

K-12 Education and Immigration

Part 5

Nearly 50 million students are enrolled in U.S. public schools. About one in 20 is an immigrant. U.S.-born children of immigrants represent an even larger burden—14 percent of total enrollment. *Thus at least 19 percent of all pre-K to 12 public school enrollment is the result of immigration.*¹

This means that nearly 10 million public school students are immigrants or the children of immigrants. This total includes an estimated 1.1 million illegal immigrant children, according to the Urban Institute. (In 1982, the Supreme Court ruled that illegal immigrant children are entitled to the same education benefits available to U.S. citizens.)

Immigrant students are far more likely to be poor than their native-born counterparts. In 2000 children of immigrants represented a quarter of all low-income students in U.S. schools.² The figure is undoubtedly higher today. The study also reports that immigrant children are rapidly spreading beyond the six states where they had traditionally concentrated (California, Texas, Florida, Illinois, New York, and New Jersey).

Without school-age immigrants and the children of immigrants, school enrollment would not have risen at all during the past decade. As it was, school enrollment increased by 14 percent between 1990 and 2000, putting it at an all-time high. Current enrollment exceeds the record set in 1970 when the last of the “baby boomers” entered the country’s school systems.³

White enrollment as a share of white population has declined over the past few decades, as white families have had fewer children and increasingly opt out of public school systems. By contrast, as family reunification increasingly dominates immigration policy, Hispanic enrollment has risen faster than the overall Hispanic population.

Some costs associated with non-English-speaking students are not easily quantifiable. For example, the mere presence of such students often disrupts main-

stream learning programs, thereby diminishing the overall learning environment in schools:

Immigrants might decrease the level of education obtained by natives if the presence of immigrants affects the quality of education. If the effectiveness of public schools declines when the student body becomes more heterogeneous, as, for example, when classrooms contain a mix of fluent English speakers with others who are Limited English Proficient (LEP), the entire class may make slower progress. If large numbers of LEP students at the school create a less-effective learning environment, the native student who was already right at the margin of dropping out may decide to leave school and join the work force.⁴

Research suggests that the inflow of immigrants has diminished educational attainment of native minorities by “*meaningful amounts.*”⁵ The negative impact applies to *all* American natives at the secondary school level, but the effects are concentrated among native minorities.

While federal aid to high-immigration school districts is large in the aggregate, it is small on a per capita basis. In some years, average disbursements range from 1 to 2 percent per pupil expenditures in districts with large numbers of LEP students, requiring states to contribute additional funds.

This may explain why immigration is such an explosive issue. Natives who send their kids to school where some children aren’t able to speak a single word of English fear for their own children’s future.

English as a Second Language (ESL)

The surge of immigrant children has led to a steady increase in the number of students who speak a foreign language at home, and if they speak English at all, they do so “with difficulty.” A report titled *The Condition of*

Education 2010 from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) shows that:

Between 1979 and 2008, the number of school-age children (children ages 5–17) who spoke a language other than English at home increased from 3.8 to 10.9 million, or from 9 to 21 percent of the population in this age range.... An increase (from 18 to 21 percent) was also evident during the more recent period of 2000 through 2008.

Seventy-five percent of those who spoke English with difficulty spoke Spanish.⁶

The federal government requires public schools to include ESL or Bilingual Education (BE) programs in their curriculum to accommodate the needs of the non-English speaking students, regardless of their legal status. Approximately 3.8 million public school students — 7.9 percent of total K-12 enrollment — are enrolled in classes for “English Language Learners” (ELLs), according to Department of Education statistics.⁷



These classes are significantly more expensive than mainstream English classes. Personnel costs include specialized teachers who supplement instruction provided by the mainstream English teacher and professional development to strengthen the skills of teachers working with ELLs. These require additional school district outlays.

Just how expensive? The Rand Corporation conducted case studies of delivery and cost of bilingual education in 1981. Rand researchers found that program costs varied by the type of instructional delivery

model that was being used in a local school. “Pull-out programs” that required the hiring of extra teachers to deliver supplemental instruction to ELLs were the most expensive. On the other hand, programs that used self-contained classrooms where one teacher provided bilingual instruction were less expensive.

