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Rosalyn Rodriguez, Ed.S.
Nastasia Schreiner, M.Ed.

Diverse Classrooms: Examining Academic Achievement of Recently Arrived Foreign-Born Students in Miami-Dade Schools with High Immigrant Enrollment

Introduction

Miami has long been a major hub for immigration in the United States. Due to its strategic location and historical connections to Latin America and the Caribbean, the city is experiencing significant demographic shifts that affect various aspects of community life. Recent reports state that Miami-Dade County is home to over 2.7 million residents, with a significant portion being immigrants or descendants of immigrants (U.S. Census Bureau, 2023). This changing demographic environment brings opportunities and challenges, particularly within the education sector.

The immigration trends in Miami-Dade County are influenced by various factors, including economic conditions, political instability in home countries, and changing immigration policies at the federal level. Miami-Dade's unique position as a gateway to the United States significantly impacts these trends. Over the past decade, the city's immigrant population has grown by 7%, and this trend is expected to continue, given the region's crucial role (Pew Research Center, 2022). These changes have significant implications for local schools, which are increasingly responsible for meeting the needs of a diverse and often under-resourced student body.

Schools in Miami-Dade are facing multiple challenges associated with this demographic change. Language barriers, cultural disparities, and unequal access to resources can significantly influence the educational achievements of immigrant students. Furthermore, policies at both the state and federal levels, particularly those impacting funding for English language learners and safeguards for undocumented students, significantly shape the educational journeys of these students (National School Boards Association, 2023).

This research brief explores the increase in Foreign-Born students in Miami-Dade County Public Schools (M-DCPS) and their academic achievement. By examining demographic and student achievement data, this brief seeks to understand the interplay between immigration and education in one of the nation's most diverse cities. This understanding is important for developing effective strategies to address the challenges and harness the opportunities presented by Miami's dynamic demographic landscape.

Data

In this research brief, "Foreign-Born Recently Arrived Students" refers to students not born in any of the 50 states and enrolled in M-DCPS during the specific school year. Throughout the rest of the report, we will use the term "Foreign-Born" to refer to the students who meet the above

definition. These students were identified for the last three school years (2021-2022, 2022-2023, and 2023-2024).

Next, traditional schools with the highest concentration of Foreign-Born were identified to examine whether having a large influx of such students within a school impacts student achievement. The school percentages of Foreign-Born students were determined for the last three years. The schools with a 3-year average of at least 15% were selected as the schools with the highest influx of recent Foreign-Born arrivals, resulting in 25 schools (Table 1). Interestingly, these schools were all either elementary, middle, or K-8 centers.

Table 1

Average Percent of Foreign-Born Students in Selected Schools (2021-2024)

School	School Type	2021-2022			2022-2023			2023-2024			Average Percent Over three years
		Number of Foreign-Born	Total Number of Students	Percent of Foreign-Born	Number of Foreign-Born	Total Number of Students	Percent of Foreign-Born	Number of Foreign-Born	Total Number of Students	Percent of Foreign-Born	
1	Middle	113	630	18%	217	729	30%	178	826	22%	23%
2	K-8	58	159	36%	39	235	17%	48	308	16%	23%
3	Elementary	64	400	16%	114	437	26%	95	432	22%	21%
4	Elementary	86	571	15%	196	723	27%	109	663	16%	20%
5	K-8	239	916	26%	124	777	16%	95	628	15%	19%
6	Elementary	225	1048	21%	172	969	18%	150	880	17%	19%
7	Middle	71	580	12%	181	676	27%	124	737	17%	19%
8	Elementary	81	490	17%	115	553	21%	97	534	18%	18%
9	Elementary	57	403	14%	105	440	24%	69	435	16%	18%
10	Elementary	84	445	19%	98	469	21%	64	457	14%	18%
11	Middle	106	561	19%	101	574	18%	92	570	16%	18%
12	Elementary	101	611	17%	149	720	21%	111	730	15%	17%
13	Elementary	105	748	14%	154	758	20%	142	831	17%	17%
14	K-8	235	1152	20%	139	940	15%	137	853	16%	17%
15	Elementary	76	434	18%	90	477	19%	70	501	14%	17%
16	Elementary	49	371	13%	80	418	19%	72	419	17%	17%
17	Middle	64	629	10%	164	698	23%	107	676	16%	16%
18	Elementary	18	162	11%	43	194	22%	32	200	16%	16%
19	Elementary	60	343	17%	54	347	16%	58	364	16%	16%
20	Elementary	46	408	11%	78	428	18%	83	446	19%	16%
21	Elementary	20	256	8%	53	253	21%	54	280	19%	16%
22	Elementary	83	588	14%	103	599	17%	93	581	16%	16%
23	Elementary	53	444	12%	128	564	23%	69	552	13%	16%
24	Elementary	46	320	14%	73	366	20%	42	354	12%	15%
25	K-8	113	865	13%	217	1024	21%	116	1028	11%	15%
District	Overall	13939	239228	6%	19776	241710	8%	16649	239379	7%	7%

