

# Opportunity knocks: How immigrant Dreamers can meet local businesses' skill needs

## A FACT SHEET

Young immigrants known as Dreamers can play an important role in responding to the talent needs of local businesses, especially for in-demand middle-skill positions. Policymakers and advocates should take action to ensure that Dreamers are able to access the education and training opportunities necessary to allow them to make their highest and best contributions to their communities.

### WHAT ARE MIDDLE-SKILL JOBS?

Middle-skill jobs require more than a high school diploma, but not a four-year degree. These jobs comprise a majority – 53 percent – of the U.S. labor market, and projections indicate that demand will remain strong in the future.<sup>1</sup>

Businesses in every state have strong demand for middle-skill workers. National Skills Coalition (NSC) has published state-by-state fact sheets illustrating the current and future role of middle-skill jobs in each state's economy.<sup>2</sup>

Middle-skill jobs are found in every sector of the economy, including:

- Healthcare jobs, such as laboratory technicians and phlebotomists
- Information technology jobs, such as computer network support specialists
- Manufacturing jobs, such as machinists, certified production technicians and computer numeric control (CNC) operators
- Transportation, distribution, and logistics jobs, such as supply chain specialists and cargo and freight agents.

## A middle-skill gap

### United States jobs and workers by skill level 2015



[www.nationalskillscoalition.org](http://www.nationalskillscoalition.org)

### HOW DO WORKERS BECOME QUALIFIED FOR MIDDLE-SKILL JOBS?

There are a wide variety of pathways to obtaining middle-skill credentials. People can earn such credentials via community college certificate or two year degree programs. Or they can attain credentials via apprenticeship or career and technical education (CTE) programs, via training provided by trade associations or industry groups, or through nonprofit or other private training providers. In

some cases, incumbent workers can also earn credentials through the company that employs them.

## IMMIGRANTS CAN CONTRIBUTE MORE IF WE STRENGTHEN CONNECTIONS TO CAREER PATHWAYS

In addition to the Dreamers who have already earned middle-skill credentials, others are still in school — or are outside of the traditional education and workforce systems entirely. For example, an estimated 400,000 lack a high school diploma or equivalent.<sup>3</sup> Others are working learners enrolled in community college or other training programs who could complete their education more quickly and successfully if key supports were in place.

There are practical steps that policymakers and advocates can take to ensure that these young people can contribute to their communities and help local businesses meet their talent needs. **Crucially, many of these policy recommendations will strengthen connections to career pathways for U.S.-born individuals as well as immigrants.**

## FEDERAL POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **Implement a Career Pathways Fund under the Higher Education Act (HEA)** to provide crucial career navigation and support services to working adults and other learners at community colleges and other institutions of higher education. Congress can enact this proposal as part of HEA reauthorization. Learn more in NSC's *Skills for Good Jobs*, and our forthcoming career pathways publication, available on our website.
- **Create more seamless connections between adult education and Career and Technical Education programs.** Young adults who are participating in adult education classes for high-school equivalency may be eligible for and interested in transitioning to postsecondary programs receiving funds under the Carl D. Perkins CTE Act (Perkins Act). Congress can use the upcoming reauthorization of the Perkins Act to promote better alignment of its career pathways with adult education activities funded under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). Learn more in NSC's *Skills*

## IMMIGRANT DREAMERS ARE PART OF THE MIDDLE-SKILL SOLUTION

Approximately 1.7 million young people in the United States today are so-called Dreamers — immigrants who came to this country as children and do not have authorized immigration status. Most already qualify for the federal Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, and others would qualify if they had access to adult education opportunities.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, to date approximately 800,000 such young people have been granted DACA status, which provides temporary protection from deportation and a two-year renewable work permit.<sup>5</sup>

To obtain DACA, individuals must have a high-school diploma or equivalent, or be in school. Many DACA recipients have gone beyond these educational requirements to earn middle-skill credentials. A recent survey showed that 75 percent of respondents had progressed beyond the high-school level in their education, including 20 percent who had already earned a middle-skill credential such as an associate's degree and others who had gone even further in their schooling.<sup>6</sup>

Another study, from the National UnDACAmented Research Project, found that DACA recipients are eagerly pursuing higher education opportunities and advancing in the workforce. The study also found that individuals could make greater gains if they had improved access to high quality educational and career advising and other supports to enable them to overcome barriers to completion.<sup>7</sup>

As these findings demonstrate, immigrant Dreamers can be an important part of the middle-skill solution for American businesses.

for Good Jobs and Perkins Act Recommendations for Reauthorization, available on our website.

- **Add a middle-skill pathway to the DREAM Act.**

The DREAM Act is bipartisan legislation that has been introduced in each Congress for more than fifteen years. It would provide a path to permanent immigration status and eventual U.S. citizenship for DACA recipients and other Dreamers. Past versions of DREAM have provided just two pathways to citizenship: serving in the U.S. Armed Forces or earning a two or four year degree. Policymakers should address the changing needs of the U.S. labor market by adding an additional option that would allow immigrants who earn other recognized postsecondary credentials to apply for citizenship as well. Learn more in NSC's *Missing in Action: Job-Driven Educational Pathways for Unauthorized Youth and Adults*, available on our website.

