

Mass Immigration and Education

There's a heated debate about whether the quality of American K-12 education has declined. (My considered conclusion, looking at the data: probably yes, taking into account the increased dropout rate.) But what can't be denied is the increase in cost. Per pupil expenditure has risen from \$2,290 in 1980 to \$11,257 in 2007. K-12 education now costs \$562 billion per year, about 4 % of GDP.

Immigration – and not the often-cited “baby boom echo” – is driving the school-age population increase. Immigrants are younger and tend to have more children. Thus they account for a disproportionate share of the growth in enrollment and costs. In 2005 about 10 million of the 50 million children enrolled in U.S. public schools were the offspring of immigrants. This is equal to *all* of the growth in the school-age population over the last 20 years.

Immigration adds not merely to the total cost of K-12 education, but to per-pupil costs. School districts must hire specially trained teachers and institute new programs. Bringing a student with limited English skills to average performance levels requires spending an additional \$10,000 per student, according to a recent case study. Although there are no national estimates, bilingual education is estimated to add \$4 billion to education expenditures in California alone.

Ironically, immigrant students who go through some type of bilingual education appear to earn significantly less than their counterparts in English immersion classes. Many immigrant students drop out anyway. More than one-third (37.5%) of Hispanic immigrants ages 16 to 24 do not have a high school diploma.

School violence is more frequently encountered in districts with high concentrations of immigrants. So is remedial education.

Even immigrants who stick it out and go to college suffer relative to natives. College-bound Latinos and Mexican-Americans were the only major ethnic groups for which verbal SAT scores declined between 1987 and 2005.

As an immigrant myself, what seems to me to be the real question is: What is the impact on American children of having their classrooms filled with foreigners? Recently, I asked a leading education expert whether there was any research on the subject.

“Not only is there no research,” she said, “but there isn’t going to be any research – because no one wants to know the answer.”

The answer, however, wants to know us.

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