



Equity by Design:

The Students We Share: US Teachers' Responsibilities Given That Some of Their Students Will Later Go to School in Mexico

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The Students We Share: US Teachers' Responsibilities Given That Some of Their Students Will Later Go to School in Mexico

America has often been considered and portrayed as a nation of immigrants. Even as the welcome of immigrants is currently fraught and has been in the past—think of the denial of entry to Jewish refugees on board the MS St. Louis in 1939 just prior to the outbreak of World War II. Still, it remains the case that icons like the Statue of Liberty and poems like Emma Lazarus's "The New Colossus" loom large in the public imaginary. As importantly, laws still allow America to be a site for the legal arrival of both refugees and the highly trained (like medical doctors and software engineers). Yet for purposes of this research brief, the dominant imagining of America as a nation of immigrants is problematic in two ways. First, the conceptualization of immigration makes one country a sender and another a receiver, which ignores the longstanding history that those who cross borders often do so multiple times in a more circular migration pattern that is not neatly just 'from' and 'to' (Foner, 1997). The task of welcoming and supporting the transnationally mobile may well be different than that of supporting the permanent immigrant. Secondly, while America may still welcome many, it does not welcome all. And for would-be migrants from certain countries, Mexico foremost among them, there are few legal routes to come to the US as a permanent immigrant unless one has family ties.

Equity Assistance Centers, like the Midwest and Plains Equity Assistance Center, are charged to support public educational agencies with the equitable treatment and civil rights of students, particularly in relation to their race, sex, religion, and national origin. In this brief, we offer information to educators who teach students who traverse the Mexican/US border in order to examine issues experienced by and

supports for students who are likely to return to school in Mexico, their country of origin.

With long-ago push factors, like the Mexican Revolution, and, more recently, economic challenges like the peso crisis and the conversion of subsistence-oriented small farm holdings to mechanized agriculture, as well as pull factors, like the historic Bracero program and more recent American demand for unskilled labor, the Mexico/US migration has become the largest international migration in the world (Craig, 1971; Massey & Espinosa, 1997; Nevins, 2002). More Mexico-born individuals live in the US than any other foreign-born population in any other country in the world (United Nations, 2016). But the pattern of this migration, which was always partially circular, even as the US-based Mexican population steadily grew bigger (and the US-born Mexican American population became larger), has changed (Pew Research Center, 2015).



From 1965 to the recession of 2008-09, the South-to-North flow of migrants from Mexico to the US was huge and, after the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA), went to more parts of the US—forming what

some have called the ‘New Latino Diaspora’ (Wortham, et al., 2002; Hamann, et al., 2015)—than ever before. So even as the Mexican and Mexican American populations of Texas, Arizona, and California have grown in recent years, so too have those of Georgia, North Carolina, Nebraska, and Oregon. But since the recent Recession, and likely exacerbated by both increasing xenophobic rhetoric and immigration enforcement, the Great Migration of Mexicans to the US has increasingly become the Great Expulsion. Demographers point out that more people with ties to both the US and Mexico are now heading North-to-South, i.e., from the US to Mexico, than in the other direction.



This has many dimensions, one of which is a growing population of students in Mexican schools with prior experience in the US. Some of these were born in Mexico, moved to the US and now have moved back, but many are US-born and, per the US Constitution’s 14th Amendment, are US citizens by birthplace. Some of these students in Mexican schools left the US when they were small and have little to no memory of it, but many—our 2010 estimate was 420,000—attended US schools prior to their current Mexican ones. That fact is the core rationale for this research brief. Students currently in American schools may soon be in Mexican schools, which can be a more or less jarring transition depending on both what US teachers do and what Mexican teachers subsequently do. It should be added that what US teachers do and

Mexican teachers then do has implications not only for the future of Mexico (where many of these coming-of-age youth will spend their adulthoods), but also the future of the US (where others, many with US citizenship, will return).

Perhaps for the first time ever, it is important for American teachers to think of their prospective emigrant students, not just their immigrants and the native born. Not all those who might leave will leave. So it is hazardous to presume departure, especially if it leads to a student feeling unwanted here. But it is equally hazardous to ignore how frequently it can and does happen.

The remainder of this brief includes six components. We turned to two leading education researchers, William Perez of the Claremont Graduate University and Sarah Gallo of the Ohio State University, to independently offer their advice, in bullet form for US teachers. Both have studied schooling on both sides of the border, focusing on students with experience in both systems. Both have written passionately about the vulnerabilities of such students, but both would also claim that excellence and opportunity are possible. Binational school experience can support a bilingual, cosmopolitan, financially secure adulthood (Hamann, et al., 2006).

