A summary report from *Speaking for Ourselves: A Study with Immigrant and Refugee Communities in the Twin Cities*

SPEAKING for OURSELVES

Perceptions, Attitudes, and Expectations about Education among Immigrants and Refugees in the Twin Cities

Minnesota is home to more than 400,000 immigrants and refugees. The majority live in the Twin Cities. *Speaking for Ourselves: A Study with Immigrant and Refugee Communities in the Twin Cities* looks at the experiences of Hmong, Karen, Latino, Liberian, and Somali immigrants and refugees living in Hennepin and Ramsey counties.

With the guidance of our advisory group (see a list on page 20), we interviewed 459 immigrants and adult children of immigrants about their lives – their families, education, jobs, health, and engagement in their communities to learn: What are the biggest needs of immigrant and refugee communities in the Twin Cities? What are the issues that are of greatest concerns? What assets are available to address them? For more information about the study methods and participants, see page 16.

This summary highlights what *Speaking for Ourselves* participants had to say about education. It highlights common themes, and suggests potential strategies to support these communities. Other *Speaking for Ourselves* summary reports focus on civic participation and social engagement; employment; health, mental health, and health care access; personal money management; transportation, housing, and safety perceptions; and the immigrant experience in the Twin Cities. All of these reports can be found at wilderresearch.org.

SEPTEMBER 2015

Wilder Research

Information. Insight. Impact.

Cultural communities at-a-glance

The Latino population makes up the largest foreign-born population in Minnesota. About 7 percent of people living in in the Twin Cities are Latino. The vast majority of these immigrants originate from Mexico, although Minnesota is also home to Latino immigrants from many other Central and South American countries. About 40 percent, or nearly 100,000, are foreign-born.

Hmong refugees began arriving in Minnesota in the 1970s and 1980s following the Vietnam War, with a smaller second wave arriving in the early 2000s as a result of the closing of a refugee camp in Thailand. The Twin Cities metropolitan area is now home to over 64,000 Hmong residents, making it one of the largest Hmong populations in the country. Karen refugees have recently begun to settle in Minnesota fleeing the violence of the Burmese civil war. At least 3,000 refugees have settled in the Twin Cities; 85 percent came to the U.S. within the last 10 years.

Somali and Liberian refugees came to the United States following civil wars in their countries. Somali refugees first started arriving in the U.S. in large numbers during the 1990s. An estimated 32,000 or more Somalis reside in Minnesota, which makes it the largest Somali community in the United States. Over 10,000 foreign-born Liberian refugees have settled in the Twin Cities. About 80 percent have arrived within the last 15 years.

What are some of the most important issues to remember when communicating the study results?

- Because each cultural community is unique, any and all comparisons made between or across communities should consider the unique historical, social, and economic contexts of these communities.
- Recognize the difference between perception data and incidence data. The *Speaking for Ourselves* study mainly focuses on perceptions of respondents from immigrant and refugee communities; this study does not provide representative incidence data.
- Because immigrant and refugee communities are smaller and close-knit (including, in some cases, the interviewers who worked on this study), and the questions may broach subjects that are sensitive, interpretation of findings must take social desirability bias into account.
- In order to ensure positive impact, data from *Speaking for Ourselves* should be used in conjunction with other data sources. Any policy or programming decisions should be made only in collaboration with affected immigrant and refugee communities.

Key findings

Among *Speaking for Ourselves* respondents, most households (75%) with young children (age 0-4) receive child care from someone living in the home. Very few participants (9%) send their children to child care centers or early childhood education programs.

Fourteen percent of *Speaking for Ourselves* participants who have young children said they receive regular care from unlicensed relatives or friends in that person's home; this was more common among Liberian respondents (45%). Few respondents (5%) receive child care from a licensed family child care provider.

Of *Speaking for Ourselves* participants who do send their child(ren) to child care outside of the home, the majority (90%) felt "a lot" or "somewhat" invited by child care providers and teachers to talk about advanced, extraordinary, positive skills, and abilities that their child(ren) exhibit(s) at home. Additionally, 86 percent felt that the advice about raising children received from child care providers and teachers supports their own knowledge, experience, and/or cultural values.

Most school-age children (82%) from *Speaking for Ourselves* participant households attend public school.

In addition, one-fifth (20%) of participants who have school-age children reported that they attend public charter school, and only a few (4%) said they attend private school (Figure 1). When choosing a school for their children, two-thirds (67%) of respondents felt that they had many good options from which to choose. Another 20 percent of respondents felt they only had one good option, and 5 percent felt they had no good options.

1. Do the school-age children in your household attend…? (Mark all that apply)

	N	Public	Private	Charter
All respondents	284	82%	4%	20%
Hmong respondents	58	85%	0%	22%
Karen respondents	88	89%	0%	18%
Latino respondents	65	82%	11%	15%
Liberian respondents	28	71%	7%	25%
Somali respondents	40	70%	3%	28%

Children of Karen respondents make up the largest share of English Language Learners, whereas children of Liberian respondents make up the smallest share; however, cultural and language challenges related to education impact all immigrant and refugee communities that participated in *Speaking for Ourselves*.

