

# Drought, poverty, violence drive migration to places like Cincinnati's East Price Hill

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Roberts Paideia Academy had one Hispanic student in the 2005-06 academic year.

By September 2014, the Latino enrollment in the East Price Hill elementary school had grown to almost 50%, 343 of 697 students.

Today, because of a surge since January and an unexpected spike since April 1, the number of Spanish-speaking students at Roberts has ballooned to 67% of 829 students.

It isn't just Roberts seeing the surge; it's happening at other Cincinnati Public and Archdiocese of Cincinnati schools.

"It's a majority of single mothers with a child or children," said Antonio Fernandez, director of the Roberts Welcome Center, part of the Community Learning Institute.

Triggers for the surge has been a slight easing of the logjam at the southern U.S. border, and intensified poverty and violence in the Northern Triangle nations of El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala.

"There are a mix of reasons," said Julie LeMaster, an immigration lawyer and executive director of the nonprofit Immigrant and Refugee Law Center, housed in the Roberts Welcome Center. "It's like people are trying to beat what's coming next from the (Trump) administration."

Data from the law center, CPS and two Catholic elementary schools in East Price Hill detail the spike.

- **Legal waiting list:** With the addition of another staff attorney, the law center had cleared its waiting list for service. Since April 1, the list has grown back to 40 clients.
- **Cincinnati Public Schools' English as a Second Language (ESL) program:** 65 students from the border have enrolled in the city's public schools since April 1, including 12 ESL learners at Roberts. More than 900 English learners are new to the district since the start of the academic year, among them 91 unaccompanied minors since January.
- **Catholic schools:** At St. Lawrence School, the number of Latino students increased from 102 in 2017-18 to 140 and now make 44% of the school population. At Holy Family, enrollment of Hispanic students has risen steadily since 2010-11 to 108 and now accounts for 59% of the student body, according to the Archdiocese of Cincinnati's Latino Outreach Program.

Numbers only reveal part of the growth. "We are learning of a number of families who have recently arrived who are afraid to enroll their children in school or seek legal assistance," lawyer LeMaster said. "The administration's policies are have a chilling effect."

Yet people keep migrating north.

Why and why now? Answers complex

Violence and disputes over land and mineral rights in Guatemala have led to murders of Mayan and other Indigenous leaders, which, in turn, have spurred more desperate and last-resort migration.

Climate change and drought throughout the Northern Triangle also are fueling emigration. The United Nations World Food Program reports that 2.81 million people are struggling to feed themselves in southern Guatemala, northern Honduras and western El Salvador. Coffee is the only crop unscathed.

Hunger is one of the major reasons that migration hasn't stopped, according to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. Human rights activists with Bread for the World say that nearly half of Guatemalan children are chronically malnourished.

For example, said Fernandez of the Roberts Welcome Center, if a father accompanies his wife and children, he knows he is likely to be arrested when he follows through on his appointment with Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

"Even if he is deported, he has hope that his wife and children can stay," Fernandez said. "Many farmers are coming because they can't pay back" loans they have taken out on their farms."

The Central American migration to East Price Hill and surrounding neighborhoods also has resulted in people moving from suburban Springdale and Fairfield. Fernandez said that's because some migrants believe they're safer in a larger community. They also are nearer to necessary education, social and legal services in Cincinnati as compared to other areas locally.