

INCREASING SKILLS & OPPORTUNITY FOR WISCONSIN'S IMMIGRANTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Immigrants have been shaping Wisconsin's economy since the state's founding, and it is critical to ensure that today's immigrants have access to the skills and education that will build shared prosperity and strengthen our economy into the future. This brief provides an overview of demographic trends among the immigrant population, and addresses pressing needs with regard to citizenship, language training, and access to higher education that prevent these working families from thriving economically.

In short, the following policy approaches would expand the economic opportunities available to immigrant workers in Wisconsin:

- Invest in and expand effective programming to advance the education and skills of immigrant workers;
- Strengthen the access of non-citizens to educational and economic opportunity; and
- Raise the wage floor for all workers.

At the state level, there are a number of steps that could be taken to increase opportunity and education for immigrants, strengthening their contribution to the economy. These steps include:

- Ensure a consistent focus on immigrant issues in state and local workforce development plans being developed in response to the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act;
- Devote resources to further investigate and evaluate the unique success of career pathway bridges for immigrant students;
- Strengthen practice at public colleges and universities by disseminating these research results and best practices across campuses;
- Target a portion of workforce funding streams directly to immigrant populations or develop new sources of funding to support and expand career pathway bridge programming for English language learners.

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ABOUT COWS

COWS is a nonprofit think-and-do tank, based at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, that promotes "high road" solutions to social problems. These treat shared growth and opportunity, environmental sustainability, and resilient democratic institutions as necessary and achievable complements in human development. Through our various projects, we work with cities around the country to promote innovation and the implementation of high road policy. COWS is nonpartisan but values-based. We seek a world of equal opportunity and security for all.

Written by Laura Dresser and Mel Meder

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While citizenship will remain a federal issue, restoring in-state tuition for undocumented immigrant students at public colleges and universities in the state would expand access to higher education for many immigrant workers. Establishing citizenship resource centers can increase temporarily authorized immigrants' access to naturalization.

Lastly, raising the job floor in the following ways would benefit all workers, but especially immigrants:

- Raise and index the state minimum wage;
- Ensure strong enforcement of labor standards, especially by increasing access of immigrant workers to information about their rights in the workplace;
- Extend paid sick leave to all workers and develop a state paid family & medical leave insurance program.

INTRODUCTION

On February 18, 2016, thousands of immigrants and their supporters gathered at the Wisconsin Capitol. Carrying banners with butterflies that proclaimed “Immigration is Beautiful,” the protest was aimed at two bills under consideration in the Wisconsin legislature that hold both material and symbolic threats for immigrants, especially those who are undocumented: AB 450 ends the practice of “sanctuary cities,” barring cities from implementing policies which explicitly inform immigrants that citizenship status will not be an area of inquiry in routine law enforcement practice, while SB 533 requires cities to add “not for voting” designation to any local photo identification they issue.¹ The protest and the implications of these laws should place immigrant issues at the center of our state policy conversation. Immigrant workers are making invaluable contributions to key economic sectors throughout the state of Wisconsin. Policy should support rather than undermine their participation in the state's economy.

We have a chance, as a state, to begin considering education, training, and labor market policies that can support immigrant workers in making a steady transition toward greater financial stability. Such policies will help create opportunity in our economy while building the skills that employers need. Such policies can help build a floor under labor standards to ensure that the state's best employers are not undercut by unscrupulous actors willing to undermine labor standards by subjecting immigrants to illegal conditions or outright wage theft. Such policies help build a stronger Wisconsin for all of us.

Focusing policy attention on these issues honors not only today's immigrants but also Wisconsin's history. Immigration has been a driving economic force from the very founding of both our nation and our state. Shortly after Wisconsin became a state, just over one in three residents were foreign-born.² In the 1850s, the state's immigrants were primarily from Western Europe, and their influential role in Wisconsin's shaping is widely evident in everything from the state's devotion to brats to its myriad ethnic festivals.³ Over the course of the 20th century, the share of immigrants among Wisconsin's population fell from that high. In the 1990s

1 Wisconsin State Legislature, “2015 Senate Bill 533,” introduced Jan. 8 2016 (accessed Feb. 23 2016), available at: <https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/2015/related/proposals/sb533>; Wisconsin State Legislature, “2015 Assembly Bill 450,” introduced Oct. 23 2015 (accessed Feb. 23 2016), available at: <http://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/2015/related/proposals/ab450>.

2 Economic Analysis and Research Network, “Future of Work in Wisconsin Final,” (accessed Feb. 2, 2016), available at: <http://www.earncentral.org/futureofworkinthestates.htm>.