Very few participants from the Karen community (13%) reported speaking English at home. The majority of people from the Hmong community settled in the U.S. decades ago (58% arrived over 25 years ago) but many (60%) still speak a language other than English in the home. About half of the Somali community in Minnesota arrived more than 15 years ago and the other half arrived within the last 15 years; however, just 61 percent speak English at home. Just over half of Latino respondents (52%) speak English at home.

The percentage of Liberian participants (19%) who reported having children in an ELL program may seem high for a population whose primary language is English. One explanation for this could be that schooling may have been interrupted for some Liberians due to the civil war which lasted for 14 years. Another explanation could be that their accent and pronunciation of words may make it difficult for Americans to understand them, and some Liberians may have difficulty understanding American speakers if they are new to the U.S. (Figure 2).

2. Percent of respondents whose children are English Language Learners (of those with school-age children)

Liberian	19%
Somali	23%
Hmong	27%
Latino	45%
Karen	82%

More than four-fifths (83%) of *Speaking for Ourselves* parents reported being very satisfied with their children's ELL program. Almost all (97%) of Karen respondents reported being very satisfied, whereas only two-thirds of Latino respondents (69%) reported being very satisfied. Almost three-quarters (73%) of Hmong respondents reported being very satisfied. There were not enough participants with children in an ELL program in the sample from the Liberian and Somali communities to report on these findings.

More than one-third (37%) of *Speaking for Ourselves* participants reported they speak and understand spoken English "only a little bit." When asked about challenges related to their children or family's school experiences, learning English or challenges transitioning between different languages at school and at home was the most commonly mentioned issue.

As the newest immigrant and refugee community that participated in this study, Karen respondents were more likely to report issues with speaking and understanding spoken English and with reading in English, with 42 percent stating they could not do so. Respondents from all communities were more likely to

report difficulties with writing than with reading and speaking in English, with Karen respondents again reporting the most difficulties (Figure 3).

3. How well do you…

	N	Very well	Somewhat well	Only a little bit	Not at all
speak and understand spoken English?					
All respondents	383	14%	32%	37%	16%
Hmong respondents	100	21%	29%	39%	11%
Karen respondents	101	2%	17%	40%	42%
Latino respondents	94	15%	30%	49%	6%
Somali respondents	68	15%	60%	19%	6%
read in English?					
All respondents	383	16%	28%	32%	24%
Hmong respondents	100	21%	26%	24%	29%
Karen respondents	101	6%	18%	35%	42%
Latino respondents	94	15%	22%	48%	18%
Somali respondents	68	18%	56%	21%	6%
write in English?					
All respondents	383	15%	26%	30%	29%
Hmong respondents	100	20%	23%	22%	35%
Karen respondents	101	5%	20%	36%	40%
Latino respondents	94	12%	19%	40%	29%
Somali respondents	68	18%	53%	19%	10%

Over three-quarters (79%) of *Speaking for Ourselves* participants have taken English classes to improve their English skills; 1 in 5 are currently taking English classes.

Most respondents (88%) reported the ability to speak, understand, read, and write in the language of their cultural community "very well."

Participants were asked in to describe the main challenges their family has faced related to their children's schooling after they moved to Minnesota. Despite some challenges, over one-third (39%) of *Speaking for Ourselves* participants said they faced no challenges at all.

> "He is currently in a language class so that he can improve his speech. He is doing well. As matter of fact, he is about to exit." – Latino respondent
>
> "For now, none. No challenges for now. They all were born here (in America), so no challenges." – Liberian respondent

Challenges related to language learning given by respondents from various cultural communities are illustrated with a few participant comments below:

> "Language barrier. At home my child will speak Hmong. At school, they have to speak English. It is a hard transition." – Hmong respondent
>
> "Learning English is too hard for my 8-year-old. Kids make fun of him not knowing English." – Latino respondent
>
> "The way Americans speak will take some time for them to understand because they just came from Africa." – Liberian respondent

Additional barriers were each noted by a small proportion of participants and varied across cultural community, as follows:

Hmong participants mentioned peer pressure as a challenge for children at school.

> "I am afraid they might meet some bad friends who will bring them to be involved in drugs and robbery." – Hmong respondent
>
> "I am afraid that if he sees some bad friends there might be illegal activities." – Hmong respondent

Both Latino and Liberian participants noted bullying by other students and racism as a problem.

> "Getting along with others – not everybody in their class likes them because of their race." – Liberian respondent
>
> "Maybe color. In the school that is predominantly white, it is easy for a child to be bullied or not be heard because of her skin color." – Liberian respondent
>
> "The teasing they get from other children. They get teased about their clothes, shoes." – Latino respondent

Somali participants noted challenges related to limited English and not having anyone at home to help their children with homework.

