

The Use of a Multidimensional Support Model to Examine Policies and Practices for Immigrant Students across Canada

Louis Volante
Brock University

Camila Lara
Brock University

Don A. Klinger
University of Waikato

Melissa Siegel
Maastricht University / UNU-MERIT

Abstract

In the larger context of migration, the education and integration of immigrant children within Canadian school systems has become a pressing concern for education policy makers. Through a systematic content analysis, this study developed a Multidimensional Support Model to examine education policies and support measures that have been articulated by Ministries and Departments of Education across Canada to facilitate the integration and success of immigrant students in K–12 public education systems. The discussion underscores the timeliness and rationale for Ministries and Departments of Education to develop a stand-alone policy document to address all of the unique needs of immigrant students comprehensively and devote greater attention to the socio-economic challenges immigrant students disproportionately face. Developing this document would also address the importance of greater policy coherence and collaboration among ministry sectors. The utility of the proposed support model, which drew on the existing literature, is also discussed in relation to future research studies.

Keywords: immigrant children, integration policies, inclusive education

Résumé

Dans le large contexte de la migration, l'éducation et l'intégration des enfants immigrants dans les systèmes scolaires canadiens sont devenues une préoccupation urgente pour les décideurs de l'éducation. Grâce à une analyse de contenu systématique, cette étude a élaboré un modèle de soutien multidimensionnel pour examiner les politiques et les mesures de soutien en éducation développées par les ministères de l'Éducation du Canada pour faciliter l'intégration et la réussite des élèves immigrants de la maternelle à la 12e année dans le système d'éducation publique. La discussion fait ressortir l'argumentation et la nécessité, pour les ministères de l'Éducation, d'élaborer rapidement une politique indépendante pour examiner en profondeur tous les besoins uniques des étudiants immigrants et de consacrer une plus grande attention aux défis socio-économiques auxquels ils sont disproportionnellement confrontés; elle soulève également l'importance de politiques plus cohérentes et d'une meilleure collaboration entre les différents secteurs ministériels. L'utilité du modèle

de soutien proposé, qui s'appuie sur la littérature existante, est également envisagée en lien avec les perspectives de recherches futures.

Mots-clés : enfants immigrants, politiques d'intégration, éducation inclusive

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Introduction

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has reported that Canada has the second largest share of the percentage of first- and second-generation immigrant students among all OECD countries at 29.6% (Huddleston et al., 2015). Similarly, the most recent 2016 Canadian census indicated that almost 2.2 million children under the age of 15 are foreign-born (first-generation) or have at least one foreign-born parent (second-generation), representing 37.5% of all Canadian children (Statistics Canada, 2017a). Collectively, these figures suggest that a sizeable share of children currently within Canadian elementary, middle, or secondary schools have a recent history of immigration, and this number is likely going to increase in the coming years—particularly in the most populous provinces of Ontario, British Columbia, Alberta, and Quebec. Not surprisingly, schools play a critical role in supporting immigrant students' integration through education (Volante et al., 2017b).

Given the diverse student population across Canada, governments must consider the complex needs of immigrant students and develop evidence-based policy frameworks that promote their success. This study seeks to examine this issue through an in-depth analysis of provincial policy frameworks across Canada. The key analytic objective is to examine the degree to which provinces have developed immigrant-friendly policies that facilitate positive student outcomes. The existing literature underscores the importance of immigrant integration to ensure active participation in the social, cultural, and economic lives of their communities (King & Skeldon, 2010; Volante et al., 2017a).

While many education systems strive to provide equal educational opportunities for all students—regardless of their immigration status, socio-economic background, or country of origin—only a few manage to meet these laudable objectives (Schleicher & Zoido, 2016). In a report released by MIPLEX in 2015, it was highlighted that in most countries, poor educational outcomes among immigrant students were accompanied by weak targeted policies that were not effective in practice (Huddleston et al., 2015). A more recent report on education systems released by UNESCO (2018a) highlights the different educational approaches to migrant culture, ranging from assimilationist to inclusionary approaches, with the latter leading to more positive self-perceptions amongst immigrant students. The previously noted report also underscored how immigrant students tend to be concentrated within schools with lower academic standards and performance

levels, which negatively affects their educational achievement. Thus, education policies geared toward immigrant student populations can and do exert a pronounced influence on migrant student outcomes within education systems.

The most common measure for making cross-national comparisons of student achievement, including those for first- and second-generation immigrants, involves the disaggregation of results from the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA). PISA is a triennial international survey that evaluates education systems around the world by measuring 15-year-old students' scholastic performance on mathematics, science, and reading literacy. The PISA survey is currently the most widely used measure of student achievement by researchers and policy makers alike (e.g., Behtoui, 2013; Cheema, 2014; Jonsson & Rudolphi, 2011; Lai et al., 2014; Marques et al., 2007; Meunier, 2011; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2016; Pasztor, 2008; Pong, 2009; Rangvid, 2007, 2010; Ron-Balsera, 2015; Sohn & Ozcan, 2006; Stomquist, 2012; Volante et al., 2017b; Volante, 2018). PISA results suggest that in the majority of OECD countries, first-generation immigrant students perform significantly lower than their second-generation counterparts, who in turn perform lower than non-immigrant students (OECD, 2015). In some cases, when one considers standard scores, immigrant students in Western destination countries are more than two grade levels behind their same age non-immigrant peers (Volante et al., 2018).

Interestingly, the MIPEX report indicated that Canada ranked significantly higher in the use of effective education policies to integrate immigrant children in comparison to the international average (Huddleston et al., 2015). Likewise, unlike other OECD countries, Canada has not only consistently ranked as a top performer on PISA, but overall results show that in Canada immigrant students also tend to perform as well as non-immigrant students (OECD, 2015). Yet, it is important to note that when scores are further disaggregated by provinces, immigrant students not only significantly outperform non-immigrant students in some provincial jurisdictions, but significantly underperform in other provincial jurisdictions (OECD, 2015; Volante et al., 2017b). It is worth noting that provincial education systems enjoy jurisdictional autonomy in the design and implementation of all education policies—an arrangement that is rather unique in relation to the international community. Thus, it is more accurate to discuss Canadian education as separate provincial/territorial systems—which tend to possess similarities and differences.

