



The **Opportunity** Agenda

*Building the National Will
to Expand Opportunity in America*

Public Discourse on Immigration

Media Content and Opinion Analysis

- ▶ English-Language Acquisition
- ▶ Children of Immigrants

Acknowledgements

This report was produced through the generous support of the Annie E. Casey Foundation. The research and writing of this report was performed by Loren Siegel Consulting with the assistance of Jesse Serrins. It was edited by Laura Morris and Tony Stephens, and was designed by Element Group, New York.

The views expressed in this report are solely those of the author, and not those of The Opportunity Agenda or its funders.

About The **Opportunity** Agenda

The Opportunity Agenda was founded in 2004 with the mission of building the national will to expand opportunity in America. Focused on moving hearts, minds and policy over time, the organization works closely with social justice organizations, leaders, and movements to advocate for solutions that expand opportunity for everyone. Through active partnerships, The Opportunity Agenda uses communications and media to understand and influence public opinion; synthesizes and translates research on barriers to opportunity and promising solutions; and identifies and advocates for policies that improve people's lives. To learn more about The Opportunity Agenda, go to our website at www.opportunityagenda.org.

Table of Contents

Introduction	4
PART I: English-Language Acquisition	
Executive Summary	5
Media Analysis	7
Public Opinion Analysis	14
Recommendations	19
PART II: Children of Immigrants	
Executive Summary	21
Media Analysis	23
Public Opinion Analysis	29
Recommendations	32

Introduction

An important element of opportunity in America is a body of national and local policies that welcome new immigrants and provide a pathway to citizenship and participation, while promoting the economic security and mobility of everyone in our country. **To build public support for these policies, it is critical to: develop and support effective communications by civic leaders, scholars, and other supporters; build greater capacity within immigrant and other social justice organizations to communicate a shared, effective message; and achieve measurably better media coverage that shifts the public debate.**

In analyzing media coverage and public opinion of two important and related issues in the immigration debate, English-language acquisition and the children of immigrants, this report provides additional context to immigration supporters' understanding of the public discourse and the strategies needed to lay the foundation for positive policies. The goal of the media analyses is to determine the framing and coverage of the issues, the sources and quotes that are used, editorial and op-ed positions taken, regional differences, and challenges and opportunities in coverage. The goal of the opinion research is to assess public understanding and perceptions **on the users**; to identify supportive, persuadable, and opposing audiences; and to determine areas including support and opposition that are especially high or low.

Combined, the reports provide findings on current public discourse on English-language instruction for immigrants and perceptions about children of immigrants, as well as openings for and barriers to building support, including relevant audiences; preliminary messaging recommendations; and preliminary communications outreach recommendations.

PART I: English-Language Acquisition

Executive Summary:

The Opportunity Agenda commissioned a study of the public discourse surrounding English-language acquisition programs for immigrants with limited English proficiency (LEP). In this study we examine how this topic is being framed by the media and how the dominant media frames are influencing public opinion as evidenced in recent public opinion research. We conclude with a series of recommendations about how advocates can reframe the issue, use their access to the media to state their case more persuasively, and build broad popular support for increased funding for English Speakers of Other Languages programs (ESOL).

Media Content Analysis: Major Findings

- ▶ The media links the issue of language acquisition to one segment of the immigrant community: Spanish-speaking immigrants.
- ▶ Two competing frames emerge: **(1)** today's immigrants do not want to learn English (that is, do not want to integrate) and therefore must be compelled to do so; and **(2)** today's immigrants want to learn English, and their school-age children quickly become proficient (and integrated into United States society).
- ▶ Implicit in the negative frame is the idea that the role of government is as enforcer of rules rather than provider of services. None of the articles that mention learning English as a requirement of citizenship, for example, talk about how such learning will be accomplished. The implication is that immigrants will have to figure that out for themselves (tapping into the “personal responsibility” frame).
- ▶ Advocates have a low profile: few are quoted in news articles, and there were no opinion pieces by advocates in our sample. Immigrants were also rarely quoted.
- ▶ Readers are not getting a clear picture of where the responsibility for providing ESL (English as a Second Language) programs resides. A reader who wished to engage with the issue would not know what to demand from whom.

- ▶ Articles about lawsuits that call for translation services as a remedy are a double-edged sword because they highlight the needs of immigrant communities, but reinforce the negative frame that immigrants do not want to learn English.
- ▶ Although few in number, the feature articles that describe actual language acquisition programs are upbeat, informative, and engaging.

Public Opinion Analysis: Major Findings¹

- ▶ Most Americans support the concept of ESL programs.
- ▶ A plurality support increased funding for ESL programs, and that support increases to a majority after people hear arguments pro and con.
- ▶ Most Americans think immigrants are motivated to learn English.
- ▶ The two strongest arguments against increased funding are based on personal responsibility and competition for resources.
- ▶ The two strongest arguments in favor of increased funding are community-based, reflecting the benefit of such programs to the common good, and future-oriented, regarding our country's ability to retain and grow a workforce.
- ▶ The views of African Americans generally mirror the views of the public as a whole, while Asian Americans and Latinos are more supportive than the public as a whole of increased ESL funding.
- ▶ The most persuasive messengers on this issue are teachers and immigrants who have learned English.

Recommendations

We recommend that advocates and their allies:

1. Pitch upbeat feature stories about government-supported ESL programs that work.

The publication of positive feature stories will go a long way toward challenging negative stereotypes and demonstrating how ESL programs promote the common good. Identifying teachers and immigrants who have learned English and pitching them to reporters as quotable sources can build on the public's trust in those messengers.

2. Build relationships with Latino, Asian American, and other journalists of color.

It is noteworthy that a majority of the articles in our sample about immigrant integration were authored by journalists with Hispanic or Asian surnames. Reaching out and pitching to Latino, Asian American, and other reporters of color should be a high priority.

3. Generate and place more opinion pieces.

The fact that very few opinion pieces were picked up by our scan suggests either that not many are being submitted or that op-ed editors are choosing not to publish them. By soliciting and placing strong opinion pieces and commentary, advocates can alter public perceptions. High priority should

1. All findings are from top-line numbers from an April 2008 national survey administered by Lake Research Partners for the Asian American Justice Center (AAJC).

be assigned to op-eds by local officials who support ESL programs and oppose English-as-the-official-language laws; commentary by demographers and researchers that challenges stereotypes based on recent research; and op-eds by teachers and school administrators showcasing successful programs.

4. Reconsider messages around language rights litigation.

Language rights litigation is an important weapon for the enforcement of human rights. Focusing communications solely on the remedy of more translation services, however, may have the unintended consequence of reinforcing the negative frame.

Media Analysis

SEARCH METHODOLOGY

Electronic searches were performed using the Associated Press Multimedia, Gale Infotrac, Global Newsbank, and Proquest databases, with a total of 23 media outlets scrutinized over a seven-month period, from October 2007 to April 2008. Media outlets searched included the major national newspapers and newsweeklies, National Public Radio (NPR), as well as local and regional papers from every region of the U.S. A list of media outlets included in the search appears in Appendix I.

The search term combination “Immigrant AND English” was used, which returned a total of 657 articles. From this sample we randomly culled 20%, or 132, of the articles (using the random sequence generator at <http://www.random.org>). Each of the 132 articles was assessed for relevance, and 46 articles were kept.

