

School Reform: The Demographic Imperative and Challenge

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Over the course of the past three decades, education reform has evolved alongside rapid, immigration driven demographic change. In 1970 only 6 percent of students in U.S. schools were the children of immigrants. Today one in five students has immigrant parents. This rapid demographic transformation holds implications for the implementation, financing and success of standards based school reform and the 2002 No Child Left Behind Law.

We argue that one quiet revolution in federal education over the course of the past fifteen years has been towards a more inclusive set of policies regarding immigrants and limited English proficient (LEP) students. This movement toward inclusion can be traced in the successive reauthorizations of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in 1988, 1994 and 2002. The ESEA is the largest federal program of support for education in general, and for disadvantaged students in particular. These reauthorizations have gone beyond broadening the services extended to LEP children to holding the schools that they attend accountable for their performance.

In this chapter we document the demographic trends from 1970 to 2002 that serve as the context for these policy changes. A distinguishing characteristic of this profile is that it derives from two national data sources: the U.S. Census and the U.S. Department of Education's Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) (NCES 2003). Each periodically interviews large, nationally representative samples of respondents. Census data are collected with uniform procedures using a standardized definition of English language ability and limited English proficiency. Schools' data use definitions that can vary by

state, district and even school. Thus unlike other analyses of immigrant and LEP children in schools our approach presents consistent measures across time and states.¹

The Policy Context: Education Reform

The Congress first required states to implement comprehensive accountability standards for schools receiving federal funds in the 1994 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). The law marked a departure by holding schools to high standards for all children, including disadvantaged students for whom expectations— and standards—had historically been lower. In addition, new content standards, student performance assessments, teacher professional development and the other elements of the educational system were to be aligned with one another.

The 2001 No Child Left behind Act (NCLBA) strengthens the accountability provisions in the 1994 law. The NCLBA mandates, among other things, that state-devised reading and mathematics assessments be given each year in grades 3 – 8 and at least once in high school; a “highly qualified” teacher in every classroom; greater accountability for the performance of all students in all schools; and a 12-year timeframe for states to get all students to academic proficiency (Exhibit 1). Of particular note is the fact that the NCLBA requires that results on state tests be disaggregated and reported by student subgroups, including economically disadvantaged students, students in major race and ethnic groups, students with disabilities and, most importantly, LEP students.

¹ Census and schools-based data differ in other important ways. LEP status is defined by the Census on the basis of a child’s ability to *speak* English; schools’ data take a “whole child” approach and are based on the student’s ability to read and write English, as well as speak and understand oral English. The Census’ assignment of LEP status is based on reports of parents or whoever fills out the Census form. Schools’ assignment is more often done by teachers and other professionals. Census data are collected using sampling strategies; schools data are based on direct counts and tend to be more complete.

Schools must meet adequate yearly progress (AYP) standards set by the state for passing rates on standardized tests for each of these groups of students. AYP standards increase each year; in other words, states continually “raise the bar” on student achievement during the 12 years of NCLBA implementation. Schools that do not meet AYP targets for two years or more in a row are labeled “in need of improvement” and are subject to a set of interventions and sanctions that increase in intensity with the number of years the school misses the targets. Key interventions and sanctions include providing technical assistance to improve performance; permitting children to transfer from failing schools; requiring that they receive supplemental services; and, at higher levels of intensity, school restructuring and the threat of closing and complete reorganization (Committee on Education and the Workforce 2001).

The performance incentives and sanctions for non-compliance in the NCLBA offer great promise for LEP students and children of immigrants and the schools they attend. In theory, higher standards, greater expectations, and increased local accountability should drive increased resources to the most disadvantaged, disproportionately raising their achievement levels. Moreover, early results indicate that the advent of standards may hold promise for disadvantaged students generally (Grismer and Flanagan 1998). Further, most children of immigrants fit into one or more of the NCLBA designated-groups (major race and ethnic groups, economically disadvantaged, LEP) whose performance will be key to schools’ success.

Exhibit 1: Major Provisions of the No Child Left Behind Act

The No Child Left Behind Act introduces several far-reaching education reforms at a time of rapid, immigration-driven demographic change. Key policy shifts include:

- Requiring schools, districts and states to test all students (including LEP students) annually in math and reading by 2005-06, and science by 2007-08.
 - Requiring that tests be aligned with state standards, with results disaggregated by student subgroups, including economically disadvantaged students, students in major race and ethnic groups, students with disabilities, and limited English proficient students.
 - Requiring that states establish adequate yearly progress (AYP) goals for student performance—goals that increase until 2013-14, when 100 percent of students reach designated proficiency levels.
 - Imposing a graduated set of penalties and sanctions on schools that fail to make AYP across each group for two consecutive years. Sanctions include allowing parents in schools determined to be in need of improvement to transfer to another school and to receive special supplemental services such as tutoring or remediation.
 - Mandating that every new elementary school teacher have a BA degree and pass tests in reading, writing, mathematics and other basic elementary subjects. Experienced elementary school teachers must demonstrate their competency on standardized assessments for all subjects that they teach.
 - Increasing the credentials that paraprofessionals working in the classroom must obtain.
 - Expanding overall funding for educating disadvantaged students under Title I and targeting spending on the poorest districts. Federal funding has also been increased for providing language instruction to LEP students under Title III, with funding for language programs changed from a discretionary to a formula-based grant program driven in large part by the distribution of LEP students by state.
 - Requiring policies to encourage and sustain active parental involvement in choices regarding students' programs.
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Issues and Challenges. But the convergence of school reform and demographic change also raises a number of challenges. Do schools have the capacity to meet the needs of LEP students and children of immigrants? Does the challenge of standards' implementation drive schools to focus resources and attention elsewhere and to exclude LEP students and children of immigrants from accountability systems? Do reforms lead to unintended outcomes: most notably, more students held back in grade, and a weakening of schools through school choice or mandated restructuring?

Capacity constraints. At a structural level, standards-based reforms and high-stakes testing may be based on assumptions that often do not hold for many LEPs and children of immigrants. One is that the basic elements for academic success (i.e., educators with appropriate resources and know-how) already exist in the classroom. A second is that given the right incentives, students are ready to perform at the desired performance level (Ruiz De Velasco and Fix 2002). These assumptions about institutional capacity may not hold for many schools with large numbers of LEP students and children of immigrants, for several reasons:

- a lack of reliable assessments in languages other than English;
- shortages of teachers trained to teach LEP students in languages other than English;
- limited professional knowledge about effective instructional approaches for developing academic English literacy;
- the exclusion of ESL/bilingual teachers from school-wide curriculum planning and standards development;

- limited professional development for mainstream content area teachers to help them incorporate English language development into their math, science or history classes; and
- limited planning time that permits language acquisition and mainstream teachers to plan together (Ruiz De Velasco, Fix and Clewell 2001).

Unintended effects. Beyond these organizational barriers, sanctions built into new accountability regimes may have perverse, unintended effects on hard to serve student populations. First, to avoid accountability-driven sanctions, schools and districts may try to shape the pool of tested students in ways that exclude the lowest performing students. (LEP students, for example, may be held back in order to avoid testing them.)

Second, new incentives could also lead teachers in schools that are attempting to achieve a designated pass rate to focus their resources on students in the middle instead of those at the bottom of the achievement ladder (Goldhaber 2002). Third, schools with high shares of LEP students and children of immigrants could be identified as in need of improvement (many have already been), triggering the public school choice mandate in the NCLBA. School choice could lead many non-LEP, non-immigrant students to transfer, stranding many poorer-performing and LEP students in schools that remain in need of improvement.

Parents' limited English skills. The NCLBA also expands schools responsibilities to communicate with parents and gives parents in failing schools new choices and options. However, as we document here, in many cases, the ability of immigrant parents to understand test results, secure supplemental services, or exercise school choice options will be reduced by their limited English proficiency. We find, for

example, that four out of five LEP students in K – 12 live in families where parents are LEP as well.

