

Article

Immigrant Children and Youth in the USA: Facilitating Equity of Opportunity at School

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Abstract: A great deal has been written about immigrant children and youth. Drawing on work done in the USA, this paper focuses on implications for school improvement policy and practice. Discussed are (1) the increasing influx of immigrants into schools; (2) different reasons families migrate; (3) concerns that arise related to immigrant students; (4) prevailing school practices for addressing immigrant concerns; (5) a framework for broadening what schools and communities do; and (6) policy implications, cautions, and recommendations for embedding immigrant concerns into a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of student and learning supports.

Keywords: immigrant students; addressing barriers to learning and teaching; learning supports

1. Immigrant Children and Youth in the USA: Facilitating Equity of Opportunity at School

In just under three decades, the immigrant population has tripled in the United States. In 2007 the foreign born population of the US was 13%. (66% of all immigrants lived in six states: CA, NY, TX, FL, IL, and NJ). However, immigrant populations have grown rapidly in NC, GA, AR, SC and TN [1].

The United States is being transformed by high, continuing levels of immigration. No American institution has felt the effect of these flows more forcefully than the nation's public

schools. And no set of American institutions is arguably more crucial to the future success of immigrant integration [2].

Schools are a fundamental and natural place for meeting many needs of immigrant youngsters and their families. Moreover, the success of many schools is dependent on how well they address the needs not only of immigrants, but also of all newcomers.

Drawing on work done in the USA, this paper focuses on the way that concerns related to immigrants can be embedded equitably into a school improvement agenda for addressing the needs of all students. In the process, we share with readers of this international journal a picture of the status of young immigrants in the USA and some lessons learned from analyses of policies and practices that affect their schooling. Specifically, we touch on matters that have implications for improving schooling for immigrants and all other students. To these ends, we discuss (1) the increasing influx of immigrants into schools, (2) an appreciation of different reasons families migrate, (3) concerns that arise related to immigrant students, (4) prevailing school practices for addressing immigrant concerns, (5) a framework for broadening what schools and communities do, and (6) policy implications, cautions, and recommendations for embedding immigrant concerns into a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of student and learning supports.

2. Immigrants and Schools

Every school has an influx of newcomers. In some schools, many newcomers are from another country. Newcomers vary in the type and amount of supports they need to enable a successful transition and adjustment to school and neighborhood. For example, beyond initial supports, schools receiving youngsters from other countries need to develop interventions that address immigrant concerns and considerations arising from a multicultural student body. A sense of all this is illustrated by the following comments we regularly hear during our ongoing work at schools:

- A large part of our dropout problem is that so many immigrant students leave early to go to work;
- Immigrant girls are leaving school because their families have arranged marriages for them as early as 14 years of age;
- The refugee organization in our community is bringing in many families whose children have never been in school;
- Our schools have families who speak many different languages, and we don't have enough translators to facilitate communication;
- On campus, student groups establish their territory and newcomers not only aren't invited in, they are stigmatized (e.g., labeled FOB—Fresh Off the Boat);
- Our ELL students aren't doing well learning English and aren't showing progress on the state achievement tests; this is having a serious negative impact on our average yearly progress;
- Many parent are unhappy because we are not helping their children maintain their home language;

- Unannounced immigration raids at the packing plants during the school day led to countless numbers of children coming home to find no adult there.

2.1. A Quick Look at the Numbers

Estimates indicate that the immigrant population in the USA is about 41 million (13% of the 313.9 million population). It is further estimated that 11.5 million are unauthorized. Some immigrants are first generation and recently arrived; those born in the USA of at least one immigrant parent are described as *second* generation. In 2012, 17.4 million children under age 18 lived at home with at least one immigrant parent (25% of the 70.2 million children under age 18 in the USA). Second-generation children accounted for 88% (15.2 million) of all children with immigrant parents. Almost 9.6 million have immigrant parents whose family income is below 200 percent of the federal poverty threshold. About 1 to 1.5 million are undocumented [3,4]. Crises in other parts of the world are further complicating matters here (and even more so in other countries).

According to the U.S. Department of Education (2015), there are approximately 840,000 immigrant k-12 students in the USA and more than 4.6 million English learners. The number born in other countries or born in the USA of immigrant parents is increasing faster than any other group [5,6].

2.2. What Does this Mean for Schooling?

Legally: “All children in the USA, are entitled to equal access to a public elementary and secondary education without regard to their or their parents’ actual or perceived national origin, citizenship, or immigration status. This includes recently arrived unaccompanied children, who are in immigration proceedings while residing in local communities with a parent, family member, or other appropriate adult sponsor. Under the law, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) is required to care for unaccompanied children apprehended while crossing the border. While in care at a HHS shelter, such children are not enrolled in local schools but do receive educational services and other care from providers who run HHS shelters. Recently arrived unaccompanied children are later released from federal custody to an appropriate sponsor—usually a parent, relative, or family friend—who can safely and appropriately care for them while their immigration cases proceed. While residing with a sponsor, these children have a right under federal law to enroll in public elementary and secondary schools in their local communities and to benefit from educational services, as do all children in the U.S.” [7].

