



BREAKING DOWN THE
BARRIERS
FOR IMMIGRANT YOUTH

A report on the barriers facing immigrant youth in Greater Portland and
recommendations on how to help this generation survive and thrive in Maine

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Compiled for the Hudson Foundation by LearningWorks,
The Institute for Civic Leadership and Steve Wessler

2013

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I won’t get the job.”

“We want our children in school and
staying out of trouble.”

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They assume they know our lives,
but they do not have a clue.”

“We have to be happy where we are and work
with what we have. We have peace, school and
housing (even if the housing isn’t appropriate
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have the same chance, but it’s enough.”

“I saw some kids down at lunch
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everybody would start laughing.”

“I hear white Americans laugh at us
for speaking Arabic.”

“When I take my brother to the store people
assume I am a single mom and say ‘are those
your kids.’ I am 15!!!”

“Police stopped me when I was walking
and asked me if I had robbed a store.
This made me angry.”

“Whenever I go out with my family I see
how people look at us that makes me feel
that they have something against me.”

“Teachers assume we need help. This makes
me feel stupid and unimportant.”



Portland youth members
of the Telling Room

Photos by Winky Lewis



The project was funded by the Hudson Foundation, a Maine charitable foundation that has been funding efforts to improve the lives of Mainers since 1992. During the project, United Way of Greater Portland provided supplemental funding for additional community conversations.

This data and its conclusions reflect the hard work and advice of those who served on the project’s Leadership Team: Emma Connor, LW Project Outreach Coordinator; Dolly Hersom, House of Languages; Jan Kearce, Institute for Civic Leadership, Executive Director; Mia Ntahobari, Burundi Association; Joel Russ, former LW Development Director; Blanca Santiago, Independent Consultant (now at Maine Community Foundation); Ethan Strimling, LW CEO; and Steve Wessler.

This report would also not have been possible without the questions, advice and encouragement from Hudson Foundation Board members Gillian Schair, Erica Schair-Cardona, and Justin Schair

Although the funders and researchers were obviously key to preparing this document, all of it pales in comparison to the youth and families who entrusted us enough to speak honestly about their experiences in Maine. While we cannot list the names of all 482 people who participated, we can say thank you and honor what they gave by sharing this report and acting on its conclusions.



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“The youth and parents who we met with are remarkable for their strength in creating a new and productive life in Maine...”

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Almost 500 recent immigrants to greater Portland, Maine participated in this study.

Over the course of the last year the Hudson Foundation commissioned LearningWorks and its two partners, the Institute for Civic Leadership and Steve Wessler to conduct a focus-group study of almost 500 recent immigrants to Greater Portland, Maine. The purpose of the study was to provide comprehensive qualitative data regarding the barriers facing immigrant, refugee, and asylee youth who live in this area. The depth and breadth of the interview and focus group data that we gathered provides us with a solid platform from which both to identify barriers and to recommend new policy directions.

On the following pages you will hear directly from the youth and families struggling to survive in a new culture with a different language and unfamiliar customs. The youth and parents who we met with are remarkable for their strength in creating a new and productive life in Maine and also for the difficulties and hardships they must surmount. However, the resilience is deeply familiar in its similarity to all of the immigrant groups that came before: from the Irish to the Jews, from the Italians to the Francos, from the Chinese to Pacific Islanders.

The report is published as a way to give added volume to the voices and struggles of these, our new neighbors. Our hope is that, through sharing its content, we can assist schools, police departments and other institutions to work more effectively to support immigrant and refugee youth and parents. But we also release it in hopes that we will be even more prepared for the next generation that arrives to build our great state and nation.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

While the data gathered in this report is immense and the conclusions broad, there were four areas of barriers for youth that rose most prominently: acquiring English proficiency, racial bias, family acculturation, and individual and family trauma

Acquiring English

The ability of immigrant youth and their parents to effectively converse, read and write in English is critical to academic success, pursuit of college degrees, and the ability to secure meaningful well-paying jobs. This report recommends the following approaches:

- * Increase available English Language classes in the greater Portland area for parents.
- * Increase day care options for immigrant families who need to go to school.
- * Provide bi-lingual dictionaries, library cards, and orientation for all new immigrants.
- * Build a network of conversation groups for people to utilize their English skills.
- * Further analyze the effectiveness of current English language programs in K-12.

Racial Bias

The racial bias that immigrant and youth of color experience, particularly African youth and Hispanic youth, is pervasive and all-encompassing. They hear racial slurs on the school bus and in school, and they experience differential treatment from well meaning teachers. They are followed in stores, and they hear degrading comments from customers and clerks. They hear degrading language in their neighborhoods and at times in their workplaces. This report recommends the following approaches:

- * Provide teachers with training on how to avoid disempowering students of color.
- * Provide students with low key interventions to confront degrading language.
- * Support organizations of color to train parents on how to talk about bias with children.
- * Expand mentoring programs for immigrant, refugee, and all students of color.
- * Improve curricula to teach about all ethnic groups represented in school.

“...there were four areas of barriers for youth that rose most prominently: acquiring English proficiency, racial bias, family acculturation, and individual and family trauma.”

Family Acculturation

Like many parents immigrants have high hopes for their children. However, supporting the path to success for their children can be challenging as they face issues related to their own acculturation: knowledge of support systems, language limitations, inability to find adequate work, and incidences of racial bias. Tension between desire for and speed of parent and child acculturation can also affect family cohesion. This report recommends the following approaches:

- * Ensure that people from all cultures are represented in schools, services, and city jobs.
- * Develop youth programs that are close to home and run by the community.
- * Develop coaches to assist new Mainers with culture, education, jobs, etc.

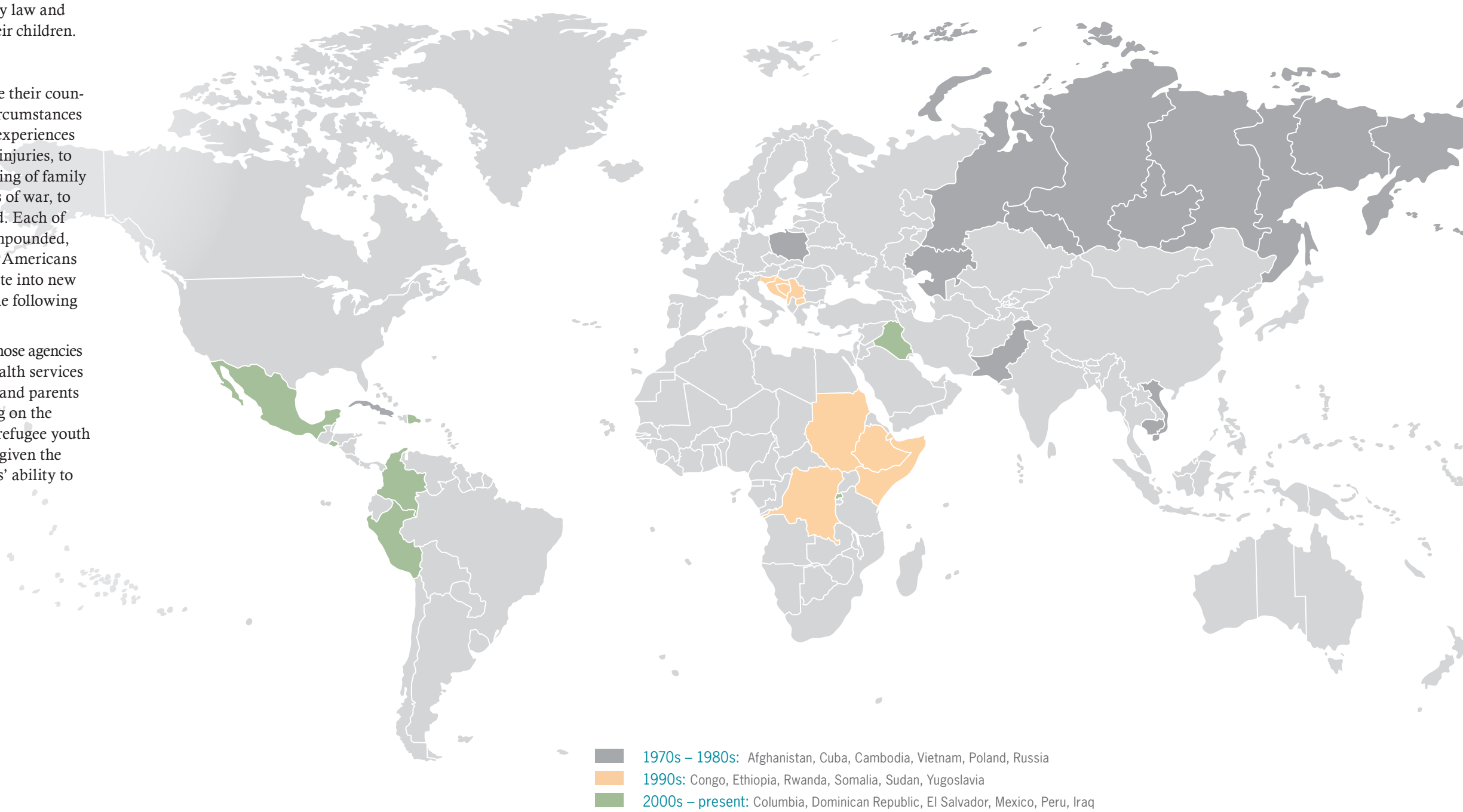
* Support ethnic community based organizations in their efforts to develop materials to help parents understand family law and navigating a new culture with their children.

Individual and family trauma

Parents may have chosen to leave their country, fled or been driven out by circumstances beyond their control. These life experiences range from debilitating physical injuries, to loss of family members, to lowering of family status, to rape and the calamities of war, to the loss of identity and homeland. Each of these experiences, alone and compounded, present significant issues as new Americans first confront and then acculturate into new communities. We recommend the following approach:

* Provide sufficient support to those agencies that currently provide mental health services to immigrant and refugee youth and parents on coping with trauma. Focusing on the mental health and well being of refugee youth is an area of particular concern, given the impact of trauma on the students’ ability to learn.

ORIGINS OF RECENT IMMIGRANTS TO PORTLAND, MAINE





INTRODUCTION

Report Background

This report is the culmination of a project designed to identify strategies for overcoming barriers to success for immigrant, refugee and asylee youth (shortened to immigrant hereafter) in Greater Portland, Maine. The project was funded by the Hudson Foundation, a Maine charitable foundation that has been funding efforts to improve the lives of Mainers since 1992. During the project United Way of Greater Portland provided additional support. UWGP, who is strategically focused on healthcare, income and education, provided additional funding for community conversations.