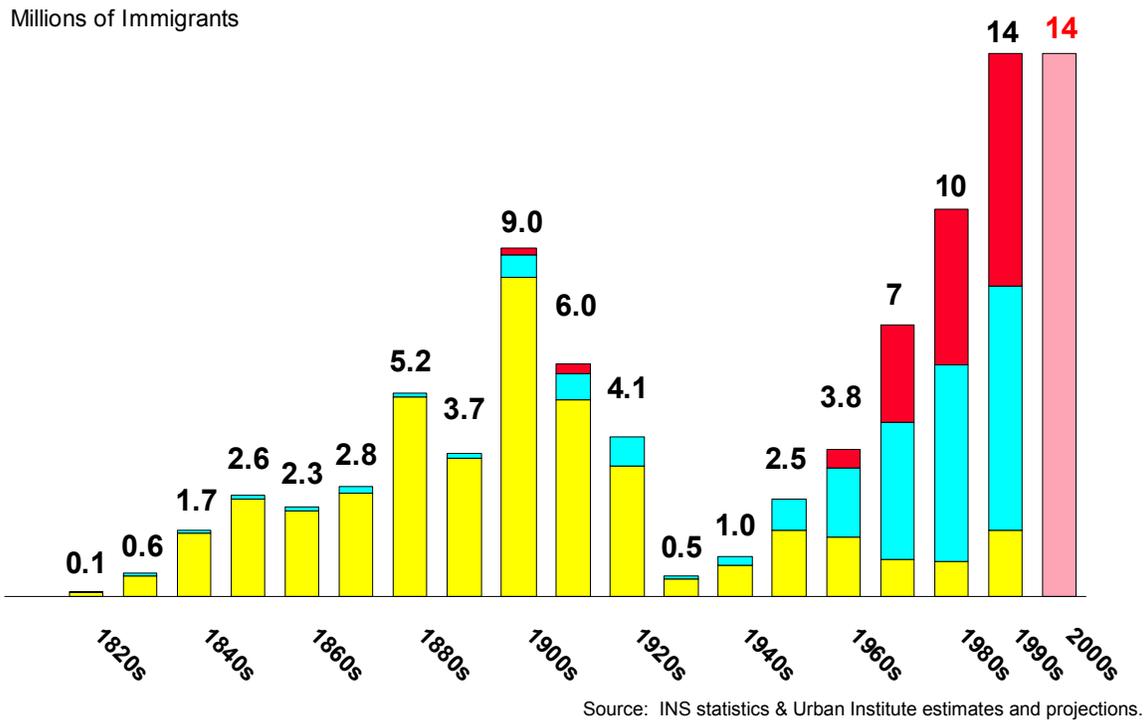
With this as context, we turn now to a discussion of the immigration-led demographic trends that converge with these policy developments.

General Immigration Trends

High Sustained Immigration Flows Since 1970.

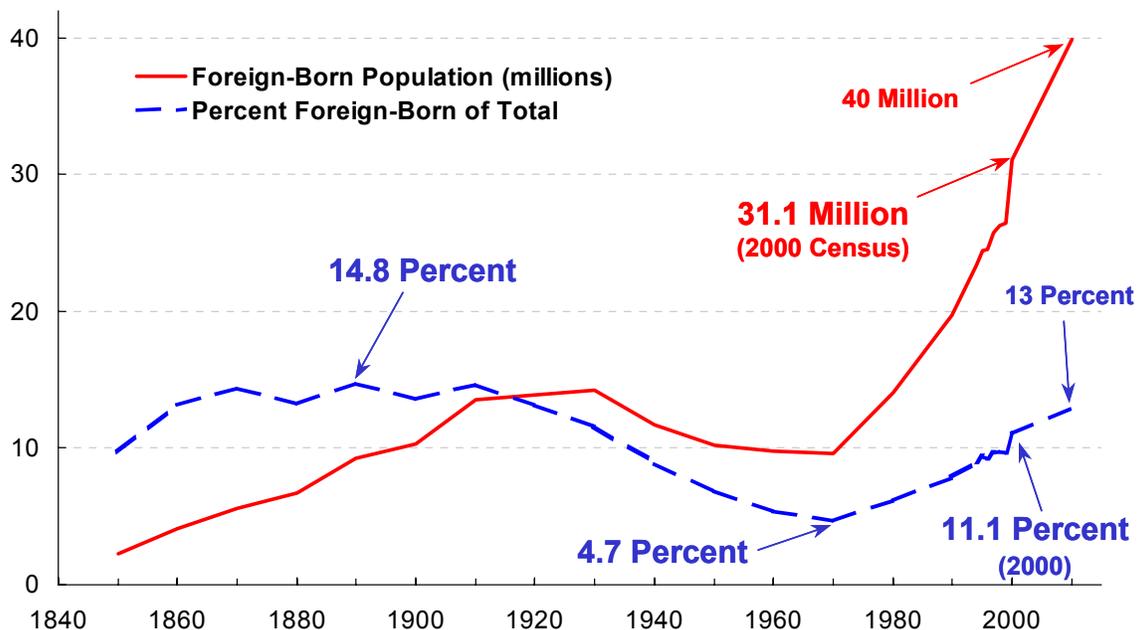
Four trends in immigration over recent decades are central to understanding immigration's impacts on U.S. schools. The first is high, steady flows. During the 1980s and 1990s roughly 24 million immigrants entered the U.S. with flows in each decade exceeding any prior decade in U.S. history (**Figure 1**). With more than a million immigrants entering each year, the foreign born population tripled from 10 million in 1970 to 32.5 million in 2002. If the past is a guide to the demographic future we estimate that the foreign born population will reach 40 million by 2010.

Figure 1. Current In-Flows are Very High



As a result of high flows the share of the population that is foreign born rose from 4.7 percent in 1970 (an historic low) to 11 percent in 2000 (**Figure 2**). By the year 2010 the immigrant population will make up 13 percent of the total population – a share that still falls below the high of 15 percent that occurred in the 1880s.

Figure 2. Immigrant Numbers at Peak – Percentage is Not



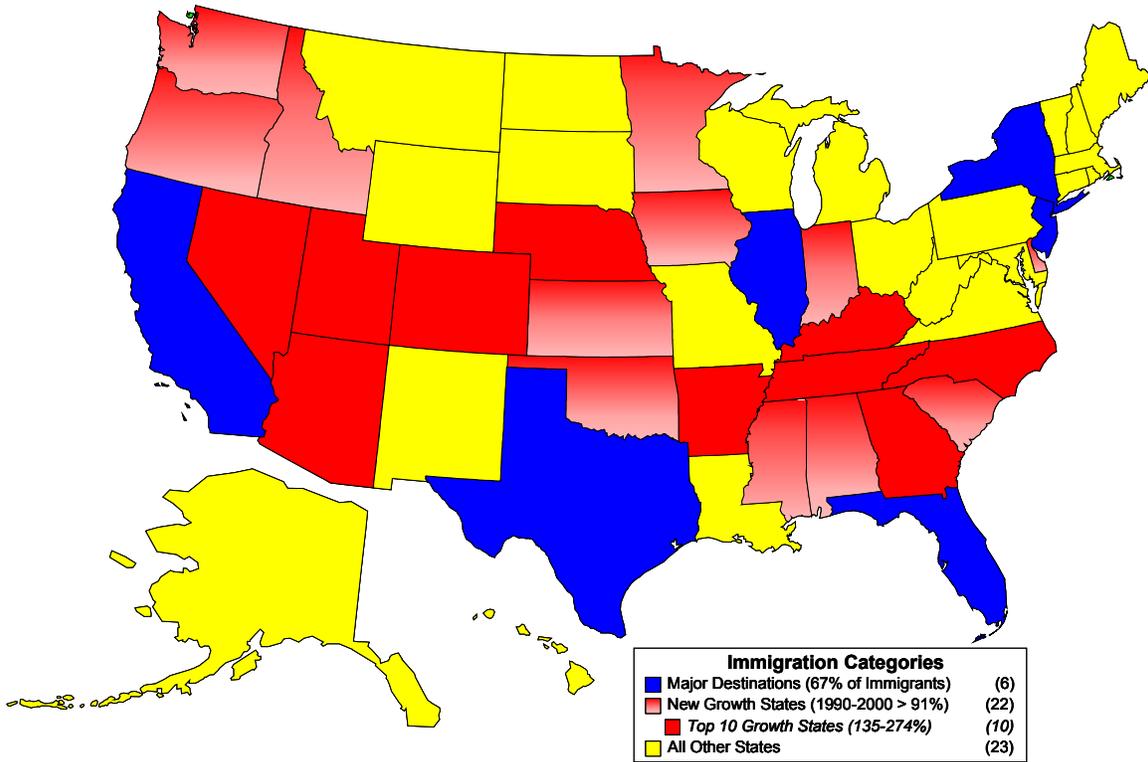
Dispersal to Non-Traditional Receiving Communities.

A second broad demographic trend with far reaching implications for schools and for the impacts of standards based school reform is a rapid dispersal of the immigrant population during the 1990s beyond the six major destination states to nontraditional receiving communities – many of which had not settled substantial numbers of new immigrants for almost a century.

Prior to 1995 the six major destination states (CA, NY, TX, FL, IL and NJ) (Figure 3) had accounted for three quarters of the nation’s immigrant population for several decades. That share declined slightly to two thirds by the late 1990s. Especially rapid growth was seen to the 22 “new growth” states, most of which are located in Rocky Mountain region the Midwest and the Southeast. The immigrant population in

these states grew three times faster than rate of immigration growth for the nation as a whole during the 1990s.

Figure 3. New Immigration Growth Centers



This trend is notable for two principal reasons. In the first place, the immigrant population that is settling in the new growth states is more recently arrived than the population in the traditional receiving states. This means that it is younger, is more likely to have limited English skills, to earn lower incomes and to be undocumented. All are traits that complicate the delivery of instructional services to children within those families.

