

Acknowledgements

Illinois Immigrant Policy Project (IIPP)

The Illinois Immigrant Policy Project (IIPP) began in 1995 to catalyze thinking about *immigrant* policy in the State of Illinois. Members are drawn from immigrant and refugee serving organizations, state and local government and national policy institutes. Its purpose is to conduct research and analysis around issues concerning immigrants and to develop forward looking policies and programs that will further the full integration of immigrants into the fabric of Illinois society.

In October 2000, the IIPP Steering Committee established several working groups which cover the following arenas: health and human services, education, employment, economic development, and immigration law. Each working group met to consider critical questions and commission appropriate research and policy analysis.

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The initial two segments of this report were prepared by Christina Kappaz of Millennia Consulting, LLC. They are a compilation of the key issues and recommendations that emerged from a hearing-style consultation held in June 2001. The hearing brought together 70 policymakers, administrators, academicians and community representatives to discuss the broad issues put forth by the Education Committee of the Illinois Immigrant Policy Project, and to identify policy and practice recommendations that promise to strengthen immigrant education in Illinois. As a starting point for those discussions, the Education Committee commissioned and reviewed the three background papers that framed the key issues on a national scale: (1) *Challenges and Promising Practices in Early Childhood and Family Literacy Education for Language Minority Students*, prepared by the National Association for Bilingual Education; (2) *Challenges Facing High Immigrant-Serving Secondary Schools in the Context of Standards Based School Reform*, prepared by Michael Fix and Jorge Ruiz Velasco of The Urban Institute; and (3) *Keys to the Golden Door? Adult ESOL, Literacy and Employment Preparation*, prepared by Heide Spruck Wrigley of Aguirre International.

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STRENGTHENING ILLINOIS' IMMIGRANT POLICY:

Improving Education for Immigrants and Refugees in Illinois August 2002

SUMMARY DOCUMENT

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Based on:
A Public Hearing held in June 2001,
Input from IIPP Education Committee Members,
and Background Papers Prepared by
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and Heide Spruck Wrigley of Aguirre International

@Illinois Immigrant Policy Project, 2002

I. BACKGROUND OF THE REPORT

In April of 2001, the Education Committee of the Illinois Immigrant Policy Project (IIPP) was convened by the Department of Human Services and the State Board of Education to develop recommendations that would strengthen immigrant education programs in Illinois. The committee is part of the Illinois Immigrant Policy Project Roundtable Initiative that is directed toward framing the issues of policy and program that should be addressed by the State as immigration continues over the next decade. During the past five years, IIPP has supported eight studies that have had a significant influence on Illinois' legislative, administrative and private sector response to the needs of immigrants and refugees.

The IIPP Education Committee is comprised of a representation of stakeholders in immigrant education including regional superintendents, local school board members, principals, teachers, state legislators, representatives from the Governor's office, the Illinois State Board of Education, the Department of Human Services, the Illinois Community College Board; the Adult Learning Resource Center, the Urban Institute, and community based organization staff. The Education Committee followed a process that incorporated research as well as public comment and discussion to identify impediments to immigrant access to and success in education; and to propose changes in policy and practice that would reduce or eliminate these impediments. Its primary focus was on policies and practices that would improve education for low-income, language-minority families and individuals.

The Education Committee reviewed three background papers prepared to help the Committee to identify issues to be addressed in the following areas:

- 📄 Early Childhood Education (ages 0-8) and Family Literacy – *Challenges and Promising Practices in Early Childhood and Family Literacy Education for Language Minority Students*, by the National Association for Bilingual Education
- 📄 Intermediate, Middle and Secondary Education – *Challenges Facing High Immigrant-Serving Secondary Schools in the Context of Standards Based School Reform*, by Michael Fix and Jorge Ruiz Velasco of The Urban Institute
- 📄 Adult Education and Transition to Work – *Keys to the Golden Door? Adult ESOL, Literacy and Employment Preparation*, by Heide Spruck Wrigley of Aguirre International

In June of 2001, a one-day hearing-style consultation brought together 70 policymakers, administrators, practitioners, academicians and community representatives to discuss the broad issues put forth by the Education Committee and to identify policy and practice initiatives that promise to strengthen immigrant education systems in Illinois. The proceedings of the consultation have been incorporated into the recommendations for immigrant education policy and practice in Illinois that are laid out in this report. In addition, excerpts from the background papers have been incorporated into the report in the various issue descriptions and, where noted, in the recommendations.

