

***Teach Plus Urges Your  
Support for the Dream Act***

## Our Undocumented Students Need Champions

By: Sarah TeKolste, Indianapolis Teaching Policy Fellow

October 30, 2017

**HUFFPOST**

Each morning, I stand in the hall and greet my students with a chipper “Buenos días, ¿cómo estás?” The day after the Presidential election, Mauricio said to me in English, with as much teenage aggression as he could muster: “What are you greeting us in Spanish for? We speak English. And besides, what do you care? We’re all gonna be gone soon anyways.”

When did saying “good morning” in Spanish become a political statement? What had I done to make Mauricio believe I was not on his side?



I teach Spanish to many kids who already speak the language at home. My students range from recent immigrants from Guatemala who are multilingual speakers of Spanish and various Mayan languages to Honduran, Mexican, and Nicaraguan American students whose families have been in the United States for generations. Unsurprisingly, my students who were raised here hesitate to speak Spanish at school more often than their peers who are recent immigrants. Whereas students who are recent immigrants are often used to speaking Spanish to their teachers in their countries of origin, students who only know U.S. schools are accustomed to an English-only environment with their teachers. For much of their lives, they have been told that it is not appropriate to speak Spanish in school, that it is somehow better to address their teachers in English. If they were reluctant to speak Spanish before, what must they be feeling now with anti-immigrant rhetoric so prominent in the national discourse?

At Emmerich Manual High School where I teach, we celebrate diversity with cultural dress days, shared meals, and the performing arts. We want all of our students, and especially our immigrant and refugee students, to know that their culture is an asset to the community. Our halls are decorated with a multitude of flags representing the nationalities of our immigrant and refugee students—from Mexico to Myanmar to Syria – and our department-wide theme of “world changers” promotes global citizenship and ambassadorship.

Yet, Mauricio made me realize that I would have to do more than hang flags and speak Spanish to really earn my students’ trust. I learned in the last year that in order to build relationships with some of my most marginalized students, I could no longer be apolitical on issues of immigration.

In 1982, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Plyler vs. Doe* that states cannot constitutionally deny students a free public education because of their immigration status. Yet English language learners, who are often immigrants and sometimes undocumented, remain one of the most marginalized groups in our public school system, in part due to a lack of bilingual educators. In order to help these students achieve their fullest academic potential, it is paramount that we welcome all students and the languages they speak.

In September, many students who were brought to the U.S. as children were plunged into uncertainty. Should they still pursue a college degree? Will they be able to get a work permit? Does their education even matter? At Manual, my colleagues and I have tried to make sure that undocumented students understand their rights and know how to access the right resources. A local immigration attorney has come to our school to speak with students and families about the rescission of DACA, and we have provided students with informative literature on DACA, college access for undocumented students, and inalienable rights in the case of an immigration raid. If students are

worried that they or their parents will be deported, it doesn't much matter whether they can conjugate a verb or pass a test. If students feel unconditionally supported at school, however, they will strive to achieve the high expectations their teachers set for them.

I didn't know how to respond to Mauricio the day after the election, but one thing has remained clear to me: I would not stop speaking Spanish to my students. Children should not feel that their identities are threatened in their home country because of the language they speak. By working to celebrate multilingualism and foster an appreciation of diversity, we as educators can build a safe, welcoming environment that leads to the best educational outcomes for all students.

Equity in public education means that every child gets what they need. Right now, our immigrant and refugee students, and especially our undocumented students, need champions to make sure that happens.

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## Let's make the DACA dream a reality

By: Carla Cariño, Colorado Teaching Policy Fellow

October 26, 2017

**HUFFPOST**

I recently asked my 11th graders “What does it mean to be American?” Not one of them mentioned citizenship or papers. The majority of them talked about rights and freedom. One student in particular said something that stood out.

To me, what it means to be an American goes beyond your place of birth or the documents you have. What it means to be an American is less about who you are than what you are about— how you live your life, how you contribute to this country, how you pledge allegiance to a flag hoping and praying it will make room for you.



For many of my students, whose families have come from another country, this statement embodies their existence. Being American means understanding democratic rights like freedom and liberty. Being American means the ability to participate in a system in which citizens have voice. Citizenship is an action. It's something you do.

I later had the opportunity to attend a naturalization ceremony at the Colorado History Museum. I asked a few of my advisement students to go with me and so seven of us watched 38 people from 17 different countries become citizens that day. Four out of six students I brought have immigrant parents as do I, so this was an emotional moment. When we discussed the event afterwards, one student said to me, “I kept imagining my parents up there and what it would be like for them in that moment.” This is the same student who helped organize the DACA walkouts at our school, the same student who so passionately advocates for immigration issues in class and the same student who is determined to live the American Dream citizenship in action. Dreaming is a common human experience. We all dream and the dream of citizenship for our DACA students is grounded in the dreams that all of us have for our children and our communities.