Provincial Education Autonomy and Achievement Differences

Under Canada's Constitution Act of 1867, provinces and territories have constitutional jurisdiction over K–12 public education. Ministries and Departments of Education in each province are responsible for developing policies and legislative frameworks that guide the provision of educational services within their jurisdictions. While variations between provincial education policies exist, all provincial governments work towards the development of policies that promote positive student achievement, including the success of immigrant student groups. It is also worth noting that Canada's three territories have education systems that have traditionally adopted the curriculum and assessment frameworks of particular Canadian provinces. Yukon follows the same structure as British Columbia while the Northwest Territories and Nunavut follow the structure of Alberta (Volante & Ben Jaafar, 2008).

Certainly, such policies influence the educational outcomes and achievement of students; however, a variety of other dimensions have also been shown to influence students' educational achievement. In the case of immigrant student achievement, these dimensions include individual student characteristics (gender, age of arrival, etc.), family (socio-economic status, parental education levels, etc.), school/education system characteristics (stratification/tracking at an early age, provision of language support, etc.), community (ethnic isolation, poor housing, etc.), host society (multicultural and social protection policies, income inequality, etc.), and geopolitical context (anti-immigrant sentiment, neo-liberal approaches to school financing, etc.) (Volante, Klinger et al., 2019). Although the range of dimensions influencing immigrant student achievement is complex and interactions amongst different dimensions may vary across jurisdictions, examining provincial policy frameworks against evidence-based research can help us understand how existing policies are narrowing or widening achievement gaps between immigrant and non-immigrant student populations.

Not surprisingly, the large majority of newly arrived immigrants settle in Canada's most populous provinces: Ontario, British Columbia, Quebec, and Alberta. The 2016 census reported that a total of 3,851,770 immigrants live in Ontario, 1,292,500 immigrants live in British Columbia, 1,091,170 immigrants live in Quebec, and 845,000 live in Alberta (Statistics Canada, 2017b). Statistics Canada has also reported that among recent immigrants living in Canada in 2016, approximately 6 in 10 were admitted under the economic category, 3 in 10 were admitted under the family reunification class, and 1

in 10 were admitted as refugees (Statistics Canada, 2017a). These settlement trends have led the cumulative proportion of first- and second-generation immigrant students to vary significantly across provinces. While Ontario (44%), British Columbia (36%), Alberta (25%), Manitoba (23%), and Quebec (15%) have relatively large proportions of immigrant students, Saskatchewan (8%), New Brunswick (6%), Nova Scotia (4%), PEI (4%), and Newfoundland and Labrador (2%) have significantly smaller proportions (Council of Ministers of Education, Canada [CMEC], 2015a).

PISA 2015 provincial results show that Alberta, British Columbia, and Quebec are not only the overall top-performing Canadian provinces in science, reading, and mathematics, but their provincial scores are close to Singapore's scores (science: 556; reading: 535; mathematics: 564), which is the top-performer worldwide (OECD, 2016). Students in Ontario performed similar to the Canadian average (science: 526; reading: 527; mathematics: 516), while significantly higher compared to the OECD average (science: 493; reading: 493; mathematics: 490). Conversely, students in the Atlantic provinces, as well as in Manitoba and Saskatchewan, performed lower than the Canadian average and were comparable to the OECD average. It is important to note that Manitoba (17%) and Saskatchewan (17%) have the highest proportion of low achievers in all of Canada, resulting in a significant performance disadvantage (CMEC, 2015b).

Table 1. PISA 2015 provincial results

Science		Reading		Mathematics	
Province	Mean Scores (S.E.)	Province	Mean Scores (S.E.)	Province	Mean Scores (S.E.)
AB	541 (4.0)	BC	536 (5.6)	QC	544 (4.8)
BC	539 (4.3)	AB	533 (5.2)	BC	522 (5.0)
QC	537 (4.7)	QC	532 (4.7)	AB	511 (4.7)
ON	524 (3.9)	ON	527 (4.4)	ON	509 (4.2)
NS	517 (4.5)	NS	517 (4.9)	PEI	499 (6.4)
PEI	515 (5.4)	PEI	515 (6.1)	NS	497 (4.6)
NB	506 (4.5)	NB	505 (5.2)	NB	493 (5.1)
NL	506 (3.2)	NL	505 (5.2)	MB	489 (4.2)
MB	499 (4.7)	MB	498 (5.0)	NL	486 (3.2)
SK	496 (3.1)	SK	496 (3.6)	SK	484 (2.9)

Source: Adapted from OECD (2016).

The OECD has reported that the differences in performance of first- and second-generation immigrant students, in comparison with non-immigrant students in Canada, is “negligible” (OECD, 2016, p. 248). Nevertheless, the disaggregated achievement data clearly highlights that there are some significant variations across provinces. For instance, PISA 2015 science achievement scores, which represented the major tested domain, showed that first-generation immigrant students scored above non-immigrant students in British Columbia, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Ontario—while the opposite was true for Alberta, Manitoba, Quebec, and Saskatchewan. The largest performance gap between non-immigrant and first-generation immigrant scores was in Saskatchewan, with a 32-point difference—which is roughly equivalent to one grade level (Volante et al., 2018). The performance gaps in Alberta, Manitoba, and Quebec were smaller, ranging between 8 and 16 points. In contrast, second-generation immigrant students’ achievement results were higher/lower by 1 to 5 points than those of non-immigrant students in some provinces. Surprisingly, given the lower outcomes for first-generation immigrants, second-generation immigrant students in Saskatchewan significantly outperformed non-immigrant students by 26 points.