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As a third item, we have included a map made by Dr. William England that shows the school history of 14 students who were ‘found’ by Drs. Edmund T. Hamann, Juan Sánchez García, and Víctor Zúñiga (coauthors of this brief) in schools in the Mexican states of Jalisco, Nuevo León, and Zacatecas and who, as part of their previous education history, had been enrolled in school in Missouri, Kansas, Nebraska, or Iowa. A point of the map is to illustrate how rich and varied the US school and geographic experiences are of binational youth who find themselves in Mexico. The example of 14 with tie-ins to this region served by the Midwest and Plains Equity Assistance Center is just a reminder that this experience is not just one that connects Texas, California, or other Border states to Mexico.

Our fourth piece starts as a vignette and notes the forced move of a US-born American citizen child to Mexico when her parents were deported in the spring of 2017 and describes the worries by her US-based school counselor.

Although most children who go from US schools to Mexican ones are not deported (or forced to move because of the deportation of a guardian), this can happen and has happened. In the interest of child well-being, it is worthwhile to consider how this prospective trauma might be mitigated.

The fifth piece is a short ‘by the numbers’ feature that highlights various dimensions of schooling and demographics in Mexico (and its links to the US). Finally, the research brief ends with references to select research publications by the authors of this brief and the two special contributors. The list is not exhaustive, but it does allow readers ample opportunity for further exploration. In addition to these references at the end, both Dr. Perez and Dr. Gallo have embedded some resources in their short lists of recommendations, notably the no-cost documentary ‘*Una Vida, Dos Países*’ created by Dr. Tatyana Kleyn of the City University of New York. This 30-minute film interviews students in Oaxaca who previously were in US schools.

Facts and Figures

- In 2010, number of US-born students in Mexican schools: **300,000**
- In 2010, number of students in Mexican schools with previous US school experience: more than **420,000**
- In 2015, population of foreign-born residents in Mexico: **1.2 million**
- In 2015, proportion of foreign-born residents of Mexico born in United States: **98%**
- In 2015, average age of foreign-born residents in Mexico: **15**
- Year that *primaria* (Grades 1-6) became obligatory in Mexico: **1917**
- Year that *secundaria* (Grades 7-9) became obligatory in Mexico: **1992**
- Year that *preparatoria* (Grades 10-12) became obligatory in Mexico: **2012**
- In 2016, total enrollment in Mexican schools (including higher education): **36.3 million**
- Net migration between US and Mexico 1995-2000: **+2,270,000 to US**
- Net migration between US and Mexico 2009-2014: **-140,000 from US**
- Number of Mexicans who left US 2009-2014: **1 million**

Sources: a-b (Zúñiga & Hamann, 2015), c-e ([United Nations, 2016](#)), f-i (<http://wenr.wes.org/2016/08/education-in-mexico>), j-l ([Pew Research Center, 2015](#))

What US Teachers Need to Know About Mexican Schools — William Perez

The school climate in Mexican Schools is unwelcoming to transborder Mexican American students:

- Hostile school climates may exist due to deep-rooted anti-American sentiment, stemming from a legacy of complex and contentious relations between the US and Mexico.
- Cultural ties to American traditions, which they first learned about in US schools, often remain deep among transnational students. Many still celebrate American holidays.
- In our research, 85% of the young adults we surveyed reported some type of discrimination during the past year, including 70% who reported having been told not to speak English and 72% who reported that they have been made fun of for the way they speak Spanish. [Note, in surveys from Mexican primaria and secundaria students, younger than Perez's sample, Zúñiga, et al. (2008) found that most Mexican students (as opposed to transborder students) reported that their transborder classmates were welcome or not unusual. This does not undo Perez's finding, but raises issues of whether 'unwelcome' relates to age, becoming more common in advanced grades, and/or whether there is a discrepancy between what Mexican students intend (or admit to) and what transborder students experience.]
- Mexican schools usually do not create spaces to allow transborder students to talk about their experiences and struggles, and offer few psycho-social, academic, and linguistic supports.
 - An example of supportive Mexican schooling is highlighted in the documentary, "[Una Vida, Dos Países: Children and Youth \(Back\) in Mexico.](#)"

