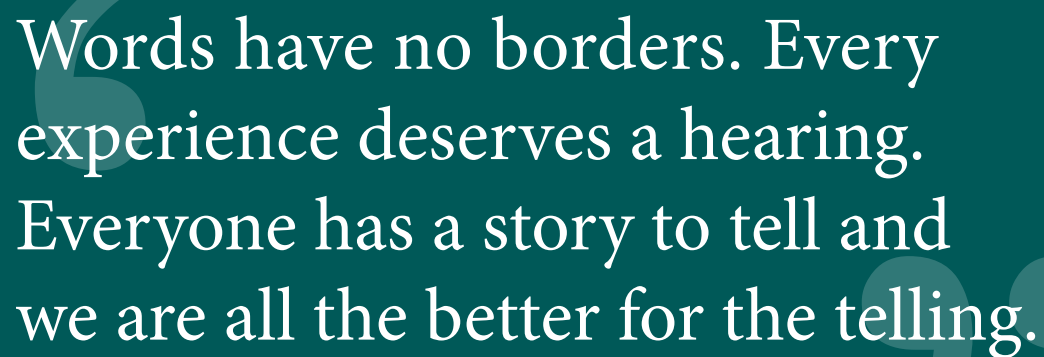




Teacher Voices:

Immigration, Language
and Culture



Words have no borders. Every
experience deserves a hearing.
Everyone has a story to tell and
we are all the better for the telling.

Edwidge Danticat

Words Have No Borders: Student Voices on Immigration, Language and Culture
(New York: The College Board, 2009)

http://www.host-collegeboard.com/advocacy/writing/Words_Have_No_Borders.pdf

Editor's note: In this report, we use the term English language learners (ELL). However, we use the terms "English as a second language" (ESL) and "limited English proficiency" (LEP) if used in the original source notes.

Teacher Voices:

Immigration, Language and Culture



Community and the “Rhetoric of Blame”: “I brought my students along with me when I volunteered to do things. Little by little, I knew the students were not looked at as ‘her kids’ but a little more like ‘our kids.’ That was my goal.”

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The Power of Diversity and Collaborative Learning: “Our school is a richly diverse population. ... By putting [students] in a group together, you’re able to give them a lot of different opportunities to show what they’re able to do — and support each other through the work that they do.”

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The Importance of Writing: “It (student writing) is the best way that I’ve been able to learn about my students, to explore their backgrounds, to communicate.”

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Diversity and the Fundamentals of Effective Teaching: “... the biggest thing is focusing on individuals more than on groups. Group information is helpful up to a point. But all kids are individuals, both of their culture and not of their culture.”

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Culture and Community in the Classroom: “I come from their community ... I understand their stories and I understand their struggles ... their stories are my stories.”

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A Shared Vision of Success: “We’ve worked together to address the skills gap for some of our students. We developed a similar vocabulary strategy that we use across subjects for all four years, creating a system for ninth through 12th grade.”

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Foreword

Immigration, language and culture have been the focus of policy debates since the founding of our nation.

The year 2011 is no exception. We are in an ongoing — and often vitriolic — debate about who should be allowed to enter and stay in our country; what rights and benefits should be provided; the role of English, second and third languages in our schools and society; and who has the power to make these decisions.

We make no apologies for our firm beliefs about immigration, English language learning and the importance of education. We believe that newcomers and bilingual speakers make our nation stronger. We also believe that all students should have full access to all levels of education.

In the following report, you will find the stories of six teachers who believe in the power and promise of immigrant students and English language learners. Their stories begin to help us understand the assets these groups of students bring to our classrooms, the challenges they — both students and teachers — face, and the role that teachers and schools play in their students' lives.

The teachers profiled in this report put forth a wide variety of topics and opinions. But two themes came up consistently. One theme is the complexity of the terms *immigrant* and *English language learners* because it includes so many kinds of student personal histories, languages, cultures, ages, education backgrounds, and family and community structures. The other theme is the need for a national immigration policy that encourages and supports all students to attend college and join our workforce.

This report is the fifth in the College Board's Teachers Are the Center of Education series, developed to present the great work taking place in our classrooms. This nation is now making critical decisions about the future of our education system, including the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. If we are to make the improvements we need, we must be actively guided by the voices of teachers.

Gaston Caperton
President
The College Board

Sharon J. Washington
Executive Director
National Writing Project

William J. Bushaw
Executive Director
Phi Delta Kappa International

Recommendations

Teachers are the most important school-based influence in improving student achievement, especially for immigrant students and English language learners.

To meet the challenges of teaching and learning on a national and state level, educators and policymakers need to create or facilitate the following:

- A set of mutually agreed-upon standards for English language teaching and professional development.
- Assessments that accurately measure English language learner progress, strengths and weaknesses, and school accountability.
- Passage of an immigration bill that encourages all students to achieve academically at all levels.
- Support for school reform to ensure safe and effective learning environments for all students

On a local and classroom level, educators need to create classrooms that:

- Foster a vision of immigrant and English language learners as assets to our schools, communities and country.
- Use a wide variety of teaching methods, including collaborative learning.
- Base teaching and learning on the needs of individual students.
- Teach many means of communication, including a strong focus on writing.



Wilma Ortiz: Community and the “Rhetoric of Blame”

Who is Wilma Ortiz?: Wilma Ortiz is a middle school teacher with 20 years of experience. She currently teaches at Amherst Regional Middle School, in Amherst, Mass., where she has taught a variety of English language education subjects for the past 17 years. After receiving her teaching credentials in Massachusetts in bilingual education and ESL, Ortiz began her career teaching science to English language learners. She utilizes her own learning experiences to teach her students and help them become part of the larger community. She was named Massachusetts Teacher of the Year in 2011, the first time the award has been given to a teacher of English language learners in the state of Massachusetts.

How Wilma Ortiz became a teacher: Years after she graduated from the University of Puerto Rico with a B.A. in education and secondary science, Ortiz moved to the United States with her husband. She had to learn to adjust to a new culture and to develop much greater fluency in English. “I learned about English as a Second Language (ESL) classes for adults at night at Woburn High School. ... I was the baby of the crowd. These were older immigrants, factory workers and laborers, and they came at night to study ... and before I knew it, I was helping everybody with their homework.”

Her story: Students arrive at Amherst Regional Middle School before 7:45 a.m. Wilma Ortiz is ready, greeting most by name as she walks with them through the hallways, interrupting a steady stream of conversation with questions about their lives and their schoolwork.

