

December 16, 2013



# Preparing Immigrant Students in Minnesota for Higher Education



## Authors

### Lisa Vu

2013 Research Intern  
Graduate Student  
University of Minnesota  
lisa.vu@state.mn.us

### Nancy Walters, Ph.D.

Program Manager  
Tel: 651-259-3907  
nancy.walters@state.mn.us

## About the Minnesota Office of Higher Education

The Minnesota Office of Higher Education is a cabinet-level state agency providing students with financial aid programs and information to help them gain access to postsecondary education. The agency also serves as the state's clearinghouse for data, research and analysis on postsecondary enrollment, financial aid, finance and trends.

The Minnesota State Grant Program is the largest financial aid program administered by the Office of Higher Education, awarding up to \$150 million in need-based grants to Minnesota residents attending eligible colleges, universities and career schools in Minnesota. The agency oversees other state scholarship programs, tuition reciprocity programs, a student loan program, Minnesota's 529 College Savings Plan, licensing and early college awareness programs for youth.

## Minnesota Office of Higher Education

1450 Energy Park Drive, Suite 350  
Saint Paul, MN 55108-5227  
Tel: 651.642.0567 or 800.657.3866  
TTY Relay: 800.627.3529  
Fax: 651.642.0675  
E-mail: [info.ohe@state.mn.us](mailto:info.ohe@state.mn.us)  
[www.getready.state.mn.us](http://www.getready.state.mn.us)  
[www.ohe.state.mn.us](http://www.ohe.state.mn.us)

MINNESOTA  
OFFICE OF  
HIGHER  
EDUCATION

*reach higher*

# Table of Contents

---

<b>Table of Contents</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>Executive Summary</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>6</b>
Methodology.....	6
Definitions of “Immigrant Students” .....	7
Minnesota’s Changing Demographics .....	8
Place of Origin .....	8
Legal Status .....	9
Immigrant Students in Minnesota.....	10
Primary Languages Spoken at Home.....	10
Limited English Proficient Students .....	11
<b>Challenges That Affect College Access and Success for Immigrant Students</b> .....	<b>14</b>
Language Barrier.....	14
Model Minority Stereotype.....	14
Limited Social Capital.....	15
Conflicts Between Home and School Cultures .....	15
Biases in the Education System.....	15
Family Pressures.....	16
Difficulties Financing Higher Education.....	16
<b>Organizational Best Practices</b> .....	<b>17</b>
Provide Outreach Beyond Students .....	17
Build and Strengthen Partnerships .....	17
Recruit Dedicated Team Members .....	17
Facilitate Travel To and From Events .....	17
Utilize Holistic Programming .....	18
Pay Attention to Cultural Cues .....	18
Increase Enrollment in Advance Classes.....	18
Simplify the Financial Aid Application Process .....	18
<b>Organizational Challenges and Resources Needed</b> .....	<b>22</b>
Funding.....	22
Curriculum and Materials .....	22
Partnerships .....	22
Staffing .....	23
<b>References</b> .....	<b>24</b>
<b>Appendix A: Description of Organizations and Programs</b> .....	<b>25</b>
Carleton College.....	25
Comunidas Latinas Unidas En Servicio.....	26

Hmong American Partnership .....	27
Learning Disabilities Association, Inc. ....	27
Minnesota African Women’s Association .....	28
Minnesota State University, Mankato.....	28
Neighborhood House .....	29
Northfield Public Schools .....	29
Saint Paul College .....	30
Women’s Initiative for Self Empowerment, Inc.. .....	30
<b>Appendix B: Survey for Project Directors .....</b>	<b>31</b>

# Executive Summary

---

The purpose of this report is to facilitate cross-organizational learning about how to best prepare immigrant students within Minnesota for higher education. The report offers information about challenges that affect immigrant students' ability to access higher education or to succeed within it, as well as a summary of best practices and challenges faced by organizations that work with immigrant communities on these issues. Information for the report was gathered through a review of the literature and an analysis of responses from a survey sent to project directors of ten organizations in Minnesota with college access programming for immigrant students. These organizations are: Carleton College; Comunidas Latinas Unidas En Servicio; Hmong American Partnership; Learning Disabilities Association; Minnesota African Women's Association; Minnesota State University, Mankato; Neighborhood House; Northfield Public Schools; Saint Paul College; and Women's Initiative for Self-Empowerment.

College access and success may be impeded by several factors for immigrant students:

- The language barrier can impact students' performance in the classroom and on standardized exams used as part of the admissions process. Limited English proficiency would cause students to take developmental education, which adds time towards degree completion and cost of a degree.
- The model minority stereotype is the belief that all Asian students are well-represented and enjoying success within the higher education system; the stereotype does not acknowledge the diverse needs within Asian communities and could divert resources from populations that need interventions.
- Limited social capital can affect students' access to information and other resources about college. Limited social capital may be observed in students who have few college-educated role models who could share their higher education experiences or those with limited social connections to aid in navigating into and within the higher education system.
- Different cultural expectations in the home and school environments could place immigrant students in the difficult position of not knowing which set of rules and expectations to follow. In particular, gendered notions from parents about what career path their daughters should pursue can affect female students' ambition and participation in certain coursework.
- Certain practices within the education system can create biases against immigrant students. Immigrant students' chances of gaining admission to a prestigious college or for obtaining scholarships could be hindered when there is an over-reliance on standardized test scores, since standardized tests are not always objective instruments for measuring students' abilities. Meanwhile, assimilationist policies that seek to Americanize students do not acknowledge the rich linguistic and cultural knowledge that students from other cultures already possess.
- Responsibilities to the family like taking care of younger siblings, helping with housework, or acting as a cultural and language liaison can divert students' attention from their schoolwork. These obligations can also make it difficult for immigrant students to leave home for college or to participate fully in the collegiate life.

- Higher education is expensive, and students who are undocumented face extra difficulties in finding ways to finance it since their legal status precludes them from many forms of financial aid. In addition to tuition costs, college application fees and standardized testing fees have also been found to be financial burdens for immigrant students.

The project directors who responded to the survey shared the following set of best practices that have helped their organizations:

- Information about college should be disseminated widely to the parents and communities of immigrant students rather than just to the students themselves. This broad outreach can help inform parents who have limited knowledge of the higher education landscape in the United States and to other community members who can help share the information further.
- Partnerships offer opportunities to share information and resources. Organizations have found it helpful to collaborate with other like-minded organizations, immigrant community organizations, and student groups.
- The recruitment and hiring of dedicated team members help organizations in building relationships with immigrant communities. Team members who can relate to the experiences of the immigrant communities with whom they work or those who speak the language can be particularly effective in the relationship-building process.
- The provision of transportation for students and parents to attend events is often necessary to increase attendance. Sometimes this means offering rides to the event or giving out vouchers for public transportation or gas. In some cases, organizations have found it helpful to offer events in conjunction with community events attended by immigrant groups.
- Immigrant students may be considered disadvantaged not only because of their immigrant background but also for other factors like being the first person in their families to attend college or being from low-income households. Holistic programming that acknowledges the variety of obstacles that stand in the way of college access and success for the students are needed to combat their complex situations.
- Cultural cues must be respected when working with immigrant communities. Materials about college should be culturally relevant, as well as the delivery of such information. When working with groups with a strong social hierarchy, it is sometimes best to have the executive director deliver the information or to rely on a liaison from the immigrant community to disseminate the information.
- A rigorous college preparation curriculum can help immigrant students' college applications be more competitive; therefore, organizations emphasize the importance of increasing immigrant students' enrollments in advanced courses during high school. Another programmatic objective that organizations find beneficial involves demystifying the financial aid process for students. Financial literacy workshops and those that help students complete the FAFSA form are popular services for students.

The following are reflections from the project directors about obstacles that their organizations face:

- Issues with funding were most frequently mentioned as challenges for the organizations. The limited amount of money available impacts the day-to-day operations as well as programmatic offerings that organizations can make available. Meanwhile, the short grant cycles and small pool of funders require organizations to divert programming resources toward efforts to secure funding.
- Organizations that work with immigrant groups like Hmong or Karen have difficulties finding curriculum and materials that are culturally relevant for their target audience. The development of such materials in-house is not always possible for organizations with limited resources.
- Organizations could use more facilitation in the establishment of partnerships. College student groups and test-making companies were mentioned as two groups that would help certain organizations. College students can serve as peer mentors and role models for high school students. Meanwhile, test-making companies could help organizations better prepare students for their exams by detailing how students' abilities are evaluated on the tests.
- Insufficient staffing is another concern for organizations, and this can lead to a heavy workload for existing staff. For organizations that rely on volunteers or short-term workers like Americorps members, the frequent staff turnovers hinder the relationship-building process with immigrant communities. The situation with non-permanent staffing also requires the organizations to devote resources to train new staff frequently.