3 David Long and Dan Veroff, “A Brief History of Immigration in Wisconsin,” University of Wisconsin Extension and UW Applied Population Lab, Dec. 13 2010, available at: http://www.apl.wisc.edu/publications/WI_Immigration_History.pdf.

and 2000s, immigration to the US began to rise again. In 2013, of Wisconsin's 5.7 million residents, more than 272,000 are foreign born (Table 1).

Wisconsin's 272,000 immigrants account for 5 percent of the state population. That's well down from levels a century ago, but higher than in the recent past. While Wisconsin's immigrant share – accounting for one in twenty residents – is significant, it is worth remembering that the national immigrant share, 13 percent, is more than twice Wisconsin's.

Disparities in poverty status become clear along lines of citizenship status more than whether an individual is US born or an immigrant. Table 2 shows that three in ten working immigrant families where at least one parent is an immigrant, like their non-immigrant peers, are struggling to get by with incomes below the modest threshold of twice the federal poverty line.⁴ About one tenth of the total population in both groups are counted among the working poor. Factoring in US citizenship status by origin reveals more disparity, especially for non-citizens. Table 3 indicates that immigrant individuals who attain citizenship are

4 WFPF 2015 data tables identify 200 percent of the federal poverty threshold as \$47,248 in 2013 dollars. A family is defined as either a married couple or a single-parent family with at least one child under 18 years of age. A family is considered to be a "working" if, in the last 12 months, family members aged 15 and older show combined work effort of at least 39 weeks – or combined work effort of at least 26 weeks, plus one currently unemployed parent actively looking for work in the past four weeks; thus the consistently unemployed or only occasionally employed are not counted as working.

Table 1

WISCONSIN POPULATION BY ORIGIN, 2013

Category	Population
Total WI Pop	5,725,352
US Born	5,452,746
Foreign born - total	272,606
Foreign born citizens	117,502
Foreign born non-citizens	155,104

Source: 2011-2013 American Community Survey 3-Year Estimates Table S0501

Table 2

WISCONSIN WORKING FAMILIES' POVERTY STATUS BY ORIGIN OF PARENT(S), 2013

Poverty Status in Past 12 Months	No Immigrant Parents	At Least One Immigrant Parent
Below 100 percent of the poverty level	9.2%	9.6%
100 to 199 percent of the poverty level	20.4%	19.8%
At or above 200 percent of the poverty level	70.4%	70.6%

Source: Working Poor Families Project 2015 Data Tables 1.A.2a, 1.A.2b, S.3a, and S.3b. Data on total number of families in each category of parent origin, used to generate the distributions, was imputed.

Table 3

ESTIMATED DISTRIBUTION OF WISCONSIN INDIVIDUALS' POVERTY STATUS BY ORIGIN, 2013

Poverty Status in Past 12 Months	US Born	Foreign Born - Citizen	Foreign Born - Non-Citizen
Below 100 percent of the poverty level	13.0%	11.8%	25.3%
100 to 199 percent of the poverty level	17.4%	21.1%	30.6%
At or above 200 percent of the poverty level	69.6%	67.2%	44.1%

Source: 2011-2013 American Community Survey 3-Year Estimates Table S0501

impoverished at about the same rates as US born individuals, with over one in eight living below the poverty line. That level of poverty is fairly high, but there is not enormous disparity in it. However, non-citizen immigrants are twice as likely to be in poverty. One in four non-citizen immigrants lives with income below the nation's meager poverty line, and less than half of non-citizen immigrants have income above 200 percent of the poverty threshold – a level of income that is by no means excessive. More than half of Wisconsin's non-citizen immigrants are struggling to make ends meet, in spite of a strong and consistent commitment to work.

The economic contributions of Wisconsin's immigrants through tax revenue add a strong fiscal case to the moral imperative for greater inclusion of immigrant workers. Within the state's direct control, increasing the wage floor and offering expanded career pathway bridges and other training programs would move more immigrant residents of all citizenship statuses into higher-paying jobs, generating more local and state tax revenue. While action to resolve citizenship status can only occur at the federal level, Wisconsin would also have much to gain in its tax-base if its non-citizen immigrants became citizens. Recent estimates suggest that undocumented residents already pay over \$80 million in state and local taxes in Wisconsin, but that their being granted full legal status would generate an additional \$17 million in tax revenue.⁵

In order to support a more robust policy discussion about immigrants in the state, this paper seeks to shed light on the Wisconsin immigrant population, documenting background demographics and key challenges that affect their employment and prosperity. We close with policy ideas for improving immigrant economic outcomes and helping solve skill issues in the state. We offer these solutions not only to secure stronger economic outcomes and opportunity for the state's immigrants but also because we know that only by building the skills of all Wisconsin residents will the state be able to thrive economically. The state's immigrants, like generations of immigrants before them, are working to seize the opportunities that Wisconsin offers. With targeted policy and training and strong labor standards, Wisconsin can build infrastructure to allow more immigrants to strengthen the state's skills base.