Note: District percentages reflect only traditional (non-charter) schools.

Table 2 identifies the top 10 countries/territories of origin for Foreign-Born students district-wide over the past three academic years.

Table 2

Top 10 Birth Countries/Territories of Foreign-Born Recently Arrived Students

2021-2022			2022-2023			2023-2024		
Country	Count	Percent	Country	Count	Percent	Country	Count	Percent
Cuba	19,730	6.3%	Cuba	27,980	8.7%	Cuba	32,239	10.0%
Venezuela	14,118	4.5%	Venezuela	14,188	4.4%	Venezuela	14,280	4.4%
Honduras	5,383	1.7%	Colombia	5,141	1.6%	Nicaragua	6,283	2.0%
Colombia	4,419	1.4%	Honduras	5,093	1.6%	Colombia	5,427	1.7%
Haiti	4,009	1.3%	Nicaragua	4,960	1.5%	Honduras	5,019	1.6%
Nicaragua	3,696	1.2%	Haiti	3,918	1.2%	Haiti	4,621	1.4%
Dominican Republic	2,042	0.6%	Dominican Republic	1,953	0.6%	Dominican Republic	1,919	0.6%
Guatemala	2,006	0.6%	Guatemala	1,945	0.6%	Guatemala	2,147	0.7%
Puerto Rico	1,764	0.6%	Spain	1,673	0.5%	Spain	1,543	0.5%
Spain	1,645	0.5%	Puerto Rico	1,488	0.5%	Puerto Rico	1,262	0.4%

2021-2022

During the 2021-2022 academic year, Cuban students represented the most significant proportion of Foreign-Born Recently Arrived Students at approximately 6% of the total student population at M-DCPS. Venezuelan students also contributed significantly, comprising about 5%. Following closely were students from Honduras, at about 2%; Colombian, Haitian, and Nicaraguan students were not far behind, contributing about 1% each. The remaining countries were all below 1%.

2022-2023

In the academic year of 2022-2023, there was a notable shift in the composition of students. The proportion of Foreign-Born Recently Arrived Cuban students increased significantly to approximately 9% of the total student population at M-DCPS, reflecting a rising trend in Cuban migration. Venezuelan representation decreased slightly to about 4%, while Colombian, Honduran, and Nicaraguan students saw a modest increase to about 2% each. All other countries were approximately 1% or less.

2023-2024

In the 2023-2024 academic year, Cuba's representation in the Foreign-Born Recently Arrived Student population increased again, accounting for 10% of the total student population in M-DCPS. Venezuela maintained its steady share at about 4%, while the number of Nicaraguan, Colombian, and Honduran students was approximately 2% each. All other countries were approximately 1% or less.

The data from the past three years shows a significant shift, particularly with the growing influence of Cuban students in the Foreign-Born Recently Arrived Student population. This reflects broader migration trends and potential changes in educational policies across regions. As global conditions evolve, these patterns may shift, providing further insights into the international student landscape.