# Introduction

---

With over 4,400 colleges and universities offering a variety of degrees and programs, and more than 2,000 non-degree granting institutions, the postsecondary education landscape within the United States can be a complex web to navigate for high school students (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). The transition from high school to postsecondary school can be particularly challenging for students who grew up in another country or for those born to parents who had limited experience within the United States educational system. There exists programs sponsored by the state and federal governments, nonprofit agencies, and higher education institutions that aim to help immigrant students prepare for college and succeed once enrolled; this report provides an overview of the work of ten college access programs for immigrant students in Minnesota in order to facilitate cross-organizational learning about the delivery of such college access programs for immigrant students. The report focuses on challenging issues experienced by the program providers as well as innovative strategies that the organizations have devised to facilitate the transition from high school to postsecondary school for immigrant students.

## Methodology

The organizations and the programs highlighted in this report are as follows:

<b>Organizations</b>	<b>Programs</b>
Carleton College	From the Ground Up
Comunidades Latinas Unidas En Servicio (CLUES)	Youth in Financial Action
Hmong American Partnership (HAP)	Hmong American Partnership Financial Literacy Program
Learning Disabilities Association, Inc. (LDA)	Learning Connections—Developing College Ready Writing
Minnesota African Women’s Association (MAWA)	African Girls College Attendance Program Financial Literacy Project
Minnesota State University, Mankato (MSU)	Enter University
Neighborhood House	Westside Ladder to Achievement
Northfield Public Schools	Tackling Obstacles and Raising College Hope
Saint Paul College	Transitioning and Retaining Underrepresented Students through the Power of You (POY)
Women’s Initiative for Self Empowerment, Inc. (WISE)	Girls Getting Ahead in Leadership

A description of the organizations and their programming related to college access and success for immigrant students can be found in Appendix A. These organizations were selected because they receive funding administered by the Minnesota Office of Higher Education (OHE). The Hmong American Partnership, Minnesota African Women’s Association, and Neighborhood House received funds from the federal College Access Challenge Grant program for financial literacy projects, which is a federal program that helps low-income students prepare for and succeed in postsecondary education. The remaining seven organizations are recipients of the Intervention for College Attendance Program, a state grant that supports initiatives to increase postsecondary school access and success for traditionally underrepresented groups in higher education.

A literature review was first conducted to obtain a broad overview of issues that have been noted to hinder the educational achievements of immigrant students and pose challenges for their postsecondary educational attainment. Afterwards, a survey was sent to the project directors at each organization that asked them to reflect about their targeted immigrant populations as well as the organizational challenges and best practices experienced through the course of working with immigrant students. A list of the questions addressed in the survey is included as Appendix B.

## Definitions of “Immigrant Students”

The use of the term “immigrant” to classify students often depends on the objectives of the organization or agency working with this population. For instance, in its No Child Left Behind Act, Title III, section 3301(6), the U.S. Department of Education defines **immigrant children and youth** as those who: a) are age 3 through 21, b) were not born in any state, and c) have not been attending one or more schools in any one or more states for more than three full academic years. This definition establishes the criteria for states to receive federal money for educational services offered to students and, notably, it prioritizes those who have been in the country for less than three academic years.

When organizations want to emphasize the length of time that a person has spent in the United States, the terms “first-generation,” “1.5 generation,” or “second-generation” immigrant may be used. A **first-generation immigrant** is someone who was born outside the United States and arrived in the United States as an adult. A **1.5-generation immigrant** was also born outside the United States but arrived in the United States as a child. A **second-generation immigrant** is the child of a first- or 1.5-generation immigrant.

When the conditions that brought a person to the United States are to be emphasized, organizations might reference the person’s immigration status as either a refugee or immigrant, documented or undocumented. **Documented immigrants** are those who meet the criteria set forth by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. The most common avenues for people to immigrate legally to the United States are through family or employment-based sponsorships. **Undocumented immigrants** are those who have come to the United States through illegal means. **Refugee** is a subcategory of immigrants and refers to persons who have arrived in the United States in order to escape warfare or persecution in their country of origin. The Minnesota Department of Education does not track the legal status of its students, although students’ educational backgrounds are surveyed to assess their proper placement in school and to ensure access to the appropriate services.

To call attention to specific needs of immigrant students, organizations might also label students as “English Language Learners (ELLs),” “Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education (SLIFE),” or “Migrant Students.” **English Language Learners**, also known as **Limited English Proficient (LEP) students**, may include those whose first language was not English or those who live in households where English is not the primary language used. **Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education (SLIFE)** refers to those who had little or no formal educational training in their country of origin or those whose education was disrupted by warfare or other causes. **Migrant students** are those who work or who are part of families that work in agricultural industries that require them to move regularly along with the growth cycles of the crops. The constant moves create disruptions in the students’ schooling that require mitigation.

Each term mentioned above focuses on a specific characteristic of an immigrant so that policies and programs can cater to the particular needs of the students; however, to obtain the most comprehensive information about the needs of immigrant students and available programs for them, a broad definition of the term “immigrant student” is applied in this report. In effect, the immigrant students discussed in this report includes those who are new arrivals to the United States as well as those who were born in this country to foreign-born parents; students who are in the United States with proper documentation and those without the necessary paperwork; and ELLs, SLIFEs, and migrant students. Students’ first-hand experience with the migration process or having parents who were not born in the United States is viewed as a potential signal that such students could use additional support because these circumstances might cause students to have limited access to information about the postsecondary education system.

## Minnesota’s Changing Demographics

In the 1990s, Minnesota saw a dramatic shift in its foreign-born population; while the nation saw a 57 percent increase in the number of foreign-born individuals, this growth rate in Minnesota was by more than 130 percent (Minneapolis Foundation, 2010). In 1990, 2.6 percent of Minnesota’s population was foreign-born, and this number rose to 5.3 percent in 2000 (United States Census Bureau as cited in American Immigration Council, 2013). By 2011, 388,839 residents, or 7.8 percent of Minnesota’s total population, were born outside the United States, which placed the state 22nd in the nation for the highest percentage of foreign-born residents (Minnesota Compass, 2013).

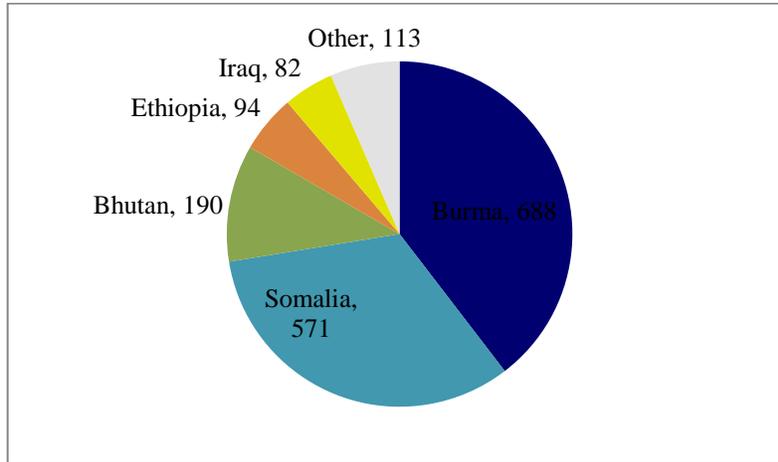
### Place of Origin

Immigrants from Latin America and Asia comprise the largest proportion of Minnesota’s foreign-born population: Latinos made up 1.2 percent of Minnesota’s total population in 1990, 2.9 percent in 2000, and 4.8 percent in 2011 while Asians accounted for 1.8 percent of Minnesota’s population in 1990, 2.9 percent in 2000, and 4 percent in 2011 (United States Census Bureau as cited in American Immigration Council, 2013). Minnesota also has a sizeable immigrant population from Africa, particularly from Somalia. In 2010, there were about 32,000 people in Minnesota with Somali ancestry making up 0.6 percent of the state’s population (Minnesota Compass, 2013).

## Legal Status

Over the years, Minnesota has received many people who arrived in the United States as refugees. From 2000-2012, the number of refugees who have made Minnesota their first home was 37,139. This number does not include refugees who relocate to another state or those who move to Minnesota after being resettled elsewhere in the United States; however, it does indicate that refugee resettlements have an effect on the profile of the state’s population. Figure 1 displays the top countries of origins of refugees who were resettled in Minnesota in 2012.

