

Children of Immigrants and Education in Indiana: Reports from the Frontlines



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Section One

The Story So Far ...

A Summary of “Indiana Immigration and Workforce Patterns”

This Working Paper, which focuses on how the children of immigrants in Indiana are being prepared (or not being prepared) for post-secondary education, is part of the Sagamore Institute study, “The Impact of Immigration on Higher Education in Indiana.” Funded by the Lumina Foundation for Education, the study’s final report is scheduled for release in mid-June 2008. It will be preceded by three Working Papers intended to inform the policy community of the status of Sagamore’s research and to elicit suggestions for the study as a whole. The third Working Paper, to be released in late March 2008, will examine the ways that immigrants are reshaping the institutions of higher education and workforce training in Indiana, and the manners by which higher education is contributing to changes in the state’s immigrant population.

The first Working Paper, “Indiana Immigration and Workforce Patterns,” provided a complex and detailed examination of Indiana’s population trends, possible directions of economic development, and educational needs. Some highlights from that study are particularly important for this Working Paper:

- Smaller but faster growing. The proportion of Indiana’s population that was born outside of the United States is about four percent, significantly lower than the twelve percent that immigrants comprise of the nation’s total population. On the other hand, Indiana’s immigrant population has one of the highest rates of growth in the U.S.: between 2000 and 2005, Indiana’s foreign-born population grew thirty percent; for the country as a whole, the foreign-born segment grew sixteen percent.
- As of 2005, immigrants from Mexico, Central America, and South America made up slightly less than fifty percent of the state’s foreign-born population; but the high rate of increasing numbers from those countries guarantees that they are now much more than a majority of the state’s immigrant population.

Figure 1. Absolute and % change in the foreign-born population of Indiana, 2000-05, by continent and sub-continent of origin.¹

Origin	2005 Population	Absolute Change 2000-05	Change Rate
Total	242,281	55,747	30%
Europe	41,360	-1,945	-4%
N Europe	7,465	-1,307	-15%
W Europe	11,403	-1,974	-15%
S Europe	3,460	-748	-18%
E Europe	18,899	1,987	12%
Asia	59,864	10,251	21%
E Asia	26,060	7,066	37%

S-Cent Asia	14,904	2,602	21%
SE Asia	15,271	726	5%
W Asia	3,629	158	5%
Africa	12,319	5,011	69%
E Africa	5,261	2,980	131%
Mid Africa	815	522	178%
N Africa	1,577	311	25%
S Africa	669	50	8%
W Africa	3,213	936	41%
Oceania	859	-126	-13%
Americas	127,879	42,561	50%
Caribbean	4,592	991	28%
Cent Amer	108,765	40,310	59%
S America	7,295	1,894	35%
N America	7,227	-634	-8%

- Of the state’s immigrant population of 242,000 in 2005, nearly 100,000 were born in Mexico. With more than forty percent of the state’s immigrant population, the proportion of Mexican-born in Indiana is substantially higher than the proportion of Mexican-born among all immigrants for the U.S. as a whole.

Figure 2. Indiana’s foreign-born population, 2005: country of origin and population (six largest source countries)¹

Mexico	98,698
China	13,252
India	10,628
Germany	8,042
Korea	7,823
Canada	6,784

- The foreign-born are moving into communities across the state, with particularly high rates of growth along the Chicago-Fort Wayne and Chicago-Lafayette trans-urban corridors and especially in Indianapolis and its neighboring counties.
- Many of Indiana’s rural communities would be experiencing very sharp population declines without the strong influx of foreign-born newcomers.

Although it did not focus primarily on education, the first Working Paper made several important observations about the educational attainment of Indiana’s immigrant population:

- The larger portion of Indiana’s growing immigrant population has minimal education and few advanced skills. The smaller part stands at the peak of the global education and skills pyramid, vital to the area’s most important industries and prosperous firms. The foreign-born population in Indiana is much less likely to have graduated from high school than their domestic-born or native counterparts. Almost one in three foreign-born Hoosiers lack a high school diploma; one in seven U.S.-born Hoosiers lack a high school degree. The foreign-born, however, are also much more likely to hold a bachelor’s degree than their

domestic-born or native counterparts. They are twice as likely to possess a graduate degree.

Figure 3. The cascading educational attainment profile of the 25- years and older foreign and non-foreign born, 2005: Indiana²

Possess.....	non-foreign born	foreign-born
at least a high school diploma	86%	68%
at least some college	48%	44%
at least a bachelor's degree	21%	27%
graduate degree	7%	14%

It may be counter-intuitive that immigrants in Indiana are both less educated and more educated than the state's non-foreign born population, especially that nearly one out of three immigrants lack a high school diploma while one in seven have a doctorate. To oversimplify a complicated reality, think of the foreign-born workforce in Indiana as consisting of two types of immigrants: a large group that takes the jobs that the native-born population **does not want to do**, and a smaller group of immigrants that take jobs that native-born workers **can not do**. The first group works at low-skill and low-pay jobs that require little education. The second group consists of highly skilled and well educated immigrants who fill gaps in Indiana's workforce caused by too few native-born workers receiving enough, or more accurately enough of the right type, of education.³

- The differences in educational attainment are particularly striking when comparing newcomers to Indiana from Latin America with the foreign-born from the other regions of the world.