The grant was awarded to LearningWorks (LW), a non-profit organization dedicated to providing the best learning opportunities in Southern Maine for at-risk youth, the immigrant community, and low-income families. LW was joined by two partners, the Institute for Civic Leadership (ICL) and Steve Wessler. ICL builds Maine's civic capacity by training, supporting, engaging, and convening a growing network of skilled leaders. Steve Wessler has been engaged in human rights work in Maine and elsewhere for the past 21 years. This report would not have been possible without the financial support and questions, advice and encouragement from Hudson Foundation Board members Gillian Schair, Erica Schair-Cardona, and Justin Schair.

This report reflects the hard work and advice of those who served on the project's Leadership Team: Dolly Hersom, House of Languages;

Mia Ntahobari, Burundi Association; Joel Russ, former LW Development Director; Blanca Santiago, Independent Consultant (now at Maine Community Foundation); Ethan Strimling, LW Executive Director; Emma Connor, LW Project Outreach Coordinator; Jan Kearce, ICL Executive Director; and Steve Wessler. Emma Connor, the project's sole dedicated staff person, was also responsible for outreach and research.¹

Our "bottom-up" research was designed to primarily focus on hearing the voices and stories of immigrants and the people who serve them. We thank our stakeholders – the youth, parents, service providers, and others – who shared their time, experience and hopes with us as we listened deeply to our community. Their stories are the backbone of this report.

¹Joel Russ retired from LearningWorks in January 2013. His work in coordinating the project for its first nine months was superb and this project could not have succeeded without him. Blanca Santiago left the Leadership Team in January, 2013 when she took a position at the Maine Community Foundation.

Major Findings from Our Research

After speaking with over 380 young people and at least 130 adults, we identified four significant barriers to the full inclusion and success of immigrant youth: acquiring proficiency in speaking, reading and writing English; racial bias; individual and family trauma; and family acculturation.

The ability of immigrant youth to effectively converse, read and write in English is critical to academic success, pursuit of college degrees and the ability to secure meaningful well-paying jobs. Beyond facility with the English language, a key ingredient of success is a sense of self-esteem that encompasses both self and family. The sense that not only does one have the capacity to succeed, but deserves to succeed and has the opportunity to do so provides motivation, seeds aspiration and turns hopes into reality. Racial bias, trauma and family acculturation affect self-esteem and the ability to become proficient in English.

The racial bias that immigrant and youth of color experience is pervasive, particularly for African and Hispanic young people. Racial bias occurs in schools, jobs, neighborhood and shopping. Racial bias for students of color is omnipresent. This bias can and does negatively affect self-esteem. The lower self-esteem caused by repeated exposure to racial bias can lead to anger, depression and negatively affect academic success – including learning the English language, and lead to difficulties finding good jobs. The racial bias directed at immigrant and refugee youth is very similar to the bias directed at American born students of color. Accordingly, the recommendations discussed at the end of this report for steps to reduce both racial bias directed at youth of color and the impact of that bias should be applied to immigrant/refugee and American born youth of color.

Parents may have chosen to leave their country, fled or been driven out by circumstances beyond their control. Each of those immigration pathways, as well as the potential desire to return “home,” has significant influence on the ability of parents and children to acculturate. They arrive in our city with the values, experiences, education, life stories and hopes that provide many of the assets, as well as the motivation to succeed in a new environment. At the same time, they may emotionally and physically carry the pain of experiences that are not easily overcome in a different, potentially unwelcoming community. These life experiences, many of them traumatic, range from debilitating physical injuries to loss of family members through death or separation, lowering of family status, reduced resources, rape, the calamities of war, long term stays in refugee camps and the loss of identity and homeland. Each of these experiences, alone and often compounded, can present significant issues as new Americans first confront and then acculturate into new communities. Learning English and a whole new way of being are required during one of the most stressful times in their lives.

Like many parents, immigrant parents have high hopes of their children pursuing their education, finding good jobs, being happy and contributing to their community and family. They also want their children to honor their cultural traditions or, at least, be proud of their origins. Supporting the path to success for their children can be challenging as they face issues related to their own acculturation – knowledge of educational and community support systems, language limitations, inability to find jobs that match their qualifications, work schedules that affect time with their children, incidences of racial bias and incomes that may not match the needs of their families. These issues can also affect family cohesion as the tension between desire for and speed of parent and child acculturation is out of sync.

“The racial bias that immigrant and youth of color experience is pervasive...”



IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR GREATER PORTLAND

Our study focused on the experience of immigrant and refugee youth in Portland, South Portland and Westbrook. The data below is only for Portland, but it provides a sense of the magnitude of challenges presented by rapid changes in demographics.

With a population of 66,363 (U.S. Census, 2011), Portland is Maine's largest and most diverse city. In the last 25 years, Portland's diversity underwent exponential change as it became a resettlement site for refugees from all over the world. In fact, in the last ten years alone, the minority populations of Portland increased from 9% (2000 Census) to 16.7% (2010 census).

During the '70s and '80s, refugees from Afghanistan, Cuba, Cambodia, Vietnam, Poland, and Russia resettled here. In the '90s, refugee arrivals were from Congo, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Somalia, Sudan, and Yugoslavia. In the last five years, families from Colombia, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Mexico, and Peru have arrived in great numbers. Finally, in the past couple of years a large number of refugees from Iraq have become residents of the city.

Over 90% of the refugees in Maine live in Portland and the U.S. Department of Justice identified Portland as having a statistically significant number of refugees per capita. It is harder to obtain accurate numbers of immigrants but we believe that Portland has the largest number of immigrants of any city in the state.

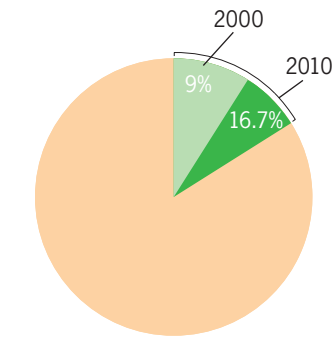
Portland Public Schools (PPS) serve 7,063 students at 10 elementary schools, 3 middle schools, 4 high schools, and one K-12 alternative school. In 1987, PPS had five languages other than English spoken by students. Now, over 60 languages are represented. Some are common, such as Arabic, Russian, Somali, Spanish, and Vietnamese. Others, less common, include Acholi, Amharic, Dari, Azande, Nuer, and Pashto. In 1987, PPS' English as a Second Language (ESL) population was just 150 students. Now, the district has over 1,800 language minority students, representing 25% of the total school population. About 1,400 of them are identified as English Language Learners (ELLs).

Portland Adult Education (PAE) immigrant enrollment grew from 1,178 in 2009 to 1,459 in 2012. While funding increased to support the growing demand, there is still a long waiting list for English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes, as well as continuing need for classes that teach the vocabulary necessary for specific jobs. The 1,459 students in 2012 were from 73 countries around the world. However, 6 countries represent 70% of the total as follows: Somalia – 28%, Burundi – 10%, Iraq – 10%, Sudan – 10%, DRC – 7% and Rwanda – 6%. While the number of students has grown, the number of hours of instruction per student has significantly decreased.

Over the past ten years, the overall youth population in Maine decreased by 5.8% while the minority population has increased 72%.

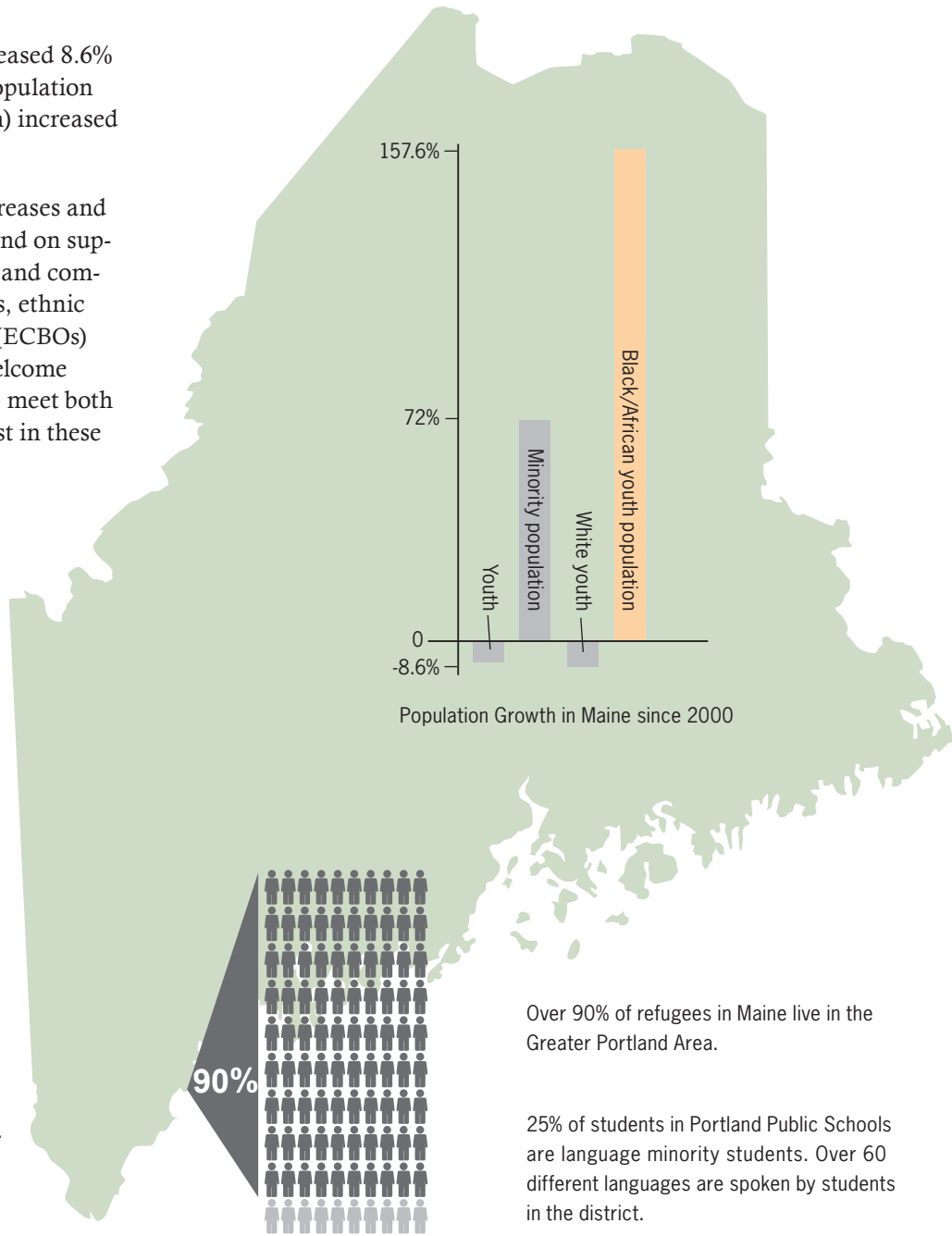
The white youth population decreased 8.6% while the Black/African youth population (largely immigrant/refugee youth) increased 157.6%.