Table 2. PISA 2015 science results: Non-immigrant, first-generation, and second-generation immigrant students’ mean scores

Province	Immigrant Students %	Non-Immigrant Mean Scores (S.E.)	First-Generation Immigrant Mean Scores (S.E.)	Second-Generation Immigrant Mean Scores (S.E.)
Alberta	28.0 (1.8)	543 (4.1)	535 (6.3)	548 (6.6)
British Columbia	39.4 (2.7)	540 (4.6)	548 (7.7)	541 (6.9)
Manitoba	23.9 (1.2)	506 (5.7)	490 (6.5)	502 (8.2)
New Brunswick	5.6 (0.8)	507 (4.7)	535 (13.1)	c (c)
Newfoundland and Labrador	2.5 (1.2)	508 (3.3)	c (c)	c (c)
Nova Scotia	8.3 (1.2)	520 (4.4)	522 (15.4)	c (c)
Ontario	37.1 (2.4)	526 (4.2)	531 (6.5)	529 (5.3)
P.E.I.	5.2 (1.2)	513 (5.2)	c (c)	c (c)
Quebec	23.3 (3.9)	541 (4.3)	527 (11.2)	535 (10.0)
Saskatchewan	13.8 (1.0)	500 (3.4)	468 (8.1)	526 (13.3)

Note: c represents missing values.

Source: Adapted from OECD (2016).

Although Canada remains a top performer in PISA and the achievement gap between immigrant and non-immigrant populations is relatively smaller compared to other Western educational jurisdictions, it is important that policy makers address the performance disadvantages experienced by students within certain provincial contexts, as educational achievement has a significant bearing on future educational and economic opportunities. Education policies should be responsive to the diverse needs of their student population and help narrow achievement gaps between different segments of the student population.

Multidimensional Support Model

This study aims to understand how education systems across Canada are supporting immigrant students' success and integration within school systems with an eye toward identifying potential gaps. Admittedly, the operational definition of what *integration* of immigrants entails continues to be a concept debated by scholars and policy makers, since there is no "single, generally accepted definition, theory or model of immigrant integration" (Castles et al., 2001, p. 12). Nevertheless, scholars have established models and frameworks that provide a broader understanding of what constitutes "successful integration" under key areas of activity in the public arena, including employment, housing, health and education. For this study, we have drawn on several models that address the successful integration of immigrant children within school systems identified in the available literature. In particular, we have utilized the Comprehensive Support Model (European Commission, 2013) to help shape our Multidimensional Support Model. The Comprehensive Support Model encompasses specific policy measures/actions that address the needs of immigrant students under four educational support dimensions: (1) linguistic support, (2) academic support, (3) parental involvement, and (4) intercultural education and child-friendly learning environments (see European Commission, 2013, pp. 35–36).

In order to make our Multidimensional Support Model more comprehensive, we have added two additional educational support dimensions that closely align with emerging evidence and empirical research literature regarding the importance of psychosocial and socio-economic needs of immigrant students (Volante et al., 2018). This is noteworthy, as immigrant children around the world are more likely to experience bullying and

discrimination that can result in poor mental health, which can have significant negative effects on children's behaviour inside and outside of classrooms (Ron-Balsera, 2015; Spomer & Cowen, 2001; UNESCO, 2018b). Involuntary migrants, such as refugees who have been forced to flee their homeland due to armed conflict, are especially susceptible to psychosocial challenges. In order to address these various difficulties, policy makers and school authorities should focus on addressing bullying within schools and supporting the well-being of students by preventing the development of depression, isolation, or any other mental health issues. Hence, we have added the *psychosocial support dimension* to our model, which comprises policy measures/actions that encourage the provision of counselling services, the establishment of partnerships between schools and community health clinics, and the development of bullying prevention policies and strategies. Of course, it is fair to acknowledge that each of these provisions and supports would also be beneficial for the entire student population.

Our model also recognizes the central importance of socio-economic status (SES), as it has been consistently associated with lower educational outcomes, as well as lack of access to opportunities and resources (Marques et al., 2007; OECD, 2011; Ron-Balsera, 2015; Schleicher & Zoido, 2016; Schnepf, 2007; Volante, 2016; Volante, Schnepf et al., 2019). Schools in low SES neighbourhoods are often disadvantaged, which can increase the possibility of educational segregation and low-quality education (Schleicher & Zoido, 2016; Strelakova-Hughes, 2017). In order to capture this barrier—which is referred to as a double-disadvantage (Volante, Klinger et al., 2019)—a sixth educational support dimension was established to analyze the provision of supports for children coming from low SES backgrounds. Under the *socio-economic barriers dimension*, policy actions include the establishment of policies that provide support for students coming from low SES backgrounds, as well as support for disadvantaged schools.

Overall, our revised model, which builds on the Comprehensive Support Model, provides a good fit for this analysis given the strong similarities between Western industrialized school systems and the similar background characteristics of immigrant student populations within these traditional countries of immigration.

Methodology

Document Collection and Classification

Our Multidimensional Support Model, as well as relevant literature, guided the selection of documents and collection of data for this research. The documents selected represent guiding frameworks issued to school districts, which outline specific expectations regarding the implementation of the ministry policies and programs, including directives for minority student populations such as immigrant students. All the policy documents, guidelines, and resources that were analyzed in this study were gathered through the websites of each provincial Ministry or Department of Education up to March 2019. Documents that made explicit or implicit references to *immigrant students*, *at-risk students*, *visible minorities*, *integration practices*, *linguistic support programs*, *assessment methods*, *instruction methods*, *academic support*, *reception measures*, *special education*, *special classes*, *literacy development*, *parental involvement*, *intercultural education*, *friendly learning environments*, *equity and inclusion*, *cultural diversity*, *ethnic diversity*, *teacher training*, *student well-being*, *bullying prevention/intervention*, *mental health support*, *emotional/psychological support*, *low socio-economic status*, *disadvantaged students*, and *disadvantaged schools* were selected. After an initial scan that discarded policy documents that made peripheral mention to the key terms noted above, a total of 199 documents were analyzed, as shown below in Table 4. The table shows the number of documents that aligned with each dimension, as well as the relative percentage across all of Canada. It is worth noting that individual policy documents could be counted towards more than one dimension.

