



The Importance of Protecting Immigrant Students' Access to Free Public Schools Established by *Plyler v. Doe* (1982)

Key Takeaways of *Plyler v. Doe* (1982)

On June 15, 1982, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in a 5-4 decision that public schools must **serve all children, regardless of immigration status**. The court concluded that educating all students was in the **best interest of the state**. Denying students free enrollment in public schools based on immigration status would create an underclass of uneducated people based on characteristics outside their control, and **violates the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution**.

Challenges to *Plyler v. Doe* through legislation or legal action would **deny hundreds of thousands of students' access to public schools**.

Recommendation: Protect the equal educational opportunity for all children to learn and contribute to the U.S. economy and society, regardless of immigration status.

Considerations for Texas Schools

- Denying Texas students from public schools based on immigration status could **cost the state over \$237 billion** in future economic contributions.
- Requiring public schools to collect, verify and report student immigration status could **cost at least \$214 million** (early estimate by Every Texan).
- More than 1 in 3 Texas school-age children have at least one parent who is an immigrant. **Challenges to *Plyler* could deny many U.S.-born children access to public schools**, including those in mixed-status families, and children who have trouble accessing their legal documents like those in foster care or experiencing homelessness.

Recommendation: Avoid imposing costly immigration status verification duties on school districts that will also cost the state in economic contributions and a prepared workforce.

RESOURCES

FWD.US - The Power of Plyler in Texas fact sheet, <https://www.fwd.us/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/The-Power-of-Plyler-in-Texas-v3.pdf>
IDRA Plyler v. Doe – The Law in Education, https://www.idra.org/education_policy/plyler-v-doe-the-law-in-education/
MPI (2018). English Learners in Texas, https://www.migrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/publications/EL-factsheet2018-Texas_Final.pdf
MPI (2024). Children in U.S. Immigrant Families, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/data-hub/charts/children-immigrant-families>.
TEA FAQ Hub – Title III, Part A. <https://www.txel.org/faqhub/title-iii-part-a/>