Figure 4. The cascading educational attainment profile of the 25-years and older by region of origin, 2005: Indiana⁴

	Latin America	Africa	Asia	Canada & Oceania	Europe	U.S. born
no diploma	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
diploma	47%	82%	87%	92%	85%	86%
some college	21%	69%	72%	70%	47%	48%
associates	11%	51%	60%	62%	31%	28%
bachelors	8%	36%	54%	56%	24%	21%
masters	3%	15%	23%	30%	12%	7%
doctorate or first professional	2%	7%	3%	16%	4%	2%

Fewer than half of the adult Latin American newcomers to Indiana have high school diplomas; more than four-fifths of immigrants from the rest of the world have diplomas. Five percent of immigrants from Latin America possess graduate degrees. Compare that figure with immigrants from Africa who are more than four times more likely to possess a graduate degree; immigrants from Asia who are more than five times more likely to possess a graduate degree; those from Europe who are more than three times more likely to possess a graduate degree; and immigrants from Canada, Australia, and New Zealand who are more than

nine time more likely to hold advanced degrees than their counterparts from Latin America.

- In the economy of the 21st Century, both highly educated and uneducated workers will be able to find jobs. After carefully analyzing projections of the occupational composition of Indiana's workforce, "Indiana Workforce and Immigration Patterns" concluded that *future job growth* (i.e., new jobs added to the economy) will require substantially higher levels of education. At the same time, future total job openings (most of which will be existing jobs requiring the replacement of workers who have retired or left for other reasons) will be associated with slightly less need for a high school diploma or postsecondary certification. Moreover, the graying of Indiana's population could open even more service and physical care jobs requiring less education. So, it is not exactly true that a worker will need an advanced degree or high quality education to get a job in the future; but it may be true that an advanced degree will be necessary to get a "good job" in one of the new sectors of the economy that can be expected to drive the economy's growth. (See below for more on what a "good job" may mean.)
- "Indiana Workforce and Immigration Patterns" identified two distinct geographic patterns for the state's strong growth in the future. Most sectors or industries identified by the Indiana Economic Development Corporation's strategic plan will probably rely on clustering in large metropolitan areas to take root. Advanced manufacturing is the one sector that could flourish across a broader geographic footprint, primarily along corridors of interstate highways. These two patterns are not mutually exclusive, but they are associated with different sorts of investment in providing training and education. Moreover they could rely on different relations of risk and trust distributed among the public sector, employers, and the employees receiving training.
- Both patterns of economic development — clustering along the Lafayette-Indianapolis-Bloomington axis or distributed more broadly along interstate corridors — will produce "good jobs" that pay higher wages for an investment in skills and education. However, the first Working Paper drew from recent work by economist Alan Blinder who argues that, in the coming years, far more "good jobs" in the U.S. may be vulnerable to "offshoring" than is usually recognized. The requirement of higher education is no guarantee that a job can not be done in another country for less money. Viewed this way, "good jobs" are those that are protected from "offshoring," regardless of the job's skill and educational requirements. For many jobs, it will be most important how complementary skills and talents could reward jobs that cluster together in geographic proximity, that are thus difficult to distribute across the globe. This indicates that a key to "good jobs" in the future will not only depend on what workers know. "Good jobs" will depend on abilities to trust and collaborate flexibly in teams ... which changes our way of thinking about what education should be.

Section Two

The “Feel” of Indiana’s Demographic Realities and the State’s Educational Challenges

Previous studies by Sagamore Institute have focused on quantitative analyses of demographic changes in Indiana,⁵ in particular, the rapid influx of “new immigrants” from Latin America, (primarily, but not exclusively, from Mexico⁶), Africa, and Asia. The research for this Working Paper was more qualitative, based on interviews with teachers and school administrators, students, guidance counselors, directors of nonprofit and faith-based organizations working with immigrants, education researchers, “English as a New Language” instructors, and many others. The information from the interviews was consistent with the demographic numbers; but, the interviews provide a sense of how these demographic realities are “felt” on the frontlines, by those who must deal with the state’s educational challenges on a daily basis.

Observations offered by many interview subjects fell into a few categories:

1. No one expects the tide of new immigration to reverse or even slow down. No one said that we would some day see fewer rather than more immigrants in Indiana. This is true of documented as well as undocumented immigrants. Some of the reasons our respondents gave for expecting immigration trends to continue into the future included:

- Indiana’s economy needs more workers, especially as the population of “Baby Boomers” reaches retirement age.
- Income differences between Mexico and the U.S. mean that no matter how imposing the wall, Mexicans and others from South of the Border will find a way to the U.S. where they can make five or six times more money.
- Several believe that broader trends of globalization are irreversible, and that it is not likely that there can be a frictionless passing of goods, services, and ideas across borders without also having people cross borders.

This could reflect a human tendency to project today’s trend indefinitely into the future. But it could also reflect assumptions shared by most of those who are on the frontlines. The notion that the federal government could stem the flow of unauthorized immigrants from the South by tighter border enforcement was dismissed by most. In fact, any discussion of reversing the flow of immigrants seemed to be viewed as unrealistic, perhaps even part of a racist fantasy of returning to an America Impregnable that never really existed.

2. At the same time, few interviewed for this project expected to see politicians in Washington, D.C. adopt comprehensive immigration reform legislation any time soon.

As a result, most seem resigned to having public schools that serve increasing numbers of children with parents who lack legal immigration status.

