

When I learned that I'd be writing an essay on which side I'd be on regarding the issue of undocumented immigrants receiving a public education, I was certain of the stance I was going to take. But, this is an issue that when I considered the arguments on both sides I went back and forth many times and honestly had a hard time deciding which side to be on. This is any issue that does not have an "easy fix," where the solution may cause more problems. For me, I don't have a problem with undocumented immigrant children getting a public education if their parents or caretakers are contributing in some amount financially to the school district (paying taxes). If they are not, then I don't think it's right for legal residents to pay for the education of a child that is in the country illegally. With that said, both sides have very legitimate arguments and the answer may be for both sides to compromise and give a little to find a practical way to allow these children a chance to experience the fruits of the country, while contributing to the cost of those opportunities in at least a small way.

The main points that I thought were compelling and were very firm arguments are...that it's unjust to punish the children for the actions of their parents. However, the counter argument is that it's equally unfair to require legal residents (tax payers) to pay for the education of kids that are not in this country legally. It also encourages immigrants to cross the border illegally with the knowledge that their children will receive a free education. It's worth the risk for them. The flip side to that is regardless of how much money it costs the taxpayer to fund the immigrant's education, the cost to take care of an uneducated population would be far greater. Many undocumented immigrants are employed and pay taxes. If they own a home they pay property taxes, and even renters pay a portion of property taxes in their rent. However, some illegal immigrants are in the cash flow economy and pay neither payroll nor property taxes. Resentment from the law-abiding tax payers towards illegal immigrants that are not paying taxes and their children getting a "free education" will escalate and create tension. So is there a way that these kids can get an education and still somehow contribute to the cost?

What I came up with is this...If a kid tries to enroll in a public school and their parents cannot prove their citizenship, they then need to prove they're employed and are paying taxes (not in the cash economy). If they cannot do either the student's name and information goes onto a list. From there they are monitored throughout their educational career. Then, when they enter the workforce, have gained legal citizenship and are earning U.S. dollars, they will start "repaying" a percentage of the cost of their education back to the state in the form of some sort of tax or fee. The idea is that their basic education is paid for by the taxpayers as sort of a very low interest loan to be repaid after the student starts to see the rewards of their education they received.

I realize that this could and more than likely will open up new issues and challenges. Such as...who's responsible for tracking the students and collecting the money when it's time for them to repay? What happens if the student leaves the country after they graduate? It creates a certain dependency from the student to the state and more government control over the person. And I'm sure the list of "new" problems would go on and on. However, this is a tricky issue. We are a country made up of immigrants. How can we deny a child, through no fault of their own, the chance to pursue opportunities and dreams?

The main point to this issue I think is, if immigrants, even undocumented, are contributing financially (paying taxes) to the services provided by the state or municipality that they live in, then they should be able to receive those services. That includes public education. However, if they are not "throwing some money into the pot," and they are in the country unlawfully, then they should not be able to receive the benefits.