



June 19, 2006  
GWDC Supporting New  
Immigrants Committee  
Chair: Noreen J. Dunnells

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# Final Report and Recommendations

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Integrating Immigrants and Refugees into  
Minnesota's Economy and Culture

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## Section

# 1

## Introduction to the Committee's Work

**Focus Question:** What policy recommendations are needed to integrate immigrants and refugees into Minnesota's economy and culture to maximize Minnesota's global workforce competitiveness?

**Focus Population:** Immigrants and refugees in Minnesota. While the committee name was "Supporting New Immigrants," the committee did not limit their focus or their policy recommendations to only new immigrants. Rather, their work took into consideration the entire immigrant and refugee population, regardless of the amount of time they have lived in the state.

**Committee Members:** Jocelyn Ancheta, Gus Avenido, Noreen Dunnells (Chair), Jose Gonzalez, Abucar Iman, Brenda Johnson, Jim Johnson, Linda Lade, Rollie Morud, Diane Pecoraro, Jack Wiley, Heladio Zavala, and James Zentner.

**Committee Staff:** Barry Shaffer and Renee Raduenz.

### **General Overview of the Committee's Work:**

Over the past year, the Governor's Workforce Development Council's Supporting New Immigrants committee focused on learning more about the issues and barriers facing immigrants and refugees in Minnesota. Specifically, the committee targeted their efforts on developing policy recommendations that would better integrate immigrants and refugees into Minnesota's culture, economy, and workforce. The committee began meeting in March 2005 and has met 12 times since then. The committee structure was comprised of a diverse group of individuals representing a cross-section of immigrants, nonprofit, government and business sector professionals.

The committee focused initially on four primary areas: social integration and cultural competency, models for collaboration, systems changes, and education/literacy advancement. The committee process included inviting professionals from various community agencies to present and provide background information for members to assess the issue. Representatives from the following organizations gave presentations to the committee: The Hubert H. Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs, Lifetrack Resources, Metropolitan Economic Development Association, Latino Economic Development Corporation, Department of Employment and Economic Development, Department of Human Services, and the Minnesota Department of Education (Adult Basic Education program). In December, the committee distributed a survey via e-mail to community based organizations throughout Minnesota that have a stake in this work to glean their input and suggestions for policy recommendations. Fifty-one recommendations were submitted and the committee spent the month of January reviewing and culling the information. As a result, six themes emerged from the recommendations: (1) barriers to employment (2) healthcare (3) English language acquisition (4) systems issues (5) job training and skill development, and (6) higher education. The subsequent committee meetings focused on distilling and prioritizing the final policy recommendations for inclusion into the Governor's Investment Advisory.

## Section

# 2

## Importance of Integrating Immigrants & Refugees into Minnesota's Workforce

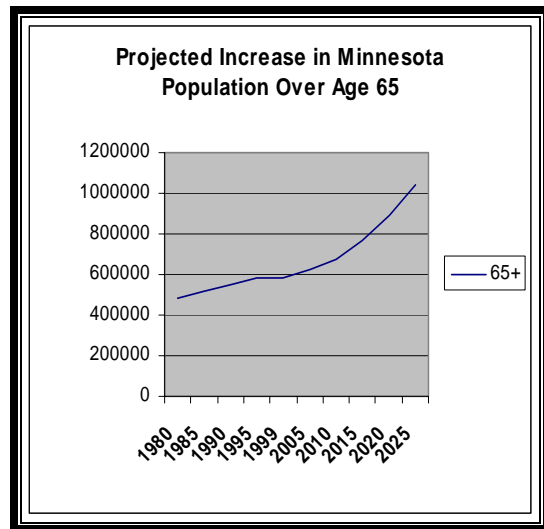
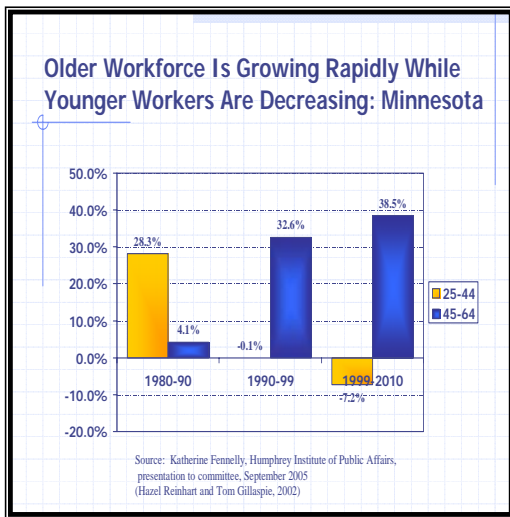
Refugees and immigrants have kept Minnesota demographically young, economically competitive, and culturally rich. They continue to provide an entrepreneurial spirit and needed

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labor force. They have kept cities and small towns vibrant. Minnesota's bright future is tied with how the State and its government institutions effectively pursue a fast-track policy of developing the economic and social potentials of our new Minnesotans.

