

Minority administrators, school personnel key to engaging immigrant parents

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Minority principals and other administrative personnel at elementary and high schools play a key role in implementing policies and practices aimed at engaging immigrant parents of students, according to new research from Rice University, the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee and Vanderbilt University.

The researchers examined how schools in districts with [immigrant populations](#) are addressing low levels of parent involvement in their children's education and providing opportunities for engagement and support. The study, which will be published in the March edition of *Social Science Quarterly*, compared 447 schools in districts that have established immigrant populations with 685 schools in areas that have rapidly expanding immigrant populations. The analysis was based on data from the 2003-04 National Center for Educational Statistics' Schools and Staffing Surveys.

"A substantial body of research has linked parent involvement to an increasingly wide range of schooling outcomes, including improved student performance and self-esteem, teacher confidence and community relations," said Melissa Marschall, associate professor of political science at Rice University and lead author of the study. "But in many cases, immigrant parents have cultural and language differences that negatively impact their involvement in their child's schooling and education. With the rapid growth of immigrant populations -- from 6 to 20 percent between 1970 and 2000, and estimates suggesting another 30 percent increase by 2015 -- parental outreach programs are more

important than ever."

The study found that "cultural brokers" -- school personnel with important connections to parents' racial or ethnic origin group -- had a positive impact in school policies and practices in districts with established immigrant populations (Houston, Chicago, New York City and towns near the U.S.-Mexico border). However, at schools in new immigrant destinations, like Cedar Falls, Iowa, or Durham, N.C., such cultural brokers are in much shorter supply. At these schools, though, the study found a positive association between minority principals (African-American) and parental involvement programs, which suggests that these principals are taking an active role in addressing the needs of immigrant and minority parents.

"We believe this research demonstrates that school personnel don't necessarily have to share the same backgrounds to understand the needs and issues of immigrant parents and students or to make decisions that will benefit them," Marschall said.

Marschall said she hopes the study will encourage schools and districts to explore ways to engage immigrant populations and provide resources that these groups need to be involved.

"Schools have always counted on parental support, even for tasks as simple as encouraging their children to do homework," she said. "A lot of schools have targets for minority outreach, but the only way to effectively reach this group is to provide the resources and information that they need. To do this, schools must understand the population they serve. As school demographics change, [school](#) outreach programs must evolve," she said.

More information: Study: Parent Involvement Policy in Established and New Immigrant Destinations: [onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10 ...](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1467-8624.2017.01411.x)

[237.2011.00833.x/pdf](#)

Provided by Rice University

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