This connection with students, the building of community between students and teachers, is very important to Ortiz. As she considers her own journey to become an educator, she is very aware of the importance of being part of the larger school community in order to achieve academically and make connections across cultures. In reflecting on her early years as an ESL teacher, Ortiz notes, “The hard part was to convince my colleagues at that time about how to better support my students and bring the voices and the needs of the parents and the needs of the students to the administrators. In my first school, I began in a very secluded program where my classes were in the basement. My colleague, another bilingual teacher, taught her special education class in a little corner in the cafeteria. It was a less than ideal environment in which to teach and learn ... How could I bring the students to the center and not be invisible in the school?”

Ortiz continues, “I decided that I needed to get involved in the school community, inside and outside of my school. I needed to volunteer for things and events so that people could see me and I could be visible and present. I brought my students along with me when I volunteered to do things. Little by little, I knew that the students were not looked at as ‘her kids’ but a little more like ‘our kids.’” That was my goal. I wanted them to be integrated into every facet of the school. They were not integrated in activities and events even in some of the elective classes because they had no English.”

In 2009, Ortiz completed her Ph.D. in language literacy and culture at the University of Massachusetts. She has begun conducting research in her own school while teaching full time. “I’m constantly looking at policy and how decisions are made ... I wanted to understand ‘the rhetoric of blame.’ Teachers are blamed for students not passing the standardized tests. Teachers are blamed for students not acquiring proficiency in English. There is constant blame. I thought

Amherst Regional Middle School
School Size: 530 students
Ethnicity: Asian/Pacific Islander: 12%; Black: 4%; Hispanic: 12%; White: 64%; Other: 9%
ELL: 14%
Immigrant: 40%

“At this present time, my middle school is seventh and eighth graders. Students come with a variety of literacy and language abilities and cultural backgrounds. We have many things that bring us together: that we are in this country to learn English and master the language and to be able to have access to society.”

that if I could understand how policies are made, then I could participate in making them better.”

She is particularly frustrated by the current standardized assessment system, and would like to see a different approach for English language learners. When students are learning new academic content and a new language at the same time, an accurate assessment of their learning is particularly difficult. Students who have content knowledge in another language may not be able to demonstrate that knowledge in English.

Ortiz explains, “The first thing I would like to see changed is the law regarding students who participate in the MCAS (Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System) testing the first year they are in the country.” In the past, students took a standardized test within the first three years of being in the United States. “Today,” she notes, “the pressure on the students, parents and teachers is huge and I think it just makes sense to look at the policies again.” Ortiz’s concern, along with many of her colleagues, is that teachers and students in many districts spend too much time preparing for the test, often at the expense of more comprehensive learning goals.

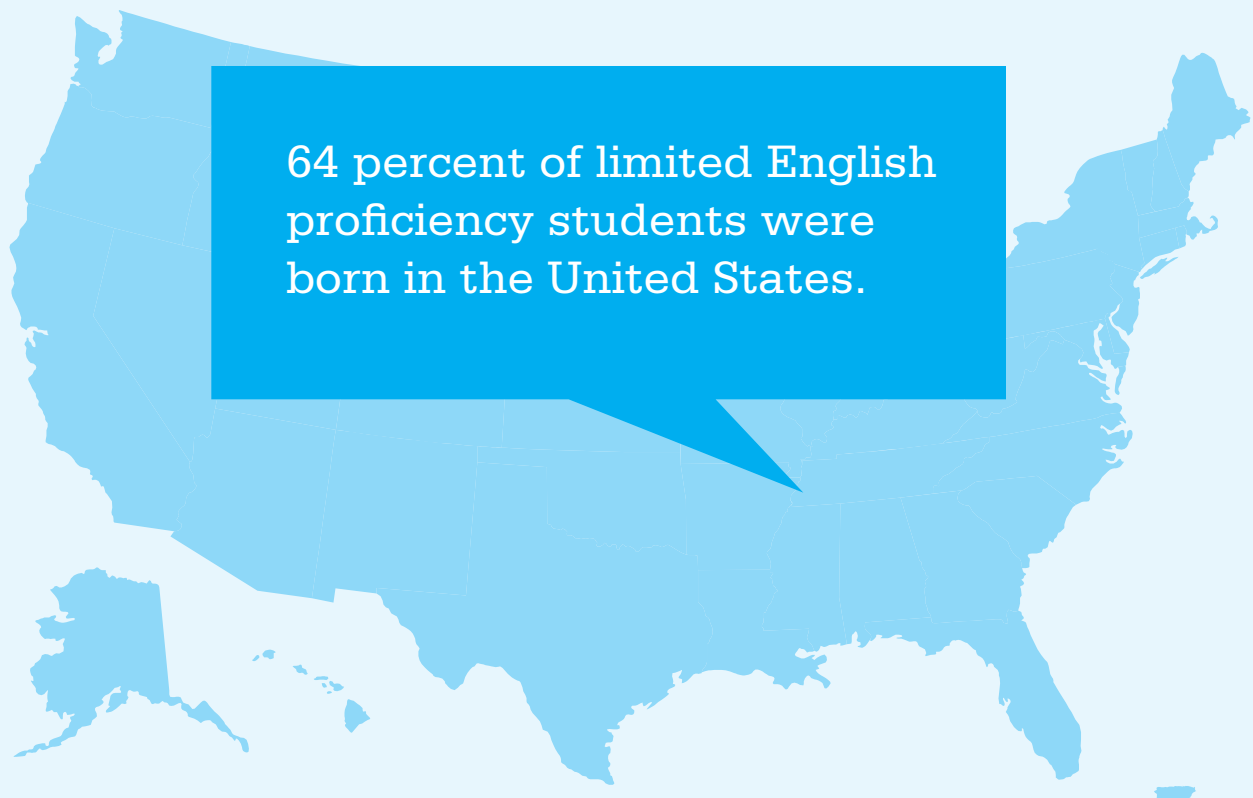
Ortiz’s long-term goal is to foster better understanding among policymakers, educators and the general public. Debates about learning often miss the key points of agreement that all students need to be educated to meet the challenges of the 21st century. “All of the extra things that are part of quality teaching are not given enough credit or recognition. ... Teaching is not just about the curriculum, writing a lesson plan and conducting a lesson. It is much more than that. I don’t think the public is aware enough of all that educators do and I don’t think teachers have really let the public know what’s happening. I think we need to tell our stories and everybody needs to hear what’s going on, the successes and the struggles, in order to appreciate what’s going on in classrooms.”



English Language Learners

In **2006**, there were approximately 5 million K–12 students in the United States identified as limited English proficiency.

