt illustrates, immigration reform would open immense opportunities for Oscar and his family. His wishes and those of his undocumented peers were simple. They wished to be like everyone else. They wanted to feel accepted and be given the opportunity to reach their goals. Esteban encapsulates the feeling regarding creating a pathway to citizenship, "it gives us encouragement for us to succeed and actually have a future. It's so many things." Despite the progress made in California and across the country over the past five years, stark differences remain in the access to resources and supports available to undocumented immigrants. To students and adults at City School, immigration reform was long overdue.

### **Summary of Chapter Findings**

This chapter detailed the manner in which state and federal policies affect the high school experiences and life experiences of undocumented high school students. As illustrated

throughout the chapter issues of immigration and education intersect during students schooling experience, in particular, as they prepare to transition from high school to college and/or work.

State policies such as the California Dream Act and the creation of DACA have eliminated some of the barriers undocumented students encounter in high schools.

Undocumented youth in California qualify to receive institutional and state aid to attend college. Many have also obtained a Social Security number through DACA and are able to legally work to help offset college costs. These changes have raised awareness about the needs of undocumented high school students. Schools, such as City School, play a pivotal role informing students about the resources at their disposal. The California Dream Act and DACA have helped ameliorate some of the obstacles that prevented undocumented students from pursuing higher education or working. However, they have not solved all of their problems.

Despite more financial supports available, undocumented youth continue to struggle to find the money to pay for college. Because they remain ineligible from receiving federal financial aid, they have limited resources compared to their U.S.-born/legally residing peers. As a result, some undocumented youth feel as outsiders in comparison to their classmates. Moreover, not all undocumented youth qualify to apply for DACA. And, for those that do, they quickly learn the limits of their Social Security number when they are unable to use it for FAFSA. Moreover, many youth who have yet to be approved for a work permit through DACA or are ineligible to do so, enter underground workplaces where they are at high risk of being exploited.

Youth who struggled to learn what their documentation meant for their future opportunities were also among the students at City School. International students with F-2 visas explored their options, with some considering and, in some cases, making the decision to become

undocumented in order to qualify for certain public benefits. This matter of documentation added a layer of complexity to how the school responded to the needs of their students.

Ultimately, the fate of the undocumented youth in this study falls within the jurisdiction of the federal government. Students worried about the possibility of deportation or that one of their family members would be deported. At times, educators at City School have had to contend with how to support students who have been affected by family separation because of the deportation of a family member. For this reason, many held hope that the federal government would stop deporting families and create a pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants. Despite skepticism and trepidation, undocumented youth desired to become citizens and be afforded the same opportunities as everyone else.

## **Chapter 5**

### **College-going Supports, Disclosure, and Students' Privacy**

The passage of the California Dream Act and implementation of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) have provided schools with tools to support undocumented students. With new supports available in California, undocumented students are now better situated to attend college or gain lawful employment. To reap the benefits, however, students must be made aware of these resources and be supported by the school throughout the college application process. As such, findings from this chapter detail the way City School addressed the needs of its undocumented student population as well as the needs of students caught in a legal gray area. In particular, I consider how City School incorporates the needs of students dealing with issues of documentation during the college application process, providing insight on the systems and procedures the school has created to support students as they prepare to transition out of high school. It directly responds to the following research question:

How are issues of legal status addressed as high school students prepare to graduate and apply to college?

#### **Developing a College-Going Culture at City School**

Schools play a critical role in helping students meet their goal of pursuing higher education. Through academically rigorous courses, quality teaching, and social supports schools help students and their families build a strong foundation for a college-going culture (Oakes, 2003; Alvarez & Mehan, 2005; Mehan 2012). In doing so, schools equip students with resources, networks, and dispositions to pursue a college education and succeed in their postsecondary pursuits. During the academic year, City School prioritized the development of its college-going culture. While the quality of instruction and academic supports are critical

components of creating a college-going culture, here, I primarily focus on the informational aspects and supports during the college application process.

### *Developing a College-Going Culture*

As part of an intensive accreditation process, City School adopted increasing college preparation and enrollment as one of its goals for the year. To increase students' access to information and provide additional college preparation activities, the school expanded its college center. Emily, a part-time AmeriCorps Vista volunteer, oversaw the college center. In her intended role, she was responsible for helping the school develop and sustain a college-going infrastructure. However, given the high need to support seniors during the college application process, Emily dedicated most of her time to working directly with students. In the fall semester, she conducted one-on-one interviews with seniors to assess their needs and to offer individualized support during the college application process. Emily also helped students sign-up for the SAT and ACT exams, coordinated college visits, and hosted events where students received assistance on their college applications.

To help coordinate college-going efforts across the school, Emily collaborated with Division 3, advisory teachers and the academic counselor, Amanda. As part of the Advisory program, the school divided students into three divisions: Division 1 was comprised of 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders, Division 2 included 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> graders, and Division 3 was comprised of 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> graders. Advisory was intended to help foster more supportive relationships between the teacher and student. With a mix of juniors and seniors in each advisory, teachers were able to conduct personal check-ins and provide the support they needed to navigate the college preparation process. In addition, the 12<sup>th</sup> grade English teachers dedicated a class unit on writing the college personal statement. As part of their creative writing, seniors were asked to think critically about

who they were and pick an aspect of their life to write about. Eventually, these writing exercises became initial drafts of their college personal statements.

The burgeoning college-going culture permeated across the school. Emily comments, “I think everybody at this school, staff, everybody is really supportive of students applying to college.” By including teachers, administrators, and volunteers in the college-going process the school efforts were better aligned:

You had the English teachers working on it, you had the advisors working on it, you had the counseling, we brought in any volunteers who were working on it. So, I just felt like the campus and the school did a better job of concentrated coordinated efforts to help students apply to college. [Lisa, English teacher]

Extending college-going supports beyond the work of the college counselor allowed the school to provide individualized guidance to students. As a small school, it was also feasible for teachers to help reach the entire senior class. Raul explains City School’s approach to developing its college-going culture:

I think at this school the kids are much more – they’re much less numbers and they’re much more individuals and that it has forced us to look at each kid individually and know what they need to go to college. And so I think that that has helped us to create a strong culture around pushing kids to go to college that is actually very effective because it’s not – there’s kind of a generalized push that I think happens at most schools. But here we’re trying to create individualized paths for different kids. And through our advisory program, we’re able to target these groups of seniors in smaller numbers. [Raul, English teacher and Division 3 advisor]

Rather than speak about college in broad terms, the school made an effort to target information to students in a way that would be most helpful. Although more time intensive, working individually with students permitted adults to recommend an ideal college path. These types of supports were most common in the college center through the one-on-one interviews or in advisory.

Students noted the school's efforts to support their college goals. As the third class to graduate from City School, the school's work on college preparation had improved immensely. The majority of students felt the school was prepared and supported them throughout the college application and decision process. Danilo notes the improvement:

I feel like the school is really prepared 'cause I talked about it with my sister and she was like the first graduate, right, so she's like, she told me, "you guys have it better 'cause the school is prepared," and they weren't really prepared for their class. So they had things a little bit late. [Danilo, 12<sup>th</sup> grade]

By the time students in the class of 2014 became seniors, City School was better equipped to provide them with the help necessary to apply for college. The personalized attention they received made students feel like adults cared. Liu Yang compares her experience at City School with her experience at her former school:

My old high school, they don't care about students. They have to do SAT by themselves. Teachers don't care about those stuff and we don't have meetings like helping with colleges. We don't have any of that kind of stuff. [Liu Yang, 12<sup>th</sup> grade]

In contrast to her previous school, Liu Yang felt that teachers at City School were helpful and genuinely cared about supporting students to reach college. As an immigrant student, and the first in her family to attend college, the support she received from her counselors and teachers lessened the stress and worries she felt about college. In conjunction with providing students with information about college, students such as Liu Yan emphasized the care teachers and counselors demonstrated while doing so. This quality, as I will show later in the chapter, was particularly important for working with undocumented students and developing trust.

#### *Developing College-Going Systems: Informing Students About College*

The majority of students at City School will be the first in their family to attend college. As an AmeriCorps Vista volunteer and the designated college counselor, Emily was tasked with developing systems to support the dissemination of college information to all students.

However, the majority of her time was spent working with seniors on their college applications and informing them about their college options. Eva, notes students increased awareness about college:

I think what is strong is the awareness that we're beginning to build about the importance of going to college. I think we have a lot of students this year who were very much like, "I never thought about applying to college in ninth grade," who did. And who got in or who at least seem to be going to community college. [Eva, Math teacher and Senior advisor]

Eva's comment suggests that the school's emphasis on college has led students who did not originally think about college to apply and plan to attend. At the start of the school year, a number of students were skeptical about applying to college. In part, their reluctance stemmed from having a lack of information they needed earlier in high school.

Adults at City School recognized more work was needed to support their college-going efforts. Throughout the academic year, the school focused on preparing seniors for their college applications by offering information workshops for them and their parents. Senior advisory teachers were heavily involved in keeping track of students progress and offering guidance throughout the process. However, the school hoped to create an infrastructure in order to reach all students in strategic and helpful ways.

We're not there yet, I mean I think we did a lot this year, at least in having students apply to colleges, and the college kickoff we had and then we really kind of put that out there for everyone to know, in parts. So I think we're starting to work towards that, but there is still a lot of infrastructure that we need to build and I think some of it is personnel, but some of it is to really think about how do we build that structure and system to support students to really make it to college and then graduate from college. [Sofia, Principal]

According to Sofia, while developing students' college-going identity, the school needed to also prepare students to be college-ready to succeed upon graduating from City School. However, information about college did not always reach students in a timely way.

In many cases, students did not receive information about college eligibility until their junior or senior year of high school. It created a dilemma for the school when they were figuring out the type of support students needed throughout the application process. Emily explains, “I think they need to be learning about college before they’re juniors and seniors. They need to know the A-G requirements...they don’t necessarily know the implications if they don’t have one of [the requirements].” Because the information did not reach students early in high school, Emily and the academic counselor spent time at the beginning of the year informing students about college requirements. Isabel did not seriously think about college until the 11<sup>th</sup> grade, she says, “When we got to 11th grade, that’s where you get more into it. That’s where you have to start planning out the colleges you would like to go to.” Although Isabel was satisfied with the information she received, specifically, the workshops and college trips the school offered, other students felt blindsided when they received information about college during their junior year:

I think they didn’t give us a lot of information until we had to apply, to be honest. Months before they just told us “You have to apply this date” in different schools and we did research and stuff. In 9th and 10th grade I felt like... I don’t know about 9th because I wasn’t here but in 10th grade I felt like they didn’t give us a lot of information until we became juniors and that’s when they started telling us to get college ready. [Karla, 12<sup>th</sup> grade]

Karla was college-eligible, but felt lost throughout the college application process because she felt unprepared. Rather than talk to Emily or teachers, she went to her older sister to complete and submit her college applications because she felt the counselors and teachers were overburdened. Students, such as Karla, who did not regularly frequent the college center relied on friends for information and support. Itzel explains:

In 9th, 10th I didn’t really receive that much [information]. But since I was a junior and senior, I didn’t receive that much information from like the teachers, it was mostly from my friends. How we’re talking and how they had siblings that went to college. And again we tried to help each other and from Ms. Collins yeah from Ms. Sanders (Emily), but not a lot from the teachers. [Itzel, 12<sup>th</sup> grade]

Itzel's excerpt indicates that despite increased efforts from counselors and teachers to talk about college and help students, there were still some students who were not receiving the information they needed to make informed decisions about college.

As a way to improve the way information was shared with students, Amanda believed the school needed to be more strategic about the way they talked to students regarding their college opportunities. Amanda reflects on the way the school could better guide students in the future:

I think what we have to do is go back and look at how we did and be more strategic as far as setting goals for each kid individually and looking at where they in their index. Looking at each individual index at the end of their junior year, knowing what that is, knowing what schools they can apply to, looking at them as a young man or a young lady or a student and looking at whether they need the small setting, big setting, where they're going to be most successful and being more strategic and looking at the school, looking for a school specific for the students. [Amanda, Academic Counselor]

Amanda felt it was necessary to provide additional support. Although it seemed there was more "hand-holding" happening, she believed the school needed to offer and maintain frequent communication with students in order to scaffold the process and make it less daunting.

Many students were the first in their family to attend college. As such, learning about college as juniors and seniors was sometimes overwhelming. At times, it was difficult to process the information the school provided about college. Esteban explains, "They were giving so much information, a lot in 11th grade. I guess I got pressured by it, and I got intimidated because of so many things they were asking for." Esteban wanted to attend college since starting high school, but knew very little about being college eligible and how to apply for college. Despite disseminating information and offering support, some adults felt that the increased societal expectation to enroll in college pressured students to continue onto postsecondary education immediately after high school:

I think in some ways it's created a lot of pressure on the kids. For a lot of them it is something that nobody else has talked about in their families, nobody else has

experienced in their families and there is this expectation that they're going to do it, but yet they just feel overwhelmed by the things that need to happen in order to get there. [Ana, History teacher and Division 3 advisor]

Because the infrastructure to support a college-going culture was still being developed and the barriers students encounter outside of school, Ana worried it might be unreasonable to expect all students to apply and enroll in college at this point. The sentiment on the difficulties students encounter was shared by other adults and went beyond a specific student population. Emily explains:

I think that in general, I don't think it's just the undocumented [students]. I think a lot of the kids in the school just don't know the whole college process and don't know what needs to be done. I don't think its strictly undocumented students. [Emily, College Counselor]

Although undocumented students encountered additional burdens while applying to college, the lack of knowledge about college and how to navigate the system applied to all students. Still, undocumented students encountered unique challenges in preparing for college.

### *College-Going and Undocumented Students*

City School enrolled a high number of immigrant-origin youth. Among this group were a significant number of undocumented students who required additional assistance in navigating the college application process. In general, adults were aware of the precarious legal predicament of this student population and consciously worked to address their needs. However, as the vignette below illustrates, the needs of undocumented students were not always touched upon when college representatives visited the campus to discuss their application and admissions process.

In early fall, college representatives visited City School. In one of the first college visits, every senior was invited to attend a presentation from a large, public university during their advisory period. On the day of the presentation, students enter the Multi Purpose Room and take

a seat. A young Latina greets the students and lets them know she will be discussing admissions, financial aid, and college/campus life. She starts by asking students what comes to mind when they hear the word college. Students shout out answers such as parties, the freshman 15, and rigorous course work. The speaker laughs and goes on to talk about her university's admissions process. She stresses that the university admits well-rounded individuals, and on average, their freshman hold an unweighted GPA of 3.88. A couple students are surprised and let out a sigh. However, she clarifies that GPA is only one of the many criteria they consider while reviewing student applications. She mentions they have a holistic applications review process and consider different aspects of students' lives, in addition to GPA and SAT or ACT scores. The presenter cites community service as an important factor and asks the students whether they have done some type of community service. The majority of students raise their hands and a couple of them share some of the organizations they have been involved in.

Towards the end of the session, the presenter talks about financial aid. She asks students if they know what a grant is. Students comment that it is a type of financial award. The presenter agrees and notes that it is money they don't have to pay back. As the session comes to an end she hands students an information handbook and reviews some of the scholarships available. She quickly highlights a couple of scholarships targeted at Latina/o students and provides the group with a web address to learn more about financial aid. The presentation was informative and energized some students to begin to work on their personal statements. However, it did not address issues important to different student groups. While the college representative noted scholarships available for Latina/o students, she did not mention anything about undocumented students.

This also occurred during other college information sessions. For example, after a visit from a private college, Emily shared with me that she asked about admissions and scholarships for undocumented students. According to Emily, the representative responded that they considered undocumented students as international students and did not offer them financial assistance.

Although City School tried to address the needs of undocumented students, the information sessions, workshops or college fairs they encouraged students to attend did not always address supports for this student population. This type of invisibility discouraged undocumented students and made them feel like outsiders. Gan explains:

I felt like the undocumented students were mostly left out. And then when they're in class, you know the college people come and talk about [college], and like, college fairs, I would be like, "oh, do you guys accept undocumented students?" and then they'll be like, "yeah, and then they were like, there's some information about it." and then I look into it and then it's like, the money problem was like twice or three times. [Gan, 12<sup>th</sup> grade]

Gan noticed that information relevant to undocumented students was seldom discussed. Even when a college representative mentioned she was eligible for financial assistance, Gan felt college remained out of reach because the financial costs remained high. In addition, there was a lack of support and guidance from college representatives. It made Gan feel disheartened about her college prospects. As a result, some students questioned their ability to attend college after they realized they had limited options. Maricel explains, "They lose hope, but that's when they come in and I try to talk to them, that it is not impossible, that you can be successful even though you feel like it's not going to happen." As a result, undocumented students benefitted from additional words of encouragement to navigate the uncertainty of their college prospects.

To supplement the workshops and college fairs students regularly attended, City School hosted information sessions for undocumented students. Students were called out of class or

invited during weekend sessions to learn about various types of resources and opportunities available. Rey comments:

I think these workshops really help people. They call you down, if you were born outside of the U.S., it wasn't saying that you were undocumented, but they just called down the people who were and they gave a presentation about going to college. That it's not hard for you to go to college. It was in, I think in 10th grade or 11th grade, so I guess the school really supports that...I think the most helpful one was when an organization came down, it was on a weekend and they explained how AB 540 changed their lives, 'cause they were already in college, but the deferred action wasn't in place yet. And when they came in they explained how it helped [Rey, 12<sup>th</sup> grade]

As Rey explains, students who were born outside of the U.S. were invited to attend the workshops. Rather than identify individual students who were undocumented, the school invited any student who was born outside of the country. This approach made it safer for students to attend the sessions, should they not want to reveal their legal status. One of the most powerful sessions Rey attended was when undocumented college students visited the campus to talk about their college experience. In addition to learning about laws such as AB 540 and the California Dream Act, Rey heard directly from students who had benefited from these policies.

Through information sessions or individual conversations, there was a concerted effort to educate undocumented students about the resources in college. Students were thankful about the school's college support efforts:

I was really thankful for that 'cause they didn't put us behind. We were always the priority to them. So I was really able to like approach more into those undocumented society, how we can get through. I learned that we still can go to college no matter. [Keong, 12<sup>th</sup> grade]

Keong appreciated the way counselors and teachers ensured they received the information they needed to navigate the college-going process. The constant support from City School made Keong feel that undocumented students were being taken care of and seen as a priority.

The increased focus on college going and supports for undocumented students even reached younger students. During my conversation with Oscar, a 10<sup>th</sup> grade student, he mentioned he felt satisfied with the information he had received about college. He explains:

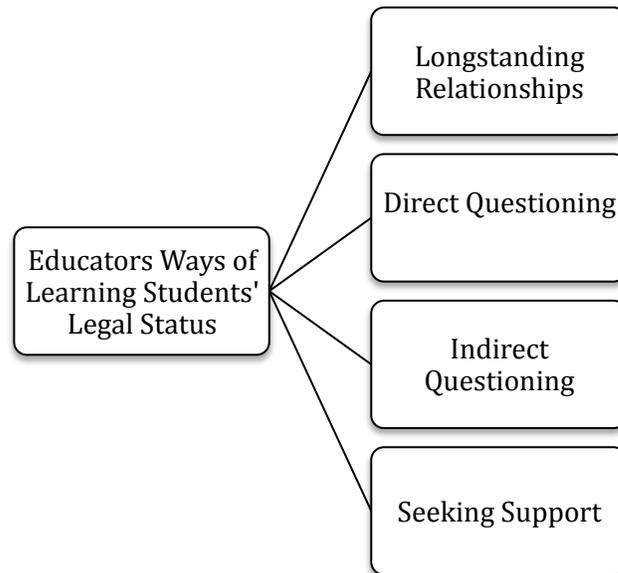
I think I've received pretty much what I need based on how to get into college, what do you need to get into college, if you're undocumented what are some of the things that are provided for you as an undocumented students. What are the benefits in the state of California, financial aid, loans and all that stuff. [Oscar, 10<sup>th</sup> grade]

Oscar still worried about financing his college expenses, but felt at ease knowing there were some supports available. Hearing about college from his teachers and counselor throughout the year made him consider his options after high school. While he still had a lot of questions about college, he felt less overwhelmed when he thought about college.

### **Educators Ways of Knowing: Disclosing Legal Status**

As a way to support all students during the college application process, adults worked closely with seniors. Through one-on-one interviews, a survey administered in the English class, and advisory, the school counselors and teachers worked collectively to identify appropriate resources for students. Among these resources were supports for undocumented students. To effectively assist undocumented students, it was important for educators to know their legal status. There were four ways adults at City School learned about students' legal status: 1) longstanding relationships, 2) direct questioning, 3) indirect questioning, and 4) students seeking support (Figure 5.1). Each type of disclosure afforded students different levels of agency and comfort when discussing their legal status with teachers and counselors. These interactions also highlight the level of trust and care schools must develop and employ in order for undocumented students to feel safe to disclose their legal status and know they will be protected and treated fairly.

Figure 5.1. Educators Ways of Learning Students' Legal Status



### *Longstanding Relationships*

Since entering City School, most students developed a trusting relationship with at least one adult. Students relied on the support of the adult and felt safe confiding in them about personal issues, be it academic or social. As such, even before the start of their senior year, many students had disclosed their legal status to a counselor or teacher.

Keong's transition to high school was difficult. Despite excelling academically, he had a difficult time making friends and socializing with students of a different race. A self-proclaimed, "troublemaker" during his freshman year, Keong was often called into the office for fighting. At the time, Amanda, the academic counselor, also provided behavioral support to students. Throughout the year she worked with Keong and listened to his problems. As time passed, Keong realized she cared about him and changed his behavior. He credits Amanda for helping him change and for not giving up on him. Even after he stopped meeting with Amanda for misbehaving, Keong maintained a close relationship with her and visited her office frequently. He explains, "Ms. Collins [Amanda], she was always my support, whenever I had troubles, she

always helped me to get through it.” When it was time to think about college and decide what to do about his international visa, Keong sought Amanda’s support. He felt she was someone who he could trust and offer him sound advise.

Once students established a trusting relationship with adults, many felt comfortable sharing their legal status. The comfort to disclose their legal status was sometimes influenced by the personal stories adults shared about their lives. For example, Maricel, the school’s Spanish teacher, was candid with students about her immigration journey and being undocumented when she was in college. Her personal stories resonated strongly with students and helped create strong bonds, Isabel explains:

...she came here undocumented. She went to college undocumented, too. So I feel like this connection with her. We all do. The people that know her. So, I feel really comfortable with her about it and showing her. And she tells me “oh, do this, this is how it works.” [Isabel, 12<sup>th</sup> grade]

Listening to Maricel’s immigration journey and struggles about being an undocumented immigrant made Isabel feel comfortable to share her legal status. During lunch, Isabel and a few of her friends would sit and talk in Maricel’s room. They developed a strong bond with Maricel and talked with her about what was happening in their lives. Maricel listened to the students and offered advice when needed. Undocumented students, in particular, connected with Maricel because they knew she understood their struggle, Rafael adds:

*Con Ms. Diaz [Maricel] con ella me sentio comodo hablar de eso porque ella tambien fue indocumentada. Tambien tuvo una experiencia similar a la mia, mas dificil pero de esa manera me identifico yo con ella. Ella me habla de su experiencia y yo le hablo de la mia. Me sentio seguro por que se que ella no va usar mi informacion o mis cosas para algo mal. Ella entiende, entonces ahí me sentio bien. [Rafael, 12<sup>th</sup> grade]*

With Ms. Diaz [Maricel] I feel comfortable talking about that because she was also undocumented. She also had an experience similar to mine, more difficult, but that’s how I identify with here. She talks to me about her experience and I tell her about mine. I feel safe because I know that she will not use my information for something bad. She understands so I feel good. [Rafael, 12<sup>th</sup> grade]

After learning about Maricel’s story and developing a relationship with her, Rafael felt she was someone he could trust. Moreover, it was important for Rafael to feel that Maricel or any other adult would not use misuse his personal information. In time, students recognized that adults at City School made a conscious effort to build relationships with students based on trust. David comments, “The trust we have with teachers also is something that I really do admire here in this school.” In regards to issues of documentation, teachers were aware of their need to be sensitive.

