



# Public or private? The influence of immigration on native schooling choices in the United States<sup>☆</sup>



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## ABSTRACT

This study examines whether rising enrollments of foreign-born students in US public schools caused a movement among native children from public schools to private schools, something the literature has labeled native flight to private school. Using data from the National Center of Educational Statistics School District Demographic System, estimates of native flight are constructed using enrollment data on native and foreign-born, school-age children from 1990, 2000, and 2010. Concern regarding omitted variables bias necessitates the use of an instrumental variables technique. An instrument for the foreign-born enrollment is created using information about the ethnic composition of school districts in 1980 to predict the enrollment patterns of foreign-born students in later years. Two-stage least squares estimates confirm the presence of native flight. Flight to private school among white native students is occurring in smaller school districts in non-traditional immigrant receiving states, while flight among native minorities and Hispanics is located in school districts that reside in traditional immigrant receiving states.

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## 1. Introduction

Over the last several decades, immigration to the United States has altered the demographic makeup of primary and secondary public schools. To this end, Fig. 1 reports the percent (solid line) and the number (dotted line) of all children aged 3–19 enrolled in public school who are foreign-born in major metropolitan areas in the United States from 1990 through 2010.<sup>1</sup> These data indicate that

between 1990 and 2010, the number of foreign-born children enrolled in public school increased by more than 40%, moving from 1.54 million to 2.18 million. Over that same time period, the fraction of all students who are foreign-born in public schools increased from 5.23 to 5.76%, a 10% increase.

These changes have attracted the attention of policy makers and researchers in part because this large influx of new, foreign-born student population may place strain on the existing public school system. Between 1990 and 2010, growth among the population of foreign-born children in public school was responsible for about 8% of the growth

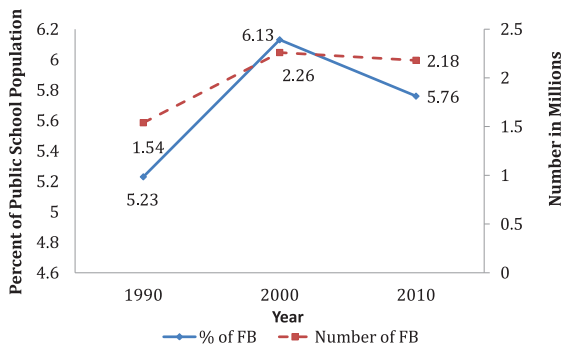
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<sup>1</sup> Author's calculations come from the School District Demographics System run by the National Center for Education Statistics. The School District Demographics System (SDDS) publishes aggregate totals of nu-

merous variables, including enrollment by nativity, for school districts across the country for multiple years. The SDDS uses both decennial census and American Community Survey data to create these aggregate statistics. Aggregate school enrollment statistics for this particular figure are derived from the 1990 and 2000 decennial censuses along with 5 year estimates from the 2006–2010 American Community Survey (U.S. Department of Education, 1990; U.S. Department of Education, 2000; U.S. Department of Education, 2006–2010). Metropolitan areas used in the construction are based upon MSA definitions used in the 2000 Census.



**Fig. 1.** Percent and number of foreign born students enrolled in public school. *Notes:* Author's calculations come from the school district demographics system run by the national center for education statistics. The school district demographics system (SDDS) publishes aggregate totals of numerous variables, including enrollment by nativity, for school districts across the country for multiple years. The SDDS uses both decennial censuses and American Community Survey data to create these aggregate statistics. Aggregate school enrollment statistics for this particular figure are derived from the 1990 and 2000 decennial censuses along with 5 year estimates from the 2006 to 2010 American Community Survey. The statistics above are for individuals living in MSAs between the ages of 3 and 19 enrolled in primary or secondary school in the United States.