WHO ARE WISCONSIN'S IMMIGRANTS?

DIVERSE IN COUNTRY OF ORIGIN

While many discussions about immigration to the United States are framed around immigrants from Latin America, the reality of immigration nationally and in Wisconsin is substantially broader than that. Table 4 shows the region of origin of Wisconsin's immigrant community. To be sure, Latin American countries are the predominant source of Wisconsin's immigrants; 41 percent of the state's immigrants have come from Latin America. But over half of Wisconsin immigrants are from other regions. More than one in three immigrants are from Asia and another 19 percent of immigrants are from Europe. Immigrants are not a monolithic group, and the

Table 4
IMMIGRANT POPULATION IN WISCONSIN BY WORLD REGION OF ORIGIN, 2013

Latin America	40.8%
Asia	33.7%
Europe	18.5%
Africa	4.0%
Northern America	2.5%
Oceania	0.5%

Source: 2011-2013 American Community Survey 3-Year Estimates Table CPO2

⁵ Lisa Christensen Gee, Matthew Gardner, and Meg Wiehe, "Undocumented Immigrants' State & Local Tax Contributions," February 2016 (updated version), page 3, available at: <http://www.itep.org/pdf/immigration2016.pdf>.

divergent outcomes – especially those of citizenship status, language proficiency, and education – have large impacts on their economic inclusion in Wisconsin.

CITIZENSHIP STATUS

Table 1 (see introduction) shows the citizenship status of the state's 272,000 immigrants, distinguishing between immigrants who are naturalized citizens of the US and non-citizen immigrants. (Naturalization refers to the process by which foreign-born residents become US citizens, guaranteeing them the same legal rights to work and live in the country as any US-born citizen.) There are some 117,000 naturalized citizens in Wisconsin, accounting for 43 percent of the state's immigrant population.⁶

Wisconsin has another 155,000 immigrant residents that are not US citizens, and this non-citizen category holds three meaningfully different statuses in it.⁷ The first subgroup of immigrants is lawful permanent residents, who are legally permitted to live and work in the US on a permanent basis (also known as holding a “green card”). A second distinct category of non-citizen immigrants is lawful temporary residents who are technically not considered immigrants due to the temporary nature of their student or work visas, but commonly understood to be immigrants and counted by the Census among the foreign-born population.⁸ The final category in the non-citizen immigrant status, and the center of the most contentious political debates, are undocumented residents who do not have status to work in the US legally. Estimates from 2012 suggest that there are about 85,000 undocumented immigrants in Wisconsin, which means just 3 of 10 immigrants in the state are undocumented.⁹ (This share is directly in line with the estimated national share of immigrants that are undocumented of 27 percent.¹⁰)

Further demographic data are presented with distinctions by citizenship status to demonstrate the striking disparities in outcomes between these two sub-populations.

LIMITED ENGLISH

English language proficiency is essential to thriving in Wisconsin's economy and one of the most important skills that many immigrants will need to acquire. Here the data are not on “immigrants” per se, but on the general population; however, immigrants and their children (many of whom have been born in the US) are the groups that predominate in the “limited English” statistics. It is important to consider two generations, as a 2013 estimate indicates that 18 percent of US born children of immigrants in Wisconsin lack English proficiency.¹¹ Table 5 suggests this effect as well, with five percent of US born Wisconsinites speaking a language other than English at home and one percent lacking proficiency.

⁶ Data from 2011-2013 ACS 3-Year estimates table S0501.

⁷ Data from 2011-2013 ACS 3-Year estimates table S0501; further details on legal definitions of various residency statuses available from the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration services Glossary page: <http://www.uscis.gov/tools/glossary>.

⁸ United States Census Bureau, “About Foreign Born Population,” (accessed Feb. 24 2016), available at: <https://www.census.gov/topics/population/foreign-born/about.html>.

⁹ Pew Research Center, “Unauthorized Immigrant Population Trends for States, Birth Countries and Regions – Wisconsin,” Dec. 11, 2014 (accessed Dec. 14, 2015), available at: <http://www.pewhispanic.org/2014/12/11/unauthorized-trends/>.