TOPIC SUMMARIES

1. The “Spanish Threat” (11)

These stories are about efforts to pass anti-immigrant laws. Most of them mention, but do not go into any depth about, efforts to enact laws making English the “official language.” Examples include:

- ▶ “Mayor Steven M. Lonegan of Bogota [New Jersey] once demanded that McDonald’s remove a Spanish-language billboard, and **tried to make English the official language** of his small New Jersey town . . . But recently, the conservative Mr. Lonegan suffered an attack of the ironies when the police discovered two illegal immigrants working at a home he owns.” (“A Mayor with a Tough Stance on Immigration Is on Both Sides Now,” *New York Times*, October 16, 2007.)
- ▶ “A year after **pushing to make English the official language** in Taneytown [Maryland], a councilman in the Carroll County city council is proposing a measure intended to stave off illegal immigration.” (“Immigrants Again an Issue in Taneytown: ‘Sanctuary City’ Status Opposed by Councilman,” *Baltimore Sun*, December 5, 2007.)
- ▶ “Meanwhile, in the Senate, Republicans have introduced at least 15 immigration enforcement bills. They include **measures to make English the nation’s official language**, to prevent illegal immigrants from getting driver’s licenses, to deport immigrants convicted of drunk driving offenses . . .” (*Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, March 9, 2008.)

Also included are stories about Republican efforts to pass federal laws that would compel people to use English. Examples are:

- ▶ “Under intense pressure from her Hispanic caucus, Democratic House Speaker Nancy Pelosi has smothered legislation that would protect employers who **require their workers to speak English.**” (Editorial, *Arizona Republic*, November 30, 2007.)
- ▶ “Senate Republicans are set to announce today the hardest-hitting package of immigration enforcement measures seen yet—one that would require jail time for illegal immigrants caught crossing the border, make it harder for them to open bank accounts and **compel them to communicate in English** when dealing with federal agencies. (“Senate GOP Pushes Strict Bills on Immigration Enforcement,” *Houston Chronicle*, March 5, 2008.)

A couple of pieces include quotes in which ordinary Americans express their fear of the “Spanish threat”:

- ▶ “They come over and they even get a tax break,” Jane Vetter, who works at Pizza Ranch, said. “**Then they want to change our language over to Spanish** and then our national anthem, they want to change that. It just upsets me . . .” (“Fear of Foreigners Roils Iowa; Angry Rural Voters Voicing Far-Fetched Theories,” *Boston Globe*, December 23, 2007.)
- ▶ “I don’t understand what the illegal immigrants think we should do as American citizens. Just continue to let them flood our country and not have any type of response to that? I mean, **the non-English-speaking people here could easily take control of the state** because we don’t have any laws that prevent them from registering to vote.” (Caller to “Talk of the Nation” with Neal Conan, NPR, December 3, 2007.)

2. Non-English-Speaking Students (8)

Most of these pieces refer to non-English-speaking children in the context of their increasing numbers in the public school system. Again, these are mentions rather than in-depth treatment. Examples follow:

- ▶ “The [Prince William County, Virginia] school system released new figures late last month showing that classes for English for Speakers of Other Languages, dominated by children of Hispanic immigrants, grew by 13 percent, to 13,393 students.” (“Rise in Latino Enrollment Is Slowing; 25 Percent of Students in County Are Hispanic,” *Washington Post*, November 4, 2007.)
- ▶ “One in five Greeley elementary school students needs help with English.” (“Colorado Town Ousts Its Mayor, a Longtime Republican, after He Blasted Raid on Meatpacking Plant,” *Houston Chronicle*, November 28, 2007.)
- ▶ “Markham is considered one of the district’s most difficult schools to run. Almost 700 of its 1,500 students are immigrants, just learning English.” (“Brewer’s Apology to Parents Isn’t Enough,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 15, 2008.)
- ▶ “Lampson said the large Hispanic immigrant population and a growing Asian and African immigrant population in Texas have led to concerns that students with difficulty in English are being unfairly assessed for their performances by the same standards for students with English as their first language.” (“Educators Support Changes to Federal Law,” *Houston Chronicle*, November 8, 2007.)

- ▶ A report by the University of Notre Dame’s Institute for Latino Studies “is the culmination of nearly a year’s worth of round table discussions and combines the input of community leaders from nine Chicago suburbs experiencing the challenges of a swift demographic shift: overcrowded housing, a shortage of social services for immigrants and an influx of students who speak little English.” (“Study Aims to Aid Latino Immigrants; Suburbs Urged to Increase Outreach,” *Chicago Tribune*, November 19, 2007.)

3. Immigrant Integration (13)

Several of these pieces note the increasing numbers of immigrant and second-generation English speakers:

- ▶ “What we’re finding—Pew came out with a study in 2007—really trying to identify what language Latino voters consume in. And they came out with the study’s finding that **79 percent of Latinos consume their news in English** when it comes to deciding who to vote for. So when you see a lot of individuals pouring tons of money into Spanish-specific ads, they’re really touching only 21 percent of the electorate.” (Maria Teresa Petersen, Executive Director of Voto Latino, on NPR’s “The Bryant Park Project,” February 1, 2008.)
- ▶ “Some marketers are starting to rethink how they advertise to Hispanics, one of the fastest-growing consumer segments in the U.S. Starting as early as this week, Microsoft’s MSN Latino, a Spanish-language Web site with about 11 million monthly visitors, for the first time will offer marketers an ad service that targets second-generation Hispanics, mainly with spots that have heavy doses of English . . . **Research showed that second-generation Hispanics are more comfortable reading and writing in English**, and they speak a mix of the two languages to different members of the family—Spanish to parents, for instance, and some of both languages to siblings and to children.” (“Pitches to Hispanics Get More Nuanced; Ads Incorporate English,” *Wall Street Journal*, January 8, 2008.)
- ▶ “The Pew Center found that only 23% of first-generation Spanish-speaking immigrants spoke English very well. But 88% of the next generation reported speaking English very well, and this figure jumped to 94% for later generations.” (Raul Reyes, “Time to Dispel Those Immigrant Myths,” *USA Today*, December 18, 2007.)

Others describe successful local integration programs:

- ▶ “The population of students learning English is rising briskly in school systems in the Washington suburbs . . . To serve a population of English learners that has quadrupled in eight years, Myrtle and his staff at Highland have transformed a sleepy neighborhood school into a bustling hub of civic life, with weekend soccer tournaments, evening English classes, after-school tutoring and an ensemble of school-based community services.” (“Young English Learners a Rising Tide in Suburbs,” *Washington Post*, November 13, 2007.)
- ▶ “Since September 2006, all students in grades one through five in Loudon County, Va. have been given 30 to 60 minutes of Spanish instruction each week. Last year, officials in Fairfax County, Va. decided to expand the study of foreign languages to all 137 elementary schools over a seven-year period. Twenty-five Fairfax schools provide 30-minute lessons twice a week in Spanish, Japanese, Arabic, Chinese or French starting in the first grade . . . ‘They’re like sponges,’ said Mary Lynn Pearlman, a kindergarten teacher here, speaking of her young pupils. ‘In middle school they would worry about how they sound and their accent. Here, they don’t care.’” (“Building a Nation of Polyglots, Starting with the Very Young,” *New York Times*, November 14, 2007.)

- ▶ “Most of the women (and a handful of men) arrive [at a Brooklyn-based Maryknoll missionary center] eager to learn English so they can help their children with their homework . . . ‘To me, they are tremendously motivated,’ said Sister Eileen Trainor, the center’s associate director for education. ‘They are devoted to their children, and they will do anything for them.’” (“For Helper of Immigrants, a Tale of Loss and Destiny,” *New York Times*, December 21, 2007.)