Table 4. Total number of documents analyzed, by province and educational support dimension

Province	Total No. Documents	Linguistic Support	Academic Support	Parental Involvement	Intercultural Education	Psychosocial Support	SES Barriers
1. AB	18	12	11	5	8	4	2
2. BC	19	8	13	4	4	6	3
3. MN	22	4	10	7	7	10	4
4. NB	23	8	11	3	8	7	6
5. NL	24	15	13	6	4	7	3

Province	Total No. Documents	Linguistic Support	Academic Support	Parental Involvement	Intercultural Education	Psychosocial Support	SES Barriers
6. NS	16	1	7	2	9	5	1
7. ON	22	5	11	4	9	9	2
8. P.E.I	20	1	12	3	2	4	1
9. QC	17	6	10	4	6	6	3
10. SK	18	3	11	3	7	9	3
TOTAL	199	63	109	41	64	67	28
% Share		32%	55%	21%	32%	34%	14%

Coding and Document Analysis

A qualitative content analysis of the documents was performed following deductive methods (Bowen, 2009; Eisenhardt, 1989; Hsiu-Fang & Shannon, 2015). Following our model, six initial coding categories were identified to represent the six educational support dimensions required to address the needs of immigrant children within schools. Subcategories were used to further organize relevant information, taking into consideration the policy measures/actions recommended under each dimension. Drawing from the Comprehensive Support Model (see European Commission, 2013, pp. 35–36) and relevant literature, operational definitions were determined for each category and used as guidelines when coding relevant data:

- *Linguistic support*: Policies, procedures, and/or strategies that involve assessment methods for ESL students, instruction methods for ESL students, provision of special/transitional classes, provision of language training, provision of teacher training on ESL, and encourages mother tongue instruction (European Commission, 2013).
- *Academic support*: Policies, procedures, and/or strategies that address grade placement, establish reception measures, provide induction programmes, address learning needs, encourage targeted support, provide mentors/tutors/teaching assistants, and promote re-integration programmes (European Commission, 2013).
- *Increased parental involvement*: Policies, procedures, and/or strategies that increase the understanding of “parental involvement,” provide adequate information through various communication channels, promote the use of interpreters, and provide reception and orientation support for immigrant students and their families (European Commission, 2013).

- *Establishment of intercultural education and child-friendly learning environment:* Policies, procedures, and/or strategies that promote staff training for diversity, employing teachers and mentors from different migrant backgrounds, integrating cultural diversity in the curriculum, teaching heritage language, use of materials to improve intercultural education, and allowing for cultural accommodations (European Commission, 2013).
- *Psychosocial support:* Policies, procedures, and/or strategies that involve the establishment of counselling and psychological support services, partnerships between community-based organizations and schools, and bullying prevention strategies (Ballard et al., 2014; McKenzie et al., 2016; Mellin et al., 2013; Weist & Christodoulou, 2000; Weist et al., 2003).
- *Addressing low SES barriers:* Policies, procedures, and/or strategies that provide support for immigrant students coming from low SES backgrounds, as well as support for disadvantaged schools (Areepattamannil & Berinderjeet, 2013; Entorf & Lauk, 2008; Marques et al., 2007; OECD, 2011; Schleicher & Zoido, 2016; Schnepf, 2007; Strekalova-Hughes, 2017).

These six dimensions are further summarized and represented in a coding tree in Figure 1.

To reiterate, individual policy documents could be assigned to more than one thematic focus. For example, if a policy document made mention of immigrant student psychosocial issues and trauma (i.e., bullying) and also referred to socio-economic supports that should be offered, it would be counted in two separate categories on Table 4. It is for this reason that the raw total of policy documents in each thematic focus equals more than the sum for the province. This process allowed the authors to get a broad snapshot of the distribution of themes within a province and across Canada. More fine-grain analyses were conducted to examine the depth of information in each cell that provides a more fulsome analysis of the relative attention to these dimensions within provincial jurisdictions.