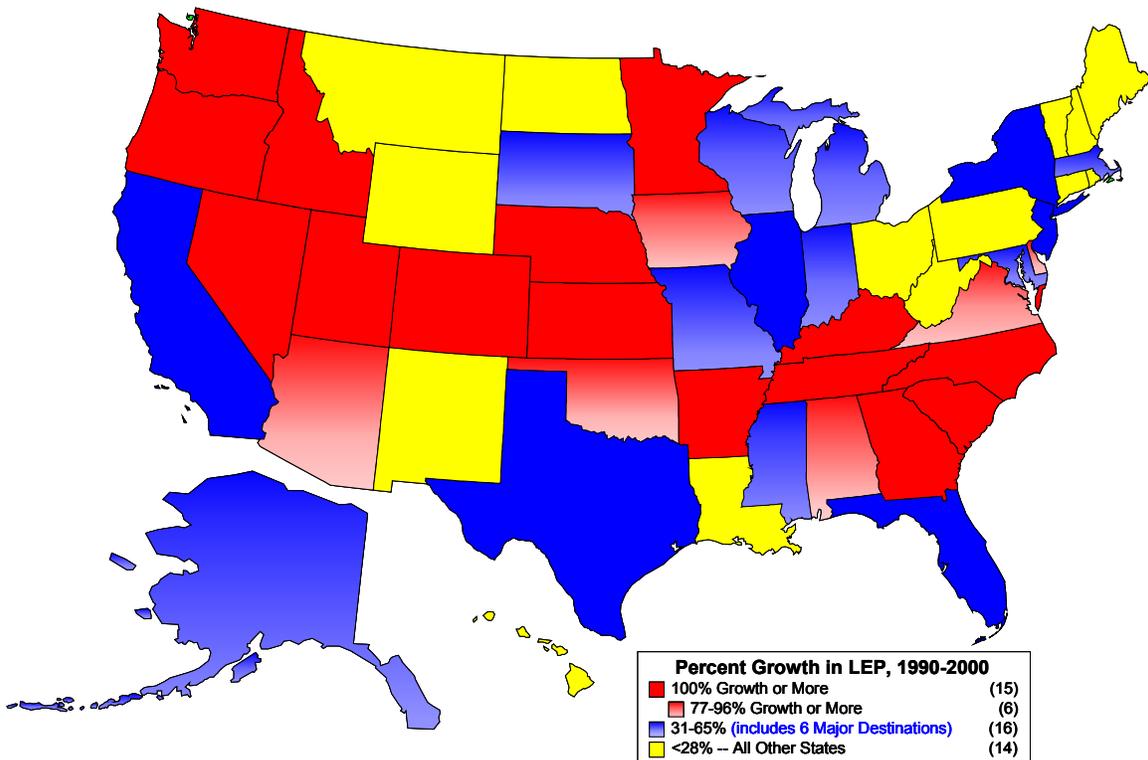
Second, it is generally the case that schools and other institutions in these new settlement states are less likely to have the infrastructure in place that can meet the needs

of the immigrant and LEP students such as networks for hiring bilingual teachers, or established curricula or assessment instruments.

Growth in the Limited English Population.

Like the immigrant population overall, there was both substantial growth in the limited English proficient (LEP) population between 1990 and 2000 and a dispersal away from the traditional states (**Figure 4**). Nationwide, the LEP population grew by 52 percent from 14.0 to 21.3 million during the decade. Not surprisingly the states with the fastest growing LEP populations coincide with those with the fastest growing immigrant populations.

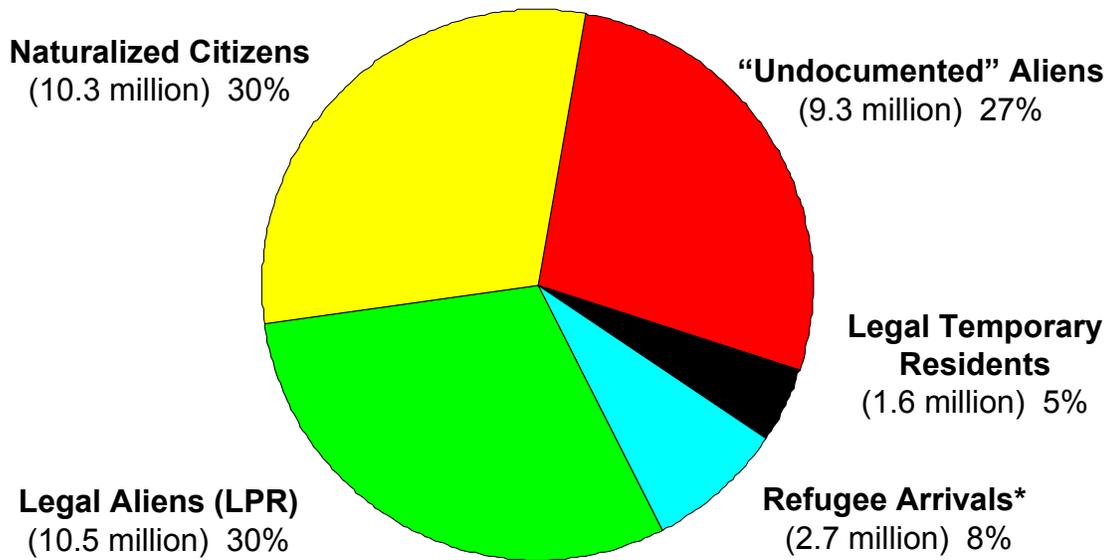
Figure 4. Growth in Limited English Population



Rise in Undocumented Immigration.

A fourth trend is the rising number of undocumented immigrants and the share they represent of all immigrants. Between 1990 and 2002 the undocumented population tripled from 3 to 9.3 million persons and the share the undocumented represent of all immigrants doubles from 13 to 27 percent (**Figure 5**). Census data indicate that the flow of the undocumented has continued, if at somewhat diminished levels, following September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. While roughly three quarters of children with an undocumented parent are themselves citizens, we estimate that that there are 1.4 million undocumented children under 18 in the U.S.; 1.1 million of school age.

Figure 5. Legal Status of Immigrants



34.5 Million Foreign-Born in 2002

(Based on March 2002 CPS & Author's Estimates)

* Entered 1980 or later.
Includes 1 million naturalized.

The institutional challenges posed by increased undocumented immigration have been deepened by recent legislation that makes it more difficult for the undocumented to

convert to legal immigrant status.² Thus, while being undocumented may have once been, in effect, a transitional status, it has become more permanent, with potentially far-reaching implications for school engagement and social mobility.

Legislation has been proposed that would extend legal status to undocumented students who graduate from high schools after having been in the U.S. for at least five years.³ By granting legal status the legislation would, by extension, authorize these students to qualify for in-state tuition at post secondary institutions. We estimate that 65,000 undocumented students graduate from U.S. high schools annually who have lived in the United States for 5 years or more.

Demographic Trends among Children of Immigrants K - 12

With these general demographic trends as background we turn to trends among children of immigrants enrolled in U.S. schools. As the following profile indicates, a key defining feature of the nation's immigrant student population is its diversity: diversity in terms of generation, legal status, language ability, grade at entry, time in the U.S., and relative linguistic isolation both within the school and the home.

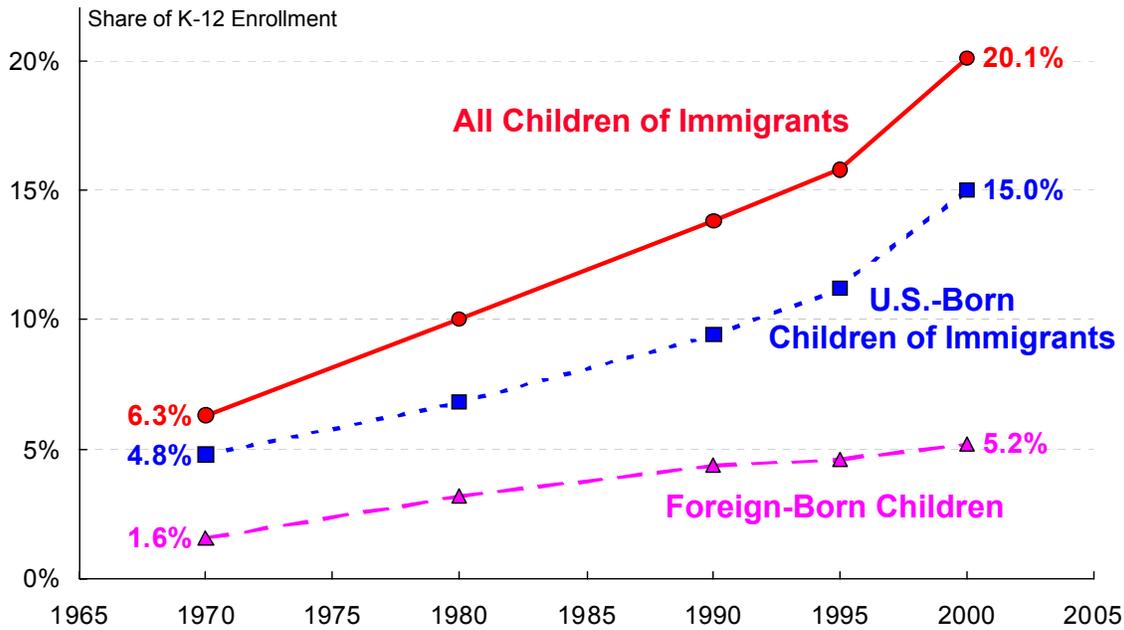
Rising Share of K- 12 Population.