4. The “Language Barrier” (8)

This batch of articles focuses on the harms that can result from lack of English or lack of translation services. A few examples are:

- ▶ “Despite steps forward, Limited English Proficiency families who are eligible to use the state system continue to **face barriers that limit their understanding of services, benefits, and resources** that are their rights as residents and taxpayers.” (“Speaking the Same Language,” *Boston Globe*, February 20, 2008.)
- ▶ “Pharmacies across the city routinely **fail to help non-English speakers understand** their prescriptions, raising the chances that customers could harm themselves by taking medicines incorrectly, immigrant advocacy groups charge in a discrimination complaint that they plan to file today with the New York attorney general’s office.” (“Non-English Speakers Charge Bias in Prescription Labeling,” *New York Times*, October 31, 2007.)
- ▶ “As Latinos have flooded into the U.S., their fatality rates in construction have steadily exceeded those of non-Hispanic workers, although both proportions have trended down of late for full-time workers. Many of the Latinos killed or hurt are like Lopez, who is an illegal immigrant from Guatemala. They tend to hunker down in the shadows fearful of being caught. **Many can’t speak English**. Even those who do rarely point out on-the-job dangers because they desperately want the money.” (“Uncertain Safety for Latino Workers,” *Chicago Tribune*, March 2, 2008.)

5. The Path to Citizenship (6)

A requirement that “illegal immigrants” learn English was often mentioned in the context of candidates’ views on immigration policy and a “path to citizenship”:

- ▶ “‘Some would have to go back,’ McCain said last month. ‘Others would have to go back to the country they came from—touchback we call it—before they can come back and get in line behind everybody else and **learn English** and pay fines, etcetera.’” (“McCain Shifts on Immigration,” *Arizona Republic*, November 8, 2007.)
- ▶ “Where most of the GOP candidates oppose legalization as an unacceptable amnesty, Giuliani and McCain favor a path to legal status for illegal immigrants who pay back taxes and fines, **learn English**, and have clean records.” (“Dems Straddle Border; GOP Field Hawkish,” *Houston Chronicle*, November 11, 2007.)
- ▶ “Obama acknowledged that he is not yet well known to many Hispanic voters. Hispanics, he said, will gravitate toward his campaign when they learn that he organized Chicago’s Hispanic neighborhoods to be politically effective, voted in the Illinois legislature to grant in-state tuition to students brought into the country illegally by their parents and that he supports citizenship opportunities for illegal immigrants willing to **learn English**, pay a fine and meet other requirements.” (“Campaign 2008,” *Houston Chronicle*, February 16, 2008.)

ANALYSIS

1. Competing Media Frames

The majority of articles in our sample link the issue of language acquisition to one segment of the immigrant community: Spanish-speaking immigrants. Since speaking English acts as a proxy for integrating or assimilating into American society, the media frames that emerge inform us not only about the national discourse on language acquisition, but on the larger issue of immigrant integration as well. Two competing frames emerge from this sample of articles: **(1)** today’s immigrants do not want to or do not try to learn English (do not want to integrate, or want to stand apart); and **(2)** today’s immigrants want to learn English, and their school-age children quickly become proficient (and are integrated into U.S. society).

Unwilling or unable to learn

About one-third of the sample articles mention learning English in the context of proposed “English-only” laws or as an item on the now familiar list of requirements undocumented immigrants must meet on the (still theoretical) “path to citizenship.” These articles do not treat the issue in any depth and are negative in tone. They reinforce the stereotype that for these immigrants, language acquisition is something that must be required, compelled, or coerced. What the reader takes away is that Spanish-speaking immigrants are not making an effort to learn English; the subtext is that they refuse to assimilate and are different in this regard from the immigrants of yesteryear.

This negative stereotype is further reinforced by the batch of eight articles that cast the issue in terms of a “language barrier” and language acquisition as a problem rather than an opportunity. Because they cannot speak English, Latino construction workers are at higher risk of being killed or injured on the job. Because they cannot speak English, immigrants cannot understand prescriptions and might harm themselves by taking medicines incorrectly. Because they cannot speak English, Spanish-speaking parents cannot help their children with homework.

The “unwilling or unable to learn” theme accentuates the differences between recent, especially undocumented, Spanish-speaking immigrants and everyone else. It raises the specter of millions of outsiders among us who will never become part of the American mainstream. In its most extreme form, this theme feeds xenophobic ideas like those expressed by a man quoted in the *Baltimore Sun* who said that Spanish-speaking immigrants were “taking over” his church, or the woman quoted in the *Boston Globe* who claimed that immigrants “want to change our language over to Spanish.”

Ready, willing, and able to learn

About half the articles deliver a positive counter-frame. Some of them are business pieces about the size and influence of the Hispanic consumer market. A *Wall Street Journal* article reports that “Some marketers are starting to rethink how they advertise to Hispanics” because the traditional use of Spanish is not reaching “second-generation Hispanics,” who “are more comfortable reading and writing in English.” That 88% of U.S.-born adult children of Latino immigrants speak English “very well,” as noted in a study by the Pew Hispanic Center, was reported in articles in the *Los Angeles Times*, *USA Today*, and *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, as well as on NPR. The articles focusing on the rise in Latino enrollment in public schools note the relative ease with which young people pick up new languages. An ESL supervisor from a Washington, D.C., suburb was quoted in a *Washington Post* article: “We know from evaluations that one of the greatest outcomes is that many are quite proficient by the first grade and go on to become bilingual and bicultural.” A *New York Times* article quotes a kindergarten teacher with Spanish-speaking pupils: “They’re like sponges.”

Although few in number, the articles that describe successful language acquisition programs are upbeat, informative, and engaging. Two of them merit special mention; both are reprinted in Appendix II. On November 13, 2007, the *Washington Post* ran a one-thousand-word story on the front page of its Metro section entitled, “Young English Learners a Rising Tide in Suburbs.” The reporter spent time at Highland Elementary School in Silver Spring, Maryland, where “more than half the students speak limited English.” He reported:

“These newest LEP students are largely U.S. citizens, born within a few miles of their school but raised in homes where English is not spoken. To serve a population of English learners that has quadrupled in eight years, Principal Raymond Myrtle and his staff at Highland have transformed a sleepy neighborhood school into a bustling hub of civic life, with weekend soccer tournaments, evening English classes, after-school tutoring and an ensemble of school-based community services such as housing assistance and mental health counseling. In a neighborhood bounded by Viers Mill and Randolph roads and Connecticut and Georgia avenues, there is no more popular destination than the school.

“The classroom approach at Highland is a particularly vigorous model of English for Speakers of Other Languages, a standard immersion program that teaches students the language as they learn their academics.”

A second strong piece, running 1,200 words, appeared in the *New York Times* the next day, on November 14. “Building a Nation of Polyglots, Starting with the Very Young” reports on school systems that “consider the acquisition of languages so important in today’s polyglot, globally entwined America that students start learning a foreign language in kindergarten.” This is another upbeat story with quotes from English-speaking students explaining why they want to learn Spanish: “Ryan Geary, a shy, blue-eyed 6-year-old likes to learn Spanish, she said, to be helpful ‘because I have some Spanish friends and they don’t speak much English.’ Ryan can’t actually speak Spanish well. Not yet. But she is learning.”

2. Whose Responsibility?

Implicit in the negative frame is the idea that the role of government—principally the federal government, **but because of the leadership void, it increasingly devolves upon states and localities**—is as the enforcer of rules rather than the provider of services. None of the articles that mention learning English as a requirement of citizenship talk about how such learning will be accomplished. The implication is that immigrants will have to figure that out for themselves (which taps into the “personal responsibility” frame).

Most of the articles conveying a more positive frame are silent or ambiguous on the question of who is responsible for funding language acquisition programs and for making them accessible to the non-English-speaking public. An exception is a news article from the *Chicago Tribune* (by a Latina journalist) about a report released by the diversity committee of the Metropolitan Mayors Caucus “aimed at helping suburban municipalities incorporate Latino immigrants.” The report recommended the development of “dual-language programs” by local school districts (*Chicago Tribune*, November 19, 2007). The other articles about language acquisition in the elementary grades focus on individual schools and give the impression that providing language instruction to non-English-speaking students is up to the discretion of a principal or school board. (The only exception was a brief item in an *Arizona Republic* roundup of the year’s key events, published on December 30, 2007: “Judge again orders more money for English language Learner programs. The 15-year battle over funding for teaching non-native speakers English continued in court, as lawmakers are deeply divided over how to resolve it.”)

