



Written Testimony on the Effects of Illegal Immigration on K-12 Education

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Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education
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Dear Chair Bean, Ranking Member Bonamici, and Members of the Subcommittee,

Thank you for the opportunity to address you today on this important matter. As a member of the Orange County Board of Education in Southern California, and Director of California Local Elected Officials for the California Policy Center, an educational nonprofit, I have seen firsthand the impact of illegal immigration on our K-12 education system, and the challenges that it poses to our schools, teachers, and most importantly, students and their families. Today, I'd like to share with you some of the issues that we see every day in California.

Our educational systems in Orange County and California are undeniably strained and the Governor and legislature are preparing to cut billions of dollars from the state budget. Illegal immigration only exacerbates how many parents feel about our school districts. Districts with high numbers of non-English speaking students often require additional resources to provide English as a Second Language (ESL) programs. While there is some additional funding for non-English speaking students, the additional funding does not adequately cover the associated costs. Though these cost pressures are mitigated by taxpayers through bonds, taxes and other fundraising mechanisms in a state with an already high cost-of-living, it is our citizen students who miss out on a high-quality public education as funds are shifted away from in-classroom learning. In addition, the extra funding received by districts with higher immigrant populations/more English language learners deprives other districts of funding for their most basic programs.

Staffing within the districts becomes difficult with illegal immigration. There is a heightened need for more teacher training and professional development. Districts must often hire additional translators and paraprofessionals to help alleviate the pressure on teachers. Immigrant students are put in classrooms with other students but require additional tools such as translation devices to receive content in their home language.

There are also additional costs for staff to provide testing to get a baseline on students' English language performance, and more funding is necessary to test these students periodically to determine when they are ready to be reclassified. To become Level 1 fluent takes about seven years of schooling depending on other factors such as the age of the student. Younger students typically adapt easier and learn the language more quickly, but it is still a long and expensive process.

In California, there is also standardized testing to assess progress for English learners and migrant students. The 2022-23 statewide proficiency scores reveal more than 75 percent of migrant students fail to meet state English language standards and more than 85 percent do not meet grade-level math standards. Obviously, this impacts the pace and manner in which teachers can teach class material to the class as a whole. There are also frequent attendance issues for these students often due to lack of dependable transportation, which makes assimilation and keeping up with the class curriculum even more difficult.

For schools who do not already have ready access to Title 1 resources, no amount of additional technology or one-on-one aides are effective or affordable.

Other district projects – like textbook adoptions – become more complicated and require more time and resources. In addition to the routine activities of reviewing new textbooks, a separate strand for the English learners must also be adopted. Parental notices, school newsletters and legal documents must also be translated.

School nurses and health assistants must divert attention from their basic duties to deal with medical issues such as vision and dental care that may not have been addressed in a student's home country. Because many English language learners are also experiencing poverty, providing personal items and clothing for students also strains resources.

Another cost is the California Universal Meals Program, where any student up to 18 years of age can come to school and have breakfast and lunch without any proof of need. In Santa Ana, they also provide a summer lunch program five days a week. Reimbursement doesn't match the expense, so ultimately local taxpayers are burdened with this additional cost.

Funding in California is already challenging because upwards of 85 percent of our education funding goes to school administration. It is more difficult to maintain high educational standards when redirecting considerable resources to address the additional needs arising from illegal immigration. These programs demand a significant portion of our already constrained budgets, which makes it difficult to assist every child in reaching their full potential. The need to divert resources toward specialized programs for undocumented students often results in fewer resources available for other students such as students with special needs, gifted and talented programs and other extracurricular activities.

Despite our generous per pupil funding in California, we are 49th in the country for literacy. California per pupil spending is budgeted to be \$23,519 this year, which is significantly higher than the national average of around \$17,000. The state provides most of the education funding for California schools; from 2018-2019 to 2022-2023, state funding increased by 40 percent, but it has not improved our literacy rate.

Many Orange County district schools are experiencing an increase in population that significantly impacts staffing. We often hear about this when we have requests for inter-district transfers on appeal at the Orange County Board of Education. We are especially reminded of this issue when a “basic aid district” – a district that can fully fund its schools with a percentage of tax base rather than funding through the state’s “average daily attendance” calculation – comes to complain to our boardroom. At the Orange County Board of Education, we believe that parents know what is best for their children and we almost always grant an inter-district transfer to the requesting family. Unfortunately, basic aid districts do not receive additional funding for the additional students. So any child that needs additional services can be really problematic for the district.

Overcrowding complicates and destabilizes classroom management. It affects the quality of the education because of the reduced attention that each child receives. When teachers are spread thin in a classroom, there will be learning loss and the overall quality of the education will be compromised for many students.

Not only is a high student-to-teacher ratio a concern for overcrowding, it can also lead to safety issues when supervision suffers. Students who don’t understand our language, customs or societal norms can be disruptive to learning and create additional challenges for the teachers and other school support staff and administrators. When teachers and aids are focused on class interruptions, it takes time away from the important instruction they are trying to provide.

We often don't know the ages of students since a child may not have their birth certificate. Thus, we may be putting seven-year-olds in kindergarten classes or 20-year-olds in classes with tenth graders. Safety is especially important in states like California that have sanctuary policies which limit the cooperation of state and local law enforcement officers with federal immigration authorities.

Since 2021, U.S. Customs has encountered 470,000 unaccompanied minors/illegal immigrant children. In 2023, California had over 11,000 of those unaccompanied minors who must – by law – be enrolled in public schools by their sponsors. According to the California Department of Education, currently over half the 944 school districts in California (540) are providing services to migrant students. The influx of unaccompanied youth, many of whom may have been abandoned or trafficked, in our school systems also creates additional challenges with mental health, housing stability and school safety issues.

In conclusion, it is critical that everyone understands the real-world impact of illegal immigration on our education systems and **the need to secure our border**. Our first priority must be the safety and education of our students, and no amount of funding can paper over these complex challenges that threaten to overwhelm our schools.

Thank you for inviting me to share these observations and concerns with the Committee.