With rates increasing, schools are confronted with growing pressures to focus on many concerns. Among the most obvious is addressing students with limited English language and cultural differences, both of which may generate behaviors among peers and staff that are associated with prejudice and discrimination. Additional intervention concerns arise when students’ families are undocumented, are refugees from war zones, are living in poverty, have little formal education, and so forth [8–11].

In general, understanding the diverse nature of immigrant subgroups is essential in developing appropriate school policies and practices. The heterogeneity arises from a myriad of factors. Families leave their country of origin for different reasons (e.g., better opportunities for work and

education, political asylum, and quality of life). During migration, youngsters' experiences vary considerably. Upon arriving in their new home, they are involved in complex transactions; other challenges arise during the settling in period. As they cope with diverse situations and events, the outcomes are sometimes positive, sometimes negative. Over time, most youngsters assimilate, albeit in a variety of ways; some, however, remain outsiders [12,13].

3. Appreciating Differences in Why Families Migrate

As noted, different motives propel migration. Three prominent and not mutually exclusive reasons families leave their country of origin are (a) to enhance economic opportunity; (b) to reunify the family; and/or (c) for political considerations. Understanding these matters can help schools anticipate and plan for problems some students may bring with them to school.

3.1. Seeking Economic Opportunity

The long-standing image of the USA as a land of milk and honey has drawn immigrants from all over the world. For some, the promise is fulfilled. For many, however, the reality is sobering. Fortuny, Chaudry, and Jargowsky report that in 2007 "Immigrant children had the highest poverty rate (26%); ...the rate for native-born children of immigrants was lower (19%), but above the rate for children of native born parents" [1].

Chaudry and Fortuny [13] note that "Family incomes vary significantly for different countries and regions of origin. In 2008...wages were very low for Mexican (\$11) and Central American families (\$13), who earned about half as much hourly as workers in families with origins in the Middle East and South Asia (\$25): Europe, Canada, and Australia (\$24); and East Asia and the Pacific (\$23)".

Low income means insufficient access to common amenities and the opportunities available to those with moderate to high incomes. It means food insecurity and crowded housing conditions. It means vulnerability to and difficulty in coping with stressors, including medical and mental health problems [14]. For immigrants, poverty is associated with undocumented status, lack of English language facility, poor school performance, and no high school diploma. It is noteworthy that about one-third of the foreign-born lack a high school diploma [15].

3.2. Seeking Family Reunification

In the mid 1960s, USA policy began stressing family reunification. Under this policy, parents, spouses, and children of USA citizens can become legal permanent residents. After five years, the adults are eligible to become naturalized citizens, and when parents become citizens, so do their children [16].

Under the unification policy, one family member often comes to the USA with others following after an interval of time. Psychological costs are attributed both to the family's period of separation and the process of reuniting. Suárez-Orozco, Bang, and Kim note that "Children separated from their parents were more likely to report symptoms of anxiety and depression in the initial years after migrating than children who had not been separated. During the reunification stage, children and youth often report ambivalence about leaving behind their beloved extended family, caretakers, and friends and are anxious

about meeting members of the biological family who have become strangers over the prolonged separation” [17].

Factors related to reunification undoubtedly affect motivation and attitudes about self and others that new arrivals bring to school. For instance, degree of choice in coming to a country would affect feelings of self-determination [18,19]. Degree of success in coping with a new language and a new culture would affect feelings of competence. Degree of connection with those who came before and with others in the community and at school would affect feelings of relatedness to significant others. All this would affect attitudes about bridging cultures [20].

3.3. Seeking Refuge

Refugees are persons admitted to the USA based on a well-founded indication that they have cause to fear persecution in their home country [21]. For fiscal year 2015, the ceiling on refugees was set at 70,000. It is unclear whether recent crises abroad will cause the ceiling to be raised. Persons admitted as refugees can subsequently apply for legal permanent residency [16]. Almost half of all refugee arrivals (46.4 percent, or 32,450) in fiscal year 2014 came from the Near East/South Asia—a region that includes Iraq, Iran, Bhutan, and Afghanistan. In the period from 2009 to 2014, the USA resettled approximately 400,000 refugees, earlier (between 1975 and 2005) about 2 million refugees, with approximately half having arrived as children [22,23].

Fangen cautions:

There are differences between first-generation immigrants who come as refugees and those coming through family reunion, as well as differences between those coming from war areas and those who do not have such experiences. This is partly a matter of having had any access to schooling before arriving in the host country, partly a matter of the extent to which one has experienced traumas or having or not having someone to relate to when arriving [24].

By definition, refugees suffer from persecution (which often involves physical and emotional trauma), are forced to relocate to another country, and may experience social exclusion and discrimination in the USA. This is a recipe for psychosocial and educational problems.

However, it must be noted that increasing references to post traumatic stress syndrome (PTSD) have generated a tendency to generalize and medicalize refugee experiences. Murray, Davidson, and Schweitzer [25], however, note that a shift is occurring away from emphasizing refugees’ resettlement challenges as traumatic, since resettlement experiences also can foster strengths and enhance capacity and resilience. They call for a holistic approach that appreciates cultural differences, context, and “the inherent strengths and wisdom within the refugee community. Researchers and practitioners must keep in mind the potential cultural ill fit and iatrogenic effects of cognitive-behavioral, pharmacological, and other Western interventions and the cultural factors which may influence responses to treatment”.