The percentage of **school age children** with limited English speaking abilities nearly doubled from 2.8 percent in 1979 to 5.4 percent in 2005.





Anthony Finney:

The Power of Diversity and Collaborative Learning

Who is Anthony Finney?: Anthony Finney teaches ninth- and 10th-grade biology at The Flushing International High School. Located in Queens, N.Y., the school is part of Internationals Network For Public Schools, a nonprofit organization of innovative public schools working exclusively with recent immigrant students who are also English language learners (ELL). With 393 students from 35 countries, speaking 20 languages, Flushing International teaches both linguistic and academic skills throughout the school day by infusing English into all its content classes. In 2010–2011, the Internationals Network had 11 schools in New York City and two in California. Flushing International was created in 2004, and Finney, who has been teaching for six years, has been working at the school since its second year of inception.

On the role of a teacher: “When I started teaching, I imagined the teacher as the authority figure in the classroom. It was the person from whom all the knowledge was flowing. I think now the teacher is really more like an MC, the ringmaster, the facilitator, the coach of a lot of different things that are going on in the classroom.”

...being able to identify the things that the students are doing well and being very explicit about what it is that they can do helps them to build up their self-confidence to take risks and to do more that they thought they could do.

His story: Located in Queens, N.Y., the most diverse county in the country, The Flushing International High School is a multicultural collaborative environment in which to teach and learn. It builds both linguistic and academic skills through a curriculum that creates a culture of teamwork between and among students and teachers. All lessons are project based, creating opportunities for students to work together every day, and are taught by interdisciplinary teams of five teachers, one each in math, social studies, science, English and art. The teachers work with the same group of 75 students for two consecutive years.

It was this collaborative approach of working with ELL students that attracted Finney to Flushing International. "Over a period of time, a group of five teachers really gets to know a particular group of kids, just as the kids get to know each other really well," he explains. "We teach them using a collaborative model, so in addition to the teachers working in a team, we also have the kids working in teams."

Flushing International sees its diverse student body as an asset. But it realizes that each student is an individual with individual strengths and weaknesses. In response, the school has created many pathways for students to work and grow together. Each teacher team has three classes of 25 students and each class is a mix of ninth- and 10th-graders or 11th- and 12th-graders.

All classes travel together throughout the day for all five of their subject lessons. All emphasize project-based learning. Students sit at round tables that encourage conversation and teamwork, and teachers mix the diversity and abilities of the students at each table. English language learning is included in every class, regardless of content area, providing students with an opportunity to utilize their growing English skills in various academic and social settings. With the emphasis on English learning, Flushing International has partnered with the National Writing Project to build on their students' skills.

The mixed grade levels in the classes also contribute to collaborative learning. The younger students emulate their more experienced peers and see how an additional year helps improve language skills. The older students find reinforcement of their knowledge and skills as they translate and teach concepts to younger classmates.

Flushing International High School

School Size: 393 students

Ethnicity: Asian/Pacific Islander: 40%; Black: 2%; Hispanic: 58%; White: 1%

ELL: 100%

Immigrant: 100%

“At one table, you might have somebody who is very recently in the country, who doesn’t speak very much English, maybe even has an interrupted formal education, working with somebody who is a very advanced student with pretty strong English skills,” Finney explains. “The idea is that they’re able to support each other through the work that they do. We try as much as possible to make sure that we have Spanish, Chinese, Korean, Ethiopian students all working together so that the common exchange is in English. ... I think it helps because there are so many different modalities of language that they’re struggling with. ... By putting them in a group together, you’re able to give them a lot of different opportunities to show what they’re able to do.”

Finney also believes there is another important aspect of collaborative learning: its replication of how the world works outside the classroom. “There aren’t many jobs I can think of where you’re working in isolation from other people ... In real work environments, you have to be able to take feedback from other people, and choose according to what the group decides. Besides the language and the content that we’re teaching the students, I think this is also a life skill they are developing.”

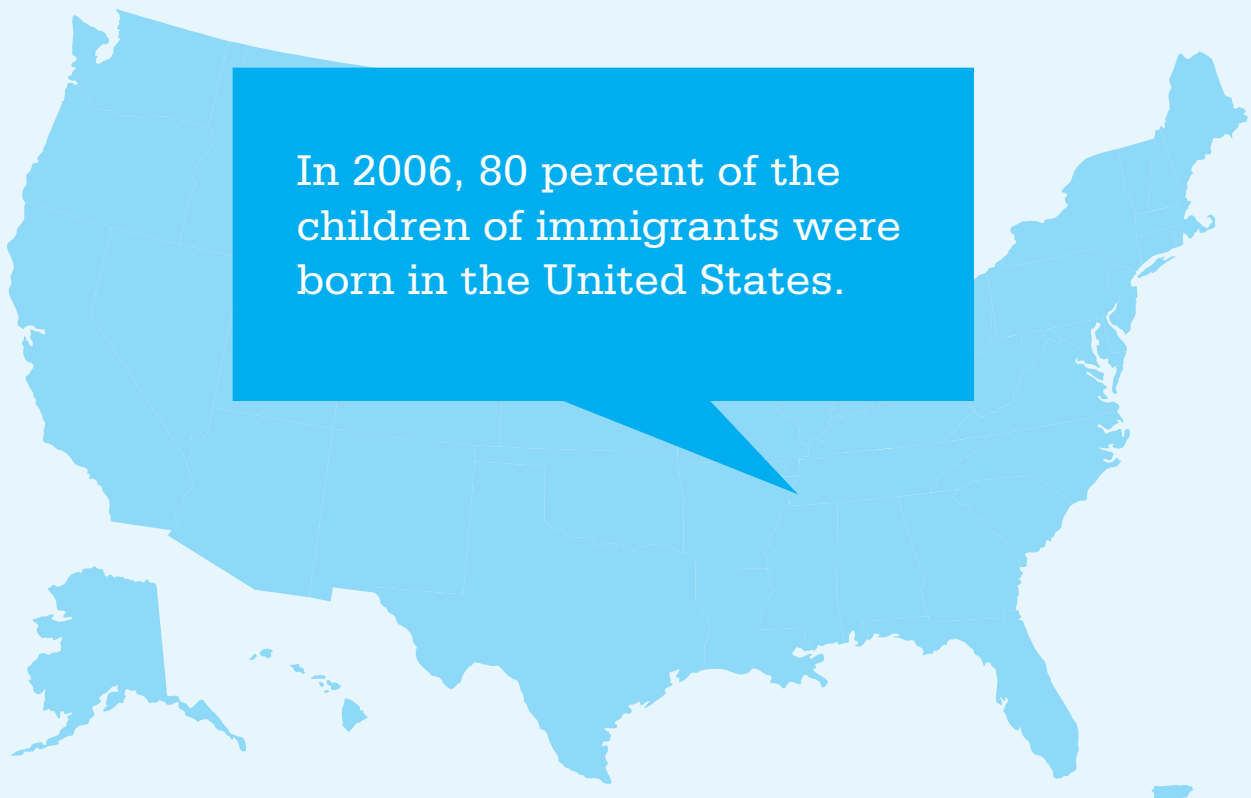
Success for his students, according to Finney, requires more than success in his school and classroom. It also will require changes in policy. “We’ve got a lot of kids who are among the most talented that we’ve graduated who have really struggled to be able to pursue their education because of their documentation, especially ... where a kid says, ‘well it doesn’t really matter whether or not I graduate from high school because I’m illegal anyway.’ ... It really makes all the sense in the world for these students to stay here who are able to graduate from high school, who are able to get an advanced degree and join the workforce.”