Figure 1: Number of Refugees Settled in Minnesota in 2012



Source: Office of Refugee Resettlement, Refugee Arrival Data 2012

Undocumented immigrants living under the legal radar have also shifted Minnesota’s demographics. In 2010, there were an estimated 85,000 undocumented immigrants in Minnesota who accounted for 1.6 percent of the state’s population (Passel & Cohn, 2011). Figure 2 shows the estimates of undocumented immigrants in Minnesota in the last 20 years.

Figure 2: Estimated Undocumented Immigrants in Minnesota, 1990-2010

Year	Number of Undocumented Immigrants
1990	15,000
2000	55,000
2005	85,000
2007	110,000
2010	85,000

Source: Passel & Cohn (2011)

# Immigrant Students in Minnesota

As Minnesota’s overall population is diversifying, so too is its student population. As indicated in Figure 3, the number of non-white students enrolled in Minnesota schools has been increasing since 2008 while the number of white students in the state has decreased.

**Figure 3: Student Enrollment by Ethnicity**

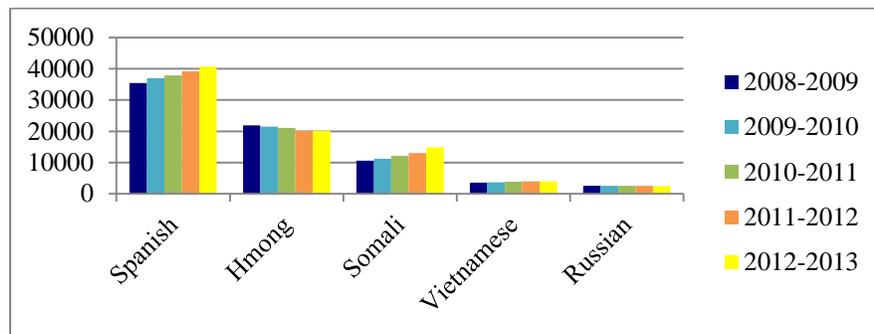
	<b>Academic Year 2008-2009</b>	<b>Academic Year 2012-2013</b>	<b>Percent Change from 2008-2009 to 2012-2013</b>
<b>Total Number of Enrolled Students</b>	835,934	845,177	+1.1%
<b>American Indian</b>	18,057 (2.2%)	19,352 (2.3%)	+7.2%
<b>Asian</b>	51,787 (6.2%)	57,843 (6.8%)	+11.7%
<b>Hispanic</b>	53,753 (6.4%)	61,417 (7.3%)	+14.3%
<b>Black</b>	79,911 (9.6%)	89,772 (10.6%)	+12.3%
<b>White</b>	632,426 (75.7%)	616,793 (73.0%)	-2.5%

*Source: OHE’s calculations made from the Minnesota Department of Education 2008-2009 and 2012-2013 Enrollment Data*

## Primary Languages Spoken at Home

School districts in Minnesota are responsible for determining the primary language of students in Minnesota through the use of a home language questionnaire. The results from the questionnaires of the last five years show that while the majority of students in Minnesota live in English-speaking households, there has been a steady increase in the number of Spanish-speaking students, a trend that corresponds to the increasing percentage of Latinos in the state. Other prevalent languages spoken in the homes of students in Minnesota include Hmong, Somali, Vietnamese, and Russian. Figure 4 shows the prevalence of these languages over the last five years. Meanwhile, Figure 5 provides a county-level summary of languages other than English commonly found among students.

Figure 4: Top 5 Languages Other than English Spoken by Students in Minnesota in the Last 5 Years



Source: MN Department of Education, 2008-2013, Primary Home Language Totals

Figure 5: The Number of Students for the Top 12 Primary Languages Other than English in Select Minnesota Counties

	Anoka	Carver	Dakota	Hen-nepin	Nobles	Olm-sted	Ram-sey	Scott	Stearns	Wash-ington	Total
Arabic	620	5	217	411		298	222	20	42	50	1885
Chinese, Mandarin	116	34	310	784	5	192	253	90	27	165	1976
English, Creolized	73	0	66	890	5	8	67	7	0	25	1141
Hmong	1360	11	247	4659	1	77	12709	11	7	544	19626
Karen (Pwo, S'gaw)	0	0	0	0	88	0	2073	0	0	0	2161
Khmer, Cambodian	48	28	287	244	0	358	244	188	10	44	1451
Lao, Laotian	183	48	216	429	90	146	47	108	69	10	1346
Oromo	268	9	50	341	9	10	459	2	53	34	1235
Russian	424	54	333	656	0	36	179	278	9	64	2033
Somali	642	61	1336	6914	0	1005	2283	130	940	55	13366
Spanish	2409	721	4101	13921	1070	1003	5820	957	743	599	31344
Vietnamese	620	56	619	1061	21	197	674	294	115	141	3798
<b>Total</b>	<b>6763</b>	<b>1027</b>	<b>7782</b>	<b>30310</b>	<b>1289</b>	<b>3330</b>	<b>25030</b>	<b>2085</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>1731</b>	<b>81362</b>

Source: Minnesota Department of Education 2012-2013 Primary Home Language Totals

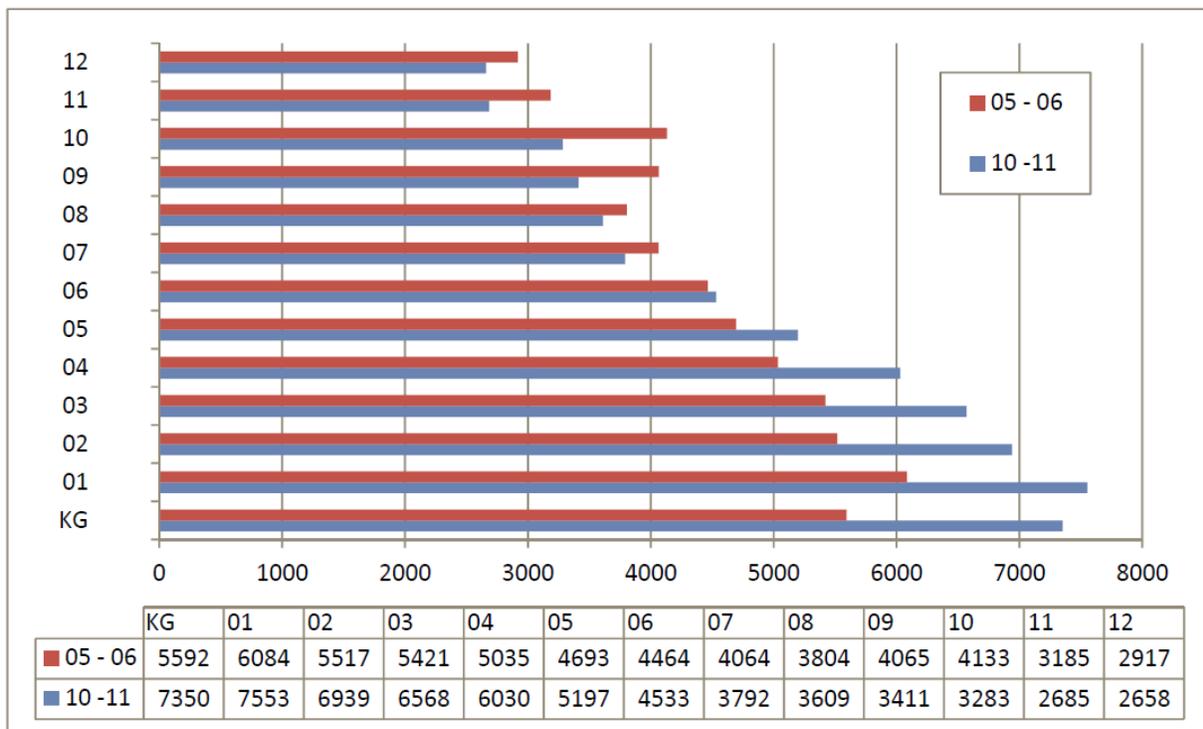
## Limited English Proficient Students

Students in Minnesota's school districts may be classified as limited English proficient through a process that includes determining the primary language spoken at home, testing to measure English proficiency, having teachers observe their students, and/or receiving recommendations from parents. As indicated by Figure 6, the highest concentration of English Language Learners (ELLs) is in kindergarten through grade 5. The number of ELLs in K-6 public schools in 2010-2011 surpassed the numbers from

2005-2006, whereas the number of ELLs in grades 7-12 has decreased over time. As shown in Figure 7, the St. Paul School District has the highest number of students who are ELLs within Minnesota with 13,463 students in the 2010-2011 academic year. With 7,307 students who are ELLs, the Minneapolis School District has the second highest enrollment rate of students needing additional training in English.