Immigrants are part of the larger community; they make contributions and accept responsibilities. Immigrants need to have equal opportunity and access to the things that make Minnesota great: quality education, healthy and safe environment, quality of life, and good paying jobs. They, like everyone else, may need supports and services to achieve their full potential and realize their role in the changing Minnesota.

Minnesota will be better prepared for upcoming workforce shortages by utilizing its untapped labor pool, which includes immigrants and refugees. One can see from the graph on the left that between the years of 1999-2010 Minnesota is predicted to experience a shortage of workers between the ages of 25-44 while the population of 45-64 year olds will constitute almost 40% of the workforce. The projected increase in Minnesotans over the age of 65 is demonstrated in the graph on the right. Integrating immigrants and refugees into the workforce will contribute to keeping Minnesota's economy robust in preparation for these upcoming predicted shortages.



Source: Katherine Fennelly, Hubert H. Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs, presentation to committee, September 2005, (Reinhart and Gillaspie, 2003).

Section  
**3** Immigrants and Refugees in the U.S. & Minnesota

Approximately 325,000 immigrants live in the state of Minnesota<sup>1</sup>; roughly five percent of Minnesota's total population<sup>2</sup>. While the number of immigrants in Minnesota is relatively low, the state experienced

<sup>1</sup> MN DEED Labor Market Office, presentation from Oriane Casale, June 22, 2005.

<sup>2</sup> Census 2000, (Katherine Fennelly, Hubert H. Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs, presentation to committee, September 2005).

a dramatic increase in the foreign-born<sup>3</sup> population from the years 1990-2000. Between these 10 years, there was a 130 percent increase in the number of foreign-born living in Minnesota<sup>4</sup>. Where do immigrants choose to live in Minnesota? A little over 75 percent of immigrants in Minnesota live in the Twin Cities, with the remaining living in cities outside of the Twin Cities. In general, cities with meat-packing companies draw a large portion of the immigrant population (i.e., Worthington, Faribault, Austin). In regards to educational attainment, 67 percent of foreign-born in Minnesota have graduated from high school or higher, while roughly 25 percent have a Bachelor's Degree. Overall, data suggests that in the Upper Midwest, the foreign-born have a higher labor force participation rate than native born (73 percent vs. 71 percent)<sup>5</sup>. According to national data, the foreign-born have accounted for 46 percent of the net gain in the total labor force since 2000<sup>6</sup>. However, there is no accurate data that tells us how many of these employed immigrants are underemployed. Despite these statistics, one stakeholder pointed out the often under-stated and disheartening reality:

*"Although the rate of employment is very high among immigrants and refugees, they are among the lowest income families in the state. Immigrant and refugee workers are more likely to earn low wages, to work multiple part-time jobs and to receive no benefits from their employers. Lack of education, language barriers, poor training, discrimination, geographic isolation and lack of bargaining power are among the key factors that limit immigrant and refugees' earnings<sup>7</sup>."*

Furthermore, not all immigrants participate in the labor force at an equal rate. The Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that the labor force participation rate of foreign-born women in the U.S. with children under 18 was 58.5 percent in 2005, compared with 73.2 percent for native-born mothers<sup>8</sup>. There is a need for more skills training and English language courses to help them integrate and advance in the workforce and culture. And, an additional untapped labor pool may exist within the population of foreign-born women.

Based on trends and future projections, Minnesota's strong economy will continue to draw immigrants into the state, which will result in this population being the fastest growing segment of Minnesota's workforce. With that being said, the support services that immigrants need for transitioning into the workforce vary immensely. Some speak fluent English, yet do not have skills to be competitive in the workforce. Others possess needed skills, but are not English language proficient. Some have professional degrees but have not found work in their field of training and are under-employed, while others might desire additional training but can not afford it or are not aware of opportunities available to them. Whatever the situation is, it is clear that more can be done.

