Analytical Report

“Ways of Improving the New Immigrants’ Education Level in the State of Virginia.”

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ENG 115
NVCC – SPRING 2003
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April 3, 2003
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Introduction

In each society, a lack of education generally keeps those who didn’t attain higher levels of education behind into poverty. In America, the situation is sharper, since a lot of people go to school and the economy employs individuals with more and diverse skills. In Virginia, the situation becomes even more pronounced as that State neighbors the national capital and has many urban areas with population concentrations, where diverse and advanced skills are needed to earn a decent income.

When new immigrants come to America, many of them don’t have adequate training to be able to work skilled jobs, or their education cannot be documented, on top of language barriers. In Virginia, the new immigrants face the same challenge as their peers across America.

The purpose of this report is to share with you my findings on how those immigrants can improve their education level and close the poverty gap compared to a native of the State of Virginia.

In this report, you will encounter some abbreviations and / or technical words, which will be defined either after their mentioning, or at the bottom of the page in the space of the footnotes.

I made my research exclusively on the web, which I trust when it comes to seeking information with limited time. Websites used in this report are listed at the end of the document, under the works cited section. Also, my limited time obliged me to stick with research on higher education.

During my research, I focused on the following issues:

- Level of new immigrants’ education and poverty in the State of Virginia, compared to that of natives.
- How new immigrants can convert their knowledge into skills recognized by the State of Virginia.
- What sources of higher education are available in the State of Virginia.
- How accessible those sources of higher education are and what is the best way to access them.

Data Collected

Level of new immigrants’ education and poverty in the State of Virginia, compared to that of natives.

In Virginia, immigrants, described as “foreign born” in the 2000 Census conducted by the Census Bureau, accounted for 8.1 percent of the 7,187,734 population estimate.

Two tables on the next page, resulting from a U.S. Census Bureau survey published in March 2002, show that the percentage rates of lower levels of education and higher levels of poverty are highest under the “Not a Citizen” column, corresponding to the new immigrants population. (State and County QuickFacts)
Table 1. Educational Attainment of the Population by Citizenship Status: March 2002
(Numbers in thousands.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT</th>
<th>CITIZENSHIP STATUS</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Native Citizen</th>
<th>Naturalized Citizen</th>
<th>Not a Citizen</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>Percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 9th grade</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td>27.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9th to 12th grade (no diploma)</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school graduate</td>
<td>32.1</td>
<td>33.2</td>
<td>26.6</td>
<td>24.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some college or associate degree</td>
<td>25.3</td>
<td>26.9</td>
<td>19.7</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor's degree</td>
<td>17.7</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>20.1</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced degree</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than high school diploma</td>
<td>15.9</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>22.6</td>
<td>40.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school graduate or more</td>
<td>84.1</td>
<td>86.9</td>
<td>77.4</td>
<td>59.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than bachelor's degree</td>
<td>73.3</td>
<td>73.2</td>
<td>69.0</td>
<td>76.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor's degree or more</td>
<td>26.7</td>
<td>26.8</td>
<td>31.0</td>
<td>23.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1/ Age 25 years and over.
2/ Years of school completed, not attended.

Ethnic and Hispanic Statistics Branch, Population Division
Internet Release date: March 10, 2003

Table 2: Poverty Level of the Population by Citizenship Status: March 2002.
(Numbers in thousands.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AGE, AND POVERTY STATUS</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Native</th>
<th>Naturalized Citizen</th>
<th>Not a Citizen</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>Percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Population</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Below poverty level</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>19.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above poverty level</td>
<td>88.3</td>
<td>88.9</td>
<td>90.1</td>
<td>80.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under 18 years</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Below poverty level</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>19.4</td>
<td>28.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above poverty level</td>
<td>83.7</td>
<td>84.2</td>
<td>80.6</td>
<td>71.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 to 64 years</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Below poverty level</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>18.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above poverty level</td>
<td>89.9</td>
<td>90.7</td>
<td>91.3</td>
<td>81.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65 years and over</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Below poverty level</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>18.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above poverty level</td>
<td>89.9</td>
<td>90.4</td>
<td>86.9</td>
<td>81.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1/ Excludes unrelated individuals under 15 years.
2/ Poverty status based on income in previous calendar year.

Ethnic and Hispanic Statistics Branch, Population Division
Internet Release date: March 10, 2003
Although new immigrants have done well in the Bachelor and Graduate categories, their numbers are very low compared to those of natives under the same college, high school diploma, and lower grades categories, a huge pool of population. This situation can explain why the poverty rates amongst the new immigrants are higher than those of natives, since a better education helps in earning more income in general.

