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To understand citizenship, one must know the definition and responsibilities and how it correlates to our past, present, and future. Citizenship is the relationship between an individual and a state to which the individual owes allegiance and in turn is entitled to its protection ([www.britannica.com > topic > citizenship](http://www.britannica.com/topic/citizenship)). Therefore, citizens have certain rights such as the right to vote, the right to a public education, and the right to equal protection under the law, which should be universal human rights and a rule of the law. However, throughout history, people have fought for these basic rights whether they are U.S. Citizens or undocumented immigrants with the right to a public education at the forefront.

Most people are familiar with *Brown v. Board of Education*, a historic decision that marked the end of the “separate but equal” precedential ruling by the Supreme Court that state-sanctioned segregation of public schools was a violation of the 14<sup>th</sup> amendment (*Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) National Archives). United States citizens had to fight for the right to an equal public education leading up to the ruling in 1954, but the fight continues to present day. The fight is for children brought across the border and only know the United States as home who want to have the same educational rights as citizens. In 2012, under Barack Obama, a federal program called DACA was created. The program allowed people brought unlawfully as children into the United States the temporary legal right to live, study and work in America, instead of fearing deportation ([www.theguardian.com > us-news > 2020](http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020)). These rulings and programs may seem a world apart from Merrill, Oregon, but Lost River Jr. Sr. High School has students affected by their ethnicity and birth rights. For example, peers who have participated in school sponsored clubs such as Future Business Leaders of America (FBLA) and Future Farmers of America (FFA), have had to opt out of conferences due to their legal status and the requirements of federal travel; thereby, they have had unequal educational experiences by default.

Educational equality will remain a controversial subject that continuously finds its way back to the Supreme Court as the educational system continues to seek change, especially with the ebb and flow of politics. Every day when the news is turned on, the topic is about border protection and the cost to taxpayers caused by illegal immigration. In 1973, the Supreme Court rejected a federal legal challenge to Texas’ school funding system (*Education Week: “After 50 Years, a U.S. Supreme Court Decision on Educational Equity Is Still Debated”*, Mark Walsh, March 20, 2023). The lawsuit challenged inequities in the underfunded Texas educational system that created disparities along race and class lines due to the tax base. Border state challenges are understandable with the costs associated with illegal immigration, but other states are not immune to the same struggles. The taxes are not being paid to the federal government through earned wages even though some immigrants benefit from federal programs, including education. Therefore, financially, the cause and effect is a deficit in the federal budget that future generations will be paying for.

Immigration and the right to education is not solely a United States issue. “People have always been on the move, but the scale and speed of transnational migration is unprecedented in today’s world. It is estimated that in 2015, there were around 244 million international migrants in the world, which accounted for about 3.3% of the global population.” (*Migration Education and Learning*) The reasons for migration are complex, but race, ethnicity, gender, social class, and

educational background manifest the inequities and outcomes of those seeking change. Merrill, Oregon has a population of Honduran, Guatemalan, and Mexican immigrants at Lost River Jr. Sr. High School. Like world migration, they are escaping corruption violence, hunger, and natural disasters like many others worldwide, but they are also finding a better way of life with family members already immersed in the American way of life. Last year, at Lost River Jr. Sr. High School, a student painted an impactful mural for her Senior Project. She painted Central and South American iconic symbolism within a silhouette of the United States. As a newly immigrated Honduran, this is how she saw her new home, but she yearned to go back to a place rife with violence knowing she couldn't. So, she looked towards the future of becoming a pediatrician, and she graduated with honors.

The United States was founded by immigrants, yet immigration creates strong feelings. People illegally cross for many reasons. I have a unique perspective as my grandmother and grandfather crossed illegally for a better life, and my grandfather was deported a few times only to find his way back. They never sought government assistance, worked hard in agricultural and low-income jobs, and became U.S. Citizens. Three of four of their children, two born in the United States and two Mexico, currently work in the educational system in one form or another. As first-generation Americans, they bridge the language and cultural gap for immigrants within the local school system, which are Title I schools that receive federal funding for low-income students. Despite the challenges put before them, they are the ones who are teaching the future generations and paying forward the sacrifices of those who strive for a better future.

Like everything, there is a dichotomy to life. There are those who are looking to escape the trials and tribulations of life to "foreign countries", but there are also those who take advantage of the weaknesses of a country and its people. The United States is no different, but when the population of its people are educated, there is more reason than emotion to exact change. Therefore, with the federal government continuing DACA and abiding by the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, among border state controversies, the United States is strengthening itself against the world, nationally, and locally by empowering all people. I truly believe that the United States will never be Utopia, but it will definitely be the original country of opportunity that is the definition of Citizenship.

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