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Stability for Dreamers is good for all Texans

The DACA program has been a powerful engine of opportunity and economic growth for Texas and the nation



People rally outside the Capitol in support of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals during a demonstration on Capitol Hill in Washington on Thursday, Oct. 6, 2022. (Jose Luis Magana / ASSOCIATED PRESS)

By Bob Mong and Nick Garcia
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As education leaders in Texas representing both K-12 and higher education viewpoints, we understand the importance of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program for students in this state and this country, and we join other Texas voices in asking for a [federal bipartisan legislative fix for Dreamers](#).

Despite the recent [news](#) that Congress could not coalesce around legislation embodying the Senate's bipartisan [immigration framework](#), nothing has changed about the underlying realities: The border and immigration policy status quo is not working for anyone, and meaningful legislative reforms are still urgently needed for Texas Dreamers, the Texas economy, and our state's K-12 classrooms and college campuses.

Notably, the American public, including voters in Texas, strongly support the contours of what the bipartisan Senate legislative framework had proposed: protections and citizenship for DACA recipients and Dreamers paired with border security measures. The very nature of bipartisan legislating means that some provisions would have required our lawmakers to compromise in order to forge a breakthrough. Despite the likely inaction in Congress this year, the stakes of the failure to enact reforms are still enormous, with tens of thousands of Texas workers and students set to lose DACA protections and work permits barring a policy fix.

The DACA program has been a powerful engine of opportunity and economic growth for Texas and the nation. Over its 10 years of existence, DACA has provided work permits, protections from deportation, and other opportunities for Dreamers — undocumented immigrants who arrived in the U.S. as children and who have grown up in our nation. Collectively, [they contribute more than \\$1 billion in federal, state, and local taxes](#) and power our state's economy while supporting their communities.

At the University of North Texas at Dallas, our support for DACA and Dreamer students is a core part of our larger vision to create a pathway to upward socioeconomic mobility for Texans from all backgrounds. Through programs such as our partnership with TheDream.us scholarship program and our broader commitment to educate first generation college students, we have long been a campus that welcomes Dreamers. No single statistic or anecdote can fully capture the hundreds of unique stories of Dreamers who have strengthened our UNT Dallas classrooms, and who are now putting their degrees to use in the Texas workforce thanks to DACA. Yet a larger point of commonality does exist. Namely, each individual story demonstrates why expanding opportunities for Dreamers, whether through new chances at higher education or via programs such as DACA, benefits not only the directly affected individual, but also the broader community and state as a whole.

Meanwhile, at Teach For America San Antonio, we also have seen firsthand how DACA and opportunities for Dreamers can be transformative. Across America, more than 350 DACA recipients have joined Teach For America to teach and lead in our nation's classrooms. These current and former TFA members join 20,000 DACA educators across the country who serve our students every day.

Among these educators is María Rocha-Carrillo, who relied on DACA's work permit to join Teach For America in 2015 and taught in San Antonio while obtaining her master's degree. Her Dreamer background empowered her to uniquely contribute to the classroom as a bilingual educator. She achieved significant academic progress as a first-year and second-year teacher in San Antonio. Today, she works in a New York City school that two TFA San Antonio alums helped found — a first-of-its-kind free public Montessori campus in the Bronx. María represents the best of what TFA is. She is a remarkable leader, wholly committed to the mission of ensuring every child has access to an excellent education, who aspires to shape the experience of students not just within the walls of her classroom, but across our entire system of education. These are the leaders we want in our classrooms fostering the next generation.

Despite its popularity and successes, the future of DACA is imperiled. As a result, the urgency remains high for policymakers to ensure that teachers like María, DACA alums from UNT Dallas, and other Dreamers — with and without DACA — can continue to thrive and lead in this country. Despite the reality that another legislative compromise appears unlikely to be enacted this year, the status quo remains unacceptable and our pro-Dreamer advocacy must continue.

On our campus and in the workplace, UNT Dallas Dreamers are counting on Congress to keep them in mind, and DACA teachers like María should not be relegated to the shadows when they belong at the front of our classrooms. We ask Congress to help forge a breakthrough and deliver meaningful reforms that will strengthen our state and our nation, both now and in the future.

Bob Mong is president of the UNT of North Texas at Dallas and a member of the Presidents' Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration. Nick Garcia is executive director of Teach For America San Antonio. They wrote this for The Dallas Morning News.