



MEMBER FDIC
Capital One, N.A.

ONLINE SAVINGS ACCOUNT

Start earning a **3.50%** APY* with a \$10,000 b

- Great rate
- Easy transfers^o
- No fees

<http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/nation/la-na-freecollege8-2008jun08,0,1475368.story?page=2>
From the Los Angeles Times

Denver promise of free college is breaking some hearts

Illegal immigrants graduating from high school find that the 2004 pledge won't cover out-of-state tuition, and they're not entitled to Colorado resident prices.

By DeeDee Correll

Los Angeles Times Staff Writer

June 8, 2008

DENVER — A lot of kids sat up and took notice the day the mayor showed up at Cole Middle School, offering to make a deal: If they'd study hard and stay in school, he'd find the money to pay for college. Four years later, the first of those students are ready to take him up on his offer -- and Mayor John Hickenlooper is ready to deliver.

But the deal has soured for some students in the group: those who are illegal immigrants. Because they would be required by Colorado law to pay out-of-state tuition, it would cost much more to pay for their college educations.

Although the mayor says he will give the students the same amount of monetary support that legal residents will receive, it's far less than what they will need to cover tuition. At least 10 of the 38 who graduated are affected, according to a private group helping the students.

Some now say the mayor has backed away from a commitment that boosted their hopes for the last four years. "We acknowledge the fact the mayor is giving us partial help, but that is not what he promised," said Yadira Zubia, 19.

But Hickenlooper's senior policy advisor, Katherine Archuleta, says the mayor has kept his promise. "The decision by the state Legislature [to charge out-of-state rates] was not in his control. He's doing everything he can."

The issue of whether illegal immigrants should receive the benefit of lower tuitions has been the subject of much debate in recent years. Advocates say that out-of-state rates put college out of reach for such immigrants and that children shouldn't be punished for their parents' decisions to enter the country illegally. Opponents argue that illegal immigrants should not receive the same benefits afforded legal residents.

In this case, the students shouldn't receive any aid at all, said Stan Weekes, director of the Colorado Alliance for Immigration Reform. "Aiding and abetting illegal aliens is a felony, and it's my contention that His Honor would be guilty of a felony," he said.

A federal law passed in 1996 prohibits states from charging in-state tuition rates to illegal residents unless they offer the same rates to all citizens and legal residents of other states, said Grisella Martinez, an immigration policy analyst at the National Immigration Law Center.

Nevertheless, California and nine other states let illegal residents pay tuition at in-state rates -- an approach that two years ago survived a lawsuit aimed at ending the practice in California.

In 2006, Colorado lawmakers decided that people who could not prove their legal residency must pay out-of-state rates, which can be nearly four times the in-state rates. For example, in-state tuition at the University of Colorado-Boulder was \$6,635 this year, while out-of-state students paid \$24,797.

The university system does not track which students are in the country illegally, but officials said that over the past decade they knew of only two such students who enrolled at out-of-state rates. Neither was able to finish, said University of Colorado spokeswoman Deborah Mendez-Wilson. "It's a rare bird who can come up with the funds," she said.

Back in 2004, when the mayor made his offer to the 366 sixth-, seventh- and eighth-graders at Cole Middle School, it was to give them a reason to stay in school and to help them see college as something within their reach.

Today, many of the Cole students say that they never considered higher education an option until Hickenlooper made his announcement that day: He would raise the money to make up the difference between the cost of tuition and what they could earn in scholarships so that they could go to college.

"I was like, 'Yeah, right,' " said one student, now 18, who did not give her name for fear of deportation. "But as the years went by, I was like, 'Maybe this is true. I'm going to be able to go to college.' "

"Everybody started thinking about getting more education," said Zubia, 19, who was born in Chihuahua, Mexico, but was brought to the United States when she was 5.

"When the mayor made the pledge, he was speaking to a class of students. He wasn't analyzing who was documented or undocumented," Archuleta said.

At the time of the Cole offer, the Legislature had not yet decreed that illegal residents had to pay out-of-state rates, but the University of Colorado system already had a policy of charging the higher rates to students who could not prove their legal residency, Mendez-Wilson said.

Students took Hickenlooper's promise to mean he would pay whatever they needed him to pay.

However, the mayor's staff said it cautioned the illegal immigrants a year ago that they would not be eligible for more financial support than legal in-state students.

Patricia Lawless, an organizer with Metro Organizations for People, which is assisting the illegal immigrants, said city officials didn't tell the seniors specifically until several months ago that they would not receive enough to cover the gap.

It is unclear how many students will eventually be affected. In the first wave of high school graduates from Cole Middle School, at least 10 who want to go to college have realized that they can't afford to after all.

Some now entering their final year of high school are discouraged. "Our families can't afford to make up the difference," said a 17-year-old boy who wants to attend Colorado State University and become an engineer. Even if he worked three jobs, he said, he couldn't earn enough to pay for it.

One 17-year-old said she felt like giving up on school. "There's no way I'll be able to go to college," she said.

Illegal immigrants don't qualify for federal student aid.

Zubia's father, Catalino, is angry that the mayor raised the students' hopes in the first place. "This is not fair," he said.

Help for the Cole students is being routed through the Denver Scholarship Foundation, which Hickenlooper helped found.

It is also offering assistance to qualified students throughout the city's public high schools.

Last month, the Cole students and their supporters called on the mayor to meet his original promise, but they also appealed to the community to help them find a way to pay for college.

"It's a tough issue," said Archuleta, the mayor's advisor. "I think the kids really want to go to university or college or trade school, and I think the law has changed their access."

deedee.correll@latimes.com

If you want other stories on this topic, search the Archives at latimes.com/archives.

TMSReprints

Article licensing and reprint options

Copyright 2008 Los Angeles Times | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Terms of Service](#)

[Home Delivery](#) | [Advertise](#) | [Archives](#) | [Contact](#) | [Site Map](#) | [Help](#)

partners:

