

Missouri's Growing Immigrant Population and Implications for School Districts

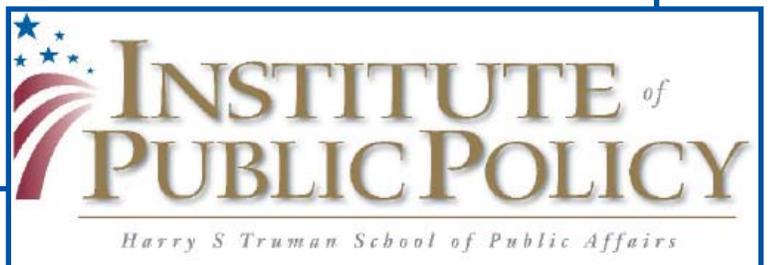
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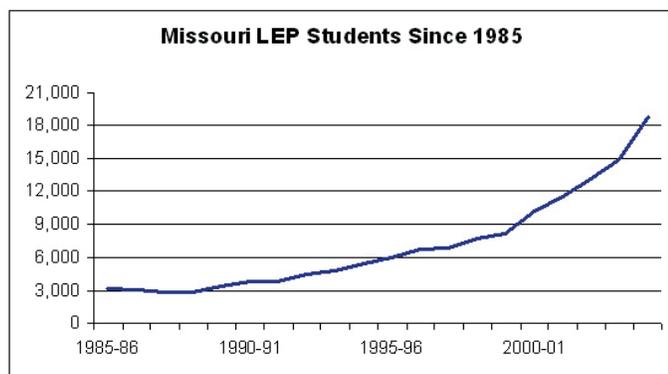
Missouri's Growing Immigrant Population and Implications for School Districts

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Overview

Missouri has experienced considerable growth in immigration, and this trend is reflected in the growth of Limited English Proficient (LEP) students. There has been steady growth of LEP students in Missouri over the past twenty years, but this growth has increased significantly in the past five years. According to the 2004 Limited English Proficient Student Census of the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), the number of LEP students has increased dramatically from 10,238 students in 1999 to 18,745 LEP students in 2004. The rapid growth immigration has left many schools unprepared to address specific needs of children with limited English proficiency.

Figure 1



Source: Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2005

No Child Left Behind Title III

Immigration is a phenomenon that school districts must address in order to be compliant with federal laws. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) creates increased accountability measures for public schools. The goal of the law is to have all children proficient in reading and math by 2014 and states must develop annual tests to measure student progress. The law calls for the use of scientifically proven teaching methods, highly qualified teachers in every classroom, and increased parental involvement.

Title III of NCLB, Language Instruction for Limited English and Immigrant Students, specifically targets the issues that accompany immigration by making formula grants available for states to develop their own programs to serve the needs of their LEP student population. Of the grants given to states, 95% of the grants are given directly to Local Educational Agencies (LEAs or school districts) and are broken down into two different groups, LEP funds and Immigrant funds.

LEP allocations, which account for 80% of the money allocated to LEAs, are based on the percentage of LEP students in a district in proportion to the state population and is given in a minimum block grant of \$10,000. A district must also have at least 20-21 students in the district in order to qualify for the block grant, but the more LEP students there are in a district in comparison to the state, the more Title III funding the district receives. For example, Columbia schools received \$58,829 for 350 students and St. Louis received \$496,087 for 2,895 students in 2004-05.

The immigrant funds account for 20% of LEA funding, and this grant is based on the number of recently arrived immigrant students in the current year as compared to the average of the two preceding years. A district may qualify for immigrant funds but not have enough to qualify for the block grant. Immigrant funding ranged from \$5,000 for an increase of 5 immigrant students in Troy to \$74,864 for an increase of 132 immigrant students in St. Louis.

The remaining 5% of the state's Title III funds are used towards State Educational Administration and Planning (3%) and State Educational Agency Statewide Activities (2%). Statewide activities include the Migrant Education and English Language Learner program, which has nine regional centers throughout the state that provide technical assistance to school districts in implementing programs.

Title III Funding in Missouri

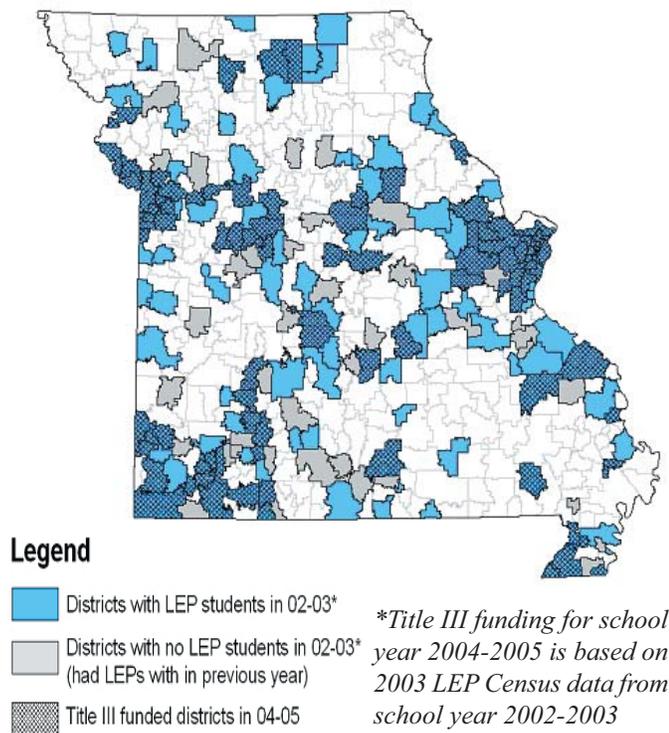
Although districts may not qualify for Title III block funding, they are required by NCLB to provide services for their LEP students. Of the 220 districts in Missouri that have reported at least 1 LEP student from the LEP Census, only 106 have



received some type of federal funding since the implementation of NCLB based on available DESE data on LEP allocations.