3. Many of those interviewed fear a significant backlash against new immigrants—a common occurrence throughout the course of past immigration to the U.S.—which they believe will make their jobs that much more difficult. Partly because they expect the numbers of undocumented immigrants to increase in the months and years to come, those interviewed expect a worsening of the sorts of controversies over immigration—legal and otherwise—that have erupted across the country in recent years. Most of those interviewed have heard expressions of anti-immigrant sentiment recently and, in the cases of those who work closely with newcomers, they have often experienced angry criticism directed toward them personally. But few reported widespread overt anti-immigrant sentiments expressed by teachers or school officials. One person reported conflicts among students taking on an anti-immigrant tone, although she believed this could just be ordinary adolescent cruelty grabbing the nearest available source of insults.

4. Several note that Indiana is quickly becoming a first destination for newcomers and that, as a result, the newest newcomers sometimes seem less prepared for life in Indiana or the United States. In the past two or three years, several reported that a change could be detected in the patterns of immigration to Indiana. Earlier, immigrants from Mexico and Central America usually journeyed first to one of a handful of states, such as North Carolina or Illinois, where friends or family had already settled. After spending many months or even a year in this first destination, they would then look for a state in which to settle for a longer term, although not necessarily permanently since most expected to return home after saving a specific amount of money from working. Indiana's relatively low cost of living, ample employment opportunities, and reputation for toleration of newcomers has made the state an attractive destination for longer-term plans.

In this way, Indiana has benefited from the first destinations bearing the costs of acculturating those absolute newcomers. By the time they moved to Indiana, those newcomers were familiar with important aspects of American society and culture, with expectations associated with work-life in the U.S., with crucial formal and informal patterns of law enforcement, and so on. They also had begun the process of learning the English language. Those who found the transition to the culture and way of life in the U.S. too difficult returned home before deciding to move to Indiana.

Lately, however, this pattern has changed. A growing numbers of immigrants from Latin America in Indiana have been telling their relatives and friends back home that Indiana is a good place to which to relocate. As a result, Indiana communities are now expected to bear those costs of initial acculturation, which had been borne by other states not too long ago. An important aspect of this new pattern is the growing number of newcomers who have moved directly to the state from southern Mexico and Central America. Martin Alcala Salgado, Mexican Consul in Indianapolis, noted an increased number of immigrants who speak indigenous languages first, then speak Spanish as a second language (or sometimes barely at all). Lacking fluency in English and Spanish, Salgado

says, leaves members of this group particularly vulnerable. It can be assumed that it also makes schooling that much more difficult for those children.

Although they are well aware of the diversity of “new immigrants,” the challenges associated with Latinos are always at the forefront of discussions. Go into a school in the Indianapolis metropolitan area or to large university towns such as Bloomington or West Lafayette. The student body often looks like the United Nations with a population drawn from Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Many teachers and officials may implicitly assume that the children of immigrants from Asia, in particular, come from better educated families and thus encounter fewer difficulties than the children of immigrants from Mexico and elsewhere in Latin America ... and they might be right in many cases. But such assumptions can lead to problems for non-Latino students to be ignored or set aside.

In the schools of rural areas and smaller towns, by contrast, almost all of the newcomer students are reported to be from Latin America. In this case, school officials and teachers often miss entirely the significance of the cultural differences among Latino students, failing to acknowledge their country or region of origin, for instance, or even their family background, clustering them all into one large “Hispanic” or “Latino” group.

Many on the frontlines are aware of the problems associated with the children of unauthorized immigrants, but few know how to address them. Teachers and school officials know how fragile are the relations and trust that allow unauthorized immigrant parents to send their children to state schools without fear of attracting the attention of immigration authorities. As a result, even though they are aware of the particular challenges facing these children and their families, school officials often delicately avoid inquiring into their students’ immigration status. ... and perhaps also avoid asking other questions that might be important for addressing the students’ needs.

Most of those interviewed reported that the vast majority of teachers, like most community leaders, would like to do whatever they can to help new immigrants; but few respondents think that very many teachers or community leaders are adequately prepared for the challenges. It might not be surprising that few of those who deal professionally (primarily or exclusively) with new immigrants and their children — teachers of English as a New Language, for instance, or Latino advocates — believe that most teachers are equipped to deal with the challenges of children of immigrants; that is why we have professionals and advocates, after all. What was more surprising was how often in discussions with regular teachers, *none* would say they felt qualified to deal fully with the challenges of the children of newcomers.

The greatest problems that newcomers face — and perhaps the biggest problems they are seen as imposing on broader society — could be called “systems under stress,” that is, systems that would be facing increasing pressure and difficulties even if they did not also have to handle a rapidly growing population of newcomers. Two of these systems under stress are health care and law enforcement. Even without coping with uninsured undocumented immigrants, for example, the United States would face a crisis in its health

care system. The stressed system may come close to crashing when it has to care for patients who are unfamiliar with a modern hospital or with preventive care, or for those who do not speak English. This is how teachers and education officials sometimes report feeling: their system would be close to breaking even without the challenges of children of immigrants.

How are the state’s demographic realities perceived as particular challenges for the educational system as well as for preparing the children of immigrants for post-secondary education? Sagamore’s researchers found that the challenges mentioned most often fall into four broad categories:

I. Students in Schools under Stress

Various aspects of schools themselves contribute to problems reported by students, teachers, and others. In no particular order of frequency of mention, these include:

- **Limited bilingual staff.** Language difficulties were almost always identified as the first or second most important problem in schools, by students and by others.