II. EDUCATION NEEDS OF IMMIGRANTS

Almost 15% of Illinois residents – 1.75 million people – are foreign-born, with approximately 40,000 new arrivals each year. More than half of the state's population growth in the 1990s was due to immigration. Immigrants and refugeesⁱ are a vital part of our community, not only bringing rich cultural diversity but also helping to maintain our state's labor force and tax base. They comprise a growing percentage of the Illinois workforce. Preliminary studies have shown that immigrants pay \$6.11 in taxes for every \$1.00 of public service they utilize.

Education is a critical tool for immigrants as they strive to meet their own potential and become dynamic members of Illinois society. The importance as well as the challenge of providing education to immigrants is heightened by the language barriers faced by many immigrants. The 1990 U.S. Census estimated that there were two million language minority individuals residing in the state of Illinois. By 2000, the new census estimated that there are 2.4 million people, nearly 1 in 5 Illinois residents, who speak a language other than English at home. The percent of people who speak Spanish at home in Illinois increased from 6.8% in 1990 to 11% in 2000. Six percent of Illinois residents speak Polish, Russian, German or another European language at home, and 2% speak an Asian or Pacific Island language.ⁱⁱ

Many communities and school systems receiving new immigrants have little experience or infrastructure to serve non-native English speakers. In the 1990s, immigrant populations grew in Chicago area suburbs and many counties outside of the Chicago metropolitan area. Though Chicago was once the principal port of entry for immigrants to Illinois, 41.5% of legal immigrants in the late 1990s settled directly in the suburbs.ⁱⁱⁱ

Educational systems throughout the state must therefore work to develop programs that meet the needs of the growing immigrant population. A unique set of challenges presents itself in each of three arenas of education: early childhood education and family literacy; intermediate, middle, and secondary education; and adult education.

1. Early Childhood Education and Family Literacy

An extensive body of research indicates that preschool experiences are central to students' development of contextual knowledge as well as to their development of language, social, and cognitive abilities. For children living in poverty, preschool helps offset the social, emotional, cognitive and physical challenges that — if left unattended — place them at risk for school failure in later years. For language minorities, preschools can provide highly effective bilingual programs that build on children's existing language strengths and cultural ties. Nevertheless, for most language minority families the promise of such early intervention remains unfulfilled.

According to the Census Bureau's March 2001 release of pre-primary school enrollment numbers, only 56% of Asian three to four-year olds are enrolled in some type of preschool program. The number is even lower for Hispanics—37% of three to four-year old children are enrolled. And, while 20 percent of students enrolled in programs like Head Start speak a language other than English (in Chicago 43% of preschool participants are Hispanic), the majority of America's language minority children have never participated in a Head Start program.

Where family literacy programs are concerned, research has demonstrated the positive influences that they can have on subsequent literacy achievement in school. This fact is of great importance to language minority parents, many of whom face considerable linguistic and educational challenges – especially in taking part in their own children's day-to-day education.

In light of this, early childhood education and family literacy programs hold great promise for immigrant language minority families. Much remains to be done, however, to ensure that the programs are accessible to these communities and that they adequately address their needs.

2. Intermediate, Middle, and Secondary Education

According to the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE), more than 143,000 students who are ELLs were enrolled in the state's schools during Fiscal Year 2000. Although these students speak 124 different languages, over 110,000 of them speak Spanish as their home language. From 1985 to 1999, the number of ELLs who are enrolled in Illinois public schools increased by 136 percent. In Chicago, this number increased by 94 percent, while in the suburbs and other parts of the state the increase was 212 percent. While almost half of all ELLs in Illinois attend Chicago Public Schools, ISBE reports that most of the growth in ELL enrollment is occurring down-state and in the counties surrounding Chicago: DuPage, Kane, Lake, McHenry, and Will counties. About 16 percent of students in Chicago Public Schools are ELLs.

