



Labour Market Matters

Special points of interest:

- Institutional changes made to Quebec educational system helped to greatly improve the educational attainment levels of Francophone Quebecers in the last generation.
- Children of immigrant-born parents found to out-perform all other generational groups educationally.

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Institutional Change helped bring Francophone Quebecers back on par with their Franco-American counterparts, study finds

A positive relationship between the educational attainment of parents and that of their children has been observed regularly in economic literature. Children of more educated parents will tend to be more educated themselves. While this relationship is generally pervasive across countries and time, it is not clear whether parents with more education actually transmit certain values to their children which make them more likely to be more educated themselves, or whether parents who push their children to have more education simply happen to have more education themselves.

In his paper *“Intergenerational Progress in Educational Attainment When Institutional Change Really Matters: A Case Study of Franco-Americans vs. French-Speaking Quebecers”* ([CLSRN Working Paper no. 28](#)), CLSRN Affiliate Daniel Parent (HEC Montreal & McGill University) attempts to define the relationship between parent and child educational attainment. He finds that educational attainment is due in large part to institutional, rather than parental factors. Using data on the massive out migration of approximately 1 million French-Canadians who moved mainly to New England between 1865 and 1930. The study looks at how the educational attainment and enrolment patterns of their descendants compare with those of similarly aged French-speaking Quebecers.

Data from the 1971 Canadian, and 1970 US censuses reveal that

New England born residents who had French as their mother tongue enjoyed a considerable advantage in terms of educational attainment. Parent attributes this large discrepancy to their exposure to the US Public School system which had no equivalent in Quebec until the late sixties. Effectively, the study found that among the older generation studied from the 1970 and 1971 Canada and US census data, the older generation of Francophone Quebecers who would have faced the old elitist Quebec schooling system, was substantially less educated as a group than their comparably aged Franco-American counterparts who would have attended more liberal American public education system during the same time. Turning to the 2001 Canadian and 2000 US censuses, Parent finds strong signs that the gap has subsided for younger-aged individuals. The study found that contrary 30 years earlier, young Quebecers in 2001 had roughly the same number of years of schooling and were at least as likely as their American counterparts to have some post-secondary education, but still trail when it comes to having at least a B.A. degree.

Parent argues that this rapid reversal of educational outcomes between Francophone Quebecers of the younger generation and their Franco-American counterparts reflects the benefits derived from the profound changes Quebec made to access to, and the quality of its educational institutions, particularly in the post-secondary system in the mid-to-late 1960s. The speed at which this educational “catch-up” occurred, speaks to the importance

of access to, and quality of educational institutions relative to other mechanisms underlying the parent-child correlation for educational achievement, at least in this context. Indeed, if more educated parents have more educated children themselves because of the transference of educational values and knowledge, suddenly opening up access to secondary and post-secondary schooling should not result in a fast catch-up process. The rapid “catch-up” observed in the study indicates that the institutional changes Quebec made to its educational institutions may be more responsible for the younger generation of Francophone Quebecers pulling nearly even in terms of educational attainment with their Franco-American counterparts by 2000.

In the span of one generation, after Quebec had made substantial changes to access to, and the quality of, its educational institutions, the generation of Francophone Quebecers studied from 2000 and 2001 Canadian and US census data were almost completely on par with their Franco-American counterparts. The results of the study suggest that when institutional constraints to access to quality education are relaxed, as they were in Quebec in the 1960s, people with fairly diverse backgrounds in terms of parental education can derive large benefits, which helps to benefit and improve society as a whole.

Children of immigrants found to have significantly higher levels of educational attainment than children of Canadian-born parents



Children born to immigrant-born parents are found to out-perform every other generational group educationally.

Photo: [Arvind Balaraman](#)

“Very few 2nd generation ethnic groups do not outperform the 3rd-and-higher generation”

Many immigrant groups have a long tradition of turning to education as the mechanism best suited to promote success for their children. From the host countries perspective, the level of education achieved by the children of immigrants is a critical measure of the long-term multi-generational integration of immigrants. As children of immigrants are a significant component of the total population in Canada and the US, it is important to know how these youth are performing relative to other North American youth.

A review of recent research by CLSRN affiliates Garnett Picot and Feng Hou entitled **“Preparing for Success in Canada and the United States: the Determinants of Educational Attainment Among the Children of Immigrants”** ([CLSRN Working Paper no. 59](#)), finds that the children of immigrants in Canada (2nd generation Canadians) have a significantly higher level of educational attainment than the children of Canadian-born parents (3rd-and-higher generations). The study finds that this higher level of achievement is most noticeable among visible minority 2nd generation, with significant variation among various ethnic groups, with children from Chinese and Indian immigrant families registering the highest educational attainment. Very few 2nd generation ethnic groups do not outperform the 3rd-and-higher generation, the study

finds. This review of the research points to several key factors attributing to the educational attainment gap between 2nd and 3rd-and-higher generations. Thanks in part to the implementation of the points systems which favours highly-educated individuals, immigrants to Canada are more highly educated than the population as a whole. Studies have found that this higher immigrant parental education accounts for perhaps one-half of the positive educational attainment gap between the 2nd and 3rd-and-higher generations. Location of residence is an important factor, as 2nd generation immigrants live disproportionately in large urban areas where educational attainment is typically higher. “Ethnic Capital” or the measured educational and income levels of an ethnic group as a whole also plays a role in the educational attainment levels of 2nd generation immigrant youth – accounting for about a quarter of the gap, according to the study. Picot and Hou also find that parental expectations also play an important role.

Outcomes vary significantly by ethnic/course region group in both countries. In the U.S., 2nd generation youth with Mexican, Puerto Rican, and Central American backgrounds have relatively low levels of education compared to other 2nd generation immigrant youth, although they too, tend to outperform their 3rd-and-higher generation counterparts, after one accounts for the fact that their parents tend to have very low levels of education. Studies have found that this lower level of achievement is due in part

to low levels of education among their immigrant parents.

In Canada, by contrast, children of the larger and increasingly immigrant numerically important immigrant groups such as: the Chinese, South Asians, and Africans, register superior educational attainment levels compared to those of the 3rd plus generation. Picot and Hou believe that this result is partly related to the high levels of parental attainment among entering immigrants.

An interesting point is that the effect of parental educational levels on the educational attainment of children is weaker among families with immigrant rather than Canadian-born parents, suggesting that the intergenerational transmission of education is weaker among immigrant families than it is with Canadian-born families. This weaker association is due in large part to the fact that children from less educated immigrant families are more likely to achieve a higher level of education than their Canadian – born counterparts from families with similarly low levels of parental education. In other words, intergenerational upward educational mobility is greater among families with immigrant rather than Canadian-born parents. In the US, the extent to which the parents advantage (or disadvantage) in educational attainment is passed on to their children appear to be the same among immigrant as among American-born families.



Intergenerational upward educational mobility is greater among families with immigrant rather than Canadian-born parents

Photo: [Federico Stevanin](#)

Endnotes

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