4. Concerns about Immigrant Students

Whatever the reason for leaving their country of origin, obviously many immigrant families adapt successfully after arriving in a new country. Furthermore, researchers have cautioned about tendencies to stereotype students from immigrant families as low performers [26]. For example, Crosnoe and

Turley [27] highlight that group data on children of Asian and African immigrants indicate higher performance than other groups.

However, for some immigrant youngsters, the challenges they experience can be overwhelming. Problems can begin with events related to the decisions to migrate and the migration process itself; other concerns are associated with the complexities of the post-migration period [28,29]. As Perreira and Ornelas underscore, the mobility process of migrating includes matters such as “whether the children walk, drive, fly, or come by ship; whether they travel with a trusted family member or friend or are smuggled into the country; and whether they experience hardships during travel such as detainment in a refugee camp, assault, or hunger. The post-migration stage pertains to the settlement experiences of children; the process of navigating life in a new country; and the realization of changes in family economic situations, dynamics, and social roles. Pre-migration and migration influences are critical to children of immigrants, whereas post-migration influences are critical to second and later immigrant generations as well” [30].

The stress of coping with a new language and a new culture, a less than welcoming reception, racism, discrimination, school and community violence are recipes for learning, behavior, and emotional problems [31–34]. In addition, many immigrant students report feeling that their teachers view them in unfavorable ways [35]; also analyses of informal social patterns at schools indicate an isolation from their English speaking peers [36,37].

Other factors causing stress include intergenerational conflict and psychological reactance to parental guidance. These arise as a youngster identifies with the peer culture at school and with what is learned from the school curriculum. As Qin stresses, immigrant children and youth must traverse multiple cultural worlds “and the often conflicted expectations they face in daily life. Many are torn between the attachment to their parents’ culture, the lure of the adolescent peer culture, and aspirations to join the American mainstream culture” [32].

Relatedly, immigrant parents and other family members bring varying understanding and attitudes about schooling and about how to interact with school staff [38]. Some of this reflects their own experiences with schools, cultural and religious values, and the reasons they left their country of origin. As a result, home involvement and engagement with the new culture and with the school varies markedly. Furthermore, if the youngsters learn to cope in the new environment faster than their parents, they may find themselves having to assume adult functions in their families (e.g., as language translators and as agents in economic transactions). All this can add to stress and role friction.

Undocumented immigrant families experience additional stressors [39]. As the American Immigration Council stresses: “Raids and other Immigration and Customs Enforcement actions that separate parents and children pose serious risks to children’s immediate safety, economic security, well-being and long-term development” [40]. Available data indicate that roughly 5.5 million children are living in the USA with at least one unauthorized immigrant parent. Of these, 4.5 million are USA born citizens. In a recent 10-year period, over 100,000 immigrant parents of USA citizen children were deported [40].

It has been suggested that refugee students are among the most vulnerable for school failure and its consequences. In addition to the stress of migration and adaptation to the new, they may have been victimized in their country of origin and often seem to feel personal and cultural bereavement to a greater extent than non-refugee immigrants [23].

A Note about Immigrant Resilience:

While the emphasis in this paper is on addressing concerns, we again want to stress that some immigrant youth display remarkable resilience and rise above their negative experiences. Schools need to understand and promote resilience [41]. For example, from a motivational perspective, research suggests that resilience is associated with experiences that enhance feelings of competence, relatedness, and connectedness with others [18].

Suárez-Orozco and colleagues note that:

Successful adaptations among immigrant students appear to be linked to the quality of relationships that they forge in their school settings. ...Social relations provide a variety of protective functions—a sense of belonging, emotional support, tangible assistance and information, cognitive guidance, and positive feedback. ...Relationships with peers, for example, provide emotional sustenance that supports the development of significant psychosocial competencies in youth. ...In addition, connections with teachers, counselors, coaches, and other supportive adults in school are important in the academic and social adaptation of adolescents and appear to be particularly important to immigrant adolescents [34].

5. Prevailing School Practices for Addressing Immigrant Concerns

In the USA, there is consensus that schools should welcome and orient newcomers, enhance English language skills of those with limited English proficiency, and connect families with neighborhood services as much as feasible. In addition, when problems arise related to prejudice and violence involving immigrant students, schools tend to react with various programs designed to address relational concerns (e.g., conflict resolution and mediation, programs designed to enhance supportive relationships). Furthermore, in low performing schools, dropout data are a red flag indicator, and thus dropout prevention programs may pay special attention to subgroups such as immigrant students [42]. A number of federal education programs are available to support newly arrived students (e.g., focusing on ensuring that limited English proficient students master English, to address poverty concerns related to newly arrived students and their families).

Beyond the above matters, there is considerable disagreement over what else schools should do to help immigrants. This is not surprising given the diversity in and between the subgroups. As Tienda and Haskins note, “Although Mexicans are the nation’s largest immigrant group and the subject of many studies, their experiences cannot be generalized to all recent immigrant groups, even those from Latin America” [43].