Just as immigrants are a rising share of the total population, the children of immigrants – both foreign and U.S. born – are a rising share of the nation's K-12 population. Between 1970 and 2000 children of immigrants tripled from 6 to 20 percent **Figure 6**). By the year 2015, children of immigrants will compose 30 percent of the nation's school population.

² The Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act, PL 104-208 (1996).

³ The Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors Act, S. 1545, July 31, 2003.

Figure 6. Immigrant Children are a Rising Share of Students (1 in 5)



Source: Van Hook & Fix (2000); Urban Institute tabulations from C2SS PUMS. Excludes Puerto Ricans.

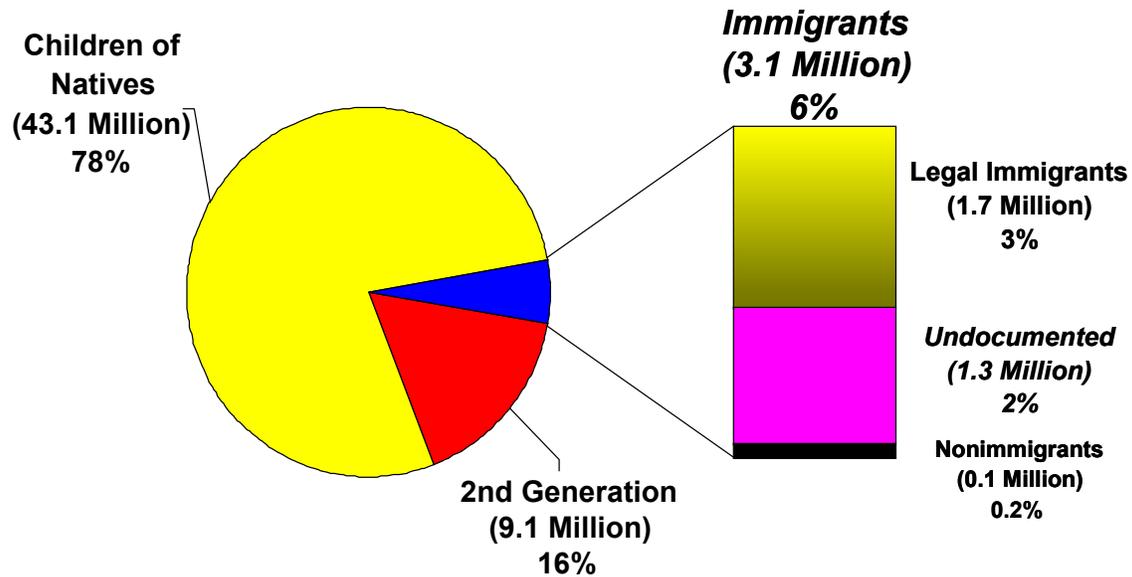
Distribution of Children of Immigrants by Generation, Legal Status.

It is important to distinguish between these children by nativity. Three out of four children of immigrants are U.S. born members of the *second generation* and are, hence, citizens. These citizen children are eligible for all public benefits on the same terms as citizen children born to natives. One in four children of immigrants is foreign born or members of the *first generation*. These immigrant children represent 5 percent of the total U.S. student population. The foreign-born children of immigrants are more likely to have limited English skills, to be low income, and to be ineligible for public benefits than the U.S.-born children of immigrants.

In terms of absolute numbers, there were 10.5 million children of immigrants in U.S. schools in 2000 according to the Census; 2.7 million were foreign born (**Figure 7**). We estimate that 60 percent of foreign-born students were legal immigrants, forty percent

were undocumented, representing 2 and 3 percent respectively of the nation's total K-12 enrollment.

Figure 7. 20% of School Kids are Children of Immigrants



55 Million Children Enrolled in Grades K-12
 (March 2002 CPS & Urban Institute Estimates)

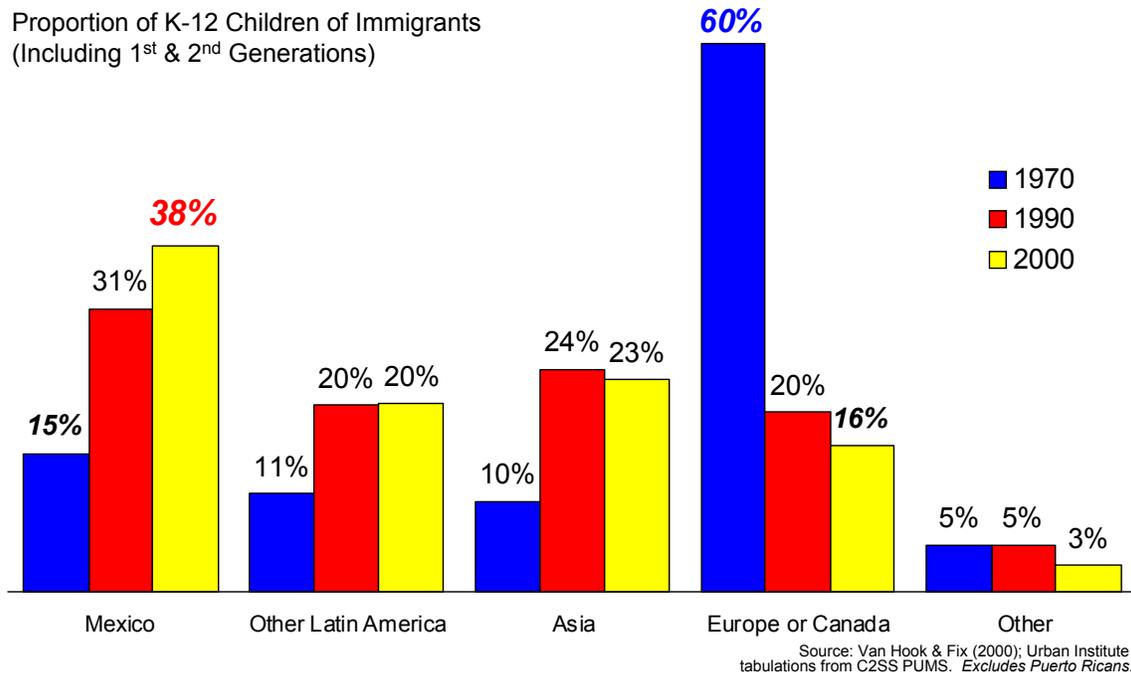
Source: Urban Institute tabulations, Puerto Rican-born in 1st generation.

Changing National Origins.

One of the most frequently noted developments in immigration over the past generation has been the shift in the national origins of the nation's immigrants from Europe and Canada to Mexico, Latin America and Asia. This shift can be seen among the children of immigrants enrolled in school as well (**Figure 8**). In 1970 children of immigrants were far less diverse than the student population is today, with children of Europeans and Canadians composing 60 percent of the immigrant child population. By 2000 that share had declined to 16 percent with the population more evenly divided between children of Mexican, Latin American, Asian and European/Canadian origins. Mexican children of immigrants grew fastest over this period, rising from 15 percent of

all children of immigrants in 1970 to 38 percent in 2000. These rapid increases in Mexican students are important in part because they are more likely to be poor, LEP and to have low school completion rates.

