



# PRITZKER ACCESS SCHOLARS

LEGACY REPORT 2024



Cultivating Builders  
and Opportunity Multipliers

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

# Opportunity. Impact.

Motivated by a goal to provide educational and career opportunities for undocumented high school students, the **Pritzker Traubert Foundation** and Pritzker Foundation in 2015 launched the Pritzker Access Scholars program with the **Noble network of charter schools**.

PAS provided full college scholarships and other crucial services to 405 undocumented high school seniors, supporting them to earn college degrees and change the trajectories of their lives and the lives of their families. Twenty-six colleges and universities partnered with the foundations.

Later, **TheDream.US**, the nation's largest college and career success program for undocumented immigrant youth, also became a partner.

"In a world where life seemed so out of my control, suddenly, I had a future to look forward to," scholar Karina Ortega Dominguez recalled of the day she learned that she'd receive a scholarship.

She graduated with a double major in math and economics. Today Karina runs a program that rewards teachers for exemplary work in Noble Schools.

### PAS' powerful effect

**194 of the 306** scholars who entered college in 2015-19 earned bachelor's degrees—a rate of nearly 64%.

**Almost 70%** of PAS recipients who'd earned bachelor's degrees, were employed full-time or continuing their education as of November 2023.

**3 in 4** undocumented Noble students remained enrolled at the fifth semester in college from 2015-19—a higher rate than documented peers.

**Nearly 63%** of the 99 PAS students who entered college in 2021 and 2022 are persisting.

**15 times**—the amount a student's lifetime earnings increase for every dollar invested in a scholarship and administrative costs for a PAS recipient.



Karina Ortega Dominguez was a Nobel student, graduating from St. Olaf in 2021.

## “Suddenly, I had a future to look forward to.”

As an undocumented high school student, Karina Ortega Dominguez was ineligible for virtually all financial aid. She assumed college was out of the question and thought she’d have to return to Mexico, the country she left at three years old.

Fidel Chilchoa, also navigating his high school academic journey as an undocumented student, was trying to find a way to college. His best shot, he thought, would be to work as a waiter for a couple years after high school and try to save money.

Today, as a college graduate who completed a double major in math and economics with a concentration in race and ethnic studies, Karina runs a program that rewards teachers for exemplary work in the Noble Schools, a network of charter schools

that works with many undocumented students. Karina is a Noble graduate.

Fidel, also a Noble alum who graduated college with a double major in finance and accounting and a double minor in economics and Spanish, works as an investment management analyst for Mesirow, a financial services firm.

Both are examples of how far a young, resilient, motivated person can go and how much they can contribute, given the right opportunity.

In their cases, that opportunity was the **Pritzker Access Scholars** initiative, a partnership with Noble and TheDream.US—the nation’s



largest college and career success program for undocumented immigrant youth—that provided full financial scholarships and wrap-around services to more than 400 undocumented high school seniors in 2015-22.

“In a world where life seemed so out of my control, suddenly, I had a future to look forward to,” Karina recalled of the day she was notified that she would receive a Pritzker Access Scholarship. “I finally had an opportunity that was going to allow me to go to college.”

Fidel called the scholarship “my ticket to college. Without it, I would have struggled to go. And I knew that people at the foundation and Noble were always there if I needed anything. I really felt confident that I was going to be able to graduate from college.”

Karina and Fidel are first-generation college graduates. Before they attended college, their siblings never considered going, either. Now, Karina’s younger sister is a University of Illinois student; a younger brother is making plans for college. Fidel’s younger brother is interested in science and thinking about becoming a doctor.

Other PAS recipients speak of the opportunity in a similar context.

“It’s changed everything for me,” said PAS student Veronica Romo, a 2019 graduate of North Park University.

Added Laura Salas, a PAS recipient who graduated from Monmouth College in 2019: “My life changed completely. I was excited. I was happy that I was getting this opportunity, and I feel really privileged. It was like a dream come true.”

**Above:** Veronica Romo graduated in 2019 from North Park University. **Right:** Fidel Chilchoa, a 2022 Noble graduate, said the scholarship was “my ticket to college.”



# A robust personal and societal ROI.

A federal policy begun in 2012, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, better known as DACA, provides protection from deportation and a renewable work permit for two years to immigrant youth who came to the U.S. as children.