Conflicting agenda about immigrant policy are another reason for the many disagreements about practice. The matter is exacerbated further by the lack of an overall intervention framework guiding development of student and learning supports. Moreover, there is relatively little leadership and infrastructure for integrating efforts to enable equity of opportunity for success at school.

Below we highlight some examples of prevailing school and neighborhood programs designed for immigrant students. While the examples are from the USA, they will be of interest to anyone involved in addressing the needs of immigrant students and their families.

6. A Sample of Current School and Neighborhood Programs in the USA

6.1. Examples of School-Based Supports in the USA that Have Relevance for Schools Elsewhere

6.1.1. Welcome Centers and Newcomer Programs

Many districts have a central location for enrollment of students from other countries. The focus often is on orienting newcomers and assessing the skill level in a student's native language in order to plan the best academic placement. In some cases student support services (e.g., health care, mental health, career counseling, tutoring) are available to assess social and emotional needs and provide follow up support to the student and family.

Newcomer programs are short-term (usually 6–18 months). The intent is to address limited English proficiency, low literacy, limited schooling, and ease transition. Programs sometimes serve families as well, providing not only outreach specific to the school, but also adult ESL, orientation to the community, and help with accessing social services, health care, housing and employment. Schools often partner with the community to serve parents and families [44,45]. Cautions are raised, however, about segregating students and about putting them in situations where there are few English speaking peers [46]. Francis, Rivera, Lesaux, Kieffer, and Rivera state that “Effective newcomer programs recognize that they provide temporary, short-term supports, in some cases for only part of the school day...” Further they suggest as guidelines for maximizing benefits and minimizing risks that “following their placement in a newcomer programs these students will continue to require additional support to meet high academic standards in mainstream classrooms. Most newcomer programs are characterized as a first step in a long-term process within which the students transition into increasingly integrated settings with decreasing levels of support”. They conclude: “For this model to be successful, teachers must coordinate curriculum and instruction across newcomer programs, ESL/bilingual programs, and mainstream classes” [47].

Examples:

- *Student Intake Center* in the Dallas Independent School District [48];
- *ESL Newcomer Academy*, Jefferson County Schools, KY [49].

6.1.2. Family Involvement

When looking at the growing immigrant population, two-generation strategies often focus on parental involvement in education...engaging them more fully in the educational process in the home, school and community could bring academic returns for their children. For the most part, these efforts have targeted parental involvement through, for example, programs to help immigrant parents construct home literacy environments or to help teachers better communicate with immigrant parents. Yet, attempts to alter the barriers to involvement behavior through, for example, programs to help parents increase their education or their own English proficiency, have also gained traction [50].

Example: See the review of *the Parent Institute for Quality Education* (PIQE) by Golan and Petersen [51].

6.1.3. Language Acquisition and Quality Instruction

English as a Second Language

The *What Works Clearinghouse* lists programs that have been effective in enhancing language acquisition and reading for students who are English language learners. The Clearinghouse indicates there is a dearth of effective programs for older students [52].

Calderon, Slavin, and Sanchez note that:

In spite of their striking diversity, English learners in secondary schools have typically been lumped into the same English as a Second Language (ESL) classroom, with one teacher addressing the needs of students with dramatically varied English proficiency, reading, and writing skills. In elementary schools, a common practice is to pull out English learners across grades K-5 for thirty minutes of ESL instruction. For the remainder of the day these English learners attend regular classes in a sink-or-swim instructional situation, usually with teachers who are unprepared to teach them [53].

Instruction in General

Calderon, Slavin, and Sanchez stress that “what matters most in educating English learners is the quality of instruction” [53]. For them, such quality is found in comprehensive preschool to twelfth grade reform models which include the following elements: (1) school structures and leadership; (2) language and literacy instruction; (3) integration of language, literacy, and content instruction in secondary schools; (4) cooperative learning; (5) professional development; (6) parent and family support teams; (7) tutoring; and (8) monitoring implementation and outcomes.

General Principles for Developing Effective Teaching and Learning Contexts for Immigrants Adolescents

Walqui outlines 10 general principles and profiles a program at Calexico High School in Calexico, California that puts the principles into practice. Calexico is a bilingual/bicultural community on the southern border of the United States; 98% of the students are Latino, and 80% are English language learners [54].

6.1.4. Professional/Staff Development

Everyone stresses the importance of teacher and sometimes other staff development related to enhancing cultural understanding and competence.

Spaulding, Carolino, and Amen have developed a compendium of best practices for professional development of teachers of immigrant students [55].

The Bridging Cultures Project provides a recent example of resources to support teachers’ use of cultural knowledge to increase student success at school. The project stresses a framework for “understanding and preventing conflicts experienced by many students, which are often invisible to teachers” [56].

6.2. Examples of Related Community Supports

6.2.1. Family Services and Resources

Most communities with new immigrants pull together resources to assist them. For example, the NY City, Department of Youth and Community Development, Immigrant Family Services website provides immigrant families with the tools and links so they can “take full advantage of the educational, professional, health, and social resources available to them” [57].

6.2.2. Mental Health Supports

Caring Across Communities is designed to help meet the mental health needs of immigrant children and youth. Available are tools, resources, and strategies to effectively address the needs as well as lessons learned from demonstration sites [58].

