



OP-ED

MDC president: The DREAMers are America's future. Let them stay.

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A dream can be assigned different definitions. It can be an illusion, one from which the dreamer would be well-advised to wake up, seeing the world, and yourself, with clear eyes. But there is also the dream of aspiration. You may not see this dream in its full shape and color, but you know it's connected to a vision, a spark of possibility.

Miami Dade College (MDC) has welcomed people with dreams for a very long time. Today, the college is home to many known as DREAMers. The children of undocumented parents, DREAMers are attending college, serving in the military, and beginning careers because of the policy known as DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals). But the promise of DACA — two-year protection from deportation and a temporary work permit — may soon be broken for 800,000 DREAMers across the nation. Decision-makers in the Department of Homeland Security are now considering DACA's termination.

Ultimately, it will be the president's decision.

The end of DACA would be a decision in search of a rationale. DACA recipients are furthering their lives at no cost to U.S. taxpayers. They receive no federal benefits — neither Pell Grants nor student loans nor healthcare coverage — and no pathway to citizenship or green card. They are law-abiding, having committed no crimes. They pay their taxes and the cost of \$495 to enter the DACA program.

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DACA eligibility requires that they arrived in the United States when they were 16 or younger, and have lived in this country for at least 10 years. The estimated average age of DREAMers when they crossed the border with their parents was 6 years old. Young adults now, they are powerless to change their status. Those who would advocate the end of DACA cite violation of immigration law and, in fact, many DREAMers have seen their parents deported. But really, can you charge a 6-year old with violating immigration law?

Donald Graham, former publisher of the Washington Post, along with Bill Ackman, CEO of Pershing Square Capital, is co-founder of a fund to support immigrant children in college. At the kickoff of the program, he said, "There has never been a more impressive time for charitable giving in America." He asked, "How can we change the world? I will be betting on DREAMers."

He's betting on DREAMers like Yoana and Santiago, students at MDC. Both epitomize the challenges and grit of immigrant children helped by DACA. Yoana's father was deported when she was 4 years old. She is completing her degree in interior design and architecture, and Santiago is studying nursing with the dream of becoming a doctor. These are people you would want as neighbors. In fact, a recent study of 1,700 DACA students showed a success rate of 85 percent of students graduating or continuing their studies, significantly higher than overall rates at the colleges they attend.

Educators live for the moment when the doors of a young life open, when the vision comes into focus. It hardly matters where you were born when that happens. The decision to abandon DACA would be one infused with partisan politics. It would be wrong, plain and simple. What it will do is tear young people from the momentum of discovery. It will violate the most basic code of American life, one that says don't trample on another person's dream. Let's hope the DACA decision is guided by a generous understanding of people's hopes, by the wisdom of aspiration.

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