Research Shows Latino Immigrants Lagging Others; Deficits in Education, Wages Not Improving, Studies Say

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Body

A pair of ***studies*** examining ***immigrants***' progress in two crucial arenas, schools and the labor market, bear troubling news about ***Latino immigrants***.

Latino immigrants arrive in the United States with fewer educational and economic advantages than natives or ***other immigrants***, ***deficits*** that do ***not improve*** as time goes on, according to the reports released last week by Rand Corp. researchers.

"We have an economy that increasingly is asking for more educated people, but we are moving in opposite directions," ***said*** Georges Vernez, director of Rand Corp.'s Center for ***Research*** on Immigration Policy in Santa Monica, Calif., and one of the reports' authors. "That is ***not*** a good sign for the future."

The worrisome trends were especially true of ***immigrants*** from Mexico, who were found to fare the worst in school enrollment and in ***wage*** parity with native-born Americans.

The education ***study***, based on U.S. census data and a nationwide survey of 21,000 high school sophomores and seniors, is the most comprehensive analysis so far of ***immigrants***' achievements from elementary school through college. It offers some good news.

It found, for instance, that ***immigrants*** in general are as likely as native-born Americans to graduate from high school and to aspire to and enroll in college. In fact, ***immigrants*** are more likely than their native counterparts to stick with college for four straight years, in large part because their ***immigrant*** parents have higher educational expectations than native parents do.

But ***Latino immigrants*** -- principally from Mexico -- were found to ***lag*** in educational attainment and aspirations. In 1990, for example, only 74 percent of Mexican ***immigrants*** between the ages of 15 and 17 were in school, compared to 95 percent for natives and ***other immigrants***. The problem, Vernez ***said***, is ***not*** that they drop out but that they never "drop in" or enroll in school in the first place.

Vernez and co-author Allan Abrahamse ***say*** they do ***not*** know why this occurs but speculate that schooling patterns in Mexico may be an important factor. The average Mexican completes school through the seventh grade, they note, so an ***immigrant*** who arrives in the United States at age 15 or older may have been out of school for at least two years.

"They do ***not*** enroll in U.S. schools either by choice, because of inability to catch up with ***others*** their age, or by economic necessity," Vernez and Abrahamse write in the ***study***, called "How ***Immigrants*** Fare in U.S. Education."

They ***said*** that encouraging more ***Latino*** parents to be involved in their children's schooling and upgrading the education of the parents themselves could help to lift young ***immigrants***' educational status.

Like the education ***study***, the Rand Corp. report on the labor market also found differences among ***immigrant*** groups. ***Immigrants*** from Japan, Korea and China start out with ***wages*** much lower than native workers, but catch up in seven to 12 years, while European newcomers arrive with earning power similar to natives and maintain that parity over their working lives, the ***study*** ***said***.

But the ***wage*** gap persists and sometimes increases over time for the Mexican ***immigrants***.

The ***study***, based on an analysis of U.S. census data, concludes that the ***wage*** differences are attributable in general to the Mexican ***immigrants***' lower levels of education and work skills. But even for those Mexican ***immigrants*** with education or skill levels comparable to native workers, ***wages*** are lower and the progress toward parity slower, the ***study*** found.

The researchers ***said*** some of the reasons could be differences ***in education*** between the United States and the ***immigrants***' native countries, poor English-language skills, cultural differences, discrimination and the ***immigrants***' legal status.

Overall, the ***study*** finds that ***immigrants***' ***wages*** have been falling steadily in relation to natives' earnings over the past 20 years due to lower education and skill levels.

For ***immigrants*** from Central America and Mexico, average ***wages*** were 25 percent to 40 percent lower than natives' in 1970; by 1990, the differential had grown to 50 percent.

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