Figure 5. Limited English Speaking Students in Indiana, 2006-05⁷

Year	Limited English Students
2006-07	42,728
2005-06	35,817
2004-05	31,956
2003-04	28,741
2002-03	22,589
2001-02	20,352
2000-01	17,194
1999-2000	13,079
1998-99	10,616
1997-98	9,156
1996-97	8,610
1995-96	7,720
1994-95	6,293
1993-94	5,342
1992-93	4,840

- **Lack of bilingual or Spanish-speaking counselors.** The lack of Spanish speakers seems particularly pressing when there is trouble, when discipline may be required, or when timely intervention would prevent trouble from arising altogether. One example stands out. Angel Picket-Chone, an English as a Second Language teacher at Northview Middle School in Washington Township, Marion County, mentioned a student, currently expelled for fighting and gang-related activity, who is illiterate in both English and Spanish. The lack of linguistically

and culturally qualified psychologists in the district requires bringing a bilingual psychologist to the school from out of town.⁸

- Lack of role models.** Several Latino students mention not knowing anyone “like them” who has succeeded in school or who has even gone on to college. It could be that this is one of the most important effects of having relatively few teachers or school administrators who are Latino or who are recent immigrants. David Hernandez, teacher at the Crispus Attucks Medical Magnet School, part of the Indianapolis Public Schools system, observes that, of the 60,000 certified teachers in Indiana, fewer than one percent are Hispanic. In Indianapolis Public Schools, where Latinos are the fastest growing segment of the school population, there are thirty Hispanic teachers among some nearly 2,500 full-time teachers in the system.⁹ The percentage of minority teachers in Indiana has been shrinking steadily in the past two decades.

Figure 6. Minority Teachers in Indiana, Percent of Total¹⁰

Year	Pct Minority Teachers
1979-80	6.1%
1980-81	6.2%
1981-82	6.1%
1982-83	6.2%
1983-84	6.3%
1984-85	6.2%
1985-86	6.1%
1986-87	6.0%
1987-88	6.0%
1988-89	5.9%
1989-90	5.8%
1990-91	5.7%
1991-92	5.6%
1992-93	5.5%
1993-94	5.2%
1994-95	5.3%
1995-96	5.3%
1996-97	5.3%
1997-98	5.2%
1998-99	5.2%
1999-00	5.1%
2000-01	4.8%
2001-02	5.0%
2002-03	5.0%
2003-04	5.0%
2004-05	4.9%
2005-06	5.0%
2006-07	5.0%

Hernandez admits that it is hard for the teaching profession to compete with a career in business for qualified Latinos. He confesses that other teachers tend to advise their most gifted students not to enter the teaching profession.

- Isolation from other students.** “Isolation” is mentioned in two senses. The first is when newcomer students have neither students nor teachers who speak their language. In these cases, we are told, the student picks up English quickly out of necessity. The second form of isolation is when a relatively large number of

students speak a language in addition to English (usually, but not always, Spanish) and perhaps through their own choice do not mingle with other students.

- **Lack of training by teachers or staff to integrate non-English speaking students into classes and schools.** The very rapid growth in the numbers of new immigrants in Indiana is a fairly recent development, starting after many teachers received their training. It takes time for new methods of teacher training to take root in university education departments. It would be expecting a great deal for teachers in mid-career to learn Spanish, although it seems that many are trying to do so.
- **Newcomer parents' failure to participate in their children's education.** Frequently mentioned is the difficulty of getting Latino parents to speak with teachers or to help their children with their studies. Language is an obvious barrier for parents dealing with teachers or helping with homework. So too is the fact that many immigrants themselves have little schooling. Both parents may work multiple jobs which do not permit time off to visit teachers. Even though undocumented parents may feel confident that they can send their children to state schools without fear of immigration woes, they themselves may feel uncomfortable interfacing with any government organization.
- **Parents without much education may have low expectations for their children.** These low expectations held by parents could end up being echoed by the teachers.
- **Lack of administrative support or leadership.** One factor seems to characterize the schools that are most often identified as sterling examples of success in addressing the challenges of the children of immigration: a strong commitment by the school's administration. By contrast, those schools where teachers express the most frustration with the problems of newcomers seem to be the schools where teachers feel that they must juggle many competing priorities set by the administration, priorities that may be poorly defined.
- **Newcomer students' inability to keep up with the pace of classes.** Almost every immigrant student interviewed reported this as a problem, at least in the first weeks and months. The challenge seems to be to make sure that the newcomer students do not turn off education altogether.
- **Inflexibility of lesson plans to deal with new challenges or difficulties.** One frustration expressed by both students and English as a New Language teachers is that many teachers have trouble adapting to the realities of new types of students.
- **Lack of Spanish-speaking psychologists or therapists.** Many are aware that behavioral problems or learning disabilities may be missed because they are assumed to be caused only by an inability to speak English. Angel Pickett-Chone, ESL teacher at Northview Middle School, described how difficult it is to identify a Spanish speaking student with special education needs. She reported on a 6th grade student in her school who was given several non-verbal tests shortly after he arrived at Northview to determine whether he required special education. The psychologist's judgment was that the student's inability to speak English was

responsible for the student's delays and not any form of learning disability. But, Ms. Pickett-Chone protested that the student demonstrated problems of short- and long-term memory, and thus could not read nor retain what he had been taught in English or Spanish.

