Education: Immigrant Community Education

CONTEXT

The Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRAIRA), the Antiterrorist and Effective Death Penalty Act (AEDPA) and the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) all passed in 1996 making sweeping changes in immigration law, consequences of crimes for immigrants and access to benefits for immigrants. The nature of these changes and constant efforts to improve these and other laws has created confusion and misinformation in immigrant communities.

Santa Clara County has the largest number of immigrants and the greatest diversity of immigrants of any county in Northern California. Within California, only Los Angeles County and Orange County have greater numbers of immigrants. From 1990 to 1999, approximately 200,000 legal immigrants processed at the INS came to Santa Clara County. Other immigrants are in the county form other counties and areas of the country, and there are tens of thousands of undocumented immigrants in Santa Clara County also. In Santa Clara County’s schools, 23% of students are Limited English Proficient and speak over 100 different languages. Residents of the county represent virtually every country on earth.

The large number and diversity of immigrants provide enormous challenges to immigrant community education in so many need areas of immigrant lives. Most organizations in the county provide some community education regarding their services, but very few consistently provide oral or written translations or reach out to under-served communities. Some organizations provide multi-lingual hotlines or answering systems. The adult education districts reach over 20,000 immigrants each year through such programs as ESL, parenting classes and civic education.

Dozens of ethnically based community and social service organizations provide community education in dozens of languages. Projects such as MayFair Initiative’s Casa a Casa Program keep a finger on the pulse of the neighborhood issues by knocking on doors and discussing people’s concerns. The project helps residents to act on these issues by working with their similarly concerned neighbors. Ethnic-based Family Resource Centers established by the Social Services Agency provide valuable information and workshops to many immigrant communities. IRCC, a Vietnamese-centered agency, provides a welfare hotline in Vietnamese. Service, Immigrant Rights and Education Network (SIREN) features a Question and Answer hotline regarding immigrant issues, immigrant rights education workshops, and advocacy by immigrants on their own behalf.
FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Finding 1: Immigrants do not have access to information in order to make decisions about their lives and to advocate on their own behalf.

Each of the five immigrant groups represented in Immigrants Building Community discussed the need for community education. The types of needs discussed by all groups were 1) getting information in one’s primary language, 2) obtaining information about services that are available and 3) understanding how to access the services.

IBC discussions revealed that “information is blocked by some elite and opinion leaders due to their personal interests.”

Every focus group that was conducted discussed community education as a part of the solutions to one or more of their top five issues.

---

WHAT IMMIGRANTS SAY
ABOUT THE NEED FOR INFORMATION IN THEIR OWN LANGUAGES

“Section 8 is a big benefit for low-income people. I help people to find such housing as a volunteer. But in Santa Clara County there is no information regarding Section 8, only rumors. People are not informed how it works. We need clear and accurate information on how Section 8 works.” Max, a Russian immigrant

“It is very difficult to know how to treat kids here in the United States because there are laws against child abuse. But the kids turn around and use that against us so that we won’t reprimand them. I have a very hard time understanding what to do as a mother to discipline my kids.” Helen, a Mexican woman on CalWORKS

“Unfortunately, many institutions don’t have the trained personnel to understand our needs and feelings as Latinos. Sometimes they don’t know how to treat us.” Luna, a Mexican immigrant

“I recognize the letters that are sent [from] my son’s school and I know they’re important but since I cannot read them I just throw them away.” Shamis, a Somali woman

At every income level, immigrants were less likely to be registered to vote than US-born, according to random sample survey results.
Almost 55% of immigrants from the top five immigrant groups earning less than $50,000 per year reported knowing of a low-income food program compared to 80% of native-born residents at that income level. Native born are thus 45% more likely to know of such a program. The same immigrants reported knowing of a childcare program for the low income at 22%, whereas 36% of US-born knew of such a program. Native born are thus 61% more likely than immigrants to know of such a program.