This report highlights the process the committee took to learn more about the immigrant population in Minnesota in order to formulate solid and effective policy recommendations. Over the past year, the committee invited various professionals to come and present information that would provide more insight into the key barriers facing immigrants and refugees in Minnesota. In addition, the committee sent a formal e-mail out to approximately 30-40 different local community-based organizations that serve immigrants and refugees in some capacity to solicit their input and recommendations for policy. Based on that information and the rich discussions that occurred among the committee members, the

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<sup>3</sup> The term "foreign-born" and "immigrant" are used interchangeably. U.S. immigration laws refer to "immigrants" as those who intend to remain in the U.S. permanently and the Census Bureau uses the term "foreign-born" as denoting anyone who is not a U.S. citizen at birth (including naturalized citizens, legal permanent residents, temporary migrants, refugees and persons illegally in the U.S.).

<sup>4</sup> Census 1990 and 2000, (Katherine Fennelly, Hubert H. Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs, presentation to committee, September 2005.

<sup>5</sup> MN Deed Labor Market Office, presentation from Oriane Casale, June 22, 2005.

<sup>6</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics, US Department of Labor, *Foreign-Born Workers: Labor Force Characteristics in 2005*, April 14, 2006.

<sup>7</sup> Quote from Department of Human Services representative.

<sup>8</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics, US Department of Labor, *Foreign-Born Workers: Labor Force Characteristics in 2005*, April 14, 2006.

committee developed fervent, actionable policy recommendations that have been submitted to the GWDC Executive Committee to be considered for inclusion in the GWDC 2006 Investment Advisory to the Governor.

Section 4 summarizes how the committee built awareness among its members and describes the presentations that were given to the committee over the year. Following that is a summary of how the committee gathered stakeholder input and a listing of the themes that emerged from the submitted recommendations. The recommendations the committee submitted for the Investment Advisory are in Section 6 and recommendations to GWDC and other entities are listed in Section 7. The report closes with final concluding thoughts provided by the Chair of the committee, Noreen J. Dunnells.

## Section

# 4

## Committee Process & Building Awareness

Since the committee was comprised of community leaders with varying backgrounds and experiences in relationship to working with or serving immigrants and refugees, there were a lot of opportunities over the year for committee members to expand their knowledge and learn more about the imminent challenges facing immigrants and refugees in the state. The committee enjoyed the presentations that were given by the various community leaders and professionals. They gained a tremendous amount of insight and received valuable information in the form of labor market information, statistics, and demographic and employment data which were all vital to the committee's analysis.

However, much of the learning that took place among the committee members occurred during the meeting discussions when members (especially immigrant members) shared their experiences and stories with the other committee members. It was during this time that members engaged in discussions that were not just academic in nature but rather in conversations that provided a rich opportunity for members to explore, inquire, and confer about sensitive and often controversial topics surrounding immigrants and refugees.

Furthermore, committee members shared their expertise by providing data and sharing background research. The committee gained a tremendous amount of background information that helped lay the foundation for further learning from the State's Refugee Coordinator at the Department of Human Services, Gus Avenido. He provided the committee members with useful information such as: the distinction among various types of immigrants and refugees, different ways immigrants and refugees have immigrated into the U.S., and the types of assistance programs immigrants and refugees qualify for under federal and state legislation. Gus quickly became an important contributor to the committee process by providing the committee with information on numerous occasions and by helping staff plan the committee's meetings and agendas.

While it is impossible to acknowledge all of the contributions made by each and every committee member, it is important to recognize some of the contributions that members made that supplemented and enriched the committee's dialogue and learning process:

Barry Shaffer (staff), the state's Adult Basic Education (ABE) Director and Diane Pecoraro, also from the Department of Education, provided members with an overview of ABE services and presented enrollment statistics on the English as a Second Language (ESL) program within ABE. The committee learned that ESL enrollees make up approximately half of the total number of ABE enrollees (over 38,000 adults were served in FY 2005) and over the past six years, ESL enrollment has increased by 42 percent. Due to recent influxes of immigrants to Minnesota, ESL waiting lists are at an all time high. Brenda Johnson, an economics instructor and Vice-Mayor for the City of Chatfield and Linda Lade, Director of College Transitions at Minnesota State Colleges and Universities (MnSCU) also provided

the committee with useful information on demographics of students using ESL services and programs at the state's universities and colleges.

In addition, Jocelyn Ancheta shared valuable statistics on immigrants in Minnesota; Linda Lade distributed cultural competency training materials; Heladio Zavala attended a forum on higher education for undocumented students and reported back to the committee; Gus Avenido analyzed the NGA policy position on immigration and refugee policies and led a committee discussion; Noreen Dunnells and Heladio Zavala shared information on "Create CommUNITY," an initiative out of St. Cloud; and Barry Shaffer created useful guidelines and matrixes to help members formulate and frame the committee's policy recommendations.

