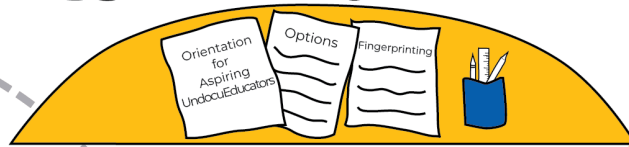


# Aspiring UndocuEducators' Guide to Self-Advocacy



## The UndocuEdu Team of CUNY-IIE

Roxana Herrera Ramírez  
Farah Said  
Guadalupe Ambrosio  
Chaewon (Jessica) Park  
Carlos Pérez Valle



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Cover art by: Janet Pérez Valle



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With support from:

**Ariana Mangual Figueroa**

Graduate Center of the City University of New York  
Former Interim Principal Investigator, CUNY-IIE

**Rosa Rivera-McCutchen**

Lehman College  
Former Interim Co-Principal Investigator, CUNY-IIE

**Tatyana Kleyn**

The City College of New York  
Principal Investigator, CUNY-IIE

**Nancy Stern**

The City College of New York  
Co-Principal Investigator, CUNY-IIE

**Sara P. Alvarez**

Queens College  
Interim Co-Principal Investigator, CUNY-IIE

**Daniela Alulema**

Project Director, CUNY-IIE



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# Foreword

Many of us came to New York State (NYS) at a time when it was impossible to student teach, be fingerprinted, or get licensed. This has had detrimental consequences for us. However, we have banded together. Through our emotional and intellectual labor, we have developed this tool so other students can make informed decisions about their academic and professional paths.

In September 2022, while we were still developing this tool, the New York State Education Department (NYSED) updated its policies to allow undocumented students without a social security number (SSN) to do fieldwork, take certification exams, and/or student teach in NYS. This is one step in the right direction, but further permanent policy changes are still needed so that all aspiring educators, regardless of immigration status, can serve in NYS classrooms. Although it is a statewide policy, universities and colleges are in charge of implementation. Therefore, it can look different for each campus. This policy still requires students to self identify and advocate. This win is possible because of student activism and allies who continue pushing for the state to take leadership in their implementation of the policy change.

Every U.S. state has varying standards and requirements to become an educator. This creates added barriers and different access levels for undocumented students who wish to become **traditional classroom teachers** (see [The State of Undocumented Educators in New York](#) which outlines barriers in detail). As undocumented students we face unique systemic barriers when pursuing a career in teaching. Hence, we created this rubric for those who wish to know of these obstacles sooner, and for those who now have the tools to make an informed decision.

We believe that teacher education programs for aspiring educators should be equally accessible to all undocumented students (both **DACA** and **non-DACA**). However, we are often forced to disclose our status to get answers. Instead, programs should transparently disclose the requirements to receive a degree in education. This transparency is crucial to the success of undocumented students pursuing a career as classroom teachers.

**Note: The definition for words highlighted in yellow are in the glossary.**

The following story sheds light on the systemic barriers that an undocumented non-DACA student faced during their academic journey and their dream of becoming a classroom teacher:

*My name is Farah Said. My academic journey started when I moved from Egypt, my homeland, to the United States in the summer of 2008.*

*I graduated high school with aspirations to become a committed and thoughtful educator, but I was oblivious to the consequential implications of my immigration status. It was not until I got accepted to the Childhood Education program at CUNY's City College of New York in 2013 that I was confronted with the limitations that came with my immigration status. I discovered that my immigration status impacted the possibility of even entering college since undocumented students in New York State (at the time) were ineligible for the majority of federal/state aid along with limited private scholarships. In addition to limited financial support, I learned immigration status can limit the academic majors that undocumented students can choose from.*

*To my disappointment, specific courses within my program required certain documents that undocumented students do not have such as background checks for clinical hours that mandated a social security number in my local school district. This reality is especially true for undocumented students like me who still do not qualify for the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrival program (DACA) which was enacted in 2012 by President Obama.*

*I do not qualify for DACA because I arrived in the United States on June 18, 2008—one year later than the required date (June 15, 2007). I learned that without DACA, I am barred from student teaching and subsequently, completing my education degree. I was given this information almost one year after being accepted into the program. When I was interviewed by the education department faculty this requirement was not communicated to me nor was the information accessible before applying to the program.*