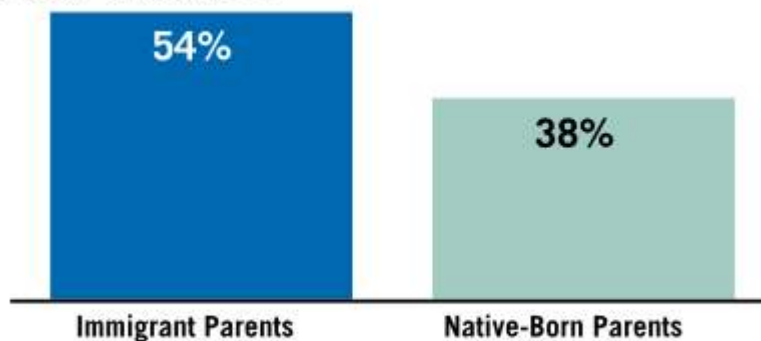
- **Inability of some Latino newcomer children to speak Spanish.** Since new flows of immigration extend directly to Indiana from southern Mexico and Central America, schools now have to deal with Latino students who barely speak Spanish. This may result in a compounded sense of isolation for these students. In some cases, schools that have successfully tailored their English as New Language programs to Spanish-speaking students may have a hard time addressing the situation of groups such as refugees from Burma.

II. Families Face the Pressures of a New Environment

Children of immigrants do not only face new realities of schools. Their families are being forced to adapt to a new cultural environment that may even seem hostile as well as foreign. Some of the pressures experienced by families and parents shape educational outcomes of the students.

- **Parents do not want to speak English at home.** Few teachers say they wish that their immigrant students would speak a language besides English at home, even though many say they do not want their students to lose their native tongue. Some of the reasons why students say their parents would not speak English at home include: they are unable; they do not want their children to lose their home culture; and the parents do not expect the family to remain in the U.S. permanently.
- **Poverty and the need to contribute to family income.** Many of the immigrant families are living on the edge, sometimes far below the poverty line.¹¹

Figure 7.
Children in Low-Income Families in Indiana, by Parents' Nativity, 2006



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Indiana Demographic Profiles

One of the greatest pressures reported by students and teachers for the children of immigrants to drop out of school is a desire to get a job. A sixteen-year-old working a minimum wage job can earn much more than most adults in the countries from which their families come. Add to this the belief that higher education is not possible, and it may seem unrealistic to defer working in order to graduate.

- **Transportation difficulties.** Indiana does not allow undocumented immigrants to obtain a driver's license. Add to this the absence of adequate public transportation in most of Indiana's cities, and it is difficult for many parents to participate in their children's education, even if they desire to do so. It also can make it hard for their children to participate in the clubs, sports, and other extracurricular activities that comprise an important part of socialization in American education.
- **Parents are unable to communicate with teachers or school officials.** Only a portion of the communication difficulties for parents come from the inability to speak English. Many immigrants have almost no experience communicating with education professionals of any kind.
- **Domestic violence.** A recent symposium on domestic violence in Latino families¹² focused on reasons why this is a difficult problem, and why it was particular difficult for educators. Most of Indiana's new immigrants come from cultures with different expectations for relations between husbands and wives, between parents and children, between society and families. Practices that may be the norm for a particular religion or culture may seem abusive in the U.S. Sometimes they *are* abusive both in the U.S. as well as in the home culture. Add to this the fact that undocumented immigrants are understandably reluctant to contact law enforcement or social service agencies for fear of being discovered. It is no wonder that the teachers who discussed this issue could only express the hope that nothing serious was happening to their students. The teachers could not say with confidence that they would know how to recognize problems or how to address them if such were to arise.
- **Lack of parental expectations for educational success.** Most teachers interviewed did not believe that the parents of their students actively did not wish for their children to succeed in school. Most parents came to the U.S. in part to seek a better life for their families, and they know an education is better than none. But if they themselves lack much experience with schooling, they probably do not know how much to expect from their children.
- **Parents' intimidation by the educational system.** Lacking much schooling themselves, parents may not know what they can and should expect from their children's teachers, and they may not know how to ask.
- **Children often have to play too great a role mediating between newcomer families and the rest of society.** Several people remarked just how much is expected of some children of immigrants. For instance, if the children speak English at all, they may be expected to translate for parents or grandparents who

are shopping, visiting a doctor, or transacting some business. The children may understand how to navigate through official institutions such as schools much better than their parents do. In addition, they may have duties of caring for younger siblings or helping in a family business. This leads to extremely high expectations for the child and may result in schoolwork suffering from these additional responsibilities.

III. Lack of Communication from Colleges

Students, teachers, and others often say that the children of immigrants are unwilling to put in the extra effort to succeed in school because they have no opportunity to attend college. Given this reasoning, it would appear to be better to drop out and secure a paying job, which brings an immediate pay-off and avoids future frustration. This seems particularly problematic for undocumented students. If they have lived in Indiana for a few years and have graduated from an Indiana high school, they are, in fact, eligible to pay in-state tuition at one of the seven state institutions of higher education. But they are not eligible for most forms of financial aid. In the summer of 2007, Sagamore Institute researchers distributed surveys to students participating in “Project Stepping Stone,” a free week-long college prep course for Hispanic high school students in Indiana created and run by the Indianapolis chapter of the National Society of Hispanic MBAs (NSHMBA).¹³ Several students explained why, until being recruited to participate in Project Stepping Stone, they had not considered going to college.