Committee members were extremely dedicated, engaged, and passionate about the committee charge and in providing the GWDC with carefully crafted policy recommendations to be considered for inclusion into the Governor's Investment Advisory.

As the committee work progressed, members also built awareness by listening to presentations and gathering information from the following professionals/organizations:

- The Assistant Director of the Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) Labor Market Information Office, Oriane Casale, gave a presentation to the committee entitled "Immigrants in Minnesota." She reviewed the various types of immigrants living in Minnesota (i.e., legal, temporary, undocumented) and provided a comparison of Census data to show the increase in the immigrant population from 1990 to 2004. She also provided the committee with various local and national statistics regarding each of these populations by highlighting labor market characteristics, labor force participation rates, occupations held by immigrants, educational attainment of immigrants, and lastly, language skills of immigrants.
- Karen Calcaterra from Lifetrack Resources presented information to the committee on Functional Work English (FEW) programs and the St. Paul Community Literacy Consortium. This included: an overview of the program structure; a description of skill areas that have been used for FWE programs; a summary of accountability measures within the program; and sharing best practices for administering, managing, and teaching a FWE program. The presenter also introduced Lifetrack's CAREER employment programs that work with immigrants and refugees in workforce development and employment placement. Lastly, she handed out a list of prioritized refugee needs that the organization collected from consultations with refugees living in the community.
- Katherine Fennelly, a professor and expert on immigration policy from the Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs presented to the committee on "Immigrants in the Minnesota Workforce." Her presentation highlighted statistics on the increasing immigrant population in the state, the growth of English Language Learners in Minnesota, and the effects of past immigrant legislation (Federal Immigration Reform Act of 1986). She attributed legislative changes and current policy as contributors to the high level of poverty in the immigrant population (poverty rates among the immigrant population are triple that of US-born population). The professor shared her ideas for how policy could be changed at both the Federal and State level. In general, she identified the following four policy needs for low wage workers: a) legal entry, b) path to legalization, c) legal protections, and d) entitlement to benefits.
- George Jacobson and Edgardo Rodriguez from the Metropolitan Economic Development Association (MEDA) and Ramon Leon from the Latino Economic Development Center (LEDC) also presented to the committee. The mission of LEDC is to promote sustainable communities by expanding business opportunities to low- and moderate-income Latinos in the state of Minnesota and creating a socially-responsible business community. LEDC provides strategies,

structure, and tools with which to remove systemic barriers and promote sustainable communities<sup>9</sup>. MEDA's mission is to help Minnesota's ethnic minority entrepreneurs achieve success in the free enterprise system<sup>10</sup>. One story they shared, that illustrated the kind of gaps and barriers they witness through their clients, was about a Latino student who dropped out of high school to financially support his parents, who were not employed due to having limited English language skills. They stressed the importance of outreaching to parents to educate them on how critical their children's education is and the benefits it will bring when they finish school.

Committee members specifically reviewed the following materials/reports and attended the following forums as part of its work:

- National Governor's Association Immigration and Refugee Policy Position.
- "Governor Pawlenty's Proposed Steps to Encourage Legal Immigration," Star Tribune article, January 12, 2006.
- *Assets and Needs Assessment of Foreign Trained Medical and Nursing Graduates in Minnesota: A Review of Literature*, Nancy A. Omondi and Wilhelmina V. Holder, 10/28/05.
- Forum at the offices of Robins Kaplan Miller & Ciresi entitled: "How does U.S. Immigration Policy Affect Minnesota?" Panelists addressed this question while specifically examining the importance of high-skilled professionals in comprehensive immigration reform.
- Forum about the "Academic Options for Undocumented Students: Is There a Future After High School?" sponsored by Familias En Accion.

## Section

# 5 Stakeholder Input

In an effort to assist the committee in identifying solutions to the workforce challenges facing immigrants and refugees in the state, the committee sent out a formal e-mail to 30-40 different local community-based organizations<sup>11</sup> to solicit their input on the issue. The organizations were identified as having a mission related to the issues the committee was discussing or they directly serve immigrants and refugees in the community. The organizations were asked to identify policy recommendations, which encompass new or amended state law, state agency rules, regulations or policies, and other suggestions for governmental or organizational related action. Individuals were told that their responses were voluntary.