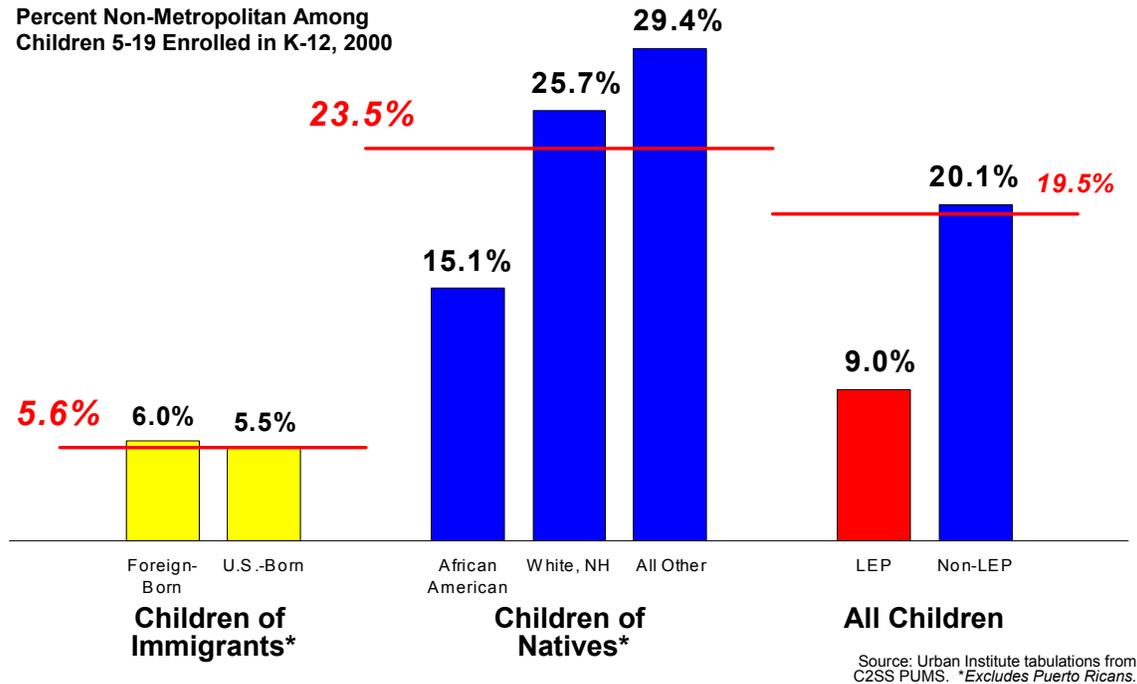
Figure 8. Origins of Immigrant Children Shift Markedly by 2000



Concentration in Metro Areas.

Following long established trends, the children of immigrants are more urbanized than children of natives. Virtually all children of immigrants (94 percent) live in metro areas as compared to 77 percent of natives (**Figure 9**).

Figure 9. Children of Immigrants (and LEP) Concentrated in Metro Areas



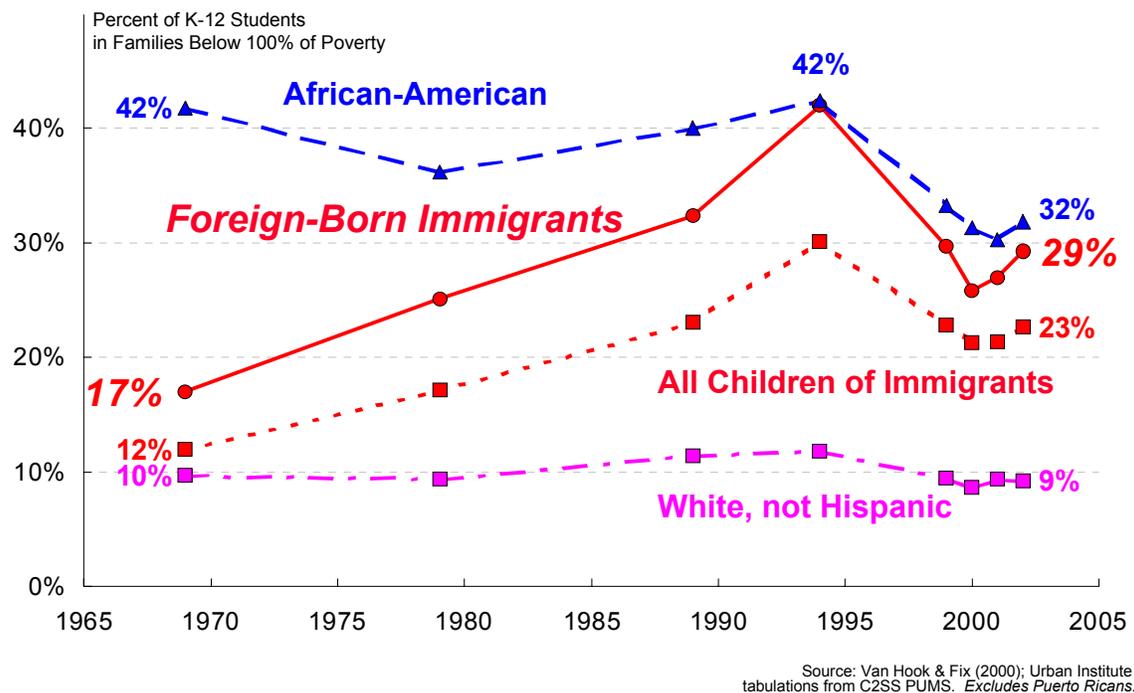
The share of children who are LEP in non-metropolitan areas (9 percent) is higher than the share that is foreign born (6 percent), suggesting that a large share of rural immigrant children have limited English skills. These relatively high LEP concentrations pose challenges then to rural schools’ ability to meet new standards (Taylor, Martin and Fix 1997).

Trends in Poverty.

Changing national origins have been accompanied by a rise in poverty among the children of immigrants. In 1970 poverty rates for all children of immigrants (12 percent) and white non-Hispanics (10 percent) were roughly equivalent, with foreign-born immigrant children having somewhat higher rates (17 percent) (**Figure 10**). But by 1995 one third of the children of immigrants and almost half of foreign born immigrant children lived in families with incomes below poverty. Their poverty rates approached

those of African American children, representing a major shift from 1970 when rates for the children of immigrants were closer to non-Hispanic whites. (In fact, poverty rates among *foreign-born* children of immigrants equal those of African Americans in 1995.) These trends reinforce the fact that high poverty is a relatively recent phenomenon among the children of immigrants.

Figure 10. Immigrant Children Increasingly Poor, but Trend Reverses in Late 1990s



However, we see a reversal in this 25 year trend occurring between 1995 and 2000 with poverty rates for African American, immigrant children and children of immigrants falling rapidly. The largest percentage point declines occur among African American children. As a result, differences in rates between children of immigrants and African Americans narrow from 30 percentage points in 1970 (42 versus 12 percent) to 11 percentage points in 2000 (33 versus 22 percent). This leveling in poverty rates should

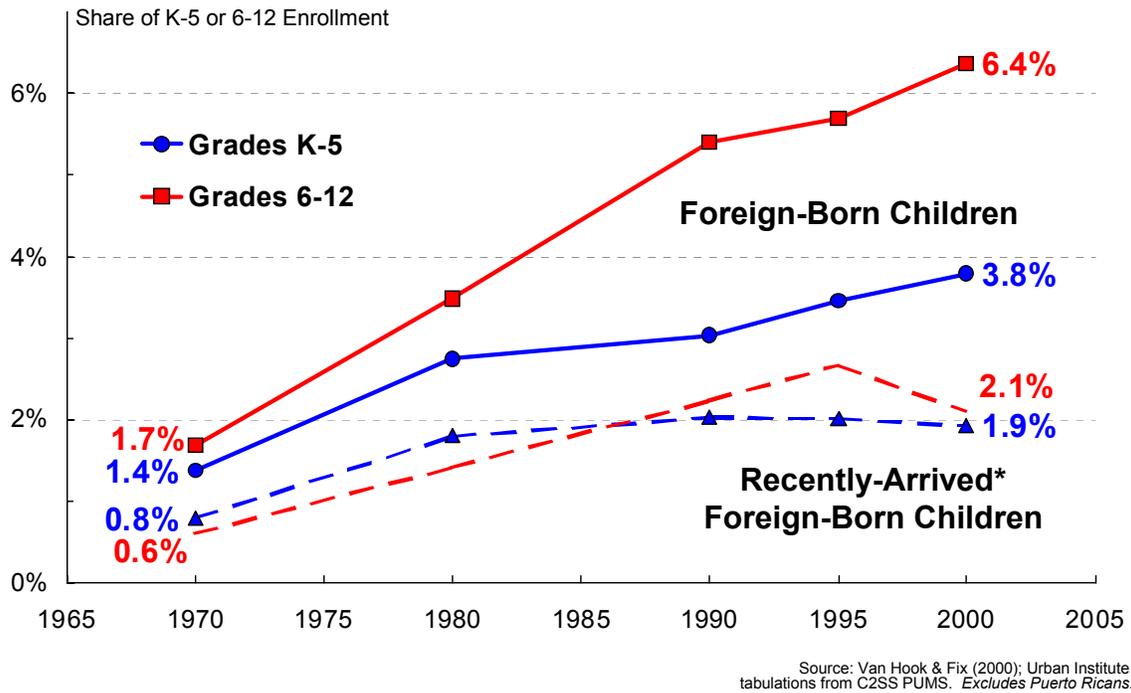
translate into a more even distribution of Title I funds to schools educating African American and immigrant youth.

Since 2000, we have seen a downturn in the economy and an especially steep rise in poverty rates among the foreign-born children of immigrants, although they remain lower than African American children (29 versus 32 percent).

Grade Distribution of Immigrant Children.

Both the number and share of *foreign born* children of immigrants are higher in secondary schools, where they represent 6.4 percent of the total student population, than in elementary schools (3.8 percent) (**Figure 11**). Foreign-born children who are recently arrived (i.e., in the past five years) and who are likely to require the most language and literacy instruction, are slightly more likely to be in secondary than elementary schools (see the dashed lines in the figure below).