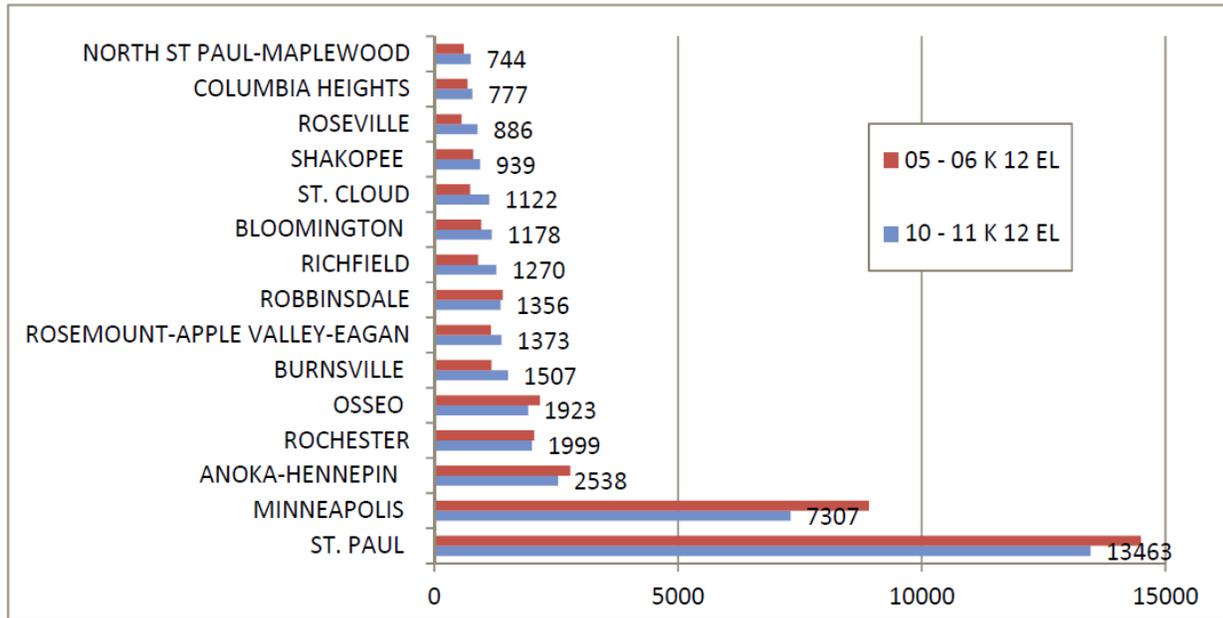
ELLs who took the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments which test students in reading, math, and science had varying proficiency levels. As shown by Figure 8, students in grades 9 and 10 had the highest proficiency rate in 2011-2012. Out of 3,264 ELLs who took the state exams in the ninth grade, 1,162 (or 35.6 percent), met proficiency standards, while 29.1 percent of tenth graders who were tested attained proficiency levels. First graders had the lowest proficiency level with less than one percent of those who took the exam passing the state's standards.

Figure 6: Distribution of K-12 Students Identified as ELLs Enrolled in Minnesota Public Schools by Grade, 2005-2006 and 2010-2011



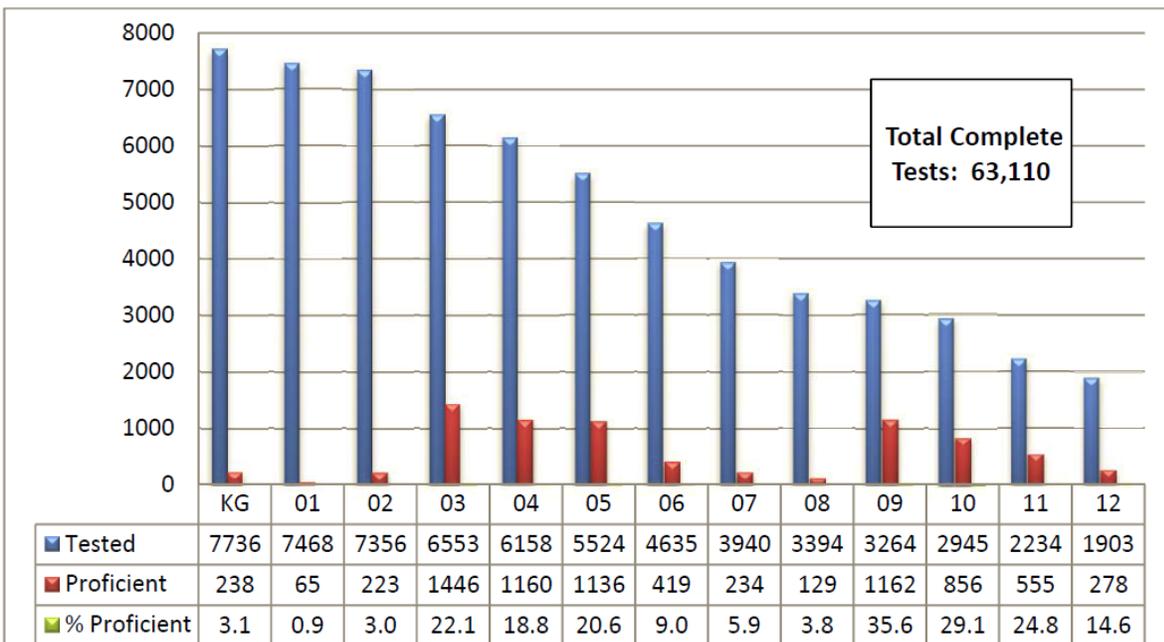
Source: Minnesota Department of Education 2005-2006 and 2010-2011 Fall LEP Enrollment

Figure 7: ELL Enrollment in the Largest 15 Minnesota Public School Districts



Source: Minnesota Department of Education 2005-2006 and 2010-2011 LEP Enrollment

Figure 8: Number of ELLs Assessed and Met State Proficiency Criteria



Source: Minnesota Department of Education 2011-2012 ACCESS Results

# Challenges That Affect College Access and Success for Immigrant Students

---

A review of the literature was conducted to determine challenges that could affect college access and the educational success of immigrant students. In addition, the directors of college access programs of ten organizations in Minnesota were asked to describe challenges that they have observed for the immigrant student populations with whom they work. While some of these issues, such as the language barrier and the model minority stereotyping, are unique to immigrant populations, other issues are also applicable to students of lower socioeconomic status or those who are the first in their family to attend college. The explanations provided below, however, concentrate on the particulars that apply to students who might fall within those demographic categories but who are also immigrants.

## Language Barrier

Along with math, English language proficiency is a major criterion for judging a student's level of college readiness on college entrance exams like the ACT and SAT. Limited English proficiency can affect students' chances of gaining acceptance into their school of choice, or it can cause students to take remedial courses that are both costly and additional investments of time. Respondents to OHE's survey have noticed other consequences of limited English proficiency for students, including acculturative stress, increased chance of dropping out of high school, and enrollments in Adult Basic Education courses or English as a Second Language courses.

There are several factors that influence how quickly the language barrier could be surpassed. The director of the Intervention for College Attendance Program at Saint Paul College notes that the learning curve depends on the language background of the student—languages that are not Latin-based tend to result in a steeper learning curve for students. For instance, students who come from an oral tradition where a written form of the language does not exist have to be oriented first to the written tradition. The director also reports that the time needed to obtain English language proficiency is prolonged when students do not utilize English within the home, such is the case when there are grandparents living within the household who do not speak English. She also observes that the technology that allows immigrants to connect with others from the same country of origin has also meant less incentive for immigrants to practice English regularly.

## Model Minority Stereotype

The belief that all students from Asian backgrounds have demonstrated excellence in education is part of the model minority stereotype. This stereotype does not acknowledge the diversity within the Asian student populations; while certain Asian groups like Chinese and Japanese have a longer history of being in the United States and in its higher education system, students from Southeast Asian countries like Laos, Cambodia, and Viet Nam who arrived in the past 20 years could still need assistance to increase their representation in higher education (Lee, 2009). The model minority stereotype can result in resources being diverted from the Asian student populations because of the misconception that they are all fairing well within the educational systems.

