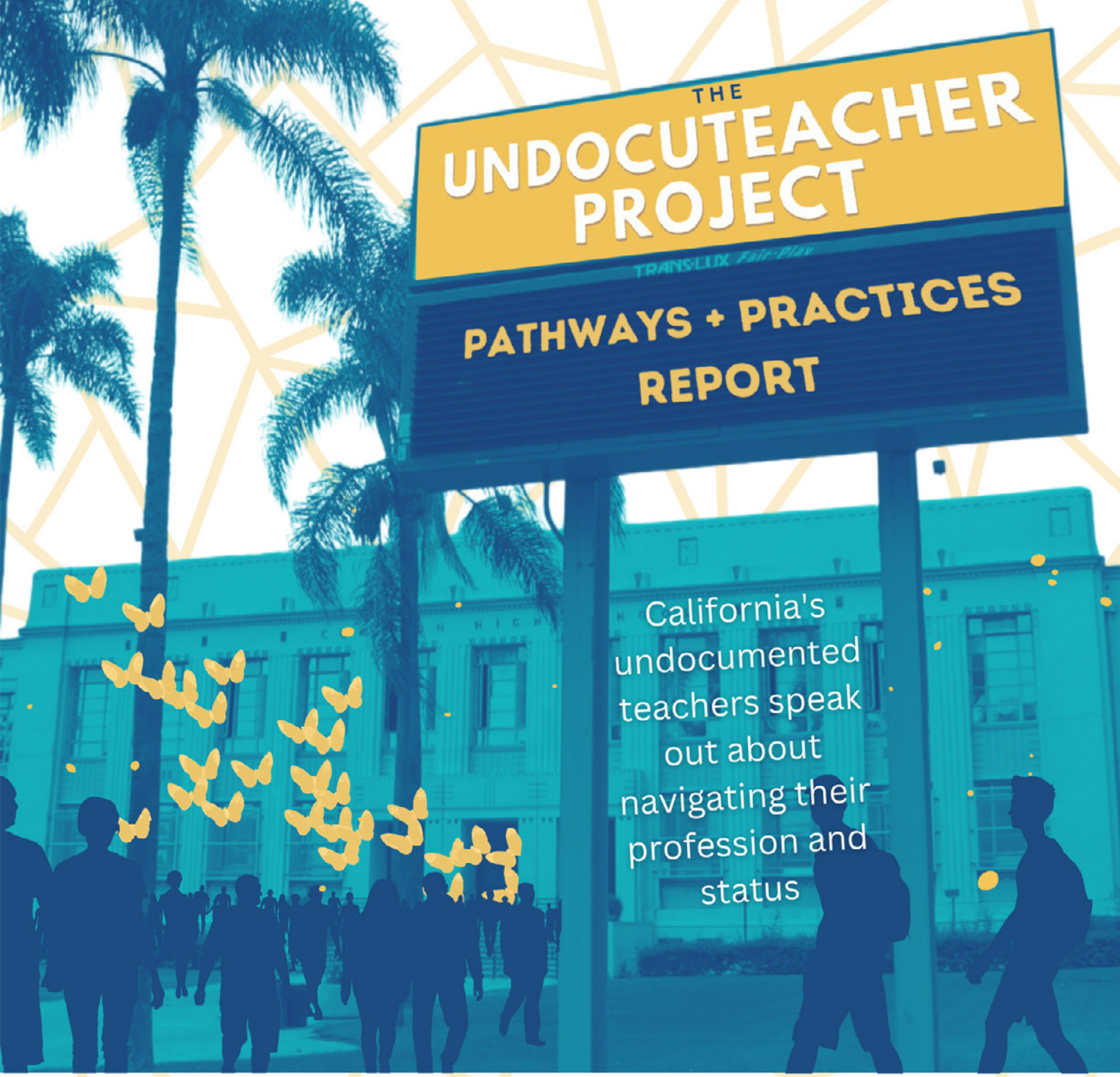

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KEY TAKEAWAYS

Below are key takeaways, recommendations, and implications from our research, organized according to the major sections of the report.

PATHWAYS: BECOMING AN UNDOCUTEACHER *What are the pathways into teaching for undocumented people?*	
Findings	**Implications & Recommendations**
Motivations. Inspired by their diverse backgrounds, participants entered the profession for a variety of reasons, including a sense of giving back, commitments to social change, and increasing representation.	Efforts to diversify the teaching workforce should incorporate an intersectional framework that deliberately includes citizenship status along with race, class, gender, sexuality, language, ability, and other identities.
Gaining experience. Education-related programs, internships, and networks are an important gateway to the teaching profession.	Ensure that undocumented students can both access and receive compensation for relevant opportunities at the college level.
Roadblocks. Aspiring undocumented teachers can pursue licensure, but cannot actually serve in classrooms without access to work authorization.	Aside from reinstating DACA and other immigration reforms at the federal level, state-level advocacy may carve out employment pathways.
Teacher education. Current and future teachers felt that immigration status wasn't identified as a form of diversity that was discussed in their programs. Undocumented students may also be particularly impacted by student teaching requirements and access to funding.	Teacher educators can reflect on their approach to intersectionality and intentionally incorporate legal status when developing programming for new teachers. Moreover, state agencies and schools of education can make financial aid more accessible for undocumented students.

PRACTICES: TEACHING WHILE UNDOCUMENTED

How does status impact their roles as teachers?

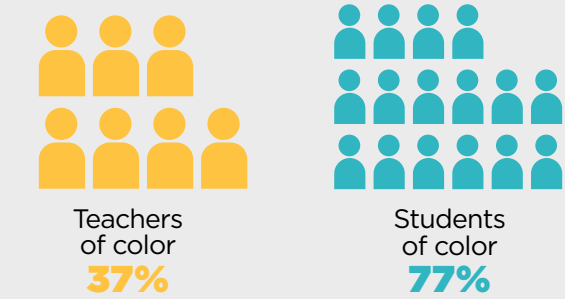
Findings	Implications & Recommendations
DACA Renewals. Teachers face interruptions in DACA work authorization that can be profoundly disruptive on personal and professional levels.	School districts and ally organizations can demonstrate their support for these teachers by covering costly renewal fees and supporting them through potential lapses in work authorization.
School support. Teachers primarily reported positive relationships with administrators and work colleagues, but some experienced hostile or unsupportive school environments.	School-focused allyship campaigns and trainings can go beyond supporting students to include undocumented teachers and other community members.
Classroom connections. Teachers provide critical mentorship and work to build community within their classrooms.	Future studies could elicit student voices that speak to undocumented teachers' various impacts.
Teaching for change. Teachers seek to further aims of social justice both within and beyond their classrooms.	As they take on roles of being teacher activists and leaders, it is crucial that they know that administrators and the broader school community have their back.
Wellbeing and mental health. Teachers experience a host of stressors, but also derive strength from their roles. The support they provide students may also reflect a form of cultural taxation.	Increasing access and support to mental health resources would be crucial, especially given the unpredictable and tumultuous political climate. Moreover, policymakers can look more structurally to reducing job demands and ensuring that teachers have more voice in decisions that impact them. Professional development and teacher education can also incorporate humanizing approaches to support teacher growth and sustainability.

INTRODUCTION

As the Trump administration set in motion a plan to rescind DACA in 2017, undocumented advocates and allies took legal action to halt the move. Among the various cases that were ultimately heard by the Supreme Court, one lawsuit included several DACA recipients as plaintiffs to demonstrate just how disruptive the action would be to their personal and professional lives. The plaintiffs included an immigrant rights attorney, a future doctor, a mental health practitioner, and two public school teachers. Miriam Gonzalez Avila, a DACA-mented middle school teacher from Los Angeles, shared her decision to sign on to the suit despite concerns over her own status. Talking about her students, many of whom were undocumented themselves, she said, "Since they were the ones who were like, 'So, Miss, what's going to happen?' I didn't want them to think that I was just going to do nothing. I told them, 'No, I'm going to fight.'"[1] While broad-based legal resistance was ultimately successful in ensuring DACA remained intact, further attacks have barred the approval of new applicants while uncertainty about the program's future has only grown.