Children of Immigrants

There are **over 15 million** children of immigrants in the United States.

The number of young **children of immigrants** has doubled since 1990.





Brandy De Alba: The Importance of Writing

Who is Brandy De Alba?: Brandy De Alba teaches eighth grade English language arts at Theodore Roosevelt Elementary School, a K–8 school in Stockton, Calif. Her school, located in a primarily low socioeconomic area, has 13 different ethnicities, and the students come from 10 different linguistic backgrounds. This is her 15th year of teaching. A native of Stockton herself, she has spent her entire career at Roosevelt.

The Importance of Teachers: De Alba describes her own high school experience as initially being motivated by sports, not academics, and nearly becoming a high school dropout. “I had one teacher, who happened to be the softball coach, who stuck with me. He took me under his wing. He’s the one who showed me how to make up what I had missed, to go to summer school and adult school. He helped me look for colleges and to get into college. I was the first in my family of 10 children to do so. About 15 years later, I went back and thanked him because I didn’t realize what he was doing for me at the time.”

Her story: Theodore Roosevelt Elementary School is one of the lowest test-performing schools in the Stockton Unified School District, but the middle school grades have the highest attendance rate in the district, including magnet schools. It also has the lowest suspension rate in the district. This is the result of the staff’s collaborative efforts to support student attendance and address their learning needs. De Alba states, “When a parent comes in for a conference, all of the teachers meet with the parents. We ask, ‘What can we do to support you? Tell us what you need.’ And the parents are responding.”

Although De Alba is committed to her students’ overall well-being and their academics, she puts particular emphasis on the importance of writing. She notes that her students’ writing is the “best way that I’ve been able to learn about my students, to explore their backgrounds, to communicate.” She also understands that, because of academic and linguistic issues, writing is a challenge for them. “It’s a struggle at first. They get very, very annoyed with me when I say we’re going to write. But after the first month of school, they begin to ask me if they’re supposed to be writing something.”

In her English language arts classroom, De Alba designs writing assignments that meet the California State Standards but also the particular needs and interests of her students. As part of a unit on autobiographical and biographical narratives, she includes an assignment in which her students need to identify and analyze roadblocks that could prevent them from graduating from high school. De Alba’s eighth-graders visit their neighborhood high school to identify potential roadblocks and then review the assignment with their parents. Another assignment related to the high school visit includes learning how to conduct an interview. Students formulate questions and practice their interviews for the visiting day when they shadow a high school student partner. The eighth-graders also present what they learned when they return to school. De Alba explains, “I really want them to see what it’s going to be like when they get to high school and why we push them so much here.”

De Alba also uses writing to help her students understand the larger world in which they live. Her students’ fall research project included reviewing articles about the 9/11 attack on the U.S.,

Roosevelt Elementary
School Size: 546 students
Ethnicity: American Indian/
Alaskan Native: 3%; Asian/
Pacific Islander: 11%; Black:
12%; Hispanic: 70%; White: 4%
ELL: 46%
Immigrant: 5%

“...a lot of writing is healing for my students. I really try to focus on pushing their writing into giving them voice and power. And it moves through therapy all the way into engagement and power and advocacy for them.”

and she assigned a broad range of news articles, video clips and editorials to her students. Her students then analyzed this writing for the point of view and how the evidence was used, seeking to understand the impact of evidence and emotion in framing information for the reader.

All her students keep their written work in a portfolio, and De Alba conducts mini-lessons on grammar and revision, using all their writings. At the end of each marking period, the students choose their three best pieces from the different genres to turn in for a final grade. By the end of the semester, “they feel honored to present me with their final finished work.”

One area that De Alba would really like to see changed is standardized assessment and its impact on English language learner students. Once a student is classified as an English learner, they have a minimum of 30 minutes a day of English language development until they pass the California English Language Development Test. Many students become proficient in oral English, in listening and speaking, but their academic skills are not strong enough to pass the reading and writing portions. This year Roosevelt is trying something new and platooning two periods for English language development in both language arts and algebra. This gives students a “double dose” of the content required to meet the California State Standards, not only the English language development standards. “We are changing our pedagogy in teaching the curriculum to our students who are classified as English language development. We are scaffolding the curriculum so that our students can be prepared to meet the California State Standards.”

De Alba is committed to her students’ success and sees their ability to speak two languages as an asset. “Just because students do not speak English as a primary language doesn’t mean that they don’t know things. They have assets. They have primary languages, they have experiences. Many have [an] education from their home countries. We need to see what they have, bring that into the fold and go from there. And to do that we need to treat the whole student.”



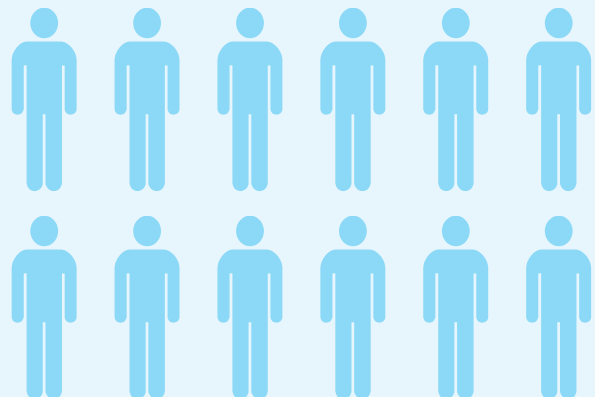
Immigrants in the U.S.

Between **2000** and **2009**, the foreign-born population in the U.S. grew from 31 million to 38.5 million, representing a change of 24 percent. By comparison, between 1990 and 2000, the foreign-born population changed from 20 million to 31 million, a difference of 57 percent.