Intermediate, middle, and secondary education face several unique challenges in regard to the immigrant population. Most importantly, schools must develop appropriate means of addressing the needs of language minority students in the context of the standards-based accountability systems being instituted throughout the state and the country. As schools implement standards-based education and measurement of student performance, ELLs must be included so that they have the same opportunities as their native English-speaking peers to graduate from high school and continue their education or training.

There are two sub-populations of ELLs of special concern. One is the set of immigrant children who arrive not as young children but as teens. Many of these late entrants must overcome critical literacy gaps and the effects of interrupted schooling in their home countries. The time available for these late arriving secondary students to master a new language and pass subjects required for high school graduation is limited. As a result, language and content instruction must be offered simultaneously rather than sequentially. The second population of emerging concern among educators can be classified as "long term" ELLs. This population is composed of ELL/immigrant children who spend many years in a bilingual or English as a Second Language (ESL) program but do not progress sufficiently in English literacy to meet state or local criteria for promotion from ELL status.

3. Adult Education

For many new immigrants and refugees learning English means having access to the keys that open the golden door. Behind the door is the world of English where immigrants comprehend what doctors and social service workers try to explain to them and where speaking on the phone in English loses its terror. This is a world where English learners have access to good jobs and health care for their family and where they are able to help with schoolwork so their children can succeed as well. In this place adults no longer have to depend on their children to translate and they can make friends with neighbors who don't share their language. Behind the golden door is a world of work where immigrants are not defined by their lack of English but by the skills and experiences they bring to the job.

While about one third of the legal immigrants arriving in Illinois during the period 1990-1996 had professional occupations, an almost equal number were service workers or manual laborers. Many of these immigrants require English language skills to enroll in vocational training, advance in the workplace, support their children in schools and participate in their communities. In Illinois more than half of reported adult education students are enrolled in ESL classes.

Adult education finds itself at a crossroad, as the Workforce Investment Act puts a great deal of emphasis on workforce development and collaboration among service providers. Calls for collaboration require creative responses so that funding streams can be brought together to develop comprehensive programs that combine skills training, with social service support on the one hand and quality English language education and literacy development on the other. On the other hand, the focus on employment related skills will make it difficult to support and implement programs for those not in the labor force, made up mostly of learners hoping to transition to higher education, work-at-home women who want to increase their communication skills and further their education, and the elderly for whom participation in ESL programs may mean less social isolation and an opportunity to join with others to learn and share stories.

III. KEY ISSUES

The report summarizes policy and practice recommendations for each of the three educational arenas – early childhood and family literacy; intermediate, middle, and secondary education; and adult education. Recommendations are distinguished between state level policy recommendations and program practice recommendations directed at the local school level or professional development entities including colleges and universities.

In the full report, the recommendations are presented together with a description of the specific issues and challenges to which they are responding. These issues fall under the following seven broad issue areas that apply to all three arenas.

- (a) Systemic commitment to implement educational programs that meet the learning needs of ELLs - Key elements that must be addressed in this regard include barriers to access, the need for *outreach* and *communication*, and *flexibility* in terms of scheduling and programming to meet specific needs of immigrants.

- (b) Bridging language acquisition and skills development through research-based approaches – More *research* is needed to identify what *instructional approaches* are most effective for ELLs and the elements of instructional approaches that have already demonstrated success should be replicated.
- (c) Integration of educational programs for immigrant and refugee students into mainstream educational and training systems – Immigrants and refugees are often *marginalized from mainstream* educational programs.
- (d) Availability of qualified teachers and appropriate training for teachers – There is a *shortage of teachers* qualified to teach immigrants and refugees. In addition, better and increased *teacher preparation* is needed.
- (e) Adequate data collection on immigrants and refugees to guide program and policy decisions – *Data is needed* to document the need for programs, tailor the development of services and demonstrate program outcomes.
- (f) Development of meaningful standards and outcome measurements for ELLs – The application of *standards* and *outcome measures* may strengthen program accountability. However, high-stakes testing without accommodations for ELLs may have negative consequences.
- (g) Coordination of resources and programs at the state and local levels – *Coordination of existing resources* and links between local *programs* are needed to build strong educational programs for immigrants.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

The report's recommendations include policy recommendations directed at state level policymakers as well as programmatic, or practice, recommendations directed at the local school level and professional development entities. The key recommendations for each educational arena are presented in the three tables below.