As they straddle the worlds of immigration and education, undocumented teachers like Miriam remind us that teaching is a profound, political, and often precarious profession. Facing not only the inhumanity of an exacting immigration system, undocumented teachers also must confront demanding working conditions as well as the increased policing of pedagogy in classrooms nationwide. Building on previous research focused on individual accounts,[2] this landmark report represents an attempt to more broadly speak to the diverse experiences and perspectives of both current and aspiring undocumented teachers. A review of research focused on job security for teachers of color emphasizes that we know little about the actual work experiences of undocumented teachers in schools.[3] The project's objective is (a) to understand how undocumented immigrants navigate political and professional challenges to become public school teachers in California, and (b) to explore what this means for their pedagogical practices and choices. The study is guided by the following research questions: What are the pathways into teaching for undocumented people? In what ways does their status influence their roles as teachers? Ultimately, this report is aimed at not only recognizing the structural conditions that shape and restrict their opportunities, but also the vital contributions of undocumented teachers within the profession and the lives of students. By centering their voices, we bear witness to the urgent need for both immigration and educational justice.

The struggles of undocumented youth have always been deeply entwined with efforts to expand access and equity in education. Despite the uncertainty surrounding their jobs and residence in the country, they are also committed educators working in essential public institutions and with populations who reflect their own backgrounds. Significant demographic shifts underscore the important role that undocumented teachers can play. Since 2014, the majority of public school students nationwide have been non-White. However, the teaching workforce has yet to similarly diversify. This disparity is particularly pronounced in California, where 77% of all students are non-White but only 37% of their teachers are, according to the California Department of Education.[4] Moreover, California is home to the largest population of English learners—one of the fastest growing student populations in the country—but recruiting teachers with the requisite skills has not kept pace.[5] These gaps are further exacerbated by issues of high teacher attrition and teacher shortages in lower-income communities. The pandemic has only heightened labor issues, as K-12 workers recently reported the highest burnout rates of any sector and a steady stream of educators continues to exit the profession.[6] Given that research has long demonstrated the positive academic and social-emotional impacts



(California Department of Education)

[1] Mark Keierleber, Teacher v. Trump: How an Educator's Lawsuit (Temporarily) Halted the President's DACA Repeal," The 74, January 10, 2018.

[2] See: J. García, "'Lo que yo en realidad quería hacer': Rationales of Latina/o DACA Recipients for Pursuing Careers as Teachers," *The Urban Review* 52, no. 5 (2020): 830–852;L. E. J. Treviño, J. García, and E. R. Bybee, " 'The day that changed my life, again': The testimonio of a Latino DACAmented teacher," The Urban Review 49 (2017) 627–647.

[3] A. J. Castro, "Teachers of Color and Precarious Work: The Inequality of Job Security," *Labor Studies Journal* 47, no. 4 (2022): 359–382.

[4] https://www.cde.ca.gov/pd/ee/diverseteacherworkforce.asp.

[5] https://calbudgetcenter.org/resources/bilingual-teacher-shortage-threatens-students-bilingual-opportunity/#bilingual-teachers-table.

[6] https://news.gallup.com/poll/393500/workers-highest-burnout-rate.aspx.

of having a teacher that reflects their students' backgrounds[7], it is imperative to better understand diverse pathways into the profession.

Much of the research and discussion on undocumented youth has focused on educational access, but less so on experiences with status across the lifecourse. Studying the professional experiences of undocumented teachers can provide important lessons for immigration reform regarding their roles in public institutions and the ongoing adversity they face. California is one of few states that allows undocumented people to obtain teaching licenses **(See Box 1)**. As a sanctuary state, California is keen on creating employment pathways for undocumented people. Professional licensing bodies in California can accept a Tax ID number or a social security number, thereby allowing undocumented workers access to a variety of credentials. The Migration Policy Institute estimates that there are 20,000 DACA-eligible teachers across the country, with 5,000 of them in California alone. [8]The study can also serve as a model to study the experiences of undocumented professionals in other fields as well, particularly those that may require licensure.

INFO BOX 1: Background on undocumented students and teachers.

What terms will be helpful in understanding this report?	What laws support California's undocumented students?	Where can undocumented people teach?
• **DACA/ "DACA-mented"** refers to those undocumented immigrants who are enrolled in the federal Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program who have protection from deportation and work authorization, among other benefits. • **"Fully undocumented"** refers to those individuals who are non-citizens who have not been able to obtain DACA due to eligibility or the current injunction but may benefit from state programs.	• **Assembly Bill (AB) 540.** Passed in 2001, sets forth criteria for undocumented students to claim nonresident exemption and pay in-state tuition. • **California DREAM Act.** Allows undocumented students to apply and receive various forms of financial aid.	• States where any undocumented person can receive a teaching license: California, Colorado, Illinois, Nevada, and New Jersey. • States where only DACA-recipients can receive a teaching license: Arkansas, Nebraska, New York, West Virginia.

[7] David Blazar, "Teachers of Color, Culturally Responsive Teaching, and Student Outcomes: Experimental Evidence from the Random Assignment of Teachers to Classes," EdWorkingPaper: 21-501, 2021, https://doi.org/10.26300/jym0-wz02.

[8] https://www.migrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/publications/DACA-Recipients-Work-Education-Nov2017-FS-FINAL.pdf.

METHODS

The report draws from 16 interviews with current undocumented teachers and 9 interviews with future teachers. Current undocumented teachers provided insights on their pathways into teaching and the ways in which their status may shape their approach to teaching and learning. Undocumented students in credentialing programs, meanwhile, shared their reasons for becoming teachers and their expectations in pursuing their professional pathway. All interviews were conducted virtually. Semi-structured questions were meant to elicit testimonios, or self-narrated life stories of oppression and resistance that help build solidarity and inspire action.[9] Our mixed-status research team of liminal status students and professors collaboratively conducted and analyzed interviews. Throughout the research process, we contended with how our differing identities and statuses impacted our relationship to our participants and the resulting study.[10]

WHO ARE UNDOCUMENTED TEACHERS?

Undocumented communities carry multiple identities that can both further marginalize them but also provide multiple forms of belonging.[11] In addition to their citizenship status, our participants also variously discussed how being queer, Muslim, disabled, and Indigenous shaped their identities. Their countries of origin include El Salvador, Guatemala, Korea, Mexico, Peru, Philippines, and Taiwan. Nearly all of our participants were first-generation college students or graduates and came from working-class backgrounds. Their paths to becoming undocumented vary. Some interviewees recalled traumatic border crossings as young children, others came to visit family members and overstayed their visas, and still others came to pursue educational opportunities later in life. In several cases, participants belonged to mixed-status families and had siblings who are citizens. As we discuss later, language is also a central part of many of their identities—in particular, being non-English speakers became an early marker of their difference. Finally, in this report, there were also significant generational differences among participants. On one hand, the teachers we spoke to were able to take advantage of DACA during their college years, thereby also opening doors to employment as well. The students we spoke with, meanwhile, are able to take advantage of some state supports for undocumented students but have not been able to obtain DACA given the program's hiatus. Pseudonyms are used for participants quoted throughout the report.