Three feature articles focus on private actors who have assumed the role of providing language acquisition services: a new instructional TV show called Survival English launched by Azteca America, a Spanish-language television network (*Atlanta Journal-Constitution*); the Maura Clarke-Ita Ford Center in Brooklyn, New York, a community-based nonprofit agency that teaches English to immigrant women (*New York Times*); and the Welcome Project of Somerville, Massachusetts, which holds ESL classes (*Boston Globe*).

One of the “language barrier” articles reports on a discrimination complaint brought against 16 pharmacies in New York for failure “to provide linguistic help to guarantee that people who speak little or no English receive equal access to health care” (“Non-English Speakers Charge Bias in Prescription Labeling,” *New York Times*, October 31, 2007). Another, an opinion piece by two service providers, accuses the state of Massachusetts of not doing enough to apprise non-English-speaking residents of state-supported child care (Mary Reed and Valora Washington, “Speaking the Same Language,” *Boston Globe*, February 20, 2008). A third piece, a commentary by the director of the Association of Clinicians for the Underserved, describes the difficulties non-English speakers have in navigating the health-care system (“Bridging the Gaps; Mobile Clinic Delivers Care to Immigrants, but Challenges Are Daunting,” *Washington Post*, January 22, 2008). The language barrier articles are double-edged swords. On the one hand, they at least assign some responsibility—to private pharmacies, state government, and “the fragmented health system,” respectively. On the other hand, the remedies they seek—more translation services—reinforce the stereotype that immigrants do not want to learn English.

In summary, readers are not getting a clear picture of what the appropriate remedy is, nor are they being given information about where the responsibility for providing language acquisition services resides. A reader who wished to engage with the issue would not know what to demand from whom.

3. Sources

Advocates on either side of the immigration debate have a low profile in this sample of articles. We found only four direct quotes from advocates in news articles, two from immigrants’ rights representatives, and two from anti-immigration organizations. In general, it appears that reporters are not seeking comments from members of the advocacy community on this issue. There were only two opinion pieces, both of them authored by service providers for immigrants. This is not a large enough sample upon which to base an analysis of messaging and framing by either side of the debate.

We found a number of quotes from local and state officials that are positive in tone and challenge the negative stereotypes regarding language acquisition and today’s immigrants. These include:

- ▶ Mayor Jim McCarron of Taneytown, Maryland: “It [a city council proposal to make English the official language] seems mean-spirited, as far as I’m concerned. It actually is a slap in the face to anybody that has ancestors who were immigrants, or is currently an immigrant.” (*Baltimore Sun*, December 5, 2007.)
- ▶ Mayor Joseph Curtatone of Somerville, Massachusetts: “‘This is everybody’s city who wants to live here, work hard, and make a positive contribution. I don’t care what your status is,’ said the mayor, whose parents were born in Italy.” (*Boston Globe*, November 18, 2007.)
- ▶ Mayor Nick Valentine of Newburgh, New York: “They remind me of my family, who came to Newburgh because others from their section of Italy had come. They’re looking for locations, for storefronts to open businesses—usually grass-roots enterprises like hairdressing, auto repair, landscaping, food shops, restaurants. They’re very religious. My old church, Sacred Heart, just had their first Spanish mass—200 people came.” (*Wall Street Journal*, November 17, 2007.)

We found very few quotes from immigrants themselves.

Public Opinion Analysis

Existing research shows that the American public places a high premium on the ability to speak English. When asked in June 2007 to respond to “several parts of a possible new immigration bill,” an overwhelming majority *strongly* favored a requirement that those applying for citizenship learn English:

Q. Now I would like to get your reaction to several parts of a possible new immigration bill. Please tell me whether you strongly favor, somewhat favor, somewhat oppose, or strongly oppose each of the following parts of this bill . . . All immigrants who apply to be U.S. citizens would be required to learn English.

Strongly Favor	Somewhat Favor	Somewhat Oppose	Strongly Oppose
73%	16%	6%	4%

(NBC News/Wall Street Journal poll conducted June 8–11, 2007. N = 1,008 adults.)

The public also responds favorably to the proposition that English be “the official language of the United States” and appears to support the right of employers to require employees to speak English while on the job. (These surveys, however, neither test arguments for and against such policies, nor describe in any detail what is meant by “official language.”) Survey results indicate:

Q. Should English be the official language of the United States?

84%	Yes
11	No
6	Not sure

Q. Should a company be allowed to require that its employees speak English while on the job?

77%	Yes
14	No
8	Not sure

But the public is more divided on the English-only policy as applied to other real life examples:

Q. Should election ballots and other official government documents be printed in English only or should they be printed in both English and Spanish?

59%	English only
35	English and Spanish
5	Not sure

(Rasmussen Reports, conducted November 19–20, 2007. N = 800 likely voters.)

Analysis

In April 2008, the Asian American Justice Center (AAJC) commissioned a major public opinion survey (N = 1,200) to probe how Americans think about adult ESL programs. The most comprehensive survey on this issue to date, it included oversamples of African Americans, Latinos, and Asians. At the time of this writing, the data had not yet been analyzed, but the top-line numbers were available. This report should be read in conjunction with the forthcoming analysis by Lake Research Partners for the AAJC.

► **Most Americans support ESL programs**

Public support for ESL programs in general is strong, and it becomes stronger when a holistic definition of ESL programs is provided:

Q. Do you favor or oppose adult English as a second language programs?

	Total	White	African American	Latino	Asian
Strongly favor	59%	5	59	79	75
Not so strongly favor	19	18	25	12	14
Not so strongly oppose	5	6	7	0	3
Strongly oppose	11	13	5	3	4
Favor	77%				
Oppose	16				

Q. Now, I would like to read you a definition of adult English as a second language programs. Adult English as a Second Language, also known as adult ESL, is instruction for both teaching and strengthening English-language proficiency and basic skills in reading, writing, speaking, and understanding English for non-native speakers. ESL is the fastest growing instructional area in adult education programming. ESL providers include community colleges, public schools, faith-based organizations, adult schools, and nonprofit organizations. Having heard this definition, do you favor or oppose ESL programs?

	Total	White	African American	Latino	Asian
Strongly favor	66%	66	56	87	80
Not so strongly favor	18	17	31	10	13
Not so strongly oppose	3	3	3	0	2
Strongly oppose	9	11	5	2	3
Favor	84% (+7)				
Oppose	12 (-4)				

- **A plurality supports increased funding, and that support increases after hearing pro and con arguments.**

Q. Do you favor or oppose increasing funding for adult ESL programs or keeping funding the same?

	Total	White	African American	Latino	Asian
Strongly favor	34%	29	38	64	63
Not so strongly favor	14	13	15	11	19
Not so strongly oppose	8	8	7	5	0
Strongly oppose	14	15	17	6	4
Keep the same	25	28	21	9	11
Favor	48%		52		
Oppose	21		24		

Q. Sometimes in a survey like this, people change their minds. Do you favor or oppose increasing funding for ESL programs or keeping funding the same?

	Total	African American	Latino	Asian
Strongly favor	38%	46	64	64
Not so strongly favor	19	23	3	2
Not so strongly oppose	5	2	3	2
Strongly oppose	14	9	4	4
Keep the same	21	17	16	7
Favor	57% (+9)	69 (+17)		
Oppose	18 (-3)	11 (-13)		

NB: In general, African Americans' views closely mirror those of the public as a whole, but African Americans changed their minds in a favorable direction more than the general public after receiving more information. Figures for white respondents were unavailable for this question.

