



“Creating Opportunity for All Our Youth”

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We should be able to agree that providing a high-quality education for all our children, regardless of their background, is a critical investment in our future. And when we tell our youngest that the sky is the limit, we must keep our word by working to eliminate any barriers to their success.

That’s why, during the week of May 1, workers and their unions joined together with immigrants to champion the causes of freedom and opportunity through collective voice and action. Our joint effort was about creating an opportunity to make a decent living—and that starts with making sure all children are prepared for college, career and life. There is no better way to do that than to revive the DREAM Act.

The 65,000 undocumented immigrant students who graduate from American high schools each year include class valedictorians, student council presidents, straight-A students, and idealistic young people committed to their families and improving their communities. Their ambitions are to become tomorrow’s nurses, computer programmers, engineers and soldiers, among other things. Many were brought to this country at a young age by their parents, have played by the rules, and have become courageous role models for their peers, but their immigration status bars them from opportunities to better themselves.

We strongly urge our leaders to support the DREAM Act. This important piece of legislation received strong bipartisan support when it was introduced in December; it was passed by the U.S. House of Representatives but fell short by five votes in the U.S. Senate.

It’s a travesty to deny our youth a shot at pursuing their dreams of going to college and becoming productive members of our society, simply because they were brought to this country at a young age and don’t have a Social Security number. The DREAM Act would help so many promising young adults who, because of their immigration status, are barred from an accessible and affordable higher education. The bill would create a pathway to legal status for qualified students who were brought to the United States before the age of 16, if they complete high school and at least two years of either college or military service.

Most discussions about jobs, immigration and our future generation of workers inevitably leads to the topic of the future prospects for our Latino youth, many of whom are the children of immigrants or are immigrants

themselves. Immigrant children are the fastest-growing segment of the U.S. population today, now comprising one-fourth of the nation's 75 million children. Many of these children come from poor families; they are less likely to be enrolled in a high-quality preschool program and are the least likely of any group to be prepared for college. Only 13 percent of Latinos have a bachelor's degree, and even fewer—a mere 4 percent—have a graduate or professional degree. We must do better and focus on opening doors, not closing them.

Maryland recently passed legislation to allow immigrant students to fulfill their dreams of a college education, and several other states have or are considering similar legislation. We fully support states doing what is best for their students, and we denounce the repeal of current state laws that allow qualified undocumented students to pursue higher education.

The DREAM Act is a practical, fair solution that upholds the best of our American values. It stands apart from other legislation because, regardless of one's views on how welcoming our borders should be, its goals are simply the right thing to do. We can no longer afford to turn promising students away from opportunity. Doing so impedes America's ability to be a 21st-century global economic leader and runs contrary to our cherished aspirations for the American dream.

Randi Weingarten is president of the 1.5 million-member American Federation of Teachers. Margaret Moran is the president of the League of United Latin American Citizens, the largest and oldest Hispanic membership organization in the country.