*Ever since then, I knew I could not apply for student teaching. I started going to school part-time with the hopes of buying time and potential policy changes that would grant me my degree in childhood education. I spent six years in constant internal fights; mental, emotional, and physical distraught; and money spent on a major that I had a slim chance of actually completing. I took all the required classes for my major in addition to coursework for my concentration in elementary mathematics. Even though I firmly believed that I was capable of overcoming any adversities within my educational journey, I eventually hit a roadblock for my education major. By 2019, it was time to finally graduate but I had no solutions or alternatives that would lead me to earn an education degree or fulfill my dream of becoming a classroom teacher. Therefore, I was forced to transfer all of my credits from my major and minor and conform to graduating with a degree in Interdisciplinary Studies of Arts and Science.*

*Due to my experience, and the experiences of many other students like me, we at UndocuEdu, decided to create a tool for undocumented students in New York State to make informed decisions about their education journeys in light of a lack of transparency from current educational departments in higher education across our state.*





# The Evolution of The 3-Part Self-Advocacy Tool

From March to April 2021, UndocuEdu conducted research on the experiences of undocumented students pursuing an education major across schools in New York State. Our primary finding was that undocumented students faced patterns of systemic barriers in their efforts to become certified Prek-12 teachers in New York State and had to find creative ways to facilitate their entry into the profession. You can read more about our findings and recommendation in [“The State of Undocumented Educators in New York.”](#)

From 2021 to 2022, UndocuEdu created a three-part tool that includes:

1. The rubric for assessing education program support for undocumented students
2. A self-advocacy checklist, and
3. Questions that undocumented students should ask potential education programs.

The purpose of this 3-part resource is for you to have a tool for self-advocacy as you consider how inclusive and responsive educational programs are to the undocumented students that they serve. You can use this rubric, the checklist, and the additional questions to make personalized decisions about a potential education program that you are considering. If after evaluating a potential program with the rubric – and after considering and asking the suggested questions following the rubric – you find that the institution does not meet your needs, we encourage reviewing other programs that have successfully recruited, retained, and sought employment for undocumented students.





# How to Use This Rubric

The first part of our tool entails a rubric to assess education programs' level of support for undocumented students. The rubric (presented on page 13) contains four different criteria:

1. Easy-to-find & clear information about how to get into the education program/major
2. Easy-to-find & clear information about graduation & certification requirements once you are in a program
3. A transparent implementation of the NYSED policy on fingerprinting & clinical placements for undocumented students
4. Variety of options for financial support

Descriptions of all criteria are located in the far left column. Each criterion reflects one of the four areas that we consider critical to informing prospective undocumented students who wish to major in (Pre-K through 12) education. The rating system can be found on the top row; this scale is composed of four levels. The lowest rating – represented by one star – indicates “little-to-no support for all undocumented students” while the highest rating – represented by four stars – represents “exemplary support system for all undocumented students.”

The rating scale centers the experiences and access level of undocumented students without DACA. To receive the highest score, a program must provide **alternative pathways/alternative certification** to non-DACA undocumented students.

**On the next page you will find a description of each criterion.**

## 1 EASY-TO-FIND & CLEAR INFORMATION ABOUT HOW TO GET INTO THE EDUCATION PROGRAM/MAJOR



This section aims to assess how accessible and transparent a program is about its **general admission requirements**. We believe that information should be easily found on a program's website or that other forms of information distribution be available (i.e., recruitment materials and communication with faculty and staff during the admissions process).

Students should not have to out themselves as undocumented in order to obtain the specific information that they need to make an informed decision about how they can enter the education program/major at a respective institution.

## 2 EASY-TO-FIND & CLEAR INFORMATION ABOUT GRADUATION & CERTIFICATION REQUIREMENTS ONCE YOU ARE IN A PROGRAM

This section aims to assess how accessible and transparent a program is about the graduation and certification processes. This can help undocumented students to determine whether a program will not only accept them but also have information about the revised NYSED guidance on fingerprinting and clinical placements.



This information should also be clear and present to a student as they consider their options before, during, and after the application and enrollment process.



### 3 A TRANSPARENT IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NYSED POLICY ON FINGERPRINTING & CLINICAL PLACEMENTS FOR UNDOCUMENTED STUDENTS



This section aims to assess whether or not a program is effectively sharing information on the revised NYSED guidance on fingerprinting and clinical placements as an integral and essential part of students' admission process. With this revised guidance, undocumented students will be able to complete graduation and initial certification requirements.