In 2015, the first year of the Pritzker Access Scholars program, more than 35,000 DACA recipients resided in Illinois. Many were unaware of their undocumented status until they applied for a driver's license or financial aid to attend college.

Pritzker Access Scholarships provided a debt-free opportunity for undocumented high school graduates to attend college—still the most

important onramp to the middle class and beyond. A college education is, in essence, a trajectory to the American Dream. The Pritzker Traubert Foundation believes that undocumented students deserve equal access to it.

When PAS was launched, supporters of the initiative and many young people had hoped that a path to citizenship would materialize. It hasn't.

Although Illinois allows individuals in most professions to obtain professional and occupational licenses regardless of their immigration status, the nationwide landscape is more foreboding, especially for high school students.



“ This is what is so important about what the Pritzker Traubert Foundation and Pritzker Foundation have done. Without the scholarships, these students could not have opened the college door. What the foundations have done serves as a model for other foundations. ”

**Candy Marshall**, former CEO of TheDream.US

The \$2.5 million investment from the Pritzker Traubert Foundation and Pritzker Foundation for the class of 2015 is projected to yield an aggregate of

**\$38 million in lifetime earnings**  
to the graduates.

An estimated 100,000 undocumented students will graduate from U.S. high schools in each of the next two years. DACA's unavailability as a result of court decisions in 2022 and 2023 means that few if any have a realistic opportunity to attend college and obtain legal work authorization.

Against that backdrop, the young Pritzker Access Scholars fulfilled their promise and worked to earn college degrees, which benefited them, those around them and the economy in near-astonishing ways.

Here's precisely how:

- **Research into the initiative** shows that for every dollar invested in a scholarship and administrative costs for a PAS recipient, the student's lifetime earnings increased by 15 times that amount and the student's impact on

society jumped by five times the initial one-dollar investment.

- **For the class of 2015 alone**, the \$2.5 million investment from the Pritzker Traubert Foundation and Pritzker Foundation is projected to yield an aggregate of \$38 million to the graduates in lifetime earnings and \$13 million in lifetime fiscal impact on society.

"This is what is so important about what the Pritzker Traubert Foundation and Pritzker Foundation have done," said Candy Marshall, former CEO of TheDream.US, the nation's largest college and career success program for undocumented immigrant youth, and a partner in the PAS initiative. "Without the scholarships, these students could not have opened the college door. What the foundations have done serves as a model for other foundations."



In 2015, Arne Duncan, then Secretary of Education, offers Pritzker Access Scholarships for the first time.

## 64% graduation rate. Nearly 70% employed or in graduate school.



Penny Pritzker, then Secretary of Commerce, addresses the first Noble class to receive Pritzker Access Scholarships.

Pritzker Traubert Foundation Trustee Penny Pritzker remembers the day in 2015 when she, as U.S. Secretary of Commerce, and U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan walked into a hot, crowded Noble Schools gymnasium to offer Pritzker Access Scholarships for the first time.

“The parents, the sisters, the brothers, the aunts, the uncles—whoever showed up with the student—they understood this was a door opening for their whole family and it wasn’t to be taken for granted,” Penny recalled. “To see the pride in these students and their families was extraordinary. They were thrilled somebody cared enough to give their student

the chance. It brought tears of joy to me. It brought home how fortunate I have been and how grateful I am to those who gave my great grandfather an opportunity so many years ago.”

Students who received a PAS seized the opportunity. Since the 2015 launch of the Pritzker Access Scholars program in Noble Schools, college matriculation among Noble undocumented students has risen to more than 3 of 4. Before the scholarship initiative, that ratio stood at about 1 of 4.

Noble attributes that increase in large part to the Pritzker Access Scholars program and Noble’s partnership with TheDream.US.

## On average, bachelor's degree holders receive a higher wage than those without a college degree

Median yearly earnings of full-time year-round workers age 25 and older: 2018



University of Chicago To&Through Project graphic. Source: Ma, J., Pender, M., & Welch, M. (2019). *Education pays 2019: The benefits of higher education for individuals and society*. New York, NY: College Board.

