

“How I Got Here: Maria—Educator-focused Video”

Lucy: Hi there, I'm Lucy. Today, you get the opportunity to meet the oh-so-inspiring, Maria. We know that the journey to college is vastly different for everyone. Maria's journey in particular offers us a glimpse into the life of an undocumented student living and attending school in the United States. Of course, in Texas, this scenario is pretty common, but while her status may sound familiar, her feelings and experience are very personal.

You'll see how fear and the stigma of being labeled as undocumented almost prevented her from going to college. Happily, thanks to an especially tuned-in educator's help and some diligent research, she was able to get herself on the path to success. Now, you may be wondering, is this just a lesson for the handful of kids in my class that might have undocumented status? The answer is, nope, not at all.

While some of the information here will pertain to those undocumented students specifically, your entire class can learn from Maria's story. Despite popular belief, undocumented students can in fact attend college in the United States. Although the laws are ever-changing, with some work, you can find the steps needed to make it happen. The other big takeaway here is Maria's amazing perseverance, everybody can learn from that. She group up in a new culture, had to learn a new language, and dealt with an ever-present discomfort about being different. Despite all that, she stayed on target and went to college. That's a ton of stuff to deal with at her age, but she did it, so get ready to be impressed and I'll be right back.

Maria: Are you all ready? Yes? Okay.

Hello everyone, my name's Maria and I attend the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, and I am undocumented.

Here we go.

My major is environmental science. I think it's very important that we take care of our environment. I love being in nature because I love being out and exploring. I was born in Durango, Mexico. I come from a single-parent family, my mom, she actually only had a elementary level education, but that didn't deter her from telling her kids that we should go to college. I was brought over to the United States when I was eight years old. I came not knowing a lot of English and it was very hard adjusting to the culture. I felt rejected by people I didn't even know. Sometimes you think about like, oh my God, what if somebody finds out I'm undocumented? You think of, maybe all my efforts are going to go to waste.

Lucy: See? We told you she's awesome. What's remarkable about Maria is how she discusses her fear in telling others about her citizenship. Imagine hanging onto that secret and how crippling that can feel. As educators, we need to assure students in this situation

that they're not alone and that there's plenty of help for them. The more facts they're aware of, the more empowered they become, and the less fear they have to deal with.

It'd be a good idea to share with your students what the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act means to them. FERPA requires institutions to keep quite a bit of information private, including citizenship status. Let students know that your door is open to share this kind of information. Doing so may alleviate any guilt they've been carrying around or make them aware of options they would have never known about. There's real power in this knowledge.

In the next part, check out how Maria transforms from defeated to activated once she knows her college dream is possible. Armed with this realization, she doesn't let anything derail her, and works hard to get to college, not being defined whatsoever by her undocumented status.

Maria: When I was in my junior year of high school, I thought I could not take my SAT because I did not have a social security number. I was very mad at the world, I was mad at my mom because I was like, "Ma, you did this to me," like I can't go to college. My GEAR UP program had SAT sessions that would help you prep up for the test. My GEAR UP facilitator comes in and he's like, "Maria, how come you haven't taken your SAT?" I was like, do I tell him that I'm undocumented or do I not tell him and not go to college? I decided to tell him right there and then, "You know what, it's because I don't have a social."

Then my facilitator's like, "Well, Maria, you don't need one," so I was like, "What!? I don't need one?" Right there and then I signed up for my SAT. My dream university was Purdue University and I was so ready to go to Purdue but I had this limitation because of my immigration status so I couldn't leave my area. I ended up going to the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley and it's been a blessing to be here locally.

This is Bucky. This is the engineer building, this is my dorm right here. Hey.

Lucy: I'm back. This is a good time to go over some of the particulars surrounding deferred action for childhood arrivals, or DACA. Back in 2012, it was announced that some people who came to the United States as children, and meet specific guidelines may request consideration of deferred action for a period of two years. Deferred action means that the action of being removed from the country is suspended for two years and happily, the deferral can be renewed after that two year period. Just to clarify, DACA does not provide lawful status, but the good news is that it does provide eligibility for work authorization.

To qualify, applicants must be at least fifteen years old, have continuously lived in the US since June 2007, and currently be either in school or already graduated from high school, or have earned a GED. Applying for a DACA permit requires a fee of four hundred sixty-five dollars and unfortunately, there's no assistance currently available for applicants. For more specific information, head over to the US Citizenship and Immigration Services website.

Those are the must know facts. Please encourage your students to visit the site if they have any questions, which, they probably will. Likewise, be sure they know they can talk to a counselor or immigration specialist for any and all assistance. As you've seen, just knowing that information can make all the difference in the world. Oh, and one more thing, it's also important for students to be one hundred percent honest about their immigration status when filling out applications because any untruths can cause admission to be revoked.

For students without a social security number, encourage them to ask for a student ID number when they apply so they don't have to provide a social, and lucky you, now you get to check out where Maria's journey takes her.

Maria:

When I got deferred action for childhood arrivals, it felt like all the doors had opened. Deferred action for childhood arrivals gives students who came to the United States before the age of sixteen the opportunity to apply for a two year permit. You get to be in the country for two years, legally. [inaudible 00:07:04] for me, it has given me so many opportunities.

Right now, I'm along the US/Mexico border and it feels kind of surreal to be so close to it and not be afraid. I feel freedom, I feel like a butterfly, they have no boundaries, they migrate from country to country. Even though I do have a lack of immigration status, it does not deter me from pursuing my dreams.

If you are an undocumented student, these are the steps you have to take. First, you have to take your college entrance exams. The second step is applying to a university. Once you know if you have been accepted or not, then you should definitely try to apply for financial aid, and you're going to do the FAFSA application, so that's financial aid from the state of Texas undocumented students. Being undocumented does not define who you are. You are your own person and you know what you want to do, you know where you come from, and you know where you want to go, there's people out there looking out for your success.

Your success really depends on how bad you want it and what difference you want to make in the world. Never give up. If your parents never gave up to give you a better life, you should never give up to give yourself a better life.

Lucy:

Go Maria! The world will be a better place because of her. Inspired by her mom's urgings to go to college, Maria began preparing at a young age. She quickly adapted to her environment and overcame any hurdles that life threw her way. She didn't let her undocumented status slow her down. Despite not being able to attend her first choice college, she made it all work out. Her pursuit of a career in environmental science is incredibly appropriate because if there's one person who knows about navigating changing conditions, it's this girl.

When working with your students, it's important to remember that undocumented DACA participants are eligible for the TASFA, which of course, is different from the FAFSA despite the tricky rhymes. Another way for undocumented students to get

funding for school is via private scholarships. Usually undocumented kids are warned against talking to anyone about their immigration status, and while it's easy to understand why they'd like to remain silent, it doesn't mean they can't be informed and ask for all the help they need.

It's vital to encourage students to research their rights and current laws on credible websites if they're not comfortable speaking to anyone in person. Once they learn about laws like FERPA, they may be able to realize their collegiate dreams just like Maria, and I'd say that warrants about eight thousand smiley face emojis. Wouldn't you agree?