The committee received over 50 responses from approximately 18 different organizations throughout the state (almost a 50 percent response rate). The committee concluded that six distinct themes emerged from the compilation of recommendations. The six themes are as follows: 1) barriers to employment, 2) English language acquisition, 3) healthcare, 4) higher education 5) job training and skill development, and, 6) systems issues. A summary of the recommendations received from the e-mail solicitation are listed below.

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<sup>9</sup> Latino Economic Development Center website: [http://www.ledc-mn.org/about\\_us.html](http://www.ledc-mn.org/about_us.html).

<sup>10</sup> Metropolitan Economic Development Association website: <http://www.meda.net/SiteViewer.aspx?tabid=176&mid=1>

<sup>11</sup> Please see Appendix A for a list of organizations and individuals that submitted policy recommendations to the committee.

## Barriers to Employment

Many of the recommendations proposed by the stakeholders related to removing or decreasing barriers associated with childcare, transportation, and housing. The committee recognized the importance of these issues, but decided not to write a specific recommendation about these barriers because they considered them as issues that could be addressed more adequately through the social service system, rather than the workforce development system. For anyone to successfully gain and retain employment, basic needs must first be met. For low-income immigrants, support structures should be in place so that they can access these services and become better equipped to enter the workforce.

There were five key themes within the *Barriers to Employment* category that surfaced from the recommendations received. They are listed below:

- **Transferability:** allow immigrant professionals the opportunity to forego residency training and other related course work and training if they pass the initial licensure test that is required. If they fail this test, short-term training courses should be available to prepare them for re-taking the test and practicing in the US. Financial assistance and loans should be available to qualified applicants.
- **Housing:** support and advocate for affordable housing for immigrants and refugees.
- **Childcare:** low-income immigrant and refugee families should have access to flexible, culturally appropriate childcare for their children.
- **Transportation:** reduce barriers and increase access to immigrants who are trying to obtain their driver's license.
- **Job Experience:** reduce existing barriers (e.g. requiring 6 months of job experience) for refugees applying for entry-level jobs. Many refugees have not been employed for years because of their refugee status and do not have six months of job experience.

## English Language Acquisition

English language proficiency is essential to the effective and timely integration of Minnesota's immigrant and refugee populations into the state's workforce. The following recommendations support the growing need for English language acquisition:

- a) The majority of language acquisition related recommendations received by the committee stressed the need for additional English language training resources in order to address ESL waiting lists statewide and to increase the intensity (more programming per student) of existing programs so that students would gain employability at an accelerated pace. These multiple recommendations were synthesized by the committee into one final recommendation to increase the base funding of the state's Adult Basic Education programming by 25%.
- b) A program should be developed and supported by the State to establish work-focused ESL programs for incumbent workers in Minnesota companies (ESL Workforce Education). Implementation of this recommendation would continue the federally funded 2004 WIA Incentive Grant program that will sunset in June of 2006.



- c) The Governor's office should encourage the Minnesota congressional delegation to change US TANF legislation so that intensive ESL classes would qualify as an approved "core activity" for limited English proficient TANF recipients.

## Health Care

The following recommendations relating to healthcare were brought forward by numerous stakeholders:

- a) Medical training and standards should be improved on a statewide basis. This includes providing a source of funding that clinics and hospitals can access to pay for interpreters when serving refugee and immigrant populations.
- b) Funding should be available to meet the basic health needs of immigrant and refugee families, especially immunizations and health assessments for children.
- c) A health benefit incentive should be given to small businesses that will fund employment physicals for New Minnesotans.
- d) Case managers should be utilized to help New Minnesotans navigate the health care system and health education materials should be available in multiple languages.

## Higher Education

It is clear that participation in post secondary training and higher education has a significant economic benefit to the individual's (and the State's) economic health. Many recommendations received by the committee would require involvement and specific training services that could best be provided through the State's higher education system. The following recommendations were received and considered:

- a) Barriers exist for undocumented immigrants who have graduated from Minnesota schools to access the state's higher education institutions. One way to address this barrier would be to support the passage of legislation (i.e. the DREAM Act) which would allow undocumented Minnesota graduates to be eligible for resident tuition rates at MnSCU institutions and the University of Minnesota.
- b) Education is needed for Minnesota employers, employees, state employment workers, educators, and daycare providers that would address issues of cultural awareness and discrimination law. In addition, the general public should be better informed about the economic and societal impacts, benefits, and values that immigrants and refugees provide for Minnesota.
- c) Efforts should be made to ensure that all eligible low income immigrant and refugee families know and utilize the subsidies and resources that are available to them as well as services and resources that help them support their children.

