

Diversity Within: Latino Newcomers in Our Schools and Communities

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Education Brief #1

While Latin American immigration to the United States is not a new phenomenon, it has gained more attention in recent years because of dramatic increases in the movement of immigrants into areas, such as Indiana, that have had relatively low numbers of Latino immigration compared to “traditional” urban and Southwest destinations. This recent arrival of Latin-origin immigrants at “new destinations” (see further reading) is exemplified by *Figure 1*, which shows the dramatic growth of limited English students in Indiana from 1999 to the 2006-07 school year.

To understand who Latino newcomer students are, it is important to make the distinction between “longstanding” and “newcomer” Latinos. There is a chronological difference in terms of years in the state of Indiana, (e.g., many northern Indiana Latino residents go back 100 years or more), but also a class difference, as a new wave of immigrant workers arrived in Indiana from 1995 forward, primarily working in meatpacking, construction, and the service industries. This brief will focus on such more recent immigrants, or “newcomers.”

National Origin Diversity

In general, Latino newcomers to Indiana are mostly Mexican (about 75% overall). The percentage of Mexicans is much higher in certain counties, like Elkhart and Bartholomew, which has a lot from the Mexican state of Veracruz, and lower in other counties like Greene or Daviess in the South,

with a lot of Central Americans). Nevertheless, significant numbers of Latino newcomers to the state come from virtually every other Latin American country.

Many of the immigration patterns are initiated by “beachhead” communities which get established and generate migratory streams linking Indiana with certain regions of Mexico, or certain countries. While some migration comes directly from Latin American countries, immigrants to Indiana may also come from other regions and cities of the United States. For example, migrants may come to Indiana from Chicago, California, or Texas because they are fleeing gang violence and looking for economic opportunity.

Labeling & Stereotyping

While the national, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds, not to mention the life experiences, of Latino newcomers are extremely diverse, when immigrants come to the United States from Latin America, they are “captured” by umbrella terms like “Latino” and “Hispanic.” They have to learn what it means to occupy this uniquely U.S. racial-ethnic category. Some come to embrace it as part of their identities over time, and others don’t. In any case, usually a **strong sense of national identity prevails**, and educators should be aware of this. Non-Mexican students and parents often resent being lumped together as “Mexicans,” just as Mexican students and parents, especially those more recently arrived, may prefer not to be called “Latino” or “Hispanic.”

Socio-Economic Class

There are also common stereotypes about the typical Latino immigrant to Indiana—specifically that they are Mexican, rural, poor, and uneducated. This may be true of many Latino immigrants, but certainly not all. Actually, a good number of immigrants come from cities, and many have six years of primary schooling or more. Of course, some actually migrate here as professionals—as doctors or architects, for example. Even amongst those working here in relatively low-paying, unskilled jobs, it's not uncommon to find people who were schoolteachers, nurses, or other kinds of professionals in their home countries. It is often the lack of work, or the wage differential, that drives them to the United States.

Because of the broad range of backgrounds among Latino immigrants, it is important not to make assumptions about socio-economic class. Further, in order to work toward integrating Latino newcomers into a community, it is important to consider the difficult socioeconomic conditions often affecting both newcomers' arrival and their community membership. For example, in a recent study of responses to Latino newcomer immigrants in Indiana (Levinson et al. 2007), researchers found in one community that, while acceptance of cultural difference promoted ethnic tolerance, it also prevented long-standing residents from appreciating important socio-economic class issues affecting newcomer Latinos. As the home of a large university, this community has historically drawn a large international population, and researchers found that many people view the community as open and welcoming to ethnic diversity. Yet a significant portion of the newcomer Latino population that has arrived there since 1995 are poorer and less schooled. This was a largely unfamiliar social-class group for many in the town. For example, school personnel were more accustomed to having international students whose parents were professionals or graduate-students. Such students are not as

likely to face the same socio-economic difficulties as many of the recent newcomer Latinos, and these difficulties are compounded when they go unnoticed or ignored by teachers and others. Thus, it is important that teachers give attention to an individual student's background and experiences, and not make assumptions that all international and immigrant students have similar socioeconomic backgrounds.

Levels of Schooling

For those immigrant children who arrive here already at school age, there may be quite a variety of levels of schooling. If they're from small villages, it's not uncommon for children who are older than 7 or 8 to have only 1 or 2 years of formal schooling; but if they're from towns and cities, it's more likely that they've been in schools right up to the point that they come to the U.S. This variety of school experience makes it very important for school authorities to ascertain each child's level of schooling. Mexican schools are surprisingly strong in their instruction of certain subjects, especially math and, in some cases, natural science. If they've been in school in Mexico, the children's content knowledge in many areas is likely to be strong, and it's easy to confuse children's struggles in school because of **language difference**, with their struggles in the content area.