> "We don't have a lot of skill to help them with homework due to our language barriers." – Somali respondent
>
> "They need extra help with their homework since my husband and I can't help." – Somali respondent

Challenges related to learning English and the difficult transition from English at school and another language at home were the most commonly reported barriers for Karen participants.

> "My children are still learning the English language so they struggle." – Karen respondent
>
> "They still struggle with English and they don't have anyone who can help them at home." – Karen respondent

Just one-quarter (24%) of *Speaking for Ourselves* participants who have school-age children feel "fully able" to help their children with homework (in English), and only one-third (34%) feel "fully able" to volunteer at their child's school. On the other hand, three-quarters (77%) of participants feel "fully able" to provide a home environment that is good for studying.

Overall, respondents feel they are most able to support their children's education by providing a home environment that is good for studying, attending and participating in school conferences, and by reading and signing school papers. Respondents were less confident in their ability to assist with English language-intensive activities, such as helping their children with homework, registering their children for extracurricular activities, and volunteering at their children's school (Figure 4).

Despite Karen respondents' difficulties with assisting their children with English-language homework, the majority of these respondents felt fully able to attend and participate in school conferences, volunteer at their children's school, and read and sign school papers. Just over half (52%) of all respondents felt fully able to provide their children transportation to school activities, but only 20 percent of Somali respondents responded this way. Somali respondents also felt less able to support their children's education by registering for extracurricular activities, providing a home environment that is good for studying, and reading and signing school papers.

4. When it comes to helping your children with their education, to what extent are you able to…

	N	Fully able	Partly able	Not at all able
help them with homework and reading (in English)?				
All respondents	277	24%	42%	35%
Hmong respondents	54	24%	33%	43%
Karen respondents	87	3%	32%	64%
Latino respondents	64	27%	59%	14%
Liberian respondents	27	70%	22%	7%
Somali respondents	40	20%	65%	15%
provide transportation to school activities?				
All respondents	279	52%	31%	17%
Hmong respondents	56	66%	29%	5%
Karen respondents	87	54%	20%	26%
Latino respondents	64	50%	30%	20%
Liberian respondents	27	56%	33%	11%
Somali respondents	40	23%	65%	13%

4. When it comes to helping your children with their education, to what extent are you able to… (continued)

	N	Fully able	Partly able	Not at all able
register for out-of-school time (extracurricular) activities?				
All respondents	274	43%	27%	29%
Hmong respondents	55	47%	22%	31%
Karen respondents	85	31%	9%	60%
Latino respondents	62	63%	27%	10%
Liberian respondents	27	52%	44%	4%
Somali respondents	40	23%	65%	13%
attend and participate in school conferences?				
All respondents	279	70%	24%	6%
Hmong respondents	56	55%	29%	16%
Karen respondents	87	79%	16%	5%
Latino respondents	64	89%	6%	5%
Liberian respondents	27	67%	33%	-
Somali respondents	40	35%	63%	3%
provide a home environment that is good for studying?				
All respondents	279	77%	19%	4%
Hmong respondents	56	66%	29%	5%
Karen respondents	86	87%	5%	8%
Latino respondents	65	89%	9%	2%
Liberian respondents	27	93%	7%	-
Somali respondents	40	40%	60%	-
volunteer at your child(ren)'s school?				
All respondents	272	34%	33%	34%
Hmong respondents	56	13%	30%	57%
Karen respondents	79	57%	11%	32%
Latino respondents	65	35%	42%	23%
Liberian respondents	27	26%	52%	22%
Somali respondents	40	18%	53%	30%
read and sign school papers?				
All respondents	273	73%	18%	9%
Hmong respondents	55	75%	14%	11%
Karen respondents	86	69%	13%	19%
Latino respondents	64	83%	12%	5%
Liberian respondents	26	89%	11%	-
Somali respondents	37	46%	54%	-

Parental encouragement was the most commonly mentioned key strength of culture or family that helps children to be successful in school.

When asked about the strengths that their family or culture has that helps their children be successful in school the top strengths mentioned by respondents varied across cultural community, for instance, parental verbal encouragement was the most noted strength with the Karen community (70%) and the least mentioned in the Somali community (0%). Religiosity was the most frequently mentioned strength in the Somali community (71%), but was not mentioned at all in the Hmong community (0%).

Hmong participants highlighted family closeness, support, family structure, and general stability as strengths within their culture that support children in school.

> "Set a good example for my children. Support them with good advice and family structure." – Hmong respondent
>
> "We have a good routine – 9 PM go to sleep. Help our kids with homework and set a good example for our kids such as working hard and have good discipline." – Hmong respondent

Parental verbal encouragement was noted as a primary strength in by Karen participants.

