

# SAF

## INSIDE

p. 2 Forward, Forward,  
Don't Look Back

p. 3 Undocumented and  
Unafraid

p. 4 Investing in Human  
Capital

p. 5 Thank You to our  
Donors

p. 6 Funders,  
Program Updates,  
Announcements

## Focus on Access to Education



From left: No human being is illegal; HKonJ rally; photos by Justin Valas.

## The Right to DREAM

by Christine Contreras, SAF Student Organizer

Although I was born and raised in the U.S., my parents both came from Chile as teenagers. Growing up, I witnessed how they worked their hardest to provide me with the opportunities that they were never afforded. Education has always been important to me because I see it as the one aspect of my life I can control that will enable me to not only have a successful future, but also to be able to provide for my parents and give back to the Latino community. Unfortunately, not everyone is as lucky as I have been; in this country, a single paper can determine a student's future. My dedication to my own education has led me to fight for the rights of *all* students, regardless of documentation.

I found an outlet for my passion when I heard about Student Action with Farmworker's first Student Organizing School. The Student Organizing School (SOS) is comprised of college students from around North Carolina who support policy and labor campaigns to improve farm labor conditions. Student organizers work on their campus to provide awareness about three different campaigns: Access to Education for All, Harvest of Dignity, and the R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Campaign.

As a student organizer I focused my efforts on providing awareness about access to education through collaborating with other universities to host events like the "Give up Your Dreams for the DREAM" event, held at UNC-Chapel Hill, where I spoke about my connection to the education campaign. We hosted a series of "Die-Ins" at Duke in which students would lie down with protest signs and "die" for the thousands of dreams currently not being realized. I also participated in a radio interview in Carrboro, thus allowing me to reach an audience beyond university students.

Being a student organizer with SAF has not only opened my eyes to the harsh living and working conditions faced by farmworkers, but also to the injustices faced by all immigrants in North Carolina. This issue of From the Ground Up is dedicated to the thousands of students looking for a chance to realize their dreams; we hope that you will join with us to advocate for education rights for all!



Baltazar on the schoolbus, photo by 2010 SAF intern Michelle Lozano Villegas.

"Though I am living among so many promising young people with great futures ahead of them, I know every parent, documented or not, has dreams for their children. There is nothing unique in dreaming. It's the fulfillment of dreams that's sometimes beyond one's control."

- Professor Charles  
Thompson, Center for Documentary  
Studies, Duke University

SAF is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization whose mission is to bring students and farmworkers together to learn about each other's lives, share resources and skills, improve conditions for farmworkers, and build diverse coalitions working for social change.

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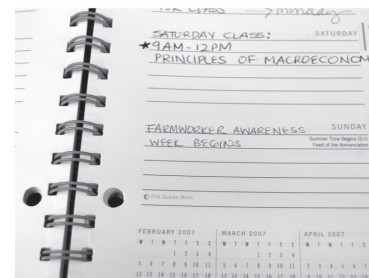
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# Pa'delante Adelante, No Mires Pa'tras | Forward, Forward, Don't Look Back

by Bart Evans, SAF Coalition Coordinator

As the new Adelante Coalition Coordinator at SAF, it has been a privilege to be able to work with concerned students and educators who believe in access to education for all. I became politicized to these issues while I was getting my B.A. at UC Santa Cruz, where unfortunately the UC system is no stranger to budget bumbles and diversity debacles. Yet it was later when I was briefly teaching in public high schools in Watsonville, CA, that I realized how much our public school system is failing students, and yet at the same time, how exciting it is that students are passionately organizing around this issue. This energy has exploded at a national level—from California to North Carolina, undocumented students are making history by sitting-in, coming-out, and rising up against the anti-immigrant rhetoric.

2011 has already been a busy year in North Carolina for educational issues. In the eyes of many, public education has come under attack, from K-12 to higher education. The NAACP and groups like NC Heroes Emerge Among Teens (NCHEAT) have been fighting against re-segregation policies taken on by the new Wake County School Board, and against state legislation that would remove the cap on charter schools—measures that would further exacerbate the socioeconomic divisions in NC public schools. In the words of Reverend Barber of the NAACP, “Only Forward, Not One Step Back!”



Triptych from *Nuestras Historias, Nuestros Sueños* by Gretchen Doores & Emily Shenkin.