**How new immigrants can convert their knowledge into skills recognized by the State of Virginia.**

New immigrants come in with different levels of education, and therefore they need different ways of converting their knowledge into useful skills recognized by the State of Virginia. Also, some of them have their knowledge documented, others do not, and others are not educated at all.

For those whose education can be documented, there are institutions specialized in assessing and certifying their credentials.

In Virginia, I have found on the web the following institutions:

- A company called “Credential Evaluators, Inc.”, who operate nationwide, and have branches in Virginia (CEI).
- An organization called “Educational Credentials Evaluators, Inc.” (ECE). This organization operates in the United States and Canada, and has branches in Virginia as well.

The web addresses for these two institutions can be found at the end of this report, under the references section.

For those whose education cannot be documented, they can take assessment tests in order to obtain a diploma or certificate, be awarded college credits, or be admitted in a specific educational program.

There are numerous tests that individuals can take, and they differ depending on the level of education and the purpose of taking them. The Educational Testing Service, a worldwide private educational testing and measurement organization, offers and administers a considerable number of tests, and has sites in the State of Virginia. A complete list of tests they offer and the selected sites in Virginia can be found on their website. (ETS)

Here are some of those tests that can help new immigrants:

- Test of English as Foreign Language (TOEFL): This test is designed to assess the level of English skills of foreigners who plan to study in a North American college or university, especially when the particular institution has it as a requirement.
- Test of Spoken English (TSE): This test gives no-native English speakers an opportunity to demonstrate their ability to speak the English language. It’s mostly designed for individuals who plan to obtain licenses of practicing in medical and health allied fields, such as doctors, pharmacists, registered nurses, etc.
- College-Level Examination Program (CLEP): This program is the most widely accepted credit-by-examination program in the country. More than 2,800 accredited colleges and universities award credit for satisfactory scores on CLEP examinations. CLEP enables a person to demonstrate college-level achievement in 34 different subject areas. By obtaining scores that are satisfactory to the college, the person may receive up to two years of college credit. CLEP examinations are administered at more than 1,200 locations in the United States and will be arranged for anyone living outside the U.S.
- **DANTES**: This program is a nationally recognized testing program that gives individuals the opportunity to receive college credit for education acquired outside the traditional college/university classroom.

- **Graduate Management Admission Test (GMAT)**: This test is used by many graduate schools of business & management as one criterion in considering applications for admission.

- **SAT**: This test measures verbal and mathematical reasoning skills students have developed over time and skills they need to be successful academically. Many colleges and universities use the SAT as one indicator among others—class rank, high school GPA, extracurricular activities, personal essay, and teacher recommendations—of a student's readiness to do college-level work.

Another very important test, but not administered by the Educational Testing Service, is the **GED** (General Education Development), which is rather administered by the GED Testing Service worldwide, and is available in the State of Virginia.

The GED test is designed for individuals who want to obtain an equivalent of a high school diploma. According to the Center for Adult Learning Educational Credentials (CALEC), an organization based in Washington, DC, “more than 860,000 adults worldwide take the GED Tests each year. Those who obtain scores high enough to earn a GED credential outperform at least 40 percent of today’s high school seniors…One out of every seven high school diplomas issued each year in the United States is based on passing the GED Tests. More than 95 percent of U.S. employers consider GED graduates the same as traditional high school graduates in regard to hiring, salary, and opportunity for advancement.” (GED Testing Service)

The American Council on Education, dubbed ACENET, hosts the website of CALEC, with complete and detailed information on the GED Test, and its URL ¹ is listed at the end of this report. (GED Testing Service)

For those who have very little or no education at all, they need (or must) to enroll in Adult Literacy Education Programs, which are also attended by natives who have the same level of education.

According to the National Adult Literacy Survey conducted in 1999-2000, more than one million Virginians have not completed high school. Another one million have finished it, but they are deficient in one or more basic skill areas. Also, 11,203 out of 31,674 (more than 1/3) individuals enrolled in adult education programs were English as a Second Language (ESL) Students. (Adult Education Programs and Services).

To find out more about the list of literacy services providers along with the places where they offer them in the State of Virginia, the website of the “Virginia Adult Learning Resource Center (VALRC)” is an appropriate site to visit and its URL is listed at the end of this report.

**What sources of higher education are available in the State of Virginia.**

The State of Virginia has numerous institutions offering various majors and different levels, from the associate level up to the doctoral level.