> "I support their education. I encourage them to try hard in their study. I told them the reason I came here is for their education." – Karen respondent
>
> "I encourage them to do well in school. I also encourage them to learn to grow spiritually." – Karen respondent

Latino respondents spoke of cultural/family values as a significant strength in support of education.

> "Taught our children about our origin, festive days and are very united." – Latino respondent
>
> "Teach them values, dedication, organization. To learn Spanish (be bilingual)." – Latino respondent

In addition to the importance of cultural/family values, Liberian participants noted discipline as a strength in their community.

> "My culture is very strict and don't let kids get their way or do whatever they want to do – strict on decision-making." – Liberian respondent
>
> "Respect. In Africa, the most we teach our children is respect for elders and friends so they are able to carry through." – Liberian respondent

Many Somali respondents named religion, including religious morals and religious worship as important strengths in their community. Half also mentioned language and their bilingual abilities as an asset.

> "Knowing how to read and write Somali language. Also, practicing the Islam religion (praying and reading Quran daily)." – Somali respondent
>
> "Because of my religion families help to stay together that is what helps us." – Somali respondent

The most commonly mentioned barriers to postsecondary education access, named by three-quarters (75%) of *Speaking for Ourselves* participants, are financial issues. Despite these barriers, nearly all participants (98%) believe that their children will go to college.

Respondents most frequently cited barriers around financial issues, specifically familial financial concerns, difficulty in learning about available scholarships and financial aid, and needing to work at the same time as attending school.

Other barriers, noted by less than 10 percent of respondents each, included lack of student motivation, self-esteem, and confidence; parents' lack of education; immigration status; language barriers; parents' limited understanding of the education system; and academic challenges related to prior education.

> "The hardest and biggest problem is money and financial barriers. Secondly, a problem may lie in a child's motivation if he/she is not academically prepared for college. This is a prosperous country yet many of us are still struggling with money to send kids to school." – Hmong respondent
>
> "There is not enough financial support, and we don't know about scholarships or programs to help pay for college." – Latino respondent
>
> "First, for adults who come to the U.S., they have to worry about finances for themselves and for their families. Some of these people might give up on their education due to these concerns. For people who grow up in this country, it's up to how they are guided and how they make choices for their future." – Karen respondent
>
> "Finances. If you don't have state's assistance in helping with daycare, it is hard for you. So, you have to work more jobs to be able to take care of you and your kids. Therefore, getting or staying in school becomes harder." – Liberian respondent
>
> "Lack of education and financial issues. Not having resources to finish college." – Somali respondent

Respondents from all cultural communities generally believed their children will go to college (Figure 5). Liberian respondents were most likely to strongly agree (93%) and Somali and Latino respondents were least likely to strongly agree (31% and 33%, respectively) that their children will go to college.

5. I believe my child(ren) will go to college

	N	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
All respondents	264	51%	47%	2%	0%
Hmong respondents	53	57%	40%	4%	0%
Karen respondents	77	56%	43%	1%	0%
Latino respondents	63	33%	67%	0%	0%
Liberian respondents	27	93%	7%	0%	0%
Somali respondents	39	31%	64%	5%	0%

Three-quarters (78%) of participants want to obtain additional education for themselves.

Most respondents indicated interest in pursuing more education, although the degree to which they are currently pursuing their educational goals varies by cultural community and other factors (Figure 6).

Karen respondents were most likely to say they want to get additional formal education or degrees and they were the most likely to be in school or have concrete plans to get additional education.

Despite nearly three-quarters (73%) of Somali respondents indicating the desire to obtain additional formal education, only 4 percent reported currently being in school and none reported having concrete plans to get additional education. Both cultural groups have described financial challenges as a significant barrier to paying for, getting in, and being successful in college.

Latino respondents were most likely to indicate they have barriers to pursuing further education. Liberian respondents are most likely to currently be in school.

Somali respondents are least likely to be in school and most likely to be interest but not have really looked into how to get further education. Hmong respondents are most likely to not be interested in additional education.

The majority of respondents from all education levels said they would like to get additional formal education or degrees. Those with some college or an AA degree were most likely to respond they would like to get more education (83%), and respondents with a bachelor's degree or higher were least likely to say they would like to continue their education (69%).

6. What are your plans for getting more education?

	All respondents (N=380)	Hmong (N=57)	Karen (N=80)	Latino (N=98)	Liberian (N=60)	Somali (N=62)
Not interested in additional education	22%	42%	9%	19%	12%	27%
Currently in school for education or degree	18%	12%	29%	15%	30%	3%
Not currently in school, but I have concrete plans to get additional education or degrees	26%	21%	61%	16%	33%	0%
Interested in getting additional education or degrees, but haven't really looked into it	18%	12%	0%	18%	13%	52%
Interested in getting additional education or degrees, but I have barriers	15%	12%	1%	31%	12%	18%

Most (61%) *Speaking for Ourselves* participants completed their highest level of education outside of the U.S. (Figure 7). However, three-quarters of Hmong respondents and nearly half of Liberian respondents completed their highest level of education in Minnesota. This may be related to the length of time these communities have been in Minnesota, and could impact their ability to obtain employment using their degree.