As the immigrant population increases and the demographics shift, the demand on support systems increases in volume and complexity. Service providers, schools, ethnic community based organizations (ECBOs) and individuals stepping up to welcome new Americans are challenged to meet both shared and unique needs that exist in these populations.



Minority Population of Portland, ME

In the past 10 years Portland's minority populations increased from 9% to 16.7%.



Over 90% of refugees in Maine live in the Greater Portland Area.

25% of students in Portland Public Schools are language minority students. Over 60 different languages are spoken by students in the district.



RESEARCH PROCESS

Four sources of research inform the findings in this report: Community conversations with adults, youth focus groups, stakeholder interviews, and research of existing Maine and national data.

Community Conversations with Adults

Jan Kearce, Emma Connor and Mia Ntahobari collectively conducted 14 Community Conversations with a total of 106 adult members from the greater Portland immigrant communities. The participants in these conversations came from 6 nations in Africa, the Middle East and Latin and South America. With immigrants from over 80 countries, these populations were chosen because they represent the most recent wave of new Americans.

Nationality	# of Adults	% of Total Adults
African		
Angola	1	0.9
Burundi	14	13.2
Democratic Republic of Congo	20	18.9
Rwanda	5	4.7
Somalia	24	22.6
South Sudan	18	17.0
Hispanic	7	6.6
Middle East, Arabic		
Afghanistan	5	4.7
Egypt	1	0.9
Iran	2	1.9
Iraq	3	2.8
Asian (Cambodian)	1	0.9
White	2	1.9
Russian	2	1.9
Unknown	1	0.9
Total	106	

Youth Focus Groups

Steve Wessler, with assistance from Emma Connor, conducted 44 focus groups with 383 youth from ages 9 to 18 in 10 elementary, middle and high schools in Portland, South Portland and Westbrook. We also conducted focus groups in after-school and other programs in Portland and at Long Creek Youth Development Center. (A small number of youth were younger than 9 and older than 18.) The participants came from the following groups:

Nationality	# of Students	% of Total Students
African	142	38%
African American	32	9%
Hispanic	47	13%
Arabic	22	6%
European (Immigrant)	16	4%
Caribbean	9	2%
Asian	47	13%
White	61	16%

Stakeholder Interviews:

Jan Kearce, Joel Russ, Blanca Santiago, Mia Ntahobari and Ethan Strimling took the lead in this effort. We conducted 24 interviews with individuals from Ethnic Community Building Organizations, social services agencies, educational institutions, health care institutions, and juvenile justice agencies and facilities. Stakeholders were also convened to review a summary of the findings and engage in a conversation about recommendations.

Research of existing Maine and national data:

Emma Connor and Dolly Hersom took the lead on this effort. We reviewed over 35 reports and studies on issues affecting immigrant youth, both in Maine and across the nation. Jan Kearce conducted additional research on the impact of family acculturation on the success of immigrant children.

In total, we met with almost 500 adults and youth during this project.





BARRIERS {AND ASSETS} FACING IMMIGRANT YOUTH

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BARRIERS IDENTIFIED BY IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE YOUTH

“We saw both the hopes and the dimming of hopes play out in our own community...”

BARRIERS {AND ASSETS}

ASPIRATIONS

According to studies shared or conducted by Carola and Marcelo Suarez Orozco for their book, *Children of Immigration*, “hope is the single trait that cuts across at least the initial stages of all immigrations. The hope for a better tomorrow is the mantra. It is a slight advantage that immigrants have over successive generations. It is a quality that is likely to shift and fade as the children of immigrants ... encounter the structural limitations and ambivalent embrace of their new home.” We saw both the hopes and the dimming of hopes play out in our own community.

In most of the focus groups, youth were asked to share hopes for their post high school graduation lives. Most of the young people are planning to attend college with a small number looking to join one of the armed services after high school. Only a very few students said that they were planning to enter the job market directly after high school. Over half of the students want to pursue a career that would require them to obtain a graduate degree. The aspirations of students did not vary between immigrant/refugee students and American born students or between white students and students of color.

The community conversations revealed that the parents of immigrant and refugee youth have similar hopes as their children: that

their children will go to college and enter into a profession. Parents also expressed their hopes that their children would be happy, as well as give back to their communities and families.

Beyond the hopes and dreams that parents universally share with others across the country, they want their children to successfully co-exist in two cultures. While fervently hoping that their children “fit-in” to the new culture, they also want their children to retain the culture of the family. This hope ranges from honoring their culture and celebrating their nationality to fully embracing the dress, behavior, language and religion of the old culture. What parents wanted for their children, they tended to want for themselves as many continue to be solidly planted in the old culture while both seeking and resisting acculturation. For some parents, this state of tension is on-going as they envision a time when they can return to their country of origin.

Parents aspire to play a role in their children’s success. Many consider that it is their cultural and personal responsibility to ensure that their children grow up to be good citizens with successful careers, families and culturally appropriate values. They want to be loving, engaged and supportive parents. At the same time, parents are concerned that they have lost the knowledge, as well as the power, to be a guide for their children. This

adds additional stress as the success or failure of the child may be deemed the success or failure of the father or father/mother in the eyes of their community.

Below are comments expressed by parents regarding hopes for their children:

We want our children in school and staying out of trouble.

For every individual who has children, their first priority is to lead their children in education and life to become successful.

Most important is the integration of my children into this culture. I am happy that where my children go to school is very diverse.

Being a part of this community is most important. Integration is a process, but the biggest challenge is the language.

We have to be happy where we are and work with what we have. We have peace, school and housing (even if the housing isn’t appropriate given the size of the family). We have enough to develop good relationships and for our children to go to school. This provides a chance to get everything they need. We (the parents) don’t have the same chance, but it’s enough.

The consistency of the high aspirations among student and parent groups is important because it strongly suggests that aspirations are an asset, not a barrier for immigrant and refugee youth. At the same time, other barriers – discussed below - can undermine the ability of both youth and parents to achieve their aspirations. This may lead to anger, depression, drop-outs, abuse of drugs and alcohol or illegal activity as youth cope with barriers and seek ways to feel successful.

EDUCATION

The vast majority of students greatly valued the education they are receiving; respect, admire and like their teachers; and have formed strong friendships both within and outside their racial, national, ethnic or religious group. Parents were equally grateful for their children’s educational opportunities, as well as the fact that K-12 public education is free (no cost to the parents). However, both students and parents talked extensively about issues in schools. Therefore, much of the

“... being a part of this community is most important. Integration is a process, but the biggest challenge is the language.”

material below focuses on concerns reported with the education of immigrant and refugee students. American born students of color who participated in our focus groups reported similar concerns and, therefore, are included in this report.

The students who participated in focus groups strongly indicated that racial bias is a major barrier for immigrant and refugee students. Racial bias directed at American born students of color creates a similar barrier. The comments of students also indicated that gaining proficiency in English is a major barrier. The following details some of these concerns:

// Use Of Degrading Language By Students

The pervasiveness of racially degrading language in schools is deeply disturbing. It also is very damaging to immigrant and refugee and American born students of color.

Students in the focus groups reported hearing degrading language in school about Muslims and Arabic Speakers, African Americans, Africans, Hispanics and Asians. White students reported hearing this degrading language with as much frequency or more than did immigrants and American born students of color.

“Some white people are kind of scared of blacks, as if we are like brutal.”

In one focus group with ten white American born students, they said that they hear jokes every day about black people and hear jokes about Asians, Muslims and Arabs less frequently. A different group of nine white high school students described the stereotypes they hear at school: Africans steal things, don’t speak English and are not intelligent. Asians are good at math and science. Muslims are terrorists. Hispanics steal and jump the border. In a focus group with eleven white middle school students, eight agreed that immigrants should be required to speak English before they come to the US.

The quotes from students in this and following sections of the report represent only a portion of the relevant comments. The appendix to this report contains a far greater number of comments.

MUSLIMS

Students from most groups described hearing negative words about Muslims and Arabic speakers.

I was called Osama bin Laden by white and African American students. I hear someone called terrorist multiple times per week. I used to get angry and want to fight, but now am used to it. It makes me feel sad now. They

don’t know who I am and they are ignorant about the Middle East. (Arabic speaker HS)²

I hear white Americans laugh at us for speaking Arabic. (Arabic speaker, MS)

On the bus someone said to an Iraqi student, “your god is fake” and then cursed Allah saying “God fuck Allah.” (Immigrant MS)

A kid said, “I hate Iraqis.” (Immigrant MS)

We hear terrorist, Osama is your cousin, a hijab is a towel and we hide bombs in our hijabs. (African HS) [Several African students commented that they hear these words in the classroom as well as in the hallway.]

People are scared of Muslims. (Muslim HS)

It’s not just the color of your skin or where you are from, but it also is clothing. They ask, “why are you wearing that?” [referring to her hijab] (Muslim HS)

Muslims are terrorists, they should all just die. (Immigrant MS)

Muslims get everything because the government buys it for them. (White HS)

You guys came and terrorized our country. This is our country not yours. Get out of our country. (African MS)

AFRICANS

The students in one focus group with Africans said they are stereotyped by white students as eating only fried chicken, running fast, dropping out of school and not being able to speak English. Several African students said that they thought white students are scared of black students. One student wrote, “Some white people are kind of scared of blacks, as if we are like brutal.” (African HS)

The following are comments that students have heard in their schools about Africans:

They burned down the twin towers. (White MS)

They think that refugees lived in dirt huts and played with lions. They assume they know our lives, but they do not have a clue. (African HS)

A white kid online wrote that Somalis smell. This escalated to arguments and anger that could have become physical. (African HS)

An Asian student and I were watching a video in class. In the clip we saw this starving African and the Asian student blurted out, “that’s your dad”. (African HS)

People say we are violent because of the wars in Africa. (African MS)

“Muslims are terrorists; they should all just die.”