- **Provide guidance to states and localities on the use of WIOA Title I funds to serve DACA recipients.**

As legally work-authorized individuals, DACA recipients are able to access WIOA Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth funded services provided they meet standard eligibility criteria. The Department of Labor should issue a Training and Employment Notice or similar guidance to provide examples of how workforce boards can use WIOA Title I funds to equip DACA recipients to fill in-demand middle-skill occupations.

## STATE POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **Invest in integrated education and training approaches.** Integrated education and training models enable adults to learn foundational skills such as reading or math while simultaneously being trained for a specific occupation or industry. This proven model was first developed in Washington State, where it is known as I-BEST. States can support the adoption of this approach through technical assistance, programmatic initiatives, and/or funding to organizations that provide adult education services.
- **Implement stackable credential policies.** Stackable credential policies support industry-recognized postsecondary credentials which articulate toward a higher-level certificate or associate degree in the same field. Often



stackable credentials include what are characterized as “modules” or “chunks” that are shorter than certificate programs. An individual is awarded a credential in recognition of completing the module, and if the individual continues on in a longer certificate or degree program, they are granted credit for what they have already learned. States can enact policies that either authorize or require community or technical colleges or other postsecondary training providers to offer stackable credentials.

- **Establish or strengthen sector partnerships that bring together local businesses to determine talent needs.** Sector partnerships are a well respected model for ensuring that workforce training programs are responsive to small and mid-sized employers' needs. By bringing together multiple firms in the same industry, along with workforce training providers and other stakeholders, such partnerships allow local communities to identify in-demand skills and develop the talent pipeline necessary to meet those demands. States can support sector partnerships through funds and technical assistance provided through the state labor agency, workforce boards, or other partners.

- **Invest in pathway navigator positions to help individuals make wise educational choices.** Pathway navigators provide guidance to students and workers as they identify and pursue education opportunities via community colleges and other training providers. Navigators can ensure that individuals understand programmatic requirements, help them access crucial supportive services so they can persist and succeed in their education, and find employment after graduation. States can support navigator positions through higher-education legislation and other policy tools.
- **Issue policy guidance** that affirms DACA recipients' eligibility for adult education and job training programs, and provides examples of how they can be served within existing programmatic structures. State departments of labor or education, or state workforce boards, can issue a policy memorandum that provides education and workforce providers with guidance on enrollment processes and shares examples of successful models for serving such individuals.

Find out if your state has enacted sector partnership, stackable credentials, or integrated education and training policies by viewing National Skills Coalition's 50-state



scans. Get model legislative or administrative language in our policy toolkits. Visit <http://www.nationalskillscoalition.org/state-policy> to learn more.

**To learn more about policies that can strengthen connections between Dreamers and middle-skill job opportunities**, contact Amanda Bergson-Shilcock at [amandabs@nationalskillscoalition.org](mailto:amandabs@nationalskillscoalition.org).

## ENDNOTES

- 1 National Skills Coalition analysis of Bureau of Labor Statistics Occupational Employment Statistics by State, May 2015. See fact sheet: [www.nationalskillscoalition.org/resources/publications/2017-middle-skills-fact-sheets/file/United-States-MiddleSkills.pdf](http://www.nationalskillscoalition.org/resources/publications/2017-middle-skills-fact-sheets/file/United-States-MiddleSkills.pdf)
- 2 Fact sheets for each state are here: [www.nationalskillscoalition.org/state-policy/fact-sheets](http://www.nationalskillscoalition.org/state-policy/fact-sheets)
- 3 Estimate from the Migration Policy Institute: [www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/data-hub/deferred-action-childhood-arrivals-daca-profiles](http://www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/data-hub/deferred-action-childhood-arrivals-daca-profiles). The 1.7 million Dreamers do not include children who are still too young to file for DACA, but will "age in" to the program in the future.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Statistics on DACA recipients are available from the US Citizenship and Immigration Service: [www.uscis.gov/tools/reports-studies/immigration-forms-data/data-set-form-i-821d-deferred-action-childhood-arrivals](http://www.uscis.gov/tools/reports-studies/immigration-forms-data/data-set-form-i-821d-deferred-action-childhood-arrivals)
- 6 View survey results: [https://cdn.americanprogressaction.org/content/uploads/2016/10/21111136/2016-daca\\_survey\\_draft\\_updated-FI-NAL2.pdf](https://cdn.americanprogressaction.org/content/uploads/2016/10/21111136/2016-daca_survey_draft_updated-FI-NAL2.pdf)
- 7 View NSC's summary of the study's findings: <http://www.nationalskillscoalition.org/news/blog/middle-skill-credentials-a-winning-path-for-immigrant-dreamers> and the full report from the National UnDACAmented Research Project and American Immigration Council: [https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/sites/default/files/research/daca\\_at\\_year\\_three.pdf](https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/sites/default/files/research/daca_at_year_three.pdf)