In **2009**, the foreign-born **population** represented 12.5 percent of the total U.S. population.

The **proportion of immigrants** to the total population is now lower than it was during the great migration of the late 1800s and early 1900s, when it fluctuated between 13 and 15 percent.

It is estimated that in 2008, **11.9 million** unauthorized immigrants lived in the United States.





Sharon Ornelas:

Diversity and the Fundamentals of Effective Teaching

Who is Sharon Ornelas?: Sharon Ornelas has spent 13 years teaching high school writing and English As a Second Language (ESL) to immigrant students in the Minneapolis Public Schools. Her first nine years were at Patrick Henry High School and her last four at Thomas Edison High School. Thomas Edison is a designated Newcomer Center, a school that “develops academic proficiency in English, ensures achievement of grade level standards, and develops and maintains students’ first language as a resource for learning and social success.” In 2007, Ornelas won the Milken National Educator Award: “to celebrate, elevate and activate exemplary K–12 educators.”

How Sharon Ornelas became a teacher: Originally interested in a career in international relations, Ornelas spent her junior year in college studying and traveling in India. During this period she realized that “if I really wanted to make a difference in this world, being a diplomat was maybe not the most realistic way to go about that. I had this realization that education was something that was really impactful. No matter where you go, it makes a difference in people’s lives.”

Her story: Sharon Ornelas has taught students from all over the world. At different times in her 13-year career, she has taught groups from Ecuador, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Guyana, Kenya, Laos, Liberia, Mexico, Somalia, Surinam, Thailand and Vietnam. But, as immigration policies change and world events unfold, she anticipates that she will continue to receive new nationalities in her classroom. She says of her situation "... as an ESL teacher, even if you stay in the same building, the groups of kids are going to change."

Her students bring their national, cultural, linguistic, racial and religious identities to the classroom. But they also bring widely varying personal histories. Some are born and raised in refugee camps, while others were born in the United States; some have no formal education and others are academically advanced; some speak only their native language and others are bi- or trilingual (including some with good English verbal skills); some arrived as members of extended families and others have few relatives in the United States; some are part of large communities and others live in virtual isolation; some are culturally aligned with their parents and their home countries and others are partially or wholly Americanized; and some are in the United States legally and others are undocumented.

For those teachers like Ornelas, who are committed to working with varied and changing waves of newcomers, the student diversity raises a critical educational question: Which teaching methods work best with these populations? Do different groups need different strategies or do they all respond to similar teaching methods? Ornelas herself frames the question by saying, "The cultures are going to change ... how do I work with students who come from different cultures? How do I deal with a class where there are different cultures within the class?"

Ornelas believes that the fundamentals of effective teaching practice are the same regardless of the population, that what is important for immigrant students and English language learners directly mirrors what is important for all students. She says, "Group information is helpful up to a point. But all kids are individuals, both of their culture and not of their culture. Every kid is an exception in some way, linguistically, culturally. It's important to know what different cultures value but it's also important to know that every kid in that culture does not fit into that mold. And

Thomas Edison High School

School Size: 1,024 students

Ethnicity: American Indian/
Alaskan Native: 2%; Asian/
Pacific Islander: 9%; Black: 55%;
Hispanic: 23%; White: 11%

ELL: 37%

Immigrant: 27%

“The most important ways that we can change to an asset point of view for our students is to see them as individuals. And we have to see the strengths first and then we can think about what are the student’s individual needs.”

if you really want to help kids learn, you have to see them as individuals, not as members of a group.”

In turn, the key to success with individual students is based on the teacher’s “reflective practice.” This refers to her ability to work individually and with her peers to analyze and change her practice, based not on theory or generalizations, but on what is actually happening in the classroom with each student’s learning. Once the analysis of each student is made and understood, Ornelas then develops specific actions and strategies for that individual student. This process, which requires constant and ongoing attention, mandates that every teacher “look at your student work and really reflect on what this is telling you about where students are, and how am I going to go in and change my lesson today based on that.”

Her 13 years of experience in Minneapolis Public Schools leads Ornelas to urge policymakers to focus reform efforts in four areas. One, create small classes so that all students receive the individual attention they deserve. Two, provide teachers the time they need to carefully think through and plan the strategies that will work to meet the individual needs of their students. Three, give teachers, like their students, individualized programs to improve their teaching performance: “We know that people learn in different ways. We know that with students. ... But what about adults?” And four, “My number one suggestion to policymakers is to pass the DREAM Act or something along those lines that gives our undocumented students, who are living here and attending school in our country, an opportunity to go forward with their education. I think it’s a really different future for students who are documented and for students who are not documented. ... How are we going to support these students? They’re here, they’re part of the future of our country and they will be better off and we will be better off if they’re educated, so how are we going to make that happen?”

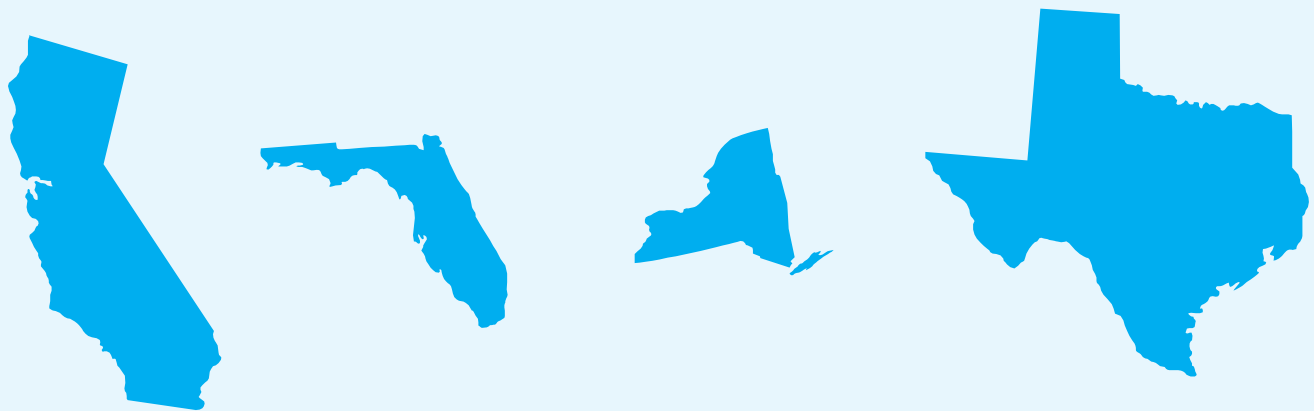


Immigrants in the U.S.