All told:

- **194 of 306** Pritzker Access students who entered college in 2015-19 earned bachelor's degrees—a graduation rate of nearly 64%.
- **An additional 62** of the 99 PAS students who entered college in 2021 and 2022 are persisting, a rate of nearly 63%.
- **From 2015 to 2019**, undocumented Noble students persisted in college at higher rates—3 in 4 remained enrolled at the fifth semester—than documented peers. Their persistence rate is closer to that of Chicago Public Schools' selective enrollment graduates.
- **As of November 2023**, 112 of 163 PAS recipients who earned bachelor's degrees had attained full-time employment or were continuing their education—a success rate of almost 70%.

- **TheDream.US reports** even higher overall figures: 94% of its 2022 alumni are employed, self-employed or have enrolled in graduate school within 9 months after graduation, compared with 84% of all college graduates across the United States.

That strong record of college matriculation and persistence occurred while COVID's impact, disproportionately harder on undocumented families, pushed students to take on more hours at work, hampering their academic involvement.

Aidé Acosta, Chief College Officer for Noble Schools, whose tenacious commitment to the students was vital, said parents and participating colleges were crucial to students' success. The collaborative approach harnessed students' potential and closed opportunity gaps.



## Employment outcomes for PAS graduates six years after high school graduation

Graduating class	Employment outcomes	Number of graduates	Total number of graduates
<b>Class of 2015</b>	Employed Full Time	31	77.5%
	Graduate school/continued education	2	5%
	No plans yet or retail/food industry	7	17.5%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>40</b>	
<b>Class of 2016</b>	Employed Full Time	36	85.7%
	Graduate school/continued education	2	4.8%
	No plans yet or retail/food industry	4	9.5%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>42</b>	
<b>Class of 2017</b>	Employed Full Time	29	73%
	Graduate school/continued education	1	3%
	No plans yet or retail/food industry	10	25%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>40</b>	



Penny Pritzker and Bryan Traubert award a student a Pritzker Access Scholarship.

“Now that I see some of our earlier students as young adults living their best lives with jobs that provide them with financial freedom, that give them opportunities to lead lives with choices,” Acosta said, “it just fills my heart. I do believe that this scholarship was a springboard. That’s what we aspire to.

“It’s not just about having a college degree,” she added. “It’s about the economic opportunities that a college degree will open up for this population.”

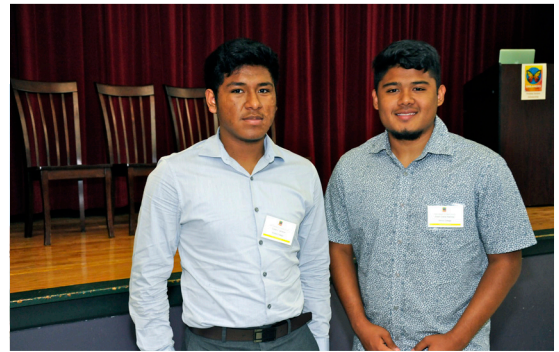
# Where it began.

In 2014, Graham Holdings Co. Board Chairman and former Washington Post Publisher Donald Graham met with Pritzker Traubert Foundation Chairman Bryan Traubert about Graham's college scholarship program based in Washington, D.C., that was designed for DACA recipients, or Dreamers.

The boards of the Pritzker Traubert Foundation and Pritzker Foundation saw the restrictions on Dreamers' potential as an injustice, liked Graham's idea and wanted to bring a version to Chicago.

But, the Pritzker Access Scholars initiative is about more than trying to correct an injustice.

"It's the idea that America is a country of immigrants," Bryan said. "We're all immigrants and most of us don't have to go back too far. My grandmother could barely speak English. That's the part of this that really appeals to me. You see these kids and you can see your grandmother as a young woman with vast potential."



A year after his conversation with Graham, the Pritzker Traubert Foundation, the Pritzker Foundation, Noble Schools and, eventually, 26 colleges and universities throughout the Midwest collaborated to establish the Pritzker Access Scholars initiative.

Noble was the right place to start. It had an ongoing relationship with the Pritzker Traubert Foundation and was known for supporting undocumented students.