Lisa explains:

I think it’s powerful for me. I feel like they trust me enough to admit that to me and I think this goes without saying but it doesn’t really change my attitude towards that student. I think what it does is it actually starts my wheel turning because then I start thinking about all the things that they need help with going to college. [Lisa, English teacher]

Lisa recognized that students’ decision to disclose their legal status to her was based on trust. Learning about students’ legal status also helped her think about the type of supports students needed to prepare for college.

In time, adults supporting students during difficult times in their life or sharing their personal stories, made undocumented youth feel safe to openly discuss their struggles with documentation. It also gave students agency in the decision to talk about being undocumented. The relationships students had with adults empowered them to be open about their legal status. Ultimately, it was their decision to talk about this personal issue.

### *Direct Questioning*

Other times, adults learned about students’ legal status by directly asking them about it. The one-on-one interviews were used to assess seniors’ college application progress (i.e., SAT ACT, and plans) and help narrow the colleges they were considering applying to. One by one, seniors were summoned to the college center. Each student sat with Emily or a volunteer to

answer questions about their college plans. In addition to assisting students, the interviews also served as a means to ask and learn about students' legal status. When a student arrived for the interview, Emily handed them an index card to answer a series of questions. Among these was the question, "Are you a United States Citizen?" During my visits to the college center I witnessed multiple exchanges where students disclosed their legal status in this manner:

After Emily hands Esteban the note card he asks her what he is suppose to do. Emily walks him through the question and asks for a phone number, he says he doesn't have one. When they get to the citizenship question, she asks, "Are you a U.S. citizen?" He seems unsure and mentions that they are looking into it. Emily asks if this is because of his "situation" and adds whether he has DACA. Again, he is unsure. Esteban mentions that the system is helping him out. Emily seems a little hesitant to probe, but Esteban says it's okay since nobody else is here. (He is okay with me being in the room). She asks if he is getting help from his foster home. Esteban says yes, but again, he's not exactly sure what paperwork they have submitted. Emily tells Esteban that they need to figure out it before he fills out his college applications. He tells her that he has social worker, but it's difficult to get a hold of her. Emily offers to talk to her to see if she can get the information they need. [Field note, September 24]

Esteban's involvement in the foster care system made his legal situation confusing. At the time of his one-on-one interview he barely knew Emily. Although Esteban did not flinch when Emily asked him about his citizenship status, the question brought to light additional issues needed to be addressed. In particular, the way being in the foster care system would affect his legal standing and college applications. At the moment, Esteban could not provide a definite answer about his citizenship status, but continued to meet with Emily throughout the semester to get support.

The majority of students easily answered the citizenship question. However, only being able to respond yes/no to the question confused some students. In part, students who were born outside of the U.S. but who had an international student visa or green card had some initial difficulty answering the question:

Two male students walk into the college center. Emily greets them and asks them to fill out a survey to gauge how much they know about college. She also asks them to fill out a note card that inquires about their citizenship status. A Korean male student looks over the card. He looks a bit confused and informs Emily that he was not born in the U.S., but has legal residence. She instructs him to indicate that he has a legal visa. (Field note, September 24)

Emily notices that Minsuh indicated that she is not a citizen. She asks Minsuh if she is an AB 540 student. Minsuh explains that she think she is, but is not sure and will talk to her mom about her situation. Emily tells her that it is important for her to be certain about her legal status because she may be able to take advantage of the California Dream Act. Minsuh asks Emily by when she would need to know Emily responds that after January 1 but before March 2 so she can fill out her financial aid. She adds that Minsuh should know before she applying to college. Emily asks whether she plans to put that she is undocumented on her applications. Minsuh is not sure, and wants to know if she could change what she puts in her application if her legal status changes. Emily tells she could look into it. It might take some work, but for now, Emily tells her, it seems that she is AB 540. [Field note, September 25]

In the first example, the citizenship question confused the student. He pondered over the question before notifying Emily that although he was not a U.S. citizen he was not undocumented. The student seemed unbothered by the question and answered the rest of the questions before returning the card to Emily. In the second example, Emily noted that Minsuh had indicated she was not a U.S. citizen. Upon learning that Minsuh was not a citizen, Emily considered she might be undocumented. Minsuh was uncertain about her legal status and needed to talk to her mom about her documentation. The need to complete her college applications and prepare her parents tax information to submit financial aid applications it was exacerbated Minsuh's need to clarify her legal standing. Minsuh agreed to talk with her mother and follow up with Emily.

Across student interviews, Emily felt students were comfortable about disclosing their legal status. It is possible students might have felt at ease because the school has worked to create a campus climate that was based on trust, personalization, and care. Perhaps Emily limited work with undocumented students and evolving understanding of the issue made it

difficult to ascertain students' reactions to being directly asked about their legal status. Still, Emily felt confident students were unbothered by the question. She shares:

The majority of the students it was just like any other question you'd ask, like, "no I don't have documents." They would give you the stories of how they came here and why they came here. A lot of them, a couple of them, their parents came as students and they overstayed their visas... [Emily, College Counselor]

The interview process gave Emily access into students' immigration stories and helped her develop an understanding of how students arrived to the country. During these interactions, Emily informed students that knowing about their legal status would allow her to provide them with better support. As such, some students such as Danilo were not alarmed about being asked about their legal status, he says, "I was like I am not a citizen, I wasn't trippin. I am not worried about it. They were like, "alright, cool." In general, students understood they were being asked about their citizenship in order to get help:

*Si, me han preguntado en el college center. Me dicen que si, como cuando me preguntaron si tenia papeles porque tenia que ver si iba aplicar al Dream Act o aplicar a FAFSA o a que colegios podia ir. Si podia ir a la universidad, todo eso. [Rafael, 12<sup>th</sup> grade]*

Yes, they have asked me in the college center. They tell me if I, like when they asked me if I had papers because they had to see if I was going to apply for the Dream Act or the FAFSA or to what colleges I was able to go to. If I was able to go to a university, and all of that. [Rafael, 12<sup>th</sup> grade]

Rafael comments that after being asked about his documentation status he was told by Emily she needed to know to determine whether he would submit a FAFSA or Dream Act application. As a result, Rafael felt comfortable sharing his legal status.

Although the majority of students talked openly with Emily about their legal status, there were some students who preferred not to talk about being undocumented. Because students were at different stages of making sense of their legal status, some preferred to only talk about their legal status with Emily. She explains:

In general most of the students were ok sharing their status if they were undocumented. They were a few students that didn't, one or two students that didn't quite know what their status was, and there were other students who had visas F-1 or F-2 visas that questioned whether they should be undocumented or not, and they couldn't be. So I think there was one or two, one or two students that just really didn't talk about it at all, and didn't want me to share their information at all with anyone because they seemed as if they were embarrassed of their status. That was probably two, I don't really know what the total number was, two students out of all of them. [Emily, College counselor]

According to Emily, a small number of students felt uncomfortable discussing issues of documentation. Because a power relationship exists between an adult and a student, I was concerned whether students felt forced to disclose their legal status. When I asked Emily about this concern, she responded:

I don't think they felt forced at all. I think one particular student just really didn't want to talk about it very much, but was okay with answering the question. The other student, I think he kind of like skirted the issue a little bit. [Emily, College counselor]

To make students feel at ease, Emily reassured them she would not share the information with anybody else. Still, it was difficult for some students to be asked about their legal status in such a direct way. Itzel comments, "It's like weird 'cause I would like to say yes, but I have to say no, I am not. So it feels uncomfortable. It feels sad. You have to say no, even though you want to say yes." Itzel felt it was strange she was asked about her legal status. Although she understood she was asked about her legal status to receive support, the question made Itzel uncomfortable. She wanted to say she had legal documentation, but her inability to do so made her uneasy.

The majority of students talked openly about their legal status with Emily. However, as Emily notes in the excerpt above, there was a group of students who did not feel comfortable discussing their legal status. Although it is not possible to ascertain whether those students felt forced to disclose their legal status during the interview, Itzel's comment suggests that even students who are open about their legal status might sometimes feel apprehensive talking about it. Despite the genuine intent to support undocumented students during the college application

process, asking students directly about their legal status diminishes their agency to decide when to disclose their legal status to an adult. As such, other approaches might be better suited.

### *Indirect Questioning*

In the course of observations, undocumented students disclosed their legal status to adults when they were asked questions related to college. The first indirect way students disclosed their legal status occurred when they completed a survey administered by Lisa and Raul in their senior English classes. The second way occurred through informal interactions such as when adults discussed with students about getting involved in extracurricular activities or when they assisted seniors with college applications.

While Emily was conducting individual meetings with students in the College Center, the English teachers administered an in-class survey to all of the seniors. The intent of the survey was to inform teachers about students' college application progress, have students list the colleges they planned to apply to, serve as a forum for students to ask questions, determine whether students had met with the academic counselor, and learn about students concerns in relation to college. Rather than directly asking students about citizenship, the English survey took an indirect approach. For example, a survey item asked, "Do you have any special circumstances that should be considered when applying to college?" Students were prompted to check items among a number of options. They included: First in your family to go to college, Undocumented (AB 540), Low income family, LGBT, Student Visa, and a final option to write-in a response. This approach allowed students to decide whether they wanted to disclose their legal status.

Lisa and Raul created the survey. After working for years with immigrant students they wanted to find ways to address the needs of this population. Although they knew it was

important to know students' legal status, they understood it was a sensitive topic. Lisa comments:

This has been a really tricky subject for many years for us and because I participate a lot with the data collection process around here. I think we are still struggling with this topic... The information that the students input is actually just shared amongst the teachers ... Actually at that time the survey was just between, I think, the other English teacher and I and the counseling staff, so the college counselor and the academic counselor. [Lisa, English teacher]

In addition to finding appropriate ways to learn about students' legal status, Lisa was also concerned about how information about students was shared. To maintain students' privacy, only Raul and her had initial access to the survey information. Eventually, the academic and college counselors were granted access to the survey as well. Moreover, allowing students to check a box gave them agency about disclosing their legal status. Raul explains:

When [we] created that survey, we sort of left it up to student to choose whether or not to disclose. It sort of underlines this idea that if the student felt comfortable talking about it, then we were going to embrace it. And embrace that because we didn't want to create or further the environment of "don't ask, don't tell," which I think is very prevalent. And encourage students to be very public about their undocumented status because it might encourage other undocumented students to sort of come out essentially. But it is something that's tricky and I don't think we're at a place where undocumented students feel completely comfortable, talking about status in public, maybe a few do but it's still definitely a work-in-progress. [Raul, English teacher and Division 3 advisor]

Raul's excerpt suggests that the option to check the "Undocumented (AB 540)" box gives students' agency regarding their legal status. By providing students a space to be open about their documentation status, Raul believes it helps create a more welcoming environment. In comparing students' legal status to a "don't ask, don't tell" approach, he recognizes that many schools and undocumented students remain unsure as to how to best approach the issue. Raul recognizes that although some students feel comfortable speaking openly about their legal status, there are still many undocumented youth who do not. This creates a situation where adults must be careful in the way they approach and discuss the issue.

A second indirect way adults learned about students legal status was when adults assisted students with their college applications. While helping students during the college application process, some teachers learned they were undocumented. Eva comments, “ that’s the first time I learned of the status of some of my students simply because they had to indicate it on their college application where they had to discuss residency and things like that.” As a Division 3 advisory teacher, Eva had known some of the students for at least a year. It was not until she was helping a student and they could not answer the residency question did she learn about their legal status. Diego shares a similar experience:

One way some students have confided in me what their status is and a way of finding that out was actually going through the application for college in November. Asking students to fill in, “oh, where’s you Social Security number?” And then kids are like, “I don’t have one or I don’t know.” And then they let me know, “oh Mister I am undocumented.” That’s a good starting place because you know the information is asked of them. [Diego, Math teacher and Division 3 advisor]

As part of most college applications, applicants are asked to provide a Social Security number. Although having a Social Security number is not a requirement to submit an application at public universities in California, most students who have one, provide it. Therefore, it is common for students to be asked for one. As such, while helping with college applications, Diego inquired about students’ Social Security number. It was during these interactions where students told him they were undocumented. Daniel considered this to be something positive because it made him aware about the type of support the student needed.

During the college application process, some students also disclosed to teachers they were undocumented by informing them they were not submitting a FAFSA. These types of disclosures tended to occur when a teacher or another adult would ask about their college plans. Itzel recalls:

Well they said that if I was going to go to college... if I was applying to FAFSA. And I said no. They said, why, so I had to tell them. They said like, that I can get help too, it's just that we have to look. [Itzel, 12<sup>th</sup> grade]

It's important to note that Itzel felt she "had" to tell the person asking she was unable to submit a FAFSA because she was undocumented. After disclosing her legal status, she was told she could still get support, but would have to look for it. Itzel felt uneasy talking about her legal status, but did not know what else to say. Isabel also disclosed her legal status after being asked about financial aid:

Well, my math teacher 'cause I have her for math and advisory so now that I started applying to colleges she asked if I had applied to FAFSA and I was like, "I did not apply to FAFSA, I applied to the Dream Act." And then she was like, "oh, okay, you're done with everything?" And I was like, I am set. And she's like, "oh, ok." I mean, we didn't talk about it, like if I am an immigrant, but by saying that I applied to Dream Act, she knows that. [Isabel, 12<sup>th</sup> grade]

During the college application process, Isabel informed her teacher she was undocumented. However, she never uttered the word "undocumented". Instead, Isabel told her teacher that she was submitting a California Dream Act application. By saying she applied to the California Dream Act, it was understood that Isabel was undocumented and they both simply moved on

### *Seeking Support*

Throughout the college application process a number of undocumented students disclosed their legal status to adults when seeking support. The copious amount of information available to students overwhelmed them at times. As their concern about college grew, they approached a teacher or a counselor for help. Amanda comments, "They feel like they can't go to college...mostly because they've heard wrong information." Once students revealed their legal status to her, Amanda informed them about their college prospects and rectified some of the misinformation they had heard. It is also during the college application process where the school

see's an increased number of undocumented students disclose their legal status. Angela explains:

It definitely spikes when we're doing the applications and the financial aid because people are like, yeah, you know that kid he is stressed out because of this and this and this. And we usually know who those students are because they visit the office very often. And they are talking with their teachers about their concerns about financial aid or something. [Angela, Assistant Principal]

The stress of applying to college coupled with concerns related to issues of documentation was difficult to deal with for many undocumented students. They visited the office to ask questions about the college process and financing their college costs.

Undocumented students approached counselors and teachers because the school had made an effort to address their needs. Even students who were U.S.-born or legally residing noticed the support the school was offering undocumented students. Minsuh comments, "The school actually engages people through the Dream Act. So, people come out with their status and ask for help and I think this school really spreads out information about the Dream Act." In one example, during her junior year, Minsuh's math teacher pointed to a poster with information about the California Dream Act. He paused the lesson for a few minutes and answered questions from a few students. According to Minsuh it was these types of isolated incidents that encouraged some undocumented students to reveal their legal status to an adult.

To receive better support during the college application process, undocumented students needed to be open about their legal status with adults. However, students' comfort level varied across individuals. For example, Victor disclosed his legal status to anyone who could offer him help. When I asked him who at the school knew he was undocumented, he said, "Most of the teachers 'cause I needed help doing my college applications. And then they would help me out." Other students were more cautious about who they sought help from. Before revealing his legal

status to a person, Rey made sure it was someone he could trust, “Because those people would help me the most and it would be easier for them to help me if they know the situation, what’s going on and stuff. And I could trust them.” As a result, only a few adults knew he was undocumented. In Rey’s view, it was only necessary for adults to know he was undocumented if they could provide some support. These types of interactions were also typical when they applied for financial aid. Pablo shares, “*Como tenemos que aplicar para FAFSA entonces le tuve que decir que no tenia papeles. Entonces ella fue la que me explico que tenia que aplicar para AB 540* (Since we had to apply to FAFSA, so I had to tell her I didn’t have papers). So, she was the one who explained to me that I had to apply for the [California Dream Act].” When Pablo learned he needed a Social Security number to apply to FAFSA he revealed to his college counselor that he did not have “papers.” He was then told he could apply for the California Dream Act.

### **The College Application Process**

Most seniors at City School spent the fall semester focused on schoolwork and college applications. To help students prepare their college applications, the school hosted a college kickoff in early October where teachers, counselors, and volunteers helped students begin the process. Throughout the application period, every student was encouraged to attend school-sponsored events and to visit the college center. Between October and November, students used their high school transcripts to input their grades, highlight their extracurricular activities, write personal statements, and ask for letters of support. Whenever they were puzzled by a question, students asked Emily or Amanda for assistance. Volunteers also helped seniors to review their application.

Most undocumented students completed their college applications without major problems. Questions that asked for their Social Security number or about California residency initially caused some concern. Students concerns were mitigated after it was explained to them that a Social Security number was necessary to complete an application and that despite not being California residents, they could qualify for in-state tuition and receive some financial aid (see previous chapter). Still, a few students required additional support when completing college and financial aid applications.

### *Preparing College Applications*

The one-on-one meetings and administration of the survey in their English class, allowed counselors and teachers to provide better support to students during the college application process. Adults strived to give individual attention to students and help alleviate some of their confusion about applying to college. While a high number of students were the first in their family to apply to college and were nervous about the process, issues of documentation made the process more cumbersome. Fortunately, the high level of support students received made the process less daunting. Rey compares his experience with that of students at large, comprehensive high schools.

For some schools, like, for example, those big schools, bigger high schools, for them I think it's harder to like get help for college 'cause when I came down there I had no idea how to apply, what website to get into, and for them to have such a big school and only a couple counselors, that would've been a struggle for me. [Rey, 12<sup>th</sup> grade]

Rey felt that in a larger school he might not have received the attention he needed. Regardless of his legal status, the college application process was new to Rey and he was unsure about where to begin. In this sense, undocumented students were just like any other student. They researched the colleges they wanted to apply to, wrote a personal statement if needed, and were supported by adults to make sure they were making progress on their application. Keong explains:

I procrastinate hard; so then Ms. Collins [Amanda] called me out every day. She was like, did you finish your application? Did you start on your essay? Did you start on your supplementary? [Keong, 12<sup>th</sup> grade]

Despite being undocumented, Keong's application process was similar to other students. He learned about the resources available to him and completed his college checklist. Periodically, Amanda followed-up with Keong and made sure he completed everything on time.

Many undocumented students commented that the school made a difference in helping them complete their college applications. Gan shares her experience about the college application process:

It definitely helped me a lot, 'cause I feel like in other schools, like my friends who go to a bigger high schools, they didn't get much help. It was like, their own thing they have to go through. But like, every like college, I was very confused about applying, what I must put and my social [security] status. If I am independent or not. I felt the school really helped a lot. [Gan, 12<sup>th</sup> grade]

As an undocumented student, Gan worried about how her legal status would affect her college applications. Gan's college application process was particularly difficult because she lacked a legal guardian. Although she lived with her aunt and uncle, they never filed the paperwork to become her legal guardians. As such, Gan did not know how to complete the parents' income section of the college application. For this reason, she spent many hours in the college center sorting out her legal situation.

Other undocumented students, such as Victor, also shared a positive view on the guidance they received in completing college applications. He comments:

This school has helped me out a lot 'cause they, it's not like other schools that have 40 or 50 kids inside the classroom. They have the time to pay attention to you. And then they, they help you, one on one. And then, what else? And then for like the college stuff they make you feel, what do you call it, I guess in a way comfortable...if you need help with anything like your Dream Act or stuff like that, they will help you out. I think that's a nice feeling to have... They help, like, they research, they help you look for the AB (540), the application thingy for undocumented students. And then, they explained to you

how to apply to it and the process that you have to take. The process it takes. [Victor, Senior]

Victor notes the smaller size of City School for receiving more attention. He also felt better after learning more about the California Dream Act and the resources available to him. Most important, he was introduced to the AB 540 application and given help to complete the form.

The college application process requires diligence and dedication from students, but also scaffolding from adults. For the most part, undocumented and international students completed the same forms their U.S.-born peers did, however, their legal status made the process more complicated at times. While Gan dealt with issues of legal guardianship, other students expected their legal status to change between submitting their application and beginning college.

International student visa holders wondered what type of application to submit (i.e., domestic or international) and whether they would be considered eligible for in-state tuition. Students navigated a complex system and worked hard to determine how to complete their college applications. The process was time consuming and taxing at times. As such, students frequented the college center to seek the support of Emily. Reflecting on the struggles of undocumented students, Raul comments:

...the student needs to be very savvy and has to have lots of confidence to navigate a very complex system...the student has to have confidence in their verbal communication skills and their interpersonal skills and has to have access to the internet, has to have access these places where they can go or where they can be pointed to resources that could help them, which I think unfortunately is a barrier for lots of students...I think they struggle with this idea that they have another page to fill out. They have another flag to who they are and where other students might be able to say, oh, I submitted my college application, it's done. It's clear. I'm just waiting now. Where undocumented students have a little bit more unknowns to deal with. I think that that can be a little bit, a little difficult and a little strange because especially when your friendships cross these borders and for the most part these are things that are not visible or are not discussed...Suddenly they become very important, very visible in this college application maze. So I think it feels very much like what is this government think of me and whom am I to this government in this country that I exist in because I have to do this extra, this extra stuff and why didn't my friend not have to do this. [Raul, English teacher and Division 3 advisor]

Raul highlights the need for students to be savvy and confident in navigating the college application process. The unique situations students find themselves in requires them to effectively communicate their legal predicament to others and complete additional paperwork. Raul also comments on the “unknowns” undocumented students encounter, which make them different from their peers. Whereas prior to their senior year, students’ legal status might not be a salient aspect of their identity, it gains visibility once they begin their college application. This also applies to international students who are figuring out how to navigate the system.

#### *Customizing Support: Gan’s College Application Process*

After receiving information about the college application process, the majority of undocumented students were able to complete their applications with relative ease. However, there were a few students whose unique family situation made it difficult for them to navigate the process. Gan’s story is one example.

I first talked with Gan in mid-October when she asked me if I was the “AB 540 expert.” She mentioned she was “very lost” and needed help figuring out how to pay for college. The next day I met her in the college center. She had a purple folder filled with documents. During our meeting, Gan tells me that she doesn’t know who her legal guardian is. She explains that her aunt had temporary custody of her when she enrolled in the district, but doesn’t think she ever filed for legal guardianship.

Gan is concerned about her college applications and does not want to pay international student fees. She asks me to explain what the difference between AB 540 and “obamacare” is. I am a bit confused, and ask her if she is referring to DACA. She nods in agreement and I clarify that “obamacare” deals with health care and is not related to her college applications. I give her a brief overview of the AB 540 policy and the California Dream Act. Gan seems a little

confused and wants to know when she will qualify to be AB 540. I inform Gan she will have to file additional paperwork and will require some follow through on her part to make sure everything is filed properly.