¹⁰ Jeffrey S. Passel and D'Vera Cohn, “Unauthorized immigrant population stable for half a decade,” Pew Research Center, Jul. 22 2015 (accessed Feb. 23 2016), available at: <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/07/22/unauthorized-immigrant-population-stable-for-half-a-decade/>; percentage imputed with total foreign-born US population data from 2014 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates table S0501.

¹¹ Urban Institute, “Children of Immigrants Data Tool,” 2012-2013 data for Wisconsin [drawn from IPUMS of American Community Survey] (accessed Feb. 24 2016), available at: <http://datatool.urban.org/charts/datatool/pages.cfm#>.

Not all immigrants or their children struggle with English proficiency, but a significant number of Wisconsin residents are facing language barriers. Overall, about three and a half percent of Wisconsin's total population age 18-64 speaks English less than "very well" as of 2013.¹² Table 5 shows that immigrants are driving the overall LEP rate. Non-citizen immigrants have the highest English language learning needs, as over half lack proficiency. Among immigrants who have gained citizenship, nearly a third are not English proficient.

Table 5

WISCONSIN POPULATION 5 YEARS AND OVER BY LANGUAGE SPOKEN AT HOME, 2013

<i>Language Spoken at Home</i>	<i>US Born</i>	<i>Foreign Born – Citizen</i>	<i>Foreign Born – Non-Citizen</i>
English only	95.1%	29.2%	11.5%
Language other than English	4.9%	70.8%	88.5%
Speak English less than "very well"	1.1%	32.2%	54.5%

Source: 2011-2013 American Community Survey 3-Year Estimates Table S0501

EDUCATION LEVELS

The educational attainment of immigrants in Wisconsin diverges substantially from that of other residents. Often, this stems from different structures of education in an immigrant's country of origin (which is very often the country in which they were educated). The most notable difference in educational attainment (presented in Table 6) is that immigrants are much more likely to have ended their education before completing high school. For example, while fewer than one in ten US born residents have not completed HS, more than 20 percent of immigrant citizens and 37 percent of immigrant non-citizens do not have HS degrees. For some immigrants, their language barriers are added onto significant literacy issues in their native language. Basic adult education – not only in English, but also literacy and numeracy – is a key need for many immigrants. Their ability to advance in the labor market and meet employers' skill needs requires a foundation of basic education.

Table 6

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT OF WISCONSIN POPULATION 25 YEARS AND OVER BY ORIGIN, 2013

<i>Education Level</i>	<i>US Born</i>	<i>Foreign born – Citizen</i>	<i>Foreign born – Non-Citizen</i>
Less than high school graduate	8.1%	21.7%	36.7%
High school graduate (includes equivalency)	33.0%	24.1%	23.4%
Some college or associate's degree	31.9%	22.4%	14.2%
Bachelor's degree	18.2%	16.7%	11.8%
Graduate or professional degree	9.0%	15.1%	13.9%

Source: 2011-2013 American Community Survey 3-Year Estimates Table S0501

12 Working Poor Families Project 2015 Data Table 2.A.5a.

At the other end of the educational spectrum, immigrants also hold advanced degrees more frequently than the US born population in the state. This is especially true of immigrant Wisconsinites with citizenship – their share with bachelors' degrees roughly matches the US born share, and their share with graduate degrees actually substantially exceeds the US born share of workers at these high levels of education. Non-citizen immigrants also have a high share with graduate degrees. Higher education is one of the surest roads to decent wages in the US labor market, and a substantial minority of immigrants in the state have clearly undertaken that route.

The immigrant population in the state is more often found at the tails of the educational distribution than Wisconsin's US born population. There are fewer workers in the middle, especially in the some college or associate's degree level. As we have consistently demonstrated in *The State of Working Wisconsin*, the associate's degree in this state secures above median wages.¹³ Increasing the number of working adults who attain these degrees provides a direct answer to needed opportunity for immigrants by connecting them to skills employers need.

INDUSTRY OF EMPLOYMENT

Immigrant workers are making important contributions to every sector in the Wisconsin economy. Table 7 reveals sectors where immigrants are especially critical, and also those where immigrants are underrepresented. The state's manufacturing sector benefits from this workforce; both citizen and non-citizen immigrants work in manufacturing at about seven percent higher rates than US born residents. This is an industry with higher median income so that access can be an important driver for immigrant opportunity. Non-citizen immigrants are over-represented in two of lowest wage industries as well. In the very low wage industries that include food services, accommodations (e.g. hotels and motels) and other services in arts and entertainment, non-citizen immigrants are twice as likely to hold jobs relative to the US born population. Non-citizen immigrants are three times more likely to hold jobs in agriculture as well.¹⁴ At the same time, non-citizen immigrants work in the public administration and educational fields at much lower rates than the native born.