This past year Adelante has welcomed the NC DREAM Team and El Centro Hispano of Durham as new members of the coalition. Together we have done outreach to high-school student groups and invited students to speak out at a series of state-wide vigils against anti-education bills in Raleigh, Greensboro, Charlotte, Greenville, and Asheville on February 1st—the 50th anniversary of the Greensboro, NC civil rights sit-ins. Through these vigils we received media coverage and heard from students, educators, and community members about the importance of access to education, and against bills targeting undocumented students.

In other news, we are proud to report that the *Nuestras Historias, Nuestros Sueños/ Our Stories, Our Dreams* documentary photo exhibit about farmworkers' educational aspirations and hopes for the future was hosted by several organizations in western NC, including El Centro, Western Piedmont Community College, and at a McDowell High School Parents' night.

[continued on p. 4](#)



From Left:  
*Undocumented,*  
*Unafraid,*  
*Unashamed,* photo  
 by Justin Valas;  
 Mock Graduation  
 Rally, SAF photo.

## Undocumented and Unafraid

by *Viridiana Martinez, NC Dream Team*

My name is Viridiana Martinez. When I was 6 years old, my father left Mexico for the United States. His previous job no longer existed; the company had to shut down due to the peso devaluation of the early 1990s caused by the NAFTA agreement. Inflation caused prices of staple food items such as milk and eggs to skyrocket and jobs became scarce. To continue providing for the family, daddy took a job in the tobacco fields of North Carolina.

A year later, my mother was able to obtain tourist visas for her, my younger sister, and me. Leaving our home behind, we left for North Carolina where we'd reunite with my father. Uncertain of the future, but excited to finally see daddy, I said farewell to my home, my teachers, and my friends.

I arrived in NC when I was 7 years old and grew up in the small town of Sanford. I was one of two Hispanic students in my elementary school. I never took an English as a Second Language (ESL) course; Sanford schools didn't offer it as there wasn't a demand for it at that time. I graduated with honors from Lee County High in 2004 and got accepted to North Carolina State University. To my disappointment, I was not able to attend. I am undocumented. And this was the first time I confronted my reality. I'd denied it for so long and nobody knew outside of my family, not even my best friends.

Almost 7 years later, I am still undocumented. There is no "line" to get in to

become a US citizen. Last year, many of us got tired of waiting for our lives to change. Coming to the realization that change didn't just fall from the sky, I, like hundreds of undocumented youth throughout the country, decided it was time to take a stand. Giving our DREAMs a voice, we set out to create awareness of our plight. I was one of three hunger strikers at the corner of Wilmington and Lane in downtown Raleigh, NC, just a couple of blocks from Senator Kay Hagan's office. For thirteen days, we refused to eat. All because we knew we needed to convey the urgency of our situation and the moral crisis under which we have lived for years.

Petitions, rallies, letters, phone calls, and protests followed the hunger strike. On December 18, 2010, Senator Kay Hagan was the 41st vote against the DREAM Act. Since then, anti-immigrant sentiment across the country has resulted in bills being introduced in many states that represent a piecemeal approach to comprehensive immigration reform. NC currently has a bill seeking to ban undocumented youth from public colleges and universities.

To sum up our current situation as undocumented youth living in the South, post DREAM Act vote, not only was the door of education slammed shut in our faces, but overall, things only got harder for us, our families, and our communities. No one chooses to be undocumented;

families and individuals were forced to migrate here the minute big businesses were given the green light to cross borders in search of cheap labor. What was my father supposed to do, continue looking for a job as my mother, sister, and I starved?

And so, close to twenty years after the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986, our communities are still migrating, and it is not "controlled." Individuals continue to be criminalized for crossing borders, while the industries that drove us here in the first place are not being held accountable. We cannot be silent. Remaining in the shadows is no longer an option. We will come out, telling the story of our own lives, and with them bring into the light what otherwise would remain invisible.

*I, like hundreds of undocumented youth throughout the country, decided it was time to take a stand. Giving our DREAMs a voice, we set out to create awareness of our plight.*

The human rights abuses occurring in our communities do not reflect the American Dream. As a North Carolinian who happens to lack a social security number, I believe North Carolina, and the United States, can be better. I believe it can be a welcoming place that puts our collective humanity first.

My name is Viridiana Martinez. I am undocumented. I am a North Carolinian. I am a human being.

We are excited to keep the momentum going with the exhibit, so please contact us if you know of a university, organization, or community group that would like to host it!

The Adelante Coalition formed in the early 2000's to address the growing challenges around Latinos' access to quality education. Since its formation, the coalition has worked at the legislative and grassroots levels to affect legislation and educate and engage the community.