PART I.
PATHWAYS: BECOMING AN UNDOCUTEACHER

When sharing their stories, current teachers would sometimes pause to note their frustrations despite feeling proud of all they accomplished. Vanessa, a DACA-mented teacher, reflected that "it sucks that even when we are somewhat privileged to have this profession, in a way, it's still unfair and we still have to fight for every part of it." Rafael, normally an animated English teacher, similarly paused during his interview to somberly note, "So far it sounds pretty simple, my path to being a teacher...But it's always been laced with this fear of deportation and what I can do to better myself... [A]t each step I was hyper aware of what it took out of me and how much effort I had [put in]." He doesn't want his experiences to become a "feel good" story about "a Brown kid from the [San Fernando] Valley with no papers" who went on to a "fancy" graduate school, but also wants others to understand the "dark undertone" running through his narrative.

> ***So far it sounds pretty simple, my path to being a teacher...But it's always been laced with this fear of deportation and what I can do to better myself... [A]t each step I was hyper aware of what it took out of me and how much effort I had [put in].***

The stories our participants shared with us remind us of the power in their aspirations, but also the weight of structural limitations. In particular, fully undocumented students with no clear path toward employment face considerable struggles. Lizbeth, a self-admitted "workaholic," was until recently taking two buses to get to a school where she worked as a teacher's assistant. She juggled this position along with a variety of other jobs she managed to take on despite not having work authorization, including working as a substitute teacher, tutor,

[9] L. P. Huber, "Disrupting apartheid of knowledge: Testimonio as methodology in Latina/o critical race research in education," *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 22, no. 6 (2009) 639–654.

[10] To read more about our approach see: E. Syeed, A. Rosas, F. Hammam, S. Shen, andF. Zeferino, "Challenging 'Citizen Science': Liminal Status Students and Community-Engaged Research," *Social Sciences* 11,no. 66 (2022), https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci11020066.

[11] Z. Valdez and T. Golash-Boza, "Master status or intersectional identity? Undocumented students' sense of belonging on a college campus," *Identities* 27, no. 4 (2020): 481–499.

and interpreter. All of her hard work, however, was recently put into perspective. It came as a surprise when her boyfriend, who Lizbeth described as "white-white," was recently hired as a teacher at a local high school despite not having a credential. For him, it's just a placeholder job, whereas Lizbeth said for herself, "it's like my dream." Their divergent realities hit home for her and speak to the circumstances of an entire generation of undocumented youth.

While their personal and professional milestones are to be celebrated, current and future undocumented teachers didn't want their struggles to be ignored either. Instead of glossing over these challenges, we emphasize that they are an integral and persistent aspect of the undocumented experience in education. As we discuss the pathways of undocumented people into the teaching profession, we are careful not to reinforce a triumphant "Dreamer" narrative popularized by politicians and the media.[12] As the story goes, hard-working, educated young people are more deserving of our sympathy and attention, often to the exclusion and marginalization of other immigrant populations. A counter-narrative emerges through the voices amplified here, one that chips away at the myth of the "American Dream" and furthers solidarity across undocumented communities. By detailing the various motivations, opportunities, and roadblocks for undocumented teachers, we hope to speak to how citizenship status shapes the teaching pipeline and teacher identities.

"I WANNA BE THE TEACHER I NEVER HAD": MOTIVATIONS FOR BECOMING A TEACHER

Participants' motivations to become teachers reflect their diverse array of experiences. In a few cases, participants did link becoming a teacher to some innate quality or saw it as a "calling." For example, one interviewee shared that in elementary school she inherited some supplies from a former teacher and excitedly returned home to play "teacher" and developed an entire curriculum for her younger sister. For most of our participants, however, they drew on inspirations from family, their activist backgrounds, polarizing school experiences, as well as educational programs that led them to the profession.

Many participants referenced a sense of "giving back" as an important motivation. Giving back was at times very personal and rooted in familial experiences. For Omar, the notion of giving back really hit home. "I went into special education, specifically," he shared, "because my younger sister had a learning disability. And then my older brother, he had a moderate-to-severe disability as well… And so having always been an advocate for my siblings, and going to IEP meetings and serving as my mom's interlocutor between her and the schools, I knew that that's something that I wanted to be a part of." Yesenia meanwhile saw her job as a fulfillment of her parents' dreams. Knowing that her father had always wanted to be a math teacher had long served as a motivation. Neither her mom nor dad were able to continue their education past high school because, as they had once told her, "they didn't have the resources, they weren't able to do what they actually wanted to do with their education."

For several participants, they saw becoming a teacher as a natural extension of their leadership and advocacy experiences. On their pathway to becoming teachers, many had gained experience in immigrant rights organizations, student groups, and service organizations. For Lupe, what stood out about his education was his teachers "constantly fostering that sense of education [that] can really liberate." Thinking back on their time as a student leader, they said "I did a lot of advocacy work there and I continue to hopefully do the work now as a teacher." Rafael also sees teaching as contributing to systemic change. Like others, he has always understood his citizenship status in relation to class status. He felt energized by Senator Bernie Sanders' initial presidential campaign, seeing his pathway into teaching as one directly intertwined with struggles around economic inequality. All teachers we spoke with echoed these commitments, as they consistently emphasized that teaching in Title I schools primarily serving immigrant communities was a priority for them.

In light of the uncertainties and transience of undocumented life, several participants found schools had served as a haven and support system in their formative years. When trying to pinpoint her reasons for becoming a teacher, Yesenia joked that, "I think everybody else saw it coming but me." Even after she had started college, she would still return to her middle and high schools to help out her old teachers. "I think I always just really liked being in school," she explained. "For me, it was like a really safe place for me where I was just kind of like okay, here, I can learn whatever I want, I can read whatever I want." After encountering racist teachers in other parts of the country, Daniela felt at home in the Southern California schools she attended. "From the moment I got to L.A. till the moment I graduated high school," Daniela shared, "my teachers were always such a huge support system… So I feel like that's what really motivates me now as a teacher." The sense that school could act as an anchor was powerfully demonstrated for Miguel. After graduating high school, his brother was diagnosed with cancer. Their school community sprung into action, helping raise money to support the family. Miguel was struck by the incredible gesture of what was otherwise just a group of "strangers" to his family. "And so when I was able to really understand that there is more to being a teacher than just being an educator," Miguel noted, "I realized the importance that

[12] L. J. Abrego,and G. Negrón-Gonzales, eds., *We are not dreamers: Undocumented scholars theorize undocumented life in the United States* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020).

one is able to have in those roles…" He was inspired to pursue a similar path, saying "that's why I wanna be a teacher, to give support to students, to keep on striving for their education, no matter what's happening."

> ***I never had a teacher that looked like me, that understood the things that I've gone through, like my culture and my background, my experiences… And so that's something that always motivates me to teach.***

Meanwhile, for others, it was the very lack of support or representation that drove them to pursue teaching. Luis, who grew up in a predominantly White and conservative area, knew his mission early on: "I wanna be the teacher that I never had." He recalled, "I never had a teacher that looked like me, that understood the things that I've gone through, like my culture and my background, my experiences… And so that's something that always motivates me to teach…" Similarly, Sofia, who is pursuing a masters in teaching, sees the need for undocumented teachers to help respond to the needs of undocumented students as a matter of social justice. "We have all these undocumented students that don't have undocumented teachers," she said. "You need representation in the education field for students going through certain things. As much as you need Asian teachers, Black teachers, you need representation within the workforce of all races and genders, you also need representation of statuses for these kids that are going through the motions of all this stuff, whether it be in grade school, figuring out what their status means, or in high school, trying to figure out what that means for their education." Several participants echoed these sentiments, citing examples of counselors and other educators who did not or could not support them, often because they simply didn't know how.