Gan's biggest obstacle is her legal guardianship. She shares with me that Emily mentioned that foster care might be a possibility. I recommend to Gan that she should talk with her aunt and uncle about her legal guardianship and tax information before doing anything. A few minutes later Emily joins us. We go over what we have discussed and she mentions the foster care system. I mention it is a topic they have to talk about with Gan's aunt and uncle. Emily agrees and clarifies she was only planning to make a call to a social worker to ask about the process. Emily explains to Gan that if they decide to look into the foster care system she would most likely be removed from her family. Still, the possibility of gaining legal residency is appealing. Gan listens and sighs quietly as she processes the information she is hearing. Emily tells Gan, "I am going to help you as much as I can."

When I stop by the college center a week later Emily tells me that Gan is ineligible for foster care because she is almost eighteen. They plan to make calls to each school and ask them to consider her as an independent person. A week later I see Gan at the college center waiting to meet with Emily. She tells me that despite the challenges she is facing she plans to attend a California State University (CSU) and believes, "it will all work out."

When Emily is ready they make call to a CSU campus. Emily mentions that she's having some, "difficulties advising a student." She explains that Gan's legal situation and tells the college representative, but is unsure about how to fill out the family income section. Emily is put on hold. She mentions, "it's going to be a run around." They look over the residency page on the CSU website and Gan comments, "oh, so complicated."

About 15 minutes later Emily's call goes through. She explains Gan's situation and is once again redirected. A third person picks up. Emily talks with the representative for a few minutes. When she hangs up she explains that the person who she talked with was an "evaluator" who recommended that Gan type \$0 on her application to account for income to be considered an independent student. She says that Gan might be denied the fee waiver, but they can call back if she encounters any problems.

In mid-November Emily shares with me that the CSU application did not let Gan submit the college application as an independent student. She included her aunt and uncle's income information. Reflecting on what was the most difficult part about applying to college, Gan shares:

Definitely my independent part...there wasn't a specific label for me to put in my college applications, where it's me, that describes me. So I didn't know if I was a foster or I was independent or like, it was one of those parts where I had no clue. [Gan, 12<sup>th</sup> grade]

Unlike other students, Gan did not see her home life reflected in the college application making it a confusing process. Fortunately, with Emily's support she was able to navigate the process and complete her applications. By the time Gan submitted her financial aid application the process was less daunting. As I detailed in the previous chapter, she was granted a Cal Grant B. Still, before enrolling in classes she needed to visit the financial aid office.

#### *Customizing Support: Jimin's and Minsuh's College Application Process*

The difficulties international students (i.e., F-2 visa holders) encounter as they prepare to graduate from high school and apply to college mirror some of the barriers undocumented students face. Despite legally residing in the country, they are unable to benefit from financial supports and are sometimes required to complete different application forms even though they completed their education in the U.S. In these instances, students' legal status takes a different form in creating challenges during the college application process. Through Jimin's and

Minsuh's story it is evident that some students require additional support to get answers to questions about college access and complete forms.

In early November Emily tells me she is planning to meet with Jimin and Minsuh to call CSU schools about their legal status. According to Emily, when she talked with a representative from the University of California she was told the students should fill out the standard application and not the international application. Emily seemed relieved to learn they did not have to complete a different application. She was also informed that each campus has discretion about granting students AB 540 status and hopes this could help Jimin.

The next day I head to the college center. Emily is at her desk and begins to talk to Jimin about her legal situation. Jimin mentions that she wants to attend a UC. Emily asks her what she plans to do if she is unable to attend a four-year university; she recommends to Jimin to attend a community college. Jimin tells Emily she does not want to attend community college. She prefers to enroll at a UC, attend for a year, and take a year off should she need to raise money. Emily asks why she is resistant to attend a community college. She also wonders how Jimin will be able to work considering her visa status. Jimin says she has heard that it is difficult to transfer to a UC from community college. Emily disagrees and references a former student who is currently enrolled in an "honors" program that will help him transfer in two years. "Where would you like to go?" Emily asks. Jimin mentions she would like to attend UC San Diego. Emily continues to probe about how she will finance her time in San Diego. Jimin says her family might be able to help her with some of the finances and once again notes that she could take some time off to raise money.

Emily tells Jimin it doesn't make sense for her to take time off. She asks, "You would rather not go to school than go to a community college?" Jimin does not respond, but her silence

seems to indicate that she would rather not go to school. Emily comments, “Jimin, I know it’s not what you want. It’s not what you want to hear.” She feels it might be better for Jimin to attend a community college and could possibly be eligible for AB 540 status. Jimin is intrigued. Emily shares with her that she was told by a UC representative that each UC campus has discretion about granting students for in-state tuition. Emily asks me whether that sounds right. I tell her that I am surprised by it and that they should probably call each campus to ask whether they would allow Jimin to qualify in-state tuition despite having an F-2 visa.

Emily dials the phone. She explains she needs clarification about a student’s college application that has an F-2 visa and has attended school in California for more than four years. She is redirected. When the next person answers, she is immediately redirected. The third person offers some insight, but is still unable to provide Emily with a concrete answer. “This is so complicated,” she says visibly perturbed.

Emily tries her luck with CSU campuses. They are planning to call Long Beach and Los Angeles to ask whether Jimin and Minsuh can complete the domestic student application. Emily looks over at Jimin and Minsuh and says, “Maybe you should be on the phone.” She starts to dial and asks Jimin to get on the phone. Jimin stands up and walks over to Emily. When she gets through she explains she is a high school student with a F-2 student visa and is wondering whether she should fill out the domestic or international student application. She is put on hold. Another representative picks up and Jimin explains her situation again. After a few “ok’s” she hangs up the phone and shares she was told to fill out the international student application.

Minsuh is next. She tries her luck with CSU Los Angeles. When the call goes through she explains that she is currently a senior with a F-2 student visa. She is put on hold. As they wait, Gan walks in. She is scheduled to work with Emily to draft and send an email to inquire about

her legal status. Gan asks Jimin and Minsuh what they are doing. They explain they are looking into applying to CSU's because of their visa status. "Mine is complicated, too," Gan responds.

Minsuh is still on hold. Emily decides to leave a message and agree to follow-up. A couple of days later, Emily shares with me that CSU LA called back and informed her that F-2 visa holders have to submit an international application. According to Emily, only CSU Pomona and CSU San Luis Obispo will allow them to submit a domestic student application. Since they are not sure how to complete the international form, Jimin and Minsuh decided to not apply to other CSUs.

The vignette illustrates the difficulty Jimin and Minsuh encountered while completing their college applications. With Emily's assistance they called colleges to inquire about their application and receive some guidance. However, the process was confusing, complicated, and time consuming since campuses were inconsistent about how they treated individuals with F-2 visas. They were often put on hold and they did not always get the information they needed.

Throughout the process Jimin had a difficult time coming to terms with the way her legal status would affect her college plans. Although Jimin was ineligible for financial aid she wanted to attend a UC school even if it meant she would have to take time off to raise money. She hoped that a UC would allow her to be AB 540 eligible. Unfortunately, after being admitted to multiple UC schools she was not granted in-state tuition. By the spring semester most of her friends were aware about her predicament, as illustrated by the following field note:

I stop by the college center and see Gan and another student talking with the college counselor. They are discussing Jimin's admission to a UC school and comment that Jimin should consider dropping her visa so she can qualify for financial aid. Gan feels bad for Jimin and jokes that she should marry someone who can get her papers. She thinks that F-2 visa holders have it more difficult than people who are undocumented because they don't get any help. Gan's friend agrees and also seems to think that Jimin should marry someone who was born in the US. [Field note, March 31]

The lack of resources available to students with F-2 visas dampened their college access opportunities. Gan, who also encountered multiple obstacles throughout the college application process, felt students such as Jimin had a more difficult time than undocumented students. Gan reasoned that at minimum, she had access to some financial support. Despite having a legal visa and residing in the country for years, students with an F-2 visa were categorized as international students, which in many cases led to confusion and frustration about how to complete college applications.

### *Financial Aid: Completing Forms and Falling Through the Cracks*

Before completing financial aid applications, City School made an effort to educate students and parents about the process. Emily created an information sheet and with Amanda, hosted an information session for parents. While they were vocal about the financial supports available to undocumented students, when information was not clearly emphasized, students could easily miss what was being said.

Isabel and her friends walk into the college center after school. They ask Emily about community college and filling out financial aid forms. Emily gives Isabel the information sheet, but because it says “FAFSA” on it, she hesitates to take it. Emily assures her it’s the same information she needs, but it just doesn’t have California Dream Act on it. It’s her last flyer so she asks them if they can go make more copies. They agree. When they leave, Emily mentions they should make copies with a title that says, “California Dream Application” on them. (Field note, January 15)

Forgetting to include, “California Dream Act” on the financial aid information sheet made Isabel think it did not pertain to her. While the process to complete the FAFSA and the California Dream Act is similar, there are still differences between the two forms. Perhaps, the confusion regarding the completion of the application could be alleviated if information is clearly defined for students.

After students returned to school from winter break, seniors were encouraged to submit their financial aid application as soon as possible. Emily was leaving City School at the end of January and she wanted most students to submit their FAFSA or California Dream Act application before she left.

The college center is relatively quiet with a handful of students working on computers. Emily tells me they are applying to community colleges. They look over and she tells them she wants them to start their FAFSA application. Most of them say they are not ready so she gives them an information sheet detailing the materials they need to complete the application. A couple of minutes later another student walks in. Emily asks him if he has anything to work on. He tells her he's planning to apply to community colleges. Emily wants him to start working on his financial aid application. "Are you a citizen?" she asks. "No, I am undocumented." Emily grabs an information sheet and explains that he will be completing the California Dream Act application. She asks whether his parents file taxes. The student tells her he doesn't think so. Emily asks him to find out and to try to get an estimate from them in case they do not file. He tells her he will be back tomorrow to fill out the application. The next day I see him at the college center working on California Dream Act application. Emily tells me that he's almost ready to submit his application. I walk over to him and notice his application is almost completely filled out. When he is ready, he calls Emily over so she can review it and submit it. I ask Emily how long it took to fill out the application. She says, "about 20 minutes." (Field note, January 14 and 15)

As students came into the college center, Emily approached them to make sure the completed and submitted a financial aid forms. As the interaction between Emily and the student shows, the process brings to light the role documentation plays throughout the college application process. After obtaining his parents' tax information, it was relatively quick process to complete the financial aid application. In order to determine whether the student needed to complete the FAFSA or the California Dream Act application, Emily asked the student about his legal status. As mentioned earlier, students were sometimes asked about their legal status to help adults determine what type of support to offer. However, it is unclear how students felt when they were asked this question. It is important to note, while the student did not seem bothered to disclose his legal status in front of his peers, other students prefer to keep the information

private or at least not draw attention to it in front of his friends. Victor preferred to avoid the issues:

...when the kids would ask you, for you to say your financial aid, they ask you, “did you get your FAFSA?”, and then most of us, not most of us, I would just go along with it and say, “oh yeah, I did.” Instead of us getting the FAFSA we get the Dream Act, which also helps you too. I don’t know, you do feel kind of different. [Victor, 12<sup>th</sup> grade]

Rather than have to explain to other students he was undocumented, Victor preferred to tell them that he submitted the FAFSA. It was easier to tell others he submitted the FAFSA to avoid further questions or made to feel different.

Adults at City School took measures to ensure undocumented students did not feel exposed during the process. While there were instances in which students were abruptly asked about their legal status in front of others, most adults took precautions to protect students’ privacy. Keong shares, “When I did California Dream Act Ms Sanders [Emily] called me out separately. She called the other visa status people separately so that we don’t feel offended.” Keong appreciated the way the school was sensitive about maintaining his legal status private from others. However, the school was not always successful.

In general, undocumented students easily completed their financial aid application. After obtaining their parents income information, Emily or a volunteer walked them through the application. Rey comments on the process, “I think the only difference was the Dream Act application...People said my application was easier and it was quicker. I thought it was quicker ‘cause it took me less time to do it than other people.” Rey found the process to be relatively easy. However, not all students were as fortunate.

Esteban struggled during the financial aid application process because he did not know what form to complete. He anticipated getting his Social Security number when he turned 18,

but his birthday was after the March 2<sup>nd</sup> filing deadline. He had received an alien number and was trying to figure out if he could use it to complete the FAFSA:

I talked to my counselor. I wanted to see if there was another way out, you know, if I could put my alien number or something. If there was a way I could just put 0 0 0 0 on my social security thing so when it came I were able to change, but just nothing popped out. I called FAFSA, I called the immigration place to see what's up with my social security, and it was just something none of us had control over. We just had to wait and I guess tried to looking into it, but at the end of the day I had to wait. [Esteban, 12<sup>th</sup> grade]

As the March 2<sup>nd</sup> deadline approached Esteban made phone calls to inquire about his legal status and financial aid. However, nothing could be done. He continues:

I was already in the process of getting my green card. I didn't know how long it was going to take. I mean my Social Security. I had already gotten my green card, I just hadn't gotten my social security. And I was in the process, I was just in wait. And, you know, I thought it was going to take, it was going to come faster then, before March 2<sup>nd</sup>, but sadly, you know, I wasn't able to apply to FAFSA for March 2<sup>nd</sup>...I had to apply for Dream Act instead of FAFSA and it's just, even though I really haven't asked I feel like, you know those people that turned it in actually get a couple more bucks or a bigger package then those who turn it in after or those who do the Dream act because I guess, the government might see undocumented people differently. Although they say they are going to help them, they probably give them the left over money, not a big amount. Not something you can work with. I guess that was the biggest thing of being undocumented. [Esteban, 12<sup>th</sup> grade]

Esteban worried that by submitting a California Dream Act application he would not received as much financial aid as other students. Since he would not have a Social Security number after March 2<sup>nd</sup>, he also worried he would be penalized for submitting the FAFSA after the deadline. Despite inquiring about his legal status to immigration services and calling the Federal Student Aid office with Emily, there was nothing he could do, but wait until his legal status changed. Similar to the process students underwent when college applications, the financial aid system was not always equipped to support the intricacies of students' legal status

### **Student Privacy and Support**

While some students at City School were very open about their legal status, others preferred to keep the information private and only discussed it with people who needed to know. Pro-immigrant policies such as in-state tuition and the California Dream Act as well as Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) have made it possible for students and adults to be more open about issues related to documentation. Still, even with increased visibility, legal status remains a sensitive topic. Adults at City School recognized the complexity of the issue. With new policies in place they knew it was necessary to address legal status, but they were unsure about what best practices to use. Moreover, there was no system in place to maintain students' privacy.

*A Catch-22: Needing to Know Students' Legal Status and Maintaining Their Privacy*

To provide students with the proper support it was necessary for adults to know about important aspects of their lives. Among these needs was students' immigration status. Since legal status complicates students' college path, knowing who was undocumented would allow adults to provide students with targeted and additional support. However, adults needed to be careful about how to ask or learn about students' documentation status.

Throughout students educational trajectory legal status was seldom addressed in school. Most activities did not require students to present a Social Security number or to disclose their immigration status. In general, it was an unspoken aspect of students' identity. This was both a positive and negative thing according to Elizabeth:

So it's unspoken which in some ways is right. It's like the bad things about No Child Left Behind was that it was this unfunded mandate from the federal government, but the good thing was it at least brought certain kinds of racial disparities out to the universe. And I feel, in some ways, we have to hide and want to be able to hold a veil of secrecy around students' status, but in some ways it would be easier if everybody knew, and we could be supportive to everybody. [Elizabeth, History teacher and Division 3 advisor]

Because undocumented students are guaranteed access to a public education, legal status seldom becomes a topic of conversation. Since it remains a sensitive topic, it is also natural for educators to choose or want to avoid the issue. However, to do so, might be a disservice to students. Elizabeth suggests it would be easier if schools were open about students' legal status. In the same manner No Child Left Behind brought to light racial disparities in academic performance, the passage of the California Dream Act and implementation of DACA acknowledged the presence of undocumented students in the educational system. According to Elizabeth, knowing about students' legal status would allow the school to be more supportive of its undocumented population.

By senior year, issues of documentation came to the forefront. College applications and work opportunities required students and adults to talk about legal status. As mentioned above, City School's college-going efforts included directly and indirectly asking students about their citizenship status. While these questions were asked within a supportive context, adults were concerned about how to best approach the issue. Lisa shares:

It's sort of a catch-22 though because if you don't know that the student is undocumented, then it's very challenging to get them resources. It's also challenging somewhat to guide them through the college going path. I feel like our school is in this catch-22 situation where we need the information and we want to gather it but we also need to do so in a way that's respectful as well as responsible. [Lisa, English teacher]

Lisa felt it was more challenging to provide undocumented students the resources they needed to navigate the college application process when adults did not know about their legal status. She compares the school's predicament to a Catch-22. The school needs to know about students' legal status to better support them, but must do it in a responsible manner that is respectful to students and their families. Angela shares the sentiment, "...we should know without really knowing, it's a back and forth, how do we know without breaching personal, sensitive

information.” Angela’s comment highlights the struggle adults encountered with dealing with issues of documentation. As the school principal, Sofia also thought about the need to address the issue in a sensitive way:

Are you going to ask all the students who is undocumented and who needs that type of help? And then how do you separate them without making them feel like, oh no, it’s out and everybody knows. So I think that’s part of the sensitivity that I hope that we’re able to do a little bit more outreach. And maybe we should start with their families and be able to identify what help they need so that we can actually do more one-on-one sessions for those families especially. [Sofia, School principal]

Sofia struggled with the idea of identifying students as undocumented in front of others. In her view, more family outreach was needed. Through one-on-one meetings the school could help identify the type of supports families and students needed pertaining to their legal status.

However, individual meetings are time consuming and raise capacity concerns. For the time being, the school relied on teachers and counselors to show discretion in addressing legal status in public ways.

Some teachers preferred to keep quiet after learning about students’ legal status. Eva explains:

I just don’t say anything. I know that’s personal information, I don’t share it and then I honestly tend to forget. So right now I couldn’t even tell you who’s documented, who’s not documented, I have no idea. It’s just that one of those pieces of information that I find it’s relevant and yet irrelevant to what I do because how I teach that student doesn’t depend at all upon their residency stuff, their residential status. [Eva, Math teacher and Division 3 advisor]

Eva underscores the importance of keeping information about students’ legal status private because it is personal. Interestingly, she admits to forget about students’ immigration status. Although knowing their legal status is important, as a math teacher, it does not matter to her whether a student is documented or not. Her teaching practice was not influenced by whether a student was documented or not.

Most adults understood the sensitivity needed to be practiced when discussing legal status. Without a system in place to talk about legal status, the school relied on people's discretion to handle such situations. Angela comments, "I think we just kind of rely on everyone's ability to show discretion and judgment, but I think it is something we could probably talk about." For the time being, teachers respected students' information and tried to protect their privacy:

I don't think we have a system other than just an honor code kind of thing, "by the way I am undocumented", "okay, no worries. I won't mention anything to anyone if you don't want me to however, this is what you're going to need to know ahead of time so that you know that you need to talk to these people and let them know that you're undocumented or otherwise you're not going to get support where you need." [Francisco, Science teacher and Division 3 advisor]

Francisco's excerpt suggests his interactions with students were casual when they shared they were undocumented. Because there was no system in place to address issues of documentation, teachers followed an honor code after learning about students' legal status. In practice, the honor code was meant to respect students' privacy. For example, Francisco acknowledged their legal situation and assured them he would not share the information with anyone else unless they gave him permission. Francisco would then direct the student to someone who could provide him or her with proper assistance.

### *Sharing Students' Legal Status With Others*

Students often revealed their legal status when they needed support and guidance. Because teachers are in close contact with students, they might be the first to be approached for help. While teachers were generally supportive of undocumented students, they were not always able to offer the support students needed. For this reason, they solicited the help of other adults or encouraged students to speak with another person. Before doing so, however, adults asked students if they were comfortable about their information being shared with other individuals.

Adults were careful to protect students' information. After learning about students' legal status they assessed the situation and determined the type of support the student needed. Above all, adults worked to maintain students' privacy:

I know that for myself and the other teachers we really respect the privacy of the students. I will ask students if I can share that information with other adults, not with other students. And then if they give me permission I will share that with the other educators, but other than that I don't bring it up to folks. [Diego, Math and Division 3 advisor]

As mentioned previously, teachers asked students permission before revealing their legal status to others. This usually occurred when the teacher or counselor was unable to offer the student the advice or resources they needed. In such cases the adult would consult someone else.

Angela explains:

I think with adults, like say it's Ms. Collins [Amanda], she hears this and then she is thinking like, "oh, I'm going to need like additional support," she'll have to ask at that point. "Okay I'm going to have to reveal this and kind of let them know it's confidential and this is why and you don't have to worry about such and such" and then she would really say it to me and that's usually what happens. [Angela, Assistant Principal]

Before asking for Angela's assistance, Amanda would inform the student she needed to reveal their legal status to her. Amanda made clear to the student that their information would remain confidential. Although it did not occur, if the student decided they did not want their legal status to be shared with others, Amanda or Angela would respect their wishes.

As the visibility of undocumented youth movement grows, it allows educators to speak more openly about the issue. The increase in awareness on the issue encourages adults to be more public in tactful and mindful ways:

We definitely are very aware of how we speak about students in public ways, also like through email and what we do not share about students, but it sort of treated not as this huge thing that we can't speak about anymore. I think it's treated as this, as sort of an aspect of the kid's identity. [Raul, English teacher and Division 3 advisor]

Raul's comment indicates that adults are conscious of the way they speak about students' legal status. Specifically, he mentions email as a tool that is not used to share students' information. However, he notes that documentation is no longer a topic that should be avoided. In contrast, Raul sees students' undocumented status as one aspect of their identity.

To provide students appropriate and effective support it is important for adults to know about their legal status. Equally important is what happens after students disclose personal information. The one-on-one interviews Emily conducted with students brought to light their legal status. Once Emily knew about students' legal status she considered how the information should be shared with teachers who were working students on their college applications. She comments, "I think it's important information for the college counselor, academic counselors to know. I don't necessarily know if the teachers need to know all the information unless the students want them to know it." While she kept a file with students' information, she opted not to share it with most people:

The one-on-one interview was only accessible to myself and the interns who were doing the interviews with me. And we asked the students if we were allowed to share the information. I did share with two teachers and thought about sharing it with the whole school, but decided it was personal information. And that maybe it wasn't necessary to share with all the teachers so it wasn't shared throughout the whole school or anything just because of that reason. [Emily, College Counselor]

During student interviews, Emily asked whether she could share the information with other adults. Although she considered sharing students' interviews with all of the Division 3 advisory teachers she decided the information was too personal. In this way, she limited access to students' responses to individuals who needed to know and could provide support.

### *School Needs to Support Undocumented Students*

During a Division 3 Advisor meeting in late October, teachers' check-in about seniors progress on their college application. Francisco is interested to know how many of their

students are undocumented. Diego also wants to know more about the resources available to undocumented students (e.g., scholarships). He thinks putting together a resource packet for students will be very helpful and knows that organizations such as Mexican American League Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF) has resources like these. Diego mentions these organizations are good and they also assist communities who are not Latino. Eva agrees it will be very helpful to have resources available to students. She says that when she talked to one of her students, he told her he didn't think college was an option because he was not aware of the opportunities available to undocumented students. Maricel then asks about the new law for undocumented immigrants. She has difficulty remembering the name. After some guessing we realize she is referring to DACA. Teachers also agree they want to know more about scholarships for undocumented students and the California Dream Act.