While this brief will primarily address policies specific to immigrant workforce needs, improving wages and benefits along with work conditions would benefit the vast majority of Wisconsin workers, regardless of origin. The MIT Living Wage Calculator estimates that, in a family with two working adults and two children, each adult must earn at least \$32,328 (in 2013 dollars).¹⁵ Based on median incomes listed above, the majority of workers in the agriculture, retail, and food service industries are especially far from earning sufficient wages; the educational and healthcare sector, employing nearly one-fourth of US born and immigrant citizens, has at least half its workers earning below this benchmark wage. Non-citizen immigrants represent an especially high portion of two of the lowest-earning sectors, food service and agriculture. Lifting up Wisconsin's working poor requires policies to raise the job floor in these industries.

¹³ COWS, "State of Working Wisconsin: 2014," August 2014, page 19, available at: http://www.cows.org/_data/documents/1647.pdf.

¹⁴ A briefing from UW-Madison's Program on Agricultural Technology Studies estimates that 40% of the Wisconsin dairy industry's workforce is comprised of immigrant workers. Jill Harrison, Sarah Lloyd and Trish O'Kane, "Briefing #1: Overview of Immigrant Workers on Wisconsin Dairy Farms," February 2009, page 2, available at: <http://www.pats.wisc.edu/pubs/98>.

¹⁵ Dr. Amy K. Glasmeier, "Living Wage Calculation for Wisconsin," Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2015 (accessed Dec. 15, 2015), available at: <http://livingwage.mit.edu/states/55>. Converted to 2013 dollars using CPI-U factors.

Table 7

INDUSTRY DISTRIBUTION OF WISCONSIN WORKFORCE BY ORIGIN, 2013

<i>Industry</i>	<i>US Born</i>	<i>Foreign born – Citizen</i>	<i>Foreign born – Non-Citizen</i>	<i>Median income in industry, 2013 dollars</i>
Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining	2.3%	1.1%	7.5%	25,155
Construction	5.3%	2.9%	4.8%	39,682
Manufacturing	18.0%	25.5%	24.1%	40,999
Wholesale trade	2.6%	1.8%	2.6%	41,273
Retail trade	11.6%	8.3%	6.9%	21,185
Transportation and warehousing, and utilities	4.5%	3.3%	1.5%	42,387
Information	1.7%	1.1%	0.9%	37,672
Finance and insurance, and real estate and rental and leasing	6.3%	6.1%	2.5%	41,509
Professional, scientific, and management, and administrative and waste management services	7.9%	9.0%	12.5%	35,433
Educational services, and health care and social assistance	23.5%	24.5%	15.1%	32,199
Accommodation and food services, and arts, entertainment, and recreation	8.3%	9.9%	16.4%	11,752
Other services (except public administration)	4.2%	4.2%	4.2%	23,201
Public administration	3.7%	2.3%	0.9%	48,945
Median household income by origin, 2013 dollars	52,139	50,688	37,425	-

Source: 2011-2013 American Community Survey 3-Year Estimates Table S0501 and B24031

POLICY INTERVENTIONS TO SUPPORT WISCONSIN'S IMMIGRANT WORKFORCE

Immigrants in Wisconsin are a diverse group – in nation of origin, facility with English, and level of education. They are making substantial contributions to our state's economy across all sectors. Even so, immigrants confront a variety of unique issues as they seek to secure a decent standard of living in their new country. All immigrants are facing a new culture and a new labor market, where written and unwritten rules may be substantially different than in their country of origin. Critical information on norms and rights, obvious to a native, can be nearly impossible to access as a recent immigrant. Further, the vast majority of immigrants are learning a new language even as they are making their way in a new cultural context. Many do not have a solid basic education on which to build skills. Lastly, a substantial minority of immigrants are on edge about their very status and right to be in the country. This fear can have disastrous effects in the labor market – the current Department of Labor chief of the Wage and Hour Division has acknowledged that workers concerned about their immigration status are less likely to report their employers for wage theft.¹⁶ For these reasons, educations, training, and information to immigrants can make a substantial contribution to their economic progress.

16 David Weil, "Improving Workforce Conditions Through Strategic Enforcement," Boston University, May 2010, page 1, available at: <http://www.dol.gov/whd/resources/strategicEnforcement.pdf>.