**Table 1a – Summary of Key Recommendations
EARLY CHILDHOOD AND ADULT LITERACY**

Issues	Policy Recommendations	Practice Recommendations
<p>Systemic Commitment to Implement Programs for ELLs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⌚ Insufficient availability of programs ⌚ Barriers to access to preschool programs ⌚ Insufficient services for children aged 0-3 ⌚ Inadequate communication with parents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⌚ Allocate State funding to increase availability of early childhood, family literacy and after school programs proven to be effective in addressing immigrant needs. ⌚ Expand State eligibility requirements to expand program coverage. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⌚ Innovate with program flexibility such as modified schedules and the use of family literacy mobiles. ⌚ Provide linguistically and culturally appropriate outreach to parents. ⌚ Set standards and provide training to family child care providers ⌚ Develop multicultural environment in programs so that all children benefit
<p>Research-Based Instructional Approaches</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⌚ Need research on and replication of effective approaches ⌚ Specific problems to overcome though better approaches include working with students with low levels of English language acquisition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⌚ Implement policies that support the best practices that emerge from research (e.g., review assessment and instruction policies for ELLs in early childhood) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⌚ Put in place research based models that develop pre-literacy and literacy skills ⌚ Identify, document, and implement best practices (e.g., training parents as first teachers and intergenerational literacy programs) ⌚ Conduct research to identify types of instructional programs that best address needs of bilingual children.
<p>Integration with Mainstream Education</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⌚ ELLs are often isolated from mainstream students and programs ⌚ Early childhood programs across the state are inconsistent in addressing needs of ELLs ⌚ Problems in transition from early childhood to elementary school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⌚ Require better screening of ELLs and continuity between early childhood and elementary education ⌚ Establish outreach programs through state education agency, to help blend family literacy and early literacy into existing ESL curriculums. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⌚ Improve transitioning within schools between bilingual and mainstream programs ⌚ Create more blended programming to ensure that ELLs receive appropriate services (eg, special education, gifted)
<p>Qualified Teachers and Professional Development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⌚ Lack of qualified bilingual teachers ⌚ Teacher education does not prepare teachers for bilingual and bicultural students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⌚ Increase recruitment and professional development with incentives such as tuition scholarships, especially for bilingual teachers and aides to work toward the Type 04 Early Childhood Education certificate. ⌚ Develop guidelines that address qualifications for programs that serve ages 0-3. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⌚ Increase recruitment efforts for bilingual/bicultural teachers for early childhood education ⌚ Include ELL education in the core curriculum for teacher education programs. ⌚ Provide professional development that incorporates the foundations of bilingual and early childhood education.
<p>Adequate Data Collection</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⌚ Data is needed on numbers and characteristics of ELLs and on specific programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⌚ Require early childhood programs to collect and report data on the number of ELLs enrolled as well as the number screened who are on waiting lists. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⌚ Develop a research agenda to examine what is happening in the immigrant communities and how best we can serve this growing population.
<p>Standards and Outcome Measures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⌚ Insufficient standards and assessment mechanisms to measure ELL student performance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⌚ Require developmental screening in native language in early childhood programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⌚ Develop assessment tools appropriate for ELLs in early childhood (ages 0-8)
<p>Coordination of Resources and Programs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⌚ Need greater coordination and consistency between programs to provide integrated services ⌚ Need more coordination between programs of different funding sources and beneficiaries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⌚ Strengthen coordination between state agencies and coordinate funds from multiple sources ⌚ Build stronger connections between adult education and early childhood programs ⌚ Standardize programs offered by community-based organizations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⌚ Establish links between schools and community programs ⌚ Provide comprehensive services, coordinating various services offered to immigrants and refugees ⌚ Increase collaboration between early childhood and adult education programs