Adelante has a broad focus, which includes supporting and educating students and educators about alternatives and opportunities as well as organizing events, lobby days, and community education to fight the anti-education bills in NC. In addition, working with El Pueblo and El Centro in Marion, NC, coalition members have been developing presentations and guides for parents, as well as a list of early college options for high school students to earn college credit while still in high school.

Visit [www.adelantenc.org](http://www.adelantenc.org) to keep up with our work and stay informed on issues of access to education.

## Investing in Human Capital

by Irene Godínez, Legislative Director for the Latin American Coalition & SAF Board Secretary

Recently I had the opportunity to hear the President of a university system speak on the importance of investing in higher education and in people. At a time when our states are hurting financially, it makes sense to think about the big picture and to consider our investment in our human capital. The reality, however, is that these grim financial circumstances and poor information have resulted in legislators across the country introducing legislation that would create a permanent underclass by denying education to entire groups of people; one of those groups is undocumented students.

There are approximately 2.1 million undocumented students in this country, with about 65,000 of these students graduating from high school each year. While most of these students could go on to higher education, many see their dreams diminished since they are ineligible for financial aid and perhaps don't have access to the information necessary to make their educational aspirations a reality. Every state has different education laws and policies dealing with undocumented students. South Carolina and Georgia bar access entirely to undocumented students at institutions of higher education. On the other extreme, states like Maryland have recently passed their own version of the DREAM Act, and Illinois not only admits undocumented students at in-state tuition rates, but is currently considering legislation that would create scholarships for undocumented students!

At the time this article went to print here in North Carolina, there were two bills proposed in the state legislature that would bar students' access to institutions of higher education. House Bill 11 titled "No Postsecondary Education/Illegal Aliens," or the Denial of Education bill and House Bill 343 titled Support Law Enforcement/Safe Neighborhoods or the Arizona "Show Me Your Papers" 2.0 copycat bill.

A recent reintroduction of the DREAM Act-- federal legislation which would provide some undocumented students with the

opportunity to earn permanent legal status provided they meet certain criteria-- has drawn attention once more to the need of remedying our broken immigration system, starting with those who came to this country through no fault of their own.

The DREAM Act has been championed by various groups and individuals that would normally not be working together. In the last Congress, the DREAM Act passed the U.S. House of Representatives with bipartisan support and won a majority in the Senate, coming just short of the 60 votes needed to overcome a Republican filibuster. American voters support the DREAM Act. According to a poll conducted by Opinion Research Corporation for First Focus in June 2010, 70 percent of voters supported the DREAM Act. This includes 60% support from Republicans and 80% support from Democrats. While the DREAM Act alone isn't comprehensive immigration reform, it is a step towards immigration reform and it is the only thing that has traction at the present time.

*"There's a lot of vulnerability in undocumented communities and a lack of systemic support, and the only way to build for that is to have voices in that community, and that happens through education."*

- Irene Falk,  
Duke Students for Humane  
Borders

There is a lot of energy around the DREAM Act, particularly from youth and their allies. We are at a critical moment when we can offer relief to the undocumented youth who have done everything that has been asked of them as students and members of our communities. It is wise to invest in these students who are already here and will remain here. They are our human capital and we can't just deny education to an entire generation. Please take a moment to contact your Congressional representatives and ask them to support the DREAM Act!

# Thank you to these individuals for supporting SAF this year, Sept 2010 - April 2011 :

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### FROM THE GROUND UP

The Student Organizing School held its final retreat April 16-17 with the Levante Leadership Institute. We conducted reflections, a celebration, and a program evaluation. National Farmworker Awareness Week, March 27-April 2, was a big success, boasting over 90 events and participation from almost 30,000 farmworkers & allies across the U.S.!

### INTO THE FIELDS/ SOWING SEEDS FOR CHANGE

SAF received over 100 applications for the summer internship & six month fellowship programs. We had an amazing group of applicants including an increase in applicants from farmworker families. We successfully selected 25 interns and 5 fellows for our programs and have placed them with health, legal, education, union and community organizations throughout the Southeast.

### LEVANTE LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE

At the Levante Leadership Institute's final retreat, students participated in trainings on gender roles and event planning. At the NC Farmworker Institute and Foro Latino, students attended workshops on financial management and planning, spoken word, and tobacco prevention. Two Levante participants, Karin Rivera and Maria Enriquez, will be attending college in the fall and will each receive a scholarship from SAF.

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August 6, 2011, 6-11pm  
at the SAF office in Durham  
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