There are positive policy steps that the state can take to embrace these immigrants, to help build their skills, and to pull them into the firms and communities that need new workers. Specifically, we identify three broad areas where state policy changes could help low-wage immigrant workers move toward greater economic prosperity:

- Invest in and expand effective programming to advance the education and skills of immigrant workers;
- Strengthen the access of non-citizens to educational and economic opportunity; and
- Raise the wage floor for all workers.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS FOR IMMIGRANTS

The data on English proficiency, generally lower levels of education, and the correlation of both with higher levels of poverty among immigrants make a strong case for investing in education and training for immigrant workers. It is also clear that all levels of education – from English language, to basic literacy and numeracy, and on to post-secondary degrees, especially at the AA level – are relevant and critical. The good news is that Wisconsin has forged a strong system of career pathways and bridges, especially on our Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS) campuses. The most relevant innovations here are likely to be investments in bridge programs that connect adult basic education with more advanced occupational skills. In these programs, workers can move more easily from work to education and build skills that grant stronger pathways to better jobs.

For immigrants, these educational innovations may be especially important and effective. In a study of outcomes of the WTCS career pathway bridge program, the data show that career pathway bridges increase the chances that participants will go on to take more credits for all participants. But the results for English Language Learners were especially dramatic: English Language Learners in WTCS career pathway bridges posted significant and substantial increases in credit taking.¹⁷ This is an important result and deserving of both greater investment and further research. Career pathway bridges in the WTCS appear to be especially effective at helping English language learners engage with and succeed on technical college campuses, and the state and individual districts should continue to invest in and expand upon this success.

The essential design elements of Wisconsin's career pathway bridges are discussed at greater length elsewhere.¹⁸ The most important elements from the perspective of immigrant workers are:

- Connecting adult basic education (HS level literacy and numeracy) with occupational skills at a post-secondary level.
- Delivering occupational skills and other post-secondary content simultaneously with curriculum for English language learners.
- Strengthening in other ways the connection from community-based English and basic skills programs to WTCS campuses where occupational and more advanced skills are taught.

17 Wisconsin Career Pathways, "Wisconsin's Regional Industry Skills Education (RISE) Career Pathway Bridges: An Evaluation of Career Pathway Bridge Programming in Wisconsin, 2012-2014," October 2014, page 18, available at: http://risepartnership.org/Media/Default/pdf/RISE_Career_Pathway_Bridge_Evaluation_10.2.14.pdf.

18 Refer to COWS, "Wisconsin Career Pathways: Postsecondary Education for Low-Income, Low-Skill Adults," Jun. 9 2015, available at: http://www.cows.org/_data/documents/1722.pdf.

The principles guiding career pathways tailored for basic education and language learning in Wisconsin are closely aligned with national best practices identified by the Working Poor Families Project.¹⁹

At the state level, there a number of steps that could be taken to increase opportunity and education for immigrants and ensure that they make a strong contribution to the economy. These steps include:

- Ensure a consistent focus on immigrant issues in state and local workforce development plans being developed in response to the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. Wisconsin's draft state plan has strong language on the need for connections to career pathways and partnership with the WTCS, guidelines for adult literacy programs, and a recognition that limited-English speaking individuals are often underserved through the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation.²⁰ While performance metrics for service to WIOA's target populations and protocol for course-correction are defined within the draft plan, enforcement of these evaluation metrics to track both reach to and success of English language learners in state and local programs will be critical;
- Devote resources to further investigate and evaluate the unique success of career pathway bridges for immigrant students;
- Strengthen practice at public colleges and universities by disseminating these research results and best practices across campuses;
- Target a portion of workforce funding streams directly to immigrant populations or develop new sources of funding to support and expand career pathway bridge programming for English language learners.

At the local level, campus and community leaders should analyze the connections between the social service and organizing groups serving immigrants and technical college campuses. Strategically and systematically, leaders should seek to build or strengthen partnerships and develop or expand career pathway bridge programming to provide a stronger on-ramp to campuses for the state's growing immigrant community.

EXPANDING OPPORTUNITY FOR NON-CITIZENS

The most essential problems of the state's non-citizen workers cannot be solved without comprehensive immigration reform at the national level. It also is clear that there are deep divisions on this issue and there is little chance of national resolution in the short term. All the more reason, then, to look to mitigate some of the problems through state policy. Some states have used policy to extend opportunity, welcome immigrants, and seek ways to connect immigrants to greater economic opportunity.

