



Breland: SJECCD supports undocumented student week of action

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Evergreen Community College District (SJECCD) is committed to the proposition that quality, affordable higher education, job training and career development opportunities should be available and accessible to every individual and family in California, regardless of ethnicity, religion, national origin, immigration status, age, gender or socioeconomic status.

As such, our board of trustees recently passed a resolution in support of Undocumented Student Week of Action, and we urge all in our community, including elected officials, to join us in showing support for some of the most vulnerable members of our community.

Given the divisive national rhetoric surrounding immigration, it is as important now as it has ever been that we set an example for the rest of the country by upholding California's values by offering educational pathways and resources for our undocumented students as they strive to meet their educational goals.

As the largest system of public higher education in the United States, California Community Colleges serve 2.2 million students. Of the estimated 223,000 California Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) participants, more than 70,000 are enrolled at California Community Colleges, including many right here at San José City College (SJCC) and Evergreen Valley College (EVC).

Many of these students are the first in their families to attend college and serve as role models for family members and others in their communities. It is vital that we assure all in our community that our campuses are committed to serving all students equally, regardless of immigration status, and reaffirm our belief that Californians of all backgrounds deserve a chance to obtain a higher education.

In addition to the social and humanitarian imperatives, providing educational support for immigrant and undocumented students has significant economic benefits for California and Silicon Valley. According to a recent study by the CATO Institute, the U.S. economy could shrink by \$215 billion over the next decade without undocumented student policies like DACA. Additionally, recent research from the Kauffman Foundation found that immigrants are more likely to create opportunities by starting their own businesses than are those who were born in America.

As Thomas Perez, former US Secretary of Labor (2013 – 2017) said, “Our workforce and our entire economy are strongest when we embrace diversity to its fullest, and that means opening doors of opportunity to everyone and recognizing that the American Dream excludes no one.”

As part of Undocumented Student Week of Action, we are calling on our elected officials, particularly those in Congress, to take action against the numerous proposals and policies that have been implemented in recent years which have engendered fear and uncertainty among our undocumented students.

One recent example of this is the proposed change to the federal Public Charge Rules. By taking into consideration the use of public benefits when determining eligibility for permanent residency, the Department of Homeland Security's recent interpretation of this rule has discouraged students from applying for assistance from much-needed programs like Temporary Assistance for Needy Families. Many now fear that federal financial aid programs — like grants and work-study — might be counted as a public benefit under this interpretation as well.

During Undocumented Student Week of Action, we urge others to join SJECCD in supporting legislation that would create a pathway to citizenship for undocumented students who were brought into the United States as children and provide a permanent solution to the DACA program, the proposed cancellation of which has put the future of tens of thousands of students in jeopardy.

On Oct. 16, public meetings will take place at both SJCC and EVC. At EVC, a “Know Your Rights Workshop” led by an immigration attorney and director of South Bay operations for Pangea Legal Services will take place from 2:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. in the Mishra Community Room. At SJCC, an immigration forum designed to provide information and updates regarding immigration policy will take place in Room 204 inside the Student Center. Both events are free and open to the public.

California Community Colleges throughout the state are focused on supporting students and building awareness during Undocumented Student Week of Action, and I hope community members will join SJECCD in supporting these activities.