► **Most Americans think immigrants are motivated to learn English.**

Q. How motivated do you think immigrants are to learn English?

	Total	White	African American	Latino	Asian
Very motivated	21%	19	22	41	42
Somewhat motivated	36	35	42	37	47
A little motivated	19	21	15	11	5
Not motivated at all	18	20	15	8	3
Motivated	76%				
Not motivated	18				

- **The two strongest arguments against increased funding were based on personal responsibility and the need to fund competing priorities.**

There are too many other priority issues—for example, health care, the economy, education—that the issue of educating adult learners of English can’t be a major priority. At a time when we have deficits at both the state and national level, we just cannot afford this. We need to focus on cutting down spending, not looking for new programs that need additional resources. Immigrants should pay for this themselves.

	Total	White	African American	Latino	Asian
Very convincing	32%	34	37	8	23
Somewhat convincing	28	26	37	28	24
Not too convincing	19	19	11	21	30
Not at all convincing	19	17	13	41	23
Convincing	60%				
Not convincing	38				

- **The strongest arguments in favor of increased funding were building stronger communities, creating a better future, and saving money in the long run.**

Increasing opportunities for immigrants to learn English benefits not just immigrants but also the country as a whole. We want our immigrant neighbors to learn English, invest in their homes and their communities, and take an active role in their child’s education. By helping immigrants integrate, we are creating stronger communities and securing the future for all children.

	Total	White	African American	Latino	Asian
Very convincing	38%	36	40	52	46
Somewhat convincing	38	39	36	33	39
Not too convincing	11	10	9	10	13
Not at all convincing	12	13	13	4	2
Convincing	76%				
Not convincing	23				

Spending money on providing ESL classes for adult newcomers now will save us money in the future. Data show that people with strong basic education and literacy skills work and earn more than individuals with low skill levels. By enrolling in ESL programs and becoming proficient in English, immigrants will be more productive members of society, be able to get health care, deal with emergencies, continue to pay taxes, and pose less of a burden on public assistance programs in the future.

	Total	White	African American	Latino	Asian
Very convincing	38%	38	37	56	47
Somewhat convincing	35	34	38	31	41
Not too convincing	14	14	11	7	5
Not at all convincing	11	11	12	6	5
Convincing	74%				
Not convincing	24				

- ▶ **The worst performing pro-ESL instruction arguments were more convincing than the best performing anti-ESL arguments.**
- ▶ **The most trustworthy messengers were teachers and immigrants who have successfully learned English.**

Recommendations

In developing recommendations for a more effective communications strategy around the issue of public support for language acquisition programs, we can benefit from a very recent, comprehensive public opinion survey commissioned by the AAJC. This research shows that:

- ▶ A large majority (84%) of the public favors ESL programs generally.
- ▶ Once they have received some basic information, 57% of the public favors increased funding for ESL programs.
- ▶ A majority (57%) think that immigrants are either “very” or “somewhat motivated” to learn English, and only 18% of the public thinks they are “not at all motivated.”
- ▶ The strongest arguments for more funding are based on the frames of building stronger communities and investing now to save tax dollars in the future.
- ▶ The strongest arguments against more funding are based on the frames of personal responsibility and competition for social services.
- ▶ The most trustworthy messengers are teachers and immigrants who have learned English.

This data provides us with some clear guidelines for framing and promoting ESL in the public discourse.

Recommendation 1: Frame ESL initiatives and funding in terms of strong communities and investing now to save tax dollars later.

Because the public has a largely favorable view of ESL programs and immigrants' desire to learn English, a priority for messaging should be to focus on the two most compelling arguments for funding. These arguments can also be used to neutralize the personal responsibility and limited resources arguments, by explaining that ESL provides an opportunity for those who want to advance, and that investing in ESL will actually produce greater returns later. An emphasis on how ESL promotes the common good—rather than just helps immigrants—also appears important to persuasion.

Recommendation 2: Pitch upbeat feature stories about government-supported ESL programs that work.

The publication of more articles like those appearing in Appendix II will go a long way toward challenging negative stereotypes, demonstrating how ESL programs further the common good, and assigning an appropriate role for government. Identifying teachers and immigrants who have learned English and pitching them to reporters as quotable sources can build on the public's trust in those messengers.

Recommendation 3: Build relationships with Latino, Asian American, and other journalists of color.

A majority of the articles in our sample about immigrant integration were authored by journalists with Hispanic or Asian surnames: Bauza, Gonzalez, Kang, Reyes, and Vitullo-Martin. Reaching out and pitching to these and other Latino, Asian American, and other reporters of color should be a high priority. The Unity '08: Journalists of Color convention in July 2008 featured an all-day session organized by USC Annenberg's Institute for Justice and Journalism on "Immigration Storytelling: Keeping Ahead of the Fast-Changing Curve." There are many opportunities for synergy here.

Recommendation 4: Generate and place more opinion pieces.

The fact that very few opinion pieces were picked up by our scan suggests either that not many are being submitted or that op-ed editors are choosing not to publish them. By soliciting and placing strong opinion pieces and commentary that address the two obstacles to public support, advocates can begin to alter public perceptions. We recommend that the following types of op-eds and commentaries be solicited and aggressively pitched:

- ▶ Op-eds by local officials (mayors, school superintendents, city council members) who have opposed proposals to make English the "official language" and/or who support ESL programs. They are well-positioned to make the case that immigrants in their communities are eager to learn English, that the community, economy, and future will all be the stronger for it, and that the government should therefore lend its support.
- ▶ Op-eds by teachers and by prominent figures who learned English through ESL programs that advocate for ESL initiatives and funding, showcase successful programs, and use the arguments identified by AAJC's research.
- ▶ Commentary by demographers and researchers that challenges stereotypes based on new or existing research. On May 13, 2008, COX News Service distributed an article with the unfortunate and inaccurate headline, "Immigrants Less Integrated Than a Century Ago." In fact, the

study's major finding was that the pace of assimilation over the past twenty-five years is quicker than a century ago, and that "the nation's capacity to integrate new immigrants is strong." A coordinated effort to accurately describe this study's findings would have been helpful and strategic.

- ▶ Op-eds by teachers and school administrators that either highlight successful programs or make the case for expanding ESL programs.

Recommendation 5: Reconsider messages around language rights litigation.

Language rights litigation is an important weapon for the enforcement of human rights. Focusing solely on the remedy of providing more translation services, however, may have the unintended consequence of reinforcing the negative frame. In responding to media inquiries about specific cases, advocates involved in language rights litigation should consider a message that includes the importance of ESL programs as a longer-term solution to the problem of language rights.

PART II: Children of Immigrants

Executive Summary:

In this study we examine the public discourse surrounding the children of immigrants by looking at how they are being framed by the media, and how the dominant media frames are influencing public opinion. We conclude with a series of communications recommendations.

Media Content Analysis: Major Findings

- ▶ The media frames for the children of immigrants convey a sense of alarm tempered by compassion, evidence of integration, and assertions that the country needs their talents.
- ▶ Articles on population trends showing significant increases in numbers create a sense of alarm and feed into the fear that "foreign" children are placing unacceptable burdens on finite social services.

- ▶ But alarm is tempered by the compassion one would expect from a society that cherishes children, at least in its rhetoric. The idea that immigrant children should not be blamed for the “sins” of their parents was repeated and reinforced in widespread coverage of the DREAM Act debate.
- ▶ Feature stories about the integration of children of immigrants into mainstream society challenge the frame of “otherness” that characterizes much of the coverage of undocumented adults (that is, their parents).
- ▶ Individual stories included in coverage of the DREAM Act debate effectively conveyed the idea that children of immigrants have much to offer the country.

Public Opinion Analysis: Major Findings

- ▶ Public opinion research into American attitudes toward children of immigrants is sparse and narrowly focused, and with one limited exception none of the relevant published surveys tested arguments or messages. Findings are therefore tentative and limited.
- ▶ Residents of states with a long history of Hispanic immigration appear to be more accepting than residents of states with a more recent history.
- ▶ A large majority nationwide is aware of automatic citizenship for children born in the U.S. A smaller majority opposes changing the Constitution to deny citizenship to U.S.–born children of “illegal immigrants.”
- ▶ A poll taken at the time of the DREAM Act debate suggests that a majority of the public feared that passage would encourage more illegal immigration.

