

The Washington State Dream Act: An Investment For *All* Washingtonians

By Elena Hernandez

Introduction

The Washington State Dream Act (WSDA) will improve access to higher education for Washington state residents by allowing undocumented students a chance to get financial aid for college. WSDA would also give our economy a much-needed boost by ensuring that our state has the well-educated, highly skilled workforce it needs to be competitive in today's global economy.¹

Washingtonians have already recognized the importance of investing in these students – also known as Dreamers. Just over a decade ago, Washington state joined a handful of other states at the forefront of immigration reform by enacting a law that allowed Dreamers to qualify for the same tuition rates that other residents pay at state colleges and universities.² But Dreamers still do not qualify for state or federal financial aid like their classmates, and therefore rely solely on private funding. Given soaring tuition and fees, this often makes the pursuit of higher education unattainable for these students, who are disproportionately from lower income families.

The WSDA would give Dreamers who work hard, earn good grades, and graduate from Washington state high schools the opportunity to compete for the State Need Grant – our state's need-based grant program – alongside their peers. Providing Dreamers with the same access to higher education as everyone else is a smart investment – not only

does broad access to higher education lead to greater prosperity for individuals and their communities, there are significant benefits to the state economy, including:

A smart investment with a big return for Washington state. Extending the State Need Grant (SNG) to Dreamers would make the pursuit of higher education more attainable, leading to higher paying careers and increased state and local tax contributions over time.

- **Increased earnings.** Higher education helps ensure that individuals and families can meet their basic needs and also thrive in an increasingly competitive economy. People who receive a bachelor's degree earn nearly \$840,000 more over their working life than people with only a high school diploma. An associate's degree yields \$300,000 over a working life than a high school diploma.³
- **Positive return on investment.** For every Dreamer that receives the SNG and earns a bachelor's degree, the tax revenue return to the state and localities could be as much as \$43,000 over the course of a 40-year working life – money that can be reinvested in colleges, K-12 schools, and other resources that bolster our economy.⁴ For a recipient of the SNG that graduates from a community and technical college (CTC), the revenue return could be up to \$22,000 over a 40-year working life.⁵

Narrowing the opportunity gap. Children from lower income families, particularly in communities of color, do not have the same educational opportunities as their more affluent peers. The cost of higher education can be a major disincentive for high school completion. Nearly 40 percent of undocumented youth do not graduate from high school, compared to 15 percent of lawfully present immigrants and 8 percent of U.S.-born citizens.⁶ Access to college financial aid would give Dreamers a strong incentive to finish high school, since they would then have a realistic possibility of pursuing higher education.

The American Dream is an integral part of our culture in the United States. Our country was built on the dreams of immigrants becoming a reality through hard work and determination, and many of us owe our success to our own immigrant past. Yet for thousands of talented youth in this country, one of the tools necessary to make their dreams a aspirations – an affordable college education – remains out of reach.

Washingtonians have an opportunity to change that with the Washington State Dream Act.

A Smart Investment for Washington State

The Washington State Dream Act (WSDA) would open the door to better-paying jobs and opportunities to get ahead for Dreamers by making higher education more affordable. The legislation would allow Dreamers to compete alongside their peers for the State Need Grant— our state’s need-based grant program (see **Box 1** for details).

The benefits of higher education are not limited to an individual and their families; everyone in Washington state gains by furthering the education of all students. The WSDA would expand on the key contributions immigrants already make to the state economy, including increased economic productivity and tax revenues.

Box 1. The Washington State Need Grant (SNG)⁷

The Washington State Need Grant (SNG) provides financial assistance in the form of grants to economically disadvantaged college students. Below are some of the primary criteria:

- Must be a resident of Washington state with a demonstrated financial need; i.e. have a family income at or below the income cutoff set at 70 percent of the median family income for the 2013-14 academic year
- Must be enrolled for a minimum of three credit hours and making satisfactory academic progress in an eligible certificate program, bachelor’s degree program, or associate’s degree program.