Across the nation, public two- and four-year campuses are at the forefront of policy innovation in support of immigrants. As of mid-2015, twenty states offered in-state tuition to undocumented immigrants with proof of sustained residency.²¹ By extending in-state tuition to long-term residents without US citizenship, these states are building the skills and education of immigrants, and sending a signal to the immigrant community that their long commitment to the state will pay-off for their children.

¹⁹ Barry Shaffer, "Strengthening State Adult Education Policies for English as a Second Language Populations," Working Poor Families Project, Fall 2014, available at: http://www.workingpoorfamilies.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/WFPF-Fall-2014-Brief_121814.pdf.

²⁰ State of Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development, "Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Combined State Plan - Draft V1.1," Nov. 17 2015, pages 73-76, 135-138, 204, available at: https://dwd.wisconsin.gov/wioa/pdf/draft_wioa_wis_combined_plan.pdf.

²¹ Gilberto Mendoza, "Tuition Benefits for Immigrants," National Conference of State Legislatures, Jul. 15 2015 (accessed Feb. 24 2016), available at: <http://www.ncsl.org/research/immigration/tuition-benefits-for-immigrants.aspx>.

In fact, Wisconsin was once briefly on the list of states allowing long-term undocumented residents access to in-state tuition. The Wisconsin program was funded in the 2009-11 state budget, and required the following stipulations to be met for an undocumented resident to qualify: a) graduated from in-state high school or equivalency program; b) has resided in WI for three continuous years, while in high school or immediately after graduation; c) intends to file for a permanent resident visa as soon as eligible.²² Both the University of Wisconsin system and the Wisconsin Technical College System were included in the provision, and by rough estimates, 86 undocumented students used the program at UW while allowed.²³

As this provision was removed from the 2011-2013 budget,²⁴ Wisconsin now stands as the only state in the nation to once make and then back away from this promise to make college more affordable for long-term undocumented students. Some states are finding new ways to expand even on this right. The state-funded University of California system recently introduced a funding stream to provide low-interest loans (similar to federal student loans, a form of financial aid that these students are still barred from accessing) to undocumented students who meet California Dream Act requirements.²⁵

In order to support immigrant workers and educational attainment, the state could restore access to in-state tuition. Without such a measure, undocumented residents of Wisconsin pay nearly three times as much as they would to attend the University of Wisconsin and an additional fifty percent to attend WTCS.²⁶ That price difference alone can put college out of reach for many undocumented students, especially given the lower median earnings for non-citizen households, seen in Table 7. As discussed, workers who lack associate's degrees or higher have much lower wages than their counterparts who attend higher education, which lowers the amount of state and local tax revenue generated by these workers. By instead expanding access to higher education, Wisconsin could increase its tax revenue as well as fulfill its moral interest in "the Wisconsin idea" that universities both strive to benefit and are accessible to the full breadth of the state's population.

But even short of that, there are things that the state or communities can do to support immigrant workers. For example, the city of Los Angeles partnered with U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services to create the Immigration Integration Partnership, which offers naturalization workshops, brief information sessions about citizenship, and strategic outreach to help non-citizens as they move toward naturalization.²⁷ Such programs help immigrant workers authorized only temporarily attain citizenship, eliminating the strain of certain visa requirements and expanding jobs available to them.

22 State of Wisconsin, "2009 Wisconsin Act 28," Section 751.36.27 and 38.22, pages 180 & 182, available at: <http://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/2009/related/acts/28.pdf>.

23 Wisconsin Council on Children and Families, "Limiting Options for Undocumented Youth: Tuition Policy Closing Doors," page 2, available at: http://www.wccf.org/assets/tuition_undocumented_immigrants1.pdf.

24 National Conference of State Legislatures, "In-State Tuition and Unauthorized Immigrant Students," Feb. 19, 2014 (accessed Dec. 18, 2015), available at: <http://www.ncsl.org/research/immigration/in-state-tuition-and-unauthorized-immigrants.aspx>.

25 University of California Admissions, "California DREAM Loan Program," (accessed Feb. 24, 2016), available at: <http://admission.universityofcalifornia.edu/paying-for-uc/whats-available/dream-loan-program/index.html>.

26 University of Wisconsin-Madison Office of the Registrar, "Tuition & Fees - Spring 2016," (accessed Dec. 18, 2015), available at: <https://registrar.wisc.edu/tuition&fees.htm>; WTCS, "Tuition and Material Fees [Summer 2015]," (accessed Dec. 18, 2015), available at: <http://www.wistechcolleges.org/paying-college/tuition-and-material-fees>.