As the vignette shows, teachers were interested in supporting undocumented students. However, they had limited knowledge about the resources and laws in place to support these students. In addition, teachers were also unsure about their role in supporting students during the college application process. Ana comments:

If we're asking teachers to support in sort of this process then I think teachers need a lot more resources and trainings around how college admission works. How the college application process works, how financial aid works. What are the resources that are available for undocumented students, like how does DACA work, how does, what is AB540, like even those of us teachers who were undocumented, at one point and were able to go to college and like we don't understand that or have any knowledge of that or can be supportive and like that's good question, let me go see, and sort of doing around. There's nothing readily available I think to support those students. [Ana, History and Division 3 advisor]

Ana expresses the need for teachers to be given trainings on college admissions process. These trainings should also highlight the specific barriers undocumented students encounter and the resources available to them. Ana explains that even teachers who were once undocumented are

confused about the process since drastic changes have occurred in recent years. Similarly, teachers who were once actively working with undocumented students expressed a need for more training on the issue. The shifting context has made it difficult for teachers to remain current on issues relating to documentation. Teachers felt there was a need to maintain ongoing supports and trainings to support students when legal status becomes particularly complex:

I think if college counselors and teachers could use training specific-college trainings on navigating the undocumented maze to college. And I've seen workshops out there where it's kind of offered on a single Saturday or maybe, but really in our experience working with our seniors, I think we found that that support needs to be ongoing. And so if there are organizations or bodies out there that can give schools sustained support over time, even if it's through just the college application season, I think that will like make huge changes in the school. [English teacher and Division 3 advisor]

As an educational institution, City School hoped to be a resource to students and their families on issues of immigration. Yet the lack of expertise made it difficult for them to fulfill this role confidently. To help resolve the issue, ideally, the school hoped to partner with immigrant rights organizations. However, creating and maintaining these partnerships have been difficult. Sofia explains:

[Immigrant Rights Organizations] working on this campaigns on the national or state level pushing and talking to politicians or lobbying for something, but then no one is really here to help the students who really need it. So it's then left to us to get informed and be able to act, but I feel like we're not always the best like, I actually need to go do more research and I wish the people who already know about it would be able to stay connected to schools in a more consistent way. [Sofia, School Principal]

According to Sofia, the work being done politically is disconnected from the work being done in schools and the local community. As a result, educators are expected to know specific details about immigration laws and supports. For this reason, Sofia hopes that immigrant advocates and organizations would maintain consistent communication with schools. The struggle to support undocumented students has also been difficult because there is little guidance from the school district.

I will say the district does not give any acknowledgement or even anything. You would have to go and find out yourself or and actually now that I'm saying it to you, I'm actually realizing how little support there is around meeting the needs of this group of students and maybe it's because we don't have the data around it or it's something that people are not counting but I would think in this area it would be even more prevalent than other places or maybe they're just putting a blind eye – like turning a blind eye to it but it's evident. I feel like I hear other counselors say the same thing. So I'm wondering, I don't even know who I would speak to about where would that go, what department – I don't even know what department does college-going stuff, where would that belong, no idea. [Angela, Assistant Principal]

Despite a high immigrant student and parent population, the district has remained relatively quiet about how schools can support undocumented students. At first, Angela speculates that the lack of data may be to blame for the district's inaction, however, she quickly notes that it might be “turning a blind eye” on the issue. As a result, Angela does not know whom she can turn to for help in the district.

Given the specific needs of undocumented students, educators at City School did not always feel equipped to provide proper support. In a school district with a high percentage of immigrant students, this is particularly worrisome as the likelihood of these students needs being met is low. Although City School has been diligent about supporting undocumented students, it seems evident that more support is needed to ensure proper care and support of this student population.

### **Summary of Chapter Findings**

Findings from the chapter contextualize the way City School incorporated the needs of undocumented students as it developed its college-going culture and students prepare to complete college and financial aid applications. Having made sense of the opportunities the California Dream Act offered, educators set out to inform undocumented students about the resource and how to access it. Given that college representative or college fairs events do not

always provide information targeted at undocumented students, it became important for City School to address the topic.

In order to reach its undocumented student community, educators wrestled with the idea of knowing students' legal status. Throughout students' high school year, there were four ways educators learned about their legal status: (1) longstanding relationship, (2) direct questions, (3) indirect questions, and (4) seeking support. After knowing students' legal status, adults felt better equipped to support the needs of undocumented students. As such, many students reported having a relatively easy time completing their college and financial aid applications. Students who were particularly confused about their legal status and its effect on the college application process, required additional support and met regularly with the college counselor or another adult to get the support they needed.

City School educators strived to create a safe and welcoming environment for all students. As such, many of them felt comfortable disclosing their legal status. Still, the school was aware that students' information needed to be handled with care. Because there was no formal system in place to collect and maintain students' privacy regarding legal status, the school relied on educators' judgment. However, a student's needs sometimes superseded the resources an adult or the school could offer. Therefore, educators expressed the need to for additional training or for the school to develop partnerships with local organizations.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Legal Status and School Treatment**

Having examined the way policies and school systems help support undocumented students, this chapter focuses on the way teachers and U.S-born/legally residing students treat undocumented students during everyday interactions in school. It also highlights moments where issues of documentation are discussed and addressed during class. The following research question is addressed:

How do educators and U.S.-born/legally residing students interact with undocumented students in school?

#### **Role of Educators in Supporting Students' Post-High School Plans**

As gatekeepers of information, educators play a critical role in imparting knowledge to students about educational opportunities. In addition to supporting the development of a college-going culture at City School, adults played individual roles in informing students about college. Teachers, in particular, guided students as they contemplated the next phase of their lives. They shared personal stories about college, family, and documentation. At times, they spoke directly about the opportunities available for undocumented students after high school in hopes of developing their agency in pursuing higher education. However, they recognized the limited support and shared experience they could impart onto undocumented students.

#### *Informing Students About College*

To increase awareness and knowledge about college, teachers conducted their own information sessions for students and shared personal experiences about college. During class, teachers would allot time to talk to students about college and the need to prepare for the future. Periodically, a teacher would collaborate with the college counselor and invite them to class.

However, because the college counselor's time was limited, she was not able to visit all of the classes. Therefore, college talk occurred at the discretion of teachers. Throughout the year, teachers shared their personal experience and spoke to students about the way they navigated college.

As a Division 2 advisory and English teacher, Lisa worked mainly with 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade students. In an effort to expose students to information about college at an early stage in high school, she prioritized college talk in class and created units around the topic. Lisa explains:

This semester for the 10th graders I did a mini-unit on college going. The college counselor came in yesterday and talked to the kids. I feel like I am the only person who has done that for those kids, which is not to say I am great or anything but it kind of makes me sad that I would be the only one [Lisa, English teacher]

As part of her English class, Lisa assigned work tasks to expose students to information about college. In addition to inviting the college counselor to speak about college access, she encouraged students to research colleges and universities of their interest. Through this process, students learned about college costs, what to look for in a college of interest, and financial resources.

While Lisa created a formal process to talk about and expose students to college, other teachers were informal and shared personal experiences about their educational journey. Since the majority of students were the first in their family to attend college, many teachers related to the obstacles students encountered in navigating the college preparation process. For example, during a class discussion about college, Maricel shared with students the dilemma she faced as she prepared to leave her home for college:

Maricel tells the class that as she was getting ready to leave for college one of her aunts told her that if she left, to never come back. She mentions that this type situation occurs more often with women than with men. Maricel contrasts this experience to one a former student who was white, and had parents who were college educated. She says that because both parents were college graduates and understood their son needed to do well

in her class in order to get into a good university. Maricel mentions that immigrants don't always understand how the educational system works in the United States. Sometimes it is very difficult for them to let children, especially girls, move away for college [Field note, September 12]

In the field note above, Maricel talked with students about the tension she experienced before leaving her home for college. At the time, Maricel felt it was necessary to address the issue because teachers had heard from students that some of their parents did not want them to apply to schools outside of the state. Although her story did not offer direct insight about navigating the college process, it resonated with students who were struggling to convince their parents to allow them to move away for college. Diana, a senior student, shares how Maricel's story inspired her:

I think because Ms. Diaz [Maricel] has a story like that her family wasn't supportive of her and everything and how she was a girl and she overcame. She's done so much without family support or anything. And like, that amazes me. And it's like, I want to be that. Even though if I am not a teacher, I want to show my brother or my sister, anybody you could do it without any support, that you don't need to have it. Even though it's good to have it, but either way, you could work on it. [Diana, 12<sup>th</sup> grade]

Diana's parents did not initially support her decision to apply to colleges outside of the state. Nonetheless, after listening to Maricel's story she was inspired to make decisions that supported her educational goals, even if it meant going against her parents' wishes. In time, Diana's parents came to terms with the possibility of her moving away. Throughout the process she relied on Maricel's support and guidance. As such, Diana hoped to inspire others in the future, especially her younger siblings, in the same way Maricel inspired her.

By and large, college talk was used to encourage students to consider postsecondary education. Most information about college was presented in general terms, however, there were instances where teachers noted particular barriers some students might encounter when applying

and attending college. The following observation captures a moment in which Maricel notes how documentation may affect students' ability to access and afford college:

After introducing me to the class, Maricel shares that she advocates for students to enter the University of California (UC) system. She mentions she is a graduate of UC Davis and notes that the UC system is comprised of a very good group of schools. However, she recognizes that for some of them, there may be the, "*cuestión de papeles* (question of papers)." Maricel mentions that some of them may be "AB 540". She assures them that she does not expect them to share whether they are undocumented with the class. Regardless, Maricel lets them know that if they are unable to afford college because they are "AB 540" they could enroll at a community college. She concludes by mentioning that her doctor started off at a community college before transferring to a UC and then attended Michigan for his medical degree. She stresses that there are many paths to college. [Field note, August 22]

While commenting on the UC system's prestige, Maricel recognized that "AB 540" students might not be able to afford college. She assured the class that she would not ask students to disclose their legal status and did not expect them to share that information publicly. Still, she noted that students, who find themselves in this predicament, might start at a community college. To mitigate the negative perceptions some students might have about attending a community college, Maricel shared that her doctor started at a community college and clarifies that there are many paths to higher education.

Teachers played an instrumental role in encouraging students to consider and want to go to college. When they recognized that students' path to higher education might be different, they legitimized students decision to forge their own path. These types of supports were particularly beneficial to undocumented students whose legal status created uncertainties about their future. Moreover, comments from Maricel and other teachers, helped students recognize the value of an education. Gabriela comments, "She always says, go to school. She's like, she says, that's the solution to everything, you might not be rich, but you'll be in a better condition." Gabriela planned to enroll at a community college, and although she did not expect to get "rich" she hoped that continuing her education would create a better life for her.

### *Personal Stories About Documentation*

Educators shared personal stories about their educational, familial, and documentation experiences. These stories helped bridge connections with students and helped them serve as role models. Some stories touched on the way issues relating to legal status affected their lives while growing up. These stories included growing up with parents who were undocumented in the 1970's and 1980's, how immigration reform in the 1980's allowed their parents to gain legal residency and citizenship, and growing up with siblings who were undocumented. Maricel candidly shared with students her story about being undocumented when she first entered the U.S. The following vignette captures a class discussion where Maricel shared her experience crossing the border and being an undocumented college student.

Maricel tells the class she has noticed that a lot of them are not comfortable reading and writing different types of literature. "*La primera vez que escribí un ensayo en la universidad lloro* (The first time I wrote an essay at the university I cried)," she tells them. Maricel shares that one of her math classes required her to conduct research and write a 15-page paper. Students seem surprised to learn they might have to write long papers in college. Noting students concern, Maricel assures them that if she was able to do it so can they.

"*Cuando yo entre a UC Davis yo era indocumentada* (When I first entered UC Davis, I was undocumented)." She continues, "*No sabia que era la universidad* (I didn't know what the university was)." However, she says she was motivated to do well after crossing "*la frontera* (the border)." Maricel is standing at the center of the room while students listen intently. She stops for a second and says out loud, "*no quiero llorar* (I don't want to cry)," but tears are already streaming down her face. She walks to her desk and grabs a cup of water. Maricel takes a sip, pauses, and tells the class that her college personal statement was about crossing the border

and the motivation she gained from that experience. Her voice carries emotion and pain. Maricel shares that after submitting her college applications, she was awarded a \$60,000 scholarship to fund her educational expenses and told that, “UC Davis was waiting,” for her. Maricel believes the reason she received the award, in part, was because of her GPA, AP exams scores, and personal story.

Speaking to undocumented students, but without calling on anyone, Maricel says, “*no los van a despreciar por ser indocumentados* (they’re not going to reject you for being undocumented).” Returning to her college admissions essay, Maricel attributes her acceptance to the personal statement she wrote. “*Lo escribí de corazón* (I wrote it from the heart),” she tells them. A student asks Maricel what she means by “personal statement.” Maricel answers that a personal statement is an essay that is intended to show the reader who they are in a formal and compelling way. She says that it’s not okay to just say, “I went to an inner city school and I sleep on the floor.” Maricel thinks her personal statement was powerful because she was able to show the reader how crossing the border motivated her to do well in school.

Shifting topics, Maricel asks the students if they have heard of what happened to the “*la bestia* (the beast).” She explains to those who are not familiar that “*la bestia*” is a cargo train that people from Central America ride to travel across Mexico in hopes of reaching the U.S. A student answers that the “Narcos” have taken over and mentions that the train derailed, killing six people. Maricel notes the danger of the journey, and says she does not wish for anyone to experience crossing the border without papers. Another student mentions that her mom told her that it used to be easier to cross without papers. “It has always been difficult,” responds Maricel, especially for Central Americans who must cross multiple borders. She notes that the Mexican government is quick to deport undocumented immigrant in their country.

Maricel shares that when she crossed the border in the 1980's she did it through Nogales and on her second attempt. Before reaching the United States she spent a month in Mexico, teaching herself how to speak Spanish with a Mexican accent in order to blend in. She also learned some English. After a long journey, Maricel mentions that she did not realize she had stepped onto U.S. territory until the escort told the group to walk normally because they had crossed the border. Maricel tells the students “*valuen la vida* (value life)” and to value the sacrifices their parents have made for them. Despite all of the challenges she encountered, she says, “*me siento muy orgullosísima* (I feel very very proud).”

The vignette illustrates Maricel's candor about her journey to the U.S. and her experience as an undocumented immigrant. Although sharing her story was painful, Maricel drew strength from her experience and made it clear that she was very proud of her life journey. By connecting her immigration journey to her educational experiences, she hoped to inspire students and show them that, while difficult, they too could attend a UC or any other college. Reflecting on the reason she shares her story, Maricel comments:

I tell the students that when I was an undocumented student, there was a law that was passed by one of the UCLA students. This UCLA student was undocumented. Her name was Leticia. So I got in with Leticia A and I always share that story because when I applied to UCs I had to apply under the Leticia A law that says the university could give me their private funds. And so I share that so my students get encouraged to do something and find a way to go to a university instead of sitting down, because I didn't sit down. I tried to find out. I used to go to the college center like them. I used to ask, “so how can I go even if I'm undocumented? What can I apply under?” So I share that story with them and I think some of them have been inspired to go. [Maricel, Spanish teacher and Division 3 advisor]

The political context and resources available for undocumented students was significantly different when Maricel attended college. Fortunately, the judicial decision *Leticia A v. Board of Regents* made her eligible to receive private funds from the university. While the ruling was repealed in 1990, Maricel was still able to complete her undergraduate education and then pursue

a Masters degree. For this reason, she encourages her students to persevere and find a way to continue their education. With more supports available to undocumented students in California today, she believes students can forge their own college path.

Maricel's story resonated with both documented and undocumented students. While citizen and legally residing students did not share the burden of navigating the college application process without legal documentation, they found her story inspirational and understood she was speaking directly to students who were undocumented. Ramiro shares:

She mentioned that she was undocumented, but I guess she did it to encourage those who don't have papers that it's always possible to make it. If you really want to become somebody you shouldn't just give up 'cause you don't have papers. She tries to encourage them to do all they can, move things around, and be successful in any way they can. [Ramiro, 12<sup>th</sup> grade]

To Ramiro, Maricel's story served as an example for encouraging undocumented students to persist regardless of their documentation status. This sentiment was particularly powerful for undocumented students who connected to Maricel's struggle:

Ms. Diaz, she went through kind of the same struggles that I did. She got kicked out of her house at a young age. She didn't do foster care, she lived with her uncles, she would struggle, she worked at a young age too. You know, she mentioned that she kept on putting effort and encouraging herself to go to high school, graduate from college, she went to UC Davis. She brags about it because I guess she wants all of us to know that where she came from, she could actually make it. She's a really nice teacher 'cause I guess she focuses more on like Latinos. She's someone that most of us could connect to where we look up to something, we could relate more than to others. Some of us probably share the same struggles she's gone through, or some of it even worse and she could relate to us and tell us, "You know what, just keep on moving forward, Ill tell you what I did, this is what I did." [Esteban, 12<sup>th</sup> grade]

Esteban related with Maricel's story because she too worked at a young age, and, although she was not part of the foster care system, she did not grow up with her parents. He recognized that Maricel is proud of where she came from and makes an effort to support students who are in a similar circumstance. While Esteban and other students found support among many other adults

at City School, Maricel's encouragement and personal story resonated powerfully and gave them the confidence to push forward.

### *Developing Undocumented Students' Agency*

Adults worked to help undocumented students develop agency. By being supportive and informing students about the opportunities available to them, adults hoped to increase undocumented students awareness about their future prospects. Despite more opportunities at students' disposal (e.g., California Dream Act and DACA), their legal status still placed them in a precarious position. As such, adults worried about their future prospects. Elizabeth shares, "My general interaction is just to worry about how they're going to build their life and where they're going to find agency and satisfaction." In part, Elizabeth's concern stemmed from the school's limited ability to support and protect students after they graduated.

One of the ways teachers worked to build undocumented students' agency was by demystifying college access. Given recent policy changes that support undocumented immigrants educational and work access, it was imperative for teachers to inform students about new resources. Lisa explains:

Just telling them that they can go to college is a big first step because it can kind of debunk some of the myths they have heard or also just give them hope maybe because a lot of students I think... what I see with 9th and 10th grade students is if they don't sort of see a path to college, then they can be really despondent or have challenges in school. So, I think if a student is undocumented, you always want to help them first to know that they can go. [Lisa, English teacher]

It was important for Lisa to relay information about college to 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade students. The lack of access to information and misperceptions about college was particularly detrimental to undocumented students. Offering students mentoring opportunities and role models was another critical element in developing students college-going identity"

I think the second thing is really giving students role models because I think coupled with they idea that they don't think they can go is that they haven't seen anyone do it. So, you kind of want to make sure that you connect them with a club or a former student that you know that could tell them "Yes, you can go and I did and this is how you do it". [Lisa, English teacher]

In addition to relaying information to students about college access, Lisa believed it was necessary to introduce them to undocumented college students. These individuals could serve as role models and speak directly to the educational experience of undocumented students.

Teachers also considered the need to create spaces in school where students felt comfortable discussing or sharing their identity as undocumented students. Despite the progress made towards expanding social supports to undocumented immigrants, issues of documentation remain a polarizing and highly personal topic. Still, the presence of undocumented students in school has made teachers such as Raul ponder ways to be more supportive. He shares:

And so I think the teachers have to create and be very deliberate in creating spaces where students are encouraged to share their identity. And then when they do so, they need to be protected by the teacher. And if students speak negatively to it, even if they're making a joke, it needs to be called out just like any ethnic or racial slur that's made based on sex orientation or gender identity. [Raul, English teacher and Division 3 advisor]

As a teacher who encouraged students to discuss highly contested issues such as race, racism, and sexism, Raul felt it was important to be considerate of students multiple identities, including legal status. However, because the topic might elicit strong views, he felt it was important for teachers to facilitate conversations and intervene when students spoke derogatorily about undocumented immigrants. In doing so, Raul was able to create a space where issues most relevant to undocumented students were addressed. These actions helped students feel supported within the school community. Moreover, Raul considered the passage of the California Dream Act and DACA as an opportunity to encourage these discussions in school. He continues:

It has helped me to, I think, feel more empowered to encourage undocumented students to be public about their status in the classroom. And, also to realize that they can have

political, economic, and social agency in the United States. So, whereas I think in the past, you kind of felt like, or some teachers I think, felt it was kind of a hopeless situation for undocumented students...I had no power over that, I can do nothing about, that student can't do anything about it. But now, since there are ways to navigate the system, I think it's been really empowering for me to help that student see that there is a pathway to higher education in the country. [Raul, English teacher and Division 3 advisor]

Raul attributes pro-immigrant policies as a reason he is better able to support and empower students to find their path to higher education. These victories have also helped him consider the different ways in which undocumented immigrants hold political, economic, and social agency in the U.S. Whereas in the past, teachers might have felt there was little recourse to encourage undocumented students to continue with their education, recent changes have made some teachers recognize the power these students hold. They have also provided teachers the tools to create a community where issues of legal status are talked about in a respectful and thoughtful ways that works build undocumented students' agency.

### *Limitations*

Despite being supportive and embracing undocumented students, adults recognized their ability to help was limited. Recent policy changes pertaining to access to higher education and work opportunities for undocumented students required adults to further educate themselves about the issue. However, as detailed in the previous chapter, adults needed additional trainings on matters related to immigration. Second, most adults saw their legal status as a privilege and recognized the advantages of possessing legal documentation. At the same time, it was difficult for them to fully grasp undocumented students' perilous predicament. Finally, adults acknowledged that some students had difficulty trusting them because of their age gap and racial difference.

The passage of the California Dream Act and implementation of DACA created new opportunities for undocumented youth. Prior to these laws, undocumented students in California

could only qualify for in-state tuition at public universities and apply to scholarships that did not require a Social Security number. These changes expanded educational and work opportunities for undocumented students and made it necessary for educators to learn about the resources available for this group. Even educators who have actively supported undocumented students have struggled to stay current on the most recent changes. Lisa explains:

Now since I have been here at this school, I have attended one workshop put on by an [immigrant rights organization] and since that time many things have changed like DACA and the Dream Act. So, I feel like I need more training now because I feel like some of the landscape has really shifted. So, it's kind of up to me to maybe learn more. [Lisa, English teacher]

Prior to joining City School, Lisa worked with and supported undocumented students. Although she continued to engage with this student population, she felt recent policy changes required her to be reeducated in order to keep pace with the evolving political and social landscape.