During the last four decades, the **foreign-born** population of the U.S. has increased in size and percentage of the total population: from 10 million (5 percent) in 1970 to 14 million (6 percent) in 1980 to 20 million (8 percent) in 1990 and 31 million (11 percent) in 2000.

80 percent of the foreign-born residents in the U.S. were from Latin America and Asia; 53 percent were from Latin America, and 28 percent were from Asia in 2009. In 1960, 75 percent of the foreign-born residents were from Europe.

Fifty-six percent (22 million) of the foreign-born residents live in California, Florida, New York and Texas.





Dolores Perez

Culture and Community in the Classroom

Who is Dolores Perez?: For the past 27 years, Dolores Perez has been a teacher at Cromack Elementary in Brownsville, Texas. She has a B.A. in elementary education with a minor in bilingual education from the Pan American University at Brownsville, a master's degree in supervision of instruction from the University of Texas–Brownsville and a secondary reading certification. Perez has been teaching first- to fifth-grade ELL students throughout her career. She is an active member of the Sabel Palms Writing Project and participated in the leadership of the National Writing Project's English Language Learners Network.

How Dolores Perez became a teacher: Teaching was a natural transition for Dolores Perez. Because she grew up in a bilingual and bicultural environment, as a young child, she was often tapped by her teachers to help newly arrived students from Mexico navigate their way through the English language in school. She practiced English with them on a daily basis and made sure they understood the academic content. Her mother was her role model and her mentor. They taught together at Cromack Elementary for 14 years.

“To know two or three languages is an asset, not a deficiency.”

Her story: Hispanic students are a minority majority in Texas and California primary schools. Immigrants are joining those who have been here for years, in some cases centuries. In many of these places, there is a deep sense of community and commitment to that community.

Dolores Perez is part of one of these communities. She and her family have lived in Brownsville for three generations, and they understand both its past and its present. As a teacher, Perez considers this a great advantage. “My students see me and they see themselves; I come from their community. I have students who are recent immigrants, first generation, second generation, so we all relate to each other because we come from the same community. I understand their stories, and I understand their struggles. Things have changed (but) ... we’re still the same people. I am lucky in that I know their stories — their stories are my stories.”

The cohesion in places like the Brownsville schools is also strong because, unlike schools in other parts of the country where multiple languages and cultures are the norm, all of Perez’s students are native Spanish speakers and most are of Mexican descent.

But this sense of community, for all of its strengths, cannot block out all of the problems of the modern world. Perez, as a teacher, cannot put aside current events. She and her students live in a town that has recently made headlines for border violence and immigration wars. Although immigration is not a major topic in her classroom, she knows that it is a national hot button issue. However, despite the tensions at the border, the learning continues in Perez’s class. She makes it clear that she is available for students and parents alike and that their immigration status is not a topic for discussion in her classroom since under *Plyler vs. Doe*, (a Supreme Court case that struck down a state statute denying funding for education to undocumented students and simultaneously struck down a municipal school district’s attempt to charge illegal aliens an annual \$1,000 tuition fee for each illegal alien student), all students have a right to a K–12 education.

In sharing the tools and strategies that help her be an effective teacher, Perez immediately identifies two that are particularly important: first, the community of family; second, the community of technology.

Parental engagement is critical to supporting her students. Perez engages parents through extensive outreach after she gets to know her students. If a student does not show academic growth, she brings in the parents. “...it’s not always the language [prohibiting the advancement]. There may be other issues. I am here to provide resources and strategies so that parents can

Cromack Elementary
School Size: 720 students
Ethnicity: Black: <1%; Hispanic: 99%
ELL/Bilingual: 68%
Recent Immigrant: 3% (in the U.S. for three years or less)

help their children at home.” Having a rapport with the parents helps her find assistance for a student who might have a learning disability instead of a language deficiency. It also aids in keeping students on track academically since those students whose parents are actively engaged tend to do better in school. She shared the story of a young man who worked very hard, stayed until 7 p.m., and passed all three state assessments. His perseverance, her instruction and the active parent engagement made a difference.

Technology is also important to student learning and is a major instructional tool. Regardless of socioeconomic status, her students are engaged in what’s happening in the world through media and technology, and are up to date in the latest social trends. In her classroom, students are exposed to a world beyond their community through Google aerial maps, streaming videos and educational websites. For example, in explaining erosion, they used the Grand Canyon as an example. Since most had no idea what the Grand Canyon was, Perez “took them on a little virtual tour of the skywalk.” This was something that her ELL students 27 years ago would not have been able to reach or imagine.

She wants her students “to have the ability to know that each language holds power.” But this can be a struggle. Perez hopes that what is referred to in some places as a deficiency — students who begin their academic careers with a lack of fluent English — will eventually become an asset for her students, since bilingual skills are becoming more important in our global society. But to fully accomplish this, she knows that she needs to do much more work with teachers. “In order to help students see themselves as stakeholders of their own learning, we teachers need to constantly work on our own professional growth so we can better understand and build upon what the students already bring into the classroom.”

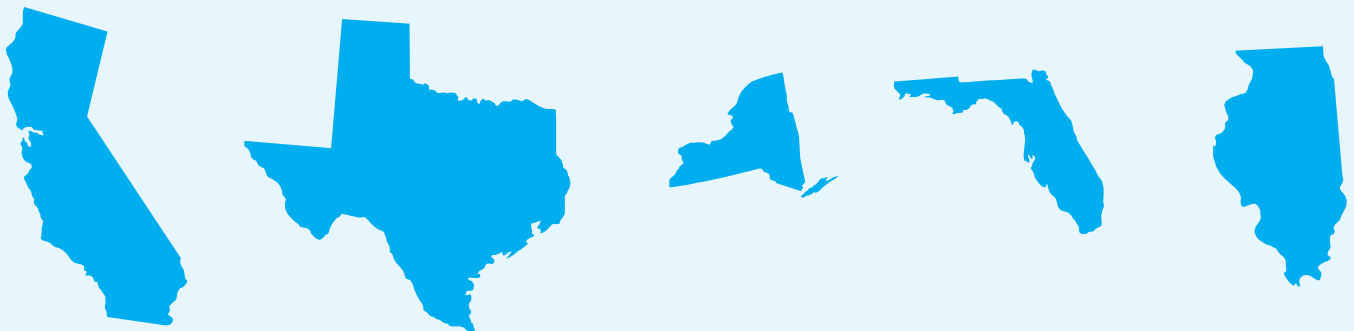


English Language Learners

Limited English proficiency **students** speak more than 400 different languages, including languages from outside the U.S. and inside the U.S. Nearly 80 percent of limited English proficiency students speak Spanish; another 5 percent speak Asian languages.