FACES the International family, adult, and child enhancement services is a community-based comprehensive services model for refugee children in resettlement. It is a program for bilingual and bicultural paraprofessionals to serve as a bridge to existing mental health services for refugees. This program is noteworthy because treatment teams include a range of mental health providers and ethnic/culturally diverse mental health workers who previously were refugees. Also, rather than focusing on a single traumatic experience, the staff address multiple traumatic events as reported by the refugees [59].

6.2.3. Refugee Orientation

The Cultural Orientation Resource Center offers cultural orientation to prepare refugees for what they as a group are likely to encounter. The focus is on helping individual refugees deal with what they are actually experiencing in their new communities [60].

6.2.4. Immigration Raids Aftermath Support

In communities that have experienced immigration raids, community based organizations, churches, non-profit service providers, lawyers, public human services agencies, and child welfare agencies have provided short-term aid to families affected [61].

7. Broadening What Schools and Communities Do

In the USA, it often is suggested that lack of proficiency in English is the primary cause for the high dropout rates among language-minority students. For example, Morse notes, “Immigrant children attend schools that are not just racially and ethnically segregated but also linguistically isolated. In many parts of the United States, persistent neighborhood-level racial and ethnic segregation is reflected in segregated schools. ...over one-half of all LEP students attend schools where more than 30 percent of students are LEP. ...LEP children are twice as likely as their English speaking counterparts to drop out of school” [44].

7.1. Needed: Language and Much More

K-12 public school enrollment data continues to indicate a rapidly growing group of English language learners—somewhere in the vicinity of five to six million students [62]. Calderon, Slavin, and Sanchez stress how diverse this segment of students is: about 20–30 percent are recent immigrants; many others are second generation; some, including children of migrant workers, have had their formal education disrupted; some students are designated as long-term English learners; some are in special education; seventy-nine percent speak Spanish as their native language [53].

While it is evident that language is a fundamental concern, it is not the only concern. In addressing that particular concern, care must be taken not to give short shrift to other factors related to poor transitions and adjustment in a new school, neighborhood, and country and ongoing obstacles to healthy social and emotional development.

The reality is that teaching English has emerged as the prevailing emphasis in U.S. school improvement policy with respect to addressing the needs of immigrant students. Indeed, such teaching is a legal mandate that is rooted in past judicial decisions (*i.e.*, *Lau v. Nichols*, U.S. Supreme Court, 1974) and ongoing policy debates and actions [63]. Moreover, to ensure a high priority focus on teaching English, the federal government requires that school districts address the needs of limited English proficient students and report the subgroup separately. Ironically, while research indicates that for many students it takes five to seven years to achieve advanced proficiency in a second language, after three years federal accountability criteria call for reading and language arts testing of these students in English (albeit with accommodations and alternative tests if indicated). For schools with many limited English proficient students, the accountability policy works against their efforts to make the amount of adequate yearly progress required by the law and also works against providing a broader set of student and learning supports for these students [64]. The irony is that, when schools attend too narrowly to the broad range of student concerns, a significant number of immigrant students continue to do poorly in learning English at school, and many misbehave, disengage, and eventually dropout.

As the above examples suggest, some schools draw on a range of interventions. However, critics stress that a broader and more proactive focus is needed in many places, and that greater attention must be given to equitable intervention access, availability, and affordability. For example, with respect to refugee children, advocates call for schools to expand the education mission to encompass restoration of social and emotional health, support for rapid socialization and acculturation, maintenance of language spoken at home and of ethnic culture, and provision of high quality early care, preschool, kindergarten, and after school programs [23,43,65].

7.2. Toward a Comprehensive System of Student and Learning Supports

Facilitating equity of opportunity to succeed at school means moving away from implementing marginalized, fragmented, and piecemeal programs for specific subgroups of students [66–69]. Needed is development of a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of interventions for addressing barriers to learning and teaching of all students. Such a system is being introduced into pioneering state and local education agencies around the USA [70]. The intervention and operational infrastructure frameworks for the system provide a template both for generally supporting all newcomers to the country and

specifically supporting particular needs of diverse subgroups. The prototype intervention framework is highlighted below.

7.2.1. Prototype Intervention Framework

Development of a comprehensive system of interventions that is fully implanted into school improvement policy and practice enhances a school's focus on addressing barriers to learning and teaching and re-engaging disconnected students [31,71]. Such a system is key to promoting the well-being and intrinsic motivation for school success of all students, their families, and the school staff and is a key element in facilitating emergence of a positive school climate. The intent is to fully embed concerns about immigrants into a system of student and learning supports designed for all students. The resulting unified approach is increasingly referred to as a learning supports component.

A learning supports component encompasses classroom and school-wide approaches and is designed to enable students to get around barriers and re-engage in classroom instruction. Attention to both these matters is essential because interventions that do not ensure a student's meaningful engagement in classroom learning are insufficient for sustaining student involvement, good behavior, and effective learning at school.

With engagement and re-engagement in mind, a constant focus in developing the intervention prototype has been on reducing any tendency to overemphasize the use of extrinsic reinforcers while pursuing strategies that enhance intrinsic motivation. This encompasses enhancing students' positive attitudes toward school by promoting feelings of competence, self-determination, and relationship.

