

## Background

Massachusetts is consistently ranked best in K-12 education in the United States by the National Assessment of Educational Progress; however, immigrant students experience disparities in educational outcomes. <sup>1,2</sup>Data from Somerville, an urban community in Massachusetts, shows an average four-year graduation rate of 54% amongst English-language learners, significantly lower than 84% in native speakers. <sup>2,3</sup> Thus the goal of this research was to collect qualitative data to understand the experiences of immigrant adolescents, ages 14-18, in Somerville Public Schools.

<sup>1</sup>.School and District Profiles  
<sup>2</sup>.Latinos in Massachusetts Public Schools: Somerville  
<sup>3</sup>. Disproportionality in School Discipline in Massachusetts

## Collaboration

The student investigator partnered with The Welcome Project and Teen Empowerment to conduct this research. The Welcome Project, builds the collective power of immigrants to participate in and shape community decisions. Similarly, Teen Empowerment works with Somerville youth to help them find their voice and use it to build peace, tolerance, and community. Using a community-based participatory research (CBPR) approach, which encourages the collaboration and equal participation of community and academic partners in all phases of a research project, Welcome Project staff, Teen Empowerment staff, a student researcher and a Tufts instructor collaborated closely on all phases of this research.

## Methods

This qualitative research study consisted of semi-structured interviews with 4 Somerville youth ages 14-18 enrolled in the Somerville Public Schools from an immigrant family. Youth participants were recruited from Teen Empowerment. The research team (student investigator, instructor, and community partners) developed a youth interview guide focused on the youth's experience in the community as well as in the school. Data was collected, coded, and analyzed and synthesized in NVIVO. This research was approved by the Tufts SBER Institutional Review Board.

## Research Project Timeline

### PREPARATION

1. Took CH182- CBPR Course
2. Met with Welcome Project staff and discussed project goals
3. Met with Teen Empowerment staff and discussed recruitment

### RESEARCH PREPARATION

1. Development of method and tool for data collection
2. Tufts IRB application
3. Re-visit data collected previously in CH182

### IMPLEMENTATION



### DATA ANALYSIS AND SYNTHESIS

1. Data Transcription
2. Edit codebook
3. Coding
4. Data inputting and synthesis in NVivo

### DISSEMINATION

1. Undergraduate Research Symposium
2. Summer Scholars Presentation
3. 2-pager synthesis of previously collected data

## Results

### Teacher's awareness of Student Challenges

- Caucasian teachers do not always understand what it means to be an immigrant in the US (3 of 4)
- Teachers don't often think about outside responsibilities facing students (2 of 4)

### Student Agency and Stress

- Students adapt and learn from stressful situations (4 of 4)
- Friends, teachers, and counselors help manage student stress (4 of 4)
- Students are not afraid to seek out support for their mental health (3 of 4)

### Diversity

- Somerville as diverse (3 of 4)
- More diversity is needed in the teacher population at Somerville High (1 of 4)
- Student diversity at the high school is indicative of the diversity in Somerville (2 of 4)

### Student as an intermediary

- Students act as intermediaries between their families and the schools (4 of 4)
- The burden of being an intermediary
- School should take responsibility for outreaching and effectively communicating directly with immigrant parents (2 of 4)

*I: Are there things you wish the school and teachers did to better support you and your family?*

*Y: Paperwork being sent home should be given in different languages, it's very annoying having to translate... it really becomes our responsibility to keep our families informed, that should not be the case. (YID 02)*

*I: Okay, and is there anything else you like about Somerville? Or is that all?*

*Y: umm, I guess how much diversity there is in the community because I know that in some towns here in Boston there is no diversity, but here there is, which is something that I feel lucky to have. (YID 01)*

*"I have nervous breakdowns in school, but from that I build off and I learn how to survive without having to depend on someone so much." (YID 04)*

## Discussion

Many immigrant youth struggle to succeed in the American educational system due to language and cultural barriers.<sup>1,2</sup> Additionally, parents often do not have the tools necessary to support their children in navigating this complex and foreign system. <sup>1,2</sup> The aim of this study was to analyze the experiences of immigrant youth within the Somerville Public Schools in order to assess for strengths and find areas for improvement. According to the preliminary results, there is a need for teachers and schools to work more closely to support immigrant youth by communicating better with families, serving as a source of support for families and receiving training to work more effectively with immigrant parents and youth. <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>. Suárez-Orozco, C., Gaytán, F., Bang, H., Pakes, J., O'Connor, E., & Rhodes, J. (2010). Academic Trajectories of Newcomer Immigrant Youth. *Developmental Psychology*, 46(3), 602-618.  
<sup>2</sup>. Lund, D., & Lee, L. (2015). Fostering cultural humility among pre-service teachers: Connecting with children and youth of immigrant families through service-learning. *38(2)*, *Canadian Journal of Education*, 2015, Vol.38(2).

## Reflections

### Lessons Learned

- Importance of teamwork
- Recognition that research with youth is different than research with adults
- How our identities impact us as researchers
- Challenges of doing research in the summer and in a short time

### Limitations

- Small sample size
- Convenience sample (participants from Teen Empowerment)
- Participants were predominantly women and from a Latino background
- IRB turn-around time

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