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UNM Gathering Pushes DREAM Act Passage

[By Martin Salazar](#)

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UNM student Luisa Serrano was just 6 when she came to the United States from Chihuahua, Mexico, with her mother.

She attended Chaparral Elementary in Santa Fe, dropped out of high school and eventually returned and got her high school diploma.

She's now in her second year at the University of New Mexico and plans to go to law school when she graduates. She wants to work in the public sector and give back to her community but says she won't be able to unless Congress passes the DREAM Act.

The Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors Act would give qualified students temporary legal status for six years and place them on the path toward legal residency and citizenship.

Serrano and dozens of others gathered at UNM this week to lobby for the federal legislation, which has bipartisan support but could face an uphill battle in Congress. The legislation has been proposed in previous years but has failed to gain the necessary congressional support.

The news conference— sponsored by Somos Un Pueblo Unido and New Mexico Voices for Children— included the release of a new report on achievement and challenges of New Mexico immigrant youths.

Eric Griego, executive director of New Mexico Voices for Children, said the report produced by his organization underscores one point: "When immigrants come to this country, that given the opportunity, given the opportunity for education, for good work, for health care that they succeed as much if not more than native citizens from the United States."

"They work hard, they study hard, they obey laws, and they become productive members of society," Griego said.

Among the report's findings:

- More than half of New Mexico's immigrant children— 51 percent— have both parents in the work force.
- Second-generation immigrant children are more likely to speak English than their first-generation parents. Third-generation immigrant children are more likely to speak only English than their parents or grandparents.
- Hispanic immigrants' high school dropout rates greatly improve from one generation to the next. "Sometimes it takes a generation, sometimes it takes two generations before they become as successful as native-born American citizens," Griego said. "But in fact they succeed."

Carmen Garcia, who came to the United States when she was 6, graduated last May from Santa Fe

Community College with an associate's degree in psychology. She'd like to pursue a doctorate in cognition, brain and behavior.

"I am American, and I would like to have the same opportunity as my classmates to pursue a career and contribute my work to this community," she said.

The DREAM Act would apply to students who entered the United States when they were 15 or younger and at least five years before the legislation is enacted. They would have to show good moral character, graduate from a high school or obtain an equivalency diploma in this country, and complete two years of college or military service.

New Mexico passed a law in 2005 that allows undocumented immigrant youths who have grown up in New Mexico to receive in-state tuition and state financial aid.

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