Operationally, the prototype builds on the idea that intervention involves a continuum of activity; however, it both evolves the continuum into an integrated set of subsystems and organizes the current fragmented laundry list of programs, services, and initiatives into six content arenas based on their functional commonalities.

7.2.2. A Continuum of Unified and Interconnected Subsystems

In education, interventions are commonly framed in terms of tiers or levels. These are prominently advocated in discussions of such practices as response to intervention (RtI) and positive behavioral supports (PBIS). The simplicity of the tiered presentation as widely adopted is appealing and helps underscore differences in levels of intervention. However, basic concerns about such a formulation include that it mainly stresses levels of intensity, does not address the problems of systematically organizing and connecting interventions that fall into and across each level, and does not address the need to connect school and community interventions. As a result, it has done little to promote the type of intervention framework that policy and practice analyses indicate is needed to guide schools in developing a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of learning supports [72].

To escape these deficits, we frame intervention in terms of a continuum of integrated, overlapping subsystems that weave together school-community-home resources. The subsystems focus on:

- promoting healthy development and preventing problems;
- intervening early to address problems as soon after onset as is feasible; and
- assisting with chronic and severe problems.

In addition to ensuring these subsystems are developed into an overall system that encompasses school and community resources, the activities across the continuum must be organized, based on functional commonalities, into a circumscribed set of content arenas.

7.2.3. Content Arenas of Activity

Our research categorizes learning supports into the following six content arenas:

- Enhancing strategies in regular classrooms to enable learning. This arena emphasizes in classroom collaboration with other teachers and student support staff to (a) enable personalized instruction; (b) enhance intrinsic motivation for all students and especially those manifesting mild-moderate learning and behavior problems; (c) provide learning accommodations and supports as necessary; (d) address external barriers with a focus on prevention and early intervening; (e) use response to intervention in applying special assistance; and (f) re-engage those who have become disengaged from learning at school.
- Supporting transitions. This arena emphasizes assisting students and families as they negotiate the many hurdles related to school and grade changes, daily transitions, program transitions, accessing supports, and so forth. For example, it stresses welcoming and providing ongoing social support for students, families, and staff new to the school to provide both a motivational and a capacity building foundation for developing positive working relationships and a positive school climate. It focuses on facilitating school adjustment and early identification of adjustment problems. It provides a focus on transitions to and from special programs.
- Increasing home and school connections and engagement. This arena is concerned with (a) addressing barriers to home involvement; (b) helping those in the home enhance supports for their children; (c) strengthening home and school communication; and (d) increasing home support of the school. It emphasizes expanding the nature and scope of interventions and enhancing communication mechanisms for outreaching in ways that connect with the motivational differences manifested by parents and other student caretakers and developing intrinsically motivated school-home working relationships.
- Increasing community involvement and collaborative engagement. This arena is concerned with outreach to develop greater community connection and support from a wide range of entities to better address barriers to learning, promote child and youth development, and establish a sense of community that supports learning and focuses on hope for the future. It includes (a) enhanced use of volunteers and other community resources; (b) weaving together school and community efforts to enhance the range of options and choices for students, both at school and in the community; and (c) establishing a school-community collaborative.
- Responding to, and where feasible, preventing school and personal crises. This arena includes preparing for emergencies, implementing plans when an event occurs, countering the impact of traumatic events, developing and implementing prevention strategies, and creating a caring and safe learning environment. Widely used school crisis teams can go beyond crisis response and provide proactive leadership in developing prevention programs to avoid or mitigate crises. Such programs can enhance protective buffers and student intrinsic motivation for preventing interpersonal and human relationship problems.

- Facilitating student and family access to special assistance (including specialized services on- and off-campus) as needed. This arena encompasses providing personalized support as soon as a need is recognized. The emphasis in doing so is on assisting in the least disruptive way using a shared and mutually respectful problem-solving approach. Special attention is given to minimizing threats to and enhancing intrinsic motivation for solving problems by strengthening feelings of competence, self-determination, and positive relationships.

Combining the six arenas and the continuum into a 3×6 matrix produces a graphic illustrating our prototype intervention framework (see Figure 1). The framework provides a guide for developing a learning supports component. The matrix is commonly used to map existing interventions and analyze gaps to determine priorities for filling them. More details about specific practices in each arena are encompassed in a set of self-study surveys developed by our Center to aid schools in developing a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of student and learning supports.