**Table 1b – Summary of Key Recommendations
INTERMEDIATE, MIDDLE, AND SECONDARY EDUCATION**

<p>Systemic Commitment to Implement Programs for ELLs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☛ Schools are not adapted to meet needs of ELLs ☛ Lack of services that extend beyond regular school day ☛ Communication with parents who do not speak English causes barriers ☛ Cultural barriers to communication must be overcome 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☛ Include ELL considerations within school reform and mainstream program decisions ☛ Develop State policy and standards for interpreters and translators in schools. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☛ Develop scheduling that provides a sustained and stable learning environment and provides for extended day learning opportunities. ☛ Provide linguistically and culturally appropriate outreach to parents. ☛ Use student data to create individualized academic plans to address diverse needs
<p>Research-Based Instructional Approaches</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☛ Need research on and replication of effective approaches ☛ Specific problems to overcome though better approaches: lack of progress toward English language acquisition and academic achievement, high school drop outs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☛ Implement policies that support the best practices that emerge from research (e.g., develop models for educating newcomers with gaps in their education) ☛ Provide incentives for high school completion such as in-state tuition ☛ Develop State guidelines on retention and promotion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☛ Expand use of existing best practices (e.g., creating smaller classes with safe environments, helping students prepare for higher education) ☛ Improve language support by providing intensive ESL instruction and native language support for newcomers.
<p>Integration with Mainstream Education</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☛ ELLs are often isolated from mainstream students and programs ☛ ESL and bilingual teachers often work in isolation ☛ Problems exist in transition from ESL or bilingual programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☛ Implement policies that promote better transitioning from bilingual or ESL programs into mainstream courses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☛ Improve transitioning for ELLs from elementary to high school ☛ Create more blended programming to ensure ELLs receive appropriate services, including gifted education, special education, vocational training ☛ Increase interaction between immigrants and mainstream students
<p>Qualified Teachers and Professional Development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☛ Lack of qualified bilingual and ESL teachers ☛ Teacher education does not prepare teachers for bilingual and bicultural students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☛ Provide incentives for bilingual and bicultural candidates to study education ☛ Create an audit to determine what higher education is doing for bilingual education. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☛ Increase training in cultural and linguistic competency for all teachers, through teacher education and in-services professional development. ☛ Hire bilingual/bicultural counselors
<p>Adequate Data Collection</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☛ Data is needed on numbers and characteristics of ELLs (e.g., date of arrival and years of previous schooling) and on specific programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☛ Require collection of data to assess student progress and program effectiveness ☛ Use data to evaluate policies such as exit criteria for long-term ELLs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☛ Develop research agenda ☛ Systematically collect data on school progress in, for e.g., parent communication, teacher in-services, alternative curriculum.
<p>Standards and Outcome Measures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☛ Insufficient standards and assessment mechanisms to measure ELL performance ☛ Proper assessments needed to measure ELL progress under new accountability standards of No Child Left Behind Act. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☛ Develop a system for evaluating progress of ELLs that documents student performance in English acquisition and core subjects. ☛ Develop assessments in the core subjects appropriate for use by English language learners, that are in line with State standards. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☛ Ensure appropriate support for ELLs to ensure their educational needs are met as they work toward achieving the AYP targets. ☛ Implement rigorous curriculum based on State standards. ☛ Use assessment results to guide student placement and instruction.
<p>Coordination of Resources and Programs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☛ Need to coordinate education, health, social, and other services for immigrants ☛ Need to coordinate resources to address dispersion of immigrants across school districts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☛ Establish State level policy to address special education needs of immigrant families ☛ Reimburse schools for costs in excess of per pupil expenditure, to fund newcomer centers ☛ Strengthen network of service providers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☛ Increase linkages among programs and provide comprehensive services, through, e.g. newcomer centers ☛ Develop statewide resources that can be shared

