

Hoping for higher education Illegal immigrants denied admission to colleges

By Maria Panaritis &
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KRT CAMPUS

PHILADELPHIA — Carlos de los Santos loves being an auto mechanic. Fussing with a carburetor, changing a clutch, installing brakes—it all feels good, he says with a smile.

In the same breath, however, emerges a reminder that all is neither so simple nor so sweet for the 21-year-old Norristown, Pa., man.

He drops his head, stares at scrubbed-white hands and fingernails traced in grease, and longs for something out of reach: college.

"Sometimes" he said, "what I do gets a little frustrating."

De los Santos is the son of illegal immigrants.

In Pennsylvania and New Jersey, that means that he and many others like him aren't able to go to college—even though the U.S. Supreme Court gives them the right to a high school cap and gown.

Illegal immigrant populations spiked in Pennsylvania, New Jersey and other states during the 1990s economic boom, making this educational divide—and whether states should tackle it—a volatile issue.

"College is almost universal now," said Richard Fry, a former immigration specialist with the U.S. Labor Department who is senior research associate at the Pew Hispanic Center, a research organization based in Washington.

"In a major-league way, we're denying opportunity to these youth. Their economic fortunes, their social fortunes, will be severely diminished."

To others, the answer is not further accommodation.

Why, they ask, should colleges even admit illegal immigrants, let alone provide tuition discounts?

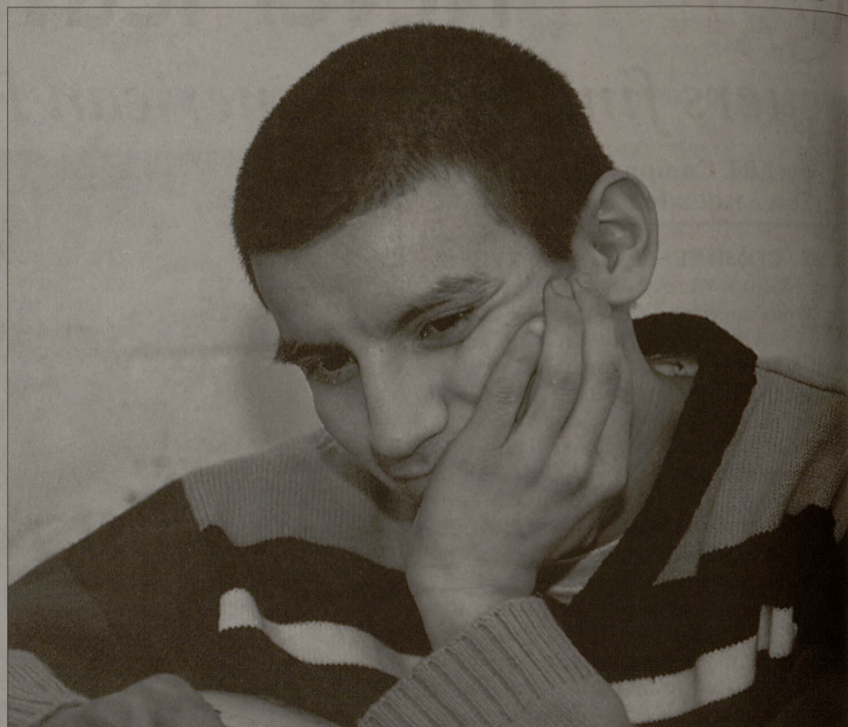
"The solution is to enforce immigration laws—not to reward lawbreaking," said Steven A. Camarota, research director at the Center for Immigration Studies in Washington. "If we have laws and then ignore them, that is far more corrosive than anything else I can think of to liberal democracy, to rule of the people, to a functioning society."

California, Texas, New York and Utah have changed state laws to permit children of illegal immigrants to enroll in public colleges and qualify for in-state tuition rates.

In Pennsylvania, policymakers are not discussing the issue.

And a New Jersey bill that would make tuition discounts possible has been overridden by budget woes and post-Sept. 11 anti-immigrant sentiments.

Elsewhere, political skirmishes have broken out—most notably in Virginia, where a clash between a community college and the state's attorney general led to a law denying tuition breaks to illegal



Carlos de los Santos, 21, sits on the family couch at his home in Norristown, Pa. Carlos, illegal alien despite the fact that he has been living in the United States for 14 years.