Grant Award

The amount of the SNG varies depending on the institution, enrollment status, and family income of the students. For example, the maximum award for a student attending a public research institution, such as the University of Washington, was \$10,686 during the 2012-2013 academic year. The maximum award for a student attending a public community and technical college was \$3,696 for the 2012-13 academic year. Eligible students receive a percentage of the maximum award based on a sliding scale.

Students are eligible to receive the SNG for a maximum of five years, provided that they have not exceeded 125 percent of the reported length of their degree program, as determined by a Financial Aid Advisor.

Increased earnings and opportunity will benefit all Washingtonians

While undocumented immigrants make up 3 percent of the population in Washington state, they account for 5 percent of the total workforce.⁸ The vast majority of undocumented immigrants in the United States are of prime working age, between 25 and 64 years old, and they are working or looking for work at rates equal to, and in some cases higher than, U.S.- born citizens.⁹

Undocumented immigrants are nearly twice as likely to live in poverty as U.S.- born citizens, despite their high levels of employment.¹⁰ In part, this is due to disproportionately low levels of education compared to the rest of the population, which makes them more likely to have lower wage jobs and lower earnings, as illustrated in **Figure 1**.¹¹

Improving educational outcomes for this integral part of the Washington state workforce will provide major benefits. Financial aid programs such as the State Need Grant incentivize high school graduation and boost college graduation rates.¹² This in turn leads to higher earnings for the individual. **Figure 2** shows the earnings potential over a 40-year working life for Washington state residents based on their level of education. Increases in earnings in turn lead to higher tax revenues for the state and localities, illustrated by **Figure 3**.¹³

A person with a bachelor’s degree can earn roughly \$840,000 more than a person with only a high school diploma. That same person would contribute just over \$142,000 in state and local taxes, approximately \$55,000 more than a person with a high school diploma in that same time period.

FIGURE 1: UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANTS FACE A CHALLENGING JOB MARKET

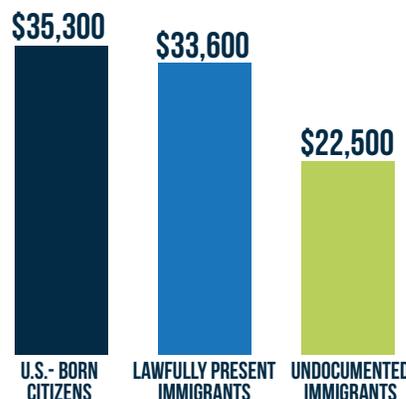
OVERREPRESENTED IN LOWER WAGE JOBS

Top five occupations with highest shares of undocumented workers nationwide, 2008



EARN FAR LESS THAN THEIR PEERS

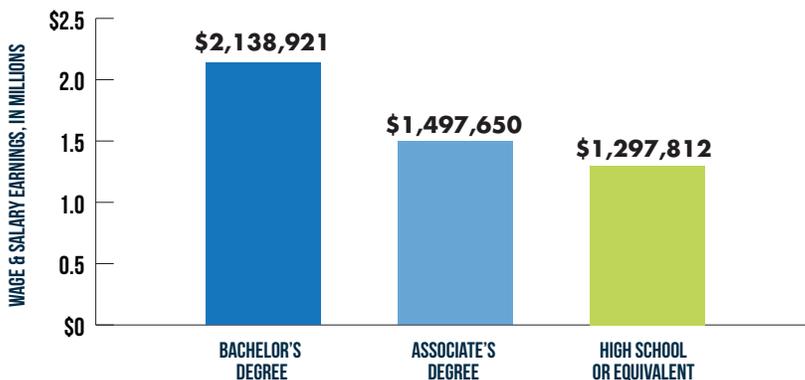
Median annual income per worker by nativity nationwide, 2008



SOURCE: Passel, Jeffrey and Cohn, D'Vera. (April 2009) "A Portrait of Unauthorized Immigrants in the United States." Pew Hispanic Center. Downloaded from <http://www.pewhispanic.org/files/reports/i07.pdf> December 30, 2013.