The revised NYSED guidance allows undocumented educators without a social security number to obtain their initial certification, which is valid for 5 years. However, U.S. citizenship or legal residence will still be required to receive a professional/permanent certification. Without a professional/permanent certification, you will not be able to continue teaching in a traditional setting. You still are required to have a work permit to be hired in most educational institutions.

### 4 VARIETY OF OPTIONS FOR FINANCIAL SUPPORT

This section aims to assess the variety of options for financial support for undocumented students. While the **New York State Dream Act** now allows undocumented students to access in-state financial support, this often does not cover full tuition and students are left to pay for the remaining balance with other resources or out-of-pocket.



Teacher education programs should help students identify the various professional roles students can take on with a degree in education, other than teaching as a classroom teacher, such as a community educator (i.e., after-school, summer camps, or recreation activities), education consultant, education administration, among other types of positions.



# Rubric for Assessing Education Program Support for Undocumented Students

## LAYOUT

- Criteria: Characteristics to be rated. Listed on the left-hand column
- Ratings: From 1 star (being the worst) to 4 stars (being the best). Listed at the top row.

## INSTRUCTIONS

1. Read rubric from left to right.
2. Assess each criterion horizontally on the rating scale based on information you've gathered about a potential teacher education program that you want to attend.
3. Select one to four stars for each criterion.



You can find information about a program on the school's website, and search for key terms such as: undocumented, immigrant, non-citizen. The website will likely be difficult to navigate, and information will not be readily available. Be prepared to ask for information in person at the prospective school.

*Affirmation: Advocacy efforts for a permanent solution for undocumented students should not fall only on directly impacted people. Programs need to prioritize advocating for this. Their actions for a permanent solution would demonstrate their commitment to the success of their students and immigrant children in our schools. Support for undocumented aspiring educators should be expressed beyond a classroom setting because we do not only exist in a classroom.*



# Rubric for Assessing Education Program Support for Undocumented Students

<b>Criteria</b>	 <b>Support for undocumented students is not present</b>	 <b>Support for undocumented students is present, but uneven and/or generalized</b>	 <b>Support for undocumented students with DACA only</b>	 <b>Specialized support is designed for undocumented students (with and without DACA)</b>
 <b>Information about admission into the education program/ major</b>	<p>Information about admissions or transferring to the program/major for any student, is unavailable or hard-to-find.</p>	<p>There is general information both on website and in-person about admissions or transferring into the program/major but little mention of undocumented students.</p>	<p>There is specific information about admissions or transfer into the program/major but this information is only for DACA students.</p>	<p>Clear and explicit information about how all undocumented students can be admitted or transfer into a program/major is provided. Program/major advising is available to help non-DACA students.</p>
 <b>Information about graduation &amp; certification requirements once admitted</b>	<p>A general outline for completing all graduation and/or certification requirements is provided but there is no clear direction or next steps for any student.</p>	<p>General information about completing graduation and/or certification requirements once students are in the program/major is provided, but this information is not specifically relevant to undocumented students.</p>	<p>Information about completing graduation and/or certification requirements is readily available, but the resources are designed only for DACA students.</p>	<p>Clear, explicit &amp; readily available information about completing graduation and/or certification requirements students with and without DACA. Program/major advising is tailored to help non-DACA students meet graduation requirements, at minimum.</p>
 <b>A transparent implementation of the NYSED Guidance on Fingerprinting &amp; Clinical Placements for undocumented students*</b>	<p>Information on the fingerprinting guidance is not mentioned in any of the education program materials or there is not other specific information about steps for undocumented students.</p>	<p>Information on the fingerprinting guidance is mentioned in the education program materials but is unclear regarding the steps required for undocumented students.</p>	<p>Information on the fingerprinting guidance and related contacts is clearly mentioned in the education program materials and readily available during the admissions process. However, it is displayed only for DACA students.</p>	<p>Information on the fingerprinting policy and related contacts is clearly mentioned in the education program materials and readily available during the admissions process. There are also clear steps for students with and without DACA to follow.</p>
 <b>Variety of options for financial support</b>	<p>No financial support at all for any student.</p>	<p>Information about scholarships and special financial support for graduation requirements (e.g., covering fingerprinting fees to do clinical hours or exam fees) is provided to you but not inclusive of undocumented students.</p>	<p>Little information about scholarships and/or special financial support for undocumented students. If this does exist, information, scholarships, and other support are exclusively for DACA students.</p>	<p>A lot of information and a variety of options for financial support is provided. It is inclusive of students with and without DACA students.</p>

\*Fingerprinting guidance update: check section 3 "NYSED Guidance on Fingerprinting & Clinical Placements"

# Self-Advocacy Checklist

In addition to the rubric, below is a checklist to keep in mind when considering different teacher education programs. These program components/characteristics can help you successfully navigate through your educational journey.