## Job Training and Skill Development

As stated earlier in the report, becoming proficient in the English language is one of the first steps that need to be taken in order for immigrants to successfully enter today's workforce; however, retention

and career advancement rely upon effective training and skill development programs. The committee considered the following recommendations:

- a) The State of MN should provide incentives to employers to hire legal immigrants with limited ELL skills.
- b) In addition to supporting employee job training, policy should support job training for employers to learn how to better understand and accommodate the needs of workers from different backgrounds.
- c) Minnesota Department of Education and MnSCU should develop non-traditional training programs for incumbent immigrant workers for jobs likely to be in demand in the next 2-3 years in Minnesota; including accelerated licensure process for highly skilled immigrants.
- d) Department of Employee Relations (DOER) should develop internship programs in government service for immigrants who are just entering the workforce; provide internships with a stipend - a job shadow experience. Also provide some level of education and assistance with understanding the role of "learning to be a student".

## Systems Issues

Minnesota is the new home to over 10,000 (legal) immigrants in any given year<sup>12</sup>. Many immigrants come to Minnesota to be connected with their families; however, many come because of the economic, educational, and cultural opportunities that Minnesota has to offer. Minnesota welcomes immigrants with a plethora of nonprofit organizations that assist with social service, language, housing, and employment needs. However, many immigrants are not connected to these resources or do not know they exist, causing them to become socially isolated and/or removed from civic, employment, and community engagement opportunities. The following recommendations submitted draw on regional infrastructure and effective service delivery systems:

- a) Minnesota should significantly broaden awareness of workforce development and social service resources available to new immigrants and refugees within the state. Infrastructure and service delivery systems should be responsive to industry and individual needs through mediums such as welcome centers, state sponsored conferences, and consortiums of organizations and councils serving immigrants and refugees. An inter-connected system is more accessible and allows for new immigrants to efficiently transition into the community and workforce system.
- b) A portal should be developed under the "Minnesota North Star" website to create and assist regional infrastructures for welcoming and supporting immigrants and diverse communities.
- c) Minnesota WorkForce Centers should provide career counseling and information resources for new Minnesotans as a core service of the Centers. Culturally and linguistically qualified staff should provide these services.
- d) State agencies and departments should collect uniform demographic data, particularly ethnic and cultural data, and utilize an equity impact assessment evaluation process to document beneficiaries and outcomes.

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<sup>12</sup> [www.demography.state.mn.us/resource.html?id=18439](http://www.demography.state.mn.us/resource.html?id=18439)

In addition, there were other *systems* recommendations that focused on economic development within Minnesota and with international trading partners. The recommendations and input the committee received of this nature are listed below:

- Immigration and international trade are two sides of the economic development equation for our state. Minnesota can benefit economically from our new immigrants as they become part of the overall workforce and we can benefit economically from growing our trade with other countries.
- Working within our state, Minnesota needs to make the training and integration of foreign-born persons into the labor force a major component of our state's economic planning. The GWDC has identified the need for more communication with economic development professionals throughout the state regarding workforce information and this should include all facets of the workforce, such as our new immigrants.
- Working with trade partners outside our state, Minnesota needs to have strategic trade accords with China and Mexico to increase our state's ability to export. These accords should work within the framework of the Partnership for Prosperity Accord as outlined by President Bush and President Fox.
- Minnesota can lead the way for enhancing U.S. trade with Mexico and China. To compete with China and other emerging economies, our nation will have to create the economic and commercial framework to take full advantage of economic efficiencies that would naturally accrue with creation of a larger internal North American market, harmonization of cross-border business practices and regulations with Canada and Mexico, and a reduction in both risk and the cost of capital. Our Minnesota workforce must also be seen increasingly as the irreplaceable input in our state's global economic production and our knowledge-based economy, and be trained and utilized fully at its most effective potential use, including our new immigrant sector of the workforce.

## Section

# 6

## Recommendations for 2006 Advisory to the Governor

Like any investment, investing toward a literate, well-trained, and extremely resilient workforce requires bold leadership, capital, multi-faceted strategies, and time. The past, present and future contributions of immigrants and refugees to Minnesota's economic well-being is an indisputable fact. As Minnesota's dependence on the workforce provided by New Minnesotans continue, the State's bright future is very much tied with how it can effectively and aggressively pursue a comprehensive workforce development policy that integrates immigrants and refugees.

The following final recommendations have been submitted to the Governor's Workforce Development Council for consideration into the Governor's Advisory. They are a result of lengthy and thoughtful deliberations of many individuals that were united around a common purpose. The Supporting New Immigrants Committee was duly impressed with the issues that were brought to the table by a wide variety of organizations, groups and individuals who offered testimony and ideas for ways to enhance the integration of New Minnesotan's into the state's economy and culture.