In their analysis, the added costs for language-assistance instruction ranged from \$100 to \$500 per pupil. In addition to personnel expenses, the researchers also noted that other costs should be taken into consideration in computing add-on bilingual education costs. These included program administration, staff development (which can add significant costs), and other functions such as student identification and assessment.⁸

The total additional per pupil costs for language assistance instruction was estimated to be in the range of \$200 to \$700 in 1981 dollars — equivalent to \$480 to \$1,675 in 2010 dollars. Using the average of the latter two amounts — \$1,030 — as our estimate of per pupil cost, the total cost of providing English Language Learning instruction to the 3.8 million students enrolled in those programs would total about \$4.1 billion (\$1,080 x 3.8 million).

To help school districts defray these costs the federal government provides English language acquisition grants. The funds are distributed according to a formula that takes into account the number of immigrant and ESL students in each state. The FY2011 Department of Education budget requests \$800 million for such grants, an amount that covers only a fraction of the added instructional costs. Local taxpayers pay for most of the federal mandate.

The federal government also requires states to test ELL students annually to gauge the effectiveness of the specialized English instruction provided to immigrants. In some districts this is particularly burdensome — or even impossible. In Stamford, Connecticut, for example, students speak 57 languages. The top three are English, Haitian Creole, and Spanish, but there are blocks of students speaking other languages. Polish is spoken by 202 students; 93 speak Albanian; 109 speak Russian; and 96 speak Bengali, district data show.

All in all, more than 140 languages are spoken in Connecticut schools. Developing tests in all the languages would be prohibitively expensive. Immigrant students have one school year before their scores must be reported to the federal government for evaluating their schools.

Very little new research has been done in this area. It is clear, however, that the per-student cost of providing English language instruction to immigrant students

is significantly higher today than it was a quarter century ago. The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) testing requirement for ELLs is in itself a major new expense item.

It's not (only) about money. The enormous sums spent educating immigrants would be money well spent if they succeed in narrowing the achievement gap between immigrants and natives, or the income gap between Hispanics and non-Hispanics.

Unfortunately no such convergence is evident:

In 2009, the 8th grade reading achievement gap between White and Black students was 26 points and the gap between White and Hispanic students was 24 points; neither gap was measurably different from the corresponding gaps in 2007 or 1992.⁹

In 2008, foreign-born Hispanics dropped out at a higher rate than native-born Hispanics, while the opposite trend held for native-born Whites, Blacks, and persons of two or more races.¹⁰

Bottom line: English language instruction for immigrants is an increasingly costly — and ineffective — unfunded mandate imposed by the federal government on states and local school districts.

Other federal programs

While most K-12 education programs are initiated at the school district level, the federal government has become increasingly active — even meddlesome. Several federal programs have effectively increased the fraction of school district outlays going to immigrants, as follows:

No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

The central goal of the No Child Left Behind program is for all students to read and to do math at grade level and above by 2014. More than half the \$20 billion budgeted for NCLB in the 2008 federal budget were Title I funds. Title I funds are distributed to state education departments and local school districts based on the number and percent of students who are poor, student test scores, and per-student costs.

Because immigrants are more likely to qualify for Title I funds, they receive an above-average share of NCLB benefits. It is not unreasonable to expect that 25 percent of Title I funds go to the 19 percent of students who are immigrants or the children of immigrants.

Migrant education

Described in the budget as “...formula grants to States for educational services to children of migratory

farm workers and fishers, with resources and services focused on children who have moved within the past 36 months,” the migrant education program was created in 1966 to address the needs of children of mobile farm workers.¹¹ The President's FY2011 budget requests \$395 million for migrant education. Approximately 635,000 children, ages 3 to 21, are eligible.¹²

The basic program distributes funds to state education departments based on each state's per-pupil expenditures and on counts of eligible migratory children residing in the state.

Recent audits conducted by the Department of Education have uncovered over-counts in the number of eligible children. California is one of several states found to have significantly over-identified children who were eligible for the migrant program. In a sample of 102 migrant children from two California school districts, the Education Department's inspector general found 38 children — or 37 percent — to be ineligible.¹³

Under current regulations, a “migratory child” is one with a parent who works in the fishing or agricultural industry and who, within the most recent three years, has moved across school district lines to seek seasonal or temporary employment in fishing or agriculture. Determining intent is difficult: many individuals may end up in those fields by default.