FIGURE 2: HIGHER EDUCATION INCREASES EARNINGS

Estimated median wage and salary earnings over a 40-year working life by educational attainment



SOURCE: Budget & Policy Center analysis of IPUMS 2011 5-year ACS data. Wage and salary estimates for full-time employees over the age of 25 in Washington state

Investing in Dreamers provides a big return

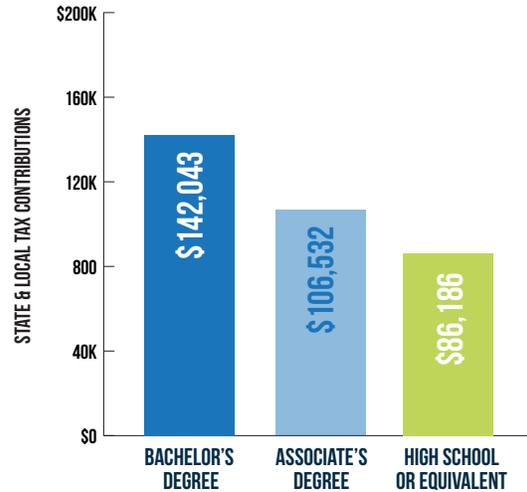
Every \$1 invested through the SNG in a Dreamer who graduates from a four-year university could produce up to \$2 in increased state and local tax revenue over time.¹⁴ Additionally, every \$1 invested through the SNG in a Dreamer who graduates from a community and technical college (CTC) could produce up to \$4 in increased state and local tax revenue (Figure 4).¹⁵

Over 40 years, the net return of this investment for the state could be as much as \$43,000 per graduate at a four-year public university and \$22,000 per graduate at a public CTC (Figure 5).^{16, 17}

These benefits are conservative estimates and do not take into account the range of other benefits the state and local governments could expect from improving the educational outcomes of Dreamers, including improved health, increased purchasing power and productivity, and better educational outcomes for future generations.¹⁸

FIGURE 3: HIGHER EARNINGS RESULT IN MORE TAX REVENUES

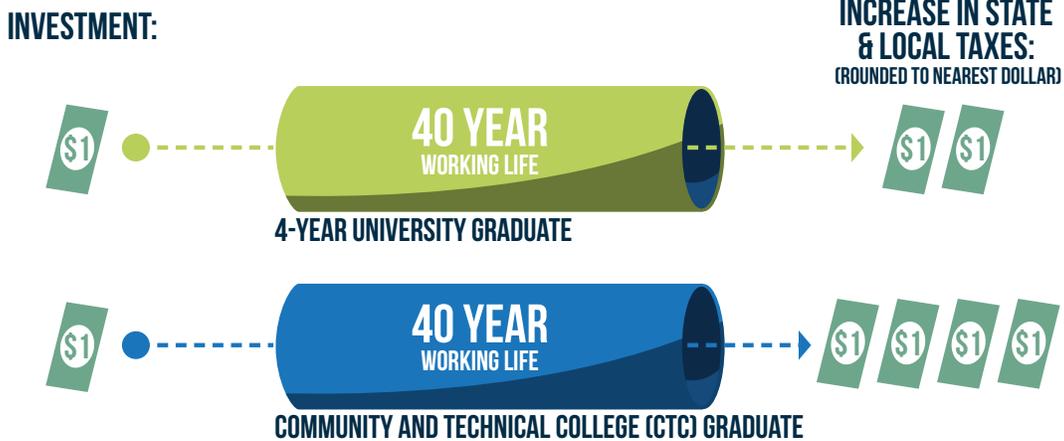
Estimated state and local tax contributions over a 40-year working life, by educational attainment



SOURCE: Budget & Policy Center analysis of IPUMS 2011 5-year ACS data.