Navigating the school system as English language learners informed how many interviewees ultimately decided to become teachers themselves. While some learned of their status only later in life, their linguistic identities became apparent—sometimes painfully—early on. "So from the start," Sofia recalled, "I didn't really have anyone to communicate with up at school, and teachers didn't really make much of an effort to scaffold my education in terms of language" in her predominately White district. Sofia noted that she would be "punished" for not knowing English, and that "it would be very frowned upon for me to speak Spanish in the classroom." These cruel encounters shaped Sofia's trajectory as a teacher. She finds teaching high school math to a large number of English learners particularly gratifying. "The light on their face when one of their teachers speaks Spanish," she shared, "it's unmatched." This connection is felt deeply, as she beamed, "high school has my heart only because of that, because being able to help them in their home language is something that they don't get from their other classes." On the other hand, several participants also mentioned the connection and support they felt from teachers who spoke the same language and encouraged them to retain their native language. Amber shared her experience with a life-changing teacher she referred to as her "rock" who she remains in touch with to this day. "I was able to have a Spanish-speaking teacher, which was really helpful for me because she was able to understand me, she was able to give me more support and whatever I needed." For many participants, being bilingual came to be recognized as both an asset and a motivation to becoming a teacher.

As campaigns and programs to build a more diverse teaching workforce gain steam, they can also intentionally address citizenship status along with multiple other identities. In addition to having insight into the realities of undocumented status, interviewees' intersecting linguistic, class, ability, gender, and racial backgrounds all shaped their pathways into teaching. As we discuss in more detail in subsequent sections, recruiting undocumented students into the teaching profession also means addressing the precarity that they and other minoritized educators increasingly face.

"I WANNA DO THIS FOREVER": GAINING EXPERIENCE

Most participants had also gained experience in education prior to entering the classroom in one form or another. Internships, mentoring, and informal support networks for undocumented students were all mentioned as important factors in their development as teachers. For Mateo, his interest in teaching was piqued when he found out about an opportunity to tutor bilingual students in LA schools. When Daisy became disillusioned with her declared business major, she began to consider her alternatives. She recalled a positive internship experience at a school and the joy she found working with elementary school children, leading her to enroll in the liberal studies program for future teachers. When undocumented students sought out her support as a peer mentor on her college campus, Adriana had an "oh my God, that was me" moment—she realized they felt alone in the very same way she once did. Seeing the impact she was having in her mentoring role, Adriana decided, "that's when I was like I wanna do this forever" and foresees herself becoming a more effective advocate for undocumented families as a teacher.

INFO BOX 2: Education Career Pathways for Fully Undocumented Students

Start your own business

- Open a childcare center
- Start a tutoring business
- Teach private classes (i.e., ESL)
- Develop workshops (i.e., writing workshops)
- Check out these resources from Immigrants Rising

Start a non-profit

- Create a education-focused non-profit organization or program
- Begin an afterschool program

Offer Educational Consulting

- Offer specialized trainings & professional development to educators, businesses, & organizations

Adapted From: Carretero-Rodriguez, E., Rodriguez-Campo, M., Sarmiento, M, Flores, R.Q., & Cepeda, I. (2021). UndocuStudent Teacher Licensure Guide. Teacher Academy Pipeline Project, Title V-HSI Grant Team, Nevada State College. Henderson, NV.

Unfortunately, research has shown that undocumented students may be excluded from educational or work opportunities that may promote their professional development.[13] Higher education institutions must work to ensure that such opportunities are inclusive of non-citizen students as they provide an important pipeline into the profession. California's recent statewide College Corps program, which offers low-income students paid internship opportunities with community partner organizations, represents an important move in this direction as it explicitly includes undocumented students.[14] In another development with potentially wide-reaching consequences, undocumented student activists and legal scholars have led the Opportunity for All campaign to remove citizenship status as a barrier to all education employment opportunities across the University of California system.[15] While these developments can provide students with access to enriching opportunities on campus, it is imperative that they also have access to employment beyond graduation.

CHALLENGES IN THE TEACHING PIPELINE

Once undocumented students have decided to pursue teaching, there are many factors to consider as they make their way into the classroom. In this section, we discuss the experiences of how undocumented students approach the decision to pursue a credential, experiences in teacher education programs, alternative certification pathways, and reasons for leaving the classroom. In particular, we emphasize the circumstance of fully undocumented students. Even as they may take advantage of certain state-level programs to pursue their undergraduate degrees, such as paying in-state tuition through AB 540 or receiving financial aid through Cal Grants, their ability to obtain work authorization remains deadlocked.

"CHOP OFF YOUR OPPORTUNITIES": ROADBLOCKS TO TEACHING

Nearly all of the current students we spoke to came of age when DACA was suspended or are otherwise ineligible to receive work authorization. Daisy, for example, submitted her DACA application just before the injunction went into effect. She recalled crying when hearing the news, frustrated that "you're just trying to figure out life and then there's people out here that want to chop off your opportunities." For many who are unable to obtain work authorization, there is a sense of being stuck in a standstill. For example, a potential interviewee we connected with over social media shared that they had decided to hold off on pursuing their credential because they felt they wouldn't be able to actually use it. That interaction leads us to ask: how many other aspiring teachers have made the same decision? Uncertainty can even plague those who are actively pursuing their credential. Alicia, who is working toward her BA and has extensive teaching experience, remains ambivalent about her plans as someone who is not eligible for DACA. "I think sometimes that [getting a credential] is a waste of money," she said with some hesitation. "Because you're educating people

[13] L. Enriquez, M. Morales Hernandez, D. Millán, and D. Vazquez Vera. "Mediating Illegality: Federal, State, and Institutional Policies in the Educational Experiences of Undocumented College Students," Law & Social Inquiry 44, no. 3 (2019): 679–703, http://doi.org/10.1017/lsi.2018.16.

[14] https://www.californiavolunteers.ca.gov/californiansforall-college-corps-for-college-students/

[15] https://law.ucla.edu/news/undocumented-student-leaders-secure-first-victory-opportunity-all-campaign-uc-announces-its-support-removing-hiring-restrictions-undocumented-students

who are undocumented, but once they finish, you don't give them work authorization, so then what are they supposed to do?" The pain of being stranded by status is particularly felt by Alex, who actually received his credential a few years ago but lost his work authorization. After achieving so much, Alex feels depressed that he can't fulfill his goal. "You know, just working at a restaurant, I get to make a living," he remarked, however "I can't help but to think that I have so much to offer."

Uncertainty about future planning is felt even by those future teachers who are still DACA-eligible. Andrea, a future teacher, discussed how DACA renewals similarly cut short the possibility of planning ahead. "So it's, it's very weird when I hear people be like, 'what's your five year plan?'" she remarked. "I'm like, 'What five-year plan? I gotta wait the two years and see what happens there and see if I get another two years.'" She was drawn to teaching in part because of the sense of stability that it would provide. But with constant attacks on DACA, Andrea says her job prospects remain "very shaky and unpredictable." For some, they focus on taking things one day at a time, and not getting too caught up in what may or may not happen in the future. They may find meaning in the present struggle of completing a course or a semester, submitting an application, or seeking out another scholarship.

In the same way that undocumented students may seek to over-document to prove their worth or gain a competitive edge, some future teachers hope to find ways to stand out. Given the logjam over immigration reform, Lizbeth shared that her gameplan is to receive a sponsorship from a private school by proving herself to be an exceptional teacher:

> So that's another reason why I wanna get my credentials and my master's because right now, there's a lot of need for teachers. And if I have those things and I apply to private schools, they might sponsor me. So, I'm just trying to have as many options as I possibly can. And I'm trying so hard to gain experience right now so that my resume [stands out], you know, I'll have my credentials, I'll have my masters, I'll have all kinds of experience with all kinds of students, grade levels, backgrounds... [I]t's almost like I have to try a lot more than someone who has their [work] permit... And it's just insane how much I have to go out there and do...

Even as Lizbeth is proud of her accomplishments, she is keenly aware of the potential for burnout. Moreover, the possibility of gaining such a sponsorship is unlikely and could introduce other risks, such as being required to leave the country to adjust status. Nonetheless, Lizbeth's drive to enhance her profile as an effective educator has already opened doors to various tutoring and translation gigs.