7. In what state or country did you complete your highest level of education?

	N	Minnesota	Another state in the U.S.	Another country
All respondents	380	32%	7%	61%
Hmong respondents	57	74%	23%	4%
Karen respondents	80	8%	0%	92%
Latino respondents	99	22%	4%	74%
Liberian respondents	59	46%	10%	44%
Somali respondents	62	19%	5%	76%

Issues to consider

The very low participation among immigrant and refugee families in licensed child care, especially center based child care and early childhood education programming, may be attributed to access and affordability as well as other factors, such as preferences for a provider who shares the family's cultural background (child caring practices, religious traditions, language, dietary restrictions, etc.)

Challenges that immigrant families face in assisting their children with their homework and barriers parents face to volunteering in the schools may be partly attributed to limited English proficiency, and is also related to school systems and culture (and their lack of familiarity with it). When asked what they would do if there were a problem with their children at school, 9 out of 10 participants (90%) said they would contact their child's teacher. Participants also said they were likely to contact the school counselor (81%) or the principal or assistant principal (60%). However, anecdotal evidence and discussions with Saint Paul Public School staff indicate that, in reality, parents and guardians from immigrant and refugee communities may not contact their child's school with their concerns as often as these data may suggest. According to these local experts, parents are most likely to contact a staff member of the child's school or district who is from their cultural community and who speaks their language, which means that bilingual and bicultural staff within the schools and district-wide are critical to the engagement and sense of connection immigrant and refugee communities have with their children's schools.

Through discussions with staff from Saint Paul Public Schools Family and Community Engagement Department, we identified several areas in which language and culture are critical to engaging parents and supporting students to be successful in school:

- Communications with the schools about their child and the school's activities
- Understanding and helping the child with their academic work
- Navigating the school system and assessing and supporting their child's progress
- Helping the child learn English
- Accessing out-of-school time activities and opportunities
- Accessing postsecondary, and especially financing options

Although nearly all *Speaking for Ourselves* participants who are parents want their children to go to college, these families face barriers in gaining access to higher education and completing a college degree, particularly if their children are first generation college students. In addition to the financial barrier named by *Speaking for Ourselves* study participants, other barriers for immigrant youth to attend postsecondary have been identified by prior research include work and family responsibilities, adequate academic preparation and achievement, a lack of resources about postsecondary education, and limited English proficiency.[1]

Although academic factors are associated with retention in postsecondary, others factors such as self-confidence, goals, institutional commitment, social support and involvement, and contextual influences (institutional selectivity and financial support) have also been shown to be positively related to retention.[2] Other factors to consider when attempting to encourage and support postsecondary achievement of immigrant students are psychological challenges such as shifting identity or taking on multiple identities, guilt related to disrupting the family system, and/or the burden of responsibility for lifting their family out of poverty.

[1] Erisman, W.,Looney, S. (2007) Opening the Door to the American Dream: Increasing Higher Education Access and Success for Immigrants. *Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP).* Retrieved from http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED497030.pdf

[2] Lotkowski, V. A., Robbins, S. B., & Noeth, R. J. (2004). The Role of Academic and Non-Academic Factors in Improving College Retention. ACT Policy Report. *American College Testing ACT Inc*.

Action steps and recommendations

In 2015 Minnesota's Governor Mark Dayton has paid special attention to increasing the affordability and accessibility of early education for all preschool aged children in the hopes of addressing the achievement gap. Research supports the effectiveness of pre-K to improve opportunities and the success of children. Incredible Years® is an example of a successful evidence-based parent-child program that is currently being delivered, by the Wilder Child Development Center, in Hmong and English. More outreach is needed within immigrant and refugee communities to inform them of the opportunities for and benefits of participating in early childhood programs.

At the same time, more efforts are needed to address the cultural responsiveness of child care centers in the Twin Cities (including staffing diversity) and to support informal (family, friend, and neighbor, or FFN) caregivers in using best practices to promote literacy and to address other key developmental and educational needs of the young children in their care.

Community organizations and school districts should also consider ways of providing language immersion and bilingual child care and early education programming options to meet the needs and preferences of families and ensure young children from immigrant and refugee communities have the opportunities they need to start kindergarten ready to learn. For families with young children as well as those with school-age children, English learning programs and bilingual outreach and support efforts should be a priority for schools to address the issues parents and other caregivers have related to helping their children with homework and participating in afterschool events and parent-teacher conferences.

School and child care staff should include individuals who are fluent in the native languages of their student's families and should have the training to provide families with the information they are looking for and to assist with the cultural translation necessary to navigate the education system.