## **Undocumented student support center**

- There are centers throughout the country (including in New York City) that support undocumented students in their undergraduate journey. These centers are usually run at the institution-level and are staffed with people who have an understanding of the barriers that undocumented students face and who provide appropriate resources.

## **Trained staff with basic understanding about immigration topics**

- Some programs operate with an underlying assumption that everyone has citizenship. This makes it difficult for undocumented students to access information about requirements. Undocumented students are forced to advocate for themselves and educate the departments that are supposed to guide them in their educational journey. This should not be the norm as it can traumatize and trigger students. It is the program's duty to be aware of these issues that students face.
- Awareness and knowledge of NYSED guidance on fingerprinting policy on undocumented students.

## **Retention of immigrant students/alumni**

- This will help you determine how many students are able to graduate from the program, and more specifically how many immigrant students have successfully graduated.





□ **Safety protocols and legal support for noncitizens**

- The school or the program has a detailed protocol for dealing with situations in which law enforcement or U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) comes to school
- The school or the program has available resources and protocol in case a student needs legal help

□ **Financial resources specifically for undocumented students**

- There is a list of options for undocumented students to get financial support
  - E.g., Undocu-friendly institutional scholarships
    - College-wide private scholarships
    - Program-specific private scholarships

# Other Questions You Can Ask

Below are some additional questions that you can ask during an orientation event, open-house, or during a first encounter with faculty, staff, or counselors for prospective students.

*Disclaimer:* You do not have to ask these questions yourself. If you feel comfortable asking these questions by yourself, that's okay. If you do not, you can have someone you trust ask these questions on your behalf.

## Category 1: Trained staff with basic understanding about immigration topics

### > Basic understanding of contemporary immigration issues

- Are you aware of current migration issues/policies in the United States?
  - If yes, what is your stance on migration in the U.S?
- Are you familiar with what being undocumented is? What does it mean to you?
- Do you know the categories of immigrant students (DACA, non-DACA)?
- What are the impacts that different immigration statuses can have on student experiences?

### > Staff responsiveness to immigration issues

- Are you culturally responsive to immigrant students and issues?
  - If not, does the department train staff on how to better serve undocumented students and/or potential students?

### > Safe and welcoming space

- Do you make immigrant students feel welcome and safe? In what ways?
- How many times have you invited DACA and non-DACA immigrant educators/ alumni to speak at your school? For what purposes?

### > Safety protocols for undocumented students

- What is the protocol of the school/program when ICE comes to campus? What protections are noncitizens given in these situations?
- What is the protocol for emergency funds/food assistance for undocumented students?
- How would a department respond if a faculty or staff member threatened a student on the basis of their immigration status? What is the disciplinary action?



## Category 2: Student Services

### > Staff responsiveness and accessibility

- How responsive is staff to students?
- How easily can students communicate with staff?

### > Support space for immigrant students

- Does the school/program have an immigrant student success center office or liaison?
- Are you aware of the obstacles that undocumented students in your department face?
- What are your protocols for when an undocumented student comes to your program with concerns about how their status will impact their education and/or career?

## Category 3: Accessible & transparent information about program qualifications

### > Requirements for enrollment

- Are the enrollment requirements applicable for undocumented students (DACA and non-DACA)?

### > Checklist of prerequisites

- Are the prerequisites for program qualification clear enough for undocumented students to know what to do/have to move on with their courseworks?

## Category 4: Accessible & transparent information for matriculated (or enrolled) students about how to meet program qualifications

### > What do you need to complete once you're admitted into the program?

- Is the list of required coursework mentioned/easily accessible for undocumented students?

### > Checklist for pathway/status check

- Are there requirements for completion of program specifically for undocumented students?
- Are there resources available specifically for undocumented students should they encounter issues in completing these requirements?
- Is there someone with information/knowledge regarding program requirement completion you can direct me to?