Recommendations

We recommend that advocates:

- 1. Conduct additional public opinion research** to gauge the degree of fear and alarm concerning population trends, and to test messages and arguments for inclusion and integration, both pro and con.
- 2. Concentrate on media markets** in areas of the country that have recently experienced increases in immigration. Positive stories and op-eds that communicate a value-based message of integration and inclusion should be proactively pitched to reporters and editors in those media markets.
- 3. Actively publicize new studies** that demonstrate that immigrant children are being successfully integrated into American society, and that their future contributions to the U.S. will provide significant economic, social, and cultural benefits to the country as a whole.
- 4. Continue promoting the voices and accomplishments of immigrant students on all media platforms.** These stories, however, should be framed and pitched in terms of how integration initiatives allowed those students to reach their full potential and contribution.

Media Analysis

SEARCH METHODOLOGY

Electronic searches were performed using Associated Press Multimedia, Gale Infotrac, Global Newsbank, and Proquest databases, with a total of 23 media outlets scrutinized over a seven-month period, from October 2007 to April 2008. Media outlets searched included the major national newspapers and newsweeklies, NPR, as well as local and regional papers from every region of the U.S. A list of media outlets included in the search is attached as Appendix I.

The search term combinations “Immigrant AND children” and “DREAM Act” were used, returning a total of 1,367 articles. From this we randomly culled 10%, or 136 articles (using the random sequence generator at <http://www.random.org>). These articles were assessed for relevance, and 58 articles were deemed usable.

TOPIC SUMMARIES

1. The Dream Act (23)

The Senate’s refusal to debate the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors Act received news and editorial coverage in all media markets. The news coverage emphasized the extreme partisanship still surrounding the immigration issue:

- ▶ “Demonstrating yet again **the potency of the immigration issue**, the Senate bill fell short of the 60 votes necessary to debate the Dream Act.” (*Chicago Tribune*, October 25, 2007.)
- ▶ “The Senate signaled a **desire to steer clear of divisive immigration issues** Wednesday by refusing to take up legislation that would provide a safe harbor for young adults who grew up in the USA after being brought here illegally by their parents.” (*USA Today*, October 25, 2007.)
- ▶ “The defeat underscored the difficulty of enacting even a narrowly tailored proposal in **the polarizing atmosphere surrounding immigration reform**.” (*Los Angeles Times*, October 25, 2007.)
- ▶ “The same dynamics that thwarted a major immigration overhaul last June played out Wednesday as the Senate rejected a much narrower bill that would offer a chance at citizenship for hundreds of thousands of young illegal immigrants who came to the U.S. as children.” (*Houston Chronicle*, October 25, 2007.)

Senator Dick Durbin, D-Ill., the bill’s main sponsor, was quoted in virtually all the news coverage. His message was twofold: (1) don’t blame children for what their parents did; and (2) these kids are the best and the brightest, and giving them a chance will be good for the country as a whole. Examples include:

- ▶ “It’s the right thing to do. This is talent we cannot afford to waste.” (*USA Today*, October 24, 2007.)
- ▶ “When you look into their [the children’s] eyes, you’ll see the same kind of hope for this country we want to see in our own children’s eyes, to be doctors and nurses and teachers, engineers, to find cures for diseases, start businesses, the things that make America grow. Give these kids a chance. Don’t take your anger about illegal immigration out on children who have nothing to say about this.” (NPR, “All Things Considered,” October 14, 2007.)

- ▶ “Since when in America do we visit the sins and crimes of parents on their children?” (*USA Today*, October 25, 2007.)
- ▶ “What crime did these children commit? They committed the crime of obeying their parents, following their parents to this country. Give them a chance to prove themselves to this country.” (*Washington Post*, October 25, 2007.)

Republican Senators James Inhofe, Mitch McConnell, and Jeff Sessions were the standard bearers for the opposition and their messages warned against “rewarding illegal behavior”; giving unfair advantage to “illegal” immigrants over “legal” immigrants; and passing a law that would encourage more immigration.

The DREAM Act editorials captured in our scan were universally critical of the Senate for not debating the bill. Here are some of the headlines:

- ▶ “Our Opinion: Students Here Illegally Deserved Chance at Dream.” (*Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, October 28, 2007.)
- ▶ “Dreams Crushed: The Bush Administration Vs. Young Immigrants.” (*Washington Post*, October 25, 2007.)
- ▶ “Mean Achievement: Lawmakers, Including Sen. John Cornyn, Slam the Door on Young Immigrants Eager to Serve.” (*Houston Chronicle*, October 29, 2007.)

2. College Tuition (10)

An exchange between Mitt Romney and Mike Huckabee, candidates for the Republican presidential nomination, concerning Huckabee’s support while he was governor of Arkansas for state scholarships for qualified children of the undocumented received widespread campaign news coverage. Most of the stories included Huckabee’s quote: “In all due respect, we are a better country than to punish children for what their parents did.” One example is:

- ▶ “Romney and Huckabee, who are in an increasingly tight battle in Iowa, clashed over whether children of illegal immigrants should receive college scholarships. Romney said Huckabee was wrong to support such a measure in Arkansas, to which Huckabee replied: ‘In all due respect, we are a better country than to punish children for what their parents did.’” (“In Debate, Romney and Giuliani Clash on Immigration Issues,” *Washington Post*, November 29, 2007.)

3. Fear and Victimhood (9)

These stories ranged from articles about the bullying of immigrant children by other children to the plight of children of immigrant workers who were the victims of workplace raids and deportations. They include:

- ▶ “A caravan of mini-vans approached Joseph Gallagher School . . . Doors slid open. Forty boys and girls from Africa spilled out . . . The vanpool emerged last year, after Bantu parents realized their children were being bullied on the bus to school. Mothers, who in Africa wrapped children on their backs to carry them through risky camps, devised a plan to move them safely through Cleveland.” (“A Tradition of Survival: A Self-Reliant Community of Bantu Refugees Invokes Values from Africa to Negotiate the Challenges of Life in Cleveland,” *The Plain Dealer*, November 23, 2007.)

- ▶ “In May he [Tom Selders, mayor of Greeley, Colorado] spoke at an open forum in Washington, D.C. about the effects of last year’s immigration raid on a meatpacking plant here, which led to the detention of 262 undocumented workers. ‘Many families and children were devastated by parents being arrested and detained. Children, citizens of the United States, were left without parents.’ (“Colorado Town Ousts Its Mayor, a Longtime Republican, after He Blasted Raid on Meatpacking Plant,” *Houston Chronicle*, November 28, 2007.)
- ▶ “On Monday, about 260 students in the Paradise Valley Unified School District who live near the . . . [Macehualli Work Center] did not show up at school. Strand [of the Northeast Phoenix Neighborhood Action Alliance] said parents were afraid for their children because of the controversy over the work center. District spokeswoman Judi Willis said parents who called in to report the absence stated they were keeping their children home because of a fear of being rounded up, accused of being undocumented immigrants.” (“Protesters, Minutemen Want Work Center Closed,” *Arizona Republic*, January 12, 2008.)