## Limited Social Capital

Social capital describes the human connections that allow individuals to obtain resources more easily and efficiently (Portes, 1998). Immigrant students suffer from limited social capital when they do not have parents who are well connected in the community, or when they lack college-educated role models who could provide first-hand accounts of the college application process and tips about navigating through the system. Stevens (2009) details how parents who have a college education are better able to advocate for their children's college admission, either by leveraging their status as alums of a particular school or taking actions based on their first-hand experiences within the college system. Immigrant students who are the first in their families to attend college do not receive the social capital that college-educated parents can offer to their children. The limited social capital is therefore tied to limited access to information about higher education. As reported by respondents to OHE's survey, issues such as the cost of college, the college application process, options for college, the importance of college, and the college experience tend to be unfamiliar to immigrant students.

## Conflicts Between Home and School Cultures

One of the functions of schools is to socialize students to the social customs and conventions of society, and this is reflected in practices that are taught to students at the K-12 level (Feinberg & Solstice, 2009). Newly arrived immigrant students might find some of the practices conflict with the social practices from their country of origin. For instance, individualism and independent thinking are values emphasized in American schools through the push for students to acquire critical thinking skills; however, in many Asian countries collectivism and deference for tradition and elders are traits that are underscored more (Hofstede, 1984). Students from such cultural traditions might find it difficult to contribute to classroom discussions because they view the teacher as having the last authoritative word on an issue. Another example, given by a respondent to OHE's survey, involves different interpretations of cheating—in the United States, cheating is an unacceptable practice; but in another culture, it might be tolerated because it is seen as a survival skill. Another conflict between home and school culture observed by a staff member at the Minnesota African American Women's Association is related to Somali girls experiencing too much pressure from their parents to pursue female-dominated career paths that are low-paying or that are not compatible with the students' interests and abilities. Cultural norms might contribute to such advice from Somali parents, but the organization also believes it is due to limited understanding of the options available to females in the United States, and it is working to provide that information for both students and parents.

## Biases in the Education System

Lack of college readiness can manifest in many forms, including low scores on admissions exams, limited participation in extracurricular activities, or limited enrollment in advanced courses during high school. These factors affect students' chances of being admitted to a competitive school or for winning scholarships. While an individual's personal characteristics could determine the level of college readiness upon high school graduation, many scholars and practitioners who work with immigrant populations take the view that the current education systems favor white, middle-class students. Standardized exams, which are often used because of their supposed ability to objectively measure students' abilities, have been shown to contain cultural references that might be unfamiliar to immigrant students (Rudert, 1993). In that instance, it is not so much the students' abilities that are insufficient for college success but rather flaws in the evaluation of their potential through the use of the standardized

tests. Another example of a bias is the focus of schools to assimilate immigrant students to American society rather than embracing the existing language and cultural knowledge held by the students. Valenzuela (1999) argues that assimilation policies erode the social capital that immigrant students already have.

## **Family Pressures**

Immigrant families are likely to rely on their school-age children to serve as translators and cultural interpreters because of their more in-depth knowledge of English and American culture relative to the parents. In large households, older children may play the role of child care providers so the parents can work long hours. Immigrant students might also need to work to help support family members in the United States or those still in the country of origin. These responsibilities can make the decision to move far from home for college or to engage in school life difficult for the students.

## **Difficulties Financing Higher Education**

The cost of higher education is on the rise, and finding ways to finance it can be difficult for any student, but is particularly challenging for undocumented immigrants who usually do not have access to financial aid from the government. Some states, including Minnesota, have recently begun to offer some financial assistance to undocumented students who meet certain criteria. Under the Minnesota Dream Act, also known as The Prosperity Act, qualified students can receive in-state tuition rates, financial aid from the state, and funds from colleges and universities.

Respondents to OHE's survey mentioned that beyond difficulties with tuition costs, some immigrant students also find it expensive to pay for required tests used in the admissions process or for schools' application fees. An important service that organizations working with immigrant students can provide, therefore, is to inform students about processes to obtain a waiver from such fees when available.

# Organizational Best Practices

---

The ten organizations that have college access programs for immigrant students shared with OHE insights about practices that have facilitated the delivery of their programs. The best practices that were frequently mentioned by the organizations are summarized below. Figure 9 provides a list of the specific practices of each organization.

## Provide Outreach Beyond Students

Many program providers surveyed for this report have found it necessary to provide outreach not only to immigrant students but also to their parents and the immigrant communities. The provision of information about the higher education system to parents helps to overcome the roadblocks that parents might have unwittingly created for their children, such as steering their child towards a certain career path or delineating too many household responsibilities that divert the child's attention from schoolwork. In some cases, it is possible to reach the parents directly; but in situations where parents' busy work schedules or limited English proficiency prevent organizations from working with parents directly, organizations have had to work with liaisons within the immigrant communities to relay the information. This strategy is often utilized as well in communities with a strict social hierarchy where information is more likely to be accepted from elders or trusted members of the communities than from outsiders.

## Build and Strengthen Partnerships

Partnerships are vital for the operations of many organizations surveyed. One crucial set of partners is the parents of students. Another set includes students' peers who can share their experiences and act as role models for the younger generation. In particular, student groups at colleges and universities make effective partners in demystifying the college experience for college-bound students. Collaborations with other agencies are also an important mean for organizations to work around the limited resources available to them; the sharing of information and resources among agencies allows organizations to learn from each other and to disperse some programming costs.

## Recruit Dedicated Team Members

Whether paid or unpaid, organizations report that having team members who genuinely care about the populations with whom they work is vital to an organization's operations. Trust-building is an important task when working with immigrant populations, and team members perceived to be undedicated could jeopardize the relationships with immigrant communities. Dedication to the success of students and knowledge of the languages and cultures of immigrant populations were mentioned as valuable characteristics for team members.

## Facilitate Travel To and From Events

Attendance at events can sometimes be low due to logistical issues like students and parents not having transportation. To overcome transportation obstacles, the Minnesota African Women's Association has given out bus passes and gas cards to those who carpool. The organization has also relied on staff to bring participants to events, although the organization would like to have a van for this purpose instead of relying on the staff's personal vehicles. Organizations have also found it helpful to integrate information sessions into events organized by immigrant communities in order to minimize the need for students and parents to devote additional time and expenses to travel to another location.

## Utilize Holistic Programming

College preparation goes beyond practical considerations like completing applications and meeting deadlines. Organizations recommend programs that help students to understand the application process and college experience; realize the importance of higher education; and to build leadership, academic, and social skills throughout secondary school. Civic engagement projects are examples of holistic programming that allow students to develop leadership skills and feel a sense of empowerment while providing needed services in the community. Another example of a holistic program is working with students to improve both their oral and written skills rather than focusing exclusively on one or the other since improvements in one area strengthen the other.

## Pay Attention to Cultural Cues

The content and presentation of information for immigrant communities must be linguistically and culturally relevant. This entails providing translations of informational materials in languages used by the immigrant populations, ensuring that definitions and examples within those materials are relatable to the target audience and being strategic about how the information is delivered. For instance, organizations have found it beneficial to place information in newspapers in languages read by specific immigrant groups or to recruit immigrant community leaders to disseminate information.

## Increase Enrollment in Advanced Classes

Many organizations surveyed for this report agreed that developmental or remedial courses taken in college are expensive and time-consuming for immigrant students. To minimize the need for such courses, they recommend trying to enroll immigrant students in advanced classes during high school in order to maximize readiness for college-level courses upon graduation. In particular, encouraging immigrant students to partake in the Post Secondary Enrollment Options program in Minnesota can allow the students to obtain college credits while in high school, thus reducing the financial burden of a postsecondary degree and shortening the amount of time towards degree completion.

## Simplify the Financial Aid Application Process

The application process for financial aid can be daunting for students for several reasons, including their unfamiliarity with the process itself, the complex forms that must be completed, and in-depth questions about parents that are difficult to answer, especially for students whose parents are undocumented. Organizations have found it necessary to help students navigate the application process as well as to provide general financial literacy education so that students are aware of the options available to them for financing higher education.

Figure 9: Programmatic Approaches of Ten Organizations in Minnesota

Organizations	Programmatic Approaches
<b>Carleton College</b>	<u>In Northfield:</u> Collaborates with partners such as the TORCH program (Tackling Obstacles and Raising College Hopes) and Riverland Community College to provide tutors who help students master the content of PSEO courses and understand college culture.

