

EDUCATION

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EFP Takeaways

In-State Tuition Policies and the College Decisions of Undocumented Students: Evidence from Colorado

Background

Undocumented students face high barriers to college. Their legal status makes them ineligible for federal financial aid, and they are also barred from in-state tuition under federal law, although state-specific policies can extend eligibility in practice. Michel Grosz and Annie Hines explore how a change in college tuition policy in Colorado affected the enrollment behavior of undocumented immigrants relative to other students. Their work is published in vol. 17 issue 2 of *EFP*.

The Study

In Spring 2013, the Colorado legislature passed the Advancing Students for a Stronger Economy Tomorrow (ASSET) bill, which extends in-state tuition eligibility to students who graduated from high school in Colorado but are unable to provide proof of legal residence. To explore the effects of this policy change, particularly on college application and enrollment behavior, the authors use student-level data from the Colorado Department of Higher Education.

Findings

The authors find that the policy led to a 16 percent increase in credit hours for new, undocumented students. Additionally, it resulted in a 17 percent increase in the probability of an undocumented student having full-time status, as well as a 30 percent increase in persistence of first-year undocumented students into their second year.

The authors also find that the policy closed half the gap in enrollment credits between likely undocumented students and similar resident students. Additionally, the policy appears to have induced students to apply who would not have otherwise applied to college, despite having similar academic ability.

Overall, the findings suggest that the legislation, and perhaps similar policies, can increase the college enrollment of undocumented students. Moreover, the authors emphasize that the findings show that students are sensitive to the cost of college and tuition policies can have large impacts on students who would otherwise not attend college.

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- Summary of:
Grosz, M. & Hines, A. (2022). In-State Tuition Policies and the College Decisions of Undocumented Students: Evidence from Colorado. *Education Finance and Policy*, 17 (2): 232-254.