Figure 11. Foreign-Born Children Increase Fastest in Grades 6-12



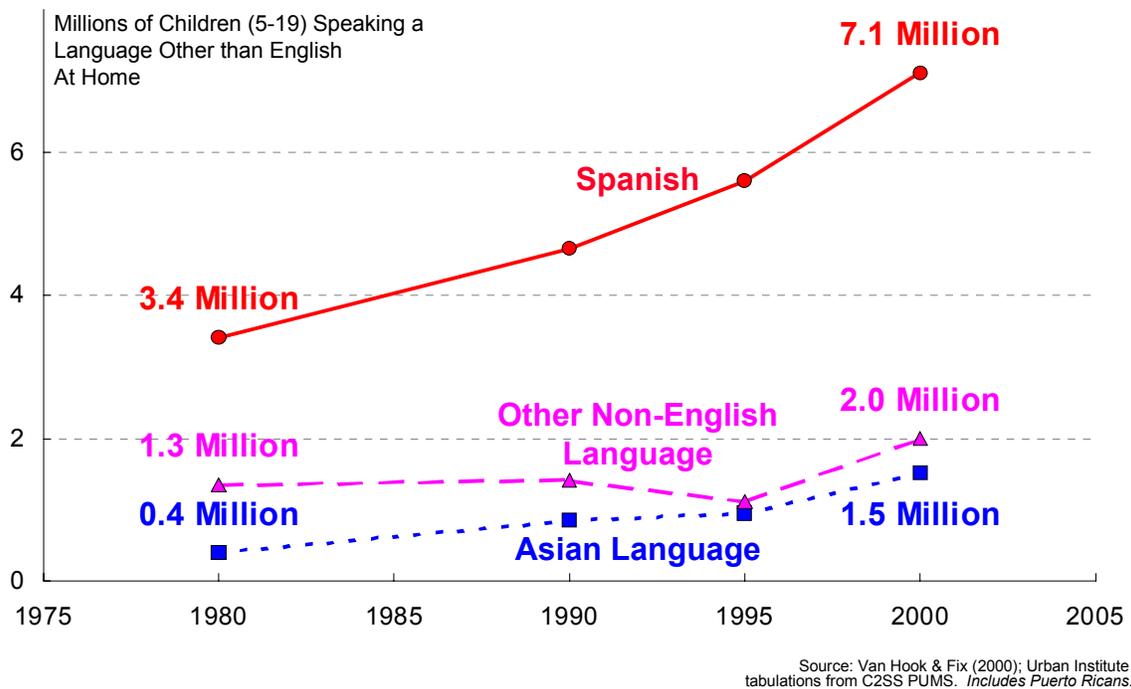
These distributional patterns hold important implications for schools. In the first place, a substantially smaller share of LEP secondary school students receives either ESL or bilingual language instruction than LEP elementary school students. Second, as we have discussed, secondary schools often do not have the capacity to meet the language and literacy needs that many recently arrived and other immigrant students need (Ruiz De Velasco, Fix and Clewell 2000). And third, Title I funds have historically been more heavily concentrated in elementary than secondary schools.

Language Spoken.

Between 1980 and 2000 rising immigration spurred a doubling (from 5.1 to 10.6 million) in the number of children from homes where a language other than English is spoken (**Figure 12**). Children from Spanish speaking homes predominate, representing two thirds of children from all non English speaking households. In 1980 there were 1.7

million more children from Spanish speaking families than from all other non English speaking families; in 2000 that number had risen to 3.6 million.

Figure 12. Spanish Increasingly Prevalent – Sharp Increases in 1990s



Sharp increases can also be seen among children from other foreign language backgrounds. They also double between 1980 to 2000; with especially steep increases among children from families speaking Asian languages. The number of children from other non English speaking households also accelerates rapidly following 1995.

Viewed collectively, these trends suggest some of the challenges that schools face in an era of standards based school reform: developing capacity that can respond not only to the scale and pace of change but to the linguistic diversity of the student population. And while the number of Spanish speakers may have grown steadily over past decades, children from other language minority groups have declined, complicating schools’

efforts to align their teaching staffs with shifting migration flows. (As figure 12 indicates, the number of K – 12 students speaking “other Non-English languages” declined from 1990 through 1995.)

Limited English Proficiency by Generation.

The prevalence of limited English proficiency declines across generations, to the point where it largely disappears by the third generation, at least as in terms of the percentage of the population (**Figure 13**). Limited English proficiency is most common among the foreign born or first generation of K – 12 students. There is some diversity in rates, however, as Mexicans are more likely to be LEP within the first (and successor) generations than Asians or the K- 12 population as a whole. As a general rule, there are few third generation non English speakers.

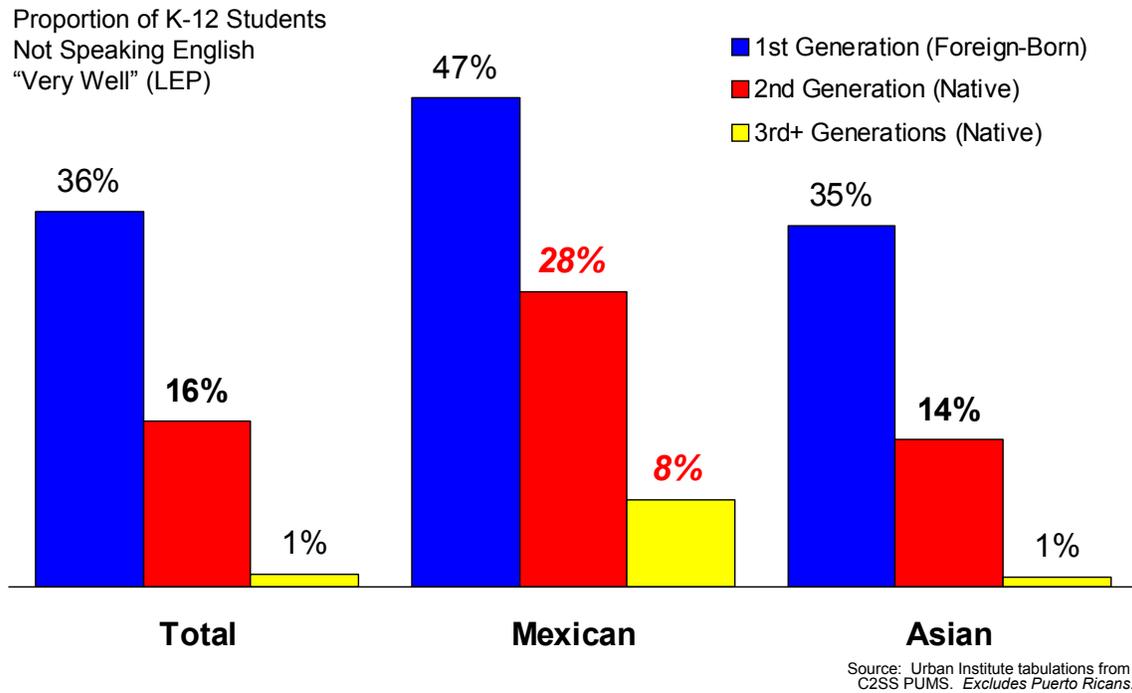


Figure 13. LEP Share Declines by Generation – Second Generation LEP Stays High

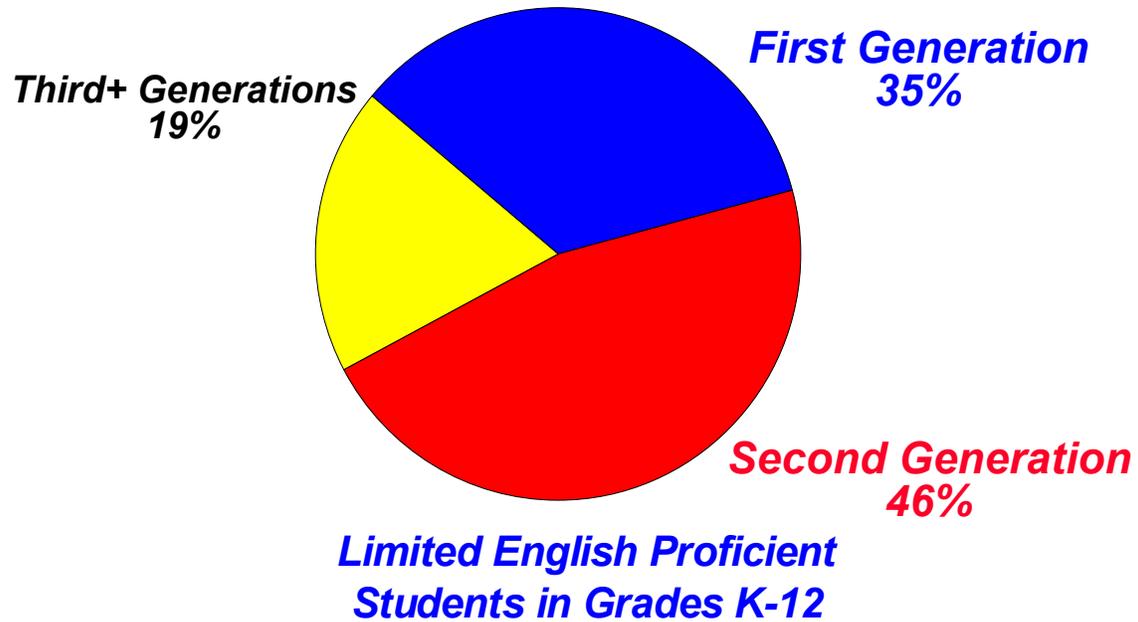
While the share of LEP students declines substantially by the second generation, again, we see substantial diversity. Second generation Mexican children enrolled in K- 12 are twice as likely as Asian children to be LEP (28 versus 14 percent). These substantial LEP rates among second generation students -- who were born in the U.S. and presumably have attended U.S. schools their whole lives -- raise important issues for schools. For example, what impact does limited English proficiency upon entry into elementary school have on later school outcomes? Do schools have the capacity to track and measure the outcomes longitudinally? Will that capacity be deepened by the No Child Left Behind Act's mandates to disaggregate student achievement for LEP students?

