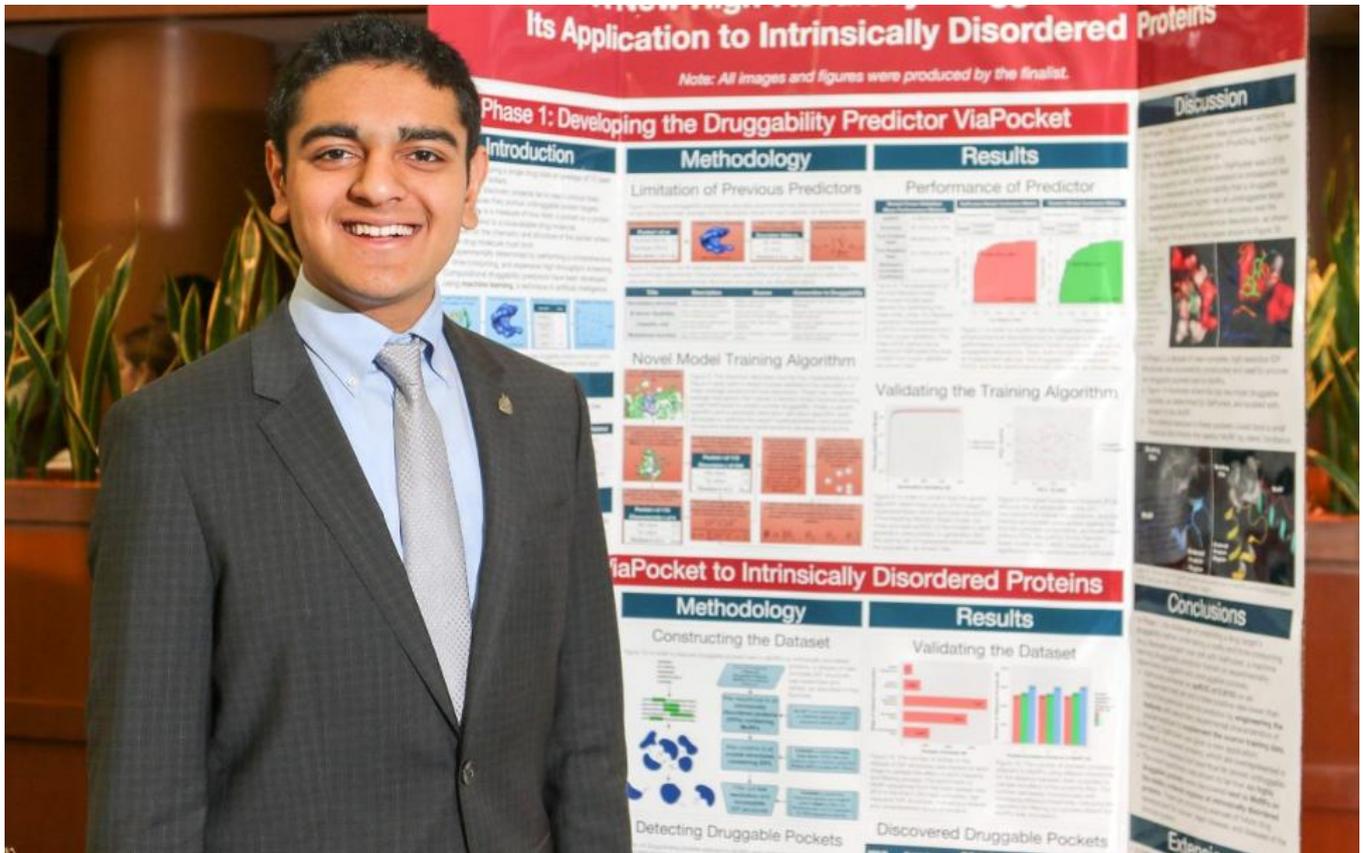


# 83% Of America's Top High School Science Students Are The Children Of Immigrants

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(Linda Doane/Society for Science & the Public)

*Amol Punjabi won the First Place Medal of Distinction for Basic Research at America's top competition for high school science students in 2016.*

What would we lose if immigrants could no longer come to America? Surprisingly, one of the most important things America would lose is the contributions made by their children.