Demographic Trends: Foreign-Born Recent Arrivals vs. Other Students (2021-2024)

Table 3 presents the demographic analysis of recently arrived Foreign-Born students in Selected Schools and all Other traditional (non-charter) schools between 2021 and 2024. This group of schools will be referred to as Comparison Schools.

This analysis reveals significant trends and variations in key areas such as English Language Learners (ELL), Free and Reduced-Price Lunch (FRL) recipients, disability status, and race/ethnicity.

Table 3

Demographics: Foreign-Born vs. Other Students Across the District (2021-2022 to 2023-2024)

	2021-2022				2022-2023				2023-2024			
	Selected Schools (25)		Comparison Schools		Selected Schools (25)		Comparison Schools		Selected Schools (25)		Comparison Schools	
	Foreign-Born	Other	Foreign-Born	Other	Foreign-Born	Other	Foreign-Born	Other	Foreign-Born	Other	Foreign-Born	Other
ELL	94.3%	33.1%	84.4%	13.0%	96.7%	39.4%	90.3%	14.9%	96.4%	45.9%	89.9%	17.9%
FRL	51.6%	86.3%	46.5%	76.8%	53.3%	67.7%	50.5%	61.0%	51.1%	68.8%	48.6%	62.1%
Disability	1.7%	17.2%	1.3%	14.7%	1.0%	16.4%	1.2%	15.3%	1.5%	15.9%	1.5%	15.5%
Race/Ethnicity												
Black	0.1%	3.5%	6.8%	22.6%	0.1%	2.9%	4.9%	22.2%	0.2%	2.6%	11.9%	21.1%
White	1.6%	1.8%	6.1%	7.0%	0.7%	1.4%	6.2%	6.8%	0.7%	1.5%	5.2%	6.6%
Hispanic	98.0%	93.9%	85.7%	68.5%	98.6%	95.0%	88.0%	69.2%	98.6%	95.3%	82.0%	70.6%
Other	0.2%	0.8%	1.4%	1.8%	0.6%	0.7%	0.7%	0.7%	0.5%	0.6%	1.0%	1.6%

Note: Foreign-Born Recent Arrivals are defined in this report as students who were not born in any of the 50 States and entered the M-DCPS during a specific academic year. Comparison Schools group includes all traditional (non-charter schools) where the proportion of recently arrived Foreign-Born students was less than 15%.

English Language Learners (ELL)

Across the three years, Foreign-Born students consistently demonstrate higher ELL percentages than Other students.

- **2021-2022:** Approximately 94% of Foreign-Born students in Selected Schools were ELL, compared to 33% among all Other students. In Comparison Schools, 84% of the Foreign-Born students and 13% of the Other students were ELLs.
- **2022-2023:** The approximate percentage of ELLs among Foreign-Born students increased to 97% in Selected Schools and to 90% in Comparison Schools, while the percentages of ELLs among all Other students grew to 39% and 15%, respectively.
- **2023-2024:** The approximate percentage of ELLs among Foreign-Born students in Selected Schools remained high at 96%, with 46% of Other students being ELLs. In Comparison Schools, the percentages were 90% for Foreign-Born and 18% for Others.

The trend indicates a higher concentration of ELL students among the Foreign-Born population, particularly in Selected Schools.

Free and Reduced-Price Lunch (FRL)

FRL participation shows significant differences between Foreign-Born and Other students, with Foreign-Born students generally having lower percentages.

- **2021-2022:** Approximately 52% of Foreign-Born students in Selected Schools were on FRL, compared to 86% of Other students. Approximately 47% of Foreign-Born and 77% of Other students in Comparison Schools were on FRL.
- **2022-2023:** The approximate proportion of Foreign-Born students on FRL increased to 53% in Selected Schools and 51% in Comparison Schools. FRL percentages among Other students decreased to 68% and 61%, respectively.
- **2023-2024:** The approximate percentage of FRL Foreign-Born students in Selected Schools was 51%, with 49% in Comparison Schools. Other students were 69% and 62% eligible for FRL, respectively.

The data indicates that Foreign-Born students typically have lower rates of free and reduced-price lunch (FRL) eligibility than Other students. This discrepancy may be explained by potential challenges faced by Foreign-Born students in providing the necessary documentation to apply for these benefits.