Education and Integration of Immigrant Children: Thematic Dimensions

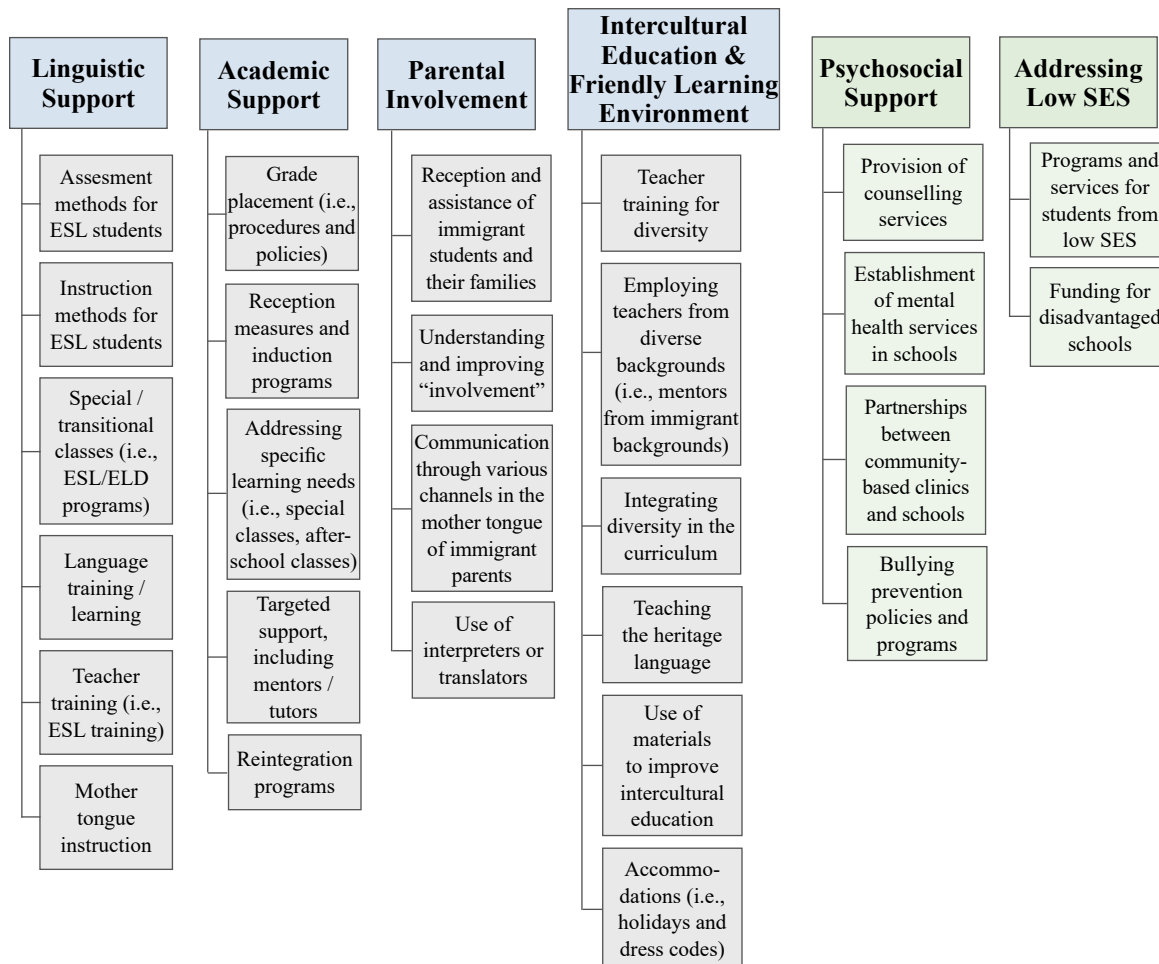


Figure 1. Coding tree

Findings

Following our Multidimensional Support Model, our analysis indicated that education policies across the country are notably inclusive, flexible, and comprehensive. Moreover, provincial policy frameworks directly and indirectly address the diverse needs of immigrant students—that is, while some provinces have explicitly developed policies to address specific barriers experienced by immigrant children (i.e., language barriers),

provinces have also developed policies that focus broadly on student achievement and well-being, which significantly contribute to immigrant students' success (i.e., academic support, parental involvement, and psychosocial support). Explicit supports for immigrant students' education and integration was strongest in British Columbia, Quebec, Alberta, and Ontario—particularly through the provinces' language and intercultural education policies, which were advanced in response to the growing diversity of the student population. This is perhaps a predictable finding given that these are the largest provinces in Canada and therefore also possess the highest relative proportions of immigrant students. (Note: Quebec has the fifth largest immigrant population in relative proportion next to Manitoba, although the difference is negligible.)

Interestingly, despite the Atlantic provinces (New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island) having the lowest relative proportion of immigrant students across Canada, these Departments of Education have also developed frameworks and strategies that promote an inclusive education system where immigrant students can thrive. On the other hand, compared to the policies and frameworks developed by other provinces, Saskatchewan appears to be the jurisdiction that has developed the weakest policy measures/actions for immigrant students—particularly when it comes to the province's approach to establishing an intercultural education system. Although we were able to identify seven policy documents that touched on intercultural education, the attention paid to this facet was rather scant in comparison to other provinces. It is worth noting that Saskatchewan possesses the largest performance gap between first-generation and non-immigrant students within Canada—as reflected in the 32 point difference noted in Table 2. The next section considers specific dimensions of our support model in greater detail across Canada.

Linguistic Support

Language learning is often considered the primary policy measure established by governments and schools in order to facilitate immigrant students' integration within regular programs. Provinces with a relatively large proportion of immigrant students have developed detailed policies that specifically focus on the provision of linguistic support for English language learners (ELL). Alberta's *English as a Second Language Policy*, British Columbia's *English Language Learning Policy*, and Ontario's *Language Acquisition*

Policy require school boards and school authorities to develop and implement policies, programs, and services for ELL students, such as English as a Second Language (ESL) and English Literacy Development (ELD) programs, develop specific assessment methods that evaluate ELL students' language proficiency, and ensure that schools and teachers continuously monitor and evaluate students' progress so that the necessary modifications to teaching practices are made (see Alberta Education, 2002, 2007, 2009a, 2009b, 2011, 2012a, 2012c, 2014, 2017a, 2017b; British Columbia Ministry of Education, 1999, 2001, 2013, 2018a; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2001, 2007, 2016a). On the other hand, Quebec's *Language Policy* states that schools are responsible for ensuring that students learn and use French in order to acquire the necessary language proficiency to succeed under the school system and fully *participate in society* (Gouvernement du Québec, 2012; Ministère de l'Éducation du Québec, 1998, 2003b). The policy's objective is to preserve French language within various spheres of public life in Quebec, including education, however, unlike other provinces, Quebec's Ministry of Education has not provided schools with practical guidelines on how to achieve this.

Alberta is the jurisdiction that has released the most resources relating to the integration of ELL students into the regular school program. Out of the 17 documents analyzed, 12 provided practical advice on the development and implementation of ESL programs, services, assessment methods, and monitoring practices for K–12 ELL/immigrant students. While British Columbia argues that their policies aim to “provide a basis for consistency, quality, and equity” (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2018a, p. 4) and Ontario states that the policy “will result in a consistent approach to the education of English language learners across the province” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 10), Alberta Education instead considers that the implementation of policies and programs depends on school characteristics, that is, the number of ELL students, the number of ESL teachers, and the resources available (Alberta Education, 2007, 2012a, 2014). Throughout Alberta's policy documents, the ministry repeatedly states that policy and program development will vary from one school district to another. Although this can result in disparities on the type of support provided to ELL students across the province, school districts and schools are nevertheless given clear guidance on what is expected from them when delivering these services.

Manitoba is the only province that has a relatively large proportion of immigrant students (23%) but has not developed a linguistic support policy. Similar to

Newfoundland and Labrador's *K-12 Multicultural Education Framework*, Nova Scotia's *ESL Framework*, and Saskatchewan's *Common Framework of Reference*, Manitoba's *Comprehensive EAL/LAL Framework* guides schools on the development of effective assessment, teaching, and monitoring practices for ELL students—but the establishment of such frameworks is not mandatory (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador—Education, 2010, 2011a, 2011b, 2011c, 2012a, 2012b, 2018; Manitoba Education, 1995, 2011a, 2019; New Brunswick Department of Education, 1998a, 1998b, 2011, 2017; Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2003a; Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2013a).