White students make comments about black people eating fried chicken and corn bread and the teacher doesn’t say anything. (African MS)

I heard a white kid at school tell a joke, “Why are blacks afraid to dream? Because the last one to have a dream was shot.” (African MS)

“Go back to Africa you terrorist.” (African HS)

“Oh my god. I forgot my laptop, almost thought a black person stole it.” (African HS)

“She is good at basketball because she’s black. She is good at dancing because she’s black.” (Asian HS)

ASIANS

In one focus group with eleven middle school white students all of them reported seeing students pull their eyes to the side to mimic what they think Asian students look like. Students also hear white students mimic Asian languages. Students reported only occasionally hearing the word “chink” as a slur about Asians.

“I saw some kids down at lunch stretch their eyes and go, ‘Hey, look. I am Asian.’”

The following are comments about Asians heard by students in schools:

They think we all look alike, are good at math, eat dogs and cats, are all martial arts people and that we all break dance. (Asian HS)

Students assume that we are all Chinese. (Asian HS)

I saw some kids down at lunch stretch their eyes and go, “Hey, look. I am Asian.” And then everybody would start laughing. (White MS)

AFRICAN AMERICANS

In a focus group with twelve African American high school students, all of them said they hear the word nigger from white students. Four students hear the word from white students at least once per day.

In a focus group with six black (immigrant and American born) girls, ages 10 through 12, all described hearing white students say that Africans are stupid between a couple of times per week to every day. Two students, one Haitian and the other Jamaican, commented that people from both their countries are stereotyped as “smoking weed and running fast.”

²MS refers to Middle School, ES refers to Elementary School and HS refers to High School.

“...[S]tudents of color perceive [some teachers] as telling them that they are not smart...”

The following are some of the comments heard by students in school about black people:

People say a lot that the African American students are thieves and don't do their work. They just all think they're bad people. (White HS)

“Where do you hide a black man’s food stamps? Under his work boots.” (White HS)

“Why do black people smell like shit? Because they are shit.” (Immigrant MS)

“What do black people and apples have in common? They both look good hanging from trees.” (African MS)

When I take my brother to the store people assume I am a single mom and say, “are those your kids.” I am 15!!! (African American HS)

Someone was talking about how black people are faster than white people. Someone else said, “Well, we white people are smarter.” (White HS)

When talking about slavery, students will look at the only black person in the class and the teacher doesn't say anything about it. (African American HS)

“What are three things a black guy can't get? Black eye, fat lip or a job.” (African American HS)

I heard someone say, “go pick cotton.” (African American HS)

“Look at the black kid run! The cops must be after him.” (African American HS)

HISPANICS

Hispanic students hear the following stereotypes: every Hispanic is Mexican, a criminal, lazy, doesn't work, is not smart and uses and sell drugs.

The following are comments heard by students about Hispanic people:

We are called wetback, beaner and spic. (Hispanic HS)

Someone told a joke. “What's a Mexican's favorite sport? Cross country.” (Hispanic HS)

They ask us, “do you speak Mexican?” They don't even know that Mexican is not a language. (Hispanic HS)

I don't feel welcome at school. I hate all of the racial stereotypes. It took my dad eleven years to get here in the US. He struggled, he was stereotyped as a criminal and other things. I feel pretty bad for him. (Hispanic HS)

“This is America, speak English.” (Hispanic HS)

Hispanics are coming here and doing illegal things. (White HS)

Even my Anglo friends make fun of my accent and how I talk. (Hispanic HS)

My dad doesn't speak English. When I read aloud in class it is hard because I think of how much harder life is for my dad. (Hispanic HS)

“Mexicans are so stupid that they should go home and eat tortillas.” (Immigrant MS)

That the Hispanic students must be druggies who lie and steal. (White HS)

// Teachers

Immigrant, refugee and African American high school students in several focus groups expressed concern about the lowered expectations that some teachers have for them. The students in one of these focus groups said they have teachers who do a great job except that some of them say things that lower student's self-esteem. White European high school students in one focus group commented that teachers treat them in the same way they treat other students.

“Teachers assume we need help. This makes me feel stupid and unimportant.”

The following are comments made mostly by black and Hispanic high school students about teachers' comments and how those comments have impacted them. Note that these comments seem most often to be made by teachers who are intending to be supportive and kind. The result, however, is very different. Some teachers, without realizing it, are sending messages that students of color perceive as telling them that they are not smart and, in some instances, are not smart enough to succeed in school.

Teachers assume we need help. This makes me feel stupid and unimportant. (African HS)

If a student is having difficulty in math that should not justify keeping him or her in ESL. But this happens. (African HS)

In my home country I was smart, but here I feel stupid. I actually had to do a math problem that was 1 + 1=? (African HS)

I am in honors English. The placement test has a native and non-native speaker version. The teacher asked if I wanted to take the non-native test and I said no. The teacher was

very surprised when she saw my score. “You did REALLY WELL.” The message to me was that she thought I was stupid. (African HS)

When I give a wrong answer they are overly nice to me. Just treat me the same and be honest. (African HS)

I wrote an English paper. The teacher thought that I had cheated and taken it off the internet. I had to show her my notes and research. It made me mad. I wanted to hit her. This only happened because I am black. (African HS)

Teachers explain to the class, but look at us with an expression that says, “do you get it?” I go the bathroom and cry. They try too hard to help. It can seem pointless to come to school if they think I'm dumb. (Hispanic HS)

Teachers say, “Oh this is so good that you are here in our class.” It is patronizing. (African HS)

Teachers work hard to make us feel welcome. (African HS)

A gym teacher asked a Muslim girl why she wore her hijab in gym. “Why not take it off?” The girl said, “because it's our culture and religion.” The gym teacher then said, “But a Somali girl takes hers off.” The girl said no and the teacher gave her a “dirty look.” (African MS)

Teachers, STOP ASSUMING AND ASK US. (Black HS)

In one focus group with seven students from two groups, Hispanic and Arabic speaking, the students agreed that teachers assume they need help. They said that this assumption is a problem because it makes them feel “dumb, stupid, not smart, like we can't do it on our own.” One student said, “Don't help us unless we ask.”

“I live as part a teen and part an adult. I have lots of phone calls to make, bills to pay and applications to fill out for my parents.”

Students of color, both immigrant and refugee and American born were consistent and clear that they want teachers to be honest with them about their performance, to ask questions rather than assume a student of color is unable to do a certain level of work and to support them in their academic efforts.

// Responsibilities In Addition To School

Immigrant and refugee students discussed their responsibilities in addition to school: including working at a job, baby sitting for younger siblings, cleaning, cooking, religious study and interpreting for their parents. One high school girl said that her parents don’t help her with her homework because they can’t read English. They do ask her to cook and clean. Some Muslim girls attend religious school a couple of hours per day and longer on weekends. In one focus group three Hispanic high school girls each had two jobs.

I live as part a teen and part an adult. I have lots of phone calls to make, bills to pay and applications to fill out for my parents. (Immigrant HS)

I baby sit for my sibs, clean the house, cook and have NO FREE TIME. It’s a double life. (Arabic speaker, HS)

// What Students Value About Their Education and About Living in the US

Students across all focus groups valued and appreciated their schools, their teachers and living in the United States.

SCHOOL

I value my friends and teachers and it is really warm in the summer. (Immigrant MS)

My teachers care about us. (Immigrant MS)

I get an education, have lots of friends and speak three languages. (Immigrant MS)

We get extra help. (Immigrant MS)

Culture Club where we talk about different countries. (Immigrant MS)

Teachers are nice and help us. (Immigrant MS)

School here has less trash and is less crowded than in my old country. (Immigrant MS)

The nice teachers and the technology and the safety. (Hispanic ES)

LIVING IN THE US

We have clean water and a clean house. In Africa we walked miles to get water. (African MS)

You can trust the police here. You could not do that where I came from. (Immigrant MS)

To get a better job, find new friends and learn English and get good jobs that give you a lot of money. (Immigrant MS)

It’s a good thing because people can have freedom and have a better life by working to earn money. (Immigrant MS)

// Friendship and Mixing

Most immigrant and refugees said they had American born students among their closest friends. However, high school students also described that their schools felt separated along racial and immigrant/non-immigrant lines. In two focus groups with African students at different high schools the students were in agreement that at lunch most students sat with students who shared racial, ethnic or national backgrounds.

The students at middle and elementary schools seemed to feel that their schools were a far more comfortable place for mixing and friendship across racial and ethnic lines than the high school students described.

The comments below are from immigrant high school students focusing on their thoughts about the mixing at their schools:

It makes me feel like Martin Luther King Junior’s work has not been completed. No one ever says let’s be only white or black, but it lives in the heart. (African HS)

I lived in Belgium after leaving Africa and we were all one group. Here we are all in separate groups. (African HS)

I feel sad because I think sometimes I should have stayed in my country where you talk to everyone without unkind thoughts. (African HS)

Things have gotten better here. The international day was helpful. (African HS)

We all have white friends, but we do not sit with them at lunch or see them on weekends. (African HS)

I don’t like the fact that, during lunch, black people are sitting together, white students are

sitting together and Asians also. We’re supposed to be united even if we don’t come from the same origin. (African HS)

I feel rejected by the other students. I don’t want to stay in the cafeteria. It seems weird to see everyone in groups. (African HS)

It makes me feel that I have no other friends but my own kind. (African HS)

“Any thoughts that exposure to racial bias is something that students of color ‘get used to’ is belied by the words of immigrant/refugee and American born students of color.”

In a focus group with eight Asian high school students, seven agreed with the comments of one student: “When I move to different tables in the cafeteria, I am more comfortable with my race. Why? The only people who understand us are other Asians.” Hispanic high school students commented in a focus group that “Hispanic students hang out together because it is more comfortable.”

The lack of mixing between students of color and white students negatively affects the self-esteem of students of color. This report does not intend to claim that there is a specific problem with students having close friends from their own racial, national, religious or ethnic group. However, a school in which students of color feel rejected because of racial and national stereotypes is not an emotionally welcoming place.

// Impact

We asked students to think about what they had told us about the bias they heard and experienced in school, stores, neighborhoods

and jobs. (The experiences in the community are discussed later in this report.) Then we asked them to describe how that bias affected them. The comments below are very disturbing. Any thought that exposure to racial bias is something that students of color “get used to” is belied by the words of immigrant/refugee and American born students of color.

“It doesn’t matter to me if they don’t mean it. Once they pass the line of just joking, I talk to them straight about how it wasn’t funny.”