Philip Martin, a professor of agricultural economics at the University of California, Davis, notes that states receive migrant aid based on the number of students eligible for the program, not on the number of students served. This obviously creates an incentive to over-count eligibles and, perhaps, minimize the number actually enrolled. Martin believes the criteria for distributing migrant education aid should be actual enrollment rather than potential enrollment.¹⁴

Other Department of Education programs specifically designed for children of migrant farm workers include:

College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP): \$2.8 million requested for FY2011.¹⁵ CAMP funds the first year of undergraduate studies at accredited colleges, as well as counseling, tutoring, health services, and housing assistance to eligible students. Approximately 2,000 students receive CAMP funds each year.

Even Start: \$70 million spent in FY2010.¹⁶ Projects include early childhood education, adult literacy, parenting education, and interactive parent-child literacy activities, often made available through government agencies, public schools, Head Start programs, and other community-based groups. Children from birth through age 7 and their parents are eligible for Even Start.

**K-12 Enrollment:
Current immigration policy vs. moratorium**

By reducing population growth, a moratorium will reduce K-12 enrollment. No surprise there. What is eye popping is the sensitivity of enrollment to immigration policy.

Under current immigration policy U.S. population, currently at 310 million, could grow to 439 million by mid-century, according to the Census Bureau projections.¹⁷ Under a moratorium, U.S. population would peak at 323.0 million in 2047, before descending slowly, to 322.9 million, in 2050. A 40-year moratorium would thus reduce population by 102 million, or 26.4 percent, below the level that would have been reached in 2050 under current immigration policy.

Enrollment will fall faster than population, however. That is because the group most affected by immigration policy — Hispanics — accounts for a disproportionately large share of K-12 enrollment:

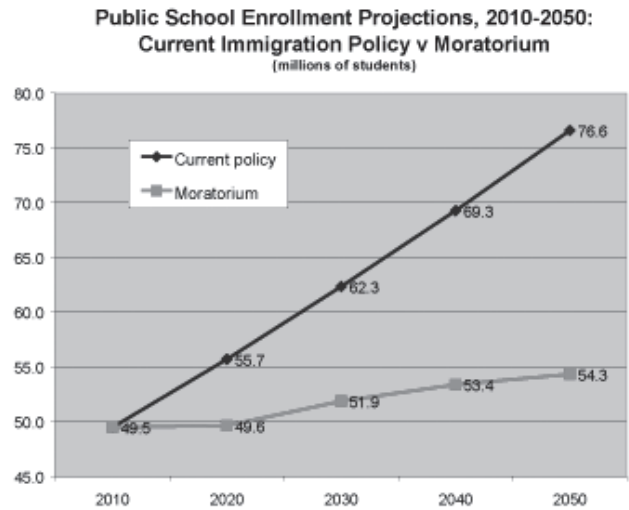
Public School Enrollment by Race and Hispanic Origin, 2008			
	(1,000s)		Enrollment as % Population
	K-12 enrollment	Population	
White	26,710	199,491	13.4
Black	7,460	37,172	20.1
Hispanic	10,426	46,944	22.2
Asian	1,797	13,238	13.6
Other	1,743	7,215	24.2
Total	48,136	304,060	15.8

Data sources: Department of Education, *The Condition of Education 2010*, Table A-4-1 <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2010/2010028.pdf> (enrollment); *Digest of Education Statistics 2009*, Table 16. <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2010/2010013.pdf> (Population)

In 2008 (latest available data), 22.2 percent of the Hispanic population was enrolled in U.S. public schools. The comparable figure for non-Hispanic whites was 13.4 percent. The enrollment gap has widened over the past few decades as white families have fewer children and increasingly opt out of public-school systems. Immigration and high fertility rates among second- and third-generation Hispanics has increased the share of the Hispanic population enrolled in public schools.

By multiplying the Census Bureau’s population

projections for each demographic group by their 2008 enrollment/population ratios and summing, we arrive at the following projections for total K-12 enrollment:



- Under current immigration policy, K-12 enrollment will increase 54.7 percent over the next 40 years, to 76.6 million.
- Under a moratorium, K-12 enrollment will increase by 9.7 percent over this period, reaching 54.3 million in 2050.
- Total 2050 enrollment will be 22.3 million, or 29 percent lower under a moratorium than under current immigration policy.
- A moratorium will cut K-12 expenditures by \$260 billion below the amount that would have been spent under current immigration policy in 2050. (Assumes per-pupil spending remains at its 2008 level: \$11,674.)

By using the 2008 enrollment/population ratios as the basis for future K-12 projections, we are assuming, in effect, that the white/Hispanic enrollment gap will not grow — despite all the evidence to the contrary. We have erred on the side of conservatism. ■

Endnotes

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