Strengths identified by each cultural community should be recognized by educators. This could be accomplished, in part, by providing additional training to all teachers and school staff about how to effectively work with families and capitalize on the unique strengths presented by each community by taking an asset-based approach. Training and other efforts could facilitate better communication between teachers and parents and may provide a more familiar and nurturing learning environment for students.

A body of research has found that participation in extracurricular activities is positively associated with adolescent functioning, positive educational outcomes attainment, as well as gains in cultural capital.[3-4]

[3] Farb, A. F., & Matjasko, J. L. (2012). Recent advances in research on school-based extracurricular activities and adolescent development. *Developmental Review*, *32*(1), 1-48.

[4] Shulruf, B. (2010). Do extra-curricular activities in schools improve educational outcomes? A critical review and meta-analysis of the literature. *International Review of Education*, *56*(5-6), 591-612.

Providing transportation for afterschool programs and/or facilitating a carpooling system to and from school activities may help to improve access for students from immigrant and refugee families who face transportation challenges. Other difficulties registering for extracurricular activities related to language barriers may be addressed by providing forms in their native language and by ensuring bilingual staff work at these programs and can conduct effective outreach and provide assistance to families as needed to support their children in fully participating in the out-of-school time activities available to them. Finally, school districts and community-based providers should ensure, and public policy should support, culturally relevant out-of-school time activities. For example, many Karen youth enjoy soccer and volleyball, but the communities where they live often do not have facilities where they can play these sports.

A large proportion of respondents indicated interest in pursuing more education, but some communities in particular may need more guidance or support to allow them to go back to school. Members of the Karen and Somali communities in particular may need guidance to help them form a concrete plan to go back to school, and the Latino community could benefit from support in addressing barriers to continuing education.

To address the unique challenges of students from immigrant families, it is recommended that colleges and universities assess the needs of first generation students and design effective retention programs that use an integrative approach to target non-academic factors in addition to traditional academic factors. Several college campuses, including several from the Twin Cities (Macalester College, St. Mary's University, Minneapolis Community Technical College, and Concordia University) have already begun to develop and implement programs to support first generation students. These programs help students deal with economic hurdles as well as cultural differences that come with being a first generation student.

Also, local postsecondary institutions should work to build stronger relationships within immigrant and refugee communities and to conduct outreach in these communities to educate them about existing financial aid options and to identify other approaches members of these communities could use to finance their higher education.

Finally, postsecondary institutions and community-based organizations should consider developing a clearer pathway or "education to employment pipeline" for new immigrants and refugees, that lays out a clear path for them from learning English and getting proper documentation to work, to learning a specific job skill and/or transferring their skills from their home country, to actually applying for jobs and going on interviews, to navigating life as a worker and managing other competing demands (child care, health needs, home responsibilities, continued schooling, etc.) This could specifically include a pipeline for students form immigrant and refugee communities who want to be educators to get jobs in Twin Cities-based child care centers and schools.

Study methods

A community advisory board made up of individuals who are members of and/or work with one or more of the participating communities provided guidance throughout this study. Wilder Research designed the survey instrument, developed and implemented the data collection approach, and conducted the analysis and reporting after gathering input from the advisory board and directly from the community.

An innovative data collection approach called Respondent Driven Sampling was used to identify and recruit eligible community members to participate in the study. This approach involves randomly selecting a handful of "seed" respondents within each community and asking those respondents to refer up to three additional people from their community. Those respondents are then asked to refer other respondents, ultimately creating respondent referral "chains" that in some cases carried out as far as 11 "waves" (Figure 8).

Adults who were born outside of the U.S., or had a parent who was born outside of the U.S., who were from one of the cultural communities included in the study, and who live in Hennepin or Ramsey counties were eligible to participate. Respondents who were referred to the study could **not** be a biological family member or live at the same address as the person who made the referral.

Speaking for Ourselves
Buy-A-Question Partners

The following partner organizations contributed to this study by funding one or more study questions and by committing to using the results to improve service access or delivery:

- Hennepin County Public Health
- Metropolitan Library Service Agency
- Minnesota Children's Museum
- Minnesota Historical Society
- Minnesota Humanities Center
- Minneapolis Institute of Arts
- Science Museum of Minnesota
- Family and Community Knowledge Systems Project, Wilder Research, and Training and Development, Inc., with funding from the Kellogg Foundation

8. Respondent Driven Sampling: Number of seeds, referrals, and waves in the referral chains

Total number of:	All respondents[a]	Hmong	Karen	Latino	Liberian	Somali
Seeds	52	11	7	11	3	9
Referrals	407	94	94	90	57	60
Maximum number of waves	--	11	7	8	9	6
Total number of respondents	459	105	101	101	60	69

[a] In addition to the five main cultural communities listed in the table, the "all respondents" group also includes 6 Lao, 7 Oromo, and 10 Vietnamese respondents. We did not obtain enough completed surveys from members of these cultural communities to be able to report data for these communities separately.

