DACA Implementation: Implications and Opportunities for Education Funders

Overview

The Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) policy, which took effect on August 15, 2012, could provide work authorization and relief from deportation to an estimated 1.76 million undocumented youth, many of whom are school-age.¹ DACA offers an opportunity for young immigrants to pursue further education and access better-paying jobs in the formal economy. Although DACA does not provide DREAMers² with access to public student loans or scholarships, certain undocumented immigrants are eligible for some forms of financial aid in states such as California, Texas, and New Mexico.³ And while not a path to legal status or citizenship, it offers a chance for undocumented youth to come out of the shadows, strive for their dreams, and increase their contributions to the social and economic vitality of our society.

Implications for Education

To qualify for DACA, potential beneficiaries must have either graduated from high school, received their GED, or be currently enrolled in school or a GED program. DACA’s educational requirements are expected to result in significant numbers of youth returning to school, remaining enrolled at the secondary level, or pursuing their GED or other accredited literacy or career training programs. Nationally, 800,000 potential DACA beneficiaries (45%) are enrolled in K-12 classes, and an estimated 350,000 additional DREAMers could qualify for DACA if they re-enroll in high school or adult educational programs.⁴

DACA-eligible children and youth may not be Americans on paper, but they have grown up in this country and are students at local schools, members of religious congregations, and volunteers at community organizations. However, these youth confront many of the issues and challenges that philanthropy seeks to address—poverty, health, and access to education and employment, among others. Additionally, limited by their undocumented status, they lack access to living-wage jobs and live in constant fear of deportation. The majority, regardless of their skills and experience, often end up working menial jobs in the informal economy—a waste of their talent and drive, especially for those who defied the odds and completed their college education.

² “DREAMers” is the term used for young undocumented immigrants brought to the United States as children and who would benefit from legislation similar to the stalled DREAM Act, which provides a path to citizenship. We use the term “DREAMer” interchangeably with “potential DACA beneficiaries” and similar terminology throughout the document.
Potential Beneficiaries

DACA is available to undocumented immigrants who meet the following criteria:

- Arrived in the United States before the age of 16.
- Younger than 31 years of age on June 15, 2012.
- Lived in the U.S. continuously since June 15, 2007; present in the U.S. on June 15, 2012 and when request for DACA is submitted.
- Graduated from high school, received a GED, currently enrolled in school or GED program, or honorably discharged from the U.S. military.
- No more than two minor misdemeanors, no felonies or significant misdemeanors, and not a threat to national security or public safety.
- Entered the United States without legal authorization or overstayed visa before June 15, 2012.
- Pay $465 for biometrics and work-authorization fees.

Top States of Residence for Individuals Potentially Eligible for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals

![Map showing top states of residence for individuals potentially eligible for DACA]

California has 460,000 potentially eligible youth, more than a quarter of the national total.

Number of Potential Beneficiaries

Source: Relief from Deportation: Demographic Profile of the DREAMers Potentially Eligible under the Deferred Action Policy, by Jeanne Batalova and Michelle Mittelstadt, Migration Policy Institute, August 2012.
More than half (57%) of DACA-eligible children and young adults live in five states: California (460,000), Texas (210,000), Florida (140,000), New York (110,000), and Illinois (90,000).5

Nationwide, the highest share of potential DACA beneficiaries come from Mexico and Central America (74%), followed by South America and the Caribbean (11%). Mexico, El Salvador, and Guatemala account for approximately 1.17 million, 60,000, and 50,000 potential DACA beneficiaries, respectively. Together with potential beneficiaries from India and Korea (approximately 30,000 for each country), these individuals represent the largest shares of DACA-eligible individuals by country of origin.6

Currently, 72% (1.26 million) of potential beneficiaries are 15 years of age and older and can apply immediately for DACA. The remaining 28% (500,000) are under 15 years of age and will be eligible for DACA benefits when they reach the age requirement, so long as the program remains in effect.7

Funding Recommendations

DACA provides funders a unique opportunity to enhance educational opportunities and outcomes for undocumented immigrant children and youth. Funders can invest in programs, services, and policies that:

- Assist young immigrants in pursuing or continuing their education, avoiding the pitfalls of for-profit schools, and seeking academic and training opportunities that increase their employability. For example:
  - For those who are in school, ensure access to high-quality programming, including but not limited to, classes for English Language Learners (ELLs) so they will be able to graduate and renew their work authorization.
  - For students who have dropped out of school, support efforts to get them re-enrolled and to ensure that there are appropriate and high-quality alternative pathways to graduation.
  - Ensure the availability of quality GED options for immigrant youth, including ELLs.
  - Support college advising, retention, and completion efforts to maximize the unique opportunities presented by DACA.
  - Help DREAMers join the formal economy through job training and placement, financial literacy services, and information about predatory lenders.

6 Ibid.
7 Ibid.
Support professional development and training for teachers, administrators, and other school staff on basic DACA eligibility requirements, including the application process and available resources such as legal services and scholarships.

Tap educators, school counselors, and other education professionals—including superintendents, school district officials, representatives of federal and state departments of education, and others—to serve as hubs to disseminate accurate information about:

- DACA eligibility and benefits.
- Application assistance and available resources including legal services.
- Education and training programs to help applicants meet DACA’s eligibility requirements.
- Scholarship and loan opportunities to cover the $465 filing fee.

Improve schools’ capacities to quickly provide potential beneficiaries with access to their academic records in order to establish eligibility for DACA. Some school districts, for example, are sending personnel to generate academic records at large community-based DACA application assistance workshops.

Help beneficiaries defray the costs of applying for DACA through grants, loan funds, and program-related investments.

Fund academic scholarships that allow DACA beneficiaries to begin—or continue—their post-secondary education.

Support advocacy at the local, state, and federal levels for increased access and enrollment opportunities in alternative education and workforce programs that provide a pathway to DACA for youth not connected to any school system.

Invest in research and documentation to measure the economic and social impact of DACA on the lives of individual beneficiaries, their families, and our society.

Investment in these strategies will help reduce dropout rates, increase educational attainment, and enhance long-term job prospects and earning potential for many young immigrants.

Learn More

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