	<p><u>In Faribault:</u></p> <p>Provides an afterschool homework help program where tutors also aim to be role models and informants about college.</p> <p>Funds and staffs the STEAM program (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math), which is a city-wide academic and enrichment program for K-8 students at risk of not graduating from high school.</p>
<b>Comunidas Latinas Unidas En Servicio (CLUES)</b>	<p>Utilizes a holistic approach to family and community well-being.</p> <p>Aims to create strong mentoring relationships.</p> <p>Provides parent information sessions throughout the year.</p> <p>Brings students to various campuses throughout the Twin Cities to connect with staff and students at the institutions.</p> <p>Solicits students' opinions for civic engagement curriculum.</p>
<b>Hmong American Partnership (HAP)</b>	<p>Organizes a financial literacy program comprised of one-time workshops and an intensive training program for a cohort of students that lasts eight weeks.</p> <p>Collaborates with State Farm to hold 4Sliceof L.I.F.E. workshops about budgeting, establishing financial goals, and investing for the future.</p>
<b>Learning Disabilities Association, Inc. (LDA)</b>	<p>Relies on teacher who has training in Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling (TPRS), a strategy for teaching foreign languages that focuses on how to use language rather than teaching about the language. With this technique, grammatical structures are not explained; instead, the focus is on having students practice using the language by reading and inventing stories.</p>
<b>Minnesota African Women's Association (MAWA)</b>	<p>Offers a Greater Minnesota College Tour for students to tour college campuses when parents cannot take them.</p> <p>Utilizes culturally-relevant definitions and examples for students and parents in the financial literacy program.</p> <p>Incorporates cultural cues in the education of parents, such as having the Executive Director or a respected community member provide the explanations for groups with strict social hierarchies.</p> <p>Provides information for parents to dissuade them from pushing daughters toward two-year colleges and training programs like Certified Nursing Assistant where the goal is to start earning money as soon as possible.</p> <p>Takes suggestions from community members, including female students, concerned mothers, and MAWA's advisory committees.</p>
<b>Minnesota State University, Mankato (MSU)</b>	<p>Hires staff members who speak multiple languages.</p> <p>Translates admissions materials into more languages.</p> <p>Provides outreach to undocumented students about taking the ACT and informs them about the accessibility of college despite their legal status.</p> <p>Organizes events at places that are convenient for students and families, like churches and community events, rather than only at high schools.</p> <p>Utilizes student leaders and student groups to advocate for higher education opportunities with immigrant communities.</p>

<p><b>Neighborhood House</b></p>	<p>Raises awareness about postsecondary options through the College Access program that includes events like college tours, college and career fairs, workshops, and presentations.</p> <p>Splits financial literacy classes into two portions, one for both students and parents to learn together and the other portion in which students and parents are separated.</p> <p>Offers individual counseling to help students select a college, understand admissions requirements, research financial aid opportunities, complete financial aid applications, and connect with academic support services.</p> <p>Emphasizes developing rapport and trust with students by reaching students early and engaging with their families.</p> <p>Encourages staff members to acknowledge students' efforts and to have a positive and authentic attitude towards the students.</p>
<p><b>Northfield Public Schools</b></p>	<p>Encourages enrollment in Post Secondary Enrollment Options courses.</p> <p>Uses MyFoundations Lab to help students prepare for the Accuplacer test.</p> <p>Partners with community organizations to help students process Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals applications.</p> <p>Offers ACT/Accuplacer Preparatory classes.</p> <p>Conducts home visits to help parents stay informed of students' progress, goals, and college/career pathways.</p> <p>Organizes programs that take place during the summer at college campuses.</p>
<p><b>Saint Paul College</b></p>	<p>Makes information more accessible by providing translations of website, installing translation software, and placing advertisements in immigrant language newspapers.</p> <p>Recruits and hires staff who speak multiple languages.</p> <p>Conducts focus group sessions with immigrant populations to learn of their needs and those of their communities.</p> <p>Collaborates with the HUBB Center, a program of the Saint Paul Public Schools' Community Education Department, to improve the English skills of Adult Basic Education students before enrollment in remedial classes.</p> <p>Facilitates access to peer tutors, mentors, writing/math labs to help course completion.</p> <p>Uses Early Alert Referral System (EARS) to provide intrusive advising and referral for students not attending class or who are experiencing classroom difficulties.</p> <p>Emphasizes proactive services for students, including establishing learning communities that pair remedial courses with other courses and using MyFoundation Lab, Directed Self-Placement, Fast Track initiatives.</p> <p>Expands College and Career Planning Success Strategies courses to teach students note-taking skills, study habits, how to reduce test anxiety and prepare for class.</p> <p>Aligns new initiatives with larger missions and plans within the college.</p>

	<p>Holds weekly and annual communication of new initiatives to internal/external stakeholders to increase buy-in.</p> <p>Conducts formative and summative evaluation and benchmarks outcomes to inform programmatic revisions.</p>
<p><b>Women’s Initiative for Self Empowerment, Inc. (WISE)</b></p>	<p>Encourages immigrant girls to create individualized career and college plans that they then work one-on-one with mentors to fulfill.</p> <p>Seeks to provide a supportive environment where girls feel comfortable asking questions and interacting with each other and their mentors.</p> <p>Offers incentives like food or other prizes when girls participate in activities. There are \$250 scholarships for those who have attended 75 percent of workshops and who attend college after graduating from high school.</p>

# Organizational Challenges and Resources Needed

---

The following section provides a summary of the major challenges that organizations are facing in the provision of college access and success programs for immigrant students. The discussion also mentions resources that the organizations believe would facilitate their work.

## Funding

When asked to describe major challenges facing their organizations, the project directors of the ten organizations surveyed most often named issues with funding as major obstacles for their work. Inadequate funding limits an organization's activities such as preventing the launch of new initiatives, evaluate existing ones, the acquisition of needed equipment, or hiring sufficient personnel. The survey respondents also mention that having a limited pool of funders is problematic because it creates a sense of uncertainty for their organizations. Meanwhile, funding that comes from short-term grants necessitates investments of time and resources to secure continued funds, which diverts the organizations' attention from the delivery of their programs.

The project directors advocate for more grant opportunities from a diverse funding stream, and they would like to see more long-term funding. One organization has plans to establish a position of a College Coach who could offer support to students to overcome academic and other challenges that result from being a first generation college student if funding becomes available. Another organization mentions that more funding would allow it to design programs for younger students to explore their college and career options as opposed to limiting outreach to high school juniors and seniors.

## Curriculum and Materials

Another challenge for organizations is finding the right curriculum and materials for their targeted immigrant populations. The ideal curriculum would be culturally relevant and formatted in the languages spoken by students and their parents, but it can be difficult to find for particular immigrant groups. The Women's Initiative for Self Empowerment, for example, has expressed difficulties in finding college information that has been translated into Karen, while the Hmong American Partnership continues to seek college preparation models that are appropriate for their students.

## Partnerships

Although many organizations are already in collaborative relationships with other organizations and agencies, they would prefer to see more opportunities to connect with like-minded organizations and individuals to exchange information and resources. The State of Minnesota was named as a potentially helpful partner in disseminating information for an organization. Another beneficial relationship mentioned is one with makers of college entrance exams. By sharing the process used to assess students' performance on the written portion of the exams, these test makers would help teachers to develop the appropriate strategies to guide their students' writing.

## Staffing

Organizations recognize the value of their human resources but also admit to difficulties in assembling an appropriate team. One staffing issue stems from inadequate resources to hire an appropriate number of team members needed to keep the workload manageable. Another issue is the high turnover rate of staff members who are Americorps volunteers with a work contract of only one year. These short contracts mean that organizations must devote resources to train new staff continually, and they also disrupt the relationship-building efforts with immigrant communities. In addition to wanting funds to hire more permanent staff, organizations also wish to increase their pool of volunteers who could help in the provision of services. In particular, volunteers who are college students are needed to be peer mentors and role models for younger students.