- **Newcomer students do not know the types of financial aid and scholarships for which they are eligible.** Many students claimed that even if they were legal residents or even U.S. citizens, they were unaware of financial assistance to attend college. Three-fourths of those who answered the survey said they did not know anything about scholarships and fellowships for which they could apply.
- **Newcomer students and their parents are unfamiliar with college admission policies.** With the exceptions of Ivy Tech and Marian College, students in Project Stepping Stone felt that no college had made much of an effort to recruit them. An absence of information is bad; worse, it seems, is a school’s apparent lack of interest in the potential student.
- **Colleges seem unaware of job possibilities for prospective newcomer students.** Latino students are aware that for many professions — from lawyer to architect to beautician — require a social security number for licensure. Colleges that do not know any details about this are seen as a less than compelling place to which to seek admission.

IV. Societal Perceptions and Signals

Finally, several respondents, including some parents, added comments about ways they believed that negative signals from society have been conveyed through the school systems.

- **Lack of cultural understanding.** At least one parent complained that teachers at his child's school damaged their own credibility when they displayed little knowledge of or interest in the country from which the family originated.
- **Limited public transportation.** One parent said that she could not easily attend her daughters' school programs and meetings with teachers because there was no public transportation available. At the same time, she complained that the State of Indiana would not allow her to obtain a driver's license or automobile insurance since she did not possess a Social Security number. She reported that this particular frustration upset her most about not being able to obtain a driver's license.
- **No Latinos in policy positions in schools and few in policy positions in broader society.** For parents, it seems to matter not only that there are few teachers in their children's school who are immigrants, but that there are few role models or figures of authority.
- **Fear of immigration authorities.** In August 2007, the Mexican Consulate in Indianapolis and the Institute of Mexicans Abroad drew several hundred people to a seminar addressing the subject, "What to do in case of a raid ... know your rights."¹⁴ Much of the discussion addressed what to do about children if parents were taken into custody in an immigration raid. It is quite understandable that parents would think this to be an absolute priority. A strong sentiment emerged that if, for some reason, raids seemed imminent, it would be better not to have their children at school.

Section Three

No Easy Solutions in Sight

When Sagamore Institute researchers interviewed those on the frontlines of dealing with the educational challenges arising from immigration in Indiana, they heard little that was unique or original. Similar views are often expressed in conferences, newspaper and magazine articles, and think tank reports. Some of the people who talked to Sagamore researchers said they have been trying to draw attention to these educational problems for years. So why do the problems persist? Why has someone not solved them yet? Without a clear understanding of the obstacles to solutions, any study's effectiveness will be blunted.

It might be tempting to blame some of the “usual suspects” who are often fingered in discussions of why there is so little progress in reforming education or straightening the legal status of more than 12 million undocumented immigrants in the United States. The dysfunctional political climate in Washington, D.C. is certainly a worthy culprit. Others criticize immigrant advocates who often present long lists of changes they want, without a sense of what is politically realistic and without a clear sense of policy priorities.

Part of the reason for persistent problems associated with immigrants in the education system is the nature of education reform rather than immigration reform. David Tyack and Larry Cuban's excellent book, *Tinkering Toward Utopia: A Century of Public School Reform*, explores some manifestations of over-aspiring approaches to school reform in the United States.¹⁵ Again and again, the authors relate, would-be reformers claim to have discovered *the* solution to a crisis-mired educational system. The results have often been frustrating. Some reforms have been blunted by the opposition of teachers who have not been adequately prepared for the changes or who believe they know better how to teach children than unrealistic outsiders. Politics torpedoes some changes; culture causes others to be rejected. Many reforms were adopted, but had their ambitious aspirations defused as the changes were absorbed and digested into the existing system. A surprising number have been blocked by what Tyack and Cuban call “the grammar of schooling,” that is, by the expectations and assumptions that parents have about what education should be. Reforms that buck these expectations too much — even if the reforms are supported by a broad constituency, including parents — are rejected as too risky for the future of their sons and daughters.

This does not mean genuine changes never occur. It means that they tend to be marginal, incremental, tinkering. It means that it may be too much for major changes to schools to be adopted in the near or distant future. It is not only a matter of lacking easy solutions that everyone in the U.S. can agree to implement. Few proposed education reforms can claim uniform support. Furthermore, any discussion of immigration these days can be guaranteed to attract very vocal minorities opposed to anything that is contemplated.

Many of the problems that worry those on the frontlines of educational struggles are much more than inconveniences. They are much more severe than “mere” problems of language instruction or establishing relations between parents and teachers who have little in common. This is why it is important to be clear about the context within which these problems are discussed. Yet, since these issues seem so intractable and daunting and will likely fester if left unaddressed, they need to be brought into the open. Precisely because they seem too large for those on the frontlines to solve, these great challenges must be faced by all of society.

Take, for instance, an anxiety about society that several respondents found troubling: the possibility that some current immigrants will not be able to move up the socio-economic ladder as did earlier groups of immigrants. Like many others, they worry that America is witnessing the emergence of a multigenerational underclass.¹⁶ Instead of the gap between some immigrant groups and the rest of society becoming smaller with the second generation and all but disappearing with the third generation, they worry that the gap will persist and likely widen. Such a persistent and widening gap could erode what are thought of as basic American values of fairness and equal opportunity.

Not surprisingly, those on the frontlines of educational challenges believe that wider access to high quality education will prevent a multigenerational underclass of descendants of immigrants from taking root. As many of our respondents observed, not providing widespread access to high quality education is more than unfair; it represents a waste for society as a whole since the talents and potential of a large portion of those who live in the U.S. are left undeveloped and unrealized.

