

Educating Undocumented Students:

The Legacy of *Plyler v. Doe*

Aarti Kohli¹

¶1 The current public debate over immigration policy has uncovered deep divisions within the United States over the treatment of undocumented immigrants. In 1982, in a case that profoundly affected the lives of undocumented families, the Supreme Court ruled in *Plyler v. Doe* that undocumented children have a constitutional right to a free public education. As a result of the extremely close decision (5-4), thousands of undocumented children were granted access to the American public school system.

¶2 Although twenty-five years have passed since the *Plyler* decision, significant gaps remain in our knowledge about the actual educational attainment of undocumented children. This symposium issue hopes to narrow that gap by presenting valuable demographic information about changes in the population of undocumented children since *Plyler*, and by presenting new perspectives on the social implications of the *Plyler* decision for both undocumented children and the communities in which they live. Research shows that although *Plyler* children are integrated into the public school system, they face many challenges upon graduating from high school. Many are stymied in their efforts to pursue higher education or gainful employment. One of the main principles of *Plyler* is that it is unjust to deny an innocent group of children the opportunity to contribute to American society. However, as the research and policy papers in this issue discuss, changes in law and social policies are still needed in order to fulfill *Plyler's* promise.

¶3 The Warren Institute focuses on immigrant education as one of its priority topics for research and policy development. These papers, along with several others, were commissioned leading up to the Warren Institute's May 7, 2007 roundtable commemorating the 25th anniversary of the *Plyler* decision. The full body of work presented at this event is available on the Warren Institute website at <http://www.law.berkeley.edu/centers/ewi/plylerdoe.html>.

¹ Director of Immigration Policy & Legislative Counsel, Chief Justice Earl Warren Institute on Race, Ethnicity, and Diversity, University of California, Berkeley School of Law.