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Like I am dirty. (Immigrant ES)

Feel really, really, really BAD. (Immigrant ES)

I feel really mad. Hurt. (Immigrant ES)

It makes me really mad to hear them say this joke to people, “you dirty smelian”. (Immigrant ES)

Sometimes I wish that I didn’t even exist. That way I wouldn’t feel and pain. I feel invisible. (Immigrant ES)

I feel bad. It feels like you will want to go to them and tell them that they are being mean. (Immigrant ES)

MIDDLE SCHOOL

I just ignore them, but it does make me mad. (Immigrant MS)

Sad and mad because it’s not polite. (Immigrant MS)

It makes me feel sad because I am a Black

African American. I feel so sad and mad at the same time. I just want to stop it because I just want to cry and I hate when people call people the N word. (African American MS)

It doesn’t matter to me if they don’t mean it. Once they pass the line of just joking I talk to them straight about how it wasn’t funny. (African American MS)

I felt very sad. I really wanted to go back to my home country. I also get mad because I know that coming to America wasn’t my choice. I had to come here to be safe from war and not finding that safety here is really uncomfortable. (Arabic speaker, MS)

Depending on what they are saying, it goes to my family and then I feel mad and angry. (Immigrant MS)

It makes me mad, angry and unhappy. I would love to beat him, but the problem is that we would get in trouble. (Immigrant ME)

Sad. Angry. Want to stand up, but can’t. (I still do because I know I’m brave). Left out. Lonely. Want to go back to my friends/family. Running away from war and I come to another war again. (Immigrant MS)

HIGH SCHOOL

A group of African and Middle Eastern high school students described the impact of racial bias.

It puts us down.

We are going to get used to it.

We are treated differently because of our race.

We are blamed for things we did not do.

“I understand that they want to know about what Africa is ... But asking if we had electricity or water, it’s like we came straight from the jungle.”

It’s just not fair to be called names. I can’t concentrate. (Hispanic/Caribbean HS)

Sometimes this high school is the best place in Maine because of the welcoming staff and students. Sometimes, it can be the worst place in Maine because of the lack of communication between people, the lack of understanding and respect for another’s situation. (HS)

I understand that they want to know about what Africa is ... But asking if we had electricity or water, it’s like we came straight from the jungle. I don’t mind them because maybe they’re curious, but there are limits. It makes me feel not deserving being here and never succeeding because they make me feel like I am unable to do well. (African HS)

It makes us feel like we’re trash. We’re not welcome. Why are we here? Makes me feel unwanted wherever I go, makes me not want to show my face again. (African HS)

I feel welcome because I don’t disrespect people. It’s good. I feel happy. (African HS)

Angry. Makes me feel like they don’t want people of different races. That everyone is completely different when we have things in common. (Asian HS)

I believe that just because you’re foreign, or your parents are, doesn’t mean you have to be discriminated against. People always say “you’re beautiful, love your skin.” But how can you love your skin in a culture where everyone is making fun of you. (African HS)

My family came to America to have a better living because there was a war going on in

our country and when I hear people telling us to go back to our country or discriminating against us it makes me feel like we don’t belong anywhere in this world because we are always treated differently. (African HS)

It makes me feel like I’m not able to do anything. It makes me feel also nothing and I can’t follow my dreams and it’s not even fair. (Immigrant, black HS)

I feel left out. I feel like the other. I feel like I’m a package filled with things that look the same, but there is that one thing in-between others that is different. The different thing is me. (Immigrant, black HS)

The feelings of being left out and rejected and the loss of self-esteem are destructive to youth of color on a personal level and may negatively impact their ability to succeed in school and obtain meaningful and well paid jobs in the future.

// Parents’ Perspectives about Education

Overall, parents surveyed had a positive outlook on the educational opportunities that schools here provide for their children. However, many parents expressed concerns regarding the equal treatment of their children in schools, and worried that schools may not be adequately preparing their children for more rigorous college or university course work. The following outlines the most prevalent themes expressed by parents:

* The opportunity for education – K-12 and college – is perceived positively. Many parents had no complaints about their children’s edu-

cation, particularly in elementary and middle school. Education is seen as crucial to success and some parents, who have given up on their own success, pin their hopes to their children. As children age, parental concern about readiness for jobs and college grows.

“Overall, parents surveyed had a positive outlook on the educational opportunities that schools here provide for their children.”

- * Knowing how to speak English fluently is insufficient for college placement and or job readiness. Some youth are graduating from school with a high level of oral fluency that doesn’t match their reading and writing abilities. This is an obstacle to satisfactorily passing standardized tests, completing job and college applications, conducting college research and continuing to learn post high school.
- * Some parents don’t understand the school system or the need for parent / teacher meetings, disciplinary responsibility or the college search and application process. Assisting with homework, helping children choose their career direction, applying to college and seeking financial aid present challenges to long term success. Part of the problem is associated with language skills, but expectations have to be reset by both teachers and parents who are accustomed to a very different partnership with the teachers (where teachers are a respected part of the child raising team, administer discipline, and connect with families outside of the school).
- * After-school programs exist and are convenient for some, but may not be easily accessible for others because of transportation. Some programs have fees. Tutors cost money that some parents cannot afford.

- * Children do not see adults of their ethnicity as teachers. Where are their role models? How do you know they know their choices?
- * Children lose hope when they are frustrated with their own level of learning, teased because they are in ESOL classes or realize that their prospects may be limited by their race as they sit in segregated lunch rooms.

Parents made the following representative comments about education:

- Schools try to do the best they can. We appreciate it – especially we appreciate those schools that have experience with multi-cultural kids.
- Children are moving along. Some are excelling. It depends on the school. Some schools push the students and have extended hours.
- When a child comes home from school, the parent has responsibility to discuss school with the child. From the beginning, there must be collaboration between children, schools and parents.
- Schools don’t understand that parents don’t speak English and don’t understand the homework. If parents can’t help or give advice, children get away from education day by day and start hating school.
- Parents get confused when paperwork comes home from school. Kids are taking advantage of that and they just tell their parents to “sign here.”
- There is an orientation and outreach from the schools. Interpreters leave messages on the home phone about parent / teacher meetings. That’s good, but some parents don’t understand the message or the need for their presence at the meeting. They may not show up because they don’t have a babysitter or the time.

- There is help in after school programs, but transportation is difficult (child may miss the last bus after school) and programs may involve an expense.
- The education system requires kids to be placed according to age. Children see themselves as not succeeding and drop out. They may sell drugs and can be seen as successful dealer.
- In public school, the children are smart and doing “ok,” but not really. There is a big hole after 12th grade. They have to go take some job because they are not ready for college. They are frustrated. Some get into trouble. Others are just prepared to do the low level jobs that their parents are doing in this new country.
- To encourage success in school, hire/train teachers from within the community to run after school programs that are culturally sensitive.
- We would change one thing – stop just telling me my kids are good or doing well – tell me the reality.
- In private schools, they hire people specifically to help children. They are African, with a little English barrier, but they provide support for the kids and can have conversations with the parents.
- Parents see education as a pathway to success. Their support and engagement has an impact on student achievement. Studies conducted by the Wiley Society for Research in Child Development indicate a significant correlation between student achievement when there is a strong emphasis on education shared by the students, their parents and their peers. In this same study, parent educational level, occupational and socio-economic status

also had an impact on student achievement. More locally and recently, a LEAP Even Start evaluation report showed an increase in literacy growth as parental comfort with their roles and their knowledge of helpful behaviors increased through LEAP staff home visits, materials and coaching.

INTERPRETING

- Many immigrant and refugee students translate for their parents on the phone, at meetings with service providers and at stores. Some students help their parents fill out applications for social services and jobs. These students say they are pleased that they can help their parents. Some students described what was difficult about interpreting for their parents:
- At school they always ask my father whether he wants an interpreter, but my dad speaks English. But they keep on asking him. (African MS)
- I have to stop studying to interpret on the phone. (African MS)
- It takes a lot of time. (African MS)
- I have to go with my mother because she needs help with interpreting, but I need to study for my tests. (African MS)
- I don’t know the medical words and can’t translate them. (African MS)
- Sometimes I know the English words but don’t know the Arabic translation. There is not a word in Arabic for cookie. (African MS)
- Regardless of their desires to be self-sufficient in this culture, parents realize that their children are invaluable interpreters as they navigate the school system, support services,

transportation, shopping and other aspects of a new city and culture. At the same time, the feeling that the parent/child roles have been reversed is pervasive and impacts some parents sense of self-worth as their leadership role in the family erodes.

“...the feeling that the parent/child roles have been reversed is pervasive and impacts some parents sense of self-worth as their leadership role in the family erodes.”

SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS

Like many children living in poverty, children of immigrants are impacted by their family’s economic status. In Maine, according to the Muskie School Study of Childcare for Immigrant and Refugee populations, poverty rates are 100% higher for immigrants vs. native born. Thirty-one percent of immigrants live in poverty. Another 50% live at 200% of the poverty level. Ninety percent of the participants in our conversations reported incomes of less than \$20,000 per year. Some families solely rely on government or community aid for extended periods of time, even if they had some resources upon entry into the country.

As parents wait for a work permit, seek employment or are under-employed compared to positions held in their country of origin, they often have to tell their children “no” to requests for non-essential purchases. In a culture where children perceive others to have a lot of material goods, a concern that arises for parents is that their children may decide to get a job rather than focus on his or her education. This diminishes their prospects to ever move beyond the jobs that parents themselves

feel they are limited to work here. Worse yet, parents are concerned that their children will steal or associate with the wrong crowd as their frustration grows.

Children see their parents, who were economically successful back home, as not successful here. Parents are concerned that this further affects their child’s view of them as successful people, further undermining their ability to provide the guidance and discipline they perceive as necessary for success.

Finally, socio-economic status of the family has an impact on a student’s educational success. Studies, including: 1) *Children of Immigrant Families: Analysis from the David and Lucille Packard Foundation*; 2) Society for Research in Child Development; and 3) in *Children of Immigration* by Carola and Marcelo Suarez-Orozco; indicate that the socio-economic status of the family affects both the ability to learn English and acculturation. Families with fewer resources may settle in communities with schools with fewer resources. They may choose to not enroll their children in Head Start or kindergarten (even when it’s free). Transportation may be an obstacle to after school resources. Parents who work two jobs may not have the time or educational background to support the academic success of their children.

Representative parent comments included:

The biggest issue for parents is the lack of ability to earn a good living until their asylum status is approved. Even then, having the right credentials, regardless of their experience, poses an obstacle to their success.