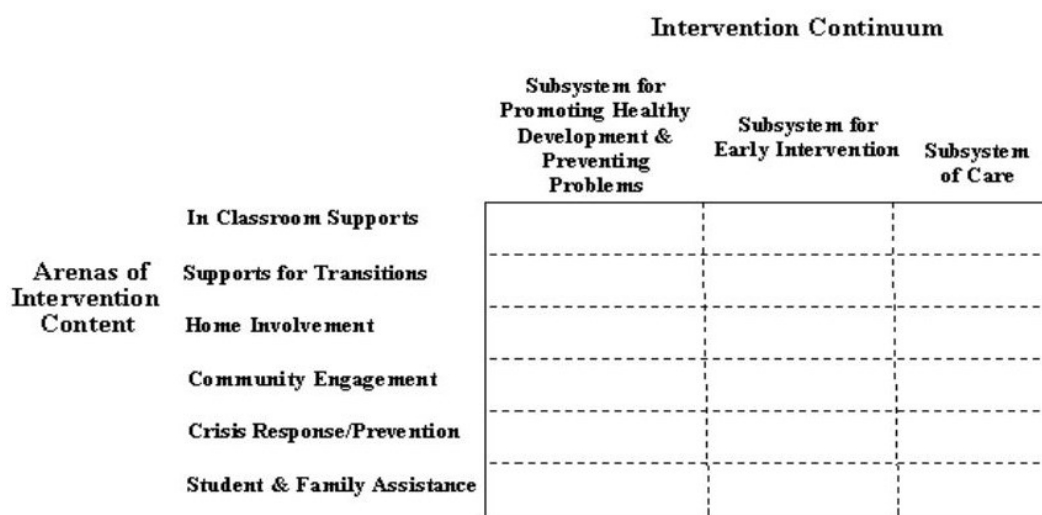


Figure 1. Framework for a Comprehensive System of Student and Learning Supports Framework for a Comprehensive System of Student and Learning Supports.

8. Policy Implications

On the one hand, immigrant students and their families raise special concerns for schools. On the other hand, many of the concerns overlap with those of other students who require student and learning supports to enable them to succeed at school.

Rather than enact so many piecemeal and fragmented policies related to specific subgroups of students and problems, it is time to recognize commonalities in the underlying dynamics causing learning, behavior, and emotional problems. From this perspective, interventions to address concerns associated with many designated subgroups can be embedded into a broad framework for enabling success at school. This does not mean ignoring or marginalizing any subgroup. To the contrary, the point is to directly address common underlying factors interfering with students benefitting from good instruction and to do so in a way that avoids fragmentation, redundancy, and counterproductive competition for sparse resources.

8.1. A Policy Paradigm Shift

To move forward from an unsatisfactory status quo, policy makers need to move from a two- to a three-component framework for school improvement. The third component focuses directly on addressing barriers to learning and teaching and re-engaging disconnected students. This component is intended to be fully embedded with efforts to improve instruction and management/governance and pursued as a primary and essential component of school improvement policy and practice. In addition, establishment of the third component calls for expanding the accountability framework for schools to encompass direct indicators of efforts to address barriers to learning and teaching [73,74].

Policy guidelines associated with the third component can be used to clarify its multiyear development into a comprehensive system. Particular attention needs to be given to establishing and connecting dedicated leadership and operational infrastructures at all levels. Furthermore, the following points require emphasis:

(1) the third component should be conceived and embedded fully into every school's improvement plan as a unifying concept for developing a comprehensive, multifaceted, and cohesive system that encompasses all efforts related to providing student and learning supports;

(2) establishment of the third component should begin with analysis of all current resources used by schools for student and learning supports with a view to realigning and redeploying resources to reduce redundancy and identifying high priority system gaps; and

(3) capacity building related to the third component should include:

- unifying the many separate organizational and operational infrastructure entities that have been built up around the piecemeal and *ad hoc* establishment of initiatives, programs, and practices;
- identifying dedicated leadership positions for the component;
- redefining job descriptions of student and learning support personnel;
- connecting relevant resources across families of schools;
- enhancing collaboration with community resources to weave together overlapping functions and related resources into a comprehensive system; and
- pursuing relevant professional and other stakeholder development and facilitating essential systemic changes.

We stress that the proposed policy shift can be done at local levels. However, where state/province and federal accountability demands work against developing a unified, comprehensive, and equitable approach to addressing barriers to learning and teaching, the third component requires adoption at the federal level.

8.2. A Caution about Limiting Policy to Integrating Services

As noted, the response to the complications related to meeting the additional needs of immigrants has led to initiating new programs and services in a piecemeal and *ad hoc* manner. The result has been to increase the fragmentation of efforts to support families and their children.

Research over the last 25 years has focused on the problem of fragmented practices. There have been many initiatives and reports (using terms such as school linked services, integrated services, one stop shopping, wraparound services, seamless service delivery, coordinated school health, co location of services, integrated student supports, full service schools, systems of care, and more). As we have discussed, several recent policy-oriented reports still stress “integrated student services” [69].

Clearly, some immigrant students need services; others do not. Any overemphasis on special services for immigrants colludes with a presumptive tendency to view all immigrant students as having deficits that must be addressed before they can perform well at school. Moreover, the overemphasis on *services* tends to work against the focus of schools on preventing problems and promoting social and emotional well-being and empowering students.

While discussion of integration is useful and seems like a common sense goal, just focusing on integration is a dead end. Limiting the focus to integrating student/learning supports has little chance of enhancing equity of opportunity for all students. Moreover, as practiced, such a minimal emphasis on systemic change can have serious unintended negative consequences. Of particular concern is that focusing primarily on integration maintains the fragmentation of interventions and does little to reduce the counterproductive competition among those personnel responsible for the various discrete programs and services. Furthermore, it can maintain the current marginalization of school/home/community efforts to address learning, behavior, and emotional problems.