Addressing the predicament of these aspiring teachers could in part be addressed at the federal level by reinvigorating DACA or the passage of comprehensive immigration reforms. While such avenues seem increasingly out of reach, state-level legal advocacy represents a potential path forward. The campaign to make undocumented students eligible for educational employment on California campuses also makes the case that any state entity, including school districts, should be able to legally hire undocumented individuals.[16] In the absence of such legal interventions, future teachers can still put their training to use in other ways, particularly as independent contractors or entrepreneurs. Higher education institutions and other ally organizations can continue to help provide trainings for fully undocumented students to pursue such careers. For more details, see **Information Box 2: Education Career Pathways for Fully Undocumented Students.**

> ***I would love to stay here, get a credential and teach Spanish to high school students. That's my goal. That's my Plan A. But I always try to have a Plan B.***

A few participants also noted that immense obstacles of remaining in the U.S. may push them to potentially leave the country, but not necessarily the profession. Alicia, a student working toward her BA, is clear about her goal of becoming a teacher. What remains, though, is the question of where she will end up doing it. "I would love to stay here," she remarked, "get a credential and teach Spanish to high school students. That's my goal. That's my Plan A. But I always try to have a Plan B." For Alicia, Plan B would mean taking her credentials abroad and trying to find employment as a language teacher in another country. Lupe, who is entering their seventh year in the classroom, is also considering their own Plan B. "I work a job that's for the community, and being an undocumented teacher through all of this," they expressed, "I give so much of myself away." Lupe is now prepared to return to their homeland as a form of "liberation" from the indignities of their status, asserting that they are "valuing myself enough to know that I should not have to constantly go through this."

"IT WAS ME ADVOCATING FOR THESE KIDS": TRANSFORMING TEACHER EDUCATION

Student voices spoke to the maneuvering they have undertaken in their teacher education programs. In most cases, teacher education programs didn't specifically cater to undocumented students or discuss status in meaningful ways. At the same time, future teachers said they didn't want to be "tokenized" or paid lip service, either. Sofia, for example, assessed the scant offerings available to undocumented students in one teacher education program she had applied to: "I would rather not participate if they're going to be selective

[16] https://www.nytimes.com/2022/10/19/us/daca-dreamers-university-of-california.html

about what I'm allowed to do and what resources I'm allowed to have." Even as Sofia is excited about the social justice-oriented program she ultimately enrolled in, she is still concerned that it is a White-dominated space. The experiences of undocumented teachers echo those of other teachers of color who find teacher preparation programs to be alienating spaces. [17]

Coursework also proved to be an arena in which undocumented students had to advocate for greater inclusion. Thinking back on her training, Andrea recalled culturally responsive education being discussed often. However, she had to take on the role of adding immigration status to discussions of intersectional identities: "So I wanted to know, right from the get go, as I'm still taking my classes, like, how, how does this impact [undocumented students]? And what are the tools that you can give me to be better able to help them? Yeah, so it was coming up, because it was me advocating for these kids or reminding people that this is a demographic that they're going to encounter." Instead of relying on undocumented students to advocate for inclusion, program curricula can be designed to intentionally incorporate immigration status as part of equity conversations that are essential to teacher education.

> ***And that was just not feasible for somebody who's undocumented, like myself, with bills to pay... I was helping out at home with rent and bills and stuff...And so there's very little help as far as students who are going into student teaching.***

For some future teachers, not feeling comfortable with sharing status in their credential programs means they cannot effectively plan or find resources to support their goals. Although Adriana feels like she has learned about the various requirements to become a teacher, she still doesn't feel "one hundred percent" as an undocumented student pursuing a credential. She wishes she could be more explicit about her status with those in the program:"I knew that I wanted to be a teacher but I was, I guess, fearful of asking someone to guide me." As she plans for her own future, Alicia also shared that she hasn't been upfront about her status when seeking guidance on her career path. Professors or administrators, she said, "can tell me, 'well, you can take a single subject credential and then teach, if you pass your CBEST...' Okay, yeah, I can do that. Of course. I love studying... But what's not up to me, I can't do anything about it. Right? What is up to me, I'm doing my best." Their experiences speak to the need for inclusive mentorship and targeted programming, interventions that have proven to support undocumented students in other higher education spaces. [18]

For those who have pursued traditional certification routes, finances also figured significantly into their experiences. Although some interviewees reported being successful in acquiring funding from university and state sources, others highlighted challenges with the various out-of-pocket costs of teacher education. Speaking about undocumented students like herself, Andrea pinpointed issues around student teaching as particularly distressing. During her orientation for her credential program, she said that students were told not to work when starting their student teaching and instead ask their families for financial assistance. The comment left her dismayed and indignant, as she recalled:

> And that was just not feasible for somebody who's undocumented, like myself, with bills to pay... I was helping out at home with rent and bills and stuff... And so there's very little help as far as students who are going into student teaching. We're expected to essentially work full-time without pay, and then extra, because we're still learning, we're not going to accomplish everything in the same time as experienced teachers. So it's not only just the 40 hours a week that they're asking us to commit to, it's the other extra hours that we're taking to not only finish our TPAs [Teaching Performance Assessments], but also figure out what it is that we're doing, as well as finish whatever homework assignments we're still getting on top of all that stuff. And to be asked to do all of that... especially for those who are undocumented is insane.

Andrea acknowledged that while this is an issue for any student, it is particularly prohibitive for undocumented students whose families may require more financial support due to limited economic opportunities.

Concerns over finances also prompted many of our participants to seek out alternative certification pathways, most notably through Teach for America (TFA). TFA has specifically worked to recruit and build a network of DACA-mented teachers. The organization helps cover their renewal fees in addition to providing many other resources and forms of support. Although some scholars and alumni have leveled critiques of the organization focused on its broader impact on

[17] L.C. Chávez-Moreno, A.M. Villegas, and M. Cochran-Smith, "The Experiences and Preparation of Teacher Candidates of Color: A Literature Review," in *Handbook of Research on Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers*, ed. C. Gist and T. Bristol (Washington, D.C.: American Educational Research Association, 2022).

[18] R. Gámez, W. Lopez, and B. Overton, "Mentors, resiliency, and ganas: Factors influencing the success of DACAmented, undocumented, and immigrant students in higher education," *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*, 16, no. 2 (2017): 144–161.

the teaching profession, our participants explained that TFA offered vital financial support and other forms of assistance. Omar, for example, detailed the factors that went into his decision:

> [O]ne of the biggest things was looking at the financial aspect of preparing to be a teacher, because I knew there was going to be additional schooling... I'd already been away at school, not necessarily contributing to my family financially for three years. And so prior to that, my family depended a lot on me, financially. So I needed to find an option that was going to pay me but at the same time, I'd be receiving my training. So I applied to the Teach For America program and I was part of the second cohort of undocumented students that was allowed to apply to the program...

As these experiences demonstrate, we must revisit and critically examine funding opportunities for aspiring undocumented teachers. The California Student Aid Commission has highlighted the various barriers to accessing financial aid, leading to as few as 14% of undocumented students receiving financial aid.[19] Moreover, teacher support grants are accessible only to undocumented students with work authorization in California. In addition to addressing deeper issues with higher education affordability, state institutions can work on addressing eligibility criteria and providing more designated financial aid for undocumented students. Additionally, the cohort model and targeted support for undocumented teachers provided by TFA could also be emulated by schools of education and other ally groups.

INFO BOX 3: Information on California teacher credential programs & scholarships.