Adults were concerned about misinforming students regarding resources and opportunities. They researched online, but the abundance of websites with information about immigration policy and resources was overwhelming at times. Moreover, it was not always clear whether the resource could be trusted. Olivia shares:

I just have to ask a lot of questions and I do research and stuff too, but there is so much stuff online and I am not 100% sure of who I want to trust online either, and some of it is just broad, it's mumbo-jumbo. They will show you like "Go here to get help" but it'll take you a year and that's not what our kids need right now. So, I try to refer them to people here who know better than I do. If I don't know something, then I am not going to pretend I do because that's not going to help them. [Olivia, Behavior Support Counselor]

As part of helping students search for educational resources, there were times when Olivia helped them search information related to their immigration status. They found plenty of information, but it was questionable sometimes. As such, Olivia connected the student with someone who was better versed on the issue. This was sometimes difficult because there were

few people who knew the issue well and could assist students. As the Assistant Principal, Angela grappled with the amount of information adults should know about issues relating to immigration. She shares:

We need everyone to kind of know and be people who could remember or at least know about it so that we can actually route students to the right place because I don't want to give misinformation either, so it doesn't mean that everyone has to know everything, but at least they know who to go to or like where those things are going to be addressed, and then we could kind of funnel students there instead of giving misinformation. So I'm always worried about that especially with legal things and even with financial aid, like I've noticed that's been an issue. [Angela, Assistant Principal]

Angela hoped that adults knew some knowledge on the issue and be able to route students to the proper support. In this way, they could avoid misinforming students and connect them with the appropriate resources. The high stakes associated with immigration and legal status made it important for Angela and other adults to guide students to proper support channels. As a school serving a high immigrant student and parent population, it was crucial for them to meet the high need.

Adults also acknowledged their privilege because they possessed legal documentation. With the exception of Maricel, all of the educators who were interviewed were born in the U.S. or obtained legal residency at a young age. Some were raised in mixed-status families—either their parents or siblings were undocumented—but had since given little thought to issues of immigration and documentation. In part, many felt that unless issues of legal documentation directly affected a person, they were less likely to be informed on the issue and be critically thinking about citizenship and immigration reform. Francisco shares:

I just feel like once you leave that space, unless you consciously decide to always be informed I think it's something that you kind of start getting removed from and you kind of don't think about. And that's how I feel like I think like coming here it's kind of brought back like, yeah, it is hard, and it reminded me of what it's like to be undocumented and why I never have to worry about those things and what a privilege it

is, you don't always think about. You just take it for granted. [Francisco, Science teacher and Division 3 advisor]

As a U.S. citizen, Francisco believed it is easy to take for granted the privileges afforded to individuals born in the country. After working with undocumented students at City School, he began to think more about their unique struggles. Sofia shares the sentiment; "I think working with the students I realized how hard it is to live in that space and how easily you forget it when you don't live in that space. What it takes and what it means to know that you're undocumented." Because adults did not live in the same legal space as undocumented students, it was difficult for them to advise students about their legal situation. As such, Diego was aware of his privilege when he advised undocumented students, "It's just heart wrenching because on the one hand, as an adult, I am speaking from a place of privilege. I am documented, I am a citizen of the United States." He chose his words carefully when students asked about what they should do regarding their legal status.

Others could not fathom the legal limbo students were in. Eva shares:

It's so hard to speak to because I come from privilege, so I couldn't even imagine. I'm sure there're all sorts of invisible barriers that I have no awareness of their existence because I can pass right through them and I don't even know they're there, but somebody who is undocumented still gets stopped. [Eva, Math teacher and Division 3 advisor]

Eva recognized her citizenship afforded her certain privileges and made it difficult for her to imagine the barriers undocumented students encounter. Whereas Eva could partake in activities where having legal documentation mattered without thinking about it, she realized that undocumented immigrants were not as fortunate.

Also making matters difficult, were differences between students and adults based on race. The majority of teachers at City School identified as Latina/o (45%), followed by Asian (31%) and White (22%). While students did not indicate being hesitant to disclose their legal

status because of differences in race, some adults did consider it to be a potential barrier. When asked how students might feel about disclosing their legal status to her, Olivia said, “They tend to be embarrassed and kind of shy about it, and I don’t know if it’s because I am white.” While it is difficult for undocumented students to disclose their legal status to anyone, Olivia considered whether race played a factor in students’ reticence. She spoke Spanish and was vocal about her support for undocumented students. Still, she recognized that students might not feel comfortable with her. Amanda shares a similar experience:

I am still an adult, I am not their age, I am not somebody that they feel like, and I am white, so they think I have no idea what their going through, which I don’t, and I think that having kids that have been through the situation, the undocumented situation help them is our best tool. [Amanda, Academic Counselor]

Amanda advised students about their future prospects. However, she felt the age gap and racial difference made students reluctant to trust her advice. For this reason, she felt it was important to invite undocumented college students who have already gone through the process to speak with them and serve as role models.

While white teachers and administrators were more likely to raise racial differences as a potential barrier for being to help undocumented students during interviews, Latina/o educators also considered how Asian/Pacific Islander students might perceive disclosing their legal status to them. With 14% of the student body being of Asian origin, adults needed to consider ways to support undocumented Asian students. This was difficult to accomplish because it seemed that Asian/Pacific Islander students were less open about their legal status in comparison to Latina/o students. Sofia shares:

I feel like Asian students, I mean I don’t think they’re as open necessarily, it might be a cultural thing, I mean, I am not Asian and that’s why they’re not telling me necessarily but it takes a little longer for them to reveal like there might be a status issue with them, whereas Latino families are often more open in saying, “Well, this is the issue. We’re undocumented or he is undocumented.” [Sofia, School Principal]

Sofia admits that because she is not Asian, students and parents might hesitate to bring up the issue. Despite attempting to be supportive and understanding of the predicament undocumented students and their families are in, trust takes time to develop and for them talk about their legal status.

### **Classroom Discussions**

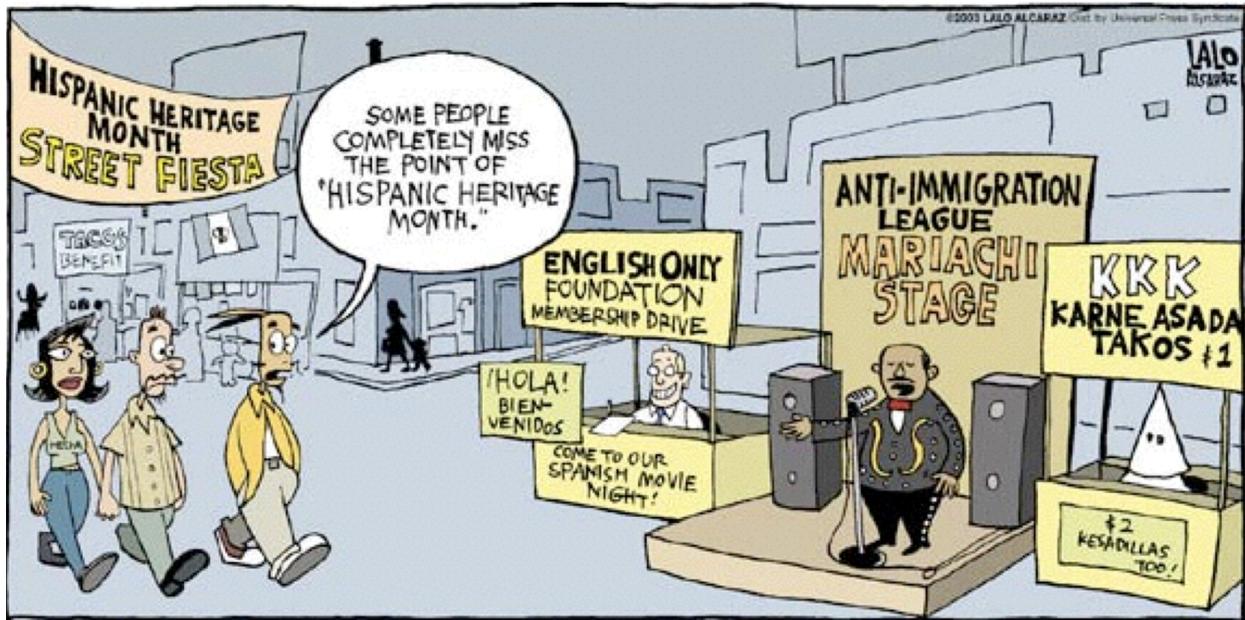
As a school serving a high immigrant student population, classroom discussions sometimes touched on issues relating to immigration and immigrants. Observations in the senior English classes and AP Spanish class captured the manner in which teachers broached the topic, student discussed it, and the way teachers facilitated the discussion. These conversations tended to focus on societal views toward Latina/os and immigrants, immigrant rights, documentation, immigration reform, and deportation. In addition, seniors participated in an internship program. After researching organizations from across the city, representatives from each site interviewed students at City School during an interview day. As the internship coordinator, Elizabeth, matched students with an organization according to their interests and best fit. Among the host sites were immigrant rights organizations. Interns visited their internship site five hours a week for ten weeks. Their culminating project was a presentation where they discussed what they did and learned in front of their peers, parents, teachers, and internship mentors. The following field notes and interview excerpts capture poignant moments where immigration, immigrants, legal status, or documentation was discussed.

#### *Senior English Classes: Perceptions of Immigrants in Society*

When issues related to immigration arose in class, conversations tended to focus on students' perceptions and societal views of immigrants in the United States. In one of the most salient conversations on Latina/os and immigration, Raul asked students to discuss a political

cartoon about Hispanic Heritage Month (HHM) (see Figure 6.1) and to respond to the question, “What do you think are some reasons people are anti-immigrant?”

Figure 6.1. Hispanic Heritage Month Political Cartoon



When students are done writing, Raul asks the class for volunteers to share what they have written or to share their impressions of the cartoon. Ramiro begins by commenting that immigrants are seen as ignorant and a waste of resources because they only take. He adds that some people commit crimes, which does not, “allow the rest to succeed.” Raul comments that people use “rare examples” to paint immigrants in a negative light.

“They have like ten babies!” Keong shouts. “Who?” Raul asks. “Us” Keong replies. Raul comments that there are different family units and many cultures where it is normal to have a lot of kids. He explains that this contrasts to the dominant American culture, which results in a culture clash. Ramiro adds that White people wait to have kids until they’re 40 and have already established a career. He says, “you are not helping the country,” by having too many children at such an early age. In contrast, he feels it hurts the country. Another student comments that others may feel threatened because immigrants might take opportunities or jobs from citizens. (Field note, October 7)

Ramiro initiated the conversation by mentioning that people typically view immigrants as ignorant, depleting the country’s resources, and prone to commit crimes because they only “take” resources. His comments reflect dominant perceptions that fault immigrants for economic instability and depleting resources for social services such as health care and education.

Interestingly, he suggests that the crimes of a few make it difficult for other immigrants to succeed. In doing so, he mirrors sentiments from anti-immigrant advocates used to justify the restriction of immigration to the United States. Rather than challenge Ramiro, Raul presented an alternative view. Raul noted how people use “rare examples” to make generalizations about immigrants. Also important to note is Keong’s and Ramiro’s comment about the economic and social limitations of having too many children causes. The students’ rhetoric exemplifies the way individuals reproduce dominant cultural expectations (e.g., family size), which is often used to critique those who come into conflict with white Americans views.

Students also shared their discontent about the treatment of Latina/os and immigrants in the U.S. Many interpreted the political cartoon as a reflection of ignorance and misunderstanding of other people’s cultures.

Rey comments that white people don’t understand people’s heritage and just think of taco trucks and Diana adds that the word “Hispanic” doesn’t necessarily mean Mexico, and questions whether it means Spanish. Marisol feels that even when they embrace other people’s culture, Americans are very stereotypical.

Maria feels there are only a few days were “we can celebrate,” and once the month is over they toss it aside. This is a problem for her because her Latina/o culture is part of her heritage everyday. Marisol adds that once the month is over, the people depicted in the cartoon will, “go back to being racist.” Rey feels that people are racist and uneducated about others. (Field note, October 15)

The political cartoon incited discussion about the misappropriation of Latina/o culture and racist views white Americans have about other racial and ethnic groups. Given the high number of students from Central America, many pointed how the word “Latino” is associated with being Mexican and how Americans retain stereotypical views of Latina/os, even while they might embrace the culture. Students reasoned many Americans hold anti-immigrant views because they worry about the scarcity of jobs and hold nationalistic views. In contrast to the

previous excerpt, students blamed the mischaracterization of Latina/os on the dominant group and problematized the way in which Latina/o culture is celebrated in the country.

During class discussion, Raul also encouraged conversation related to the way immigrants are viewed and incorporated in the United States. He used the following quote from Theodore Roosevelt to incite discussion on the topic:

*America is God's Crucible, the great Melting Pot where all the races of Europe are melting and reforming! Here you stand...at Ellis Island...in your 50 groups, with your 50 languages and histories, and your 50 blood hatreds and rivalries. But you won't be long like that, for these are the fires of God you come to! German and Frenchman, Irishmen and English, Jews and Russians, into the crucible with you all! God is making the American. – Theodore Roosevelt*

After presenting students the quote he asked them to respond to the quote's subtext and share with the class:

Students struggle to craft a response. A student comments that culture is malleable. Raul shares that people often talk about a melting pot, where you mix and combine together, but you lose your originality. He proposes an alternative view that imagines the United States as a salad. Students appear to be puzzled. Raul explains that rather than melting, ingredients in a salad retain their distinct flavors and add to the overall taste of the meal. (Field note, October 7)

During a discussion in another class, the following interaction occurred:

A student volunteers to read what she wrote. She speaks passionately about understanding the need for people to come together, however, she does not want to lose her race and ethnicity. Instead, she wants to be part of a stir-fry, one ingredient in one dish, but be able to retain her unique flavor and individuality. Raul loves the metaphor and explains to the students who did not understand the metaphor that the student is referring to being able to retain her uniqueness while still being part of a whole. He adds that rather than erase the nature of each ingredient, each ingredient should be additive to the dish. (Field note, October 15)

While Roosevelt's melting pot idea is in reference to European immigrants of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, his words remain poignant today. As more immigrants arrive from Latin America and Asia, their ability to assimilate into "American" society is questioned. At first, students struggled to craft a response. Many of the students were born in the U.S., yet, they

are the children of immigrants and grew up with the customs, ideas, and beliefs their parents brought with them from their home country. As such, Raul's comment about viewing American society as a salad rather than a melting pot resonated with many students. It also reflects the manner in which minority groups strive to retain their rich cultural and ethnic heritage while incorporating into American society. The student's stir-fry reference indicates the unique sense of belonging and membership the children of immigrants develop. Although some students felt they were "assimilated" or even "white-washed" they were adamant about retaining key aspects of their ethnicity and culture.

The discussion about anti-immigrants shed light on the way society's views immigrants in the United States. Students' comments challenged anti-immigrant perceptions by claiming that people were uneducated, selfish, and ignorant about immigrant and Latina/o culture. However, Ramiro's comments also reinforced dominant perceptions of immigrants as depleting resources and having too many children. Raul validated students' opinions and presented alternative views when their comments reinforced anti-immigrant sentiments. Reflecting on his curriculum, Raul shares:

I definitely design my curriculum to encourage students to share their identities. So if that means reading works from marginalized voices and having students publicly identify their opinions on what we're reading. Through lots of those experiences, I've seen many undocumented students publicly reveal their status and defend the rights of undocumented people and if a student has said something that might be slightly offensive towards people who are undocumented or people who are not Americanized, then I've definitely seen undocumented students stand up and speak to that. And when speaking to that they have revealed that they're undocumented. [Raul, English teacher and Division 3 advisor]

Raul attempts to create a classroom environment where students feel safe to be open about their identities. Although, students did not speak about legal status or shared a personal story about documentation while I observed either English class, Raul shares that he has witnessed students

reveal they are undocumented. He finds these moments to be powerful and admires students' courage to be open about their legal status.

*Senior Internship Class: Labor and Immigration Laws*

The majority of seniors participated in the school sponsored internship program. After researching and interviewing with organizations that had partnered with City School to host an intern, Elizabeth placed students at a site they were interested in and seemed to be a good fit. Among the partnership sites were organizations that focused on immigrant rights issues or provided direct services to immigrants in the local community. These organizations included two non-profit organizations, a labor center, and a worker's union. Students attended their internship site 5 hours per week for 10 weeks. Intern responsibilities varied across sites, but in general included assisting with event planning, conducting research, shadowing mentors, and administrative tasks. Moreover, the internship site experience was intended to expose students to the world of work and introduce them to new topics. In this context, issues relating to labor and immigration law commonly arose.

Sergio selected to intern at a local immigrant rights organization. He decided to intern there because he was interested to learn more about the opportunities available to undocumented students after the passage of the California Dream Act and, at the time, the ongoing debate to grant licenses to undocumented immigrants in California. During Sergio's time at the internship site, he participated in their educational programs targeted at immigrant families, made calls to members about upcoming events, and even passed out informational pamphlets in the neighborhood. Talking about his internship, Sergio shares:

There was purpose. They empower immigrant workers [by] teaching them their rights and they work together with them. So, when they are mistreated at work or they are not given their rights or they are not paid overtime, they help the people over there and they

help them. They are not lawyers but they help with the case and they help them set up appointments with lawyers. So, yeah, I thought that was really cool. [Sergio, 12<sup>th</sup> grade]

As an intern, Sergio witnessed the direct services the organization provided to residents of the community. He had the opportunity to listen to the stories of individuals who were being exploited at work. As a result, it made him think critically about the grocery stores he visited and how workers were being treated. In addition, Sergio's supervisor offered guidance and exposed him to pertinent issues, including immigration reform:

She was keeping us updated. She would send us ... one day she randomly sent us the Obama speech like he wanted to have immigration by the end of this year, before his term finishes. So, she was like "Oh, guys, you need to watch this." So, she sent us the link. She was like "Go watch it! Go watch it!" and we were sitting in the couch just watching. [Sergio, 12<sup>th</sup> grade]

The timing of Sergio's internship coincided with the growing push for the federal government to pass comprehensive immigration reform. Although nothing came to fruition, his presence at the internship site exposed Sergio and the other interns to timely developments in the immigration reform debate.

Interning for an immigrant rights organization motivated and inspired students. Given the attention immigration reform has garnered in recent year, students were sometimes exposed to advocacy efforts in support of providing a pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants. As an undocumented student, Isabel relished the opportunity to learn about the organization's advocacy efforts and to educate herself on the issues. Part of her responsibilities included data input, phone banking members to attend rallies/events, and assisting her supervisor with meetings. The biggest lesson Isabel learned from her internship was to never give up. While interning, she heard of group of elderly women who drove to Bakersfield to pressure a congressman to support comprehensive immigration reform. She explains:

They never gave up on like trying to get immigration reform. I would call people. They would always have meetings. I would call them to inform them. And, while I was there in the internship they had this like protest in Bakersfield so they all went there to, there's this congressman, he's like a really big, someone that really matters and he said, they were trying to get him to sign the paper, some paper, I forgot what it was, and then, they all went there, like a bunch Señoras, and they were there the whole time. They got there in the morning, eleven and they were there till midnight. They thought he was not going to there 'cause he went to his office. They went to the office and he was not there. They said that he appeared around two in the morning 'cause the ladies didn't leave. We're going to stay here till he comes. So they stayed there, and then one of my mentors, she showed me, they recorded the video and showed it to me. They said that he didn't sign. He was not against immigration reform, but he didn't want to compromise that much with it. He said that for now he was not going to sign up, but yeah. That place is a really good place. They help you a lot. [Isabel, 12<sup>th</sup> grade]

Isabel was inspired by the commitment the women displayed to meet with the congressman and demand that he take a pro-immigrant stance on the issue. As a result, in college, she planned to get more involved in organizations and clubs focused on advocating for undocumented immigrants. Moreover, even after the internship had concluded, Isabel kept in touch with the organization and planned to solicit their help to renew her DACA application. In a way, the internship provided Isabel a place to belong as an undocumented immigrant and to develop the knowledge and confidence to advocate for humane treatment.

As part of the culminating project, in groups, students were required to conduct a five-minute presentation about their internship experience. For weeks, students worked in groups to develop their talking points and create a power point presentation to succinctly capture their learning and work experience. Students who interned with immigrant rights organizations and the labor center were grouped into two groups under the theme, Immigration, Activism, and Labor Issues. The following field notes capture portions of the students' presentation:

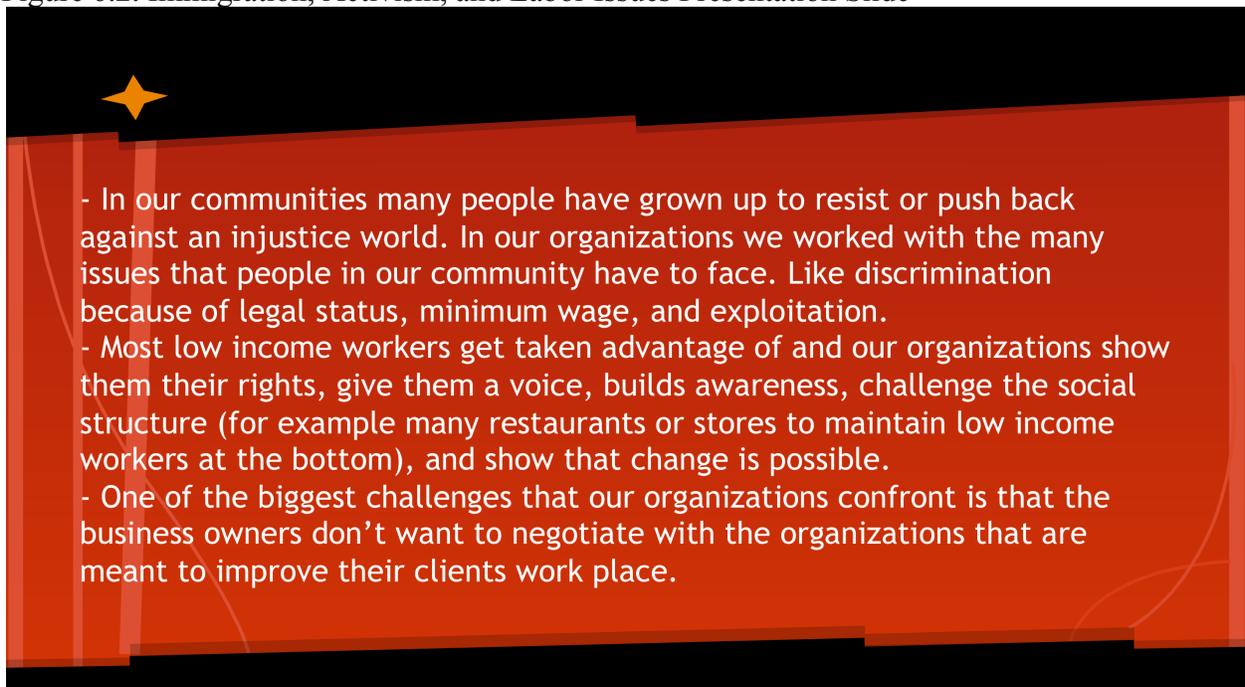
The final two groups address the theme of Immigration, Activism, and Labor Issues. Isabel steps onto the stage alongside three of her classmates. She greets the crowd and mentions that while at her internship she made phone calls and attended membership meetings. Isabel explains some of the work the organization does, which includes, providing informational workshops on issues such DACA. Her classmate, who also

interned at the same site adds, “We’re going for immigration reform!” The auditorium erupts in cheers. He explains that over the last couple of months the organization’s advocacy efforts have focused on pushing for the state legislature to approve driver licenses for undocumented immigrants. He enthusiastically claims the law will remove undocumented immigrants, “fear of driving.” The rest of the presentation showcases pictures of demonstrations that occurred during the fall. The students also take the time to highlight some of the challenges immigrants face. Isabel explains that undocumented immigrant continue to fear the threat of deportation, have less access to social supports, and are unable able to travel outside of the country. They share a few more pictures before concluding their presentation.