Although the Province of Prince Edward Island has not fully developed a policy or a framework to guide the provision of linguistic support, it is the only province that has developed a tangible provincial support program for ELL students. Through the *Provincial Itinerant Team*, ESL specialists rotate through schools providing specialized support to ELL students or teachers as needed (Prince Edward Island Department of Education, Early Learning and Culture, 2015a). New Brunswick has committed to “developing progress monitoring of English/French as a second language to ensure targeted interventions are successfully implemented with newcomers” (Government of New Brunswick, 2016a, p. 40). Nevertheless, the New Brunswick Department of Education has not released any clear guidelines providing clarification regarding the roles and responsibilities of the department, the school districts, and schools in regards to the development and implementation of these intervention practices, or the overall provision of linguistic support for newcomers and ELL students within the French and English education systems.

Academic Support

Ministries and Departments of Education across Canada have developed similar policies and frameworks to respond to the diverse learning needs of students within classrooms. Although Ontario has developed its *Equity and Inclusive Education Policy* to “meet the individual needs of students” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014b, p. 15), it is important to highlight that it is one of the few jurisdictions that guides the provision of learning assistance for students through its *Special Education Policy* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013c, 2016a, 2017a). Under the policy's mandate, schools must provide special education services and programs to *all* students who need learning support, not just those with an exceptionality and/or disability. Yet, no guidance is given to schools and teachers

on the kind of learning support that should be provided to students who have not been identified as having an exceptionality/disability.

In contrast, Quebec's *Policy on Educational Success*, British Columbia's *Diversity in BC Schools Policy*, and Alberta's *Inclusive Education Policy* acknowledge that students come from diverse backgrounds and experiences, that each learner has specific needs, and that the appropriate support mechanisms have to be established to ensure their success (Alberta Education, 2017b; British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2008a; Ministère de l'Éducation du Québec, 2013, 2017). Nova Scotia has also recently decided to replace their current *Special Education Policy* with the *Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS)*, which focuses on establishing a unified model of inclusive public education by addressing students' academic, social-emotional, and behavioural needs (Nova Scotia Education and Early Childhood Development, 2018).

The individual provincial analyses showed that all provinces have developed inclusive approaches and practices to be followed by schools, which directly benefit immigrant students' learning experiences. For instance, all provinces encourage school districts, school authorities, and teachers to adopt a *Universal Design for Learning* approach, *differentiated instruction* methods, and to make *accommodations* and/or *curricular modifications* in order to respond positively to the diverse learning needs of students within classrooms (Alberta Education, 2010, 2012b, 2013b, 2013c, 2013d; British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2008a, 2011, 2018a, 2018b; Government of Newfoundland and Labrador—Education, 2010, 2013a, 2014b, 2017, 2018; Manitoba Education, 2006a, 2007a, 2008, 2010b, 2015; Ministère de l'Éducation du Québec, 1998, 1999, 2001, 2003a, 2003c, 2006; New Brunswick Department of Education, 2009, 2013, 2015; Nova Scotia Education and Early Childhood Development, 2015b, 2016; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005, 2013a, 2014b; Prince Edward Island Department of Education, Early Learning and Culture, 2015a, 2019c; Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 1991a, 1997, 2004a, 2004b, 2013b, 2017b, 2017d).

Similarly, the majority of provinces have also developed specific guidelines to perform initial assessments and properly identify students' needs and plan accordingly for the delivery of supplementary programs and services (Alberta Education, 2004, 2017b, 2018; British Columbia Ministry of Education, 1994, 2006, 2007, 2008a, 2009a, 2009b, 2010, 2011; Government of Newfoundland and Labrador—Education, 2014a; Manitoba Education, 2006a, 2008, 2015; Ministère de l'Éducation du Québec, 1998, 1999, 2006,

2017; New Brunswick Department of Education, 1999, 2003; Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2003a; Ontario Ministry of Education, 1982a, 2010a, 2013b, 2014c; Prince Edward Island Department of Education, Early Learning and Culture, 2015a, 2019a, 2019c; Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 1991b, 2001, 2017c).

A general strategy adopted across Canadian provinces is that *all* students, regardless of their background, are to be provided with required support mechanisms, and that each student be placed in grade-level classrooms with their same age-peers (Alberta Education, 2007, 2012c; British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2016; Government of Newfoundland and Labrador—Education, 2012a, 2014a, 2017, 2018; Manitoba Education, 2006a; Ministère de l'Éducation du Québec, 1998, 1999; New Brunswick Department of Education, 2013; Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2003a; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, 2016a; Prince Edward Island Department of Education, Early Learning and Culture, 2015a; Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2001, 2017c). Only a few provinces encourage the establishment of flexible and temporary special classes to ease students' transitions into the regular curriculum, such as Alberta's *sheltered classes* (Alberta Education, 2012c) and Quebec's *welcoming classes* (Ministère de l'Éducation du Québec, 1998, 1999).

Additionally, in order to ensure students' success, provinces encourage school districts and schools to establish *student support teams* within schools (i.e., Learning Team in Alberta; School-Based Team in British Columbia; Student Services Support Team in Manitoba; Education Support Team in New Brunswick; Program Planning Team in Nova Scotia and Newfoundland; Student Success Team in Ontario; School Team in Saskatchewan and Quebec) that aim to address the multiple needs of students. All support teams across the country have similar responsibilities and are often composed of principals, teachers, counsellors, psychologists, therapists, social workers, and other staff. Overall, student support teams provide assistance in the development of services or classrooms strategies that can be adopted by teachers in order to address the needs of students, perform individual assessments and support the development of Individual Education Plans for students who need them, and provide individual assistance and monitor students' progress (Alberta Education, 2004; British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2016; Government of Newfoundland and Labrador—Education, 2014a; Manitoba Education, 2006a, 2007a, 2007b, 2010b; Ministère de l'Éducation du Québec, 2017; New Brunswick Department of Education, 2013; Nova Scotia Education and Early Childhood Development,

2012, 2013, 2016; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005, 2016a, 2017; Prince Edward Island Department of Education, Early Learning and Culture, 2015b, 2019d; Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2017a). Nonetheless, as a means to ensure that all teachers have the necessary knowledge to identify the needs of their students and modify their teaching practices accordingly, most provinces have also committed to providing professional development sessions to teachers (Alberta Education, n.d.; British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2008b, 2016; Government of New Brunswick, 2016b; Government of Newfoundland and Labrador—Education, 2013a; Ministère de l'Éducation du Québec, 2017; Nova Scotia Education and Early Childhood Development., 2012, 2015b, 2017; Prince Edward Island Department of Education, Early Learning and Culture, 2015a).