FIGURE 4: INVESTING IN DREAMERS PROVIDES RETURNS TO THE COMMUNITY

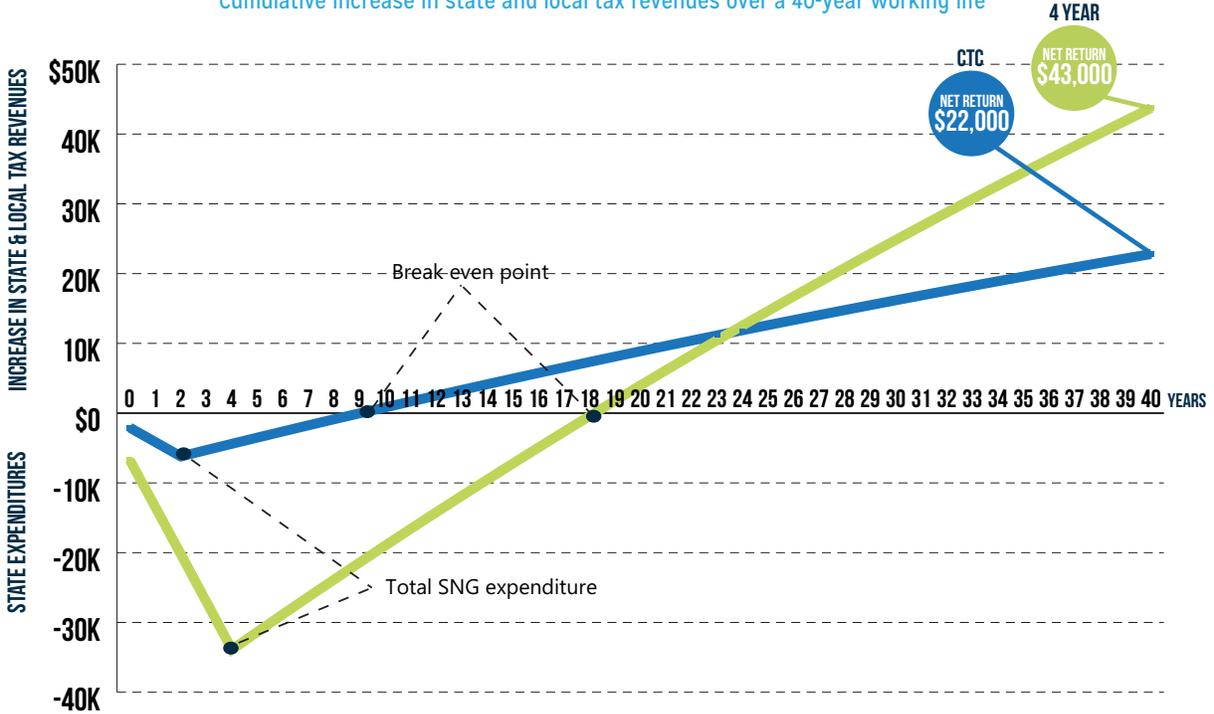
Increase in state and local tax revenues per dollar invested through State Need Grant for Dreamers



SOURCE: Budget & Policy Center analysis of IPUMS 2011 5-year ACS data. Wage and salary estimates for full-time employees over the age of 25 in Washington state

FIGURE 5: BENEFITS TO THE STATE OUTWEIGH THE COSTS

Cumulative increase in state and local tax revenues over a 40-year working life



SOURCE: Budget & Policy Center analysis of IPUMS 2011 5-year ACS data. Wage and salary estimates for full-time employees over the age of 25 in Washington state

Box 2. A Dreamer's Story: Moses Chege

Moses Chege was more than just a typical high school senior. He was a member of the varsity cross country team, a youth leader at his church, and commanding officer of his high school's Junior R.O.T.C. He planned ahead for college, challenging himself in academics by taking Running Start courses so that he would graduate high school with his associate's degree and be two years into his bachelor's degree.