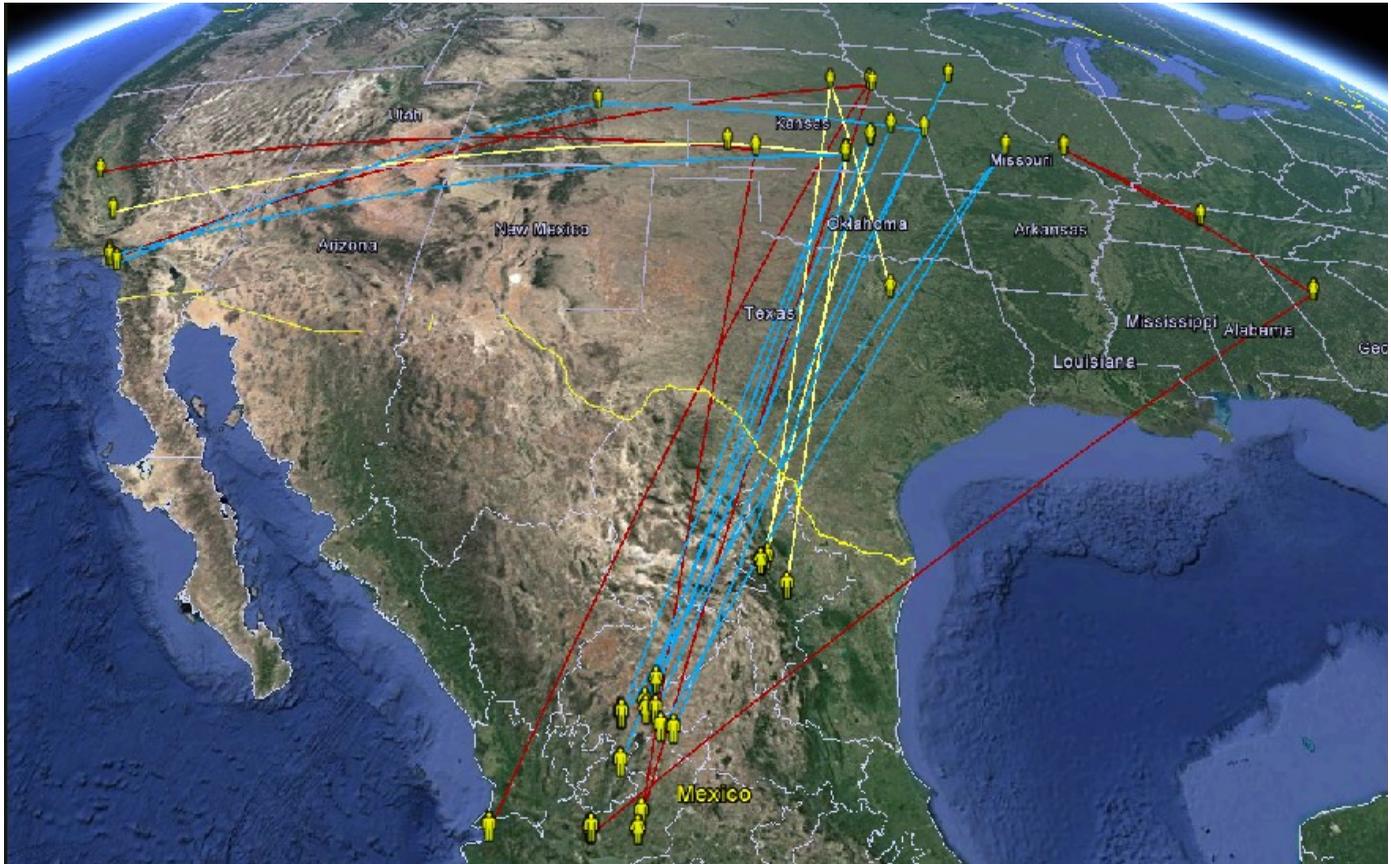
- It is critical to help potential transborder students in US schools by [nurturing their multilingualism and multiculturalism](#) so they have a better chance to adapt to Mexican schools.



US teachers should advocate for transborder Mexican American students in Mexican schools:

- Although they may live south of the US-Mexico border, transborder Mexican students are still our students. They are products of the American educational system. We taught them, mentored and advised them, and shaped their dreams and aspirations. We have invested in them a great deal and owe them our continued support to help them develop their full potential.
- US educators must engage in a dialogue with their Mexican counterparts to develop strategies to support returnees. We need to recognize transborder Mexican students with American sensibilities as an opportunity for strong US-Mexico relations.

Student Migration Trajectories: Through the Heartland to Mexico



Red lines trace geographic trajectories of students encountered in Jalisco (Mex.) schools.

Light blue lines trace geographic trajectories of students encountered in Zacatecas (Mex.) schools.