According to the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV), a state body monitoring and managing the policymaking on higher education in Virginia, there are:

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¹ URL: Universal Resource Locator = path to the webpage.
- 15 public four-year institutions,
- 24 public two-year institutions,
- 40 private not-for-profit institutions,
- 12 private for-profit institutions,
- 40 out-of-state institutions operating in the Commonwealth.

Also, the Virginia higher education system is the 11th largest in the entire United States. (SCHEV)

The list and links to websites of these institutions can be found on the website of this state body, listed at the end of this report.

**How accessible those sources of higher education are and what is the best way to access them.**

Access to higher education institutions can be difficult if one doesn’t plan ahead and gather enough information in order to make a wise decision, depending on his or her particular situation. We will focus on the following considerations:

- Citizenship requirements, in-state Tuition, and Financial Aid
- Programs offered
- Geographical location

Higher education in Virginia and across America is expensive, because the economic system is based on capitalism, which requires individuals to rely primarily on themselves instead of on relying on the government. However, residents of the State of Virginia are allowed to pay lower fees compared to non-residents of the State, sometimes down to 30 percent of the latter. As for citizenship requirements, new immigrants generally are well accepted in the higher education institutions, sometimes without totally meeting them.

Lately, there have been issues of banning undocumented immigrants from being considered as residents of the State of Virginia, but the law hasn’t passed yet and educational institutions are very opposed to that measure, which gives hope that some members of the immigrant community will not lose the privilege of studying at U.S. colleges and universities. A bill, prefiled in December 2002 and reintroduced in January 2003 to the Education Committee of the House, has more details on who would be eligible if it were to be signed into law by the governor of Virginia. (House Bill N° 1610)

As for Financial Aid, there are different types of financial aid and scholarships in the state of Virginia. They come from different sources: federal, state, institution, and private. To be eligible for those types of financial aid, the student is required to complete first the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, known as FAFSA. There are many resources available that provide financial aid information, such as the Internet, Libraries, College Financial Aid Office, and sometimes Employers. (SCHEV)

The Virginia Higher Education System offers a very rich variety of programs. It has many two-year colleges, which allows students to earn associate degrees in various specializations not available in four-year universities. Also, undecided students may use those two year-colleges to earn credits they can transfer to a four-year college and / or university. Each college or university’s website has a detailed list of programs they offer. (SCHEV)
Higher education institutions are well distributed in the State of Virginia, with obviously more concentrations in cities, where there are concentrations of inhabitants as well. Some colleges and universities have multiple campuses, which allows students to attend college near their domicile.

A new immigrant should be aware of the above considerations when planning to enroll in a college or university, in addition to other requirements specific to each individual institution. Getting information is critical to that process.

Conclusion

Summary

This report dealt with ways of improving the new immigrants’ education level in the State of Virginia. We discovered levels of education of new immigrants vis-à-vis natives of the United States, and the relationship with the levels of poverty.

The report focused on how to improve that situation, depending on the immigrants’ categories in terms of the level of education they have when they arrive in the United States.

Some of them already have a certain level of education, which can be documented, but not assessed yet against the U.S. standards. We have seen how they can convert their knowledge in skills recognized by the State of Virginia, by using institutions specialized in assessment and measurement of foreign credentials.

Others have a certain level of education, but cannot document it due to diverse circumstances. We have seen the available tests they can take and earn certificates or diplomas, or credits towards a degree.

Another category of immigrants had little or no education at all. We have seen how they can improve their education by attending adult literacy education programs, and where they could get information related to those programs.

We put more focus on achieving higher education and what was available in the State of Virginia.

We emphasized the challenges of going to college for an immigrant in Virginia, especially those who don’t have all the required paperwork to make them eligible to all the Virginia residents’ benefits. We discussed how to meet those challenges and where to look for information, the key for better access.

Recommendations

Given the information I have gathered for this report, I would recommend the following:

- Immigrants should be made aware of the availability of various education opportunities in the State of Virginia, and of the categories in which they fall, in order to use the available and suitable resources.

- Organizations working with new immigrants should profile their education level first, in order to request appropriate information or suggest appropriate action on their behalf.

- Organizations and groups advocating for immigration should follow closely changes in the State policies and try to influence them in order to allow new immigrants to keep some benefits they may loose if nobody acts on their behalf.
Sources


Educational Credential Evaluators, Inc. (ECE). 03/22/2003 http://www.ece.org/about_ece.html


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