During his senior year, Moses applied to six four-year colleges and was accepted by all of them. But as his senior year came to a close, Moses was confronted with a harsh reality. He had worked hard and been an exceptional high school student, but that wouldn't be enough. As an undocumented immigrant he does not qualify for financial aid, which meant, for the time being, pursuing his undergraduate degree is simply out of the question.

Moses moved to the U.S. from Kenya with his family in 2001, after his father was granted a student visa. Shortly after, his mother was able to obtain a green card. However, because of a discrepancy between the start date of his mother's green card and the expiration date of his father's student visa, the green card was voided and his entire family became undocumented. This change in status did not stop his family from working, paying taxes, and becoming active members of their local community.

Even though his first year out of high school wasn't quite what he expected, Moses remains optimistic and is still working hard to pursue his dream. He says he still plans to earn his bachelor's degree and pursue a Master's in Public Administration.

Addressing the Opportunity Gap

The difference between the resources and opportunities available to children from different social and economic backgrounds – referred to as the opportunity gap – is growing in Washington state. Nearly every indicator of economic wellbeing indicates that lower income families and their children are subject to significant disparities, particularly in health care and education.¹⁹ This is especially evident among communities of color and undocumented immigrants. The WSDA would directly target these disparities by encouraging Dreamers to finish high school and increase the likelihood that they will pursue higher education. In addition, the benefits of WSDA would carry through to future generations of Washingtonians – children of better-educated parents are healthier, have better educational outcomes, and practice better family planning.²⁰

Wide gap in educational attainment for Dreamers

Currently, few undocumented youth complete high school, and an even smaller number go on to college (Figure 6).²¹ Poor job prospects and the cost of pursuing higher education are disincentives for many of

these young aspiring citizens to finish their high school education.

Only 49 percent of the estimated 65,000 undocumented students who graduate from high school each year in the United States, pursue higher education.^{22, 23} These rates are significantly lower than their U.S.-born and lawfully present immigrants peers, illustrated in Figure 7.

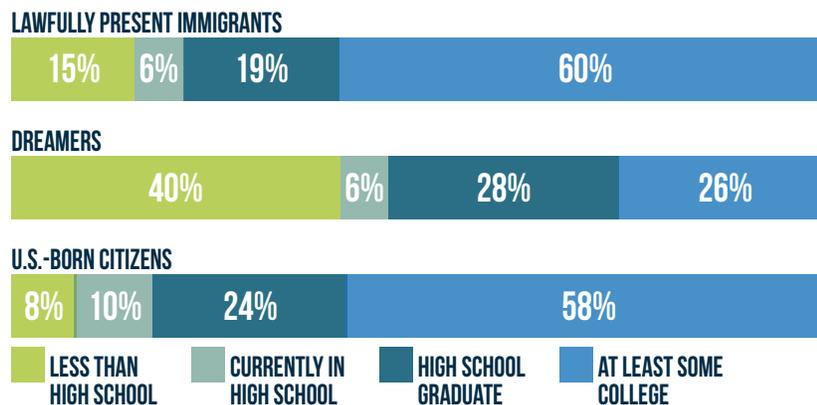
Financial aid key to college enrollment and persistence

For undocumented students in Washington state, finances are the leading factor in their decision to attend college or not.²⁴ The Washington State Dream Act will increase the likelihood that Dreamers will attend college by making the decision more affordable. For example, a \$1,000 increase in grant aid can increase the likelihood that an individual will pursue higher education by 4 percentage points (Figure 8).²⁵

The WSDA would also improve Dreamers persistence, or continued enrollment from one year to the next, once enrolled. The same study found that increases in grant aid also increased the amount of education obtained (Figure 8).²⁶