Yellow lines trace geographic trajectories of students encountered in Nuevo León (Mex.) schools.

[These 14 cases come from a dataset of more than 1,000 cases of transnationally mobile students collected by Víctor Zúñiga, Edmund Hamann, and Juan Sánchez García between 2004 and 2010 with support of Mexico's Consejo Nacional de Ciencias y Tecnología (CONACyT) and the Secretaría de Educación Pública (SEP)]

What US Teachers Need to Know About Mexican Schools — Sarah Gallo

Enrollment in Mexican Schools:

- For Mexican heritage students who may move to Mexico for any reason, enrollment in Mexican schools requires extensive paperwork that students' US schools can help provide.
- For examples of documents to support Mexican families in this process, visit: <https://u.osu.edu/gallo.85/enrolling-in-mexican-schools-materials-for-u-s-schools-and-mexican-parents/>

Limited Differentiated Instruction:

- Mexico has a federal curriculum taught with limited differentiated instruction.
- Unlike English as a Second Language courses that are offered to students not yet proficient in English in the US, there are no equivalent courses for students learning Spanish in Mexico. Many students must learn Spanish literacy without the support of second language learning techniques.

- Students who had the opportunity to study in bilingual schools in the US have easier transitions.
- Special education services are often unavailable in Mexican public schools.

Reading and Writing:

- Books are more expensive and less accessible in Mexico and storybook reading is less common. Many Mexicans participate in rich oracy practices, such as storytelling, riddles, language play, poetry, and translation. US educators could incorporate these practices into their literacy curriculum.
- Writing in many Mexican schools often prioritizes accuracy and nice handwriting. Families may be less familiar with US notions of student-centered writing. When talking about writing, it will be useful to clarify what you mean and why.

Visions of Parent Involvement:

- In Mexico caregivers are expected to attend all school-based meetings or they may be fined. When new to the US, Mexican parents may fear repercussions if they cannot attend an event.
- In Mexico most meetings about grades are held collectively, with all caregivers. Caregivers would only meet one-on-one with a teacher if their child had major behavioral issues. Mexican caregivers in the US may be nervous during their first parent-teacher conferences, as they might worry their child has done something wrong.

What Would You Do? — *Edmund Hamann*

I am a teacher educator who received the following email in April 2017 from a bilingual counselor in Nebraska who has worked in two schools with high Latino/a newcomer enrollments in the twelve years that I have known her. She makes reference to work that I

have carried out with Monterrey Mexico-based Dr. Víctor Zúñiga and Dr. Juan Sánchez García, who are coauthors of this research brief.

Say, I have a 6th grade student, US born, whose parents are being deported to Mexico next week and she is going with them. I know that you had worked with an institution in Monterrey [Mexico] on a project involving cross-country immigration. I'm wondering if you have any tips for this student who is essentially immigrating to a foreign country. She wants to take some books so she won't forget her English. I assume she'll be behind the Mexican students academically and may face teasing because of her accent. In the past US born students have reported not being accepted by peers—too "gringa." Do you have any thoughts or advice? The little girl is leaving on Friday. I have another 6th grade girl whose dad was apprehended by ICE; it was a big mess and the incident rippled throughout the [school district's] Hispanic community.

Hope all is well with you...

Although deportation is hardly the only reason, increasing numbers of students currently in US schools, including some US citizen children (as above), are quite suddenly relocating to Mexican schools. In this instance, the counselor and teachers at this young woman's school had several days to think about what they could send with her. But these were emergency considerations and mainly related to efforts to diminish trauma rather than any direct communication between teachers in one system to another. If US teachers knew some of their kids would someday attend school in Mexico (and perhaps even further in the future return to the US) what would/should those teachers do?



I would like to think that if the teachers at this girl's middle school knew she would suddenly leave for Mexico that they would have asked themselves how well their lessons had prepared her for the transition. They could have asked:

Although clearly the development of her English skills (reading and writing in addition to oral skills) had been important to her success in the US, would those skills matter in Mexico? Could they? Had this girl's Spanish skills been valued enough/developed enough that now that she was headed to schooling in a Spanish-medium system she would be able to keep up?

Did her teachers know that she would enroll in primaria (elementary school) when she returned to Mexico? Primaria runs grades 1 to 6. Would she think of it as 'going back' to elementary school to finish the academic year? Would that feel like a slight?

Did her teachers know that although only about 9% of children in Mexico repeat a grade level, that number jumps up to 31% for children with US school experience? This is usually because there is no Spanish language ESL equivalent (i.e., Spanish as a second language). So the main placement strategy for students not ready to succeed in a Spanish language classroom at their current level is to repeat the grade. As a student viewed as bright and successful in the US, how would she handle being asked to repeat in Mexico?

