



Cost of Illegal Immigrant Students Hits School Budgets

The cost of educating the tens of thousands of Unaccompanied Alien Children (UAC) who poured across our borders in the spring and summer of 2014 is having a continued effect on the cost — and quality — of public education. A new report from the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR), which campaigns for an end to illegal immigration, focuses on the negative effects the greatly increased number of students enrolled in English proficiency classes is having on seven school districts in the Washington, D.C., metro area.



FAIR's report cited data from the Department of Health and Human Services, indicating that more than 55,000 UACs were released to relatives and other sponsors throughout the United States between October 2013 and September 2014, with more than 5,100 of these settled in the Washington, D.C. area. The data indicated that these UACs were added to a pool of approximately 100,000 U.S.-born children of illegal immigrants, further increasing the number of students in area public schools who are not proficient in English. In fact, noted the report, most Limited English Proficient (LEP) students are children of illegal immigrant parents.

The FAIR report noted:

The money spent on LEP education in the D.C. area is substantial. Most of that funding comes from local sources, usually from property taxes, with most of the rest coming out of state budgets. The federal government, which is primarily responsible for the influx of immigrants and children of immigrants into local school systems, contributes only a negligible amount of funding to offset the cost of LEP education.

"Education programs are being cut," the *Washington Examiner* quoted the report's author, Eric Ruark. "We're not saying that [English proficiency classes] are the cause, but it's certainly taking money away from them."

FAIR spokesman Ira Mehlman asserted that as a result of the extra money schools must spend on LEP classes, programs for students who are already proficient English speakers may suffer.

"What is likely to happen is that the quality of their education is going to diminish," Mehlman said. "The resources available won't be spent on [students proficient in English]. It's an additional burden on schools that are already overburdened."

The rising costs of educating both Unaccompanied Alien Children (UAC) and those accompanied by parents who are also in the country illegally are being felt nationwide. Fox News reported last summer that the burden in Lynn, Massachusetts, had become so great that the city's mayor, Judith Flanagan Kennedy, traveled to Washington to seek a solution from federal officials.

"I love the fact that Lynn is a diverse community," Kennedy said. "By speaking out about this, I have been called a racist, I have been called a hater. That is not the case. I'm simply looking at this from the



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point of view of the economic impact it has had on my city.”

Kennedy spoke about her city’s immigration-related challenges in an interview with Fox News. When the program’s host, Stuart Varney, asked her to comment on the relocation of 248 children from Guatemala into Lynn’s school system on very short notice, Kennedy replied: “Yes, that’s the number that we have received between the ages of 14 and 17 in the last two school years.”

When Varney asked, “Who’s paying for them?” Kennedy answered: “We are.”

Varney then asked, “Now, can you cope? I’m talking financially. Can you cope financially?” Kennedy answered: “This year, I have had to increase my school department budget 9.3 percent, and have had to cut all of my other city budgets between 2 percent and 5 percent to make up for the influx of the unaccompanied children and the surge.”

AP education writer Kimberly Hefling noted in a report last September 29: “For cash-strapped districts, providing for these students’ needs can be arduous, particularly if they arrive after student headcounts are taken to determine school funding.”

Hefling’s report spotlighted Sussex County, Delaware, where the local chicken processing facilities and farms have long attracted Spanish-speaking migrants. Though school districts in the county already had in place an early learning program for non-English-speaking students, they were nevertheless unprepared for the influx of 70 new Hispanic students, mostly from Guatemala, who enrolled at Sussex Central High School last fall.

As we noted in our articles about this topic last summer, with the tens of thousands of pending cases involving unaccompanied children who have entered our country illegally, the process of educating, housing, and attending to their other needs will likely continue for years and cost the taxpayers a substantial amount. And President Obama’s and Homeland Secretary Jeh Johnson’s recent executive actions expanding the Deferred Action for Child Arrivals (DACA) program will only make the situation worse.

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