So our caution to schools and districts is: Don’t make either enhancing services or intervention integration an end-goal or main focus. From our perspective, efforts to better integrate resources should be viewed as just a step in moving toward a fundamental transformation in how schools and communities work together to promote healthy development and address barriers that interfere with development, learning, parenting, and teaching.

The point of moving from a two- to a three-component framework for school improvement is to bring fundamental coherence and end the marginalization of endeavors to address barriers to learning and teaching. That is, adding a learning supports component to the instructional and management components enables (a) unifying all interventions for addressing barriers to learning and teaching and re-engaging disconnected students and (b) unifying the three components of school improvement. In this context, the first steps are to unify what a school and district currently is doing; this can start with integrating existing resources, but the goal is to transform student and learning supports into a unified system and then develop them into a comprehensive and equitable approach for addressing barriers to learning and teaching and re-engaging disconnected students. As part of the process, the aim is to weave in community and home resources to fill critical gaps, but “integrating” needed community services into school settings, while helpful, is not the main goal.

8.3. Recommendations

Because developing a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system involves much more than increasing communication and coordination of student and learning supports, we advocate

- adopting a comprehensive intervention blueprint for student and learning supports and identifying which current strategies are worth keeping and what major gaps need to be filled;
- redeploying available resources in keeping with priorities for system development;

- revamping school-community infrastructures to weave resources together to enhance and evolve the system and align interventions horizontally and vertically; and
- supporting the necessary systemic changes in ways called for by comprehensive transformation, scale-up, and sustainability.

To these ends, we offer three recommendations:

- (1) Move beyond the current marginalized and fragmented approaches to initiate development of a comprehensive pre-K-16 system of student and learning supports. Specifically, we propose:
 - Moving the current pre-K-16 school policy framework to a three-component blueprint so that the many fragmented efforts to address barriers to success at school and re-engage disconnecting/non-persevering students are unified under one umbrella concept and developed into a comprehensive system of student and learning supports;
 - Ensuring that this third component is treated as equal to the others in policy priority to end the marginalization of student and learning supports and to minimize piecemeal and *ad hoc* intervention planning and implementation;
 - Expanding the school accountability framework to encompass the third component and drive development of a comprehensive system.
- (2) Revamp and interconnect operational infrastructures. Developing and institutionalizing a comprehensive system of student and learning supports requires a well-designed and effective set of operational mechanisms. The existing ones must be modified in ways that guarantee new policy directions are implemented effectively and efficiently. How well these mechanisms are connected horizontally and vertically determines cohesiveness, cost efficiency, and equity.
- (3) Support transformative and sustainable systemic change. Systemic transformation to enhance equity of opportunity across pre-K-16 requires new collaborative arrangements and redistributing authority (power). Policymakers must provide support and guidance not only for implementing intervention prototypes, but also for adequately getting from here to there. This calls for well-designed, compatible, and interconnected operational mechanisms at many levels and across agencies.

Prototypes related to each of these recommendations have been developed [71]. Resource aids also have been developed [75].

In sum, available evidence indicates that current policies and practices are unlikely to markedly increase the number of students who engage and succeed at school. It is time to move beyond piecemeal and marginalized policy and fragmented practices. The need is to develop a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of interventions that address barriers to students having an equal opportunity to succeed at school. Indeed, from our perspective, establishment of such a system is a public education, public health, and civil rights imperative.

Of course, place and context matter. To date, our work has been implemented in a variety of settings, and future research will determine further generalizability.

9. Concluding Comments

As concerns are raised about effective schooling for immigrant youth, the solution is not just to provide another set of special initiatives, programs, and services. It is not feasible or necessary to separately address the needs of every subgroup of students who experience difficulty at schools (e.g., immigrants, disenfranchised subgroups, disconnected youth, homeless students, LBGT, LD, ADHD, etc.). To do so, increases the fragmentation of interventions and produces sparse benefits.

The job of schools is not just to ensure that the needs of a particular subgroup are met. Available data clearly indicate that at every stage in the progression from pre-K-16, too many students in every subgroup are falling by the wayside. The reality is that schools are confronted daily with multiple, interrelated neighborhood, family, schooling, peer, and personal problems that require multiple and interrelated solutions.

If schools are to enhance equity of opportunity, the next decade must mark a turning point for how schools and communities address the problems of all children and youth. Needed in particular are transformative initiatives that enhance how schools work to prevent and ameliorate the learning, behavior, and emotional problems experienced by many students. This requires a policy vision for how to facilitate equity of opportunity by coalescing a comprehensive system of school and community efforts to address barriers to school success. Such a vision must encompass reshaping the functions of all school personnel who have a role to play in addressing barriers to learning and promoting healthy development. Furthermore, policy and practice must fundamentally transform how schools connect with homes and communities so they can work together in pursuing shared goals related to the general well-being of the young and society.

Equity of opportunity is one of a society's most elusive goals. Public education has an indispensable role to play in achieving this goal, but schools are hampered by fundamental gaps in school improvement policy and practice. Given the deficiencies of current approaches, the call is for new directions that move toward transforming how schools address barriers to learning and teaching. The end product must be schools where everyone—staff, students, families, and community stakeholders—feels supported.

Author Contributions

Both authors contributed equally to this work.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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