The opportunity was straightforward: All undocumented graduating seniors at Noble Schools who had DACA status and a minimum 2.5 grade point average would receive up to \$12,000 a year for four years to pay for college in addition to other support. Support would be extended for students who were on track to graduate but experiencing delays.

In 2019, PAS partnered with TheDream.US and opened the program to students outside Noble's network. Together, the Pritzker Traubert Foundation and the Pritzker Foundation have provided \$16 million in support.

## Our college and university partners

Albion College (MI)  
Arrupe College of Loyola (IL)  
Beloit College (WI)  
Carleton College (MN)  
DePauw University (IN)  
Dominican University (IL)  
Franklin & Marshall College (PA)  
Holy Cross College (IN)  
Illinois College (IL)  
Illinois Institute of Technology (IL)  
Lafayette College (PA)  
Luther College (IA)  
Lycoming College (PA)  
Macalester College (MN)  
Monmouth College (IL)  
National Louis University (IL)  
Northeastern IL University (IL)  
North Park University (IL)  
Ripon College (WI)  
Robert Morris University (IL)  
St. Olaf College (MN)  
The College of Wooster (OH)  
University of Illinois at Chicago (IL)  
Upper Iowa University (IA)  
Wabash College (IN)  
Western Illinois University (IL)



## The challenge of uncertainty. The power of legacy.

The most significant issue for PAS recipients, all DACA recipients and those seeking DACA authorization, is the unresolved issue of their legal status.

In the decade that DACA was a Department of Homeland Security policy—one meant to be a temporary solution—an estimated 825,000 people qualified for its work authorizations and protections.

But, in October 2022, the Fifth Circuit Court ruled that DACA is unlawful. Eleven months later, the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals re-affirmed that judgment but allowed current recipients to renew their DACA status.

Those decisions have created lengthy delays in processing first-time DACA applications. Some estimates place the number of delayed applications with the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) at nearly 50,000.

So, although the number of undocumented college graduates has risen over the years, these promising young contributors face a new challenge: landing gainful, legal employment.

At least 30% of the Noble class of 2018 cohort who graduated from college were unable to apply for DACA authorization due to various legal disputes coupled with the application backlog. And Noble's younger cohorts did not qualify for DACA when the Pritzker Access Scholarships were still open.

“We have a new generation of talented young people who are not given the opportunity to participate fully in the workforce,” Pritzker Traubert Foundation President Cindy Moelis said.

In response, organizations are finding innovative ways to maintain career opportunities for undocumented college graduates, including:

“ ... Education is a gateway to opportunity. These kids ... come up against the fact that they’re undocumented and see their potential curtailed. They take the opportunity very seriously. These are new adults in our communities who want to contribute. To help give them a boost is a privilege. ”

**Penny Pritzker**, Pritzker Traubert Foundation Trustee

- **Noble’s launch of a career exploration curriculum** for undocumented college grads; offering access to “micro-internships” focused on contract work, and strengthening non-employment-based experiential learning at Dominican and North Park Universities.
- **Noble’s entrepreneurial/professional licensing** training, information on worker co-ops (employee-owned and controlled business) and consulting.
- **TheDream.US internships**, fellowships, entrepreneurship training and recorded career workshops through its **Career Connections program**.

Despite the unresolved issues around DACA status, Pritzker Access Scholarships provided a path to opportunity for more than 400 young, resilient undocumented students in Chicago. The seven-year initiative complements PTF’s broader workforce development, which supports and expands career paths available to low-income Chicago families on their way to better lives—making even greater contributions to the economy and society as they move up.

These young people are inspiring, powerful examples of that very American phenomenon. They have enriched their lives, changed their trajectories and become productive, contributing members of society. Their talent has been nurtured and they have thrived in Illinois.

Along the way, they have become opportunity multipliers by opening life possibilities to their siblings, other family members and friends. They are more than dreamers. They are builders who embody promise, strength and hope.

“Fundamentally, Bryan and I believe that education is a gateway to opportunity,” Penny Pritzker said. “These kids are just like all of our kids. They believe in the possibility of America and they want to be good, contributing citizens. But they come up against the fact that they’re undocumented and see their potential curtailed. They take the opportunity very seriously. These are new adults in our communities who want to contribute.

“To help give them a boost,” she added, “is a privilege.”



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