FIGURE 6: DREAMERS HAVE LOWER EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES

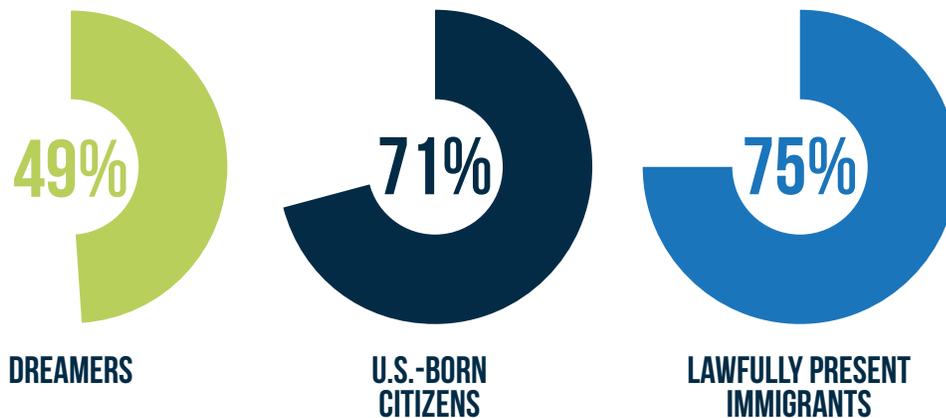
Comparison of educational attainment by nativity as a percent of the population age 18-24, 2008



SOURCE: Passel, Jeffrey and Cohn, D'Vera. (April 2009) "A Portrait of Unauthorized Immigrants in the United States." Pew Hispanic Center. Downloaded from <http://www.pewhispanic.org/files/reports/107.pdf> December 30, 2013.

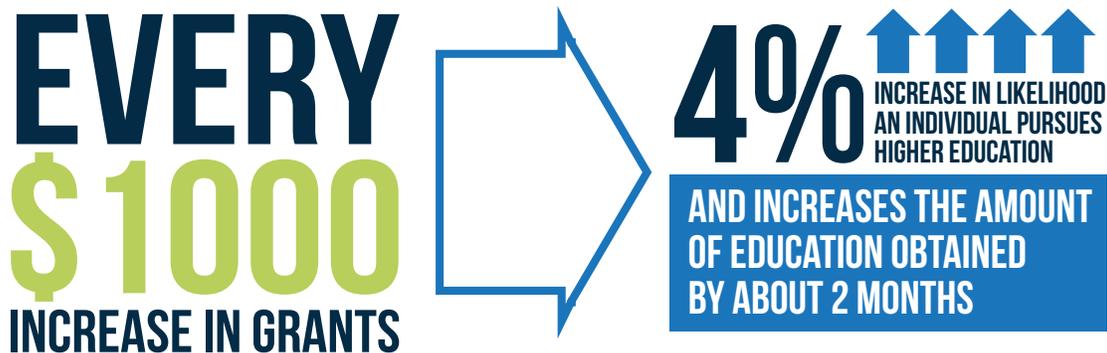
FIGURE 7: UNDOCUMENTED STUDENTS ARE LESS LIKELY TO PURSUE HIGHER EDUCATION

Rate of pursuing higher education by nativity, 2008



SOURCES: Data regarding pursuit of higher education from: Passel, Jeffrey and Cohn, D'Vera. (April 2009) "A Portrait of Unauthorized Immigrants in the United States." Pew Hispanic Center. Downloaded from <http://www.pewhispanic.org/files/reports/107.pdf> December 30, 2013.

FIGURE 8: FINANCIAL AID REMOVES BARRIERS AND IMPROVES EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES



SOURCES: Data pertaining to impact of financial aid from: Dynarski, Susan M.. (1999) "Does Aid Matter? Measuring the Effect of Student Aid on College Attendance and Completion." National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper 7422. Downloaded from <http://www.nber.org/papers/w7422> on December 30, 2013.

