

Support undocumented students during Action Week

By Rick MacLennan
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Ventura County community college students represent a wide range of ethnicities, socioeconomic backgrounds, ages and immigration statuses. Ventura, Oxnard and Moorpark colleges provide a welcoming, safe environment to all.

We believe that students, regardless of their citizenship status, should have access to higher education.

As we participate in California Community Colleges Undocumented Student Action Week (USAW), Oct. 17-21, our colleges reaffirm their commitment to building greater awareness of and support for policies that lead to undocumented student success. This year's theme is "Juntos Podemos (Together We Can): Collaborative Ecosystems that Support Undocumented Students," which recognizes that we must continue to advance best practices, ensure campuswide collaboration and advocate for policy solutions to support long-term success.

The event with virtual and in-person activities will bring together UndocuLiaisons, administrators, faculty and students across the state's 116 community colleges. Integral to the event is informing our community about the challenges undocumented students face, working to break down silos, fostering unconditional belonging and providing resources.

It is even more vital this year, as Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) plays a pivotal role in undocumented students' lives and educational future — and the program is in jeopardy.

Over 820,000 people have received DACA since it was implemented in 2012, according to The Campaign for College Opportunity. Further, 97% of DACA re-

ipients nationwide are currently employed or in school. These students go on to careers such as educators, business owners and healthcare workers, to name a few.

During the pandemic, for example, an estimated 27,000 healthcare employees — nurses, dentists, pharmacists, physician assistants, home health aides, technicians, and others — depended on DACA for their authorization to work in the United States, noted a 2021 comment signed by the attorneys general of nearly 25 states to Honorable Alejandro Mayorkas, secretary of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, and Director Ur M. Jaddou, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services.

In the 10 years DACA has been in existence, it has been the subject of opportunities and countless obstructions. On Sept. 7, the DHS issued a final rule that, with limited changes, continues DACA; the rule will take effect Oct. 31.

However, the most recent deeply troubling challenge is the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals' decision upholding the state of Texas, et al., v. United States (2021) ruling that DACA violates federal law. The impact of this decision to eliminate initial applications for DACA processing will have ripple effects for years to come for undocumented students of all ages and their families.

"Even as we hope that this decision is overturned, the uncertainty it creates is untenable. DACA recipients deserve to have their status as equal Americans protected



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from court decisions like this one," declared California Community Colleges Interim Chancellor Daisy Gonzales; UC President Michael V. Drake; and CSU Interim Chancellor Jolene Koester in a joint statement. The Ventura County Community College District is in alignment. (To read the joint statement, visit [VCCCD.edu/undocually](https://vcccd.edu/undocually).)

It's imperative that we remind students that our campuses will continue to be a safe harbor. All undocumented students in California can attend college, regardless of their DACA status, and they will continue to have access to state-funded financial aid and campuswide student services.

Students will maintain access to free legal services to renew their DACA application through our colleges' Dream Resource Centers and the California Community Colleges Higher Education Legal Services at [FindYourAlly.com](https://findyourally.com).

As Ventura County community colleges participate in USAW and celebrate the grand opening of the Dreamers Resource Center at Ventura College, we will work to eliminate institutional barriers, advocate for DACA students and take action through policies and procedures.

We encourage county residents to join us and the state's community colleges in this crucial endeavor. Combating ongoing inequalities among this underserved population will help create pathways that foster access, equity and inclusion for all. Our actions today will have a lasting benefit for current and future students and on the community as a whole.

— Rick MacLennan is the chancellor of the Ventura County Community College District. To learn more about Undocumented Student Action Week, Oct. 17-21, and view the list of USAW activities, visit [VCCCD.edu/undocually](https://vcccd.edu/undocually).