Figure 2 highlights the 2004-05 allocation of Title III in Missouri. LEP allocations for the state totaled \$2,525,791 which covered 15,190 students in the 101 school districts that received funding that year. The immigrant student funds totaled \$443,285 for an increase of 759 students. Districts that had an increase of five or more students received immigrant funds in this year. Areas that did not receive funding but had LEP students are represented by the plain blue areas. It is difficult to tell, however, which districts are actually receiving funding because districts can come together to apply for funding. Districts that are adjacent to another district with funding may receive help, but more isolated districts facing immigrant growth may not.

Figure 2. Title III Funded Districts 2004-2005



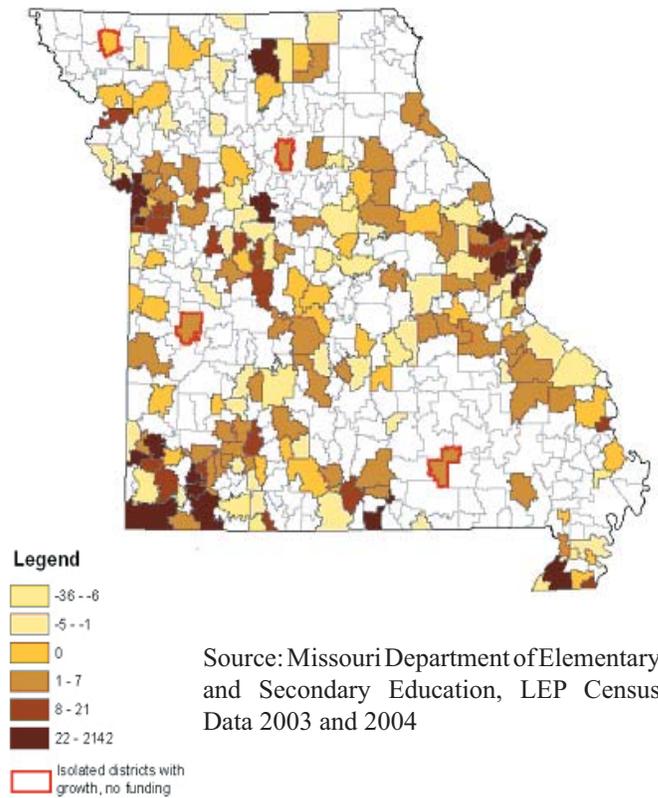
Source: Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, LEP and Immigrant Allocations

Growth of LEP students in Missouri School Districts

Missouri's change in LEP students by district can be seen in Figure 3. The change represents only one year of growth, but it is still apparent that high growth (defined as 22 or more students) is spread throughout the state. The highest growth rate has been in the Kansas City with 2,142 new LEP students, a 69% increase in the past year. Increases of LEP students can be seen throughout the state in areas that are not concentrated near large cities. Many of these increases have been attributed

to various agricultural and industrial processing plants across the state. These areas have growing LEP populations, but may not have enough students to receive block grants under NCLB. Missouri does not currently have state funds set aside for accommodating LEP students. These areas that do not receive funding have the most difficult challenge to create programs and plans for these students without additional funds.

Figure 3. Change in LEP Student Census by District 2002-2003 to 2003-2004



Source: Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, LEP Census Data 2003 and 2004

Figure 3 is also marked with areas of decreasing numbers across the state. The decline in the number of LEP students is evidence of the mobility of some immigrant groups. There were 111 districts that reported an increase of students and 68 districts that experienced a decrease in the number of LEP students. Most of the districts that have experienced double-digit decline in LEP student population contain a larger number of LEP students. For example, Columbia had a loss of 22 students but has an LEP population well over 300. Jefferson City has seen a decrease of 35 students, but continues to have a population of 231 LEP students.

Figure 3 also highlights some districts that have experienced growth but do not have enough students to qualify for block grants. These highlighted districts (Keytesville, Maryville, Appleton City, and Winona) are isolated from other districts with LEP students, which makes it difficult for them to partner with other districts to apply for funding.



Conclusion

Programs designed to serve the special needs of LEP students are crucial in the academic development of LEP students, which is recognized by the federal government in NCLB, Title III. If these needs are not addressed in the classroom, results could be lower academic achievement in the future, which may affect state annual assessment scores. An even more serious scenario would be an increased dropout rate in the state. School districts and the state should recognize the importance of LEP programs and should be prepared for the prospect of serving new LEP students whether or not they receive federal funding. These numbers suggest that Missouri should anticipate continued growth in the future.

Author Biography

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Sita Sengsavanh is a recent graduate of the Harry S. Truman School of Public Affairs at the University of Missouri – Columbia. She earned her bachelor's degree at the University of Illinois at Chicago in Management and Marketing with a Concentration in International Business. Her MPA specializations are Public Policy and Organizational Change.

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