Parental Involvement

Ontario is the only province that has developed a *Parent Engagement Policy* as a means to support and enhance parent engagement within schools through the development of different programs and initiatives (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010b, 2013d). Despite the lack of policy development, all provinces acknowledge the importance of engaging parents in their children's education to support their success. Ministries and Departments of Education encourage schools to establish strong relationships with students' families by improving communication practices with parents through the use of interpreters whenever language is a barrier; involving parents in the planning, problem-solving, and decision-making processes relating to their children's education; and encouraging their participation within school committees and programs (Alberta Education, 2004, 2007, 2013a, 2017b; British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2008c, 2016, 2018a; Government of Newfoundland and Labrador—Education, 2010, 2011a, 2011b, 2012a, 2012b, 2014b; Manitoba Education, 2004b, 2006a, 2006c, 2007b; Ministère de l'Éducation du Québec, 1998; New Brunswick Department of Education, 1999, 2000, 2003; Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2001; Ontario Ministry of Education, 1993, 2007, 2010b, 2013d; Prince Edward Island Department of Education, Early Learning and Culture, 2015a, 2019b; Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2001, 2004a, 2004b). Nova Scotia has developed its *Schools Plus Program*, which encourages parental involvement and support within schools through the provision of targeted services and activities (see Nova Scotia Education and Early Childhood Development, 2012). Yet the large majority of

provinces have failed to provide school administrators with practical advice on how they can achieve these parental involvement mandates.

Intercultural Education

All provinces—with the exception of Saskatchewan—have developed explicit policies and procedures that require school districts and schools to establish learning environments that value, respect, and promote diversity in schools. Alberta's *Inclusive Education Policy*; British Columbia's *Diversity in BC Schools Policy*; Manitoba's *Action Plan for Ethno-cultural Equity*; New Brunswick's *Everyone at the Best Action Plan*; Newfoundland's *Cultural Connections Strategy*; Nova Scotia's *Racial Equity Policy*; Ontario's *Equity and Inclusive Education Policy*; PEI's *Cultivating Growth Strategy*; and Quebec's *Policy on Educational Integration and Intercultural Education* all require schools to embed equity and inclusion within their daily operations, policy development, and programming, as well as reflect the cultural and linguistic diversity of their schools within the curriculum and in instruction, assessment, and learning materials (Alberta Education, 2013a, 2017b; British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2008a, 2008b; Government of New Brunswick, 2016b; Government of Newfoundland and Labrador—Education, n.d.b, 2010; Government of Prince Edward Island, 2017; Manitoba Education, 2006a, 2006b; Ministère de l'Éducation du Québec, 1998, 2000, 2003b, 2017; Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2011a, 2011b; Nova Scotia Education and Early Childhood Development, 2015b, 2017; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009, 2013d, 2014b, 2016a; Prince Edward Island Department of Education, Early Learning and Culture, 2008).

Although Saskatchewan introduced the *Actualizing a Needs-Based Model* framework as a means to encourage schools to adopt an inclusionary philosophy and beliefs (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2015), unlike other jurisdictions that explicitly require schools to integrate diversity within their curricula, Saskatchewan has not provided schools and teachers with specific examples (or mandates) on the ways they can adopt inclusionary practices. Manitoba has also established the Cultural Advisory Committee as a means to make the curriculum development process more inclusive and reflective of Manitoba's diversity through continuous improvements (Manitoba Education, 2006b). Similarly, Manitoba and Quebec are the only two provinces that have acknowledged the

need to enhance schools' workforce diversity in order to allow children to have a "variety of role models" (Ministère de l'Éducation du Québec, 1998, p. 30).

Additionally, as a means to promote an intercultural education system, several Ministries and Departments of Education have committed to working with schools to provide school staff and teachers with professional development/training sessions to improve their knowledge and skills on how to promote inclusive environments within their classrooms (Alberta Education, 2011, 2013d, 2017b; Government of New Brunswick, 2016b; Government of Newfoundland and Labrador—Education, n.d.c; Manitoba Education, 2006b; Ministère de l'Éducation du Québec, 1998, 2003b, 2011). British Columbia has not claimed in any of its documents that it is committed to providing professional development sessions for teachers; however, the province has developed clear and specific guidelines/indicators for teachers to assess themselves to determine whether they are successfully encouraging diversity and social justice in their teaching practices, and whether they are improving the social climate in their classrooms and schools (see British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2008b).

Psychosocial Support

When it comes to the provision of psychological support, it is important to highlight that no single province has developed a policy that mandates schools to provide mental health resources within schools. Nonetheless, the large majority of provinces have developed programs or strategies that encourage school districts to establish agreements with community-based agencies, counsellors, psychologists, behavioural therapists, and other mental health professionals in order to provide mental health resources within schools. Examples include Alberta's *Regional Collaborative Service Delivery Program*; New Brunswick's *Comprehensive and Developmental School Counselling Program*; Prince Edward Island's *Student Well-Being Teams*; Ontario's *Mental Health Strategy*; Quebec's *Mental Health Action Plan*; and Saskatchewan's *Actualizing a Needs-Based Model* (Alberta Education, 2010, 2017b, 2017c; British Columbia Ministry of Education, 1989; Gouvernement du Québec, 2017; Manitoba Education, 2010a; Ministère de l'Éducation du Québec, 1999, 2017; New Brunswick Department of Education, 2002, 2008; New Brunswick Department of Health, 2011; Prince Edward Island Department of Education, Early Learning and Culture, 2018, 2019d; Ontario Ministry of Education, 1982b, 1984,

1993, 2013d, 2014a, 2016b, 2017, 2018; Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, 2011; Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2017a).