Although the goals and challenges of school tend to be thought of in academic terms, clearly schooling is more welcoming or intimidating based on one's social confidence and historical experiences. What avenues and

obstacles contributed to her sense of belonging in school?

Expectations of geographic stability of student populations have always been hazardous, because enrollments have always included children and families who move. But in a world where new types of jobs are constantly being created while old ones give way to automation, where globalization both connects and dislocates more people than ever before, and ideas of minimizing risk and maximizing opportunity shape parenting, the prospect of mobility is perhaps higher than it has ever been. Now, as this brief has quickly sketched, it is more plausible than ever that a student currently in a US classroom may soon be in a Mexican one (and perhaps at some future date back in the US). The reasons for this dislocation will vary and may be painful (as in this case), but irrespective of the reasons, if we value the promise of schooling as preparation for adulthood and the premise of fairness that guides Equity Assistance Center work, then we have to make American educators aware of and responsive to the prospect of some of their students' future movement.

Edmund Hamann

Edmund “Ted” Hamann, is a Professor in the Department of Teaching, Learning, & Teacher Education at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. He is also an Equity Fellow for the Midwest and Plains Equity Assistance Center. An anthropologist of education, he has studied the movement of children and families between US and Mexican school systems for 20+ years. He edited (with Stanton Wortham and Enrique G. Murillo, Jr.) *Revisiting Education in the New Latino Diaspora* (2015) and *Education in the New Latino Diaspora* (2002), both about the experiences of Latinos/as and school system responses in parts of the US that have not historically had large Latino populations (e.g., Nebraska, Georgia). With Víctor Zúñiga and/or Juan Sánchez García, he has coauthored more than a dozen articles on students in Mexico with prior experience in the US. He can be reached at: ehamann2@unl.edu

William Perez

William Perez (BA, Pomona College; Ph.D., Stanford University) is a Professor of Education at Claremont Graduate University. His research focuses on the social and psychological processes associated with academic success and higher education access among immigrant, undocumented, indigenous, and deported students in the U.S. and Mexico. In 2014-2015 he was a Fulbright Scholar/Visiting Researcher at Colegio de México (COLMEX) in Mexico City. He has a forthcoming book titled, *Indigenous Mexican Students in US Schools: Ethnicity, Multilingualism, and Academics* to be published by Oxford University Press. He can be reached by email at: William.perez@cgu.edu

Sarah Gallo

Sarah Gallo is an Assistant Professor of Teaching and Learning at The Ohio State University, who recently spent a year studying schooling in southern Mexico. She promotes school-based learning that better recognizes and builds upon young children’s mobile and heterogeneous resources in the US and Mexico. This includes the traditional and innovative bilingual language and literacy skills that are rarely recognized in monolingual classrooms, as well as understandings drawn from their migration experiences. Her research has been supported by Fulbright, the National Academy of Education, and the Spencer Foundation. In 2017 she published “*Mi Padre: Mexican Immigrant Fathers and Their Children’s Education.*” US educators are that book’s primary intended audience. This book explores how a Pennsylvania family’s undocumented status shapes their children’s educational lives and learning. She can be reached by email at: gallo.85@osu.edu

Víctor Zúñiga

Víctor Zúñiga is a professor in the doctoral program for social sciences at Tec de Monterrey in Monterrey Mexico. A sociologist of education, he is coauthor (with Edmund Hamann and Juan Sánchez García) of *Alumnos Transnacionales: Escuelas Mexicanas Frente a la Globalización* (2008) and (with Ruben Hernández-León) of *New Destinations: Mexican Immigration in the United States* (2005). For 10 years (1996-2006), he led the Universidad de Monterrey’s participation in the Georgia Project, a multifaceted effort to help several school districts in Georgia (USA) to build skills to successfully respond to students and parents from Mexico. He can be reached at: vazgonzalez@itesm.mx



About the Midwest & Plains Equity Assistance Center

The mission of the Midwest & Plains Equity Assistance Center is to ensure equity in student access to and participation in high quality, research-based education by expanding states' and school systems' capacity to provide robust, effective opportunities to learn for all students, regardless of and responsive to race, sex, and national origin, and to reduce disparities in educational outcomes among and between groups. The Equity by Design briefs series is intended to provide vital background information and action steps to support educators and other equity advocates as they work to create positive educational environments for all children. For more information, visit <http://www.greatlakesequity.org>.

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