The second group consists of Sergio, Danilo, Diana, and Arturo. Sergio begins by explaining that his internship site helps, “Latino and Korean low-income immigrant workers.” They share that through their internships they became aware of some of the difficulties people in their communities experience, which includes being discriminated because of their legal status. Diana comments that, in part, some of the work of these organizations is important because they help, “give advice, build awareness, and challenge the system.” Sergio also shares that participating in the internship made him look at the stores around his neighborhood differently. He comments that now when he walks into a store he wonders if the workers are getting paid well and whether they get treated well. (Field note, December 4)

While Sergio spoke the following slide was projected:

Figure 6.2. Immigration, Activism, and Labor Issues Presentation Slide



As Sergio noted, throughout their internship experience they had to opportunity to address issues that people in their community face on a daily basis, such as being mistreated at the workplace or being discriminated against because of their legal status. Moreover, students' presentations touched on the importance of their internship sites in helping immigrant families in their community and highlighted the challenges legally residing and undocumented immigrants encounter (e.g., employer exploitation and lacking legal status). Resisting the mistreatment of workers and the second-class status ascribed to immigrants were themes that emerged in students' internship programs. In this way, they began to note and challenge the differential treatment certain members in their community.

Students learned about the struggles undocumented immigrants encounter in their daily lives, but also the work that is being done to expand access to resources and supports. For many of them, their internship experienced exposed them to jobs and individuals who work to create better opportunities for immigrants federally and in their neighborhood. By working with supervisors, phone banking members, or being present when clients sought services, students were exposed to day-to-day struggles of immigrants and began to develop a critical understanding about the world of work and immigrant rights.

#### *AP Spanish Class: Legal Status and Deportations*

Throughout the school year, Maricel presented videos, films, and literature that encouraged students to think critically about its content and message. Periodically, class discussions would lead to conversations about documentation and legal status. Towards the end of the fall semester Maricel showed a video of a song performed by a Los Angeles based, Mexican-American band called La Santa Cecilia, "El Hielo." Maricel wanted students to analyze its content and message.

The video begins with a child stating: Ice, water frozen solid; Ice Immigration Customs Enforcement; Ice, el hielo. It follows three Latina/os: a young woman, an older man, and a young man. As they get ready in the morning they watch the news coverage of a work raid in the area. “*El hielo anda suelto por esas calle* (ICE is loose on these streets),” the singer sings as each person arrives to work. She continues, “*Ahora los niños lloran a la salida, lloran al ver que no llegará mama* (Now children cry in the doorway, crying when they see that mom is not coming back).” We see that the young woman works as a waitress while the older man works as a cook in the same restaurant. Meanwhile, the video shows the young man putting on a uniform. When he turns around we see the words, “ICE: US Department of Homeland Security” are inscribed on his back. He, along with the other ICE agents storm into a building. The video cuts to the young woman in the restaurant. It is empty, and while she cleans, she see’s a group of ICE agents standing at the door. She runs to the kitchen only to find more agents had already rushed in. The older man stands next her as they look at the young man standing next to other agents. He attempts to avoid eye contact and looks uncomfortable. The video ends with a shot of the young woman’s mother and sister embracing while they watch the news of coverage the work raid. When video ends, Maricel facilitates a class discussion.

“*Reacciones?* (Reactions)?” Maricel asks the class when the video is over. A female student shares that it seems that those who work for ICE, “*no tienen sentimientos* (they don’t have any feelings)” and don’t think about how their actions affect children. Maricel agrees and comments that “*no se ponen a pensar si tienen familia* (they don’t stop to think about whether they have a family).” She mentions that one of the students tells her he plans to work for ICE when he grows up so Maricel jokes that she will never speak to him again if he works for them. Another student comments that it was interesting to see that the ICE agent who participated in the restaurant raid was Latino. He wonders about the likelihood of him having family members who are immigrants and may even be undocumented. “*Ese es su trabajo* (That’s his job),” a female student interjects with a hint of annoyance. She comments that the video shows the young man feeling remorse for participating in the raid. Maricel agrees with both students. She mentions that the video and song are making a bigger point about the United States

government and their actions toward immigrant and Latina/o families. (Field note, December 5)

The video addressed issues of documentation in relation to education, raids, deportation, leaving in perpetual fear, and family separation. As the excerpts shows, students overwhelmingly decried the actions of the ICE agents. For many students, the video's storyline exemplified the precarious conditions undocumented immigrants work and live in. Because they are unable to legally work, they are at risk of being deported if they are caught. Moreover, as the video shows and the students indicated, the deportation of a parent or love one may also have a negative impact on children, many of who are U.S. citizens. This predicament further complicates ideas of belonging. Despite being born in the U.S., children of undocumented immigrants might also live in fear over the possibility of a parent being deported. While the citizenship status of the child might grant them full membership in society, the treatment of their family or close friends might make them feel otherwise.

It is important to note that not everyone criticized the actions of the ICE agents. Some students were surprised to see a Latino work for ICE and participate in a raid. However, at least one student openly defended the officer's actions by claiming he was doing his job and showed remorse at the end of the video. While the student did not comment on whether deporting undocumented immigrants is justified, her tone suggested frustration with comments made by her classmates that he criticized the Latino ICE agent. It is possible that other students shared a similar, but felt uncomfortable sharing opposing views.

Eventually, the conversation led to a brief discussion about documentation and the perception of who is undocumented.

*“Y los Asiaticos? (And Asians?)”, “Hay Asiaticos indocumentados? (Are there Asians who are undocumented?)”* Maricel asks. Students say there are Asians who are undocumented. Maricel agrees, and mentions that because of stereotypes, people assume

Asians have money and are unlikely to be undocumented. She ends by saying, “*gente ignorante piensa asi* (people who are ignorant think like that).” (Fieldnote,

Maricel concluded the class discussion by touching on Asians and whether they too could be undocumented. Given the large number of Asian students in the school it seemed appropriate to connect legal status to the presence of Asians in the country. The majority of students agreed that there were Asian people who lacked legal documentation. However, this is as far as the conversation went. Maricel mentioned that due to stereotypes and ignorance, Asians are unlikely to be considered undocumented. The focus on Latina/os and only brief connection to Asian immigrants demonstrates the manner in which being undocumented has become racialized as a Latina/o “problem.” While Maricel broached the topic, the conversation did not elicit as much discussion.

Issues relating to documentation arose multiple times throughout the school year. Maricel often presented a film or reading and encouraged students to critically analyze its content. She encouraged an open discussion and inserted her thoughts and opinions when appropriate. While students never revealed their legal status during class conversations, Maricel admitted that some of students approached her after class to ask for help and continue the conversations. These moments made it important for her to continue to raise issue in class, even though it was sometimes difficult for her and students to discuss.

### **Undocumented Students at City School**

As high school graduation nears, having a Social Security number and being able to apply for financial aid and scholarships becomes increasingly important in students lives. At this juncture, it is difficult for undocumented students to ignore their legal status as they prepare to enroll in college or find employment. For the most part, undocumented students’ legal status at City School seldom arose in their everyday experiences. However, there were moments

throughout their high school experience where being undocumented became a salient aspect of their identity.

### *City School's Treatment of Undocumented Students*

As a school grounded in social justice ideals, educators at City School strived to be welcoming and supportive of all students. Being supportive of undocumented students proved to be sometimes challenging because students' legal status was largely unknown to adults. Nonetheless, teachers and administrators were aware that among the student body there were individuals who did not have legal documentation. As such, many made an effort to address and include the needs of undocumented students when discussing college, work, or current events. Despite not knowing intricate details about opportunities available for undocumented immigrants, educators support on the issue made it be know that students should not feel embarrassed or inferior about being undocumented.

Rather than view a lack of documentation as a negative, City School educators saw students' predicament as an opportunity to forge a different path. Prior to arriving at City School, Emily lived and worked in the east coast her entire life and had few interactions with immigrant students and families. After being at the school for less than two years, it was clear to her how the school embraced and supported all students. Speaking about the school's treatment of undocumented students, she says:

I don't think the school views it as a negative. I think the school treats all the kids the same. Coming from [the east coast] to California it's the first time I experience the California Dream Act, the application, or having so many students who are undocumented. So I think the students just don't really care who's undocumented and who's documented. So I think they really didn't notice and even cared what a FAFSA form looked like versus a California Dream Act application looked like. [Emily, College Counselor]

Emily's comment suggests that the school has normalized the presence of undocumented students. As a result, she feels, most students do not notice whether someone is completing the FAFSA or California Dream Act application.

U.S-born and legally residing students reiterated the sentiment. While most had vaguely heard of the California Dream Act and DACA, they were conscious of the school's efforts to be inclusive of their needs. Efren explains:

They accept them. They don't think they are inferior people, they treat them normal. They are smart too. They just have obstacles that they face that we don't face and I guess people now understand that in this school. So, if there is an undocumented person, they try to help him out. [Efren, 12<sup>th</sup> grade]

According to Efren, the school accepted undocumented students and treated them like another other students. He understood they faced barriers that as a citizen, he did not, but he recognized that the school understood those differences and attempted to help them.

As part of the caring campus climate the school aimed to create, students were encouraged to share personal stories without fear of being ridiculed. Many students recognized the magnitude of what it meant to be undocumented and, as such, were relatively non-discriminatory toward undocumented students. Diana comments, "Here, I don't feel like anyone would get attacked or anything for being undocumented. So, I feel like they feel pretty safe to just share without any concerns." In this way, the school served as a safe place for undocumented students inside and outside of the class. Moreover, even after students learned some of their classmates were undocumented, they did not treat them differently. Diana notes, "We know who is undocumented or who is not, but I mean, we don't discriminate against it. I mean, there is some people that joke around about it, but I don't think it's like bad." Although Diana stresses that undocumented students are not discriminated against, she admits there are some individuals

who make jokes about the issue. These jokes are intended to be harmless, but as I will show later in the chapter, they often trigger sensitive topics in undocumented students lives.

Most undocumented students felt a sense of belonging at City School. Although their comfort level in deciding to disclose their legal status and be open about being undocumented varied, they felt their needs were met and considered themselves to be part of the campus community. Gan shares the sentiment:

Because of my legal status no, actually no. I didn't feel like neglected. Or I didn't feel like I didn't belong here 'cause I know many friends, most of them who are undocumented, as same status as me. Even though their passport or visa is different, like, there are immigrant students here who's going through the same thing as I am. So, it didn't make me feel different at all. [Gan, 12<sup>th</sup> grade]

Gan gained comfort knowing there were other students who were in a similar situation. Given the high number of undocumented students at the school, Gan felt she was being taken care of and not treated differently from others. Because they were treated with respect, it helped diminish the sense of feeling different from other high school students. Isabel explains:

People knew that I was an immigrant and they wouldn't see me as less or anything so it didn't really mattered. They never showed me that, to make me feel bad and they never gave me, they made me feel comfortable with them, knowing that I was an immigrant. And then too, their parents they came here, they're immigrants. [Isabel, 12<sup>th</sup> grade]

Similarly, Isabel's high school experience was filled with supportive teachers and friends. She also reasoned that even though most of her classmates were not undocumented, many of them had parents who were immigrants and possibly undocumented.

Ultimately, it was important for undocumented students to feel just like any other student. When adults treat undocumented students in the same manner as other students it helps normalize their high school experience. Rafael comments:

*En la escuela todo esta normal. Todos me han tratado como cualquier estudiante si fuera indocumentado o no. No me han, como se dice, me han prohibido todo lo que necesito me*

*han dado la oportunidad de agarrar las clases que necesito. Si quiero ir al colegio todos me han apoyado. [Rafael, 12<sup>th</sup> grade]*

Everything is normal in school. Everyone has treated me like any other students, if I were undocumented or no. They haven't prohibited me from getting what I need, they have given me the opportunity to get the classes I need. If I want to go to college, they have supported me. [Rafael, 12<sup>th</sup> grade]

By law, public schools are required to provide every student an education regardless of their legal status. However, they are not mandated to be supportive of undocumented students or to support them in their educational pursuits, especially those related to higher education. That City School has chosen to be intentional about supporting undocumented students and creating a welcoming campus environment (e.g., targeted support during the college application process), exemplifies its commitment to all students as well as the importance of creating spaces where students feel safe. While there were instances where classmates made unfriendly remarks, these paled in comparison to the overwhelming sense of support students felt. Gan comments on the negativity she has encountered, "Inside of school there's one or two students, but it doesn't really concern me 'cause I feel like, it's like two students versus like two hundred students." With strong support throughout the school, the negative comments from a few students did little to faze here.

#### *Peers' Reactions to Undocumented Students Disclosing Their Legal Status*

The relative small size of City School allowed students to develop strong bonds over the years. Through everyday, casual conversations students sometimes revealed personal information to one another. When topics related to birthplace or future plans arose, the conversations shifted in unexpected ways. While some students talked about being born in the city and their hope to move away for college, others revealed they had been born outside of the country, and because they did not have papers, were unsure whether college was a possibility.

Many students had formed friendships as freshman at City School. Often times, students learned about their friends' legal status through a casual conversation as freshman or sophomores. Others did not learn about their friends' documentation status until they talked about college, future plans, or began the college application process. Conversations were casual and sometimes unexpected. Karla explains:

We were just talking about us Latinos we want to succeed in life and then it just came out, especially talking about how they had to see their family struggle and how they had to work really hard at school so their parents could not have to worry about bringing food to the table. [Karla, 12<sup>th</sup> grade]

During a conversation about college and their future, Karla's friend revealed to her he was undocumented and struggling financially. Karla listened and felt compassion. To her, he seemed like any other student. Still, she did not draw attention to the fact she had not known about his legal status. These types of reactions were typical. For example, Joseph comments on his reaction, "And then it's like "Oh, yeah. Cool. You are undocumented? Cool. You are a citizen? Cool," when learning about his friends' documentation status.

Similar to Karla's experience, Sylvia, a senior student, felt conversations about documentation occurred at random times. Because she had known some of her friends since middle school she was aware of their legal predicament. She shares:

I guess some of us have known each other since middle school. So, we know who was born here and who wasn't and we didn't really make a big deal out of it and when it does come up, I guess it comes out of nowhere like we would just be talking about something and I guess we go on a tangent and it just pops out. So, we just start talking about it but then where I think it's kind of messed up is that sometimes people crack jokes about it and I don't think it's funny because I have met people and I have heard a lot of stories of how hard it is to cross over. [Sylvia, 12<sup>th</sup> grade]

Students' conversations unexpectedly went on a tangent toward issues of legal status. For Sylvia, it was important that she not make a "big deal out of it" because she understood the

struggles many faced to immigrate to the country. For this reason, she also preferred for people to refrain from making insensitive jokes about undocumented immigrants.

Undocumented students also commented on friends' reactions. It was most common for their friends to show concern and offer support. Gan shares:

They were like, "oh, you're undocumented?" I am like, "yeah." And then they're like "ok." You know, it doesn't really concern me. You're still Gan, you're still the same person. Just 'cause you're undocumented it doesn't make any difference, you know. [Gan, 12<sup>th</sup> grade]

Although Gan's friends might have been surprised to learn she was undocumented, their initial reaction was to reassure Gan that her legal status did not matter to them. They still treated her the same. Other times, undocumented students interpreted their silence on the issue as not really caring whether they were undocumented. Rafael comments:

*Pues este algunos lo toman, no se que piensen ellos porque a mi no me dicen nada pero lo toman como, pues casi algo normal porque hay bastante estudiantes asi. Y han de pensar solamente soy uno mas de esos estudiantes. [Rafael, 12<sup>th</sup> grade]*

Well, some take it as, I don't know what they think because they don't say anything to me, but they take it as if it was something normal because there are plenty of students like this. They probably think that I am just one more of those students. [Rafael, 12<sup>th</sup> grade]

The high number of undocumented students at City School made Rafael feel that others might view him as simply a person who happened to be undocumented. Perhaps the dialogue around the issue normalized the presence of undocumented students on campus. However, there were instances when students were visibly surprised to learn a person was undocumented.

Students were surprised to learn a person was undocumented when the individual did not meet their perception of an undocumented immigrant. They were surprised because the student had assumed the individual had lived in the U.S. for a long period of time (Americanized), spoke fluent English, or did not meet the racial perception of an undocumented immigrant:

There are people who have lived here for a long time, people who look really Americanized and when they say “I am undocumented”, I am like “What!” <<Whispering>> I thought he wasn’t an international student. I thought he was a citizen and I was like “What? Are you kidding me?” [Jimin, 12<sup>th</sup> grade]

According to Jimin, someone who looked “Americanized” tended to speak English well, dress like other students, and had been living in the country for many years. When a student disclosed they were undocumented or had a student visa, it took students such as Jimin by surprise because they were certain the individual was a citizen. Other times, students learned about a classmate’s legal status while working on their college applications:

We were in the college center and we were just doing applications for the community colleges and we were just talking like “Oh, yeah, I was born here” and we were like “Were you born here?” and then another student was “No, I wasn’t” and I was like “What!?! You weren’t born here but you look like you were born here, your English is perfect” and they are like “No, I came as a baby” and I was like “Oh, I see.” So, you really don’t know until you get to know the person. [Sylvia, 12<sup>th</sup> grade]

While completing their community college applications, Sylvia’s friend disclosed to them that she was not born in the U.S. Although her friend did not explicitly say she was undocumented, it was inferred from their conversation that she did not have legal documentation. Sylvia was surprised her friend was undocumented because she spoke English without an accent.

When undocumented Asian/Pacific Islander students disclosed to friends they were undocumented some of their peers expressed disbelief. Given the dominant perception of Latina/os as being undocumented immigrants, it was difficult, at first, for some of their friends to understand and believe someone who is Asian/Pacific Islander could be undocumented. Gan shares:

‘Cause when I first told them, told my friends I am undocumented, they were like, “oh my god, really, you are?” It’s like, “you’re Asian.” I am like, “there’s a lot of us who are undocumented that I know of.” They’re like, “I can’t believe Asians are undocumented. I thought they were just the most typical stereotypes.” [Gan, 12<sup>th</sup> grade]

It is possible that Gan's disclosure helped shatter her friends' views about undocumented immigrants. Latin America's proximity to the U.S., the high numbers of immigrants arriving from those countries, and the media representations of undocumented immigrants has helped create erroneous perceptions of undocumented immigrants. The relatively high numbers of Asian students at City School, many of whom are immigrants, have helped challenge students' ideas regarding documentation issues. Keong and Rey share their experience:

Some Hispanics think that if they're poor they're undocumented. They think that only Hispanics can be undocumented, coming over the border. They were surprised when I first said that I am undocumented. [Keong, 12<sup>th</sup> grade]

Some of them were surprised like they didn't know 'cause they thought, like I said they thought undocumented immigrants are those people who just came from Mexico and just crossed the border. They didn't really understand it until later on. [Rey, 12<sup>th</sup> grade]

Similar to Gan's experience, Keong and Rey had to explain to their friends that Latina/os were not the only group who could be undocumented. It took some time for their friends to understand Asians could also be undocumented and had likely overstayed their visa. Through these interactions at school, undocumented students unintentionally challenged others perceptions of undocumented immigrants.

### *Humor as a Coping Mechanism*

Undocumented students often used humor to deflect negative attention to their precarious legal situation. The jokes were most commonly made amongst other undocumented students, but there were times when their U.S-born and legally residing peers joined in. Students were aware of the severity of lacking legal documentation, but used jokes and humor to laugh at a situation that is most often devoid of laughter.

Many students understood their jokes could be perceived as inappropriate or crass. They attributed their humor to their age and thought it was important to not take comments related to

documentation personal. To them, it was simply a way to “mess around” with one another and not take their situation so seriously. Gan shares her perspective:

We make jokes a lot. I mean about any topic because you know, we’re kids (laughs). We’re in high school, but no one, I don’t think, really takes it to their own heart ‘cause it’s not something to take it all the way in. Even though it’s jokes, sometimes it might hurt, but it’s best not to take it to heart, at all, so you just laugh it off. [Gan, 12<sup>th</sup> grade]

Gan admits that sometimes the jokes hurt because they are based on a harsh reality. However, as she states, it is important, “not to take it to heart” and be able to laugh about it. Students’ jokes often pointed out that a person lacked papers or that they were “aliens.” David shares an example, “That’s how Mexicans play. They say, *tu no tienes papeles* (you don’t have papers). And then, the Mexican say like, *yo si tengo papeles pero del baño* (I do have papers, but for the bathroom). Like, that’s how we use to play around.” These types of jokes were acceptable when other undocumented students made them, but not when documented students made them. Keong shares:

There’s an undocumented guy, he makes stupid jokes to me too ‘cause he’s undocumented too, ... You no face alien. You no visa alien. We make comments like that... anyone else, who ever is citizen, they don’t make any comments [Keong, 12<sup>th</sup> grade]

Despite the harsh words used in the exchange between the two students, these comments were acceptable because both Keong and his classmate were undocumented. In a way, their shared experience as undocumented immigrants made it acceptable to use issues of documentation to playfully insult one another. Still, Keong is clear that students who were documented did not make such comments, suggesting that it would not be appropriate for them to do so. These forms of humor demarcated membership as to who could or could not participate in conversations about undocumented status.

Girls, in particular, joked about finding a U.S. citizen to marry. Once married, a spouse is able to file paperwork on behalf of their wife or husband to obtain legal residency. Perhaps, as a result of this situation, undocumented students joked with their friends about marrying someone to fulfill the role. Gan comments, “[My friends] were just like, they were very concerned. They were like, are you getting your papers? Do you want to marry me (laughs)? They legalized gay marriage here you know. I would just laugh it off.” Gan’s friends were concerned about her documentation status; however, they made light of her situation by offering to marry her in order for her to obtain papers. They even joked they would be able to get married to each other because of California’s recent legalization of same sex marriage. Students sometimes joked in front of adults. While in the college center Gabriela once asked, “What if I marry someone that’s from here? Then I could be documented. I could get help (laughs).” I remember when I asked [school volunteers], they were like, don’t do it, no.” To make things seemingly easier for herself, Gabriela jokingly considered marrying a U.S. citizen. However, the school volunteers advised her against it.

U.S.-born and legally residing students also participated in these types of jokes. Similar to Gan’s friends, other citizen students extended similar offers to their friends. Silvia shares:

I was in the office and then an Asian student was talking about something...they were talking about how he was undocumented and I was like “Oh, well, you are undocumented? You weren’t born here?” and then they were like “No, I wasn’t” and I was like “Oh, you should marry me. I will give you papers”, cracking jokes which is also the kind of jokes that I like to make, “I will marry you and I will give you papers because I was born here” and I was like “Oh, I look white.” So, I think it’s kind of funny and then they laugh about it too but then some people take jokes to the extreme.

After discovering one of her classmates was undocumented, she jokingly offered to marry him to get him papers. According to Sylvia, these jokes were lighthearted and meant to make the other student laugh. As such, she saw no harm in being playful with classmates who were

undocumented by making a few jokes. However, she admits that some people take the jokes too far. In these instances, undocumented might feel attacked or ridiculed by their peers.

### *Insensitivities*

At times, playful jokes became insensitive remarks about the harsh realities undocumented students face because they lacked legal documentation. These remarks tended to be made by their U.S.-born and legally residing peers. They brought to light dominant perceptions of undocumented immigrants as being poor, without legal status, and vulnerable to being deported.