Disability Status

The percentage of students with disabilities is notably low among Foreign-Born students compared to Other students, with only minor variations over the years.

- **2021-2022:** Approximately 2% of Foreign-Born students in Selected Schools had disabilities versus 17% among Other students. In Comparison Schools, the percentages were 1% for Foreign-Born students and 15% for all Other students.
- **2022-2023:** The approximate Student with Disability (SWD) rates for Foreign-Born students at Selected Schools and Comparison Schools are comparable at about 1%. Other students had 16% and 15%, respectively.
- **2023-2024:** In both the Selected Schools and Comparison Schools, around 2% of Foreign-Born students were SWDs, while the proportion of SWD students among Other students remained constant at about 16%.

This low percentage of SWDs among Foreign-Born students could reflect either lower disability identification rates or other unknown factors affecting the Foreign-Born population.

Race/Ethnicity

The racial and ethnic composition of Foreign-Born versus Other students reveals differences, particularly in Hispanic representation.

- **Black Students:** Foreign-Born students have a consistently lower percentage of Black students than Other students. For example, in 2023-2024, Black students comprised approximately 0.2% of the Foreign-Born students and 3% of the Other students in Selected Schools versus 12% and 21% respectively in Comparison Schools.
- **White Students:** The approximate percentage of White students among Foreign-Born remains consistently low compared to Other students. In 2023-2024, Foreign-Born White students were 1% in Selected Schools and 5% in Comparison Schools.

- **Hispanic Students:** Foreign-Born students overwhelmingly identify as Hispanic, with percentages around 99% in Selected Schools over the three years. Other Hispanic students also show high percentages but consistently lower than their Foreign-Born peers.
- **Other Ethnicities:** The representation of students categorized as "Other" remains relatively low and stable across both groups.

The demographic trends from 2021 to 2024 highlight significant differences between Foreign-Born and all Other students. ELL students are more represented among Foreign-Born students than Other students, especially in Selected Schools. On the other hand, the proportion of SWD and FRL students among Foreign-Born students is lower than among Other students. Racial and ethnic composition also reveals a strong Hispanic majority among Foreign-Born students compared to Other students. These trends reflect broader socio-economic and educational dynamics that may influence student achievement results.

Analysis of Achievement: FAST ELA and FAST MATH (2022-2023 and 2023-2024)

The data on student achievement for FAST ELA and FAST MATH provides insight into how Foreign-Born students compare to their peers in Selected and Comparison schools. The analysis covers the academic years 2022-2023 and 2023-2024, revealing trends and shifts in performance across different grades and student groups, presented in Table 4.

Table 4

Analysis of Achievement: FAST ELA and FAST MATH from 2022-2023 to 2023-2024

FAST ELA (% Achieving Levels 3-5)												
	2022-2023						2023-2024					
	Selected Schools (25)			Comparison Schools			Selected Schools (25)			Comparison Schools		
	Foreign-Born	Other	Ratio	Foreign-Born	Other	Ratio	Foreign-Born	Other	Ratio	Foreign-Born	Other	Ratio
Grades 3-5	3.0%	45.7%	15.2	6.4%	55.0%	8.6	4.2%	45.0%	10.7	7.5%	57.0%	7.6
Grades 6-8	3.8%	40.0%	10.5	7.5%	53.7%	7.2	4.7%	39.8%	8.5	8.1%	56.3%	7.0
Overall	3.4%	43.5%	12.8	7.6%	52.5%	6.9	4.4%	43.0%	9.8	8.5%	56.2%	6.6

FAST MATH (% Achieving Levels 3-5)												
	2022-2023						2023-2024					
	Selected Schools (25)			Comparison Schools			Selected Schools (25)			Comparison Schools		
	Foreign-Born	Other	Ratio	Foreign-Born	Other	Ratio	Foreign-Born	Other	Ratio	Foreign-Born	Other	Ratio
Grades 3-5	16.5%	55.2%	3.4	22.2%	60.5%	2.7	17.1%	55.7%	3.3	19.9%	63.5%	3.2
Grades 6-8	24.3%	46.0%	1.9	25.8%	51.2%	2.0	23.7%	44.1%	1.9	21.2%	54.4%	2.6
Overall	19.9%	52.0%	2.6	24.0%	55.7%	2.3	20.1%	51.7%	2.6	20.6%	59.0%	2.9

