

Mayte Lara puts face on the importance of MexAustin scholarship

LOCAL

By [James Barragan](#) - American-Statesman Staff

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Highlights

Undocumented students are not eligible for federal grants and certain types of scholarships.

MexAustin scholarship will provide 140 students, some undocumented, with \$1,000.

Thirty-five percent of MexAustin recipients in its inaugural year are undocumented.

This month, [17-year-old Mayte Lara](#), an Austin high school valedictorian, was thrust into the national spotlight after her tweet about being undocumented caught fire on social media.

Lara's tweet received a barrage of negative responses, including some that said they would track her down, report her to immigration authorities and force her to return to her home country.

RELATED: WHO IS MAYTE LARA? MEET THE GIRL BEHIND THE TWEET

Her plight was covered by both local and national media, and [she even inspired other undocumented students to come out of the shadows](#) and reveal that they, too, were in the country without authorization.

Lara's story put a human face on the difficulties faced by thousands of undocumented students throughout the state and country. Her story also highlights why the efforts of local groups are so pivotal in helping those students, who often overcome tremendous obstacles just to graduate from high school and come upon even further roadblocks to a college education because they don't have access to sources of financial aid, like federal grants and certain types of scholarships.



Carlos Gonzalez Gutierrez, consul general of Mexico in Austin, delivers a \$70,000 check to Julian Huerta, deputy executive director of Foundation

In November, the Consulate General of Mexico in Austin announced it would partner with [Foundation Communities](#) to sponsor the [MexAustin scholarship aimed at Mexican and Latino students in Central Texas](#). Foundation Communities is a nonprofit that provides affordable housing and support services for low-income residents in Austin.

The scholarship would be open to Mexicans, the children of Mexican immigrants and other Latinos, but importantly, it was also available to students who were undocumented.

“I’ve heard hundreds of stories from students who have had to beat so many obstacles to get to college and regrettably there is not enough financial support for them to fund their higher education,” said Carlos González Gutiérrez, consul general of Mexico in Austin. “This scholarship is a stamp of approval, a way of telling these kids that we support their efforts.”



Mayte Lara, valedictorian at Crockett High School, speaks at her graduation ceremony.

WATCH: 'Undocumented' valedictorian inspires salutorian to go public with status

In its first year, the group will give out \$140,000 in scholarships to 140 students. Thirty-five percent of those students are unauthorized immigrants, including Lara, who will speak at the scholarship award ceremony Wednesday.

“We believe the future of the Texas workforce will depend heavily on Latinos,” González Gutiérrez said. “We think it’s against the interests of Texas to not make sure that these kids have access to funds to pay for college.”

Julian Huerta, deputy executive editor of Foundation Communities, said the \$1,000 scholarships are useful for students because they are not bookmarked for specific items.

“They could use it for tuition or fees, but can also pay for books if they’re living in a dorm — anything that helps them be successful in college,” he said.

Both Huerta and González Gutiérrez said part of the reason for funding the scholarships was to help promising undocumented students with little access to financial aid reach their goals because they believe these students will be the Latino leaders of the future.

“These kids are acutely aware of the sacrifices their parents made and do not want to let those sacrifices be in vain,” González Gutiérrez said. “They’re going to be the future leaders of the U.S. ... We want to do our part to help facilitate their higher education.”