Being without legal status created an easy target for undocumented students' peers to make comments about their legal situation. Comments were often insensitive and were intended to put down undocumented students. In particular, students noted the lack of opportunities available for undocumented immigrants. Victor shares, "For example, [they say] stereotype things, you're not going to get a job, you're going to end up working at McDonald's. That's the common thing they always say." While it was intended to be a joke, after constantly hearing the joke, Victor said it began to feel like a put down. Other times, undocumented students heard from friends about being people teasing others because of their legal status:

Later on I found out 'cause they started making fun of my friend about how he was undocumented so I was just like shocked, I was like, why would you make fun of his status? 'Cause like, what's the point of saying it around the area of like the people around us, it was going to get out of that, stop making fun of that person. [Danilo, 12<sup>th</sup> grade]

Danilo's was surprised to learn his friends made fun of another friend who was undocumented. These remarks were sometimes made in public spaces, which worried Danilo that others would overhear the person was undocumented. To make it stop, Danilo confronted his friends and asked him to stop commenting on his friend's legal status.

Despite the school's acceptance and support for undocumented students, many undocumented students preferred to keep their legal status a secret. In their view, doing so would protect them from being ridiculed by their peers. Secrecy would also prevent others from seeing them as being different. For example, Oscar preferred to keep his legal status from others because he had witnessed the way students make fun of others for being different. Below is a field note from a private conversation we shared:

Oscar and I start talking and I ask him if it is common for students to talk about their status at school. He tells me it's not very typical, and if it does come up, people often make fun of it. Oscar explains that especially in middle school people would make jokes and not take it seriously. He shares there were many instances in which students made racist comments, made fun of people because they didn't speak English well, or made comments about the way they dressed. Oscar notes it is better in high school. I ask if he knows of students who are in a similar situation from his grade. He tells me he doesn't. I wonder out loud to why students don't talk about with each other. Oscar feels that students don't want to be "criminalized" or made fun of. [Field note, October 7]

Oscar felt things had improved in high school because students had matured. However, he still did not feel safe sharing he was undocumented with other students. It was easier to avoid the topic and blend in with other students.

Sometimes the comments that hurt the most were the ones made by friends. Because undocumented students had entrusted personal information to their friends it was hurtful when they made jokes or insensitive comments. Esteban shares:

It was like two or three [friends], they would call me an immigrant or things like that or wetback, things like that, but those were only people that really knew me, which hurt even more. But like, most of the time 'cause I guess, physically I look white a lot of people, when I speak Spanish they get shocked 'cause of how fluent I am. So, most of the time they assume I am white, but those people that actually know I am undocumented they've teased me before...most of the time they're playing around. Never have they said it seriously, but like, I mean it was still hurtful. Sometimes I wonder what would happen if I weren't an immigrant. [Esteban, 12<sup>th</sup> grade]

What seemed to be innocuous comments actually hurt Esteban because it came from people who he considered to be his friends. Esteban's light skin complexion made it unlikely for people to

assume he was not born in the U.S. Therefore, individuals who knew he was undocumented teased him. Their actions sometimes made Esteban feel as if undocumented students didn't "belong" in the country.

Other times, classmates' comments were not directed at individual students. Instead, they poked fun of common fears undocumented immigrants feel, such as seeing border patrol agents. These types of comments were sometimes made in large groups or in public spaces. Clarissa shares:

You know, when they're like walking in a crowd and then they say La Migra, and then like, they're saying the migra is going to come and deport them. I mean they wouldn't yell, but they would like just say it and they would laugh about it, you know. They joked around with that. [Clarissa, 12<sup>th</sup> grade]

For citizen and legally residing students, it seemed harmless to yell, "La Migra" and joke about deportation. However, for students such as Clarissa, who lived worrying about the possibility of being caught and deported, the comments seemed insensitive and ignorant. Fortunately, insensitive comments were often masked by acts of support and empathetic feelings students held toward undocumented immigrants

### *Empathy*

Most legally residing/U.S.-born students were empathetic about the struggles of undocumented immigrants. Overall, students believed that as human beings everyone should be treated equally and held that undocumented immigrants often worked harder than individuals who were born in the U.S. Students understood the precarious predicament undocumented immigrants were in and at times challenge structures that created long waits or prevented people from obtaining proper documentation. Liu Yang shares the sentiment:

I don't know how to feel but I never can feel how they are feeling. I feel so sad. 'Undocumented', this word is so sad because some people, they can get [papers] and

some can't, it's so unfair. You have to wait, you don't know how long to wait until you get it. [Liu Yang, 12<sup>th</sup> grade]

Interactions with undocumented immigrants occurred at school, home or in their neighborhood. These points of contacts and relationships made students view undocumented immigrants as individuals who deserve respect and be afforded the same legal rights. Students challenged the notion that individuals without legal status were inferior and should be treated differently. The idea that “we are all the same” resonated across many of the conversations I had with students. Efren comments, “It's not right that people are inferior because they weren't born here. We all are the same. So, we should all have the same rights no matter where we come from.” To Efren, an individual's place of birth was arbitrary and should not be reason to distinguish among people. Joseph also agrees, “I really don't know why America did that. Putting someone as undocumented is just stupid. It's like saying you are an alien from another planet but in the end we are all the same, we are all humans.” Joseph extends Efren's sentiments by questioning the purpose of creating grouping and labels that work to distinguish. He challenges the utility of terms such as undocumented and calls on our sense of humanity to treat everyone as equals.

As Joseph suggests, individuals without documentation are subjected to ridicule and public shame. In addition, Diana challenges the use of hateful terms to reference undocumented immigrants and questions the notion that they are perpetual foreigners:

I hear a lot of people who come [called] “wetbacks” or “illegal people”... or aliens. I heard that term a lot. I feel they shouldn't be called that because they should have the rights that we do. Just because they don't have their papers doesn't mean they're strangers to [the country] or anything. We're the same, it's just that they were born in a different place. [Diana, 12<sup>th</sup> grade]

Diana argues that undocumented immigrants should be privy to have access to the same rights as those born in the U.S. She calls on people's humanity to grant equal rights to undocumented

immigrants. Diana also brings to the light the notion that lacking legal documentation does not signify that an individual is new to the country.

Students also recognized that undocumented immigrants must traverse through multiple obstacles in order to gain access to resources. Having legal status meant access to secure jobs access to financial aid, and fear from deportation. As Minsuh shares, having proper documentation is of great value:

It's all about status, I think. Having a status can mean a lot. You could get a secured job. You don't have to worry about getting deported. For our undocumented students, I think it's really hard for them to get a job like a secured one...So [undocumented immigrants] get less opportunities because it doesn't prove who they are. [Minsuh, 12<sup>th</sup> grade]

The excerpt exemplifies the importance of possessing legal documentation. Aside from securing a job, Minsuh indicates that the existence of individual who lack legal documentation is questioned and their opportunities limited because they are unable to express who they are. Consequently, students felt that undocumented immigrants had to work harder than U.S-born and legally residing individuals. As an English Language Learner (ELL) Efren could relate to some of the challenges undocumented students faced, but recognized they faced additional struggles. Reflecting on the issue, he shares, “They go through more than what I go through, they deserve more, they come from a new country and it's hard to learn English as well because I am an English learner myself.”

Many youth first noticed undocumented immigrants struggle when they entered high school. Their encounters with classmates shaped their views on the issue and made them reflect on they way they or other students with legal documentation take for granted the opportunities they have at their disposal. For example, early in high school, Sylvia noticed that ELL students enrolled in additional English classes. Her inquisitive and outgoing personality helped her develop a relationship with these students. Although it is important to note that being an English

Language Learner is not a guarantee that a student is undocumented, there is a high probability of finding students who are undocumented in those classes. In this context, Sylvia learned about their lives:

I would sit down and talk to them whenever I had the chance in some classes and they would be like “Oh, yeah, I have to work just for my family” and I guess it sucks for them and I know some of them still work and get home really late like 1 in the morning and they still have to come to school the next day and I see how much they struggle and I am just like “Okay, what do I do after school?” Nothing. I just go home, my food is ready on the table and I just watch TV. [Sylvia, 12<sup>th</sup> grade]

Sylvia contrasted her classmates’ daily experiences with hers. Whereas she went directly home after school, had food ready on the table, and watched her favorite television shows, her classmates did not enjoy such leisure. Sylvia notes that some of the undocumented students she came in contact with had to work long hours while still going to school.

In addition to discussing the difference in work opportunities, students noted the limited financial supports undocumented students received to attend college. Diana first noticed the difference as junior in high school. An older friend told Diana that despite her desire to attend college, her legal status placed limitations on her ability to afford the costs. Diana recalls the experience:

That’s when I realized there are people who do want to go [to college] and do something else, but they put them through so much stuff, they have to have papers and all that. And I am like, why does it really matter to have papers to go to college? Shouldn’t it just be for anybody? Kids who have the opportunities, kids who have the papers don’t even take advantage. [Diana, 12<sup>th</sup> grade]

Diana comments indicate that without legal documentation undocumented immigrants must traverse additionally hoops. She questions the need for people to have legal documents to attend college and argues that youth with “papers” don’t take advantage of the opportunities they have. Like Sylvia, she connects being undocumented with having to work harder.

### **Summary of Chapter Findings**

This chapter presents data on the way teachers and U.S-born/legally residing students treat undocumented students during day-to-day interactions at school. As part of an effort to promote postsecondary education some teachers developed lesson plans about college or shared with students' personal stories about their college experience. These stories resonated with undocumented students because they could use their teachers as an example to persevere. Yet, because adults were not undocumented or had not deal with issues of documentation for many years, many understood that their advice to undocumented students came from a place of privilege. As such, many were aware that they were limited in the support they could provide students.

As a way to create spaces where students could discuss issues relating to legal status, some teachers prompted and facilitated conversations about documentation in class. Students were encouraged to express their opinions, while teachers ensured that students remain respectful and feel comfortable to share their opinion. Given the large population of immigrant students in the school and neighborhood, students discussed and were exposed to the challenges immigrants encounter on a daily basis.

By and large, both educators and their peers welcomed undocumented students at City School. Undocumented students reported that most of their friends showed concern for them. At times, documented students were surprised to learn a peer was undocumented because they spoke English well or were Asian. Despite living in a precarious legal situation, many students coped by joking about their legal status among themselves; however, jokes were sometimes perceived as insensitive and mean when they were delivered to students who had legal documents. Aware of these complexities, many U.S.-born/legally residing students strived to

avoid making insensitive comments and, instead, argue for the full incorporation of undocumented immigrants into higher education and American society.

## **Chapter 7**

### **Discussion and Implications**

The aim of this dissertation study was to examine how one high immigrant, urban high school addresses issues of documentation as students prepare to transition into postsecondary education and/or work. In spite of a volatile political and policy landscape, undocumented youth have gained increased access to higher education from states policies that make undocumented students eligible for in-state tuition. Many undocumented youth have also gained legal employment after obtaining work permits through the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. Moreover, California is one of five states that currently allow undocumented students to qualify to receive state and institutional financial aid. Given the attention undocumented youth have garnered in the media, politics, and education in recent years, I set out to understand how policy changes promote the inclusion of these students in a school. Through the use of ethnographic methods, I sought to identify the multiple ways policies and schools broaden and restrict undocumented students' sense of belonging and educational opportunities. Therefore, I examined the manner in which one high school considered the needs of this student population throughout the college application process and how educators and students made sense of issues related to legal status. I also aimed to capture the day-to-day moments in which being undocumented becomes a salient aspect of a student's identity and how other students and educators respond to their presence on campus.

### **Review of Findings**

#### *Macro-level: Policies and Educational Access*

The findings in chapter 4 highlighted the way macro-level policies influence the educational opportunities of undocumented students as well as how educators and students made sense of these policies. Specifically, the findings address the research question: How do

members of a school community make sense of an ambiguous and rapidly shifting federal and state immigration policy landscape? By considering the current sociopolitical context, which both grants and restricts undocumented youth's membership in American society, I was able to examine how an undocumented status becomes prominent in the lives of students on the brink of transitioning out of high school.

Study findings illuminated the way the California Dream Act and DACA program both promote and limit access to higher education and work. The class of 2014 was the second cohort in California to qualify to receive state and institutional financial aid. Previous research has shown that states where undocumented students are eligible for in-state tuition have seen an increase in enrollment in colleges and universities (Flores, 2010; Latino Policy Center, 2011). While no data is currently available on the California Dream Act's effect on the enrollment of undocumented students in postsecondary institutions, findings from this study highlight the pivotal role educators play in informing students about the policy, whether they qualify under the policy's requirement, and how to access its benefits. In general, educators at City School viewed the passage of the California Dream Act as a tool to better support undocumented students. While older students were taught about the differences between the California Dream Act and the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and how to submit an application, younger students—who had not heard of the law and believed college was an unrealistic goal—were informed about the opportunities at their disposal. These findings reiterate the importance educators' play in demystifying the pathway to college for undocumented students (Abrego, 2006). Although postsecondary opportunities for undocumented students have garnered attention in the media, students and their family are either not being informed of their

opportunities under the law or they are receiving misinformation. For this reason, schools play a critical role in helping undocumented students navigate the college application process.

The implementation of DACA also provided educators at City School the opportunity to help students complete applications and understand the program's benefits. Educators reported assisting students and their families to understand the purpose and limitations of DACA. As part of a national survey study of DACA beneficiaries, Gonzales, Terriquez, and Ruszczyk (2014) found that 9% of their sample reported received help from their "school/college" to complete their DACA application. Survey participants were more likely to turn to a legal or community-based organization for assistance. These findings underscore the various ways undocumented youth rely on networks to access resources. They also highlight the role educators and schools play in helping students understand how to complete the DACA application. As part of the residency requirement to qualify for DACA, students collected transcripts and enrollment records from City School and their previous school. Moreover, while some students were initially hesitant to submit a DACA application, others submitted their applications immediately after the program opened. The hesitation on the part of some students derived from their initial mistrust of the program (Martinez, 2014). However, upon their DACA application being processed, approved, and receiving a Social Security number, many of the students developed a greater sense of belonging and opportunity in the U.S. These students also saw immediate benefits (Gonzales et al., 2014), such as less fear around the possibility of deportation as well as greater opportunities for lawful employment.

While the California Dream Act and DACA expanded educational and work opportunities for undocumented youth, there were limits to these benefits. Findings revealed that although undocumented students qualify for state and financial aid, they do not receive enough

support to cover the majority of their college costs. As a result, they relied heavily on outside scholarships or the support of family and extended networks. There was also confusion and disappointment among some DACA beneficiaries who were under the impression that having a Social Security number would make them eligible to receive federal financial aid. Still, some students managed to offset their college costs by working after receiving work permits through DACA. Additionally, because some students, as many scholars note, initially responded to the program and other laws designed to increase their access to higher education with trepidation, cynicism, and uncertainty, they did not submit an application when it was first available, while others did not qualify under the program's requirements (Chávez, Monforti, & Michelson, 2014; Martinez 2014). These students were more likely to work “under the table” and be paid below the minimum wage.

In sum, this study extends our knowledge on the way these policies function to support undocumented students as they prepare to transition out of high school. Specifically, it details how the California Dream Act and DACA create opportunities for inclusion, but retain elements of exclusion as access to federal financial aid and the temporary nature of the DACA program restrict full membership in American society. It is these moments where undocumented students' liminal legality (Menjivar, 2006; Torres & Wicks-Asbun, 2013) becomes more pronounced as their most recent political gains are limited and vulnerable of being stripped away.

The liminal state created by these policies was most evident among Asian/Pacific Islander (API) students. Just over a third (34%) of student participants were of API decent, some of whom held an F-2 international student visa. While these students resided legally in the country, their legal status made them ineligible to receive financial aid or obtain a work permit.

As such, some considered allowing their visas to expire and become undocumented so that they could take advantage of the benefits under the California Dream Act. However, before acting, these students and their families had to consider how becoming undocumented would impact their social and economic opportunities. Similar to their undocumented peers, they hoped that Congress would create a pathway for citizenship. Presently, little research exists on the educational experience of undocumented Asian students (Del Pilar, 2013). This study contributes to a growing body of literature on legal status and educational attainment by presenting the views and thoughts of both undocumented and legally residing API students.

*Meso-level: School Systems to Support of College-Going*

Findings in Chapter 5 focused on the procedures City School implemented to address issues of legal status during the college application and financial aid process. The findings sought to address the research question: How are issues of legal status addressed as high school students prepare to graduate and apply to college? Having examined how policies may extend access to higher education and work to undocumented students as well as how educators and students make sense of these laws, the next level of analysis focused on the steps the school took to ensure students benefited from these resources.

In the process of developing its college-going culture, City School made a considerable effort to be responsive and meet the needs of its diverse student population. Similar to the activities others researchers have reported, the college counselor held one-on-one meetings with students and provided workshops to share important information about college access (Mehan, 2012; Nienhuser, 2013). However, while adults worked to acknowledge the presence of their undocumented student population on campus, outside visitors (e.g., college representatives) often failed to provide information that targeted these youth. This revelation aligns with research

focused on undocumented college students who reported feeling invisible because the institution failed to acknowledge their needs on campus (Huber, Malagon, & Solórzano, 2009). As a result, undocumented students relied more heavily on educators' and friends' knowledge and guidance (Solórzano, Datnow, Park, & Watford, 2013; Stanton-Salazar, 2011) to supplement the little information they knew about their college opportunities and how to navigate the college application process.

To better serve its undocumented student population, many City School educators believed it was important to learn about their students' legal status and provide targeted support. Previous research has shown that undocumented students are hesitant to reveal their legal status to adults and peers because they fear being perceived as criminals (Perez, 2012). When undocumented students choose to reveal their legal status to someone, it is often because they have developed a relationship with the individual based on trust and support. This study elaborates on the way educators at City School learned about students' legal status. Findings illustrate four ways legal status was disclosed: 1) longstanding relationships, 2) direct questioning, 3) indirect questions, and 4) seeking support. Each pathway to disclosure offered students varying degrees of agency. For example, when students revealed their legal status after seeking support or after having established a longstanding relationship with an adult, the decision to do so was at the discretion of the student. In contrast, when adults directly questioned students about their legal status, with the intent of offering support, students' agency was diminished. While the school culture at City School regarding legal status was relatively friendly and made students feel safe in disclosing their legal status, there were some students who felt uncomfortable talking about their undocumented status because it reminded them of their precarious legal situation.

The findings from this study also raise the issue of how the school protected the privacy of students in regards to their legal status. Educators recognized the importance of knowing students' legal status, but also understood this was a highly sensitive and personal topic for them to discuss. Because no systems were in place to secure the proper management of students' personal information, the school relied on an honor code. After students confided in adults, the adult made sure to maintain the student's information private. They only discussed the issue with other educators if they felt the student needed additional supports, but only after the student approved of them doing so.

After learning about students' legal status, educators often offered undocumented students targeted support throughout the college application process. In general, undocumented students reported that completing their college and financial aid applications was relatively easy and not very different from their peers. In this respect, they felt included in the process. However, there were a number of students whose legal status and home situation (e.g., no legal guardian, an expected change in their legal status, or having an F-2 visa) created additional hurdles in completing their applications. As such, they worked closely with their college counselor to connect with college campuses and make sense of their legal situation. These students exhibited high levels of resiliency (Pérez et al., 2009) and perseverance in order to complete their college applications and be able to enroll in college.

Given the high number of students who were affected by their legal status, educators at City School wanted to effectively support students dealing with issues of documentation. As educators helped students' progress through the college application process, there was a collective sense among them that additional supports were needed to meet the needs of this student population. In particular, teachers noted the need for the school to offer them training in

order to keep pace with the changing policy context. This finding complements previous research on the importance of “institutional agents” to develop expertise and disseminate information where there is a high number of undocumented students on campus (Nienhusser, 2013; Stanton-Salazar, Vásquez, & Mehan, 2000). Moreover, educators expressed the desire and need to partner with local organizations, who they felt, were better equipped to offer support. Since immigration focused organizations are experts on issues relating to documentation, many educators felt it was better to connect students and their families to trusted entities within the community. However, developing and maintaining these relationships was a challenge since it was difficult to coordinate schedules to offer workshops for students.

#### *Micro-level: Day-to-day Experiences*

The findings in Chapter 6 detailed the day-to-day moments in which issues related to legal status were discussed and became salient inside and outside of class. The following research question was addressed: How do educators and U.S.-born/legally residing students interact with undocumented students in school? This chapter focused on how individuals—teacher and students—addressed issues of documentation. Through vignettes and participant interviews, I presented instances in which legal status gained prominence across multiple school settings.

Teachers play a pivotal role in nurturing academic and social advancement. When teachers hold deficit views toward their students they create uncaring and unsupportive learning environments (Valenzuela, 1999; Ochoa, 2013). In contrast, when teachers demonstrate concern over their students’ well-being and display sensitivity regarding potential stressors in students’ lives, positive relationships may develop between students and teachers (Garza, 2009; Sosa & Kimberley, 2012). In relation to issues of documentation, some teachers made individual efforts

to inform students about college. As such, they attempted to respond to the community needs of undocumented students (Etzioni, 1996, 2000). They shared personal stories, and one teacher, candidly discussed with students her experience of being undocumented while in high school and college. By sharing personal stories, teachers hoped to inspire students and show them that they too could attend and succeed in college. Their intent was also to develop undocumented students agency by informing them about college, connecting them with potential mentors, and create spaces for them in school where they felt comfortable discussing their legal status.

Although I did not witness students disclosing their legal status during class discussions, during interviews teachers and students confirmed instances where students who were undocumented openly talked about their legal status in class. Because of City School's high number of immigrant students, issues relating to immigration and documentation were sometimes topics of conversation. Teachers saw this as an opportunity to provide students a forum and space to be free to discuss issues pertinent to their lives without being ridiculed by other. This finding differs from research on college students who hesitate to share their point of view in class relating to issues of immigration and be open about their legal status because they fear how their professors or peers might react negatively (Clark-Ibañez, Garcia-Alverdín, & Alva, 2012). As such, teachers play a critical role in fostering spaces where undocumented students feel they belong as well as safe within the school community.

The right to a public K-12 education facilitates undocumented students access to the social and cultural norms of American society. As such, it is difficult to distinguish undocumented students from their documented peers. Moreover, while many attend low-performing, segregated schools and are tracked into a low-academic curriculum, their legal status is not used as a marker to differentiate from their peers (Gleeson & Gonzales, 2012).

Undocumented students forge relationships with friends and navigate the educational system just like other students. However, once in high school undocumented students are forced to consider how their legal status will affect their postsecondary education and work opportunities (Gonzales, 2011). In this study, undocumented students' legal status became a more salient aspect of their identity throughout the college application process. While lacking legal documentation often leads to high levels of stress and anxiety (Gonzales et al., 2013; Perez et al., 2010), some of the concerns undocumented students had about their legal status were mitigated by the way City School educators treated and supported them in school. Rather than perpetuate negative views about undocumented students and their educational opportunities, educators recognized that these students might need to take a different path.

The school's positive view toward undocumented students also translated into U.S.-born/legally residing students' views on the issue. In general, undocumented students reported feeling supported by friends after disclosing their legal status. However, school peers were surprised to learn a person was undocumented when the individual did not meet their perception of who they thought was an undocumented immigrant. These ideas derived from the assumption that undocumented person was someone who had been living in the U.S. for a short period of time, had a thick accent when they spoke English, or were Latina/o. Because students' racial perceptions of undocumented immigrants reflected the idea that only Latina/os were undocumented (King & Puntí, 2012), they were surprised to learn there were also API students who lacked legal documentation. Being in close proximity with API students who were also undocumented also helped demystify their ideas of who was residing in the country without legal status.