4. Demographic Changes (8)

This batch of articles reported on increases in the foreign-born population and their U.S.–born children. Some of the pieces were occasioned by the release of a new study by the Pew Research Center about population trends. Among the examples we found are:

- ▶ “This year, for the first time, more than half the students at the Silver Spring school spoke limited English . . . These newest LEP students are largely U.S. citizens, born within a few miles of their school but raised in homes where English is not spoken.” (“Young English Learners a Rising Tide in Suburbs,” *Washington Post*, November 13, 2007.)
- ▶ “With the third largest Latino population in the country, the Chicago area is no stranger to the Hispanic forces that have reshaped the nation. Latinos have driven Chicago’s population growth, stirred changes in the city’s neighborhoods, redirected marketing campaigns and changed the face of the city’s schools. Even as the pace of immigration slows, the Hispanic population continues to boom as Latino immigrants have kids here.” (“Latinos by the Numbers,” *Chicago Tribune*, October 23, 2007.)
- ▶ “The U.S. population will soar to 438 million by 2050, and the Hispanic population will triple, according to projections released Monday by the Pew Research Center . . . Even if immigration is limited, Hispanics’ share of the population will increase because they have higher birth rates than the overall population.” (“U.S. Growth Spurt Seen by 2050,” *USA Today*, February 12, 2008.)

5. Integration (8)

Most of these articles note the rapidity with which children of immigrants learn English and become integrated into U.S. society. Examples include:

- ▶ “Many immigrant children will start elementary school with poor English skills . . . But those Mexican and Guatemalan schoolchildren will learn to speak English quickly, because language skills are more easily acquired in youth.” (“Our Opinion: Immigrant Bashing Goes Its Sorry Way,” *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, February 10, 2008.)
- ▶ “The cultural argument against immigrants is that they will destroy America’s identity as an Anglo nation. A new survey from the Pew Hispanic Center of 14,000 Latinos living in the U.S. shows the falsity of that logic. It found that fully 88% of U.S.–born adult children of immigrants report that they speak English very well. Among later generations of Hispanic adults, the figure rises to 94% . . . In other words, the age-old process of assimilation is alive and well.” (Max Boot, “End the Immigrant Hysteria,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 3, 2007.)

- ▶ “As every immigrant knows, it’s far easier to learn a language as a 6-year-old than as a 16-year-old. ‘They’re like sponges,’ said Mary Lynn Pearlman, a kindergarten teacher here, speaking of her young pupils.” (“Building a Nation of Polyglots, Starting with the Very Young,” *New York Times*, November 14, 2007.)

Analysis

1. Media Frames: Alarm Tempered by Compassion, Evidence of Integration, and Assertions That the Country Needs Their Talents

Alarm over population trends

Numerous articles in the sample discuss immigrant children in the context of their increasing numbers. Stories about public schools and LEP children recite statistics or allude to “large” and “growing” numbers that may cause alarm for readers. This media frame is likely to feed the fear stoked by anti-immigration spokespeople that “illegal immigrant children” are using up finite social services at the expense of “American” children. One such example is: “‘Seats at state universities are valuable finite resources, and for every [illegal immigrant] kid who gets in, that’s one fewer legal immigrant or American who does not get in,’ said Ira Mehlman, spokesman for the Federation for American Immigration Reform.” (*Los Angeles Times*, October 26, 2007.)

Additional examples follow:

- ▶ “Lampson said the large Hispanic immigrant population and a growing Asian and African immigrant population in Texas have led to concerns that students with difficulty in English are being unfairly assessed for their performance by the same standards for students with English as their first language. In one example, Lampson cited a surge in the Lamar school district of its South Asian student population who speak Urdu only.” (“Educators Support Changes to Federal Law,” *Houston Chronicle*, November 8, 2007.)
- ▶ “Elementary school students with limited English proficiency (LEP) now number 20,000 in Fairfax, 10,000 in Montgomery, 9,000 in Prince William and 8,000 in Prince George’s counties. Just seven years ago, those four counties accounted for 23,000 elementary-grade LEP students.” (“Young English Learners a Rising Tide in Suburbs,” *Washington Post*, November 13, 2007.)
- ▶ “Immigrant children are fueling the increase in school enrollment across most of Maryland. In percentage terms, their numbers are growing faster than those of African-Americans.” (“Editorial: Tomorrow’s Students,” *Baltimore Sun*, January 4, 2008.)
- ▶ “Latinos have driven Chicago’s population growth, stirred changes in the city’s neighborhoods, redirected marketing campaigns and changed the face of the city’s schools. Even as the pace of immigration slows, the Hispanic population continues to boom as Latino immigrants have kids here.” (“Latinos by the Numbers,” *Chicago Tribune*, October 23, 2007.)

Tempered by compassion

But alarm is tempered by the sympathy and compassion one would expect from a society that cherishes children, at least in its rhetoric. The idea that immigrant children should not be blamed for the “sins” of their parents was repeated and reinforced in widespread coverage of two national policy debates. The Senate’s decision not to debate the DREAM Act in October 2007 was reported in all media outlets. Quotes from (Democratic) Senate sponsors carried this message:

- ▶ “The DREAM Act recognizes that children should not be penalized for the actions of their parents.” (Senator Harry Reid, NPR and *Los Angeles Times*.)
- ▶ “Since when in America do we visit the sins and crimes of parents on their children?” (Senator Dick Durbin, *USA Today* and *Houston Chronicle*.)

- ▶ “What crime did these children commit? They committed the crime of obeying their parents, following their parents to this country.” (Senator Dick Durbin, *Washington Post*.)

The DREAM Act controversy was quickly followed by a widely reported exchange between candidates for GOP nominee Mike Huckabee and Mitt Romney. Huckabee’s quote echoed Durbin’s message: “In all due respect, we are a better country than to punish children for what their parents did.” It was picked up by the *Boston Globe*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Los Angeles Times*, *New York Times*, *USA Today*, and *Washington Post*, and was cited favorably in several editorials as well. By linking the issue to basic American values (“Since when in America...”; “We are a better country than to...”), the Durbin and Huckabee messages would have resonated with the public.

Editorials and commentary about the lack of debate on the DREAM Act were universally critical and tended to use moralistic language emphasizing the opponents’ lack of compassion and foresight. The *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* called the decision “craven” and “an ugly bit of nativism, a short-sighted and nonsensical decision made to appease the Know-Nothings, not to advance the national interest” (October 28, 2007). The *Houston Chronicle* called it “a dismal day’s work” (October 29, 2007). The *Baltimore Sun* criticized its “meanness of spirit,” and the *Washington Post* characterized the Bush Administration’s refusal to support the Dream Act “cowardly” (both October 25, 2007).

Expressions of compassion for children were also prominent in pieces about workplace raids on immigrants:

- ▶ In news coverage of a meatpacking plant raid in Greeley, Colorado, in which 262 undocumented workers were detained, the mayor of the town was quoted: “Many families and children were devastated by parents being arrested and detained. Children, citizens of the United States, were left without parents.” (*Houston Chronicle* and *Chicago Tribune*.)
- ▶ An episode of NPR’s “Talk of the Nation” about a raid on a meatpacking plant in Marshalltown, Iowa, included this account from a Hispanic resident: “A lot of people congregated at the church because we have a really good leader, Sister Christine Feagan. And she starts calling ICE, calling places, calling jails to find out where the people are and what happened with the kids in the school because, in some situations, both parents were taken by the raid and the kids are alone in the school.”

Further tempered by evidence of integration

The media’s coverage of children of immigrants challenges the frame of “otherness” that characterizes much of the coverage of undocumented adults (their parents). The idea that children are quick to integrate comes across in articles about language acquisition in which teachers compare them to “sponges” (*New York Times*); a commentator has written: “These Mexican and Guatemalan school-children will learn to speak English quickly, because language skills are more easily acquired in youth” (*Atlanta Journal-Constitution*); and children themselves are quoted: “There’s this perception that everyone speaks Spanish or watches Univision, but my Spanish is very much limited to when I’m with my parents. In terms of media, we’re pretty much assimilated” (*Chicago Tribune*).

In our sample, this theme was reinforced by coverage of the Pew Research Center’s study, which showed: “While fewer than one in four Latino immigrants reports being able to speak English very well . . . fully 88% of their U.S.-born adult children report that they speak English very well. Among later generations of Hispanic adults, the figure rises to 94%” (*Los Angeles Times*).

