Minnesota State Constitution

Article XIII; Sec. 1: "Uniform system of public schools – The stability of a republican form of government depending mainly upon the intelligence of the people, it is the duty of the legislature to establish a general and uniform system of public schools. The legislature shall make such provisions by taxation or otherwise as will secure a thorough and efficient system of public schools throughout the state."

Our world and state and even our homes are, always have been, and will continue to be places of constant change. Among the many current and significant changes for public education is the shifting demographics in our schools. The role of school leaders is to apolitically provide an equitable school system within which all students have the opportunity to thrive.

The goal of this article is two-fold; first, to provide accurate—albeit limited—data about immigration; and second, to examine how educational leaders can foster the academic and social success of all students.

MODERN HISTORY

October 2015 marks the 50th anniversary of the seminal Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 (the Hart-Celler Act) which was widely supported by both Democrats and Republicans in Congress. The act ushered in far-reaching changes “that continue to undergird the current immigration system, and set in motion powerful demographic forces that are still shaping the United States today and will in the decades ahead.” One of the main components of the Hart-Celler Act aimed to abolish the national-origins quota. The Act eliminated national origin, race, and ancestry as basis for immigration.¹

The Hart-Celler Act marked a change from past U.S. policy which had discriminated against non-northern Europeans. In removing racial and national barriers, the Hart-Celler Act significantly altered the demographic mix in the U.S.

FACTS

- The foreign-born population in the United States has risen from 9.6 million in 1965 to a record high of 45 million in 2015.¹
- Working-class, immigrant-headed households with incomes less than 20 percent of the federal poverty line rely less on public benefits and social services than comparable U.S-born households.¹
- Fewer than 1 in 5 immigrants live in poverty. In 2015, the poverty rate for immigrants was 17.3%, compared with 14.3 for the U.S.-born population.¹
- More Mexican immigrants are returning home than are arriving in the United States. From 2009 to 2014, one million immigrants returned to Mexico while 870,000 arrived in the United States. This decline can be attributed to a drop of unauthorized Mexican immigrants, which peaked in 2007 at 6.9 million.²
More than one in four adult immigrants had a college degree or more education in 2015, while almost the same share had less than a high school diploma.\(^3\)

Approximately 43.3 million foreign-born people live in the United States.\(^4\)

Unauthorized immigrants pay an estimated $11.7 billion a year in state and local taxes.\(^4\)

The English learner (EL) population has increased 300 percent in the state of Minnesota over the past 20 years.\(^5\)

Immigrants are less likely to commit crimes or be incarcerated than the U.S.-born population.\(^6\)

While the Latinx and Asian American and Pacific Islander communities grew at the same rate during the 2000s, the Asian American and Pacific Islander community grew by a larger share from 2010 to 2015.\(^7\)

Hispanic high school dropout rates have dropped 20%. High school graduation rates have increased 26%. The college enrollment rate gap between white and Hispanic students has narrowed from 18 percentage points to 8 percentage points; The number of bachelor’s degrees earned by Hispanic students has more than doubled.\(^8\)

By 2065, just 46% of the U.S. population will be white, the Hispanic share will rise to 24%, Asians will comprise 14%—and the country will be home to 78 million foreign born individuals, according to Pew projections.\(^9\)

According to the U.S. Supreme Court’s Plyler v. Doe decision, all students—regardless of immigration status—have the right to a public education in K-12 schools. Further, according to the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) schools have no legal obligation to turn over information about students or their families to federal immigration officers without a warrant, subpoena or court order.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

There are however, additional challenges inherent in providing equitable public education opportunities to an increasingly diverse population. Language and/or cultural barriers as well as the legal status of students and families may interfere with students’ ability to learn and thrive in a public school. All students, regardless of race, religion, gender, sexual preference, or ethnicity, require healthy family and peer support to thrive.

- Remove barriers that would cause parents to hesitate enrolling their children, such as asking for social security numbers on enrollment forms or requiring documents to prove age or residence within the district.
- Increase and improve family, school, student partnerships.
- Provide funding and support to educators, school leaders, and counselors in schools that serve immigrant and non-immigrant students. Ninety percent of administrators “reported observing emotional and behavioral problems among immigrant students” who fear deportation of their parents or family members or who may have already experienced a family member’s deportation. Two-thirds of administrator respondents also said there was fear and concern from classmates who are not targets of enforcement who fear for their friends.
- Encourage classroom educators to provide opportunities for all students to share their life story with the class to improve cross-cultural interest, appreciation, and empathy.
- Adhere to The Learning English for Academic Proficiency and Success (LEAPS) Act passed in 2014 which added an increased emphasis on English learner support. The LEAPS Act requires educators to be skilled in developing the English language proficiency of their English learners. It emphasizes bilingualism and multilingualism as an asset and gives a definition for cultural competence and cultural competency for statewide accountability purposes.
• Provide cohort classes to help immigrant parents/guardians understand their child’s
cultural and academic experience as well as to learn the school’s expectations. The class
can also help families assimilate to the degree they choose.

“Immigration has long supported the growth and dynamism of the U.S. economy. Immigrants
and refugees are entrepreneurs, job creators, taxpayers, and consumers. They add trillions of
dollars to the U.S. gross domestic product, or GDP, and their economic importance will only
increase in the coming decades as America’s largest generation—the baby boomers—retires
en masse, spurring labor demand and placing an unprecedented burden on the social safety
net.”

1 Migration Policy Institute, 2015, Fifty Years On, the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act Continues to Reshape the United States, Muzaffar Chishti, Director of MPI’s office, New York University School of Law. Faye Hipsman, Policy Analyst and California Program Coordinator, MPI's U.S., Immigration Policy Program. Isabel Ball, Intern, MPI's Regional Migration Study Group and U.S. Immigration Policy Program.
4 Center for American Progress, Facts on Immigration Today 2017 Edition
5 Minnesota Department of Education LEAPS Act, 2014
6 Michelangelo Landgrave and Alex Nowrasteh, “Criminal Immigrants: Their Numbers, Demographics, and Countries of Origin.” (Washington: Cato Institute, 2017)
9 PEW Research Center, PEW Hispanic trends study, September 29, 2017

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