Conclusion

The success of our country and our state is due in part, to the success of our own immigrant past. Immigrants are the cornerstone of our communities and exemplify the pursuit of the American Dream. For too many undocumented youth, the American Dream is out of reach. Washingtonians already stood in support of Dreamers once before, proving that while immigration may be a federal issue, education is the responsibility of the state. With the Washington State Dream Act we have the opportunity to stand with them again.

Acknowledgements

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Technical Appendix

Calculating Benefits and Costs

For the purposes of this preliminary analysis, the benefits and costs of the Washington State Dream Act were examined from the perspective of the state of Washington. The cost-benefit ratio and net present

value were calculated on a per-person basis for a recipient of the State Need Grant (SNG) who graduated from either a public four-year institution or community and technical college (CTC). Because of these assumptions, the estimates therein are likely upper bounds.

Discount Rate and Time Period

This analysis examined net benefits and costs for an individual graduate over a 40-year working life. Costs and benefits in future years are viewed as less valuable than costs and benefits in present terms, therefore these estimates must be discounted. This analysis used a discount rate of 3.5% for an intragenerational study funded through tax revenues.²⁷

State Need Grant Expenditures

The calculation of State Need Grant (SNG) expenditures varied based on sector (i.e. public four-year or community and technical colleges). For the purposes of this analysis, only public four-year and community and technical colleges were examined because the vast majority of SNG recipients attend schools in these two sectors. The average annual award for a public four-year institution (\$6,711) and the average annual award for Community and Technical Colleges (\$2,077) were used to calculate the costs.²⁸ A growth rate was included for each sector as well, based on tuition growth rates prior to the start of the recession (2004-05 to 2007-08) when tuition growth was more stable than recent years.²⁹ The SNG eligibility time frame is equal to 125% of the expected time to degree completion. For a four-year institution, the maximum time frame is five years. For a CTC, the time frame was assumed to be two and a half years.

Wage Premium

In this analysis, the wage premium is the increase in earnings associated with changes in educational outcomes. American Communities Survey (ACS) data for Latinos in Washington state were used to calculate the median wage and salary income for individuals with a high school diploma, associate's degree, and bachelor's degree. Data were limited to those over the age of 25,

worked 35 or more hours per week, and 50 or more weeks per year. The difference between the median wage and salary income for an individual with a high school diploma and an associate's degree is the wage premium for obtaining an associate's degree. The difference between the median wage and salary income for an individual with a high school diploma and a bachelor's degree is the wage premium for obtaining an bachelor's degree. To account for wage and salary growth over time, the annual median wage and salary income was inflated each year after the first year by a real earnings growth rate of 2.5%, based on forecasts by Washington State's Office of Financial Management.³⁰ Fringe benefits were not included in this estimate because it is not clear what the labor market outcomes for Dreamers will be in the future given the state of federal immigration reform.

This analysis assumed a relatively constant wage premium. However, it should be noted that in doing so, the estimate likely overestimates the wage premium in early years and underestimates the wage premium in later years. The analysis also used wage data for Latinos in Washington state rather than the general population because this population is likely the best proxy for what the earnings of undocumented immigrants would be in the future. While not all undocumented immigrants are Latino, Latinos do represent the largest share. This model would likely present a closer approximation than data for immigrants generally, which would include naturalized citizens and other immigrants with much higher earnings. In addition, these estimates were calculated for graduates only and did not take into account increases in earnings for each additional year of schooling.