We need jobs. There are few good options. Sometimes our schedules don’t match the children’s schedule and we are not there for them.

When we start working, we start integrating into the community.

In high school, if children start working and they get money in their hand, they forget school. They want everything everyone else has.

FAMILY

// The Refugee or Immigrant Experience

Both parents and social service providers expressed concern about the traumatic impact of the refugee or immigrant experience on children.

Some children have lived for years in refugee camps without adequate educational resources. For example, parents from Somalia may have spent ten years in refugee camps without access to extended family or educational resources. According to parents and service providers, this makes it more difficult for them to learn English, particularly written English. This impacts their ability to help their children with their homework.

Some children have been separated from their families because of violence and disruption in their countries of origin. Others experience separation from parents and other family members because of United States immigration and deportation policies or practices.

Some children have lost many family members to violent death in their country of origin. Some of these children may have witnessed these events. For example, Rwandan parents who have had little stability because of cycles of war and genocide that led them to leave their country repeatedly. This disrupted education and tore apart families. Many Rwandans lost their entire extended fam-

ily in a culture where the family and village were part of raising the child. The story of the extended family and the community being responsible for raising the child or supporting the parents during times of strife was shared by other groups. This lack of trusted family or community support is a painful absence in their lives and, in particular, impacts the parents’ ability to manage the activities of their children – inside and outside the home.

Some youth, particularly Hispanic youth, may be either undocumented or be unsure of the validity of their immigration documentation.

“The biggest issue for parents is the lack of ability to earn a good living until their asylum status is approved.”

All of these experiences can create stress, isolation, depression and other emotional reactions that could make it harder for young people to succeed in school. Social service providers who work with refugee and immigrant youth commented that a significant portion of these young people have suffered instances of trauma prior to their arrival in the United States. This trauma can in many cases make it harder for youth to integrate and develop English language skills. Academic studies on the effect of trauma on refugee youth support the view that trauma can impede their ability to learn³.

// Disciplining Children

Some parents discussed their lack of understanding of how criminal laws in Maine apply to corporal punishment. These parents said that physical punishment was accepted in their home country, but are concerned that it – in any form – is not acceptable in the US. Moreover, these parents believe that their

³ Ellis, Heidi. *Somali Youth in the U.S: From Alienation to Acceptance*. Harvard Medical School/Boston Children’s Hospital

“The struggle between the parents desire to control the activities of their children and the children’s desire to fully adopt the new culture can create clashes between the parents.”

children might call the police if they apply corporal punishment. The largest concern that these parents have is that they are losing their ability to control their children’s behavior. In addition, some are unsure of effective alternative forms of discipline.

Fear of children calling 911 relates not only to feeling unsure as a parent about discipline, but concern that police officers will make judgments based on race or religion, rather than the facts. Descriptions of incidents involving police were described as favorably biased toward any white person involved and/or attributed to their race or religion.

// Culture

Many parents are complimentary of a U.S. culture that wants to help support refugees and immigrants through both community systems and individual efforts. Barriers expressed by the parents can be captured under the topic of acculturation and secondary headings – freedom, discrimination, and information.

Youth in this country are perceived as having far more freedom than the parents experienced as youth. The struggle between the parents desire to control the activities of their children and the children’s desire to fully adopt the new culture can create clashes between the parents, particularly as children also seek to set aside other long standing cultural traditions and religions. Parents are concerned that abuse of this freedom can lead their children down the wrong path

and into trouble with drugs, alcohol or the police. At the same time, parents struggle with the right way to intervene and support their children. Disciplinary methods used in other countries are perceived as wrong here. Parents feel threatened by the potential of calls to 911 that could result in police at their doorstep and perceptions of poor parenthood in the community. They express uncertainty about the right way to approach balancing freedom and behavioral expectations.

Parents shared some of their experiences of events interpreted as bias and discrimination in the community, school system, work environments and justice system. Examples include the following:

- * Fear of children calling 911 relates not only to feeling unsure as a parent about discipline, but concern that police officers will make judgments based on race or religion, rather than the facts. Descriptions of incidents involving police were described as favorably biased toward any white person involved and/or attributed to their race or religion. *Note:* This may be exacerbated by experiences with authorities in their own countries.
- * Teachers are not pushing children to succeed because their expectations are lower for new Americans or describing language deficits as learning disabilities.
- * The school system places a child in a grade based on age without regard to what they already know.
- * Good jobs are hard to find for everyone. For immigrants, refugees and asylees add the fact that qualifications from out of the country are not accepted, language and/or accents impede selection, race is a factor and it may take months to get a work permit.

Parents shared stories of support from many organizations as they arrive in the city. However, there remains a cultural knowledge gap that continues when the support systems fall away. The initial orientation is helpful, but many questions about the culture, access to support and ways of being successful in this culture remain and evolve over time.

“Our children learn the culture from their friends, not from us, their parents.”

The following are comments from parents:

“He’s from Africa, he doesn’t know anything.” (Parent heard white parents as they took their child away from playing with African child.)

If we take a child to the hospital, people at the hospital are asking the child if he/she is ok, treated well at home, etc. Are they asking these questions of every child or just our children?

Being Muslim AND immigrants, we feel like we are boxed out, separated from the community.

We are not wanted here. Parents had more control in Africa.

Beating in a “good way” was allowed. Kids are free here and told that they can call 911.

Police may take the parents away if they discipline their child. Children become rulers of the house. If you touch your children, they have the right to call 911.

// Religion

For many refugees religion is integral to the fabric of their community. Churches or temples serve as a trusted resource and focal point for social gatherings, programs for youth and adults, and guidance that informs or mandates behaviors. Parents, particularly those who are Islamic, are concerned about their children straying away from or being ashamed of their religion.

The following are comments from parents:

Our children learn the culture from their friends, not from us, their parents. In our culture, it is against our religious values to steal, lie, or hurt each other.

We and our children are part of / go to the Islamic mosque for religious education. They gain knowledge and learn how to treat each other.

Society affects children negatively. Back home in Africa, each family is part of a church. The link between family and church helps them to not be negatively affected. That’s not the case here.

EMPLOYMENT

// Concerns of Parents

In addition to the socio-economic issues described earlier, parents are concerned about under-employment and the ability to use their talents and skills effectively in a new country. Highly-skilled individuals are working menial jobs. While many see this as necessary to gain a foothold in the community, the loss of professional identity negatively impacts self-esteem and may impact the child’s respect for the parent. Parents also expressed concerns the insufficient family

income will push their children toward seeking jobs rather than focusing on the future opportunities provided by a good education.

// Concerns of Youth

African and other black high school students talked about issues they or their families have had with employment.

“...the loss of professional identity negatively impacts self-esteem for parents and may impact the child’s respect for the parent.”

My boss gives me and the other people of color more of the dirty work.

This [referring to the preceding comment] has happened to me also. I am the only person of color working at this [chain coffee shop] and I am the only one asked to clean the bathrooms..

My cousin called to check her schedule and a white worker called her a nigger. She quit.

They make my mom stay extra time and blame her for things that are not her fault. And she can’t defend herself because she doesn’t speak English.

A job would give me self-respect, keep me busy, and give me money.

I can’t get a job because I am young and black.

Customers would yell at us instead of just talking. They assume we are stupid.

It’s not as easy to get jobs as it is for whites. I never get replies back when I apply on line.

I work at a restaurant and a co-worker said “go back to Mexico.” I am not Mexican.

When I call about a job and they hear my accent their tone changes and they becomes less welcoming and friendly.

Several students reported that when they go to a store to apply for a job they never receive call backs. A number of students commented that one of their parents could not get a job because they did not speak English well enough.

LAW ENFORCEMENT AND JUVENILE JUSTICE

// Disproportionate Minority Contact

The data on disproportionate contact of Maine youth of color in the juvenile criminal justice system is not sufficient to permit confident conclusions about the extent, or even the existence, of higher rates of contact. This is because the data compares the rates of contact of all black youth, immigrant and non-immigrant, to all white youth. Most juveniles who have contact with the juvenile justice system come from low income families. The incidence of poverty among black families in greater Portland would appear to be significantly higher than the incidence of poverty among white families. We strongly urge the Maine Department of Corrections to begin using data on disproportionate contact that is adjusted for income.

// How Youth View Police

ELEMENTARY AND MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS

A group of seven middle school students, African and Middle Eastern said that the police treat them well. This feeling was consistent through many of the focus groups with elementary and middle school students. Younger children view police as the people who will keep them safe.

HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

Many African or African American high school students expressed a belief that police profile them because of their race or color. The following are comments expressed by high school students regarding interactions with the police:

Walking to the convenience store at 10 pm, a cop car was following me. The cop told me that he was following me because there was a reported robbery by a 20 year old black man. I said, “I’m 14!” (African HS)

I was walking with five African friends and two patrol officers stopped me to ask if we had any weapons. They didn’t search us. (African HS)

I was walking home across some lawns. I went back to find my wallet. A cop was waiting for me. “What are you doing? Can I search you for a weapon?” I said no and asked, “Do you have any good reason to search me?” (African HS)

I was playing basketball in Portland and a squad car came by and asked us for our IDs. This happened more than once. (Black HS)

Police stopped me when I was walking and asked me if I had robbed a store. This made me angry. (Black HS)

A focus group of six Hispanic and Caribbean students said that they had no problems with the police. Two African students and one Asian student, all age 13 to 15, said that they have no problem with police.

INCIDENTS IN THE COMMUNITY

Students talked about the bias they experience in the community. The exposure of youth of color to racial bias in the commu-

nity is considerable. Students of color, both immigrant/refugee and American born, hear and see racially degrading incidents in their neighborhood, while shopping and at their jobs.

// In the neighborhood

At a playground a white kid’s mom would not let me play with her kid. (African MS)

My parents have been here a long time and we now live in a white neighborhood. Neighbors don’t say hi. No white kids ever played with me. (African HS)

I live in a white neighborhood, but I hear negative things about Africans. Our tires were slashed and someone threw catsup and mustard on our car. This didn’t happen to white peoples’ cars. (African HS)

Near home every time I go to the gym to play basketball they always make jokes about this kid who is from Mexico. Like every single time I go out with my dad to shop and stuff like that they always make jokes about my dad. (Hispanic HS)

A girl was walking to school when a white man yelled “scarves are for window curtains not your head.” (African MS)

Someone said to a Mexican, “come here or I’ll tell the government on you.” (Student of color MS)

White kids in the neighborhood make comments like: “Your hair is so dark.” “Your hair is nappy.” “You look like a monkey.” “Black trash.” (African MS)

When I am on the bus I hear people saying “you don’t belong here” and “go home.” (African MS)

One time I was waiting for my dad to pick me up and a white guy in a car rolled down his window and screamed, “Go home you nigger”. (African HS)

I used to have a twitter, but I deleted it after seeing white people tweeting, “we pay for your cars and it’s your fault this country is in debt.” (African HS)

// At stores and restaurants

Youth of color report frequently being followed by sales staff when they are in stores. Black and other young people of color believe this occurs because of stereotypes that black and Hispanic teens steal. Students also report incidents of racial bias from white customers and sales staff.