Limited English Proficiency **students** are twice as likely to live in poor families compared to children who only speak English or speak English very well.

Five states — California, Texas, New York, Florida and Illinois — are home to 70 percent of the LEPs in elementary schools.





Yumi Matsui: A Shared Vision of Success

Who is Yumi Matsui?: Yumi Matsui teaches junior and senior English and humanities at the Life Academy of Health & Bioscience in Oakland, Calif., one of many small schools created by the Oakland Unified School District after the state takeover of the district. Matsui began her teaching career eight years ago when the school was brand new. The school serves a diverse population of students from East Oakland and offers internships and job placements for juniors and seniors in health- and science-related fields. Life Academy has the highest college acceptance rate of any high school in Oakland.

How Yumi Matsui became a teacher: Her commitment to teaching comes from her passion for social justice. She says, "As a student organizer [in college], I worked on many different political issues on campus. ...These activities led me to value education and gave me the desire to fight for equal educational access for all students. This work, inevitably, led me to teaching."

Her story: When Matsui began teaching, she realized that many of her high school students didn't know how to read or write beyond a fifth-grade level. "I was shocked. I asked myself, 'What am I going to do now?' It became much more complex than teaching history since some students couldn't access the content in the textbook."

Together, the principal and faculty at Life Academy have tackled these issues across disciplines and at each grade level, creating a school that is now a success. Although the students enter with a wide range of reading and writing skills, more than 95 percent graduate and go on to some form of higher education. At Life Academy, this outcome begins with a careful recruiting process for teachers who are motivated and share the staff and faculty vision — academic success for all students — for the school.

The founding principal is still at Life Academy, and the turnover rate for teachers is very small. Many of the teachers who have left have gone on to join other small schools. Matsui believes that "we have a good team of teachers here. The way that it has been kept alive is that at least a handful of the teachers that first opened up the school are still here." This stability is reflected in student behavior. Matsui says that among students there "are very few fights and very few suspensions."

This cohesion is the result of that shared vision of education and, from this, the staff and faculty create their academic strategies. For example, Matsui notes, "We've worked together to address the skills gap for some of our students. We developed a similar vocabulary strategy that we use across subjects for all four years, creating a system for the ninth through the 12th grade. We have some students who are very high performing and are taking college classes and are able to read difficult texts, and some students who really struggle."

This strategy is particularly effective because it is tempered with differentiated instruction in such areas as reading. So, for example, reading assignments are geared toward individual reading levels so that all students feel both challenged and reassured through seeing their own progress in the class.

Life Academy of Health & Bioscience

School Size: 248 students

Ethnicity: American Indian/Alaskan Native: <1%; Asian/Pacific Islander: 10%; Black: 11%; Hispanic: 73%; White: 1%; Other: 3%

ELL: 52%

Immigrant: 25%

Bilingual and English language learners in general have many assets to bring to the table because they are bicultural. They navigate through so many different worlds. We need to acknowledge their talents in order to teach them better.

Other features of the school are also responsible for the steady progress of the students. One is the powerful use of new technology tools, integrated into a strong writing program. Matsui believes that “writing is powerful. It’s learning, it’s processing, but also sharing information to others. I tell my students that being a good writer allows you to access so much, whether you’re writing a complaint letter, or you’re writing an e-mail, or all these different things that you do every day. The need to be able to learn and navigate different forms of writing is really important, especially for English language learners.”

Programs such as Digital Storytelling tap into the vast knowledge that students bring with them, and these programs allow that knowledge to form the basis of literacy instruction that is motivating and engaging. “Oakland has a partnership with the Bay Area Writing Project where I was able to get a coach who was a teacher consultant from the Writing Project,” Matsui says. “She was amazing. She came in and observed me. Gave me tips on teaching but also really got into how to teach writing, how to analyze texts and how to teach all kinds of strategies ... it just transformed my classroom and my approach of writing and how to get students to write.”

Internship experiences are also central to the curriculum at Life Academy. “All juniors and seniors have an internship ... many of my advisees have internships at places such as Oakland Children’s Hospital. These students participate by doing rotations in various parts of the hospital and shadow doctors. Some of them have incredible experiences, such as viewing brain surgery. It is no wonder these students have a desire to be a part of the medical field.”

Ultimately, the students succeed because of their own strengths and how we view their assets. As Matsui says, “Bilingual students and English language learners in general have many assets to bring to the table because they are bicultural. They navigate through so many different worlds. We need to acknowledge their talents in order to teach them better.”



Children of Immigrants

Virtually all **immigrant families** are working families. Among children with foreign-born parents, 97 percent have a parent who works and 72 percent have a parent who works full-time, year-round.

In 2008, **21 percent** of children of immigrants were poor, compared with 15 percent of children of natives.

Twenty-six percent of children of immigrants live in linguistically isolated households where no person age 14 or older is English proficient.



Project Description

This series of reports, *Teachers Are the Center of Education/Teacher Voices*, was developed to highlight the importance of teachers and the quality of their work. This specific report, a partnership among the College Board, the National Writing Project and Phi Delta Kappa International, shines the spotlight on one aspect of the teacher experience: the great work taking place in classrooms teaching immigrant and English language learners. Teachers were nominated by the College Board and the National Writing Project and were selected to provide a diverse set of disciplines, locations, kinds of schools and student populations, all committed to excellence in education. The stories of all six nominated teachers are in the report. In each case, a writer spent a day at each school observing the teacher, and then interviewing him or her and recording their conversation. A photographer also visited each school. The final stories reflect only a small portion of the conversations and observations.

Acknowledgments

We want to thank the teachers who are profiled in this report. They could not have been more supportive in allowing us into their classrooms and in sharing their thoughts about their profession, their students, writing, digital learning and American education. Our thanks also to the administrators in these schools for allowing us to visit. We would also like to thank the staff of the National Writing Project and the College Board who put us in touch with such a distinguished group of teachers and helped us in defining the shape and scope of this report. Stephanie Coggin, Kelly Redznak and Leanne Snoeck of the College Board created the layout and design of the report. Judy Buchanan, Adriana Flores, Alan Heaps, Richard Sterling and Fiona Yung helped conceptualize and write the report. School data on school size and student ethnicity were obtained from the National Center for Education Statistics (retrieved March 2011 from <http://nces.ed.gov>). Data on the percentage of ELL and immigrant students in each profile were provided by the individual schools.

Citation

In citing this report or any of its contents, please use “conceptualized and written by the College Board, the National Writing Project and Phi Delta Kappa International.”

