



Written by [Isabel Lyman](#) on May 11, 2010

The Cost of Educating the Children of Illegal Aliens: Exorbitant

A new study prepared for The Social Contract Press entitled “The Burden of Plyler v. Doe,” by economic journalist Edwin S. Rubenstein highlights the financial burden imposed on public education by the U.S. Supreme Court decision *Plyler v. Doe* (1982). In that landmark case, the justices on the Supreme Court “struck down a Texas statute denying funding for education” of children illegally in the United States.

Of course, all other 49 states were bound by this decision. Because funding for education is the largest expense incurred by local and state governments on behalf of illegal immigrants (far more than healthcare, welfare, etc.), Rubenstein sought to calculate the burden.

And what a burden it is!

Using data collected by the U.S. Census Bureau and gleaning material from other [studies](#), the author estimates the cost of educating the children of illegal aliens in this country to be as high as \$137 billion annually. This figure includes basic instruction, English-as-a-second-language programs (which, he points out, are a boondoggle), and capital expenditures (e.g. construction costs).

Because the number of native-born children of native-born parents enrolled in K-12 schools has actually declined since 1999 and because the illegal alien population is youthful, all of the increase in total enrollment figures (819,000 from 1999 to 2007) is due to immigration, both legal and illegal, of which 6.8 percent is estimated to be illegal.

A portion of Rubenstein’s monograph deals with the costs of providing ESL instruction to the children of these immigrants, including teacher recruitment, training, and compensation. In spite of huge financial outlays for these programs, bilingual education remains woefully ineffective in teaching schoolchildren spoken and written English.

Owing to the judicial activism exercised in the *Plyler* decision, school districts for decades have been forced to deal with this financial burden, pushing states with large populations of illegal aliens to the economic brink. This burden is usually borne by homeowners saddled with ever-increasing property taxes to fund these mandates. Especially hard hit are states like California, Texas, Arizona, and Colorado — popular destinations for undocumented migrants.

For instance, in FY2007 California spent \$8.5 billion on the education of illegal alien students. Rubenstein breaks down that number by noting what could have been purchased with that amount: The salaries of 31,000 teachers for three years and 2.8 million computers, enough for nearly half the Golden State’s students. Meanwhile, Texas invested \$4.3 billion into illegal-alien education which is 12 percent





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of the FY2007 budget. Again that money could have been used to pay for teacher pensions and textbooks.

Chief Justice Warren Burger, who presided over the Supreme Court when it ruled on *Plyler*, was a voice of reason. In his dissenting opinion, he wrote that states “may reasonably, and constitutionally, elect not to provide them [children here illegally] with governmental services at the expense of those who are lawfully in the state.”

While Rubenstein’s study does not delve into constitutional theorizing about the proper role of government regarding K-12 education, and steers free of bombast despite the volatility of the topic, it is a highly readable, informative fiscal exposition about the status quo. What is crystal clear from his conclusion is that unless and until *Plyler* is reversed (which, alas, isn’t going to happen anytime soon, given the current make-up of the Court), local and state governments will be obligated to provide public education for children here illegally. Such is the long-term political and societal consequences of what Edwin Rubenstein and other prescient analysts describe as “a naked usurpation of congressional powers.”

Isabel Lyman, author of [The Homeschooling Revolution](#), blogs at [The Castillo Chronicles](#).



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