The committee believes that the needs and issues facing Minnesota immigrants and refugees are many and we are aware that the solutions will require significant effort to implement. It is the sincere hope of this committee that the recommendations presented here will be taken as seriously as they were offered and that visible, direct actions will result as outcome of this important effort.

Therefore, to promote the integration and advancement of immigrants and refugees into Minnesota's economy and workforce, Governor Pawlenty will<sup>13</sup>:

**1. Create a portal under the “MN North Star” website to assist employers and organizations that serve and employ refugees and immigrants.** Employers and others who assist immigrants should have a central portal to access commonly requested documents. Information available under the portal could include: translated information on various government programs, demographic information on immigrants, cultural nuances of primary immigrant groups, legal resources, immigration statistics, and legislation affecting or related to immigrants and refugees.

**2. Support immigrant and refugee English language acquisition to accelerate workforce participation.** According to a US Census report, 7% of Minnesota's population is foreign born and this population has tripled in the past eight years. A majority of new Minnesotans speak limited or no English. English language proficiency is critical to the effective and timely integration of Minnesota's immigrant and refugee population into the state's workforce. Based on this, the following specific actions should be taken:

**a. Increase base funding of Adult Basic Education (ABE) programming by 25% per year over the next biennium and restore annual growth clause for ABE programming to address ESL waiting lists.** Over 38,000 Limited English Proficient adults are served by the state's ABE system annually, but waiting lists for ESL programming are at an all time high (500+) due to the recent influx of new refugees and immigrants (e.g., from camps in Thailand, East Africa, and the increasing immigrant population). An increase to base funding of the ABE system would allow programs statewide to increase programming to serve their ESL waiting list students and increase the intensity of service within their existing class schedules.

**b. Continue the two-year ESL Workforce Education grant program that was created through the WIA Incentive grant, which ends June, 2006.** During the current biennium the state established a Workforce Education program with \$750,000 from the 2004 WIA Incentive grant. Over 30 training programs were funded (in 50 Minnesota companies) to provide job-focused ESL instruction. Program outcomes include increased worker productivity, safety, and work-related communications. For additional program support, employers would be required to contribute a matching investment in order to receive the tax-supported training resources.

**c. Encourage changing U.S. TANF legislation to include intensive ESL classes as an approved “core activity.”** Under current federal TANF law, intensive English as a Second Language training does not qualify as an acceptable core activity. Participants must now spend their time searching for employment and learning English skills as an additional activity. Becoming more English proficient assists the participant to become more employable, productive, and self-sufficient.

**3. Support passage of the DREAM Act (S.F. 2876).** The Minnesota workforce is served by reducing barriers to undocumented students who have attended and graduated from high school in Minnesota. These students have had the benefit of developing English language skills and possess the motivation to seek further education and training. The passage of legislation that allows for undocumented students to be eligible for resident tuition at Minnesota State Colleges and Universities and the University of Minnesota is recommended. The legislation known as the DREAM Act strengthens the Minnesota workforce by providing an opportunity to students who

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<sup>13</sup> Note: these recommendations are not listed according to priority or any type of ranking order.

are ready for college and for whom non-resident tuition represents an extra burden. This legislation, which was introduced in the 2005 session and reintroduced in the current session, received the endorsement of the Board of Trustees of Minnesota State Colleges and Universities and support from the University of Minnesota.

**4. Provide funding to develop a pilot project that reduces barriers and creates a fast-track recertification process for highly educated and professional international and foreign graduates.** There are numerous barriers that health care and other professionals living in Minnesota must overcome before becoming re-licensed to practice in their field of training (e.g. International Medical Graduates). International Medical Graduates are required to complete two years of residency before they can obtain a license to practice medicine even if they were fully trained, licensed, and practicing in another country. There are many costs associated with obtaining licensure that can create additional challenges for foreign graduates. Minnesota should explore state practices, such as the Welcome Back and Physicians Corps Programs in California to assist in developing innovative policies to fill the demand of Minnesota's workforce needs.