Certificate of Clearance is required for both student teaching and field work. Some tips for undocumented students include:

- State ID's are required, no campus IDs
- Names need to match across documentation
- ITIN can be used instead of SSN
- Completing LiveScan/fingerprinting can be done in various locations, not just police stations

Funding for undocumented students can be accessed through the Golden State Teacher Grant Program, however it requires work authorization to complete the mandatory service requirement

[19] https://www.csac.ca.gov/renewingthedream

PART II.
PRACTICES: TEACHING WHILE UNDOCUMENTED

After making it into the classroom, undocumented teachers find that their status continues to inform various aspects of their jobs. In this section, we discuss what it means to be an undocumented teacher in schools today by focusing on three key areas identified in our interviews. First, they must deal with administrative processes around DACA that can cause serious disruptions in their professional and personal lives. Second, they reflect on how their status and identity informs their relationships with colleagues. Third, we explore their pedagogical practices, focusing on how they build community and advocate for change. Finally, we examine the impact that an already stressful and consuming job can have on the wellbeing of undocumented teachers.

A "TICKING TIME BOMB": CHALLENGES WITH DACA RENEWALS

All of the teachers we spoke to are currently enrolled in DACA. Even as the program provides them the possibility to work, it's not without complications. In fact, DACA-mented teachers expressed being stressed and worried about gaps in work authorization given the two-year renewal timeline. Araceli, a special education teacher, has come to see her work authorization not as a security blanket, but rather as a "ticking time bomb." Several participants described impending DACA renewal as foreboding, so much so that they delayed submitting their applications due to the stress. Although DACA-mented teachers acknowledge the rare opportunity they have, they are also regularly reminded of their precarious status. Andrea describes her job as "hanging on by a thread. And that thread is DACA." The thread, which remains inaccessible for a whole new generation of undocumented youth, has been considerably frayed even for those who have been able to take advantage of it.

> ***My DACA got backtracked for two months and I got fired from my job, unfortunately, just last year...That was my job, I loved it. I was really happy there, that meant the world to me.***

For any new teacher, the summer before they first enter their classroom is often a time of both great excitement and mounting anxiety. But for Vanessa, a special education teacher, that anticipation was also marked by a deeper, existential concern over delays in her DACA renewal. "In the moment it was really scary," she recalled. "I'm like, 'What if I don't get hired? ...Am I gonna go two, three months without getting paid?' Like I need to pay my bills." Although Vanessa ultimately received her renewal, others caught in the limbo of DACA renewals have not been so lucky. Facing a delay in their renewal, Lupe painfully recalled how they "went into a deep, deep depression because I blew through like half of my savings in six months." When awaiting their renewal, Lupe remembers thinking "I might have to do construction, I might have to sign up to clean houses, I might have to do the work that many undocumented people do." For Lupe, the continued precarity of their work authorization had major financial and emotional consequences. Another interviewee mentioned a friend who continued to work without pay for months while awaiting their own DACA renewal. DACA-mented professionals, much like friends or family members who may work in service or labor positions, may continue to navigate precarious and exploitative working conditions.

Info BOX 4: DACA renewal supports

You may be able to get your DACA renewal covered if you are a student or employee affiliated with...

- California Community Colleges. The largest higher education system in the nation offers a centralized portal to access resources.
- California State University. Find resources offered across the system's 23 campuses.
- University of California. Campus resources across nine UC campuses and through the UC Immigrant Legal Services Center.

...Or access resources from these advocacy organizations

Amber, a preschool teacher, discusses just how deeply personal a seemingly impersonal administrative process can be. "My DACA got backtracked for two months and I got fired from my job, unfortunately, just last year," she shared. "That was my job, I loved it. I was really happy there, that meant the world to me. I was so happy, excited because I was really pursuing my dream." Although the termination was based on work eligibility, it was hard to shake the feeling that she was not welcomed in the school. "Honestly," she said, "I wanted to figure this out because I don't think it's fair for us to go through the motions of getting DACA removed from us like that. I contacted my senator, I contacted people that I knew that were lawyers. I was trying to figure it out, I just wanted answers! Because it's not fair, it's just awful to feel like that. To feel like, dang, I can't work because I don't have a work permit." Amber worries about her status now more than before even as it seems like she has "made it" in her career: "I think I worry more because maybe one day they decide, 'Hey, it's all gonna be cut out for real.' And we have a profession, we are teaching... So what are we going to do?" Even after following a prescribed career path and crossing numerous hurdles, holding a steady, public service-oriented job is not enough to safeguard undocumented teachers from a sense of marginalization or even criminalization. Ultimately, if these administrative timelines can cause such disruptions for teachers, they no doubt will also impact their students as well.

SCHOOL SUPPORT: THE ROLE OF ADMINISTRATORS AND CO-WORKERS

Sharing status with co-workers and administrators brought mixed results. In some cases, they have acted as critical allies. During the initial job interview with his principal, Carlos said he made it "pretty obvious that I'm undocumented, just because that's part of my identity and it's connected to my teaching philosophy." His story resonated deeply with the principal, who told Carlos he could "easily connect to the struggles that our students are going through." For Carlos, the disclosure actually opened doors and helped form what he describes as a supportive relationship with his principal. Support from school leaders can also have very real impacts. Daniela, a first-year teacher, remembered feeling "scared that my career was on the line" when her DACA renewal was delayed. Between her principal and ally organizations, they found an alternative that allowed her to stay in the classroom and even supplemented some of the income she otherwise would have lost. "I just felt so supported," she recalled, "in a way that I had never felt before."

Others, meanwhile, have not always found such support or understanding. Vanessa confided that there have been instances in which sharing status can be "brought back against you," such as the time when an administrator suggested that she should feel grateful for having a job given her status. When Vanessa talked to her school administration about the delay in her DACA renewal, she felt let down when they told her they would not be able to keep her on. "I was hoping to hear more than, 'We're gonna terminate you if we don't get it in time.'"Depending on the location, some teachers may not feel like they can be as open about their status. Far from home and working in a school district in Central California, Yesenia said she had to be very mindful of what she shared with those around her. Growing up in LA, she was always very open about her status. But with the area's reputation as a deeply conservative enclave—not to mention another teacher who regularly wore a MAGA hat to school—she informed very few people of her status. Even when not facing an outwardly hostile climate, other teachers recalled being subjected to microaggressions that displayed co-workers' lack of understanding of undocumented communities.

To foster a supportive school climate, school-focused allyship campaigns and trainings can extend beyond supporting students to include undocumented teachers and other community members. At the same time, however, administrators and colleagues must allow undocumented teachers to share their status on their own terms. They should never be compelled to share their story or status in the pursuit of representation or inclusion.

"RELATIONAL TEACHING": BUILDING CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS

Despite the obstacles on the path toward becoming a teacher, many find ways to still show up for their students. In particular, participants noted how they build connections with students and advocate for them. Aside from what they teach, undocumented teachers find that their very presence can have a profound impact on students. Growing up in a conservative state, Luis learned to never talk openly about his status. Even when attending college, the thought of taking on the role of being the sole undocumented student activist was exhausting to him. But something happened when he became a teacher. Reflecting on his transformation, Luis noted that "it wasn't until I started teaching that I became much more open with my status and I share with my students everything about me." For Luis, he explained further:

> "it helps me connect with them better because almost every single one of my students has an undocumented family member. And so when they hear that their teacher grew up undocumented, they're like, 'oh, this guy's just like my mom, this guy's just like my dad, this guy's just like my uncle...' I feel like I wouldn't be genuine, like I couldn't be myself if I didn't tell them this big part of my identity and how I grew up.

The notion that sharing status can have such a profound impact on future generations helped embolden Luis to open up to his students. As he notes, it allowed him to show up as himself in an authentic way.