**Table 1c – Summary of Key Recommendations
ADULT EDUCATION**

Issues	Policy Recommendations	Practice Recommendations
<p>Systemic Commitment to Implement Programs for ELLs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☞ Need to reduce barriers to access, caused by scheduling, transportation, geography, family issues for women, and dispersion of immigrant programs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☞ Expand public transportation services especially to suburbs ☞ Provide more flexible funding formula to encourage program innovation and flexibility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☞ Create more flexible schedules such as weekend and evening classes ☞ Use distance education. ☞ Offer courses within learners workplaces or communities ☞ Provide affordable, quality, convenient childcare.
<p>Research-Based Instructional Approaches</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☞ Need research on and replication of effective approaches ☞ Specific problems to overcome though better instructional approaches include transition from ESL to work and inadequate programs for the elderly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☞ Implement policies that support the best practices that emerge from research (e.g., link adult ESL with workforce skills training) ☞ Streamline funding by basing funding decisions on program standards rather than attendance hours ☞ Fund adult education for elderly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☞ Research best practices and the impact of adult education, e.g, the connection between English proficiency, job skills and wages ☞ Expand use of existing best practices for each educational arena (e.g., maximizing class intensity and using distance education for adult education) ☞ Add pre-employment skills and job information to adult ESL courses
<p>Integration with Mainstream Education</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☞ Need to integrate adult education for immigrants with employer-supported programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☞ Provide incentives to employers to allow for and fund training at the workplace 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☞ Improve coordination between adult education and employers ☞ Conduct outreach to business community
<p>Qualified Teachers and Professional Development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☞ Lack of available teachers ☞ Lack of uniform hiring standards ☞ Use of part-time teachers, low pay and lack of benefits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☞ Provide incentives for programs to hire full-time adult education instructors ☞ Increase funding for professional development and teacher salaries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☞ Review qualification requirements for adult ESL teachers ☞ Increase use of distance education to train teachers
<p>Adequate Data Collection</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☞ Data is needed on numbers and characteristics of ELLs and on specific programs. E.g: limited data exists on impact or coverage of adult ESL services. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☞ Require collection of data to assess student progress and program effectiveness ☞ Support and coordinate existing efforts such as National Assessment on Adult Literacy ☞ Use data to reassess policies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☞ Support data collection and coordinate with indicators collected nationally
<p>Standards and Outcome Measures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☞ Insufficient standards and assessment mechanisms to measure ELL student performance ☞ Limited range of reliable ESL tests for adults 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☞ Develop State task force to review funding formulas based on attendance hours 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☞ Develop alternative assessment tools ☞ Follow recommendations of Program Standards for Adult Education English published by International TESOL in 2000.
<p>Coordination of Resources and Programs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☞ Need to coordinate resources to maximize impact of funding ☞ Need better communication and coordination among providers ☞ Need to coordinate adult education programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☞ Establish a state level coordination council 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☞ Increase communication and coordination among service providers ☞ Consolidate and coordinate state funded adult education programs (ESL, citizenship, tutoring, GED, etc)

V. CONCLUSION

Improving educational programs for immigrants is a priority for Illinois, since these programs can allow immigrants to integrate into society and contribute to our economy and culture more quickly and effectively. English language literacy and academic achievement are cornerstones for immigrants, providing the basis for acquisition of other knowledge and workforce skills. As the State contends with conflicting demands for limited resources, careful consideration must be given to weighing the benefits of investments in education against the costs associated with an under-educated population and under-skilled workforce. A focus on directing resources toward best practices and highly effective programs is needed; this implies a more efficient use of existing resources and reallocation of resources to meet priorities and maximize effectiveness.

Concrete recommendations have been set out in this paper for policy and programmatic changes that will enhance education for immigrants in the key educational arenas of early childhood education and family literacy; intermediate, middle, and secondary education; and adult education. A complete list of the recommendations contained in the report is replicated in Annex I. Several common issues and recommendations emerged across the three educational arenas examined.

Improving the quality of education for immigrants requires institutional flexibility that can be achieved through administrative leadership demonstrating a systemic commitment to implement educational programs that meet the needs of English language learners. State policies should demonstrate a commitment to address the needs of ELLs and allow for local flexibility to design programs that best serve ELLs. Schools should develop scheduling that best supports the learning needs of individual ELLs. Educational support outside of the regular school day should be expanded for Kindergarten - 12th grade students to help them build English and academic skills and complete homework assignments. Adult education programs should implement class times, locations and teaching approaches that accommodate working immigrants' busy schedules. They should also address common barriers to participation, such as transportation and childcare. Education programs should be available to immigrants of all ages. In particular, the State should make early childhood education available to all three and four year olds. Programs for 0-3 year olds should be expanded.

The State should encourage the development of language and cultural resources for school districts through existing regional systems. Educational institutions should work to overcome linguistic and cultural barriers to participation. They should identify and make use of language resources to transmit vital information to immigrants who do not speak English. In preschool through high school environments, the use of skilled interpreters and translated documents is essential when communicating with parents. Educational institutions should hire bilingual staff, develop linkages with immigrant communities and encourage teachers to acquire cross-cultural awareness to build connections with immigrant ELLs and the parents of young ELLs.

