

Including Immigrant Students in California's Master Plan for Career Education

Implementation Recommendations from Immigrants Rising

Last revised August 12, 2025

Why It Matters

California is home to an estimated **94,000 undocumented students in higher education**—including more than **44,000 in the California Community Colleges**, **27,000 in the California State University system**, and **4,000 in the University of California system**—plus tens of thousands more in K–12 who will soon enter the workforce.

Since **2017**, the federal government has stopped accepting new applications for **Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA)**, meaning that undocumented students who have turned 15 in the last eight years have had **no pathway to obtain work authorization**. This reality leaves thousands of students—who have grown up in California and often completed their entire K–12 education here—without legal access to traditional employment.

Despite these barriers, undocumented students represent a **critical talent pipeline** in education, health care, climate, technology, and other priority sectors identified in the Master Plan. Ensuring their inclusion will not only advance equity but also strengthen California's workforce and economy.

About Immigrants Rising

Since 2006, Immigrants Rising has transformed undocumented individuals and fueled broader changes around the country. What started as a scholarship program for undocumented students in California, has expanded into wraparound offerings in higher education, entrepreneurship, career, and mental health. With our resources and support, undocumented people can get an education, pursue careers, and build a brighter future for themselves and their communities.

Immigrants Rising is uniquely positioned to help California integrate undocumented students into every facet of the Master Plan's six priority areas. Through statewide coalitions and a proven track record of impact, we:

- [Innovate programs](#): Develop career tools, provide leadership development training, and promote alternative income models for students without work authorization.
- [Build capacity](#): Train educators, workforce providers, and employers on best practices for engaging undocumented people.

- [Advocate for change](#): Advocate for public policies that create, expand, protect, and remove barriers to opportunities for undocumented individuals to access higher education, advance their careers, and achieve economic mobility for themselves and their families.
- [Shape narratives](#): Center stories of directly impacted individuals to humanize and normalize inclusion in statewide initiatives.

Recommendations for Inclusive Implementation

1. State Planning & Coordination

- Explicitly include undocumented students as a priority population in the newly [enacted](#) California Education Interagency Council and any statewide planning and coordinating body advocacy efforts ([SB 638](#)).
- Seek disaggregated data in the Cradle-to-Career Data System (C2C) that tracks educational and workforce outcomes of undocumented students (while protecting privacy).
- Partner with state agencies to develop policy guidance on inclusive career pathways for students without work authorization, including [entrepreneurship and independent contracting](#).
- Integrate Opportunity for All ([AB 713](#)), if passed, into statewide planning efforts to expand access to employment opportunities for all students, regardless of immigration status.

2. Regional Coordination

- Support regional collaboratives (K–16, Jobs First, High Road Training Partnerships) in designing inclusive pathways that address the specific barriers undocumented students face.
- Develop regional toolkits for integrating undocumented students into local employer engagement, internships, and work-based learning—leveraging alternative income strategies where work authorization is not available.

3. Skills-Based Hiring & Career Passport

- Advocate for the Career Passport to include skills gained through alternative work experiences, self-employment, community leadership, and entrepreneurship, which are often accessible to undocumented students.
- Create templates and training modules for documenting skills in ways that resonate with employers while remaining compliant with employment laws.
- Leverage [Immigrants Rising Career Tool](#) (in development) to help students document transferable skills and career goals in ways that align with the Career Passport framework.

4. Career Pathways for High School & College Students

- Expand dual enrollment and early college credit access for undocumented high school students, ensuring they can earn industry-recognized credentials.

- Develop inclusive work-based learning models, such as [paid fellowships](#) through third-party intermediaries, entrepreneurship incubators, or project-based consulting opportunities.
- Embed the [Career Tool](#) and [ImmigrantBizHub](#) into advising and pathway planning so students can map multi-year career journeys from high school through adulthood.
- Integrate [career-building curriculum](#) into existing paid fellowship programs like [College Corp](#) to yield a comprehensive career readiness experience for undocumented student participants.
- Ensure advisory structures in TK–12 and higher education include counselors trained on undocumented student issues.

5. Workforce Training for Young People & Adults

- Partner with adult education programs to bridge undocumented learners into certificate and credential programs that lead to self-employment or employer partnerships (such as [LA Trade Tech's Los Angeles City College Enterprise Incubator \(LACCEI\)](#), which Immigrants Rising helped create).
- Promote credit for prior learning policies that recognize skills undocumented students bring from informal work or international education.
- Support career training programs that prepare undocumented students to obtain professional licenses, such as [Immigrants Rising's Mental Health Career Program](#), which equips participants with the credentials and experience needed to enter licensed professions.

6. Access & Affordability

- Advocate for state-funded financial aid expansion to cover short-term training programs and non-traditional pathways for undocumented students.
- Work with state agencies to streamline access to public benefits (e.g., CalFresh, transportation subsidies) where eligibility exists, and provide guidance on alternative supports where it does not.
- Integrate entrepreneurship grants and microloans (such as [SEED](#)) into state career education funding streams.
- Promote the [California In-State Tuition Tool](#) and the [Career Tool](#) statewide to help undocumented students navigate the cost of higher education make informed decisions about cost-effective, attainable training and career paths.

Immigrants Rising is guided by its mission to empower undocumented people to achieve their educational and career goals with confidence and without constraint through personal, institutional and policy transformation. We look forward to working with all education and labor leaders to ensure that the Master Plan for Career Education serves all Californians, regardless of immigration status. For more information or questions, please contact Pedro Ramirez at pramirez@immigrantsrising.org