27 Joel Rogers and Satya Rhodes-Conway, "Cities at Work: Progressive Local Policies to Rebuild the Middle Class," Center for American Progress and COWS, February 2014, page 293, available at: http://www.cows.org/_data/documents/1585.pdf.

RAISING THE JOB FLOOR FOR ALL WORKERS AND MAKING SURE THE FLOOR EXTENDS TO IMMIGRANTS

Improving wage and benefit standards for the jobs that currently offer the worst conditions will improve the economic prosperity of Wisconsin's immigrants as well as US born residents. The following recommendations would strengthen economic inclusion of the state's working poor:

RAISE AND INDEX THE STATE MINIMUM WAGE. Currently 29 states and Washington DC have set their minimum wage above the \$7.25 federal minimum.²⁸ Wisconsin is not among these states, and our lowest wage workers are being left behind as a result. Of the 13 states that raised their minimum wage in early 2014, and all thirteen experienced equal or better job growth compared to states that did not.²⁹ The state's lowest wage workers – immigrants among them – have most to gain as we raise the minimum, but the state's economy could become stronger as well.

ENSURE STRONG ENFORCEMENT OF LABOR STANDARDS. Wage theft – where workers are simply unpaid or underpaid by employers – is distressingly common and it is often immigrant workers that suffer the most.³⁰ Working with community and employer organizations to do outreach on labor standards and labor rights, ensuring that workers understand their rights regardless of immigration status, and aggressively pursuing law breakers are all ways that state and local government can help ensure that our labor market floor is solid and can be found under all workers. Workers should also have access to multilingual resources that describe these laws, their rights as employees, and allow workers to anonymously report employers who are in violation of these laws to state enforcement officials. Citizenship status cannot be a barrier to fair treatment in the workplace. If it is, labor standards are undermined for all.

EXTEND PAID SICK LEAVE TO ALL WORKERS AND DEVELOP A STATE PAID FAMILY & MEDICAL LEAVE INSURANCE PROGRAM. Especially when wages are low, families struggle mightily to balance the demands of work and children. Paid sick leave could be mandated at the state level and is one way to help make the balance more possible. Workers without paid sick days, very often the lowest paid workers, often simply work when they are sick or face income loss when illness or sick children keep them away from work. Where paid sick leave is required – currently a law if not yet enforced in four states, twenty-two cities, and one county – workers at the bottom of the labor market, including immigrants, will find an easier balance.³¹ Further, the US is alone among developed nations in its reluctance to provide sufficient paid leave, damaging worker productivity when balancing family needs or personal illness. A modest investment in paid family leave insurance – already implemented in California and New Jersey – would help an expected 85,000 Wisconsin workers take enough time to recover or be present with their family in crisis without forgoing pay or risking job loss.³²

28 United States Department of Labor – Wage and Hour Division, “Minimum Wage Laws in the States – January 1, 2016,” (accessed Feb. 29 2016), available at: <http://www.dol.gov/whd/minwage/america.htm>

29 Both data: COWS and the Economic Policy Institute, “Raise the Floor Wisconsin: Minimum Wage Edition,” October 2014, pages 1-2, available at: http://www.cows.org/_data/documents/1660.pdf.

30 Annette Bernhardt, Ruth Milkman, Nik Theodore, Douglas Heckathorn, Mirabai Auer, James DeFilippis, Ana Luz Gonzalez, Victor Narro, Jason Perelshteyn, Diana Polson, and Michael Spiller, “Broken Laws, Unprotected Workers: Violations of Employment and Labor Laws in America's Cities,” National Employment Law Project, 2009, page 5, available at: <http://www.nelp.org/content/uploads/2015/03/BrokenLawsReport2009.pdf?nocdn=1>.

31 A Better Balance, “Overview of Paid Sick Time in the United States,” Feb. 12 2016, available at: <http://www.abetterbalance.org/web/images/stories/Documents/sickdays/factsheet/PSDchart.pdf>.

32 COWS, “Putting Families First in Wisconsin,” September 2015, page 9, available at: http://www.cows.org/_data/documents/1741.pdf.

CONCLUSION

Making critical contributions to our state economy but often struggling to make ends meet, Wisconsin's immigrants are increasingly integrated into our economy and into the fabric of our state's culture. To ensure that immigrants make the strongest possible contribution to the state requires us to find ways to build their skills and ensure rewards for their work. Rather than undermining social and economic inclusion of immigrants with state policy, we can choose a different course. The policy ideas offered here, focused on building the education and opportunity of immigrants, provide a course correction for Wisconsin that would instead embrace and expand the contributions of immigrants to the state.