Left unspoken by those we interviewed was a political anxiety about this possible multigenerational underclass. Coming to the U.S. for work is one of the most effective anti-poverty programs in the world since it usually results in incomes several times larger than what was available in the immigrant’s home country. The possible political problem is that the children of immigrants measure their opportunities and the quality of their life not by their parents’ original home but instead by what they see around them in their parents’ new home. They see their schoolmates and friends take advantage of higher educational opportunities that seem to be — and often are in reality — closed to them. This seems like a potent recipe for frustration and resentment and possibly worse. For a flavor, we need only look across the Atlantic at the periodic outbursts of anger by immigrants and their descendants.

Compounding this problem is the chance that this persistent underclass will contribute to a broader fragmentation of American society. Lacking opportunities to acquire the skills and education needed for better jobs, second and third generation children of immigrants may find themselves in, or consign themselves to, linguistic, residential, and occupational enclaves ever more distant from other social groups. Ever since Alexis de Tocqueville’s observations of America in the early 19th century, social scientists have been aware that social stability is most threatened by groups whose rising expectations are frustrated, and who believe those around them benefit from privileges unjustly received. Our interviewees seemed to avoid talking about the political risks of denying educational

opportunities to the children of immigrants. They preferred to speak in a language of fairness and of loss to society and economy if human potential is wasted.¹⁷ Perhaps they assume it would be counter-productive to draw attention to risks posed by the rapidly increasing population of immigrants in Indiana and the country.

By contrast, opponents of legal and illegal immigration would like nothing better than to discuss the political threats that newcomers pose to the country. This is one of the claims most frequently made by those who fear immigration will lead to a “clash of cultures” in the country.¹⁸ Newcomers, they say, are already causing an erosion of important American cultural and political values, and it will only get worse unless restrictions on immigration are imposed. So far in recent years, anti-immigrant platforms have not really been decisive issues in Indiana politics. Former Congressman John Hostetler, representing Indiana’s 8th Congressional District and former chair of the House Subcommittee on Immigration, Border Security and Claims, was perhaps best known nationally for his hard line stance on illegal immigration, which may have contributed to his defeat for reelection in 2006. Indiana Governor Mitch Daniels, Mayor Bart Peterson of Indianapolis, and the mayors of other large cities in Indiana have not sought to mobilize anti-immigrant fears for political gain. In most towns around the Hoosier state, government officials’ attitudes toward the wave of immigrants flowing into their communities seems to range between nervously accepting to cautiously welcoming.

But official attitudes could change quickly if harsher stances prove popular with voters and if local economies can weather the dislocations associated with punishing undocumented immigrants. Many in Indiana and around the nation are watching with great interest the approach that the city of Frankfort, Indiana, has adopted in trying to drive out unauthorized immigrants who live and work there.¹⁹ A recent study of local efforts around the country to crack down on undocumented immigrants revealed that most live in communities that have percentages of immigrants far below national averages, but that have experienced large increases in numbers in recent years.²⁰ This, of course, characterizes much of small town and rural Indiana.

The education professionals, immigrant advocates, and service providers interviewed for this study sometimes expressed concern that efforts to address the challenges they see could be stymied by the fiscal bind facing local, state, and national governments. Public officials are being expected to provide more services at the same time that taxpayers are becoming more unhappy. Indiana, for instance, experienced a burst of taxpayer rage in 2004 and 2007 when taxes for many homeowners and others were increased suddenly. This fiscal crunch can become a crisis if taxpayers reject the legitimacy of governments that they feel are taxing exorbitantly while performing ineffectively. Such a crisis could turn into a vicious cycle if the most productive individuals and most profitable businesses leave for what they believe are less onerous business environments. Tax bases would shrink even more, which would further limit the abilities of government to meet its obligations.

Despite the grumbling by unhappy taxpayers, much of Indiana has not reached this vicious cycle of worsening fiscal crisis, and probably will not. As the first Working

Paper of this project discussed, Central Indiana and other high growth communities around the state are likely to remain economically vibrant well into the future. Innovative research centers, business-friendly governments, and state finances at the “Crossroads of America” are unlikely to melt down.

But the current fiscal crunch does constrict new initiatives that address the educational challenges that the rapidly growing number of immigrant children poses for Indiana schools. When those children receive attention, said some of those with whom we talked, even programs that achieve good results at low cost become targets of critics. This problem becomes particularly acute when the programs most urgently needed to close achievement gaps must target groups of students that symbolize everything against which opponents of immigration most fiercely oppose: the children of poorly educated or undocumented parents and the strain that they put on taxpayers.

Even if policymakers in Washington, D.C. enacted new comprehensive immigration reform legislation, these educational challenges at the local level will remain. Some might even worsen. For instance, many undocumented immigrants from Mexico and other Latin American countries remain in Indiana only because it would be difficult and perhaps impossible to return to their jobs and families in the U.S. if they returned home temporarily as proposed by some immigration reform legislation. Regularizing a guest worker program for these temporary migrants would allow them to easily move from their homes to Indiana, which, in turn, could mean that their children’s school attendance becomes even less stable.

Of course, given the ongoing debates in the U.S. Congress, it is unlikely that comprehensive immigration reform will be passed in Washington, D.C. for years to come, so this type of fear remains moot.

Given the constraints on new government programs or more aggressive policies to meet the needs of the children of immigrants — and particularly those most in need of greater attention — where can we look for answers? Consider a few promising programs and developments.