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The National Writing Project

The National Writing Project (NWP) is a nationwide network of educators working together to improve the teaching of writing in the nation's schools and in other settings. NWP provides high-quality professional development programs to teachers in a variety of disciplines and at all levels, from early childhood through university. Founded in 1974 at the University of California, Berkeley, NWP today is a network of more than 200 university-based sites located in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Co-directed by faculty from the local university and K–12 schools, each NWP site develops a leadership cadre of teachers through an invitational summer institute, and designs and delivers customized professional development programs for local schools, districts and higher education institutions. NWP sites serve more than 130,000 participants annually, reaching millions of students. For more information, please visit www.nwp.org.

PDK

Phi Delta Kappa International is the premier professional association for educators. For more than 100 years, it has focused its work on the tenets of service, research and leadership. PDK is one of the largest education associations and has more than 35,000 members, including teachers, principals, superintendents, and higher education faculty and administrators. PDK publishes the highly regarded Phi Delta Kappan, the No. 1 education policy magazine, and sponsors the annual PDK/Gallup poll of the public's attitudes toward public schools. PDK is the sole sponsor of the Future Educators Association (FEA), the only national and international professional organization that provides students who are interested in education-related careers with activities and materials that allow them to explore the teaching profession in a variety of ways. More than 250 local PDK chapters — most located on college campuses — give PDK members a unique opportunity to network with other like-minded educators. PDK's mission is to support education, particularly public education, as the cornerstone of democracy. Its vision is to be the experts in cultivating great educators for tomorrow while continuing to ensure high-quality education for today.

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ELL Report Facts Sources:

English Language Learners

In 2006, there were approximately 5 million K–12 students in the United States identified as limited English proficiency. (*The Biennial Report to Congress on The Implementation of the Title III State Formula Grant Program: School Years 2004-06*, U.S. Department of Education, 2008). (p. 7)

The percentage of school-age children with limited English-speaking abilities nearly doubled from from 2.8 percent in 1979 to 5.4 percent in 2005. (*The Role of Schools in the English Language Learner Achievement Gap*, Pew Hispanic Center, June 2008). (p. 7)

Sixty-four percent of limited English proficiency students were born in the United States. (“Spotlight on Limited English Proficiency Students in the United States,” Migration Information Source, February 2006, retrieved on March 15, 2011 from <http://www.migrationinformation.org/usfocus/display.cfm?ID=373>). (p. 7)

LEP students speak more than 400 different languages, including languages from outside the United States and inside the United States. Nearly 80 percent of LEP students speak Spanish; another 5 percent speak Asian languages. (*The Biennial Report to Congress on The Implementation of the Title III State Formula Grant Program: School Years 2004-06*, U.S. Department of Education, 2008). (p. 23)

Limited English proficiency students are twice as likely to live in poor families compared to children who only speak English or speak English very well. (“Spotlight on Limited English Proficiency Students in the United States,” Migration Information Source, February 2006, retrieved on March 15, 2011 from <http://www.migrationinformation.org/usfocus/display.cfm?ID=373>). (p. 23)

Five states — California, Texas, New York, Florida and Illinois — are home to 70 percent of the LEPs in elementary schools. (“Putting English Language Learners on the Educational Map: The No Child Left Behind Act Implemented,” Urban Institute, May 2007). (p. 23)

Children of Immigrants

There are over 15 million children of immigrants in the United States. (“Children of Immigrants: Facts and Figures,” The Urban Institute, May 2006). (p. 1)

The number of young children of immigrants has doubled since 1990. (“Young Children of Immigrants: The Leading Edge,” Urban Institute, August 2010). (p. 11)

In 2006, 80 percent of the children of immigrants were born in the United States. (“Children of Immigrants: Facts and Figures,” The Urban Institute, May 2006). (p. 11)

Virtually all immigrant families are working families. Among children with foreign-born parents, 97 percent have a parent who works and 72 percent have a parent who works full-time, year-round. (“Federal Policies Restrict Children’s Access to Key Public Benefits,” National Center for Children in Poverty, October 2005). (p. 27)

In 2008, 21 percent of children of immigrants were poor, compared with 15 percent of children of natives. ("Children of Immigrants: Economic Well Being," The Urban Institute, November 2010). (p. 27)

Twenty-six percent of children of immigrants live in linguistically isolated households where no person age 14 or older is English proficient. ("Children of Immigrants: Family and Parent Characteristics," Urban Institute, May 2010). (p. 27)

Immigrants in the U.S.

Between 2000 and 2009, the foreign-born population in the United States grew from 31 million to 38.5 million, representing a change of 23.8 percent. By comparison, between 1990 and 2000, the foreign-born population changed from 19.7 million to 31.1 million, a difference of 57.4 percent. ("The United States, Social & Demographic Characteristics," Migration Policy Institute, <http://www.migrationinformation.org/datahub/state.cfm?ID=US>, accessed March 7, 2011). (p. 15)

In 2009, the foreign-born population represented 12.5 percent of the total U.S. population. ("The United States, Social & Demographic Characteristics," Migration Policy Institute, <http://www.migrationinformation.org/datahub/state.cfm?ID=US>, accessed March 7, 2011). (p. 15)

The proportion of immigrants to the total population (12.5 percent) is now lower than it was during the great migration of the late 1800s and early 1900s, when it fluctuated between 13 and 15 percent. ("Place of Birth of Foreign-Born Population: 2009," U.S. Census Bureau, October 2010). (p. 15)

It is estimated that in 2008, 11.9 million unauthorized immigrants lived in the United States. ("A Portrait of Unauthorized Immigrants in the United States," Pew Hispanic Center, April 14, 2009). (p. i)

During the last four decades, the foreign-born population of the United States has increased in size and percentage of total population: from 10 million (5 percent) in 1970 to 14 million (6 percent) in 1980 to 20 million (8 percent) in 1990, and 31 million (11 percent) in 2000. ("Place of Birth of Foreign-Born Population: 2009," U.S. Census Bureau, October 2010). (p. 19)

Eighty percent of the foreign-born residents in the United States were from Latin America and Asia, 53 percent were from Latin America and 28 percent were from Asia in 2009. In 1960, 75 percent of the foreign-born residents were from Europe. ("Place of Birth of Foreign-Born Population: 2009," U.S. Census Bureau, October 2010). (p. 19)

Fifty-six percent (22 million) of the foreign-born residents live in California, Florida, New York and Texas. ("Place of Birth of Foreign-Born Population: 2009," U.S. Census Bureau, October 2010). (p. 19)

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