

Reflecting on *Plyler v. Doe*

In the case of *Plyler v. Doe*, the Supreme Court held (decided) the following:

By a 5-4 vote, the U.S. Supreme Court Decision in *Plyler v. Doe* (1982) decided:

The equal protection clause of the 14th Amendment applies “to anyone, citizen or stranger” residing within a state’s boundaries. The children in this case were within the jurisdiction of the state and were thus protected by the 14th Amendment.

The equal protection clause of the 14th Amendment requires Texas and the Tyler Independent School District to provide free public schooling to the children of undocumented immigrants on an equal basis with the other children in the state and school district.

Writing for the majority, Justice William Brennan concluded: “We cannot ignore the significant social costs borne by our Nation when select groups are denied the means to absorb the values and skills upon which our social order rests.”

Writing for the four dissenters, Chief Justice Warren Burger stated: “By definition, illegal aliens have no right whatever to be here, and the state may reasonably, and constitutionally, elect not to provide them with governmental services at the expense of those who are lawfully in the state.”

Answer the following questions in the space provided.

What does this case tell you about equality in public education?

Do you agree with the court that the nation bears “significant social costs” when “select groups” are denied equal means to public education? Why or why not?

What would those social costs be today?