As lawmakers haggle, thousands such as de los Santos remain in limbo. Brought here as children, they say, they are stuck in marginal jobs with no future.

"What we're pretty much asking," de los Santos said in fluent English, "is just to be equal to the rest of the people."

Nationally, there are more than seven million illegal immigrants, according to a report issued earlier this year by the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service. Seven out of 10 are from Mexico.

It is difficult for foreign nationals to obtain U.S. residency without a relative, a willing employer or a sponsor.

That is why many remain illegal residents.

For low-income students, community colleges are often the only affordable option. And just about any adult can enroll.

"It's not our nature to deny access to anyone," said Diane Bosak, executive director of the Pennsylvania Commission for Community Colleges.

But that was not de los Santos' experience.

He has lived in Norristown, home to a burgeoning Mexican population, since his early teens.

His parents smuggled him into the United States from Mexico at age 7.

He worked his way through Norristown Area High School.

A 20-year-old U.S. Supreme Court ruling on a Texas case guarantees that right in the interest of social order.

But when the B student applied at Montgomery County Community College in Pennsylvania, he left the Social

immigrant status, he lied and said he was a legal United States resident.

"I just never went back," de los Santos said.

In Pennsylvania, where higher education is decentralized, the 14 community colleges run admissions and tuition breaks as they see fit, Bosak said.

If Montgomery County Community College determines an applicant is undocumented, the student must sign a letter indicating illegal status and pay the foreign student rate, admissions head Jose Rodriguez said.

Some students have become adept at working the system—providing taxpayer identification numbers instead of Social Security numbers.

A bill in New Jersey would allow illegal immigrants to pay in-state tuition at the state's three public universities, nine state colleges and 19 community colleges.

They must have attended a New Jersey high school for at least three years and either graduated or received a GED.

But the legislation has stalled since being introduced in June. Critics say it could cost the state up to \$5 million a year.

Assemblywoman Nilsa Cruz-Perez, Camden, N.J., Democrat who co-sponsored the measure, says taxes paid by illegal immigrants should count for something.

"These are kids that are raised here, our communities, and they're not able to attain higher education," Cruz-Perez said. "This is not what this country is all about."

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PEOPLE IN THE NEWS

Schwarzenegger to host special for TV heroes and villains

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Arnold Schwarzenegger, who's portrayed robots both killing and kindly, will host an upcoming TV special about the top 100 heroes and villains of the screen.

An American Film Institute poll asked voters to choose among 400 nominated characters from American film history and decide which should be considered wicked or virtuous.

Schwarzenegger's T-800 killer robot is nominated twice, once for the attacking character he played in 1984's original "The Terminator," and again for 1991's "Terminator 2: Judgment Day," in which the android he played was a protector.

The show is scheduled for June 3 on CBS and will feature interviews with actors including Kirk Douglas, Susan Sarandon, Kathy Bates, Glenn Close, Harrison Ford, Dennis Hopper and Christopher Reeve.

AFI has sent ballots to nearly 1,500 directors, actors, studio executives, critics and others in the entertainment industry.

Some characters are nominated en masse, such as the zombies from 1968's "Night of the Living Dead" and "The Wild Bunch" cowboys directed by Sam Peckinpah's western.

Previous AFI lists include the 100 best American films by "Citizen Kane" and the funniest movies, with "Like It Hot" at No. 1.

'Full Frontal Fashion' host talks about style

NEW YORK (AP) — Ashley Landry, host of WE World Entertainment's "Full Frontal Fashion," describes her personality as having an element of drama.

"I'm not a minimalist but not over the top," said the 27-year-old actress, whose credits include 2000's "Beauty and the Beast" directed by Sally Field and "Ring" starring Minnie Driver.

Landry, a former Miss USA, says "get-it-for-less" is one of her favorite segments on the TV show because "that's what my friends in Levi's can relate to."

"I'm a shopper but I'm a good bargain," she told Associated Press in an interview. "I own a few designer pieces I wear Target."

Landry said her first "fashion experience" was the 2003 New York shows—was overwhelming and exciting.

"Full Frontal Fashion" returns to Sunday nights on the WE network earlier this month.

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