of metropolitan area public education systems. Moreover, a large fraction of foreign-born children are enrolled in a small number of school districts. In 2010, 46% of foreign-born students who attended public school were enrolled in just 100 school districts. The districts and schools that foreign-born students attend also face a number of challenges. For example, data from the 2007 Common Core of Data indicates that the average Hispanic student, which represents the majority of foreign-born children in public school (59% according to the 2010 American Community Survey), attends a school with twice the fraction of students on free or reduced-priced lunch programs as compared to white, non-Hispanic children. Many foreign-born students have limited English proficiency. According to the 2010 American Community Survey, about 35% of foreign-born students enrolled in public school self-report either not speaking English at all or not speaking English very well. Foreign-born students tend to come from families with much lower household income and have parents with lower levels of educational attainment. In 2010, the mean household income for foreign-born students attending public school was \$54,790; whereas for native students attending public school, the mean household income was \$80,132. Approximately 60% of native children enrolled in public school had fathers with at least a high school degree, compared to only 42% for fathers of foreign-born students. These factors and others have led to much lower levels of educational attainment for foreign-born students. In 2010, high school graduation rates for those aged 19–22 born in the US stood at 89%. In contrast, the same high school graduation rate for the foreign-born population of students who had been in this country for at least 5 years was 66%.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> All of the data in this paragraph are the author's calculations from a variety of sources including the 2010 American Community Survey 5-year

In the face of these trends, it is important to understand how the increased inflow of foreign-born students into public schools affects the educational outcomes and educational attainment of native students. The impact of increased immigration on the educational attainment of native students, in particular native minorities, in the United States initially received attention from *Betts (1998)* and *Betts and Lofstrom (2000)*. *Betts (1998)* showed that native minorities, the African American and Hispanic native populations, had a decreased probability of finishing graduating high school as the share of a state's population classified as being an immigrant increased. *Betts and Lofstrom (2000)* estimated that the impact of an increase in the share of immigrants in a state had the largest detrimental effect on native minorities, including Hispanic, Asian, and African American natives, in terms of lowering the overall educational attainment among these native minorities. At the post-secondary level, *Hoxby (1998)* presented evidence that the immigrant population crowd out native minorities for post-secondary opportunities.

More recently, the impact of immigrants on native educational attainment and access to educational opportunities has been found to have a much smaller negative impact; indeed some studies have found no negative impact and even suggested native students have increased their educational attainment in the presence of increased immigration. *Hunt (2012)* extended the analysis of *Betts and Lofstrom (2000)* and *Betts (1998)* and found that an increase in the share of children classified as immigrants led to a small reduction in the probability of natives graduating high school most notably with African American natives. After accounting for the impact of immigrants in the labor market along with the impact of immigrants in school, *Hunt* showed that the net effect of immigration was actually positive for African American natives leading to an increase in the probability of graduating from high school. *Neymotin (2009)* provided evidence that countered the assertion that the increased presence of foreign-born students impacts the probability of natives attending college.<sup>3</sup> Outside of the United States, studies focused on the impact of immigration on native educational attainment have found similar small negative impacts on native educational attainment (*Jensen & Rasmussen, 2011*) which are often limited to native students from a low socio-economic background (*Gould, Lavy, & Passerman, 2009*).<sup>4</sup> *Brunello and Rocco (2011)* used cross-sectional

sample (2006–2010) (*U.S. Department of Education, 2006–2010*) and the 2007–2008 Common Core of Data's Public Elementary/Secondary School Universe Survey Data (*U.S. Department of Education, 2007–2008*). Calculations from the Census use a sample of students between the ages of 3–19, not living in group quarters, and currently enrolled in primary or secondary school. The sample was also limited to individuals located in metropolitan areas.

<sup>3</sup> *Neymotin* uses a combination of student SAT test scores and college application data along with aggregate school level data from the 2000 census to show that increased presence of immigrants in public school has no effect on native students' SAT scores or college application patterns.

<sup>4</sup> *Jensen and Rasmussen (2011)* use data from math and reading test scores in Denmark to show that native students in schools with higher concentrations of immigrant students do worse on their test scores. *Gould, Lavy, and Passerman (2009)* use data on Israeli students to show

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