### > Information on New York State of Education fingerprinting guidance

- Does the program explain the impact of the revised NYSED guidance on fingerprinting and clinical placements on your academic and career trajectory?



## Category 5: Retention of students

### > Alumni network

- How do you stay connected with the alumni who are undocumented?
- Is there any account/story of other undocumented students you've worked with in the past that you can share?
- How did previous students who were undocumented navigate their way through the program?
- Is there someone who has gone through a similar experience that you can connect me to?

### > Safe space

- How do you rate your department relative to being undocumented student-friendly?

### > Availability of testimonies/accounts

- Are there testimonies/accounts of graduated undocumented students readily available to current students when requested?

## Category 6: Alternatives for DACA vs. non-DACA students

### > Support for alternative pathways

- Are you willing to discuss and guide me through alternative options for non-DACA students?
  - If so, what kind of support can they provide?
  - How does the revised NYSED guidance on fingerprinting and clinical placements impact me?

## Category 7: Variety of options and resources for financial support and legal assistance

### > Option availability

- What are the available options for undocumented students to receive financial support while navigating through the program?
- Is there a list of undocu-friendly resources for financial assistance/scholarships?
  - Is there someone you can connect me to?

### > Legal assistance

- Do you have legal services ready to support immigrant students?

### > Financial assistance

- How does the school identify undocumented students?
  - What is the process of making sure they are paying in-state tuition?



# Conclusion



While this rubric specifically addresses systemic barriers to pursue an education degree, it is our hope that undocumented students who aspire to be teachers use this 3-part advocacy tool for yourself, regardless of what trajectory you end up pursuing.

We also envision this advocacy tool to be utilized as a blueprint for other career paths that undocumented students wish to pursue. We were intentional about creating a tool that centers undocumented students who do not qualify or choose not to apply for DACA. We hope this can serve as an inspiration to create customized versions of this rubric.

Our biggest piece of advice to undocumented students is to ground yourself in your brilliance and remember you deserve to be recognized, respected, and valued regardless of immigration status and merits. Regardless of whether or not DACA is taken away, it is clear that educational institutions do not need to wait on federal change to take action themselves.



While this NYSED guidance on fingerprinting and clinical placements has created a new opportunity for many students, it is likely that you will have to continue advocating for yourself by disclosing your status. The implementation of this policy may take time.

While the new NYSED fingerprinting guidance helps to facilitate certain aspects of the education journey of aspiring undocumented educators in our state, we also want to acknowledge that there are still other barriers which prevent them from fully teaching in public schools. For example, there are still laws that require work authorization. Such laws and policies may limit someone's career trajectory.

Nonetheless, we encourage you to advocate for education departments to be openly supportive of undocumented students and share resources about the revised NYSED guidance on fingerprinting and clinical placements. You deserve to have options to make an informed decision about your future, and to make plans that do not wait on the timelines of politicians. Creating pathways for undocumented students regardless of temporary immigration policies is the way to create stability for students looking to become teachers.

Lastly, you are allowed to leave a program that does not support you; this does not have to be the end of your career in education. We hope that you do not limit yourself to traditional academic and career paths.

# Appendix - Glossary

**Alternative Pathways/Alternative Certification:** Other pathways to get certified to teach other than traditional teaching certification pathway. Alternative Pathways are created to get more qualified educators into the classroom. One common Alternative Pathway is to enroll in a university-based alternative route to teaching licensure. This is designed for those who already have a bachelor's degree. For more information on Alternative Pathways, visit this website:

[www.teachercertificationdegrees.com](http://www.teachercertificationdegrees.com).

**Certification fees:** Fees incurred during the process of teacher certification. In New York State, they could include application assessment fee (\$50/\$100 depending on programs), test fees (\$689), workshop fees (\$75/\$133 approximate), fingerprint clearance and miscellaneous fees (\$102+). A total amount of fees varies depending on the certification program one chooses (2023) ([source](#)).

**Certified track:** A track either through Traditional Certification or Alternative Certification route that would issue a certificate or licensure to teach in public schools ([source](#)).