Every province—except for Prince Edward Island—has developed legislation, policies, or guidelines for school districts and schools to advance school-level policies and practices that address safety in schools and promote positive behaviour by tackling issues of bullying, harassment, and intimidation, such as British Columbia's *Safe and Caring Communities Policy*; Manitoba's *Respect for Diversity Policy*; Newfoundland's *Safe and Caring Schools Policy*; and Saskatchewan's *Bullying Prevention Policy*, to name a few (Alberta Education, 2013a, 2017b; British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2008c, 2015; Government of Newfoundland and Labrador—Education, n.d.a, 2013b, 2013c, 2013d, 2013e, 2013f; Manitoba Education, 2001, 2004a, 2011b, 2017; Ministère de l'Éducation du Québec, 2007, 2017; New Brunswick Department of Education, 2017, 2018; Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2003b; Nova Scotia Education and Early Childhood Development, 2015a; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013d, 2018; Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2004a, 2004b, 2006, 2013c).

Addressing Low Socio-Economic Barriers

Although all provincial Ministries and Departments of Education recognize that socio-economic status affects students' school outcomes and that schools should respond to families' differing economic realities, little guidance is given on concrete programs, services, and approaches that can be taken or used by schools in order to address this barrier (see Alberta Education, 2013a; British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2008a; Government of New Brunswick, 2012a, 2012b, 2018–2019, 2016a, 2016b, 2017; Government of Newfoundland and Labrador—Education, 2009; Government of Prince Edward Island, 2018; Manitoba Education, 2006a, 2017; Ministère de l'Éducation du Québec, 2005, 2011, 2017; Nova Scotia Community Services, n.d.; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2017b; Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 1997, 2004a, 2004b).

While provincial *Poverty Reduction Strategies*, such as the ones established in Ontario, Newfoundland and Labrador, and Nova Scotia encourage schools to collaborate with community organizations to improve access to services for populations most vulnerable to poverty, no clear mandates are given as to what kinds of services would best support students from low SES families (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador,

2009; Government of Prince Edward Island, 2018; Nova Scotia Community Services, n.d.; Ontario Ministry of Education, n.d., 2014b, 2017b).

Prince Edward Island is the only province that has clearly outlined a strategy to support students from low SES backgrounds. Through the government's *2019–2024 Poverty Reduction Action Plan*, the province has committed to developing more services and supports that are child and youth-centred to increase social inclusion, skill building, self-esteem, and health in youth populations—including more after-school programmes (sports, arts, technology, and other social inclusion activities), transitional support services (from school to employment/higher education), and modifying the curriculum to reduce and address stigma around poverty and other barriers that students might face to fully participate in the community (Government of Prince Edward Island, 2018).

Discussion

The preceding analysis highlights interesting differences across provinces with respect to each of the six dimensions in our analysis model. These differences are of importance as provincial policy makers identify areas of relative strengths and weaknesses in terms of relevant education policies intended to address the needs of immigrant students across the country. Nevertheless, our analysis also suggests that provincial attention to these dimensions is largely implied and scattered within numerous policy documents. Such ambiguity can be problematic for district and school leaders, as well as classroom teachers, who may be seeking direct guidance on how to support their students. In the absence of explicit policy, it is not surprising that resulting practices are highly varied. Given the sizeable share of immigrant students within many provinces, leadership and support at the federal level in terms of broader policies and directions could provide the impetus to develop a more common educational framework in support of immigrant students. Such a framework would lead to a *shared* stand-alone policy document that comprehensively addresses the unique needs of immigrant students. The detailed analysis we have conducted here strongly suggests that school-based practitioners are unlikely to identify the wide range of best practices required for this student population across provincial education systems.

There is certainly a precedent for the development of stand-alone policy documents that target particular student populations. This is evidenced by the growing awareness of the specific supports and considerations that inform relevant policies for First Nation (more commonly referred to as Indigenous) students across Canada. Overall, such an approach provides clarity to school-based practitioners and forces governments to explicitly address factors known to affect immigrant student achievement and educational success. Although detractors of such an approach will likely argue that ethnicity and cultural background characteristics of immigrant students vary considerably across provinces, the available empirical literature has clearly identified best practices in this field which inform teaching and learning (Volante et al., 2017b).

Additionally, our analysis suggests that the provision of supports for the socio-economic challenges immigrant students disproportionately face should be further emphasized in existing policies and future policy frameworks. The relative underrepresentation of SES considerations for immigrant students within policy documents is a somewhat surprising trend since this relationship and its impact on student outcomes is widely acknowledged in the literature—particularly in cross-national comparisons that are focused on immigrant student populations (OECD, 2015; Volante et al., 2018). Clearly, there are specific supports that are especially beneficial for low SES immigrant student groups; supports that need to figure more prominently in provincial policy frameworks. The inclusion of these supports would undoubtedly benefit other students who come from a lower SES background as well.

Our study also underscores the importance of engaging with multiple sectors, such as health and social protection, to provide better support for immigrant students and their families. Greater policy coherence (or lack thereof) becomes particularly important as governments strive to support students within and outside of classrooms. Additionally, related policy documents—for example, those related to psychosocial supports—were sometimes more than 30 years old. Collectively, the multifaceted challenges immigrant students face underscore the need for policy reform and increased attention to consolidation efforts across multiple sectors.

For the most part, across Canada the foundations for supportive policy frameworks are in place, and these policies address each of the six themes we have identified as being important to enhance the success of immigrant students. Unfortunately, the attention to these themes is unequal within and between provinces. While acknowledging

that provinces have jurisdictional authority with respect to education, our work provides evidence that the substantial population of immigrant students would likely benefit from a sharing of perspectives, efforts, and policies.

Lastly, the robustness of our Multidimensional Support Model, which is based on the available empirical literature, provides a useful lens for other researchers to examine immigrant student integration efforts within and outside of Canada. Additionally, policy makers and school leaders could also use the proposed support model to help guide their provision of in-service professional development activities. Ultimately, education policies and supports should reflect the multifaceted nature of the challenges immigrant students face in contemporary societies.

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