



State of the South



Tuition Equity in Georgia

In Georgia, thousands of student residents are charged out-of-state tuition at public higher education institutions despite graduating high school in-state and meeting residency requirements that would otherwise qualify them for in-state tuition.[i] This represents a significant barrier to higher education access for undocumented students and students with lawful and legal status like DACA, refugee, Temporary Protected Status, and humanitarian parole. Other Southern states, including Texas, Virginia, Florida, and Kentucky, have taken steps to expand and protect tuition equity and have seen tax and tuition revenue benefits. Georgia is missing an opportunity to strengthen its workforce and tax base by denying in-state tuition rates to students who meet every qualification except citizenship status.



The average cost of tuition and fees for a four-year degree at a public university in Georgia is estimated to be \$7,075 for in-state students and \$24,331 - nearly 3.5x higher - for out-of-state students.

Context:

In addition to the financial barriers noted above, the Georgia university system's governing board also prohibits undocumented residents, including DACA recipients, from enrolling in certain public universities, including Georgia Institute of Technology, Georgia College & State University, and the University of Georgia.[ii]

According to the American Immigration Council, there are currently 1,174,400 immigrant residents in Georgia, comprising 10.8% of the state's population.[iii] 347,800 of those immigrants are undocumented and thus ineligible for in-state tuition rates or federal student aid.[iv] The average cost of tuition and fees for a four-year degree at a public university in Georgia is estimated to be \$7,075 for in-state students and \$24,331 - nearly 3.5x higher - for out-of-state students.[v] Barring access to in-state tuition rates for undocumented students, DACA recipients, and other students means that they may choose to pursue higher education in other states or choose not to pursue it at all.

Past Proposed Legislation:

Legislation to increase equity in tuition rates has been proposed in recent legislative sessions in Georgia. In 2023 and 2024, Georgia considered several bills to expand tuition equity that received hearings, but ultimately none of the bills passed. One bill would have offered DACA recipients the opportunity to pay at least 110% of the in-state tuition rate if they have been living continuously in Georgia since 2013 and earned a high school degree or equivalent in Georgia;[vi][vii] another bill would have extended in-state tuition to those with refugee, special immigrant, or humanitarian parolee status;[viii] a third would have expanded in-state tuition access to those with work permits.[ix] In 2022, a bill to extend in-state tuition rates to students with "certain refugee, special immigrant, or humanitarian parole status" was introduced in the Georgia House, but it did not receive a committee hearing.[x]



Impact:

Georgia has an opportunity to strengthen its workforce by offering in-state tuition to all high school graduates who have been in the Georgia school system for a certain number of years, as 25 other states do.[xi] The 347,800 undocumented immigrants living in Georgia hold an estimated \$7.9 billion in spending power and contribute \$788.6 million in state and local tax revenue, and Georgia risks losing out on this tax revenue by closing pathways to higher education for this group.[xii] Creating opportunities for undocumented students to pursue advanced degrees in-state would encourage them to stay in Georgia long-term, continuing to build the state's tax base and helping the economy thrive.

“This lack of access to higher education due to limitations on in-state tuition creates barriers to wealth-building and threatens self-sufficiency. Additionally, it increases the risk of crippling debt for families prioritizing education but already struggling financially, thus highlighting the inequities that Latinos in Georgia face on a daily basis.”

-Jean-Luc Rivera, Deputy Executive Director of Latino Community Fund Georgia

Lessons from the South:

Across the South, states differ in their approaches to tuition equity. Texas and Virginia have the most inclusive policies, with tuition equity laws in place and some state financial aid available. Florida has also passed tuition equity laws, and some major institutions in Kentucky have passed tuition equity policies. Tennessee and North Carolina prevent undocumented students and DACA recipients from accessing in-state tuition,[xiii] while Arkansas allows DACA recipients to access in-state tuition, but not undocumented students or refugees.[xiv] South Carolina and Alabama have measures in place to prohibit undocumented students from enrolling in public higher education institutions.[xv]

In Texas, the impact of expanding in-state tuition access and financial aid availability has been largely positive. The state passed the “Texas Dream Act” in 2001, guaranteeing access to in-state tuition and financial aid at public universities to graduates of Texas high schools who are not U.S. citizens or permanent residents.[xvi] In 2021, 20,137 students (1.5% of total enrollment) across the state benefited from the Texas Dream Act, and 3,539 of those students received \$17.3 million state-supported grants, less than 3% of the \$579 million awarded to all students attending Texas colleges and universities that year.[xvii] Texas Dream Act students generated a benefit of approximately \$72 million in tuition and fees to public universities and colleges in 2021.[xviii]

Ensuring in-state tuition access and financial aid opportunities are available for all students graduating from Georgia's high schools will benefit undocumented students and DACA recipients and boost the state's economy through added tax and tuition revenue and future workforce contributions. To learn more about this issue and access model language for tuition equity bills, visit the National Immigration Law Center's [Higher Education for Immigrant Students Toolkit](#).

Sources:

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[vi] Young, Ashley, and Crystal Muñoz. “[Education Equity is Good for DACA Recipients and Georgia | Bill Analysis: House Bill 131 \(LC 49 1187\)](#).” Georgia Budget and Policy Institute. March 3, 2023. Accessed November 15, 2024.

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[xi] National Immigration Law Center. “[Laws & Policies Improving Access to Higher Education for Immigrants](#).” Accessed November 15, 2024.

[xii] American Immigration Council. “[Immigrants in Georgia](#).” Accessed November 15, 2024.

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[xviii] Every Texan. “[Texas Dream Act Report](#).” May 2023. Accessed November 15, 2024.