FAST ELA Performance

Overall Achievement Levels (Levels 3-5)

- **2022-2023:** Foreign-Born students in Selected Schools achieved approximately 3% on or above grade level on the FAST ELA, significantly lower than 44% for Other students. The gap was also wide in Comparison Schools, with Foreign-Born students at approximately 8% and Other students at 53% scoring on or above grade level. The ratios of the percentages of students scoring on or above grade level for Other students compared to Foreign-Born students were 12.8 in the Selected Schools and 6.9 in the Comparison Schools. Indicating that Other students performed almost 13 times higher than Foreign-Born students in Selected Schools and about seven times higher than Foreign-Born students in Comparison Schools. This may be due, at least in part, to the slightly higher percentage of ELL Foreign-Born students in the Selected Schools (96.7%) than in all Other schools (90.3%).
- **2023-2024:** The performance of Foreign-Born students slightly improved to about 4% of students scoring at or above grade level in Selected Schools and 9% in Comparison Schools. The ratio of the percentages of students scoring on or above grade level for Other students compared to Foreign-Born students in the Selected Schools was 9.8, indicating that Other students were performing at a rate almost ten times higher than Foreign-Born students in schools with the highest concentration of Foreign-Born students. In contrast, this ratio was only 6.6 in Comparison Schools, similar to the ratio in 2022-2023.

FAST MATH Performance

Overall Achievement Levels (Levels 3-5)

- **2022-2023:** Foreign-Born students in Selected Schools achieved approximately 20% scoring on or above grade level in FAST Math, compared to 52% for Other students. In Comparison Schools, the percentage of Foreign-Born students was 24%, while that of Other students was 56%. The ratio of the percentages of students scoring on or above grade level for Other students compared to Foreign-Born students in the Selected Schools was 2.6, indicating that Other students performed at a rate of about two and a half times higher than Foreign-Born students. This is a much smaller ratio compared to performance on the FAST ELA. This ratio was 2.3 in Comparison Schools, which is very similar.
- **2023-2024:** The percentage of Foreign-Born students scoring at or above grade level was approximately 20% in Selected Schools and 21% in Comparison Schools. The proportion of Other students was 52% in Selected Schools and improved to 59% in Comparison Schools. The ratio of the percentages of students scoring on or above grade level for Other students compared to Foreign-Born students in the Selected Schools was 2.6, indicating that Other students were performing at a rate of almost two and a half times higher than Foreign-Born students, which was the same as the ratio in 2022-2023. This ratio was higher in all Other schools, at 2.9, closer to 3 times. However, these ratios are still relatively small compared to the difference in performance on the FAST ELA.

On the FAST ELA, Foreign-Born students consistently achieve lower proficiency levels than Other students in both selected and Comparison schools. Although achievement levels improved modestly over the two years, the gap between Foreign-Born and Other students remains significant. The ratios of the percentages of students scoring on or above grade level for Other students vs. Foreign-Born students were noticeably higher in Selected Schools than in Comparison Schools, indicating that the high concentration of the Foreign-Born students has a differential effect on the ELA achievement. Schools with the highest concentration of Foreign-Born students are experiencing challenges in raising the ELA achievement of such students.

Regarding FAST Math, Foreign-Born students also show lower FAST Math achievement levels than their peers. However, the ratios of the percentages of students scoring on or above grade level for Other students compared to Foreign-Born students were similar for schools with the highest concentration of Foreign-Born students vs. Comparison Schools. That indicates that the high concentration of Foreign-Born students does not have a differential effect on math achievement.

The data highlight ongoing challenges and disparities in achievement between Foreign-Born and all Other students, suggesting a need for targeted support and interventions to address these gaps and enhance educational outcomes for Foreign-Born students.

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