



The DREAM Act: Myths and Facts



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The [DREAM Act](#), currently pending in Congress, would create a path to legal immigration status for children born outside the United States who were brought here illegally before the age of 16. In many cases these individuals are unaware of their undocumented status until they graduate from high school and attempt to apply for college. Though the United States is the only home they have ever known, they live in fear of deportation. The DREAM Act has enjoyed widespread bipartisan support over the years.

This week the DREAM Act has what many believe is its last chance to be voted on by the Senate before Congress adjourns. Unfortunately a cacophony of negative misinformation about the bill is currently clouding the debate.

Opponents say that passage of the DREAM Act would hurt American students. They say it is an amnesty, a stand-in for comprehensive immigration reform. None of these assertions are based in fact. What's more, opposition to the DREAM Act ignores the value to the U.S. economy of legalizing this group of motivated, hard-working young people who want to contribute to this country. The United States military has spoken out in favor of the DREAM Act, saying it would be "good for readiness" and would help to recruit "cream of the crop" students. The Department of Defense included the DREAM Act in its [2010-2012 Strategic Plan](#) to support military recruitment.

Here are some important myths and facts about the DREAM Act, taken in part from a document prepared by the [Immigration Policy Center](#):

Myth: *The DREAM Act will result in a mass amnesty.*

Fact: The DREAM Act is not an amnesty. No one will automatically receive a green card. To legalize, individuals have to meet stringent eligibility criteria: they must have entered the United States before age 16; must have been here for five years or more; must not have committed any major crimes; must graduate from high school or the equivalent; and must complete at least two years of college or military service. Eligible students must first obtain conditional residency and complete the requirements before they can obtain a green card—a process that will take years. Not all immigrants who came as young children will be eligible to legalize because they will not meet some of these requirements. The [Migration Policy Institute](#) estimates that "of the 360,000 young people aged 18 to 24 immediately eligible for the conditional status under the DREAM Act, about 50,000

are currently enrolled in colleges and universities across the United States and thus are likely to be eligible for adjustment to permanent status.”

Myth: *DREAM Act supporters don't care about comprehensive immigration reform, which is what the country really needs.*

Fact: Many DREAM Act supporters are steadfast proponents of comprehensive immigration reform and will continue to advocate for it. Members of Congress, President Obama and many others have also clearly stated that they consider the DREAM Act a “down payment” on comprehensive immigration reform, not a substitute.

Myth: *The DREAM Act will spur more illegal immigration because it rewards undocumented youth.*

Fact: Programs like the DREAM Act, which have clear cut-off dates, offer no incentives for more illegal immigration. In order to qualify for the DREAM Act, a student must have entered the United States before the age of 16 and have lived in the U.S. for at least five years before the date of enactment. Economic conditions have far more impact on illegal immigration than specific pieces of legislation.

Myth: *The DREAM Act legalizes criminals and gang members and lets people who have already been ordered deported avoid the law.*

Fact: Immigrants convicted of serious crimes are ineligible for DREAM Act status; the DREAM Act excludes from eligibility most immigrants applying for benefits who have been under an order of deportation. Specifically, the DREAM Act states that an applicant may not have already been ordered deported unless they received the order before they were 16 years old.

Myth: *The DREAM Act would take opportunities away from American students.*

Fact: According to the National Immigration Law Center: Most undocumented students are likely to have zero impact on admission rates of native -born students: Since 2001, 10 states have made it easier for undocumented state residents to attend college by offering in-state tuition to those who qualify. A significant portion of the students that took advantage of this opportunity have done so to attend community colleges, which have open enrollment. The small numbers of students who will attend 4-year universities are not significant enough to affect the opportunities of others. The higher education community strongly supports this bill. Organizations including the American Association of Community Colleges, American Association of State Colleges and Universities, National Educators Association, the College Board, and many university presidents and chancellors support the DREAM Act.

Myth: *The DREAM Act uses taxpayer dollars for scholarships and grants to undocumented students and gives their families access to public benefits.*

Fact: Under the DREAM Act, undocumented youth adjusting to lawful permanent resident status are only eligible for federal student loans (which must be paid back), and federal work-study programs in which they must work for any benefit they receive. They are not eligible for federal grants, such as Pell Grants. DREAM Act students also receive no special public benefits and are subject to the same eligibility requirements for those benefits as other legal immigrants. DREAM Act students and their families are not immediately eligible for Supplemental Security Income, food stamps, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, Medicaid (other than emergency care), and numerous other federal benefit programs. In general, a person must be here as a lawful permanent resident for five years before they receive [non-emergency federal assistance](#).

Myth: *The DREAM Act allows undocumented students to pay less tuition than citizens.*

Fact: The DREAM Act gives states the option to offer in-state tuition to students registered under DREAM, but it does not guarantee cheaper tuition. At most, the DREAM Act allows undocumented students to access the same benefits as their peers. The DREAM Act allows undocumented students to access in-state tuition, but only if they would otherwise qualify for such tuition, *and* if state law permits undocumented students to receive in-state tuition.

Myth: *The DREAM Act lets students cut in line in front of other lawful immigrants.*

Fact: DREAM Act students do not compete for visas with other applicants for legal permanent residence. Instead, DREAM Act creates a separate program for students that requires them to earn legal permanent residence by attending college or serving in the military for two years while in a temporary legal status. DREAM will not affect the number of visas available or the time it takes to get a visa for those entering through traditional legal immigration.

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