Immigrants in the random sample survey reported that they were prevented from obtaining education, services or public benefits because of lack of information at a rate 27% greater than U.S. born residents. Approximately one-third of both Mexicans and Filipinos who responded reported the lack of information as a barrier to such services. For more detail by country, see public benefits recipient graph below.

![Percentage of Immigrants by Country Responding that Lack of Information Prevents Them from Obtaining Education, Services, or Public Benefits](image)

**Recommendations for Finding 1:**

- Santa Clara County needs to establish a comprehensive community education project to provide accurate and linguistically and culturally competent information. The source must be trustworthy and immigrants must be able to return to the source with questions or clarification. The project’s goal would be to create a structure for CBOs to disseminate information through synchronizing networks and ensuring both competent translation and consistency of information. The project would work with a network of CBOs to maximize effectiveness and avoid duplication of efforts.
The project would keep the **Immigrant Resource Guide** updated and maintained in multiple languages and be a live person resource for nonprofits and county residents to supplement the guide.

This project should be monitored by an **Immigrant Advisory Board** to insure that immigrants have a voice in the content of the community education and access to the information. This group could also serve as a watchdog for immigrant community groups and promote the use of such boards for other agencies.

Immigrants of Santa Clara County need a better structure to access “immigrant education”. Immigrant education is defined as information on institutions, legal rights, and civic engagement in the United States. Immigrants have a unique need for information about their rights and responsibilities as residents and about how to negotiate the American system. Only then will immigrants be able to make positive changes for themselves and their community. The “How to Live in America” criminal court diversion program established by Eagle County, Colorado and approved in San Mateo County serves as a model of how immigrants can address the additional barriers they face because of lack of understanding of the criminal justice system in the U.S.

**Finding 2: Discrimination is widespread in Santa Clara County. The term “immigrant” is laden with stereotypes and misconceptions. Immigrants are unable to fully express their cultural pride and identity and as a result, the entire community suffers.**

According to random sample survey results, immigrants in the top five most numerous groups report an average of 29% greater incidence of having experienced discrimination than those born in the U.S.

Of those who reported having been discriminated against, immigrants reported being discriminated by the police at a rate 3.7 times greater than native-born people. For immigrants from Mexico, the rate was 9.9 times greater and for those from Vietnam, the rate was twelve times greater.

The Community Education Work Group study of gaps in services concluded that immigrants face stereotyping and discrimination in the general population and by immigrant service providers themselves.

Six immigrants groups expressed a strong desire for cultural centers to showcase their culture and history for their children and for the general community. Latino immigrant low-wage workers expressed the need for “more information about where to register complaints related to discrimination.”
Recommendations for Finding 2:

- Develop a media campaign to combat discrimination through ongoing messages about immigrants in Santa Clara County.
- Highlight the depth of diversity of the county, contributions of immigrants, and the hurtfulness of stereotypes.
- Emphasize that all who live in this county have rights to demand good service and complain about discrimination.
- Use the Citizenship Council of Manitoba as a model. Its mission is “to encourage pride in Canada and appreciation of Canadian citizenship, to encourage intercultural understanding in a multicultural Canada, and to support immigration and provide caring services to newcomers.”

Finding 3: Immigrants have a right to information provided in their own language. Conducting business with individuals without adequate translation is discrimination.

Immigrants have the right to translation and interpretation under federal and state laws such as Title VI of the federal Civil Rights Act of 1964, administered by the Office of Civil Rights of Health and Human Services, and the California Dymally-Alatorre Bilingual Services Act. These protections are insufficient.

The random sample survey asked what prevented the respondent and his or her family from obtaining education, services or public benefits. Sixty percent of Chinese, 49% of Mexicans, and 48% of the Vietnamese respondents answered “Not enough English”. Findings were even higher for public benefits recipients:
Participants in Immigrants Building Community were concerned about the lack of information and services available in one’s primary language in every subject area.