I believe deeply that President Trump's reversal of DACA is a travesty for our country and for DACA recipients. The efforts of our DACA students need to be recognized and validated by providing a legislative pathway to citizenship. These kids are American in every sense of the word except social security numbers. They contribute to the American economy and attend many of our great higher education institutions. They are part of our society and culture, woven into our communities, striving for the same shared appreciation for Life, Liberty, and Pursuit of Happiness.

**We can do more. Here is what you can do as a teacher:**

### **Help your students find their voice**

We all need to take collective ownership of our communities and demonstrate the compassion that is necessary right now. Help your students find their voice. Show them how to access democracy by volunteering, calling legislators, writing to representatives, and working with organizations that support their ideas and needs. Empower them.

### **Help your students understand**

Talk about DACA. Help your students understand relevant legislation and why it is important for the DREAM Act to pass Congress.

## **Advocate for your students**

Write and call *your* federal legislators and advocate for these kids. They deserve their natural rights and access to the means of progress in our society through education and meaningful work.

I am a first generation American so I know firsthand what it means for one's parents to come to this nation and want the best for their children. Nobody wants to leave their homeland unless they feel the necessity to do so. Being an immigrant in this country can be hard. We have an opportunity as a nation to validate these children who can help defend some of our greatest democratic institutions. Help them stay out of the shadows and embrace them as you would any other member of your community.

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## The Best Way to Honor Latinos' Contributions is to Ensure They Can Continue Making Them

By: **Idalmi Acosta**, Indianapolis Teaching Policy Fellow

October 23, 2017

**HUFFPOST**

We just finished celebrating Hispanic Heritage month, in honor of which the White House released a statement saying that “we celebrate the accomplishments of Hispanic Americans who have helped shape our great Nation. We are grateful for the many contributions Hispanic American men and women make to our society and the vibrancy they weave into our American culture.” This is a great sentiment and it would be especially powerful if it were accompanied by action.



As an ELA teacher in a public school in Indianapolis, I daily deal with the fact that many of my students from Mexico or from central or South America don't feel welcomed in our country. Now, with DACA under threat, they fear that their families are going to be separated, that their older siblings, cousins, aunts and uncles, and friends will be sent back to Mexico and they won't be able to see them for a long time or ever again.

The DACA program has given the opportunity to over 800,000 Latinos who came here as children without documentation to go to school and get a job legally. You wouldn't blame a parent for doing everything they can to provide their child a safer and better life, and DACA recipients are not to blame for their current citizen status. Our Founding Fathers believed in the pursuit of happiness and yet we are denying that chance to thousands of people.

Every time the topic of immigration comes up, my classroom tenses as students talk about how they are hated or unwanted. There's fear and uncertainty in their eyes and the hopelessness I feel is only matched by my outrage. Diana, who is one of my 8th graders and whose stepbrother is a DACA recipient, told me: “I'm very sad that DACA might end because if my stepbrother gets deported he will not be able to find a job in Mexico.” She talked about how her brother is worried about being sent back to a country where he doesn't know anyone. He is afraid of starting over somewhere completely new.

As a teacher, my goal is to get my students to go to college so they can help their families and change their communities and the world. We talk about the issues that affect them and my answer to them is that they are the solution to these problems. I want them to realize they are our future and our hope as a society. For my students who are undocumented, programs like DACA are their hope for a brighter future. These children have grown up here and call the United States home. All they want is to stop living in fear and pursue the American dream.

If we truly want to recognize the contributions of Latinos in our country, then let's make sure they can continue to contribute. Among the hundreds of thousands of Latino professionals who enrich us with their skills, knowledge, and empathy are also tens of thousands of teachers who are DACA recipients. Many of these teachers are bilingual, a discipline that is particularly hard to staff at a time when there are more and more bilingual students in our nation's classroom. Ending DACA will remove these teachers from the classroom and will do irreparable damage to their students.

Let's celebrate Hispanic heritage by recognizing the meaningful cultural, economic, and social contributions of Latinos. But let's also celebrate it by reaching out to our congressmen and letting them know that DACA needs to continue so that Latino children have the opportunity to pursue the American dream.

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## Bilingual families help us forge multiracial nation

By: Susana Rios, New Mexico Teaching Policy Fellow

October 22, 2017

I left Mexico for the U.S. more than 15 years ago to start a family. I entered the U.S. legally and I am now an American citizen. Departing Mexico entailed a painful process to pack up my family memories, my música, my comida and my language. Once here, I quickly realized that my strong accent was very noticeable. People would talk to me in English and after hearing my response, they would ask where I came from. I felt that I got different treatment from those whose English speech was clearer and carried no accent.

It wasn't until I had my first child and watched her grow and develop that I decided to become an educator. I got a job at a child care center and my professional life took a 360-degree turn. It has been through my own path to becoming a teacher and my work as a bilingual early childhood educator that I have learned how to deal with discrimination because of my language, gender or cultural background.