An Asian student was at a supermarket and someone told him, “I will beat the yellow out of you.” (Asian HS)

A clerk at [a box store] told my mother to “go back to your country” when she and I were speaking Spanish. I translate for my mother. (Hispanic HS)

I was at a supermarket with a white friend to buy some tomatoes and other things for my mother. I picked up a chicken. The clerk looked at me and then talked to someone who looked like the manager. They were both white. The manager said “make sure you buy this.” It felt mean and racist. (African MS)

I walked in to a store once and heard someone say, “we have an African American male, prepare yourself for a chance of theft.” (African HS)

I was at a convenience store. My younger brother went into the store ahead of me and did not hold the door open for me. A white

man held the door open and said “in this country we treat women with respect.” (African HS)

At a department store, my mom, who cannot speak English, wasn’t sure which dressing room to go in. The clerk gave my mother a disgusted look. It made me angry. (Asian HS)

When my family is in the market and we pay with food stamps people are critical of us. (Arabic speaker HS)

My Somali friend and I went to a convenience store to fill up our bike tires. A car came by with three older (early 20s) and bigger white guys. They said to us “you damn niggers, go back home.” The white men tried to pick a fight. I was nervous that the men might beat me up or follow me home. (Arabic speaker, MS)

A girl and her mother were getting into their car at the supermarket parking lot when a white man in a group asked, “Are you stealing that car? How many black people can afford such a nice car?” The man then pointed and said, “The taxis are that way.” (African MS)

I feel like whenever I go shopping alone or with my family the workers always seem to be staring at me as I shop. It’s really annoying because I would never steal. My parents raised me better. It also really annoying that they try to rip my mom off ... or treat her like she’s stupid because her English isn’t that good. (African HS)

In a focus group with eleven African American high school students ten students said that they had been followed in stores by store employees multiple times. In a focus group with fourteen African high school students, seven of them were followed in stores.

“The exposure of youth of color to racial bias in the community is considerable.”

// Other comments:

The following are comments that students made regarding general instances of racial bias that they experience on a regular basis or found to be typical of their experience in the community.

I was riding the Metro bus and had only 75 cents instead of a dollar. I asked the driver if it was ok if I rode. The driver said in a mean voice, “get off the bus.” I got off. The next day a white kid had only 75 cents on the same bus with the same driver. The driver told the white kid that it was ok for him to ride and then the driver gave a quarter to the white kid. That made me feel angry. (African MS)

Whenever I go out with my family I see how people look at us that makes me feel that they have something against me. (Arabic speaker HS)

I was going to the mall with my aunt and I heard some people talking about my aunt because she is wearing the hijab. (Arabic speaker HS)

My cousin was marrying a white person. At the reception a white guy said with an angry expression, “look at all the black people.” (Caribbean immigrant HS)

Security assumes you’re going to steal. Neighbors are not comfortable with the Muslim next door. You forget your belt one day and people think you’re in a gang. People think all the good things you have are stolen. (African HS)

BARRIERS IDENTIFIED BY IMMI-GRANT AND REFUGEE YOUTH

Immigrant and refugee students described a range of barriers they face, including their race, learning English, their accents, wearing traditional ethnic or religious clothing, the cost of college, and being told that they are not smart.

Representative comments of youth included:

What if my dad can’t be certified as a pediatrician in the US? (MS)

Bad people who hate us because we are middle-eastern (MS)

Learning English (MS) and the difficulty of receiving help with English after high school.

White people think we are uneducated and dumb. (MS)

People think we are too dumb to get educated. (HS)

I want to be a teacher, but there are no black teachers here. (MS)

If I dress in traditional clothes, I won’t get the job. (MS)

The cost of college. (HS)

People trying to help when I don’t need it. I will become dependent on their help. (HS)

Our accents. (HS)

The school doesn’t teach enough math. (HS)

People just assume we are poor. (HS)

Not being a US citizen (HS)

People who make you feel “unconfident”
and you drop out. (ES)

Teachers who won’t help you because you
are from another country. (ES)

Discrimination will never end. (ES)

High school students who came to the United States in their teens said that learning English was the greatest barrier to their success. In one focus group with nine Arabic speaking high school students who had come to the United States in the last couple of years, eight students said they will need help with English when they finish high school. Five of these students were worried that colleges would not have programs to help them with their English.



MAPPING THE NETWORK – AN OVERVIEW OF SERVICES

PROMISING PRACTICES

As the field research progressed, project staff completed complementary quantitative and qualitative research to support our findings. The majority of this research was completed by Dolly Hersom and Emma Connor, with additional support from Joel Russ. In order to better inform the recommendations of the project staff, research efforts were partially directed toward determining criteria for industry best practices and identifying promising programs locally and nationally. Common criteria observed for best practices⁴ :

- * Responds directly to identified refugee youth needs in innovative, creative ways
- * Engages community leadership
- * Supports family relationships, involving parents, family members in program activities
- * Bridges U.S. and refugee cultures, promoting a positive ethnic identity in youth
- * Hires bilingual, bicultural staff from the local community
- * Uses a positive, strength based youth development approach
- * Uses evidence-based intervention
- * Fosters collaboration with other community organizations and service systems
- * Integrates evaluation into program cycle, using culturally appropriate methods
- * Produces materials, documentation that can be shared with others

The following are programs that operate primarily outside of the state of Maine that exhibit most or all of the criteria above, or are nationally recognized as examples of industry best practices:

East African Community Services (EACS); Peer Leadership Development Program in Seattle offers Somali, Oromo, Eritrean, and Yemeni youth ages 15-21 training, advanced homework assistance, and mentoring. Youth are encouraged to volunteer in the EACS afterschool program, in order to develop job skills and fulfill school service learning requirements.

Refugee Transitions; in Oakland, San Francisco and the South Bay area in California matches volunteer tutors with Afghan, Bosnian, Cambodian and Liberian refugee youth ages 7-17 for home-based tutoring and mentoring and offers on-site academic and career-readiness workshops.

Young Women's Equity Project (YWEP); in Portland, OR provides young refugee and immigrant African and Slavic women academic, career planning and portfolio development support over a long term (2 to 3 year) period with a goal of enrolling the women in college, vocational training or to secure science and math career employment. The purpose is to help the women to enter highly skilled careers in which they have been underrepresented.

Caring Across Communities; With support from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 15 sites across the U.S., including Portland Public Schools, are developing model mental health programs that engage schools, families, students, mental health agencies and other community organizations to build effective, easily-accessed services for children and youth.

The Strengthening Families Program (SFP); in Salt Lake City is a nationally and internationally recognized parenting and family strengthening program for high-risk and regular families. SFP is an evidence-based family skills training program found to significantly

reduce problem behaviors, delinquency, and alcohol and drug abuse in children and to improve social competencies and school performance. Both culturally adapted versions and the core version of SFP have been found effective with African-American, Hispanic, Asian, Pacific Islander, and First Nations families. SFP is in 26 countries with language translations into Spanish, Portuguese, French, German, Dutch, Slovenian, Russian, Tai, Burmese, Chinese and other languages.

Strengthening Multi-Ethnic Families and Communities Program; in Los Angeles is a unique integration of various prevention/ intervention strategies geared toward reducing violence against self, the family and the community. The program targets ethnic and culturally diverse parents of children aged 3-18 years. The program goal is to reduce drug/alcohol use, teen suicide, juvenile delinquency, gang involvement, child abuse and domestic violence. The program consists of twelve 3-hour sessions taught in consecutive weeks. Parent materials are available in English, Spanish, Vietnamese, Korean, Chinese, English UK, Russian, and Somali.

As part of project field research, Steve Wessler and Emma Connor facilitated focus groups at multiple youth programs in Portland. Based on program goals and structure and student responses to focus group questions, the following three programs are examples of organizations that demonstrated most or all of the best practices listed above.

Note: These programs were selected based on their practices and participant access. There are a multitude of programs in the Greater Portland area, many of which may also demonstrate these practices:

The Telling Room, based in Portland, is a literacy and creative writing focused organization that offers a multitude of youth programs. Participants in the Young Writers and Leaders program were interviewed in the course of our field research. Young Writers and Leaders is a program that targets refugee and immigrant youth in order to build literacy and language skills, and offer clients healthy avenues of self expression. Participants work with mentors over the course of a school year to develop, write, and eventually publish their own short stories, poetry, or songs.

The CHEETA Project, based in Portland, is a leadership and peace education program currently only in session during the summer. Both a teen drop-in center and an avenue for youth to build leadership skills and volunteer, this program also encourages youth who participate in the program to return in subsequent years to become staff or peer leaders.

Cultivating Community, based in Portland, offers a range of food security, nutrition, and leadership development programming for youth. Youth interviewed at Cultivating Community were engaged in food security and nutrition focused summer internship, and described program activities as multifaceted. Students also had opportunities to act as peer mentors through student led cooking classes.

The data collected from these students was suggestive. Students involved in these programs were more likely than those interviewed in public school settings to exhibit tendencies of resilience, have close friends from a range of ethnic backgrounds, report feelings of acceptance and inclusion from and toward the community, and to report the presence or positive influence of an adult role model.

Students involved in these programs [such as those listed on pp. 46 – 47] were more likely than those interviewed in public school settings to exhibit tendencies of resilience, have close friends from a range of ethnic backgrounds, report feelings of acceptance and inclusion from and toward the community, and to report the presence or positive influence of an adult role model.

⁴ From Bridging Refugee Youth and Children's Services (BRYCS)

COMMUNITY ASSET AND RESOURCE MAPPING AND INVENTORY

In order to better understand the way in which non-profits serving the immigrant and refugee community Portland work together today, the project staff initially set out to complete a community network map. Though it is still recommended that network mapping research be completed in some capacity, the complexity of a network map reached beyond the scope of the current project.