Wilder Research hired bilingual staff from participating communities to help with data collection; interviews were conducted in the respondents' preferred languages, either over the phone or in-person. Respondents received $20 for completing the survey and $5 for each referral they made, up to three.

By using Respondent Driven Sampling, we were able to survey a group of study participants who are more representative of these cultural communities in the Twin Cities than if we had used convenience sampling methods (i.e., survey people who are all affiliated with one program, religious organization, housing site, neighborhood group, etc.) However, study participants are **not** statistically representative of their broader cultural communities because scientific random sampling was not used, and the full Respondent Driven Sampling method for weighting and analyzing data was not appropriate given these data.

Therefore, the data presented here should be interpreted with caution; we do not claim that the results exactly mirror the overall experiences of the broader community. Rather, we suggest that in many cases the data produced by this study are better than any other existing source of data about these immigrant and refugee communities in the Twin Cities. The key findings included in this report have been endorsed strongly enough by a wide enough range of study participants and community stakeholders to be considered valid and actionable for all practical purposes.

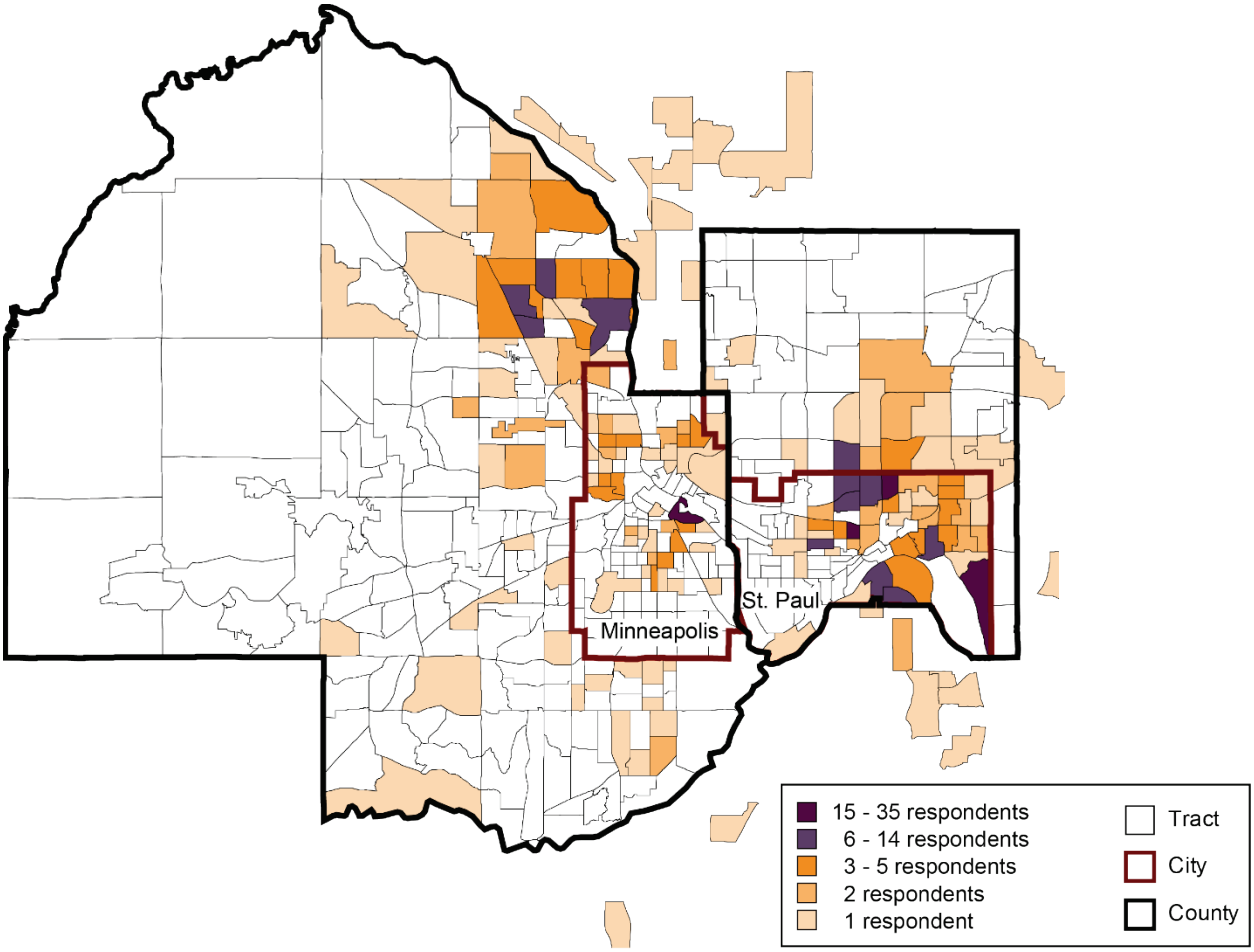
Differences among groups may be attributable to actual differences in their experiences, but may also be due to differences in survey responding patterns (e.g., some groups are more likely to give moderate responses, other groups are more likely to give extreme responses, regardless of the type of question). Therefore, as noted previously, comparison across communities should be done with caution and only with consideration of the unique contextual factors that influence these and any research findings.