**DACA:** Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals. An Executive Order issued by President Obama in 2012 that allows some eligible undocumented individuals to receive a renewable deferred action from deportation and become eligible for a work permit. DACA must be renewed every two years and it does not provide a pathway to citizenship ([source](#)). You may qualify for DACA if you:

1. Were under the age of 31 as of June 15, 2012;
2. Came to the United States before reaching your 16th birthday;
3. Have continuously resided in the United States since June 15, 2007, up to the present time;
4. Were physically present in the United States on June 15, 2012, and at the time of making your request for consideration of deferred action with USCIS;
5. Had no lawful status on June 15, 2012, meaning that:
  - a. You never had a lawful immigration status on or before June 15, 2012, or
  - b. Any lawful immigration status or parole that you obtained prior to June 15, 2012, had expired as of June 15, 2012;



6. Are currently in school, have graduated or obtained a certificate of completion from high school, have obtained a general education development (GED) certificate, or are an honorably discharged veteran of the Coast Guard or Armed Forces of the United States; and
7. Have not been convicted of a felony, significant misdemeanor, or three or more other misdemeanors, and do not otherwise pose a threat to national security or public safety.

**Felony:** A crime with a punishment of imprisonment of one year or more. In New York State, felony is defined as an offense for which a sentence to a term of imprisonment in excess of one year may be imposed ([source](#)).

**Fingerprinting:** A form of background check that cross-references an applicant's fingerprints with a database. As of July 1, 2007, all applicants for certificates, licenses or permits must undergo a fingerprint supported criminal history background check in New York State Education Department ([source](#)).

**General admissions requirements:** Typically consist of a collection of credentials (e.g. GPA, test scores, transcript) and other supplemental materials (e.g. personal statement, resume) required to apply for admission to a higher education institution or program. These requirements will vary depending on the school and department.

**General Educational Development Certificate (GED):** A certificate issued when an individual passes a series of four subject tests that assess on high school-level academic skills. It is an alternative to the U.S. high school diploma.

**Initial certification:** The Initial Certificate is the entry-level teaching certificate for anyone who has completed a New York State teacher preparation program, or equivalent coursework and experience. The Initial Certificate is valid for five years ([source](#)).

**Misdemeanor:** In the state of New York, misdemeanor is any crime that carries a potential sentence of incarceration for more than 15 days but no more than 364 days ([source](#)).

**Non-certification track:** A track designed for those seeking a career in education, but not necessarily as a teacher in public schools. Non-certification track does not lead to teaching licensure, but it



can be a good way to gain experience in the classroom before fully committing to the certification process. Some non-certified tracks include teaching support positions (substitute teachers), teaching overseas, teaching at private or charter schools, community educators, and volunteering for teaching jobs ([source](#)).

**Non-DACA:** Referring to undocumented individuals without DACA. This distinction is important because a lot of opportunities including scholarships or certified-tracks are only eligible to individuals with DACA. We strive to prioritize the concerns of non-DACA individuals when creating a self-advocacy rubric.

**NY Dream Act:** A 2019 New York State law offering state-funded financial assistance to attend university to undocumented youth who arrived in the United States before the age of 18. The NY Dream Act is not equivalent to the federal-level DREAM Act that did not pass the Legislative Branch.

**NYSED:** New York State Education Department.

**Parole:** A discretion exercised by the Department of Homeland Security that temporarily allows certain noncitizens to physically enter the United States if they are applying for admission but are either inadmissible or do not have a legal basis for being admitted to the United States. DHS only grants parole if the agency determines that there are urgent humanitarian or significant public benefit reasons for a person to be in the United States and that person merits a favorable exercise of discretion ([source](#)).

**Professional/permanent Certification:** The Professional Certificate is an advanced certificate for teachers who have a master's degree and three years of teaching experience, and complete 175 hours of professional development every five years ([source](#)).

**Traditional Certification:** A certification pathway leading to a teaching licensure that allows an individual to teach in public schools. Usually, prospective teachers complete their bachelor's degree that has a component of teacher preparation program that is sequenced to complement the prospective teacher's major. An individual then must complete student teaching experience, take state's required exam(s), and apply for teacher certification. You also need to pass a fingerprint and background check providing that you have no criminal history ([source](#)).

**Traditional classroom teacher:** An individual who has undergone a traditional certification pathway and is licensed to teach in their state according to the guidelines of that respective state.

**Undocumented:** Foreign-born people who do not possess a valid visa or other immigration documentation because they entered the U.S. without inspection, stayed longer than their temporary visa permitted, or otherwise violated the terms under which they were admitted ([source](#)).

**USCIS:** U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. An Agency of the United States Department of Homeland Security that administers the country's naturalization and immigration system. DACA applicants apply through USCIS.