# References

---

- American Immigration Council. (2013). *New Americans in Minnesota*. Retrieved from <http://www.immigrationpolicy.org/just-facts/new-americans-minnesota>
- Feinberg, W., & Solstice, J. (2009). *School and society*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Hofstede, G. (1984). *Culture's consequences. International differences in work-related values*. Newbury Park, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Lee, S. (2009). *Unraveling the "model minority" stereotype: Listening to Asian American youth*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Minneapolis Foundation. (2010). *A new age of immigrants. Making immigration work for Minnesota*. Saint Paul, MN: Amherst H. Wilder Foundation.
- Minnesota Compass. (2013). *Immigration in Minnesota*. Retrieved from <http://www.mncompass.org/immigration/index.php>
- Minnesota Department of Education. (2012). *Primary Home Language Totals 2008-2013* (Data file). Retrieved from <http://w20.education.state.mn.us/MDEAnalytics/Data.jsp>
- Minnesota Department of Education. (2012). *Student enrollment data 2008-2009* (Data file). Retrieved from <http://w20.education.state.mn.us/MDEAnalytics/Data.jsp>
- Minnesota Department of Education. (2012). *Student enrollment data 2012-2013* (Data file). Retrieved from <http://w20.education.state.mn.us/MDEAnalytics/Data.jsp>
- Office of Refugee Resettlement. (2012). *Fiscal year 2012 refugee arrivals* (Data file). Retrieved from <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/orr/resource/refugee-arrival-data>
- Passel, J., & Cohn, D. (2011). *Unauthorized immigrant population: National and state trends, 2010*. Retrieved from <http://www.pewhispanic.org/2011/02/01/unauthorized-immigrant-population-brnational-and-state-trends-2010/>
- Pew Hispanic Center. (2011). *Unauthorized immigrant population: National and state trends, 2010*. Washington, D.C.: Pew Research Center.
- Portes, A. (1998). Social capital: Its origins and applications in modern sociology. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 24, 1-24.
- Rudert, E. (1993). *The validity of testing in education & employment*. Darby, PA: Diane Publishing Company.
- Stevens, M. (2009). *Creating a class: College admissions and the education of elites*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- U.S. Department of Education. (2012). [Table 5 showing the number of educational institutions, by level and control of institution for selected years, 1980-1981 through 2009-2010] *Digest of Education Statistics* (NCES 2012-001). Retrieved from [http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d11/tables/dt11\\_005.asp](http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d11/tables/dt11_005.asp)
- Valenzuela, A. (1999). *Subtractive schooling: U.S.-Mexican youth and the politics of caring*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

# Appendix A: Description of Organizations and Programs

---

## Carleton College

Project Title: From the Ground Up

Contact: Dr. Adrienne Falcon, [afalcon@carleton.edu](mailto:afalcon@carleton.edu)

Over the past six years, funding from the Minnesota Office of Higher Education (OHE) has allowed the Carleton Community and Civic Engagement to build “From the Group Up,” a three-pronged approach to meeting the needs of traditionally underrepresented students in college. In the first year, we organized field trips for schools in the area to access Carleton resources connected with science to nurture an interest in science in students as a means of interesting them in higher education. Over the past five years, the program has grown to three main areas of work:

1) Developing an interest in and support for achievement in the sciences for immigrant students and other low-income and first generation students. We have found that many students struggle with math and science, and this stands as an obstacle for them completing high school and feeling a positive sense of self. By providing students in Northfield and Faribault with academic support in these fields as well as enrichment opportunities, we aim to raise their comfort with and curiosity about science and education in general. In particular, we have found this to be true for immigrant students who often express an interest in health careers (especially in Faribault) without an understanding of how this connects to science and math courses and college in general.

2) Supporting college access efforts. Many immigrant and first generation students struggle to navigate the college application process as well as developing a higher level of comfort with college. In Northfield, we have collaborated with the TORCH program to develop a PSEO program which aims to both support students obtaining some college credit even before graduating from high school, as well as familiarity with college culture. We have done work in the summer in Faribault with various college access programs that we have developed.

3) Supporting academic success. Without graduating from high school, students cannot go on to college. At this point in time in Northfield, immigrant graduation rates have increased significantly; however, there is still a need for homework help. In Faribault, this need is even higher, especially among the Somali and Latino communities which have high drop-out rates and high rates of educational challenge. Therefore, efforts in Faribault have focused on supporting homework help programs and reducing summer slump.

Carleton College is well positioned to provide academic support and mentorship to immigrant students. As a liberal arts college, Carleton serves a diverse group of students from Minnesota, across the United States, and internationally. For the past 25 years, Carleton has had an active student volunteer program. With the “From the Ground Up” project, efforts of students have been channeled into tutoring, after school homework help, and science enrichment activities. By learning and sharing, the college students serve as mentors and models for local immigrant students. There is a deep commitment to providing opportunities to students that meet their interests and needs, and many of them want to be involved with education in the local community. The Center for Community and Civic Engagement’s

mission stresses supporting faculty and college students engaging in reciprocal relationships. The “From the Ground Up” program has helped strengthen ties to community partners and collaboration on shared strengths and opportunities. Some of Carlton’s students who are immigrants want to pay back; others are interested in careers in education or in sharing their passions in the sciences. The funded program has allowed local 6<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade students and college students to meet their needs in ways that enrich everyone who is participating.

## **Comunidas Latinas Unidas En Servicio**

Project Title: Youth in Action

Contact: Tanya Zwald, [tzwald@clues.org](mailto:tzwald@clues.org)

Youth in Action (YA!) is designed for Latino high school students. The program prepares students to graduate high school and supports them in pursuing higher education. Students in the YA! program are matched with individual coaches who provide them with ongoing support in their educational journey. Together with their coaches, students in the YA! program attend monthly Coaching Institutes at Hamline University that emphasize three key components: academic challenges, college preparation, and coaching role-models. To encourage students on their path to success, these institutes feature presentations and testimony by Latino leaders in the community, Latino college graduates, and even current Latino college students. Outside of the program, students and coaches maintain a supportive relationship focused on academic success, leadership skills, and achieving goals for the future.

New to the YA! program this year is an exciting civic engagement component. This new addition to the program will orient YA! students to the systems and processes within their community, helping them to gain the knowledge, tools, and skills to increase their engagement and participation in civic activities within their communities. This component will bring the classroom learning to life through individual and group service-learning, volunteering, and internship opportunities, as well as a culminating student-led initiative to make a change in their community.

Through this collaborative model, the YA! program provides Latino families with consistent guidance as their students transition between high school and college, empowers parents as active partners in their student’s educational journey, gives students the support they need to achieve academic success, opens professional opportunities through internships and volunteer opportunities, and helps students realize their goals for the future through pursuit of higher education.

**YA! Mission:** Empowering Latino youth as future leaders in their communities by guiding them to achieve their academic goals, educational aspirations, and professional potential and equipping them with a network of peers, coaches, and parents in support of their educational journey and career path.

**YA! Vision:** Latino youth will graduate high school, complete postsecondary, and pursue a meaningful career path as they become future leaders in their communities and role models for the generations to come.

**YA! Purpose:** Supporting Latino youth to overcome barriers to success and break the cycle of generational poverty through the pursuit of higher education.

## YA! Program Outcomes:

Outcome I: Latino students are prepared with the skills to navigate the higher education system and motivated by personal goals for the future to seek a postsecondary degree.

Outcome II: Latino students are equipped with an individual coach who will support their academic progress, their achievement of goals for the future, and their development as a leader.

Outcome III: Latino parents increase participation in their children's education through engagement at school and educational support at home.

Outcome IV: Youth will learn how policies and laws are made and enforced and that, in a democracy, the people's voices contribute to this process. Civic knowledge and participation will empower students to envision solutions, to advocate for change, and to participate in creating real and lasting improvements in their families, communities, and beyond.

## Hmong American Partnership

Project Title: Financial Literacy Program

Contact: Dr. Mai Moua, [maim@hmong.org](mailto:maim@hmong.org)

The goal of the Hmong American Partnership (HAP) Financial Literacy Program is to provide financial literacy training to prepare low-income, at-risk youth for postsecondary education, employment, and successful, engaged adulthood. The proposed program includes two primary components: (1) intensive cohort learning, and (2) group educational workshops. Cohorts meet weekly over the course of eight weeks, for 2-3 hours each meeting. During this eight-week period, HAP covers the eight modules of the *Money Smart for Young Adults* curriculum. HAP supplements the *Money Smart* curriculum with additional materials related to local opportunities for postsecondary education and higher education financial support. HAP coordinates six, one-time educational workshops that are based on one or more of the modules in the *Money Smart for Young Adults* curriculum. Workshops provide critical, basic financial education to youth participants.

## Learning Disabilities Association, Inc.

Project Title: Learning Connections Program: Developing College-Ready Writing

Contact: Andrea Weary, [aw@ldaminnesota.org](mailto:aw@ldaminnesota.org)

The Learning Disabilities Association, Inc.'s (LDA) "Learning Connections Program: Developing College-Ready Writing" provides intensive writing instruction to young women ELL students who are identified by their school as scoring lowest on writing proficiency. In collaboration with Girls Getting Ahead in Leadership (GGAL, a program of Women's Initiative for Self Empowerment, Inc.) and LEAP Academy of St. Paul, LDA's program is critical for college admission and future postsecondary success for students.

