



Hispanic Service Institutions Funding Reform

Giovanni Escobedo, UnidosUS *Avanzando* Fellow

SUMMARY: After 27 years since the creation of Hispanic Service Institutions (HSIs), it is time for Congress to **change the funding requirements for these institutions**. The purpose of HSIs is to grant funding to institutions of higher education to assist with strengthening institutional programs, facilities, and services to expand the educational opportunities for Hispanic Americans and other underrepresented populations.

To comply with their mission, HSIs should do more than enroll large numbers of Hispanic students. As their title implies, they should focus on serving their students from college access to graduation. Emphasis should be placed on serving students during their time enrolled at the institution. HSIs should create programs to provide services and resources for non-citizen or legal permanent resident (LPR) students as part of their funding requirements. A particular group of students has historically been left out from these services; these students are mostly Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), Temporary Protection Status (TPS), and undocumented students.

Immigration status matters for college students— it dictates the level of access they receive from their institution. We cannot afford to continue leaving these students behind, doing so, would harm the social mobility of the Hispanic community in areas where it is desperately needed. Representative Vicente Gonzalez can continue the strong tradition of Hispanic members of Congress advocating for HSIs, and introduce funding requirements that would ensure every Hispanic student enrolled in an HSI has the tools necessary to be successful in college despite their immigration status.

BACKGROUND: According to the Pew Research Center, roughly 11 million undocumented immigrants reside in the U.S. as of 2016, representing 3.4% of the country's total population. Undocumented students are a subset of this group and face various hardships due to their legal status, including obstacles that prevent them from receiving the same educational opportunities as U.S. citizens and legal U.S. residents. Since 2012, roughly 800,000 undocumented immigrants received deportation relief under DACA. The Pew Research Center has outlined that DACA recipients come from various countries around the world. The majority of recipients come from Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. DACA recipients live all over the country with more than 40 percent residing in California and Texas.

A study done by the University of Southern California found that a significant number of these students live in border towns. For example, in Texas, across the Rio Grande

Valley (RGV), there are close to 12,000 DACA recipients and 20,000 DACA eligible young people. Representative Gonzalez's Congressional District (TX 15), is home of the highest number of DACA recipients and DACA eligible in the state. The Rio Grande Valley is home to the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV), South Texas College, Texas Southmost College, and the new Texas A&M Campus in McAllen, Texas. All of these institutions have been designated as HSIs; in fact, UTRGV is the biggest HSI institution in Texas and the institution with the highest numbers of undocumented and DACA recipients—close to 1,000.

While there have been a few bills introduced in Congress to address the issue of immigration, there has not been a bill signed into law. DACA provides its recipients with the ability to work legally in the country, and it is essential that they receive all the support they need from college access to graduation. California has helped its institutions create resource centers to help these students. Currently, there are more than 30 of these centers across California. With more educated immigrants, our community's social mobility will increase. However, we cannot leave other non-citizen or LPR students behind as they need to be prepared to enter the workforce as soon as there is an immigration reform bill. Ignoring the issue will continue the pattern of student disenfranchisement despite all that these students contribute to their institution's revenue through tuition and fees, and are counted for HSI designation.

KEY OUTCOMES: If funding requirements for HSIs are instituted, the education experience of thousands of students can be improved. Here are a few potential key outcomes from these changes:

- Close to 69, 0000 DACA recipients currently enrolled in a two or four-year institution along with many other non-citizen or LPR students can begin receiving the appropriate resources they need.
- HSI institutions would begin to have knowledgeable staff prepared to address the constant changes in immigration policies and better support students.
- Institutions would be prepared to adopt changes instituted by any immigration policy such as the Dream and Promise Act should it become law.

APPROACH: It is very unlikely that Congress will pass a comprehensive immigration reform bill any time soon; however there are steps that can be taken for non-citizen or LPR students. For example:

1. **Representative Gonzalez can create a new policy amending the funding requirements for HSIs:** All universities receiving HSI federal funding must establish resource centers for non-citizen students similar to the centers created in many institutions in California.

2. **Representative Gonzalez can support the Dream and Promise Act.** By supporting friendly policies targeted to undocumented students, Representative Gonzalez can help pave the way for more inclusive policies in the future.
3. **Representative Gonzalez can help advocate for the re-institution of advance parole to study abroad.** While DACA was rescinded in 2017, there are still a significant number of students protected, and they should be able to study abroad to enrich their education.

CONCLUSION: While all immigration bills have repeatedly failed to pass in Congress, the push for non-citizen or LPR students to receive the same educational and work opportunities as U.S. citizens remains a hot-button issue in today's uncertain political climate. A survey from the College Board found that, of the 65,000 undocumented students that graduate from high school every year in the U.S., only 5% to 10% enroll in college. There is much to be done to improve these numbers, from creating pipeline programs to ensure these students enroll in college to creating resource centers in HSIs to help these students be successful. We cannot afford to continue leaving these students behind. Doing so would harm the social mobility of the Hispanic community in areas where it is desperately needed. Students cannot keep paying for an education they cannot fully take advantage of since they cannot have access to all the resources, like research opportunities and graduate education, due to their status. This an excellent opportunity for Representative Gonzalez to be an advocate for students in his district, state, and country.