The State should gather information to identify what instructional approaches are most effective for ELLs. Current instructional programs do not fully address many ELLs' learning needs in the areas of language and literacy. Successful programs must take into account the diversity and varying needs within the ELL population, as well as research-based instructional approaches.

Professional development entities, especially research universities, should work with the local school level to conduct research and document best practices. Educational programs, with the support of state policies and funding, should seek to replicate best practices.

Effectiveness will be improved through the integration of educational programs for immigrants into the mainstream educational and training programs. In order to enhance integration, more blended programming is needed from early childhood education through high school, to ensure that immigrant students benefit from the educational offerings and academic instruction provided to all students, including special education, gifted education, and vocational training. Furthermore, schools should plan for better transitioning between bilingual or ESL classes and mainstream classes both within an attendance center and between attendance centers when students move from preschool to kindergarten or elementary school to high school. Opportunities for joint activities between newcomers and established immigrants and between immigrants and mainstream students need to be expanded. Adult education programs need to expand course offerings that fully integrate language and work skills development. State level policy makers need to provide incentives to employers such as tax credits for employers who support workplace training for immigrants.

There is a shortage of teachers qualified to teach immigrants and inadequate training for new and existing teachers in working with bilingual and bicultural students. Teacher recruitment efforts should target immigrant communities and provide career ladder opportunities and support such as tuition scholarships to individuals with an interest in teaching. The state should review certification requirements to ensure that they do not contribute to the inadequate supply of qualified bilingual and ESL teachers in pre-kindergarten-12th grade. Likewise, proposed professional standards for adult education teachers should be evaluated.

Teacher preparation programs at colleges and universities should include course work in teaching ELLs and multi-cultural education as core components of all teacher education programs. Professional development entities should offer training in teaching ELLs to existing teachers, including mainstream pre-kindergarten through high school teachers as well as adult education teachers statewide. They should also use technology to increase distance education programs to reach larger numbers of potential teachers including those located in geographically isolated communities. Incentives should be offered to teachers to participate in training.

Adequate data collection is needed on immigrants and refugees to guide program and policy decisions. Policy makers need to institute requirements for the collection of data to document the need for programs, the characteristics of students, and the effectiveness of the instructional programs in schools. Educational programs need to systematically collect data, and, together with professional development entities, a research agenda should be developed to guide data collection and analyze results.

The State should develop meaningful standards and outcome measurements for ELLs to track ELL student progress in all areas. It is essential that appropriate

assessments be identified to measure ELL student abilities and performance. School children, in particular, should be assessed not only in the area of English language acquisition, but also in developmental and academic areas. The curriculum for ELLs should address both English language acquisition and indicated content areas. In the case of school children, a rigorous curriculum based on the Illinois Learning Standards is indicated. Schools should develop newcomer programs with specialized instruction to accommodate the needs of immigrant children who arrive with limited schooling in their native language.

Stakeholders at the state and local level must build partnerships to strengthen coordination of resources and programs available to immigrants in order to facilitate service delivery to families with multiple needs and to promote sharing of resources across institutional and geographic boundaries. Coordination is needed among providers of education, healthcare, employment programs and social services.

Policy makers should establish a state level coordination council and strengthen interagency connections in order to ensure improved coordination and effective distribution of resources across the state. The state should promote linkages between early childhood programs and adult education programs; between employment programs and adult education; and between schools and providers of social services, mental health services and health care. Locally newcomer centers should be established in school districts with significant numbers of recently arrived immigrant children with gaps in their education or other characteristics that put them at risk of failure in school. Newcomer centers provide comprehensive services to families through either co-location of multiple services referral to other programs.

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- i Throughout the remainder of the report, the term “immigrants” will be used to refer to all foreign-born persons including those who immigrated as refugees.
 - ii David Mendell and Achy Obejas, “English on Wane in Illinois Households,” Chicago Tribune. August 6, 2001, p. 1.
 - iii Rob Paral, “Suburban Immigrant Communities: Assessment of Key Characteristics and Needs,” Chicago: Fund for Immigrants and Refugees, August 2000.