The writing program is a project of LDA's largest community-based program, "Learning Connections," which is focused on closing the academic achievement gaps of low-income students in our community. Overall, LDA's mission is to children, youth, and adults with learning and attention difficulties learn successfully, dream of possibilities, and achieve their goals.

## **Minnesota African Women's Association**

Project Title: African Girls College Attendance Program Financial Literacy Project

Contact: Melissa Nambangi, [mawa0302@yahoo.com](mailto:mawa0302@yahoo.com)

The Minnesota African Women's Association's (MAWA) financial literacy program for African girls uses nationally acclaimed evidence-based curricula to enable 90 participants to gain knowledge of financial planning fundamentals, budgeting, the nature of credit and wise credit use, the importance of saving and the use of checking and savings accounts, and the reality of and the full range of options for paying for a college education. The participants gain and demonstrate concrete skills related to these topics and they develop a personal plan for paying for college by identifying concrete steps to save money and to gain financial aid and/or scholarships for college attendance. Provided through MAWA's AGILE/Amakolo after-school program, the culturally-specific project provides an in-depth financial education experience to help participants gain knowledge and skills to successfully plan the financial aspects of attending college.

MAWA's financial literacy program is directly linked and coordinated within the overall AGILE/Amakolo project—a project that provides a high level of skill building, motivation, and support to ensure that the girls are successful in planning for and attending higher education. It aims to improve the chances of African girls attending college, pursuing better career options, and obtaining greater earning potential for their self-sufficiency and well-being as stated in MAWA's mission which is to promote the health and well-being of African women and girls in Minnesota.

## **Minnesota State University, Mankato**

Project Title: Enter University

Contact: Amy Mukamuri, [amy.mukamuri@mnsu.edu](mailto:amy.mukamuri@mnsu.edu)

The 2013-2014 Enter University (EU) program at Minnesota State University, Mankato (MSU) is made possible by a grant from OHE. The goal of the program is to prepare underrepresented high school students (low-income, first generation, and/or students of color) for college. The college readiness components that EU focuses on are:

- ACT Engage. This assessment instrument is given to students first to help evaluate their college readiness. Information from the assessment will be shared with high school faculty and staff.
- MSU EU survey. Completion of this survey enrolls students in the program and allows us to capture important data for OHE.

- Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). The program addresses how to apply, when to apply, and documentation needed.
- Admission processes for college or university. We review application steps, required grades, GPA, and ACT/SAT scores.
- The ACT examination. The program provides study tips and resources that students can access online. We also register students for the ACT exam during the college visit day and pay the application fee for each student.

## Neighborhood House

Project Title: Westside Ladder of Achievement

Contact: Kara Schommer, [kschommer@neighb.org](mailto:kschommer@neighb.org)

The Neighborhood House mission is to help people, families, and organizations develop the skills, knowledge, and confidence to thrive in diverse communities. We achieve this mission by meeting basic needs (via two food shelves and six Family Centers) and offering life-long learning opportunities that create pathways out of poverty.

Through the “West Side Ladder of Achievement,” Neighborhood House offers financial literacy classes to 100 middle school and high school students. Curriculum has been adapted from Junior Achievement to help students gain knowledge about their personal finances, create a personal financial plan, better understand the costs of college, and learn how to access federal student aid. To support these efforts, we offer students one-on-one assistance with scholarships, FAFSA, and more.

A life-long learning area project, the “West Side Ladder of Achievement” builds upon Neighborhood House’s numerous past successes in promoting financial literacy. In 2009, we partnered with a University of Minnesota Extension program to offer a personal finance class that covered such topics as: banking, types of credit, budgeting, taxes, setting financial goals, scams, and fraud. On another occasion, we took a group of youth to the Mall of America for a community service project in which they earned \$40.00 by volunteering for eight hours. More recently, in 2012, Wells Fargo Community Development staff led four sessions about checking and credit, budgeting, identity fraud, and developing a saving plan for a big purchase. Currently, our Family Centers offer a three-hour financial literacy class on the basics of banking, budgeting, and credit.

## Northfield Public Schools

Project Title: Tackling Obstacles and Raising College Hopes

Contact: Marnie Thompson, [marnie.thompson@nfld.k12.mn.us](mailto:marnie.thompson@nfld.k12.mn.us)

Located 45 miles south of the Twin Cities in Rice County, Northfield has a population of 25,000 residents. As a district, Northfield has a graduation rate of over 96%, with 88% of high school graduates enrolling in postsecondary institutions. Unfortunately, in the past, Northfield’s racial/ethnic minority

students have not experienced this same success. From 2001-2004, only 15 Latino students graduated from Northfield Public Schools, while 27 dropped out—a graduation rate of 36%. During that time, fewer than five of the Latino graduates pursued postsecondary options after high school graduation.

To address this reality, the “Tackling Obstacles and Raising College Hopes” (TORCH) collaborative was born in the fall of 2005, with an initial ICAP grant. TORCH targeted all Latino and English Language Learners (ELL) in grades 6-12 in the Northfield Public Schools, providing academic and social support, career exploration, and connections with postsecondary education opportunities. In 2007, with a second ICAP grant, TORCH was able to expand to serve additional youth, including students eligible for free or reduced lunch, all racial/ethnic minority students, and Northfield students who would be first-generation college attendees. In 2009, TORCH again expanded to provide continued support to TORCH graduates as they pursued postsecondary education. TORCH currently serves over 500 students in grades 6-12. The graduation rate for TORCH students remains at over 90%, a remarkable transformation.

## **Saint Paul College**

Project Title: Transitioning and Retaining Underrepresented Students through the Power of You

Contact: Dr. Margie Tomsic, [margie.tomsic@saintpaul.edu](mailto:margie.tomsic@saintpaul.edu)

The purpose of the program is to enhance the success of Power of YOU (POY) students by putting the necessary supports in place to recruit, retain, transfer, and graduate students beyond their current expectations and achievement levels. This project is geared to first generation college students, low-income students, students of color, or a combination of all as determined by student and financial aid records. The program has successfully put into place support systems such as academic tutoring, learning communities, twice weekly study sessions, an actively involved student leadership team, a “students who are parents” support group, student/parent recognition events, social activities, visits to four-year colleges, and a summer workshop series, among other retention strategies. Through these and more activities, the ICAP grant has helped Saint Paul College raise enrollment, retention, graduation, and transfer goals of underserved, high-risk high school graduates showing it is possible to prepare them to be productive, engaged members of the global workforce.

## **Women’s Initiative for Self Empowerment, Inc.**

Project Title: Girls Getting Ahead in Leadership

Contact: Cheryl Field, [cherylafield@hotmail.com](mailto:cherylafield@hotmail.com)

Women’s Initiative for Self Empowerment, Inc. (WISE) was founded around a kitchen table by a group of multicultural, first generation immigrant and mainstream women in 1995 as a vehicle for education, leadership, social and economic empowerment of Asian, African, and Latina women, girls, and their families. WISE’s signature program, Girls Getting Ahead in Leadership (GGAL) is a comprehensive, multi-site (school-based and after-school) program that follows and supports recently arrived, low-income, immigrant/refugee girls from freshman year of high school through college. GGAL builds on students’ strengths and helps develop the skills needed to be successful in college by using quality core programming and individualized mentors to enhance the leadership skills, academic success, college access, and economic self-sufficiency.

# Appendix B: Survey for Project Directors

---

*This survey regarding “college access/success” refers to student enrollment in postsecondary programs that provide certificates, diplomas, or academic degrees upon program completion.*

1. Name of organization:
2. Your name:
3. Your role at the organization:
4. How long has this organization provided college access and success programming for immigrant students?
5. What is the primary immigrant student population served by this organization?
6. In the context of preparing for college, what has your organization identified as the biggest challenges faced by immigrant students?
7. Have you noticed a change in the need to prepare immigrant students for college access and success? If yes, what student needs/characteristics have changed?
8. Has your organization adapted to the changing college preparation needs of immigrant students? If yes, please describe any new initiatives or modifications to existing college preparation programs that have been made to accommodate changes in immigrant students’ needs.
9. What specific strategies or program development efforts have been implemented at your organization to improve provision of college access services to immigrant students? What has made these strategies or program development efforts effective?
10. Does your organization currently face any difficulties in the delivery of college access/success programs to immigrant students? If yes, what are they?
11. What resources would help your organization in creating and delivering effective college access/success programs for immigrant students?