Which is why I was appalled when President Trump decided to end the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program and when he recently requested a slew of hard-line immigration measures in order to protect the Dreamers. I am concerned about the future of young kids whose cultural and linguistic richness is needed in our classrooms. I am concerned with the 228,000 children ages 7-14, who would have been eligible for DACA at the age of 15, and would have potentially enrolled in school. It worries me that the temporary relief from deportation and eligibility to work legally in the U.S. for about 800,000 people under DACA just got even more uncertain.

I work every day to instill anti-discrimination practices in my young students in a dual-language program in the borderlands. The children I teach are of varied ages, developmental levels, and linguistic skills, and they all enrich the class with their diverse backgrounds. Their stories enlighten mine. We have developed a strong class culture of multicultural respect, by having them bring home-based research projects about themselves to highlight their families, and share what makes them unique. We invite parents from different cultures to share their language to the class and we teach in both English and Spanish by using culturally relevant literacy.

One of my former students Alejo, who is now 9, came to the U.S. with no English at all. His dad worked in the borderlands' fields picking onions and was illiterate. After a few years in our school, Alejo was able to communicate in English with adults and his peers. Alejo's approach to learning changed noticeably as he started to learn English. He began to participate in class more often and to translate for his dad. He realized that his voice could be heard just by using language.

Alejo's story reaffirms my duty as an advocate for the wellness of my students and a better life for their families. As an educator, I can testify to the benefits that bilingual students, many of whom fall under DACA, bring to our community of learners.

When diverse students learn from each other, in different languages, they also learn to respect differences and embrace diversity.

Bilingual students come with advantages in literacy development and problem-solving skills and bring practical benefits to our classrooms, since cognitive functions develop when children grow up speaking two languages.



I am proud to be a teacher and to advocate for the education of all students including new immigrants, so they can continue to contribute to the growth of this country.

I believe we must do everything we can to ensure that children and youth under DACA can remain in this country to forge a thriving future along with their families. The more bilingual students enter our classrooms, the deeper intercultural understanding will be instilled in our American society, and the more opportunities we'll all have to live in a multicultural and linguistically-diverse world.

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# My Undocumented Students Have Invested in Our Country. We Should Invest in Them.

By: Olivia Corya, Indianapolis Teaching Policy Fellow

October 20, 2017



educationpost

At the end of my first year of teaching, Maria, one of my sixth-graders, wrote this to me:

*"Before you, school just wasn't my thing. But you showed me that hard work pays off! I went from wanting to drop out ASAP to wanting to go to college and get the degree I need to become a lawyer! In memory of you, I will stay in school and that's a promise I won't break."*



On my hardest days, Maria's words are a constant reminder of why I teach: I want to inspire Maria and hundreds of other students like her to overcome the barriers of poverty and race that stand between them and their tremendous potential.

Most of my students are the children of Mexican immigrants. The reality is that some of them are probably undocumented, and therefore can never afford the college education I urge them to crave.

Indiana, where I live, is one of just three states that specifically prohibit undocumented students from receiving in-state tuition at public universities. This was true even before the future of undocumented students became seriously imperiled by the possible termination of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, or DACA.

DACA had allowed undocumented immigrants who came to the United States as children and met certain requirements to continue living, working and studying here. Regardless of what decisions will be made in the wake of DACA on the federal level, Indiana should offer in-state tuition for undocumented students who have attended school in the state for 10 or more years.

Children who have gone to school here that long are American in every sense. Many of them have no memory of any other country.

Not only are kids who have lived here for so long invested in our country—our country has invested in them. Indiana's schools—just like schools in every state—are legally required to educate undocumented students until the 12th grade.

Depending on the school district, we as taxpayers spend roughly \$155,000 to \$175,000 on the education of each of these children from first through 12th grade.

Why pour all this money into their elementary, middle and high school education just to cut them off at the college level practically guaranteeing that they won't be able to maximize their potential to contribute to our state's economy?

## **FULFILLING PROMISES**

Many states have passed legislation that could serve as a model. In California, undocumented students are not only eligible for in-state tuition, but can also receive financial aid from a variety of sources, including Cal Grants, the largest fund for state financial aid.

California also created a FAFSA-style application for undocumented students that streamlines the process of identifying possible sources of financial aid. In 2011, Illinois passed a DREAM Act that created a privately-funded scholarship pool for undocumented students, which followed a 2003 law that made undocumented students eligible for in-state tuition. Students like mine know no country but this one. They've worked tirelessly in school and they want to contribute to the society that raised them.

I recently attended an eighth-grade graduation ceremony for Maria's class. Each of my former students gave a speech—in both Spanish and English—and every single one spoke about their dream of attending college and their desire to make the world a better place. Among them were self-declared future lawyers, orthodontists, car mechanics, teachers and politicians—and regardless of their chosen path, they were bursting with optimism.

Denying a realistic chance of attending college to these students is not only morally reprehensible, it is economically irresponsible.

Maria also included a gift with her letter: a ring with a note attached. The note said it was a promise ring “for my promise to do my best in school and in life!” She deserves a state that gives her the opportunity to fulfill that promise.

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