For some teachers, being open about their status with students was an important way to build community with students in their classes. After interviewing at three different schools, Carlos chose the school where students most closely reflected his own background as it served a large proportion of English learners and newcomer students. Speaking broadly about undocumented teachers, Carlos acknowledged, "we have a lot of experiences that a lot of other teachers will never be able to have, we have a way to connect with our students... [who] need us out there." When he is doing initial introductions at the beginning of the school year, Carlos always makes sure to let his status be known. He does that because, as he explains, growing up he "never knew who to trust" and "no other teacher really ever expressed any form of support at my school." In showing his support, he wants his undocumented students to know that "I'm there and going through their struggle and experiencing what they're experiencing. So they will have someone they can relate to and someone to look to when they need help or have any questions." While teacher participants varied in how much they chose to disclose early on, all these educators shared a commitment for undocumented students or students in mixed-status households to feel comfortable and safe with them. Although Vanessa chooses not to talk about her status "out loud to everybody," she said her "main goal as a teacher [is] just making them feel comfortable and that they're not the only ones going through it, or just through that struggle of being undocumented or coming from a mixed [status] family."

> ***We have a lot of experiences that a lot of other teachers will never be able to have, we have a way to connect with our students... [who] need us out there.***

These acts of disclosure are also intentional pedagogical strategies that undocumented teachers see as motivating students. Omar, a special education teacher, describes his decision to share status as a reflection of his approach to "relational teaching" and motivating students in planning for the future. He explained that "I share my story with my students, because... I don't want students to be afraid if they're in the same situation as I am, that they don't have any other options, and so even in taking that step, sharing my story, some of my students that are undocumented, they also kind of come out of the woodwork. And they're like, 'Hey, this is my goal. I want to do the same thing. You know, I'm trying to pursue different jobs, like what can we do?'" In addition to motivating students, Omar also emphasized that his actual knowledge around navigating legal processes has had a real impact on students. Citing the example of an undocumented student he supported in making post-graduation plans reflects his determination to ensure that what "little knowledge that I acquired along the way, I want to pass it forward." Recognition from students can also be more subtle. Lisa recalled that after sharing her status with students, she could see they were in awe of what she had accomplished as an undocumented person.

While their experiences may specifically resonate with immigrant students, they also find their perspectives allow them to connect with a range of diverse students. To Andrea, being undocumented "means that you're also very keenly aware of who your students are, and where they come from." Daniela, for instance, found that because she had shared her own story she was also able to have an unhoused student open up about his own struggles. Thinking back on the interaction, she talked about being grateful that "one of those good things that comes with being undocumented, [is] that you can share your story, and people reciprocate that." Knowing the importance of intersectional allyship, Andrea has provided students with resources on becoming allies for BIPOC, LGBTQIA+, and undocumented communities. Omar finds that the lessons of resilience are also important to his special education students. When a friend sent him the popular Brene Brown quote, "One day, you will tell your story about how you overcame, what you went through, and it will be someone else's Survival Guide," he knew he had to share it with his students. For one of their journal prompts, he asked his students to write about what someone could learn from their own struggles. "You know, because we're all interconnected, because we're all going through different struggles."

By fostering supportive relationships with diverse students, undocumented teachers are creating opportunities for solidarity and understanding in the classroom. Further study on undocumented teachers could also elicit student voices that speak to the various impacts they have, particularly in providing a sense of belonging and strengthening cultural wealth.

"TAKING UP SPACE": TEACHING FOR CHANGE

Teachers also saw their role as furthering social justice aims. In their history classes, Lupe finds that their intersectional identity informs a critical approach to their pedagogy. To Lupe, "being who I am in front of a classroom is a statement within itself. So, when I show up, showing up as my authentic self is redefining history... The fact that I'm not a cis, white man teaching children history." Similarly, Rafael leans into a transgressive approach to teaching. He embraces the label of being "illegal" and says that his mission is to "take up space"

as an undocumented person. He doesn't want his students to simply play it safe or be intimidated, and tells his English classes, "If there's one thing you get out of my class is that you're not shy... I tell students how that's the one skill-set that's helped me in all walks of life... It was my willingness to just share my thoughts and not be ashamed or afraid to share them." In addition to incorporating public speaking into the course, Rafael models this forthrightness by allowing them to ask him very personal questions and openly discussing how his status has shaped many aspects of his life. When students inevitably ask him if he's done drugs before, Rafael can answer that he hasn't due to his lifelong fear of it potentially leading to deportation. He suggests that this has real applications for students, saying "because in life, you may not have to provide a five paragraph essay, but you'll have to convince people using at least a full claim, with a full idea, not just say, 'because.' So, my hyperbole seems to be a tool I use in a classroom in combination with my willingness to share."

At times, teachers also reported taking on advocacy roles beyond their classrooms as well. Luis, who for many years felt like he had to navigate his education alone, was eager to help his students and their families. Luis recalled how he and another undocumented teacher ran Know Your Rights workshops at their school. "We reached out to organizations that could provide pro bono legal counsel," he recalled, "and we were able to get a lot of families in to see them, and they could ask questions from actual immigration attorneys and get real answers." Given the difficulties many interviewees faced with learning English upon arrival, language education also presented a critical dimension of advocating for students. Stefanie has devoted her career to supporting bilingual students at her Title I school. She herself had persisted through an education system that was far less supportive of English learners. "My teaching involves creating a safe space where students are not afraid of learning a new language," Stefanie explained. She grew especially concerned when many of her first-year English learner students would not speak to her in Spanish because they had been told not to speak it outside of their homes. Resisting a subtractive approach to schooling, Stefanie sees her approach to supporting students' bilingualism as a way to also "encourage them to feel proud of their culture." She has gone on to create a special program for Spanish-speaking students that the district recently expanded due to her advocacy.

> ***If there's one thing you get out of my class is that you're not shy... I tell students how that's the one skill-set that's helped me in all walks of life... It was my willingness to just share my thoughts and not be ashamed or afraid to share them.***

In some cases, taking such outspoken stances can also leave some undocumented teachers in vulnerable positions. One teacher told us that their activism and critical teaching methods led them to be a target of criticism from parents and administration, ultimately leading to their departure from the school district. The ongoing backlash against Critical Race Theory and broader "anti-woke" agenda has proven particularly painful for teachers of color. Undocumented teachers experience the stress and harm that comes with the suppression of race and identity in the classroom in distinct ways given their precarious status. As they take on roles of being teacher activists and leaders, it is crucial that they know that administrators and the broader school community have their back. By recognizing the ways in which undocumented teachers are also showing up in this fight, we can cultivate greater solidarity amongst the ranks of those committed to racial and social justice in our current political moment.

FEELING THE WEIGHT OF STATUS: MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Although we didn't specifically inquire about mental health and wellbeing, our open-ended interviews repeatedly led us back to the topic. For the interviewees we spoke to, mental health and wellbeing were important both in terms of their classroom roles supporting students but also in sustaining themselves. Participants expressed a range of emotions. Our interviews were punctuated both by hearty laughter as well as crushing sobs. Through many of our conversations, status was a heavy presence that both weighed on teachers and from which they derived a sense of purpose. Amber's commitment to teach and resist despite the uncertainty of immigration reform reflects this: "That's my hope for the future, within the next few years that all of us who are trying, all of us who are trying to better ourselves, for our parents, for us, that we don't have this weight on our shoulders because one day it gets taken away." In this section we discuss the differing ways teachers came to think about the wellbeing of their students and their own.

Recognizing the range of emotions and experiences students experience, teachers seek out ways to support their wellbeing. Carlos sees his job as easing the anxiety of his students, specifically those who are undocumented. "I think seeing a teacher who you can relate to in front of the class is very reassuring," he said, because "it just fills up kids with a sense of trust and a sense of being at home and just makes school a better place for them." Similarly, when outlining her own approach to teaching, Sofia said, "I really care about who they are as people... I try to be very kind in the sense that I know they're experiencing a lot of trauma in their fundamental years." In practice, Sofia finds ways to learn as much about students

and helps them navigate schools so that they can have more agency in their education. Reflecting on her own journey and role as a teacher now, Melissa attempts to strike a balance for her students. "I think it's so easy to feel numb about the world and to feel hopeless," she said. Instead of becoming despondent, apathetic, or complacent, Melissa wants her students to know that "we always have to be challenging the world that we live in to make it better."