Despite facing bleak opportunities in comparison to their U.S.-born/legal residing peers, undocumented students used humor to cope with their legal circumstance. However, findings from this study demonstrate that while undocumented students felt comfortable poking fun of one another, they felt hurt when other friends did it. For this reason, some U.S.-born/legally residing students avoid making mean spirited jokes. Instead, they attempt to be empathetic and consider their privileged position based from possessing legal documents.

### **Limitations**

This dissertation presents data on one high immigrant, urban high school in California. Across the country variation exist between states relating to policies meant to promote undocumented students access to higher education. At present, California is one of nineteen states to allow undocumented students to qualify for in-state tuition and one of five states to grant undocumented students financial support. For this reason, California serves as a unique context for studying the educational opportunities of undocumented students. Therefore, findings from this research study are not intended to reflect the educational experience of undocumented students across the country. Undocumented students residing in states who do not grant them in-state tuition and/or financial aid may experience a very different educational context. Moreover, given the high concentration of undocumented immigrants in Los Angeles it is likely that educators and students were already more cognizant and likely to acknowledge the possible presence of these students on campus. Despite the relative positive response to undocumented students at City School, I cannot claim that this a common experience for students across schools in the Los Angeles area, California, or other states. As the findings from this study show, the way federal and state laws (macro-level) influence what happens at the

meso- and micro-level. Therefore, the experience of undocumented students across different contexts may vary significantly.

Findings at the micro level primarily focus on the day-to-day experience of students transitioning into higher education or work. Less attention was paid to the transition from middle school to high school, which is also a pivotal juncture in students' educational trajectory. While students spoke in retrospect of their early high school experience, the study is unable to provide a complete analysis of how younger students are currently making sense of their legal status and how the school makes an effort to reach these students at an earlier stage. For this reason, more research is needed to better understand the role that students' legal status plays across different moments in the educational pipeline as well as how school performance mediates the issue. Finally, the U.S-born and legally residing students included were all children of immigrants. While their perspective provides a unique point of view, it does not reflect the perspective of all documented students, in particular, those whose families have resided in the U.S. for multiple generations (e.g., white and black students).

### **Future Research**

Research that examines the role of legal status on the educational experience of students has grown in recent years. However, more research is needed to illuminate the experiences of this student population across multiple life stages and contexts. Given that the political context is often shifting and that there is variation across states, comparative studies between schools where pro-immigrant and anti-immigrant laws have passed are needed to gain a better understanding in the differences in schooling opportunities undocumented students encounter. In this regard, it is also important to understand variations across school settings (i.e., urban, rural,

and suburban) to note the ways educators and students response to the presence of this student population.

Longitudinal studies are also needed to track undocumented students progress across time, educational settings, and work. These studies would be able to follow students from high school into college and/or work and provide a rich perspective on how the support (or lack thereof) undocumented students receive in high school and college helps them matriculate and persist to degree attainment. Particular attention could be given to the way undocumented students extend their networks as well as how institutional agents and family members help them achieve their educational and work goals. Larger and more diverse participant samples may also allow for more in depth analysis along the lines of gender, age of arrival in the U.S., and race/ethnicity.

### **Implications**

The findings from this study offer insights for policymakers, advocates, and educators to consider as they work for and alongside undocumented students. This study illustrates the way macro-level policies are utilized by educators to foster a responsive and inclusive school community when working with undocumented students to access higher education and work opportunities. However, these policies are only the first step in meeting the needs of undocumented youth. Implications pertinent to educators, immigration advocates, and school districts are presented first and highlight the need to provide educators with trainings and workshops to support undocumented students. They also call on schools and immigration advocates to create partnerships and for school districts to take on an active role in ensuring that all schools are equipped to address issues of legal status. The next set of implications highlight the need for schools to consider the needs of undocumented students as they develop and put into

practice a college-going culture. Suggestions for creating safe spaces for undocumented students to talk about their legal status are also presented. The final set of implications call on the need for policymakers to help oversee the implications efforts of immigration policies and work to provide undocumented immigrant pathway to citizenship.

*Educators, Immigration Advocates, and School Districts*

Despite the media attention the California Dream and DACA have garnered in recent years, students often lack the networks and resources to help access their benefits. Therefore, it is imperative for educators to be knowledgeable about the various details and differences between policies. While a school's academic and/or college counselor may serve as the person of contact for issues relating to legal status and access to higher education, other school personnel should be aware and possess some knowledge about these resources. For example, adults in school should be made aware of policies such as AB 540, the California Dream Act, and DACA as well as be able to direct students to someone or an online resource that is able to properly guide and inform to students.

Schools need to offer trainings and encourage teachers and other school personnel to attend workshops where educational resources for undocumented youth are discussed. These trainings may provide educators the tools they need to help undocumented students identify and utilize the resources available to them as they transition from high school into higher education and/or work. Moreover, if more people participated in these types of training there will be a greater number of adults who students may approach for help. While one person may serve as the primary contact, rather than rely on one person to be the sole expert, other school educators may share in the responsibility of informing and directing undocumented students to appropriate resources. This approach would prevent the school from losing the institutional knowledge it has

gained should the primary contact leaves their position. In addition, because students form relationships with multiple people in school, it is necessary for individuals to be aware about the issue and be able to direct a student to current and reliable information. It is important to note that because these policies and programs are constantly being debated and evolving, schools need to remain vigilant about changes and address these issues as part of their teacher's development program.

It is also important to consider that undocumented immigrants often enroll in some of the most segregated, under resourced schools. As such, school budgets for staff development may severely constrain the ability to offer trainings or workshops on this issue. To circumvent these limitations, schools should seek out partnerships with local immigrant advocacy organizations and colleges/universities. These organizations often offer workshops or can provide a contact person to provide information sessions for educators and students (Seif, 2004). Because immigration advocates are on the frontline regarding immigration policy, they may be ideal partners in providing correct and current information to members of a school community. They may also be able to connect schools with lawyers or other organizations if the need arises for additional support in cases where assistance is required beyond the California Dream Act and DACA.

School districts are also implicated in schools' ability to support their undocumented student population. Since school districts operate local elementary and secondary schools, they should be able to support efforts to ensure that undocumented students needs are met across all of its schools. In a study focused on the college-going activities institutional agents offered to undocumented students in New York City, Nienhusser (2013) found disparities between schools who had a "critical mass" of undocumented students and those who did not. Despite New

York's high immigrant population there were stark differences between schools efforts to educate undocumented students about their educational benefits. While City School made a conscious effort to be inclusive of its undocumented students during the college application process, they did so on their own accord. At present, there is no directive from the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) to provide services for undocumented students across all schools. As a result, undocumented students who enroll in schools where they do not comprise a "critical mass" of the student population may be at risk of not receiving adequate and timely information about their educational opportunities. School districts such as the LAUSD should play a more active role in relaying information to educators about resources for undocumented students and ensuring that all schools are responsive to their needs regardless of whether a "critical mass" exists.

#### *Creating an Undocumented Student Friendly College-going Culture and School Community*

This study examined how undocumented students needs were considered and met while City School developed and implemented its college-going culture. It is important to note that in addition to being undocumented, many students may also be the first generation college/university students or are part of a racial/ethnic group that has been traditionally underrepresented in higher education. As such, schools should be aware of how students' multiple identities may intersect and require additional supports.

For undocumented students, disclosing their legal status is a personal decision that makes them vulnerable to the ridicule of adults and peers. Educators at City School believed it was important for them to know students' legal status, but recognized the sensitivity surrounding the issue. Therefore, regardless of whether students reveal their legal status, schools, and in particular, college counselors and teachers, in addition to providing quality instruction and

academic supports, should include pertinent information about the pathway to college and/or work for undocumented students during information sessions or class discussions. The findings from the present study indicate that when educators create a welcoming and friendly school environment relating to legal status, undocumented students may be more comfortable choosing to disclose their legal status to an adult and feel that their information is being protected. Moreover, urban schools where educators exhibit high levels of support and students have regular contact with a counselor are more likely to have students complete college applications and enroll in college (Bryan, Moore-Thomas, Day-Vines, & Holcomb-McCoy, 2011; Roderick, Coca, & Nagaoka, 2011). When school structures that support academic excellence and college-going are present, undocumented students may find support regardless of their legal status (Gonzalez, 2010). Still, schools should be proactive in disseminating information about legal status to ensure undocumented students have multiple opportunities to receive information without having to agonize about disclosing their legal status to get it. Schools proactive approach may also make undocumented students feel that educators and make them feel comfortable to disclose their legal status. Resources should also target students who may not be at the top of their class and hesitant to visit the school's college center or school counselor.

Schools are instrumental in providing students the resources they need to prepare for college applications. However, undocumented students needs are often not addressed. Rather than rely on undocumented students to piece together information obtained from multiple sources (Enriquez, 2011), schools should be able to meet their information and resource needs. Findings from the present study indicate that many students are confused about what the types of benefits they receive from the California Dream Act and DACA. For example, a number of students assumed that the Social Security number made them eligible to submit a FAFSA. After

talking to their college counselor they realized they were still expected to submit a California Dream Act application. The California Student Aid Commission (2014) reported that among the 29,200 California Dream Act applications submitted for the 2013-14 academic year—the first year of the program— close to 7,500 students received a Cal Grant. However, the commission found that many undocumented students who had been approved for DACA had mistakenly submitted a FAFSA. This finding underscores the importance for educators to ensure that undocumented students receive correct information in order to complete the proper application and receive educational benefits.

A high number of undocumented youth arrive to the U.S. as small children. As such, they blend in with documented peers and hold many of the same aspirations and goals (e.g., attending college and finding a well paying job). While some undocumented students are fully aware of their legal status at a young age others do not learn they are undocumented until they are in high school (Abrego, 2006; Perez, 2012). Because they have the right to a public K-12 education, undocumented students' legal status may not be a prominent aspect of their identity until they are preparing to graduate from high school and begin to make plans about their future. As such, while not always salient, there are moments throughout their schooling experience where being undocumented must be addressed. And, because being undocumented often carries a negative social stigma it may be difficult for students to be open about their legal status with friends or teachers. For this reason, it is important for schools to provide undocumented students a safe space to discuss issues related to documentation. Similar to the way schools have instituted gay and straight student alliance clubs, it would serve schools well to establish clubs where students may gather to discuss and promote issues related to immigration and legal status on

campus. By instituting these clubs and sustaining efforts to support undocumented students, schools may be better to meet the community needs of undocumented students.

### *Policy and Policymakers*

Pro-immigrant laws and programs have helped remove a number of barriers undocumented immigrants encounter on a daily basis. The massive mobilization of immigrant youth, advocacy organizations, and allies at the local, state, and federal has held politicians accountable to enact positive change. Yet as the findings from this study suggest, the passage of policies such as AB 540 and the California Dream Act are only the first step in addressing the educational needs of undocumented students. Implementation efforts need to be considered to ensure undocumented youth have proper access to academic programs and the information they need to access these resources. Recently, the Los Angeles Board of County Supervisors formed a taskforce to investigate how it can assist undocumented immigrant enroll in the planned expansion of the DACA program as well as the recently announced Deferred Action for Parents of Americans and Lawful Permanent Residents (DAPA) (Linthicum & Sewell, 2015). The mayor of Los Angeles, Eric Garcetti, also announced the Step Forward L.A. campaign to encourage eligible immigrants to enroll in the program. As part of the program, Mayor Garcetti committed to raising \$10 million to help 100,000 immigrants apply for the program. Since schools enroll many of the youth and families who qualify for these programs, investments should be made to ensure educators have the tools to properly assist students and their families throughout the campaign. In addition, similar actions should be taken to ensure that schools are equipped to provide the courses students need to enroll in and succeed in college, support the dissemination of information regarding the California Dream Act and other policies that support undocumented immigrants.

Despite the gains undocumented immigrants have seen in recent years, a more permanent solution is needed. Just days before the expansion of DACA and DAPA a Texas judge issued a temporary injunction to prevent the Department of Homeland Security from accepting applications. The judge's action was met with support from conservatives who oppose the programs as well as confusion and anger from advocates and beneficiaries who saw this as an affront to immigrant rights. The injunction also served as a reminder of the temporary nature of DACA since its existence is dependent on the president's support. Without future presidential support, undocumented immigrants who have received relief from deportation, work permits and a Social Security number through the program may find themselves in a more precarious situation. As a result, permanent policy solutions such as Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) act or comprehensive immigration reform remain vital to ensure that undocumented immigrants have a pathway to citizenship. A pathway to citizenship for undocumented youth would mean they could pursue their educational and career goals, no longer have to fear being deported, and feel that they are full members of U.S. society.

### **Undocumented Students as Members of the School Community**

Ideas of school belonging and membership as it pertains to undocumented students are deeply complicated and multilayered. Undocumented students can enroll in a public K-12 school and partake in similar academic opportunities and social interactions, making them almost indistinguishable from their legally residing or U.S.-born peers. As such, school structures and supports rather than immigration status may play a more significant role in determining their academic success (Gleeson & Gonzales, 2012). Still, regardless of academic performance, undocumented students must contend with the way their legal status imposes limits on their postsecondary and work opportunities. Although they might have progressed through the

educational pipeline with little regard to their legal status, the college application process and transition into adulthood brings to light new challenges. It is at this juncture where schools, in particular, play a critical role in creating an environment for undocumented students where their legal status is addressed and they feel supported through this precarious circumstance.

The response to undocumented students at City School illustrates a unique example for addressing the needs of this population by creating a school community where they feel they belong. Much of the research on undocumented students describes the solitude, financial hardship, and sense of fear they experience as they navigate new educational terrains (Abrego, 2006; Clark-Ibáñez, 2012; Contreras, 2009; Gonzales, 2010). This dissertation study presents a school setting where educators have been intentional about discussing issues of documentation and creating an environment where undocumented students are not excluded because of their legal status. Yet despite a high level of consciousness on the issue, as the findings show, there is still a significant amount of confusion on the topic and situations where insensitive comments about undocumented immigrants are made.

A roadmap for working with undocumented students is not available for educators. Because there is significant variability across states regarding opportunities for higher education and restrictions on DACA eligibility, an array of considerations need to be taken when advising undocumented students. Still, as City School exemplifies, regardless of the policy context, schools are equipped to create an environment where issues of documentation are considered as part of the collective community. In conjunction with providing strong academics, schools are places where children and youth can learn about respect and care (Meier, 1995). Creating caring and respectful communities based on trust takes time and it is not an easy feat to accomplish. Unfortunately, these values are sometimes lost among educational efforts focused on high-stake

testing, accountability. As a result, the need to develop strong interpersonal relationships with students, parents, and the community are often disregarded (Oakes et al., 2000). But, if we are truly committed to the believe that every child can succeed and be college-bound than a culture of care, personalization, respect, and trust must permeate across school campuses at all levels (i.e., administrative, classrooms, individual interactions). For undocumented students, it is this ethos that can offer them a sense of hope and being valued. As their presence in the U.S. is embroiled in a contentious national debate, schools can serve as a symbol for belonging to a real community where shared values are used to support disenfranchised students (Karst, 1989).

Before concluding, I want to return to Etzioni's (1996) conception of an "authentic community." As noted earlier, an authentic community exists when the "true needs" of its members are met. Considering the efforts taken at City School to support undocumented students, it is fair to say that the school serves as a supportive and authentic community for this student population. However, it is important to note that City School is, justifiably, unable to meet all of the needs of undocumented students as they prepare to transition out of high school. As part of a constellation of communities (e.g., neighborhood, city, state, and country), the school is limited in its ability to provide undocumented students all of the supports they need to fully integrate into American society (i.e., citizenship). It is apparent that macro-level policies influence the ability of schools to effectively help students access resources (meso- and micro-level). Yet the work being done in places such as City School and local communities are also vital in affecting change at the macro-level (e.g., undocumented youth movement). While it is time consuming and difficult work, educators made an effort to make legal status a visible trait of students' identity in a respectful and caring manner. As with issues of race, ethnicity, gender, special needs, and sexual orientation, we are in a moment where legal status has gained

prominence in school discussions, particularly in high schools. A call for the academic success of all students is an admirable goal, however, it will be unattainable if schools fail to understand the multiple identities and life circumstances students and their families bring with them. By embracing undocumented students and fostering a sense of belonging, schools can help them develop their sense of self as they move forward on their educational path

## Appendix A

### Adult Interview Protocol

#### Introduction

1. Begin interview by introducing yourself, reviewing purpose of study, and purpose of interview.
2. Remind teacher/counselor/school personnel that all information provided will be strictly confidential.
3. Review structure of interview and request permission to record interview.
4. Ask if there are any questions of me before we begin.

#### Interview Questions:

##### School Context

1. Tell me about the school.
  - a. How would you describe the campus climate?
  - b. Relationship between Asian and Latino students?

##### College and Work Information/Resources

1. Describe the college-going culture at the school.
  - a. What is the school doing to support a college-going culture?
  - b. How have students responded to the support offered at the school?
2. What systems has the school put in place to provide information to students about college and work?
3. What is the school doing to support undocumented students?
4. What has been your experience working with undocumented and F-1/F-2 visa holders?
5. What systems are in place to protect the privacy of students who share their status? What would recommend?
6. Tell me about your knowledge regarding the obstacles undocumented students encounter as they prepare to leave high school?
7. In your experience, what do undocumented students struggle with in navigating the college preparation process?
8. What kind of resources would be helpful for the school to support undocumented students?

##### Belonging

1. Where are the spaces in the school for undocumented students to talk openly about their legal status?
  - a. If such a space exists, in the school, how is it being sustained?
  - b. If such a space does not exist, has the school considered creating such a space? What are the challenges in creating it?
2. Have students revealed their legal status to you? If so, tell me about how you've learned about students' legal status?
  - a. How do you think they feel about sharing their status with you?
  - b. How are students supported once they share their status?

3. What kind of support have you provided for undocumented students at the school?
4. How often, would you say, conversations about immigrants or undocumented immigrants in school occur? Among school personnel? In class? Among students?

**Adults Perceptions of Undocumented immigrants**

1. When you think about undocumented immigrants, what comes to mind?
2. How would you describe the difference in opportunities between legally residing students and undocumented students?
3. What kind of interactions, inside or outside of school, have you had with undocumented immigrants?
  - a. What type of conversations have you had with them about being undocumented?
4. What have you seen or read about undocumented immigrants in the media?
  - a. What was being said?
5. If you had the opportunity, what would you do about immigration and immigration policy in the United States?

**Demographic Questions:**

1. What is your ethnic background?
2. Where were you born?
3. How many years have you been in this profession?

## **Appendix B**

### **Undocumented Student Interview Protocol**

#### **Introduction**

1. Begin interview by introducing yourself, reviewing purpose of study, and purpose of interview.
2. Remind student that all information provided will be strictly confidential.
3. Review structure of interview and request permission to record interview.
4. Ask if there are any questions of me before we begin.

#### **Demographic Questions:**

1. What is your ethnic background?
2. Where were you born?

#### **Interview Questions:**

##### **School Context**

2. Tell me about your high school,
  - a. What do you like? What do you dislike?
3. Please talk about your experience as an undocumented student in high school.
4. Have you ever experienced any form of unfairness because of your ethnicity / nationality? How did that make you feel?

##### **Students' Aspirations**

1. What do you plan to do after you graduate from high school?
  - a. What are some of your goals?
  - b. Are you interested in a specific career?
  - c. In what ways does college fit into your goals?
2. When did you decide you wanted pursue [career or college]?
  - a. Was there a specific moment that led to you to that decision?

##### **College and Work Information**

1. What kind of information have you received about college or work during high school?
2. What challenges does
3. Who have you talked to about college and work at school?
  - a. What kind of information have they shared with you?
  - b. How often do you talk to them about college?
4. Who have you talked to about college and work outside of school?
  - a. What kind of information have they shared with you?
  - b. How often do you talk to them about college?

##### **Belonging**

1. Can you recall a moment during high school where being undocumented mattered in your life decisions?
  - a. How did you handle the situation?

- b. Who did you talk about it?
  - c. What kind of advice were you given?
2. What kind of moments and experiences have made you feel like you are a member of your high school?
3. Has there been a moment during high school where you felt you did not belong at the school because of your legal status? In society?
  - a. Were you able to talk about it with any school personnel?
4. Is there a place at your were you feel comfortable talking about being undocumented? If so, what makes a safe space for you?
5. Have you shared your legal status with anyone in you high school?
  - a. If so, was there a reason you decided to talk about your legal status with that person?
6. How often do you think about your legal status in relation to your education?
7. Who do you usually talk to about issues of immigration and/or being undocumented?

### **Peers and School Personnel Perceptions of Undocumented immigrants**

1. What differences did you notice between yourself and your documented peers in high school? At what point did you begin to notice these differences?
2. What are some of the challenges you face that your school peers might no encounter?
3. What do you think people at your school assume about undocumented immigrants?
4. Have you been in a situation where school personal or adults has made a comment about immigrants?
  - a. What did they say?

### **Immigration Reform**

1. Have you followed the debate on comprehensive immigration reform?
2. What does immigrant reform mean for you?

## Appendix C

### U.S-born and Legally Residing Student Interview

#### Introduction

1. Begin interview by introducing yourself, reviewing purpose of study, and purpose of interview.
2. Remind student that all information provided will be strictly confidential.
3. Review structure of interview and request permission to record interview.
4. Ask if there are any questions of me before we begin.

#### Demographic Questions:

1. What is your ethnic background?
2. Where were you born?
3. When did your family come to the U.S.?

#### Interview Questions:

#### Immigration Story

1. Everyone has a story of migration to the United States; please tell me about you and/or your family's journey.

#### School Context

1. Tell me about your high school,
  - a. What do you like? What do you dislike?
2. In school, have you ever experienced any form of unfairness because of your ethnicity or nationality? Tell me about it.
  - a. How did that make you feel?
  - b. How about outside of school?
3. How would you describe the relationship between Asian and Latino students at the school?
  - a. How would you describe the Latino students at this school?
  - b. How would you describe the Asian students at this school?

#### Students' Aspirations

1. What do you plan to do after you graduate from high school?
  - a. What are some of your goals?
  - b. What would you like to do as a career?
  - c. In what ways does college fit into your goals?
2. When did you decide you wanted pursue [career or college]?
  - a. Was there a specific moment that led to you to that decision?

#### College and Work Information

9. What kind of information have you received about college or work during high school?
10. Outside of school, who have you talked to about college and work?

- a. What kind of information have they shared with you?
  - b. How often do you talk to them about college?
- 11. Who have you talked to about college and work at school?
  - a. What kind of information have they shared with you?
  - b. How often do you talk to them about college?
- 12. Tell me how the school has supported you in preparing and applying for college.
- 13. What was most challenging about applying to college?
- 14. What will you base your decision to go to college?
- 15. You participated in an internship as a senior, what did you learn?
  - a. Where did you intern?
  - b. What issues did you learn about?

### **Students Perceptions of Undocumented immigrants**

- 1. What comes to mind when you think about undocumented immigrants?
  - a. Who do people usually assume is undocumented?
- 2. What have you seen or read about undocumented immigrants in the media?
  - a. What was being said?
- 3. What differences in opportunities exist between undocumented students and students who were born in the U.S. or have legal residency?
  - a. At what point did you begin to notice these differences?
- 4. What kind of interactions inside of school have you had with undocumented immigrants? Outside of school?
  - a. What type of conversations have you had with them about being undocumented?
- 5. What can you tell me about what the school is doing for undocumented students?

### **Immigration Reform**

- 1. Tell me what you know about the current immigration reform debate.
  - a. What have you heard?
- 2. If you had the opportunity, what would you do about immigration and immigration policy in the United States?

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