Based on data collected through research and community conversations and focus groups, a community asset map and resource inventory was compiled. The asset map highlights the concentration of goods and services for immigrants and refugees in Portland both geographically and categorically. A geographic presentation of the map was produced to demonstrate where community services are located in the Greater Portland region. A complementary asset map was produced to identity the concentration of types of services offered, and to help the project staff better understand the redundancies and gaps in services offered.

Note: Both maps are available on the Hudson Foundation website (www.hudsonfoundationmaine.org).

The community resource inventory (see the *Breaking Down the Barriers for Immigrant Youth Appendix*) was produced to complement both maps, and to give more detailed information about select programs serving the immigrant and refugee community in Portland. Many organizations serving the community are small and may not have a permanent address. This is especially common among Ethnic Community Based Organizations, which are often volunteer run and may have no program funding or designated space for services provided.

The inventory is not comprehensive, in that it does not provide a full inventory of all available programs in Portland. An inventory of that magnitude is beyond the scope of the current project, and preliminary research suggests that data collection among a majority of non-profits would not support a more thorough inventory. Programs included in the inventory were selected based on two criteria: first, programs cited by focus group or community conversation participants as being active in serving the community were included to the greatest extent possible. A secondary criterion of ‘instrumental’ programs was also included in the inventory—instrumental refers to the likelihood that an immigrant or refugee in Portland would have to engage with a given organization.

Research was completed through interviews, internet research, and online databases made available by 2-1-1 Maine and Guidestar. The majority of financial information included was gathered from the Guidestar archives. Based on the information compiled and the research process, recommendations arising from this aspect of the process would point to systemic improvement in data collection and reporting among the majority of non-profits serving the immigrant and refugee community in Portland.

The *Breaking Down the Barriers for Immigrant Youth Appendix* provides a Community Resource Inventory (Appendix A) and outlines, “Who is Doing What in Maine?” (Appendix B). We hope that these two appendices will be good resources for those who have read the report and are interested in taking action as either a funder, volunteer or both.

The appendix and a digital edition of this report are available on the Hudson Foundation website: www.hudsonfoundationmaine.org.

Visit the Hudson Foundation website for a digital version of this report as well as the *Breaking Down the Barriers for Immigrant Youth Appendix*. The appendix includes a community resource inventory and guide to “Who is Doing What in Maine.”

www.hudsonfoundationmaine.org



“... students of color and immigrant and refugee students are scoring far lower in proficiency than are white students. This is disturbing data ...”

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR REDUCING BARRIERS

This section analyzes the most significant barriers that confront immigrant and refugee youth as well as suggested approaches for reducing those barriers.

LACK OF ENGLISH SKILLS FOR YOUTH/PARENTS

The lack of proficiency in English writing, reading, comprehension and speaking creates a very significant barrier to immigrant and refugee youth. The lack of these skills negatively affects a students’ ability to succeed in college or other post-secondary education and their ability to gain well paying jobs. Data compiled by the Portland School Department for 2009-2010, and analyzed by the Annenberg Institute at Brown University, on student proficiency rates indicates that students of color and immigrant and refugee students are scoring far lower in proficiency than are white students. This is disturbing data and raises concerns about the effectiveness of the English language learning programs for immigrant and refugee students. The data also raises questions about whether proficiency rates are low for African American students and if so why. It is expected that the issues discussed below under the heading Racial Bias, also have a negative impact on the proficiency rates of students of color.

For adults, the lack of proficiency in English primarily affects parents in two ways:

I. The ability to read, write and speak English will affect the kind of jobs an immigrant is able to obtain which in turn will affect family income. Many immigrants and refugees are low income. Being proficient in English will help parents move to higher paying jobs.

II. Parents who are fluent in English can help their children with homework, advocate for their children more effectively in school, with police and with health care professionals

[We recommend five approaches in regard to addressing these issues.](#)

FIRST, English Language classes in the greater Portland area for parents must be increased. Places like Portland Adult Ed and LearningWorks have extensive waiting lists and additional staffing is needed.

SECOND, day care options for immigrant families who need to go to school must be increased.

THIRD, bi-lingual dictionaries, library cards and orientation, and upgraded language software and stations at language centers for new immigrants.

FOURTH, fund the coordination of a network of conversation groups throughout the Portland area for people to utilize their English skills.

FIFTH, we recommend that the Portland, South Portland and Westbrook schools begin a joint effort to analyze the effectiveness both of the English language programs for immigrants and refugees and whether or not (and why) American born students of color have lower proficiency rates.

RACIAL BIAS

Racial bias (combined with anti-Muslim/anti-immigrant bias) directed at immigrant and refugee youth comes from multiple sectors of their lives: school, shopping, neighborhoods and jobs.

This racial bias also affects African American youth, American born Hispanic youth and other American born youth of color. Racial bias, and particularly anti-black racial bias, is intense and destructive. Programming to address these issues should work with all youth of color and not just immigrant and refugees.

360 DEGREES OF BIAS

What is striking is that students told us how racial bias affects most every part of their lives. They hear racial slurs on the bus, in the hallways, and they experience differential treatment from well meaning teachers. They are followed as suspects in stores and they hear degrading comments from customers and clerks. They are assigned the dirtiest work at jobs, they hear comments from neighbors, and they feel police stop them because of race.

THE IMPACT OF RACIAL BIAS ON STUDENTS OF COLOR

The impact of exposure to racial bias is deeply destructive. The two most common

reactions described by students are anger at how they are being treated and loss of self-esteem and feelings of self-worth. In the focus group with youth of color at Long Creek Youth Development Center the boys and young men commented that their difficulties in controlling anger were a large part of the reason they engaged in crimes and were committed to Long Creek. They also commented that the racial bias they encountered from teachers, students, police and others was a major component of that anger.

Researchers have identified significant mental health risks stemming from continued exposure of children of color to racial bias including low self-esteem, elevated stress and symptoms of depression. Researchers have also observed that being targeted with racial bias is correlated to increased anti-social behavior and even violence.

[We recommend four approaches to addressing these issues.](#)

FIRST, provide students with skills to engage in low key interventions when others use degrading language and to provide teachers with training on how to avoid disempowering students of color.

SECOND, provide students of color and other students with far more positive information about the accomplishments of their racial, national, ethnic and religious groups.

THIRD, support ECOBs and other organizations of color to provide workshops, training or information to parents on how to talk about racial bias with their children.

FOURTH, expand mentoring programs for immigrant, refugee, and all students of color.

LACK OF ACCULTURATION/ ENGAGING THE PARENTS

The data shows that family situations and parental status can affect student achievement. The community conversations with parents highlighted their needs and revealed their ideas.

ENSURING SUCCESS BY LISTENING TO THE PARENTS: Parents are focused on the lives of their children being better than their own and know they must help them succeed. From their perspective success requires a strong family, good education, oral and written language skills, integration into the culture, cultural pride, discipline, and opportunities to succeed that are not negatively impacted by their nationality, race or religion.

DISCIPLINING CHILDREN: Some refugee parents come from cultures where corporal punishment is the norm as one of the methods of discipline. It is possible that some of these methods may be considered inappropriate by child welfare and law enforcement agencies. Some parents feel at a loss of how to discipline their children.

UNDERSTANDING LAWS AND RIGHTS: Some and perhaps many immigrants and refugees do not understand the laws and their rights involving school, child welfare, police and criminal law.

We recommend five areas approaches to addressing these issues:

FIRST, ensure that people from different cultures are represented and part of the support system in schools, after school programs, social services, city jobs, and the justice system.

SECOND, develop youth programs and study centers that are close to home and run

by the community to ensure children have something to do, particularly when parents are working and the home is empty.

THIRD, new Mainers need coaches, mentors and training from long time community members designed to help parents help their children in regard to culture, education, job searches, juvenile justice, and discipline.

FOURTH, social welfare organizations and ECBOs should work together to develop materials and trainings for parents on effective ways to discipline children.

FIFTH, ECBOs should work with others to develop trainings and materials to assist parents in learning the laws affecting their children and understanding their rights.

TRAUMA

A higher portion of immigrant and refugee youth have been exposed to violence and experienced other traumatic events than American born youth.

We recommend: That social service providers, consulting with ECBOs, examine whether they are providing sufficient mental health and after-school programming and other services to immigrant and refugee youth. Focusing on the mental health and well being of refugee youth is an area of particular concern, given the impact of trauma and violence on the students' ability to learn.

OTHER BARRIERS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

RELATIONS BETWEEN TEENS AND POLICE

The views of police by immigrant and refugee youth and American born students of color, based on the focus groups, appears

to change between middle and high school. Younger children view police in very positive ways. Many of the high school students, particularly black and Hispanic, believe that they are stopped and questioned by police because of their race, ethnicity or color. The NAACP and law enforcement jointly ran a day dedicated talking about racial profiling. There are also several initiatives – the statewide Juvenile Justice Implementation Committee (JJIC) and Juvenile Justice Alternative Group (JJAG) designed to address issues from a statewide perspective. JJIC is looking at education and graduation rates and engages youth on their council. Community Police Officers provide outstanding connections.

Recommendation: We recommend that the Portland, South Portland and Westbrook police departments works with ECOBs to create formal and informal avenues of communication and discussion with youth of color and parents, including consideration of community representatives acting as facilitators to ease communication.

ECBO'S

ECBOs (Ethnic Community Based Organizations) are a critically important resource for providing both services and education to parents and children. ECBOs also can function as advocates for the rights and needs of immigrant and refugee families. Many ECBOs are underfunded and lack the internal capacity for grant writing, planning, technology and other important needs of non-profit organizations.

Recommendation: We recommend that foundations and others explore ways to create a program or organization to provide ECBOs with a range of capacity building skills and infrastructure. The Maine Association of Nonprofits (MANP) is working on provid-

ing these skills and identifying what else is needed to ensure their success. ECBOs are an important part of the mix as solutions and support originate within, not outside the community.

RETAIL BUSINESSES

The focus groups with youth indicate that immigrant and refugee youth and American born youth of color experience a disturbing number of incidents that either involve bias or are perceived by youth to involve bias from customers and sales staff.

Recommendation: We recommend that retail businesses, ECOBs and anti-bias organizations work together to offer businesses training for their staff on appropriate ways to interact with youth of color.

DISPROPORTIONATE MINORITY CONTACT WITH POLICE

The question of whether youth of color are disproportionately involved in juvenile crime has and continues to be studied in Maine. It remains unclear whether the contact is truly disproportionate based on ethnicity or poverty.

Recommendation: We recommend that a quantitative study be conducted that compares rates of contact factored for socioeconomics. This will assist in distinguishing between race and socioeconomics as being factors in disproportionate rates of contact.