"there's no way in hell I'm gonna show up and put myself through that" again. They left town and holed up in a hotel to ride out election day. In light of the fact that teachers are generally not well compensated for their very demanding jobs, Lupe finds that undocumented teachers often must be especially "selfless." However, they went on to say, "I would advise any people who are trying to teach in general to just really set those boundaries, really give what you can without over-giving."

INFO BOX 5: Mental Health Supports for Undocumented Communities.

Non-emergency Resources:

- Mental Health Connector. Receive or provide mental health support through this resource from Immigrants Rising.
- UndocuMental Health. Includes directories and lists of inclusive services that are free and/or low-cost.
- DACA Self-Care and Mental Health Series. A resource created by and for undocumented people.

If you or someone you know is experiencing a crisis and urgently requires immediate assistance, please text HOME to 741741 or call 1-800-273-8255.

At times, however, addressing student wellbeing has put teachers' own wellbeing in perspective. Trying to remain positive or supportive of undocumented students can take a toll in other ways as well. Lupe remembers back to the 2016 election and the violent, xenophobic sentiment it mobilized. The largely immigrant student population they taught was scared and extremely anxious. Some parents had begun talking to their children about the possibility of being deported. Election day was particularly fraught, as students came to Lupe to seek answers and support. They thought back on that chaotic time and the conflicting emotions it elicited:

> ***I felt really privileged to be able to be a teacher for students who felt so much fear... At the same time I was fearful for my own wellbeing. I remember having the conversation with them and being like 'I may not be here to close the year with you'***

> I felt really privileged to be able to be a teacher for students who felt so much fear... At the same time I was fearful for my own wellbeing. I remember having the conversation with them and being like 'I may not be here to close the year with you'... [H]ad this happened now, I would've quit. I would've been like I knew about mental health but I was a first-year teacher super bright-eyed and all that good jazz... I was willing to be that person for them... even though I wasn't able to be that person for myself.

When the 2020 election came around, Lupe said they knew

Safeguarding their wellbeing can also mean not disclosing their status. Although many undocumented activists have been celebrated for "coming out of the shadows" and openly asserting their status, that's not the case for everyone. Edwin, who has several years of teaching under his belt, decided that sharing his status with his students is "just something that I don't want to go through." While he was clear that he wasn't embarrassed about his status, he just didn't want it to become a topic of conversation amongst students. Along the same lines, Melissa thought about what advice she would give to future undocumented teachers:

> I waited until I was comfortable to share, because I think if you share your story, when you haven't processed it, it could also be really hard on your mental health. And like sometimes you're also not in a school community where you're supported, if you do come out. And so I want aspiring undocumented teachers to be okay with also not sharing their story, because there are other ways that they can show up for the students and for themselves in teaching that doesn't require that if they are not ready.

Even as sharing status can help build community in the classroom, some teachers have also emphasized the personal toll it can take.

Teachers found that being an undocumented teacher impacted their wellbeing in a host of different ways. News headlines detailing the continued failures of immigration policy inflict pain. To help her deal with her anxiety attacks, Araceli has removed herself from receiving daily news updates. "You know, it's sad, because I am jaded," Andrea also admitted, "as

far as the amount of times I've seen the challenges go up to DACA." There's also burnout related to the activism they have undertaken in support of their community. "I stopped doing a lot of advocacy work," Lupe shared, "because I can't take the constant disappointment." Even when they aren't bombarded with the dysfunctions of the immigration system, they can become consumed by the daily demands of the job. Lisa shared that she rarely gets to talk about her identity because she has so much to manage as a special education teacher. "You're just stretched this way and that way," she reflected. Meanwhile, Vanessa recently had to take a leave of absence from work due to work-related stress. She shared that her motivation to participate in the interview was to bring attention to mental health of other undocumented teachers. Moreover, she wants her students to also learn from her experiences: "I would like my students to take away that if you're going through something rough right now, that doesn't mean that it stops here and you have to be the victim or you have to give up. Say something, ask for help."

In some cases, teachers found supporting students provided a source of strength and renewed their sense of purpose. Omar, for example, finds that his role of being a "cheerleader" for his students and helping them see the bigger picture is what allows him to remain hopeful himself. He mentioned that, "I think that's what really sustains me in the work for the long run, because my kids are happy. They have something to look forward to and they're discovering their passions along the way." For Daniela, who has long struggled with being open about her identity, finds that "my students make me feel better about it, you know, as an undocumented teacher... I feel like, because I have a story to tell. My students are very, very open to hearing [it].... It's something I was ashamed of before. And so, my students are even helping me be proud of my identity, where I come from, my struggles."

As California ramps up investments to expand the ranks of school mental health workers to support student wellbeing,[21] we must also look to the wellbeing of their teachers. Even as undocumented teachers experience joy in their work, they also confront circumstances that can impact their mental health. They potentially face burnout on multiple fronts, whether confronting inequitable schooling conditions or experiencing anti-immigrant policy and discourse. Their commitment to their students may also lead to a form of cultural taxation, as some interviewees mentioned coming to school early, leaving late, and hosting students during lunch hours. In addition to providing undocumented teachers greater access to targeted mental health services, policymakers can look more structurally to reducing job demands and ensuring that teachers have more voice in decisions that impact them.[22] Those interested in humanizing teacher education and professional development may learn from teacher activist circles that are adept at providing the kind of nurturance and sustainability that minoritized teachers seldom find elsewhere.[23]

CONCLUSION

Even as the vocabulary around inclusion in education circles has expanded to include a range of intersectional identities, citizenship status often remains overlooked as a central part of what shapes our daily lives. At the same time, however, the space for such discussion has become increasingly unsafe. Racist policies around schools and immigration in recent years have brought about bans on both books and bodies. At the time of this writing, DACA hangs on by a fraying thread. Legal challenges have halted any new applications for the program, barring a generation of future teachers from working in the classroom. Even as DACA was no doubt a hard fought win for immigration rights, the battering it has taken reflects how flimsy and incomplete of a solution it has always been. No clear path forward is imminently apparent, as DACA begins to look more like a deadend than a lifeline. As is evident in the voices and experiences of the current and future teachers in this report, comprehensive reform is needed in both the teaching profession and the immigration system.

If schools are to be sanctuaries, we must think hard about the many ways in which legal status continues to shape the experiences of the entire school community. The teachers' voices shared here have implications for how teacher educators, school communities, state agencies, and others may consider supporting undocumented teachers. The summary of key findings and recommendations found at the beginning of the report lays out a few starting points. Beyond that, the pressure brought by immigration and education justice movements at state and national levels continues to be vital in fighting the racism, criminalization, and legal backlash directed at undocumented communities. The classroom becomes another critical front in this struggle, as undocumented teachers lay claim not just to a profession, but the possibility for liberation.

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[20] https://calmatters.org/health/2022/03/california-children-mental-health-crisis/

[21] D.T. Marshall, T. Pressley, N.M. Neugebauer, and D.M. Shannon, "Why teachers are leaving and what we can do about it," *Phi Delta Kappan* 104, no. 1 (2022): 6–11, https://doi.org/10.1177/00317217221123642

[22] Lynnette Mawhinney and Kira J. Baker-Doyle "Nurturing 'A Specific Kind of Unicorn-y Teacher': How Teacher Activist Networks Influence the Professional Identity and Practices of Teachers of Color," *Equity & Excellence in Education*(2023), https://doi.org/10.1080/10665684.2022.2158397