- Project Stepping Stone, the program of mentoring high school students initiated by the National Society of Hispanic MBAs (NSHMBA) in Indianapolis, provides an important example of businesspeople who voluntarily take responsibility for a social need that they feel is not being adequately addressed by the formal education system.
- Goshen College has used a grant from the Lilly Endowment to establish a Center for Intercultural Teaching and Learning that will carry out hands-on research into how a small college can best serve the needs of the rapidly growing immigrant population of its community.
- Almost every community has many churches, both Catholic and evangelical, that are trying to provide English language tutoring to adult immigrants so that parents can be part of their children’s education. Many churches are even able to

convince their congregants who employ newcomers to provide paid time off from work to learn English.

- Amy Peterson, wife of Indianapolis mayor Bart Peterson, has established a nongovernmental Immigrant Welcome Center in Marion County that seeks to mobilize dozens of “natural helpers,” volunteers who will assist newcomers in navigating formal health, legal, and educational systems.
- Indiana has recently emerged as the leading destination for refugees from Burma. A large number of ethnic Chinese from Burma have settled in South Indianapolis where the sudden appearance of their children baffled the schools. Exodus Refugee Immigration, a private donor-supported service, provides some funding to hire a Chinese-speaking Burmese social worker who has been able to smooth the adaptation of newcomers from Burma as well as other immigrant children in the schools.

These may seem modest efforts to address problems that are puzzling policymakers in Washington, D.C. and across the nation, but considered together, they are much more significant. Taken in combination with hundreds of similar projects across Indiana, the potential of these initiatives to foster change is noteworthy indeed. They are part of what an important study calls the “educational ecology” of Indiana: the “web of complex, cross-cutting activities and contexts through which individuals and organizations attempt to ‘teach’ newcomers about living in Indiana, even as they ‘learn’ to adapt to newcomers’ needs.”²¹ Whether the educational ecology proves sustainable is one of the most important questions for policymakers and community leaders in the coming years.

Section Four

Teaching Trust: An Infrastructure for Indiana's Educational Infrastructure

Much of the discussion in the previous sections presupposed a distinction between a formal education system and an informal space that might be characterized by “3 Fs” – family, faith, and friends. The formal system does not necessarily mean public or government run, although the government does operate most of the formal education system in Indiana and the rest of the nation. The formal system is made up of rules and regulations defined and enforced by the government. By contrast, the informal networks within which immigrants live and operate not only are separate from the formal system, but they are in some ways opposed to the formal. This is not only so for undocumented immigrants, whose status depends on maintaining a distant relation to formal systems in general. For many immigrants who see an erosion of their values and culture, the formal system can seem like a threat.

On the other hand, the teachers and school administrators in the formal system complain that tradition-minded parents are unable or unwilling to help their children integrate or assimilate in schools.

The rules and regulations defining the formal system can be bases of intersection with immigrant parents and children. Schools aggressively resist inquiring into the immigration status of their students and students' parents. In doing so, they comply with U.S. Supreme Court rulings and statutes. However, they also assure undocumented parents that it is safe to send their children to schools run by a government that is on some level dedicated to disrupting the lives of undocumented immigrants.

Playing a mediating role between formal system and informal networks is a semi-formal social space that might be called “civic/community coalitions.” Here we find the dense web of nonprofit groups, ethnic associations, civic-minded businesses, service clubs, and many other types of organizations. Even the word “organization” may be too formal for the components of these civic/community coalitions.

These coalitions are the most interesting part of Indiana's educational ecology discussed in “Integrating Indiana's Latino Newcomers: A Study of State and Community Responses to the New Immigration,”²² a working paper prepared by the Indiana University Center for Education and Society. The authors of the paper examined the differences between two Indiana cities, their exact identities disguised by the fictional names “Barrytown” and “Morningside”. Both communities sought in very different ways to anticipate and address challenges associated with a rising tide of Latino immigrants. In “Barrytown” civic-minded corporate and philanthropic elites took the lead in defining the agenda for integrating immigrants. In the university town of “Morningside,” often fractious and competitive advocates and volunteers took the lead.

In the end, the well-intentioned members of the civic/community coalitions in both communities were frustrated and vexed in their efforts to integrate newcomers. Overworked volunteers in “Morningside,” suffering from “advocate fatigue,” were not replaced when they moved to other jobs. Community groups and immigrants in “Barrytown” chafed at the direction of the corporate philanthropists and their goals of “self-sufficiency.” Nonprofit groups in both communities scrambled desperately for funds. Communication with school corporations frequently broke down.

Yet, anyone who visits the real Indiana communities on which “Barrytown” and “Morningside” are based can not help but admire all that community groups aspire to achieve and all that they have achieved.

The authors of the study argued that, in order to remove the pressing burden on these civic/community coalitions, governments from the state to local level must assume a more active leadership role. They are surely correct; but whether or not this level of leadership will be forthcoming in the future remains to be seen.

This study and the third Working Paper that will follow are perhaps less optimistic about the ability of government officials to think their way through the fiscal crisis they are experiencing, or their willingness to support aggressively and openly the integration of undocumented immigrants in spite of the loud criticism of opponents of all “illegals.” While we are waiting for elected officials and bureaucrats to be more receptive to creative solutions to the problem, Indiana should focus its efforts on strengthening the capacity of civic/community coalitions in order to meet the varied needs of newcomers to the state as well as the special needs of communities that must devise new ways of accommodating individuals and families and faiths from around the world.

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- ⁷ Indiana Department of Education
- ⁸ Interview with Alberto Hernandez, May 10, 2007.
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