Increased Tax Revenues

Increases in tax revenues were calculated based on a model devised by the Washington State Institute for Public Policy (WSIPP).³¹ The total effective tax rate is assumed to be 30.1% of income based on analysis from the Center for Tax Justice.³² Using this tax rate provides the aggregate total for federal, state, and local taxes. To calculate the proportion that represents state and local taxes only, estimates about the share of tax

revenues from various sources were collected from the Tax Policy Center. According to these estimates, also used by WSIPP, 22.1% of the aggregate tax revenues come from state sources and 16.5% come from local sources.³³

Sources

1. HB 1817 and SB 6523 (2014 legislative session) would change the eligibility requirement for the State Need Grant to include those who graduated from Washington state high schools in alignment with laws regarding the definition of a state resident for the purposes of in-state tuition.
2. HB 1079 passed during the 2003 legislative session and changed the definition of a resident to include those who graduated from Washington state high schools, irrespective of their immigration status, for the purposes of qualifying for in-state tuition.
3. Calculated using median earnings for Washington state from 2007-11 ACS 5-Year Estimates of wage and salary data for adults over the age of 25 that work 35 or more hours per week and 50 or more weeks per year. Subject to a 2.5% real earning growth rate annual, based on Office of Financial Management estimates in 2013 Long-Term Forecast of Washington Personal Income. Discounted annually over 40 years by 3.5%.
4. Listed in present value terms and represents upper-bound estimates of increased state and local tax revenues minus program costs over the course of a 40-year working life. See technical appendix for more details.
5. Listed in present value terms and represents upper-bound estimates of increased state and local tax revenues minus program costs over the course of a 40-year working life. See technical appendix for more details.
6. Passel, Jeffery S., and D'Vera Cohn. "A Portrait of Unauthorized Immigrants in the United States." Pew Hispanic Center . N.p., 14 Apr. 2009. Web. 30 Dec. 2013. <<http://www.pewhispanic.org/2009/04/14/a-portrait-of-unauthorized-immigrants-in-the-united-states/>>.
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13. Calculated using median earnings for Washington state from 2007-11 ACS 5-Year Estimates of wage and salary data for adults over the age of 25 that work 35 or more hours per week and 50 or more weeks per year. Subject to a 2.5% real earning growth rate annual, based on Office of Financial Management estimates in 2013 Long-Term Forecast of Washington Personal Income. Discounted annually over 40 years by 3.5%.
14. Ratio of benefits accrued through increased state and local tax revenues divided by SNG award costs for a graduate of a public four-year university, in present value terms. This is in comparison to an individual with only a high school diploma and calculated over a 40-year working life. See technical appendix for details. The difference in benefit-cost ratio for CTC versus four-year institutions is due to the increased SNG costs associated with four-year institutions. SNG grants are based in part on the cost of tuition, which is higher for four-year institutions than CTC. Students at four-year institutions also receive SNG awards for a longer period of time. These estimates only include benefits associated with increase state and local tax revenues. Inclusion of other benefits would likely increase the value over time, particularly for graduates of four-year institutions.
15. Ratio of benefits accrued through increased state and local tax revenues divided by SNG award costs for a graduate of a public community and technical college (CTC), in present value terms. This is in comparison to an individual with only a high school diploma and calculated over a 40-year working life. See technical appendix for details. The difference in benefit-cost ratio for CTC versus four-year institutions is due to the increased SNG costs associated with four-year institutions. SNG grants are based in part on the cost of tuition, which is higher for four-year institutions than CTC. Students at four-year institutions also receive SNG awards for a longer period of time. These estimates only include benefits associated with increase state and local tax revenues. Inclusion of other benefits would likely increase the value over time, particularly for graduates of four-year institutions.
16. This is the net present value, or present value of total costs minus present value of total benefits for a graduate that receives the SNG and attends a four-year public institution. See technical appendix for details. These estimates only include benefits associated with increase state and local tax revenues. Inclusion of other benefits would likely increase the value over time, particularly for graduates of four-year institutions.
17. This is the net present value, or present value of total costs minus present value of total benefits for a graduate that receives the SNG and attends a public community and technical college. See technical appendix for details. These estimates only include benefits associated with increase state and local tax revenues. Inclusion of other benefits would likely increase the value over time, particularly for graduates of four-year institutions.
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