The overwhelming majority of focus groups expressed the need for services and/or information in their primary language.

Almost 36% of immigrants in the random sample survey stated that health services provided in their primary language would help them get better health services. Nearly half (47.9%) responded that more information/services in their primary language would make it easier to use food programs.

**Recommendations for Finding 3:**

- Santa Clara County and all other governmental and educational institutions should make a policy statement that all residents have a right to receive information in their primary language.

- To fulfill this statement, statistics should be kept on the country of origin and primary language of immigrant users of programs, and translation/interpretation goals need to be developed and implemented throughout departments and agencies.

- A community-based translation and interpretation bank is needed to provide translation and interpretation to all who request such service. Key elements of the bank include: 24 hour a day/7 day per week availability, precise categorization of translator’s ability, drop in availability at neighborhood centers, high quality translation, shared lists available to all agencies, including law enforcement, and timeliness.

**Finding 4: Immigrants from different nationalities receive information from widely varied sources.**

The following charts summarize the key sources of information and key tools to receive such information from the survey of public assistance recipients.
**Responses by Country: Where Immigrant Families Get Important Information**

*(Public Benefits Survey)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>29.6%</td>
<td>45.5%</td>
<td>53.4%</td>
<td>28.4%</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
<td>63.2%</td>
<td>41.5%</td>
<td>60.6%</td>
<td>29.2%</td>
<td>66.7%</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>54.5%</td>
<td>41.7%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>71.4%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>26.0%</td>
<td>30.2%</td>
<td>47.9%</td>
<td>23.1%</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
<td>35.1%</td>
<td>40.0%</td>
<td>42.4%</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
<td>47.8%</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
<td>54.5%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>22.2%</td>
<td>38.1%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio in PL</td>
<td>24.0%</td>
<td>75.4%</td>
<td>29.4%</td>
<td>84.4%</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
<td>17.5%</td>
<td>44.6%</td>
<td>42.4%</td>
<td>79.2%</td>
<td>68.1%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>41.7%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>23.8%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SJMN</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
<td>23.6%</td>
<td>58.3%</td>
<td>9.9%</td>
<td>60.4%</td>
<td>28.1%</td>
<td>12.3%</td>
<td>36.4%</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>23.2%</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
<td>45.5%</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio in PL</td>
<td>55.1%</td>
<td>72.9%</td>
<td>23.3%</td>
<td>33.5%</td>
<td>41.7%</td>
<td>40.4%</td>
<td>52.3%</td>
<td>27.3%</td>
<td>20.8%</td>
<td>10.1%</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
<td>55.6%</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV in PL</td>
<td>86.2%</td>
<td>61.3%</td>
<td>52.1%</td>
<td>82.1%</td>
<td>39.6%</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
<td>24.6%</td>
<td>24.2%</td>
<td>75.0%</td>
<td>17.4%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>54.2%</td>
<td>77.8%</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio in English</td>
<td>9.2%</td>
<td>16.1%</td>
<td>38.7%</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
<td>35.4%</td>
<td>22.8%</td>
<td>15.4%</td>
<td>21.2%</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
<td>18.8%</td>
<td>54.5%</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>42.9%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV in English</td>
<td>15.3%</td>
<td>25.6%</td>
<td>76.7%</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
<td>70.8%</td>
<td>43.9%</td>
<td>41.5%</td>
<td>51.5%</td>
<td>20.8%</td>
<td>55.1%</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>90.9%</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
<td>22.2%</td>
<td>47.6%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WWW</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
<td>8.5%</td>
<td>15.3%</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
<td>35.4%</td>
<td>40.4%</td>
<td>24.6%</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>40.6%</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
<td>27.3%</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church</td>
<td>24.5%</td>
<td>14.1%</td>
<td>37.4%</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
<td>12.1%</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
<td>45.5%</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Com. Org.</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
<td>9.0%</td>
<td>8.0%</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>29.2%</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>20.8%</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Govt.</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
<td>10.1%</td>
<td>9.8%</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>22.2%</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Responses by Country: Means of Communication Immigrants Have in their Homes**

