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DISPELLING DREAM ACT MYTHS

The DREAM Act—a popular proposal to provide legal status to undocumented youth who entered the U.S. as children, graduated from U.S. high schools, and attend college or enter the military—is the target of a smear campaign from anti-immigration hardliners. According to them, passage of the DREAM Act would cheat native-born students out of opportunities. This tired effort to pit immigrants and native-born—whether they are workers or students—against one another is not only destructive, but has no basis in fact. Moreover, it ignores the economic benefits that come from legalizing a group of talented, hard-working individuals who want nothing more than to contribute to America and repay the country for the opportunities they’ve been given.

Research has shown that providing a legal status for young people who have a proven record of success in the United States would be a [boon to the economy](#) and the U.S. workforce. University presidents and educational associations, as well as military recruiters, business and religious leaders, have added their voice to those calling for passage of the bill. The DREAM Act will help boost the number of high-skilled American-raised workers. A 2010 [study](#) by the UCLA North American Integration and Development Center estimates that the total earnings of DREAM Act beneficiaries over the course of their working lives would be between \$1.4 trillion and \$3.6 trillion. Removing the uncertainty of undocumented status allows legalized immigrants to earn higher wages and move into higher-paying occupations, and also encourages them to invest more in their own education, open bank accounts, buy homes, and start businesses.

The U.S. military also needs the DREAM Act. Deputy Undersecretary of Defense for Military Personnel Policy, Bill Carr, stated that the law would be “good for readiness” and would help to recruit “cream of the crop” students. The DREAM Act is part of the Department of Defense’s [2010-2012 Strategic Plan](#) to assist the military in its recruiting efforts.

Yet, despite the popular support and extensive data that should make passage of the DREAM Act a no-brainer, there are those who continue to spread half-truths about it. Here’s a run down of some of the most typical myths and the facts that refute them.

Myth: *The DREAM Act uses taxpayer dollars for scholarships and grants to undocumented students.*

Fact: The DREAM Act states that undocumented youth adjusting to lawful permanent resident status are *only* eligible for federal student loans (which must be paid back), and federal work-study programs, where they must work for any benefit they receive. They are *not eligible* for federal grants, such as Pell Grants.

Myth: *The DREAM Act allows undocumented students to pay cheaper tuition than citizens.*

Fact: The DREAM Act gives states the option to offer in-state tuition to students registered under DREAM, but it does NOT guarantee cheaper tuition. At most, the DREAM Act allows undocumented students to access the same benefits as their peers. The DREAM Act allows undocumented students to

access in-state tuition, but only if they would otherwise qualify for such tuition, *and* if state law permits undocumented students to receive in-state tuition.

Myth: *The DREAM Act gives undocumented students and their families access to public benefits.*

Fact: DREAM Act students receive no special benefits and are subject to the same public benefits eligibility requirements as other legal immigrants. This means that DREAM Act students and families are NOT immediately eligible for Supplemental Security Income, food stamps, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, Medicaid (other than emergency care), and numerous other federal benefit programs. In general, a person *must be here as a lawful permanent resident for five years* before they receive [non-emergency federal assistance](#).

Myth: *The DREAM Act will result in a mass amnesty.*

Fact: The DREAM Act is not an amnesty. No one will automatically receive a green card. To legalize, individuals have to meet stringent eligibility criteria: they must have entered the United States before age 16; must have been here for five years or more; must not have committed any major crimes; must graduate from high school or the equivalent; and must complete at least two years of college or military service. Eligible students must first obtain conditional residency and complete the requirements before they can obtain a green card—a process that will take years. Not all immigrants who came as young children will be eligible to legalize because they will not meet some of these requirements.

Myth: *The DREAM Act will spur more illegal immigration because it rewards undocumented youth.*

Fact: Programs like the DREAM Act, which have clear cut-off dates, offer no incentives for more illegal immigration. In order to qualify for the DREAM Act, a student must have entered the United States before the age of 16 and have lived in the U.S. for at least five years before the date of enactment. Economic conditions have far more impact on illegal immigration than specific pieces of legislation.

Myth: *The DREAM Act isn't just for students, but will benefit people of all ages.*

Fact: Because the U.S. has failed to address the question of illegal immigration for more than a decade, an entire generation of young people's skills and contributions could easily be lost. The young people who inspired the DREAM Act ten years ago may now be in their early 30s and should be eligible to benefit when it becomes law. Consequently, the DREAM Act encourages immigrants 35 or younger to attend college or join the military, but they must still have entered the U.S. before they were 16 AND have been here for five years immediately preceding the date of enactment.

Myth: *The DREAM Act legalizes criminals and gang members and lets people who have already been ordered deported avoid the law.*

Fact: Immigrants convicted of serious crimes are ineligible for DREAM Act status; the DREAM Act excludes from eligibility most immigrants applying for benefits who have been under an order of deportation. Specifically, the DREAM Act states that an applicant may not have already been ordered deported unless they received the order before they were 16 years old.

Myth: *The DREAM Act lets students cut in line in front of other lawful immigrants.*

Fact: DREAM Act students do not compete for visas with other applicants for legal permanent residence. Instead, DREAM Act creates a separate program for students that requires them to earn legal permanent residence by attending college or serving in the military for two years while in a temporary

legal status. DREAM will not affect the number of visas available or the time it takes to get a visa for those entering through traditional legal immigration.

Myth: *The DREAM Act would diminish opportunities for U.S.-citizen students.*

Fact: According to the National Immigration Law Center:

Most undocumented students are likely to have zero impact on admission rates of native born students: Since 2001, 10 states have made it easier for undocumented state residents to attend college by offering in-state tuition to those that qualify. A significant portion of the students that took advantage of this opportunity have done so in community colleges, which have open enrollment. The small numbers of students who will attend 4-year universities are not significant enough to affect the opportunities of others.

[Institutions charged with education of our youth overwhelmingly support the bill.](#) Well-established education organizations like the American Association of Community Colleges, American Association of State Colleges and Universities, National Educators Association, the College Board, and prominent university presidents/chancellors support the DREAM Act.

Endnotes