## Section 7 Recommendations for the GWDC & Other Entities

The committee submitted the recommendations with the highest priority for inclusion to the Advisory to the Governor (listed in Section 6 above). However, the committee created additional recommendations for the GWDC, the Governor and his Cabinet, and other entities, that if implemented, would prove to be beneficial to the State's workforce development system. These recommendations were not included in the Investment Advisory, but should be considered in future GWDC committee work. The Supporting New Immigrants Committee recommends that:

- The Governor and his Cabinet should intentionally pursue a fast-track policy and implement comprehensive strategies to develop the economic and social potential of immigrants and their communities. As Minnesota's leaders, they have a very important role in setting the tone and promoting a culture for immigrant integration policy in the State. To this end, there are several leadership imperatives:
  - a) State leaders must believe in the new reality that Minnesota's future is dependent on the indispensable contribution of all refugees and immigrants. This belief must be reflected in mission/vision statements, followed by clear policy framework to guide the immigrant integration strategies of key business units and measured by key metrics.
  - b) State leaders must be resourceful in obtaining capital and be creative in directing other resources to advance the immigrant integration policy.
  - c) Lastly, recognizing that improving current services and programs alone is inadequate to pursue a fast-track policy, the Governor's drive to excellence approach must be used to create new business models and metrics for advancing the immigrant integration policy.
- Agency commissioners and managers who are responsible for programs and services listed under 116L.665m subd.3, paragraph (a) provide strong leadership and staffing resources to develop and implement statewide and regional level policies and strategies for recruiting, hiring, training and supporting existing and future immigrant workers and their families.

- MDE and MNSCU should develop non-traditional training programs for incumbent immigrant workers for jobs likely to be in demand in the next 2-3 years in Minnesota; including accelerated licensure process for highly skilled immigrants.
- Department of Employee Relations (DOER) should develop stipend job shadowing/internship programs in government service for immigrants who are just entering the workforce. Provide some level of education and assistance with understanding the role of "learning to be a student."
- Funding should be allocated for the development of cultural centers, welcome centers, and state-facilitated conferences on immigrant and refugee issues and services.
- Minnesota WorkForce Centers should provide career counseling and information resources for new Minnesotans as a core service of the Centers. Culturally and linguistically qualified staff should provide these services.

## Section

# 8

## Concluding Thoughts

I feel compelled to acknowledge the fine work and dedication of all the committee members and GWDC staff through this process. The committee has met monthly for the past year and it has been a privilege to serve with such a highly skilled group of people who have brought their talents to the table on behalf of Minnesota's immigrant and refugee population.

I have been inspired by the collective expertise of this committee composed of high level community leaders, a few who are first and second generation immigrants themselves. The insights of committee members led to fertile dialogue and discourse and a set of policy recommendations that are both well thought out and we believe are in the best interests of Minnesota's current and future workforce.

Throughout the process, this committee focused on the current and future needs of our Minnesota workforce considering both the requirements of skilled and unskilled immigrants and refugees.

It was a pleasure serving with each and everyone on the Supporting New Immigrants Committee:

**Jocelyn Ancheta, Gus Avenido, Jose Gonzalez, Abucar Iman, Brenda Johnson, Jim Johnson Linda Lade, Rollie Morud, Diane Pecoraro, Renee Raduenz, Barry Shaffer, Jack Wiley, Heladio Zavala, and James Zentner.**

A heartfelt thank you,

Noreen J. Dunnells

# Appendix A

The committee would also like to thank the following individuals for providing them with such rich information and well thought-out policy recommendations to enhance the integration of immigrants and refugees into the state's workforce and culture.

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Casa Guadalupe, Patrice Schaaf

Catholic Charities Resettlement Program for the Diocese of Winona, Deacon Gordon D. Richard

Comunidades Latinas Unidos En Servicio (CLUES), Jesse Bethke Gomez

Community Initiatives, Minneapolis Department of Health and Family Support, Gretchen Musicant

International Institute of Minnesota, John S. Borden

Lifetrack Resources, Inc., Karen Calcaterra

Life-Work Planning Center, Susan McNamara Bruss

Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota, Patti Hurd

Migrant Health Service, Inc., Joan A. Altenbernd

Minnesota State Community and Technical College, Wadena Campus, Mary Koski, Ed.D

Minnesota Department of Human Services, Ama Sabah

Minnesota Department of Human Services, Patricia Torres Ray

Multicultural Center of Central Minnesota (MCCM), Thomas J. Pendergast

Otto Bremer Foundation, Mark Lindberg

St. Paul Community Literacy Consortium, Tom Cytron-Hysom

State Council on Black Minnesotans, Lester Collins

Strategic Solutions International, Inc. and Centro Latino de Careeras Professionals, Raymond-Michael Kornfiend

The Intercultural Mutual Assistance Association, Abucar Iman

University of Minnesota Extension Service, Juan C. Moreno