A new [study](#) from the National Foundation for American Policy found a remarkable 83% (33 of 40) of the finalists of the 2016 Intel Science Talent Search were the children of immigrants. The competition organized each year by the Society for Science & the Public is the leading science

competition for U.S. high school students. In 2017, the talent search competition was renamed the [Regeneron Science Talent Search](#), after its new sponsor Regeneron Pharmaceuticals, and a new group of 40 finalists – America's next generation of scientists, engineers and mathematicians – are competing in Washington, D.C., from March 9 to 15, 2017.

Both family-based and employment-based immigrants were parents of finalists in 2016. In fact, 75% – 30 out of 40 – of the finalists had parents who worked in America on H-1B visas and later became green card holders and U.S. citizens. That compares to seven children who had both parents born in the United States.

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To put that in perspective, even though former H-1B visa holders represent less than 1% of the U.S. population, they were four times more likely to have a child as a finalist in the 2016 Intel Science Talent Search than were parents who were both born in the United States.

Parents who were international students were more likely to have a child as a finalist than native-born parents. A total of 27 of the 40 children – 68% – had a parent who came to America as an international student. That means if international students cannot remain in America after graduation (through Optional Practical Training and improved visa policies) it will also deprive America of the potentially substantial contributions of their children.

Three of the finalists, or 7.5%, had parents who came to America as family-sponsored immigrants (although the number is four parents, or 10%, if one counts the family-sponsored immigrant who married an H-1B visa holder).

Among the 40 finalists of the 2016 Intel Science Talent Search, 14 had parents both born in India, 11 had parents both born in China, and seven had parents both born in the United States. People of Indian and Chinese birth represent only about 1% of the U.S. population each, according to the Pew Research Center.

In addition to China, India and the United States, the countries of origin for the parents of 2016 Intel Science Talent Search finalists represent a diverse set of countries, including Canada, Cyprus, Iran, Japan, Nigeria, Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan.

The evidence indicates that the children of immigrants are increasing their influence on science in America. Sixty percent (24 of 40) of the finalists of the 2004 Intel Science Talent Search had at least one immigrant parent. In 2011, that proportion rose to 70% (28 of 40) who had at least one immigrant. And in 2016, the number rose again to 83% (33 of 40) of the finalists of the Intel Science Talent Search who had at least one immigrant parent.

The science competition has been called the “Junior Nobel Prize” and more than 95% of winners of the Intel Science Talent Search (STS) traditionally have pursued science as a career, with 70% earning Ph.D.’s or M.D.’s. Many of the students I interviewed hope to start their own companies.

In 2016, seven of the nine top awards were earned by the children of immigrants, including first place prizes for innovation and basic research. Amol Punjabi won the First Place Medal of Distinction for Basic Research for developing software that could be used by pharmaceutical companies to combat cancer and heart disease.

The children of immigrants among the finalists I interviewed understood the sacrifices their parents made to ensure them a better life. And, it is important to remember, all of these children, whether born here or naturalized, are as American as you and me.

Augusta Uwamanzu-Nna appreciates all her Nigerian-born parents have done to give her the best education possible. “They sacrificed so much for me,” said Augusta, who experimented with ways to improve the properties of cement, which has practical applications that include helping to prevent oil spills. “My father grew up during the civil war in Nigeria and couldn’t afford an education.”

Despite the obstacles, Augusta's father, Tobias Nna, overcame the odds and was trained as a physical therapist. He came to the United States on an H-1B visa. "Our goal in coming to America was to provide an opportunity for our children to study, have access to journals and computers," Tobias Nna told me. "I'm very happy they have taken advantage of these opportunities."

"Seeing what my parents did to make a better life for their children has inspired me to do everything I can to succeed," said Augusta. "This is the land of opportunity."