Concerns over school capacity and student outcomes are reinforced by the small but significant share (8 percent) of third generation Mexican K- 12 students who are LEP -- despite the fact that both parents are native-born citizens. In our earlier work on this issue we found that these students had the poorest school completion outcomes of all LEP and non LEP students (Van Hook and Fix 2000).

The nation's LEP population also appears quite diverse when viewed from a generational perspective. Roughly a third of the K-12 student population is foreign born; half is second generation (**Figure 14**); and a fifth are children of natives (the third generation). Two thirds of LEP students, then, are U.S.-born.⁴

⁴ These shares are driven in part by artifacts of the quite differing sizes of the first, second and third+ generations of children in the United States. According to the 2000 Census five percent of the total student population (2.7 million) is first generation; 14 percent (7.8 million) is second generation and 81 percent (44.2 million) are children of natives or third generation or higher (see, **Figure 7**).

Figure 14. More LEP Children are Native than Foreign-Born

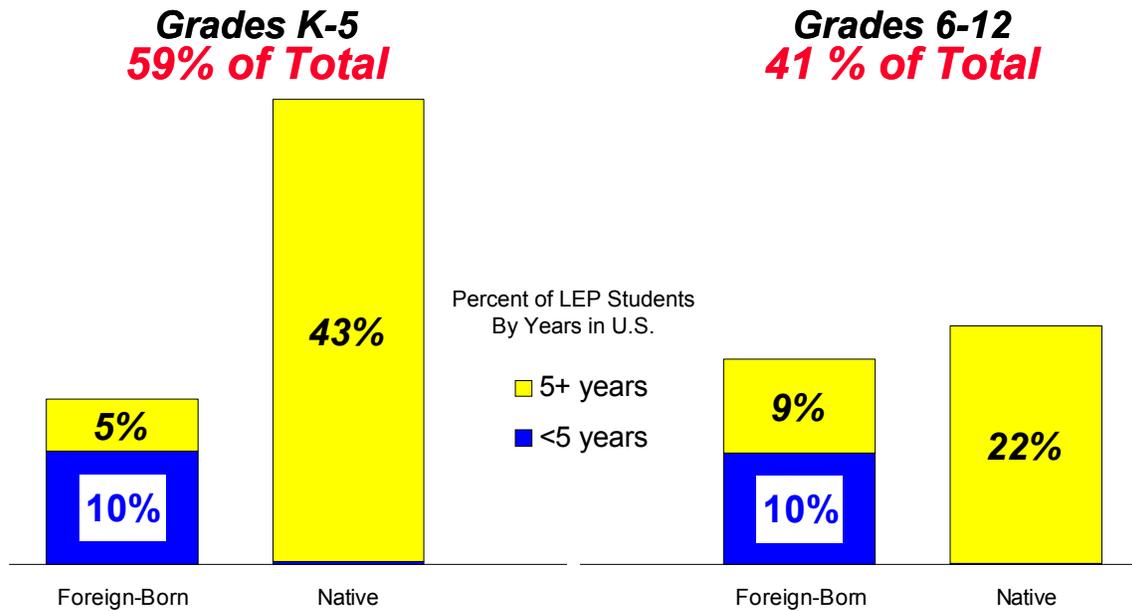


Source: Urban Institute tabulations from C2SS PUMS. Includes Puerto Ricans.

How Long LEP Students Have Lived in the U.S.

The sheer diversity of the LEP and immigrant student populations -- and the institutional challenges to which it gives rise -- are captured by **Figure 15** in which we subdivide the LEP population by grade, generation and time in the United States.

Figure 15. Many LEP Children in U.S. for Many Years



Source: Urban Institute tabulations from C2SS PUMS. Foreign-Born includes Puerto Ricans.

Roughly 60 percent of all LEP children 5 to 19 are enrolled in K- 5; 40 percent are in grades K- 12. The number of LEP students, then, does not fall off across grades as it does across generations.

The data also permit us to estimate the size of two populations that are of special concern to educators and that raise rather distinct challenges and capacity issues. The first is late entering students in U.S. secondary schools. Many of these students come to U.S. secondary schools with limited English and, in some cases, literacy skills. Many have had their schooling in their home country interrupted (Ruiz De Velasco, Fix and Clewell 2000). Secondary schools -- to an even greater degree than elementary schools -- are not structured in ways that promote developing language, content and literacy skills among these students. Census data indicate that these late entering LEPs compose a relatively small share of the overall LEP student population. The best proxy we have for them is the

10 percent of foreign-born LEPs in grades 6 – 12 who have been in the U.S. for less than 5 years.

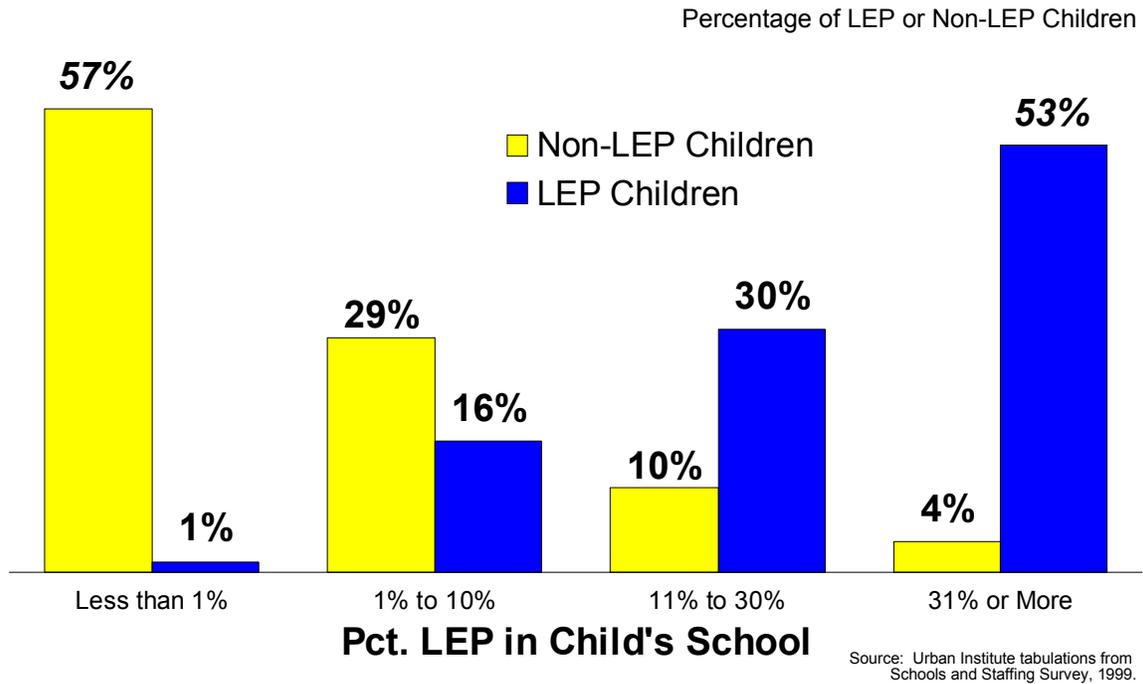
A second population that raises questions of both school capacity and past performance has been referred to as “long term LEPs.” Long term LEPs are students who have been promoted within schools (and perhaps been deemed to be English proficient) despite the fact that they not have mastered English speaking, reading, writing and comprehension skills. We assume that all foreign born students in the U.S. for 5 or more years in grades 6 – 12 fall into this category, as well as *all* second and third generation students in grades 6- 12. Starting from these assumptions, then, roughly a third of all LEP students and 75 percent of LEP secondary students can be viewed as long term LEPs. Unlike recent entrants, these students cannot be shielded from taking high stakes content tests under standards based reform.