Ethnicity: Mestizo & Indigenous Identity

Aside from differences of national origin, most Latin American immigrants are culturally *mestizo*, that is, Spanish-dominant speakers who are the product of a long history of racial and ethnic mixing, from the Spanish colonial period onward. Yet some may in fact have an indigenous identity as well, speaking a language whose roots go back to before the Spanish conquest. The number of indigenous Latin Americans in Indiana is quite small, probably around 1,000. They are most likely of Mayan or Trique heritage, from South-Central Mexico and Guatemala.

Gender

Up until the 1980s or so, it was rather uncommon for male migrant workers to bring wives and families. Now, men are more likely to bring their families, especially after an initial period of settlement; women may come as individuals, or with their children. In Indiana, it's not uncommon to find women who migrate here with their children and leave a husband behind in Illinois, Texas, or

California, often because the large cities there have been deemed too unsafe to raise children. Greater knowledge of students' particular family situations can help teachers better understand both the needs and the strengths that these children bring into the school.

For Further Reading:

CensusScope: http://www.censusscope.org/us/print_map_hispanicpop.html

Gozdziak, Elzbieta and Susan F. Martin, Eds. (2005). Beyond the Gateway: Immigrants in a Changing America. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.

Indiana Department of Education, Division of Minority and Migrant Programs: <http://www.doe.state.in.us/lmmp/welcome.html>

Indiana Latino Institute: <http://www.indianalatin.com/>

International Center of Indianapolis: <http://www.icenterindy.org/>

Indiana Project for Latin American Cultural Competency: <http://www.indiana.edu/~iplacc>

Levinson, Bradley A.U., Judson Everitt, and Linda C. Jones. (2007). Integrating Indiana's Latino Newcomers: A Study of State and Community Responses to the New Immigration. Working Paper #1, Center for Education and Society, Indiana University.

Millard, Ann V. and Jorge Chapa (2004). Apple Pie and Enchiladas: Latino Newcomers in the Rural Midwest. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Sagamore Institute (John Clarke and Justin Heet). (2006). Connecting Mexico and the Hoosier Heartland: The Economic Impacts of Mexico-Indiana Relations. The Sagamore Institute for Policy Research. Indianapolis, IN Available on-line at: <http://www.sipr.org/>

West, Evan. (2006). "The new Hoosiers." Indianapolis Monthly (November), pp. 110 ff.

Wortham, Stanton et al., (Eds.) (2001). Education in the New Latino Diaspora: Policy and the Politics of Identity. Stamford, CT: Ablex..

Zúñiga, Víctor and Rubén Hernández-León, Eds. (2005). New Destinations: Mexican Immigration in the United States. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Figure 1: Growth in Limited English Students in Indiana

	School Year 1999-00	School Year 2000-01	School Year 2001-02	School Year 2002-03	School Year 2003-04	School Year 2004-05	School Year 2005-06	School Year 2006-07
Number of LEP Students	9,114	13,079	17,194	20,351	22,584	28,741	31,951	35,816

(Indiana Department of Education: Language Minority and Migrant Programs, <http://www.doe.state.in.us/>)

To further clarify where immigrant students are moving to in Indiana, the following chart shows the 10 counties and school corporations in the state reporting the highest numbers of language minority students in the 2005-2006 school year.

Top 10 School Corporations Reporting Language Minority Students in School Year 2005-06				Top 10 Counties Reporting Language Minority Students in School Year 2005-06				
CORPORATION (COUNTY)	LEP	FEP	TOTAL LMS	COUNTY	LEP	FEP	%LEP	TOTAL LMS
IPS (Marion)	3,244	924	4,168	Marion	9,215	3,099	74.83%	12,314
South Bend (St. Joseph)	1,916	1,612	3,528	Elkhart	5,500	1,348	80.32%	6,848
Ft. Wayne (Allen)	1,224	2,096	3,320	Lake	3,477	3,350	50.93%	6,827
Sch City of Hammond (Lake)	1,783	1,476	3,259	Allen	1,585	2,541	38.41%	4,126
Elkhart (Elkhart)	2,600	177	2,777	St. Joseph	2,235	1,829	55.00%	4,064
Goshen (Elkhart)	1,440	701	2,141	Hamilton	1,137	1,692	40.19%	2,829
MSD Wayne Twp (Marion)	1,464	251	1,715	Tippecanoe	1,371	942	59.27%	2,313
MSD Lawrence Twp (Marion)	967	568	1,535	LaGrange	628	676	48.16%	1,304
MSD Pike Twp (Marion)	985	390	1,375	Kosciusko	1,013	160	86.36%	1,173
Carmel-Clay Schs (Hamilton)	225	1,130	1,355	Noble	802	260	75.52%	1,062

(Indiana Department of Education: Language Minority and Migrant Programs, <http://www.doe.state.in.us/>)