Don't waste their talents

This theme was echoed throughout coverage of the DREAM Act debate. It conveys the potentially powerful idea that the country as a whole has something to lose by not ensuring the full integration of children of immigrants into U.S. society. It also brings to mind the enormously successful tagline still used by the United Negro College Fund: “A mind is a terrible thing to waste.” Quotes like the following featured prominently in the media’s coverage:

- ▶ “It’s the right thing to do. This is talent we cannot afford to waste.” (Senator Dick Durbin, *USA Today*.)
- ▶ “When you look into their [the children’s] eyes, you’ll see the same kind of hope for this country we want to see in our own children’s eyes, to be doctors and nurses and teachers, engineers, to find cures for diseases, start businesses, the things that make America grow. Give these kids a chance.” (Senator Dick Durbin, NPR, “All Things Considered.”)

And stories of individual students highlighted their talents and accomplishments:

- ▶ “Wilbur, 20, a UCLA junior in political science . . . was brought to the U.S. at age 7, earned a 3.6 GPA at his Pasadena high school, played varsity soccer and won a community service scholarship for initiating a tutoring program for children. Now struggling to manage his academic workload, his father’s gardening business and family obligations to his mother and younger sibling, he said the Dream Act was his only hope for a future. ‘We’re not trying to ask for money; we just want an opportunity to work because we’ve been here all of our lives,’ he said. ‘It’s really disappointing and sad, because we represent the best and brightest immigrants of this era.’” (*Los Angeles Times*.)
- ▶ “They [DREAM Act opponents in the Senate] would dash the dreams of a young man such as Marco, a Georgia Tech engineering student who earned a perfect score on the math portion of his SAT. A graduate of Cross Keys High School in DeKalb County, Marco has been in this country since he was 4.” (Editorial, *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*.)

2. Sources

Advocates on either side of the immigration debate have a low profile in this sample of articles.² Spokespeople for immigrant rights organizations were quoted in only two news articles, and we did not find any op-eds authored by advocates. On the other hand, if the communications strategy was to put immigrant students front and center by giving them access to the media, it was an evident success. Students’ quotes were included in much of the news coverage of the DREAM Act, and they conveyed a strong, positive, and consistent message.

2. The two advocates quoted were Roberto Reveles, of Somos America, and Anike Tourse, of the Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights, Los Angeles.

Public Opinion Analysis

Public opinion research into American attitudes toward children of immigrants is sparse and narrowly focused, and with one limited exception none of the relevant published surveys tested arguments or messages. The observations that follow are therefore tentative and limited.

Residents of states with a long history of Latino immigration appear to be more accepting than residents of states with a more recent history.

Regional differences can be perceived in responses to recent state surveys about in-state tuition. Compare the Southwest Poll, which surveyed 1,013 residents of the Southwest U.S., with a poll done at the same time of Wisconsin residents for whom increased immigration is a more recent and less familiar phenomenon:³

Southwest U.S.

Q. Undocumented immigrants attending public colleges and universities should be able to pay in-state tuition rates if they grew up and graduated from a high school in the state.

Agree strongly	43%
Agree somewhat	28
Disagree somewhat	9
Disagree strongly	17
Agree	71%
Disagree	26%

(Southwest Poll by Arizona State University conducted November 6–December 19, 2007. N = 1,013 residents in the Southwest U.S.)

Wisconsin

Q. Should the state of Wisconsin allow illegal immigrants to receive discounted in-state tuition at the University of Wisconsin?

Yes	19%
No	86

(Survey commissioned by Wisconsin Policy Research Institute and conducted December 2–3, 2007. N = 600 Wisconsin residents.)

3. The wording of the question may account for some of the difference. The Southwest Poll used the term “undocumented immigrants” and “in-state tuition rates”; the Wisconsin poll used the more negative term “illegal immigrants” and referred to “discounted in-state tuition.”

Connecticut

Connecticut residents, who are less accustomed to immigration than residents of the Southwest but more so than residents of Wisconsin, fall in the middle.

Q. A proposal being discussed here in Connecticut would allow illegal immigrants who have attended high school in the state to pay resident, or in-state, tuition rates to attend a Connecticut public university or college, rather than paying higher, out-of-state rates. Do you favor or oppose this?

Strongly favor	28%
Somewhat favor	25
Somewhat oppose	8
Strongly oppose	33
<hr/>	
Favor	53%
Oppose	41

(Poll by the Hartford Courant and the Center for Survey Research and Analysis at the University of Connecticut conducted April 2007. N = 501 Connecticut residents.)

Similar regional differences appear with respect to the acceptance of young children of immigrants:

Wisconsin

Q. Would you favor or oppose allowing illegal immigrant children to attend your local public schools?

Favor	46%
Oppose	46

Connecticut

Q. Do you think the children of illegal immigrants should or should not be allowed to attend public elementary and high schools in Connecticut?

Should be allowed	60%
Should not be	33 ⁴

A large majority nationwide is aware of automatic citizenship for children born in the U.S., and a smaller majority opposes changing the Constitution.

Q. Were you aware that a child born to illegal immigrants in the U.S. is automatically a U.S. citizen, or weren't you aware of that?

	Yes, aware	No, not aware
National	80%	19%
Chicago	82	17
Las Vegas	80	11
Phoenix	90	10
Raleigh-Durham	81	19
Washington, D.C.	84	15

Q. Would you favor changing the Constitution so that the parents must be legal residents of the U.S. in order for their newborn child to be a citizen, or should the Constitution be left as it is?

	Favor changing	Leave as is
National	42%	54%
Chicago	36	62
Las Vegas	43	53
Phoenix	43	54
Raleigh-Durham	42	55
Washington, D.C.	33	63

(Immigration survey by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press and the Pew Hispanic Center conducted February 8–March 7, 2006. N = 2000 adults.)

A poll taken at the time of the DREAM Act debate suggests that a majority feared that passage would encourage more illegal immigration.

Q. Suppose children of illegal immigrants can gain citizenship by attending college in the U.S. Will that encourage even more people to enter the U.S. illegally?

Yes	66%
No	15
Not sure	17

(Rasmussen Reports, conducted October 24–25, 2007. N = 800 likely voters.)

Recommendations

The task at hand is to allay the public's fears that the increase in the numbers of children of immigrants presents an unacceptable burden on the country. This can be done by reinforcing the positive media frame that combines compassion with the understanding that, as in the past, the children of today's immigrants are becoming integrated into U.S. society, and they have much to offer the nation as a whole.

Recommendation 1: Conduct additional public opinion research.

It would be very productive to probe public attitudes in order to gauge the degree of fear and alarm concerning population trends, to explore important regional and other demographic differences, and to test messages and arguments, both pro and con for inclusion and integration.

Recommendation 2: Educate the public.

Research and reports from credible sources showing that, as with past waves of immigration, immigrant children today are being successfully integrated into American society—and that their future contributions to the U.S. will provide significant economic, social, and cultural benefits to the country as a whole—should be aggressively publicized.

Recommendation 3: Concentrate on certain media markets.

Strong opposition to inclusion programs for children of immigrants appears to come from areas of the country that have recently experienced increases in immigration. Positive stories and op-eds that communicate a value-based message of integration and inclusion should be proactively pitched to reporters in those media markets.

Recommendation 4: Continue promoting the voices of immigrant students.

Stories should be pitched that feature current and former students who are thriving and contributing to the economy and culture as a result of integration programs. Telling that systemic story—preferably while featuring groups of immigrants instead of individuals—may help to build understanding and support.

•



The **Opportunity** Agenda

*Building the National Will
to Expand Opportunity in America*

568 Broadway.
Suite 302
New York, NY 10012
Tel: 212-334-5977
Fax: 212-334-2656

www.opportunityagenda.org