

## **House Subcommittee on Constitution and Limited Government Hearing, “The Adverse Effects of Plyler v. Doe”**

Public education in the U.S. has long been centered on the education and assimilation of immigrants. Founding Father Dr. Benjamin Rush, in a famous speech in Philadelphia in 1786, stated, “I conceive the education of our youth in this country to be peculiarly necessary in Pennsylvania while our citizens are composed of the natives of so many different kingdoms in Europe. Our schools of learning, by producing one general and uniform system of education, will render the mass of the people more homogeneous and thereby fit them more easily for uniform and peaceable government.” Dr. Rush’s views on the political and social benefits of educating immigrant children were embraced by the pioneers of public school systems in the newly United States, including Horace Mann.

In this, as in so many things, our Founding Fathers were prescient. Rigorous empirical studies have confirmed that the longer a student remains in the education system—including benchmark attainments of high school graduation, vocational certifications, college enrollment, and college completion—the higher the likelihood that they will be a responsible and productive member of society. Years of education are significantly predictive of longevity, health, and higher life-time earnings. Years of education are also significantly predictive of lower rates of crime, incarceration, and welfare dependence. Sustained access to public education forges better adults. The benefits of public education are especially strong for the children of immigrants.

The best place for an immigrant child during the day is at school. While in school, immigrant children learn to follow the rules, to tolerate and get along with others who are different from them, to work hard, and to learn English if it is not their native language. If immigrant students were banned from school, many of them would be forced onto the street, where they would be tempted by the lure of crime, sex, and drugs. The cost of educating an immigrant child and keeping them on the straight and narrow path is dramatically less than the cost of apprehending, prosecuting, and incarcerating a young person who has strayed from that path due to the inability to access public schools. That is why much of public policy in the U.S. from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century to the present has centered on ways to keep as many minor children as possible in school for as long as we can.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, we learned what happens to children when they are unable to attend school. School closures cost America’s children nearly half a year of learning in reading and more than two-thirds of a year of learning in math, on average. The longer schools in a community were closed to in-person schooling, the greater the learning losses students experienced. Economists at Stanford University estimate the world will lose \$31 trillion in economic output due to COVID school closures. Chronic absenteeism and truancy are epidemic. The entire education policy community is focused on getting and keeping more children in school, for their benefit and ours. Thus, it would be unwise to undermine the reasoning in the Plyler case and exclude the children of immigrants from access to public schooling. The least dangerous, least costly, and most beneficial place for an immigrant child is in school.

Patrick J. Wolf, Ph.D.  
Distinguished Professor of Education Policy  
21<sup>st</sup> Century Endowed Chair in School Choice  
University of Arkansas  
(The opinions expressed here are my own)