*(Public Benefits Survey)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Radio</td>
<td>90.4%</td>
<td>79.6%</td>
<td>86.8%</td>
<td>71.5%</td>
<td>75.0%</td>
<td>92.9%</td>
<td>88.2%</td>
<td>71.9%</td>
<td>79.2%</td>
<td>60.9%</td>
<td>78.6%</td>
<td>83.3%</td>
<td>66.7%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>89.5%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV</td>
<td>99.0%</td>
<td>96.7%</td>
<td>97.0%</td>
<td>96.7%</td>
<td>95.8%</td>
<td>98.2%</td>
<td>98.5%</td>
<td>93.8%</td>
<td>95.8%</td>
<td>98.6%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>91.7%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>84.2%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VCR</td>
<td>66.7%</td>
<td>74.4%</td>
<td>79.0%</td>
<td>60.3%</td>
<td>83.3%</td>
<td>46.4%</td>
<td>88.2%</td>
<td>75.0%</td>
<td>50.8%</td>
<td>78.3%</td>
<td>64.3%</td>
<td>75.0%</td>
<td>79.2%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>42.1%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tel.</td>
<td>88.9%</td>
<td>87.2%</td>
<td>95.2%</td>
<td>91.1%</td>
<td>95.8%</td>
<td>99.1%</td>
<td>97.1%</td>
<td>87.5%</td>
<td>83.3%</td>
<td>97.1%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>95.8%</td>
<td>88.9%</td>
<td>94.7%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fax</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
<td>19.2%</td>
<td>29.9%</td>
<td>18.8%</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>32.4%</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>11.6%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comp.</td>
<td>16.2%</td>
<td>46.0%</td>
<td>58.1%</td>
<td>50.5%</td>
<td>75.0%</td>
<td>60.7%</td>
<td>66.2%</td>
<td>43.8%</td>
<td>70.8%</td>
<td>69.6%</td>
<td>42.9%</td>
<td>41.7%</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
<td>55.6%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
<td>18.5%</td>
<td>31.7%</td>
<td>19.2%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
<td>9.4%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>36.2%</td>
<td>35.7%</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>44.4%</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
<td>33.5%</td>
<td>21.0%</td>
<td>39.6%</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
<td>44.1%</td>
<td>18.8%</td>
<td>29.2%</td>
<td>49.3%</td>
<td>21.4%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>44.4%</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
<td>9.0%</td>
<td>28.7%</td>
<td>53.3%</td>
<td>56.3%</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>13.2%</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
<td>58.3%</td>
<td>17.4%</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>29.2%</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
<td>21.1%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Key:**

- **Sources**
  - News in PL: Newspaper in primary language
  - SJMN: San Jose Mercury News
  - Radio in PL: Radio in primary language
  - TV in PL: Television in primary language
  - WWW: World wide web/Internet
  - Com. Org: Community Organization
  - Govt: Government Communications
  - Comp: Computer
  - News: Newspaper subscription

**Nationalities**

- Viet: Vietnam
- Phil: Philippines
- B-H: Bosnia-Herzegovnia
- Cam: Cambodia
- E.S: El Salvador
- Eth.: Ethiopia
- Nic: Nicaragua
- Som: Somalia
Recommendations for Finding 4:

Government departments and non-profit agencies that provide community information and education to immigrants must consider the best means by which to reach different immigrant communities.

Additional Recommendations

- Provide leadership training for immigrants so that they have better understanding how to best assess community needs, provide information, and empower immigrant communities.
- Develop mentoring programs to help immigrants better understand laws, customs, and how to get involved.
- Produce a “Welcoming” video for immigrants in their own language.
- Create a multi-lingual, multi-medium immigrant alert system for changes in laws affecting immigrants, in coordination with ethnic media.