See the detailed study methodology report and data book for more information about the study methods and limitations (*Speaking for Ourselves: A Study with Immigrant and Refugee Communities in the Twin Cities Data Book*).

Study participants

A total of 459 immigrant and refugee community members participated in the study. Participants' locations (home address) generally reflect the geographical spread of these cultural communities in Hennepin and Ramsey counties (Figure 9). A few respondents live outside of the target counties.

9. Participants' locations in Hennepin and Ramsey counties



Most participants were born outside of the U.S. They are split nearly evenly between Hennepin and Ramsey counties, although some specific cultural communities are concentrated in one county or the other. Two-thirds of respondents are female; they are split fairly evenly across the age spectrum from younger adults to older adults. Although participants fall into all education levels, most have a high school diploma or less. Similarly, although all income ranges are reflected, over half have household incomes below $30,000 annually (Figure 10).

10. Demographic characteristics of study participants

	All respondents (N=459)	Hmong (N=105)	Karen (N=101)	Latino (N=101)	Liberian (N=60)	Somali (N=69)
County of residence						
Hennepin	47%	40%	0%	58%	85%	57%
Ramsey	49%	51%	100%	40%	10%	35%
Other	4%	9%	0%	2%	5%	9%
Generational status						
1st generation – born outside the U.S.	95%	87%	100%	92%	98%	100%
2nd generation – born in U.S.	5%	13%	0%	8%	2%	0%
Gender						
Female	65%	61%	77%	81%	42%	55%
Male	35%	39%	23%	19%	58%	45%
Age						
18-29	25%	26%	24%	20%	37%	18%
30-49	54%	32%	68%	66%	48%	65%
50+ years	21%	42%	8%	14%	15%	18%
Education						
No formal education	17%	46%	21%	1%	0%	10%
Elementary/some high school (no diploma)	27%	21%	57%	30%	0%	33%
High school diploma or GED	27%	1%	20%	43%	17%	39%
Some college/Associate degree	21%	0%	2%	19%	62%	15%
Bachelor's degree or higher	9%	10%	0%	7%	22%	3%
Household income						
Under $10,000	17%	10%	26%	7%	7%	33%
$10,000 to under $20,000	16%	5%	24%	22%	12%	17%
$20,000 to under $30,000	22%	8%	31%	28%	24%	22%
$30,000 to under $50,000	23%	20%	12%	31%	34%	26%
$50,000 or more	9%	21%	1%	7%	9%	1%
Don't know or refused	13%	37%	6%	4%	15%	0%

Acknowledgements

Wilder Research would like to thank the study participants and their communities who entrusted us with their perspectives and shared with us their time. The participation of the *Speaking for Ourselves* advisory board members, our partners, and the community members through each phase of the project, made this study possible and made its findings more meaningful. We would also like to thank our Wilder Research and Wilder Foundation staff who contributed to the completion of this study.

Speaking for Ourselves Advisory Board

Sunny Chanthanouvong, Lao Assistance Center of Minnesota
Angelique Cooper-Liberty, Angel Eyes Foundation
Kim Dettmer, Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota
Hsajune Dyan, Saint Paul Public Schools
MayKao Fredericks, Wells Fargo Foundation
Michele Garnett McKenzie, The Advocates for Human Rights
Rodolfo Gutierrez, HACER
Roda Hassan, University of Minnesota Medical Center, Fairview
Thang Le, Vietnamese Science & Cultural Center-Minnesota
Kristine Martin, Amherst H. Wilder Foundation
MyLou Moua, Minneapolis Public Schools
Ahmed Muhumud, City of Minneapolis (former)
Mimi Oo, African & American Friendship Association for Cooperation and Development
Chanida Phaengdara Potter, The SEAD Project
Francisco Segovia, Pillsbury United Community – Waite House
Pablo Tapia, La Asamblea de Derechos Civiles
Danushka Wanduragala, ECHO
Pahoua Yang, Amherst H. Wilder Foundation
Tony Yang, Amherst H. Wilder Foundation (former)
Ladan Yusuf, CrossingBarriers

Wilder Research
Information. Insight. Impact.

451 Lexington Parkway North
Saint Paul, Minnesota 55104
651-280-2700
www.wilderresearch.org

AMHERST H WILDER FOUNDATION
ESTABLISHED 1906
Here for good.

For more information
For more information about this report or the *Speaking for Ourselves* study, contact Nicole MartinRogers at Wilder Research, 651-280-2682.
Authors: Nicole MartinRogers, Anna Bartholomay, Emma Connell, and Denise Hanh Huynh
SEPTEMBER 2015