School Segregation of LEPs.

Recent studies have documented rising levels of school segregation among minority populations with the lifting of court-ordered integration plans issued in the 1960s and 1970s (Orfield and Yun 1999). We have adapted the analytic strategies used in those studies to assess the degree to which limited English proficient students attend school with other LEP students.

Using the 1999 – 2000 Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) we find that over half (53 percent) of LEP students attend schools where 31 percent or more of their fellow students are also LEP (**Figure 16**). (This level has risen from 48 percent in 1995/96.) Only 17 percent of LEP students attend schools where less than 10 percent of student body is LEP.

Figure 16. LEP Students Attend Linguistically Segregated Schools



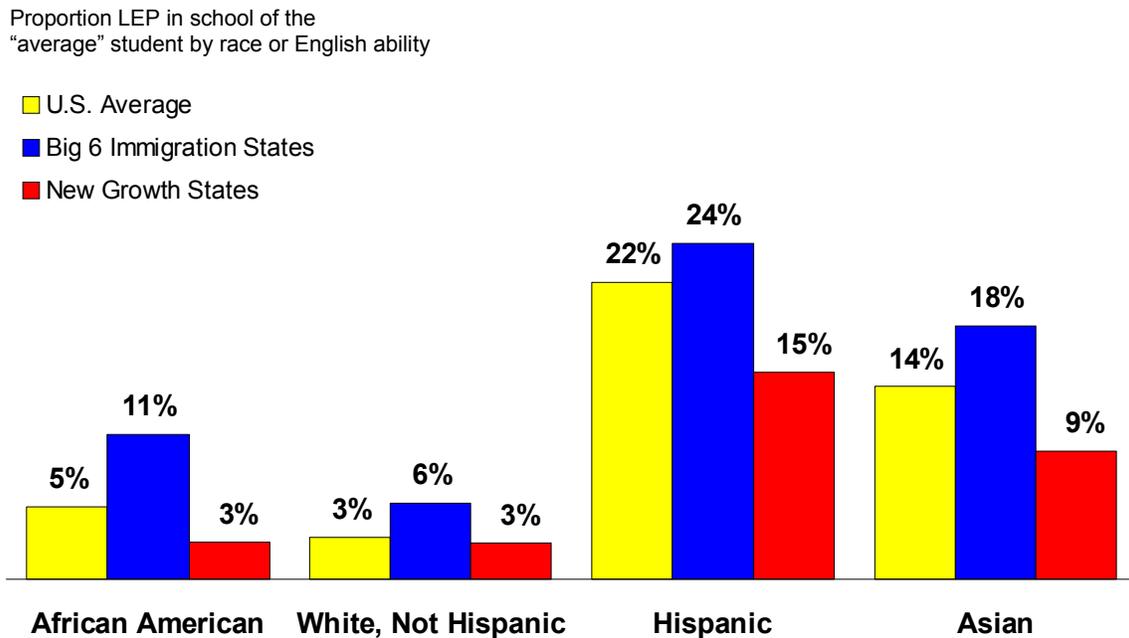
These patterns of school segregation are widespread as concentration patterns evident in the traditional receiving states appear to be reproducing themselves in the new growth states to which immigrants moved in the 1990s (see **Figure 3**). Sixty percent of students in the six large immigrant states (CA, NY, TX, FLA, ILL, NJ.) attend schools where over 31 percent of students are LEP. In the 22 “new growth states” we discussed earlier 38 percent attend such schools. These rates are particularly striking given the small share that LEP students represent of the total student populations: 13 percent in the traditional states; and only 4 percent in the new growth states.

Schools with high concentrations of LEP students may face particularly difficult challenges demonstrating annual yearly progress given shortages of trained teachers, curricula and non-English assessment instruments. Further, as the NCLB law is

implemented these highly segregated schools may be disproportionately found to be in need of improvement and subject to sanctions.

Patterns of linguistic segregation are most pronounced among the two groups of students with the highest proportion of children of immigrants: Hispanics and Asians (Figure 17). The “average” Hispanic student attends a school that is 24 percent LEP; for Asians the share is 14 percent. The “average” African American student attends schools that have a larger share of LEPs than does his or her white non-Hispanic counterpart (5 versus 3 percent for the nation, and 11 versus 6 percent within the traditional receiving states).

Figure 17. Hispanics and Asians More Likely to be in Linguistically Segregated Schools



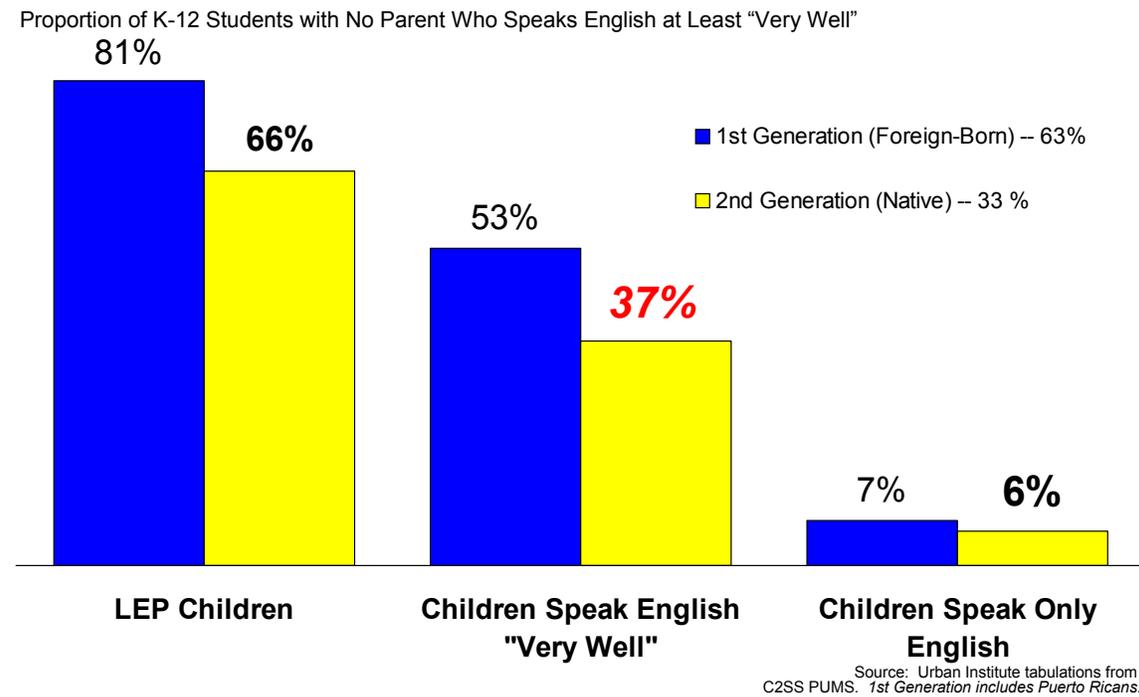
Source: Urban Institute tabulations from Schools & Staffing Survey, 1999.

Parental English Language Skills.

Linguistic isolation not only characterizes LEP students’ schools, but their families as well. Four out of five foreign born LEP children live in families where all

parents are LEP; two out of three native born LEPs live in families where all parents are LEP (**Figure 18**). These patterns are important because the NCLB imposes broad new mandates requiring schools to inform parents about their children’s progress, the performance of the schools they attend, and their rights to supplemental services and to transfer from failing schools.

Figure 18. LEP Children May Not Have Parental English Resources



The institutional challenges associated with parental communication also apply to another common type of household: where the children are reported to speak English “very well” but all parents are LEP. Over half of foreign-born LEP children who speak English “very well” have only LEP parents. In these households the student may need to translate school communications on such sensitive issues as the schools’ performance and availability of transfer.

Conclusion

The powerful demographic trends and challenges documented here occur within an extraordinarily dynamic policy context. With the enactment of the No Child Left Behind Act, U.S. schools are not just required to serve limited English proficient students they are held accountable for those students' progress and can be subjected to draconian sanctions for failing to promote it. The students themselves and the schools they attend have much at stake. Moreover, a rapidly changing student population will increasingly mean that the success of reforms themselves will be judged on the achievement levels of immigrant and limited English speaking students.

The demographic challenges to schools are clear: rising numbers of children of immigrants (most of whom are citizens); dispersal to nontraditional receiving communities with little existing integrating infrastructures; high child poverty rates (especially among Mexican children); rising numbers of English language learners and increasing segregation of LEP students. As we document here, most of those limited English speakers are U.S. born and have been in the United States for 5 years or more – suggesting abiding institutional capacity issues. A recent study reveals that the schools that fail to meet federal standards and are sanctioned are disproportionately those that enroll large shares of low income, Latino students with limited English skills (Novak and Fuller 2003). It remains to be seen, though, whether sanctions' invocation will drive increased resources to these students, changes in pedagogy, and new school capacity.

That said, the results presented here reinforce contentions that limited English proficiency among students declines sharply across generations and is quite circumscribed by the third generation.

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