



CSDA

The Center for Social and
Demographic Analysis
www.albany.edu/csda

*The Annie E. Casey
Foundation is a private
charitable organization
dedicated to helping
build better futures for
disadvantaged children
in the United States.
www.aecf.org*

Children in Immigrant Families in Alabama Fact Sheet

September 2009

PROMOTING POSITIVE OUTCOMES for children in immigrant families is critical given that they are among the fastest growing segment of the child population (ages 0-17). This brief is part of a series of 50 state-specific papers intended to provide information about the importance of reducing language and literacy barriers to ensure that children in immigrant families achieve success in school and work settings. The results presented here are combined from the American Community Survey for 2005, 2006, and 2007. Funding was provided by the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

Children in immigrant families learning English merit special attention for Alabama's future

Children with at least one immigrant parent account for 5% of all children in Alabama, and 2% of Alabama's children live with English language learner parents only.

Children in immigrant families have diverse national origins

The largest proportion of children in immigrant families in Alabama have origins in Mexico (40%). Many also have origins in East Asia (11%) and Central America (10%).

Children in immigrant families have deep roots in Alabama

This is reflected in their parents' length of residence and citizenship, their own citizenship, their parents' and their own English fluency, and their families' commitment to homeownership.

Most children in immigrant families have long-term resident parents

Three in five (60%) children in immigrant families in Alabama have parents who

have lived in the United States 10 or more years. The proportion rises to 67% for those with English fluent parents only, but is only 52% for children with mixed-fluency parents and 48% for those with English language learner parents only.

One-half of children in immigrant families have American citizen parents

One-half (51%) of children in immigrant families in Alabama have parents who are U.S. citizens. The proportion rises from 18% for children with English language learner parents only to 66% for children with mixed-fluency parents and 76% for those with English fluent parents only.

Most children in immigrant families are American citizens

Four of every five (79%) children in immigrant families in Alabama are U.S. citizens. The proportion is nearly nine in ten for children with English fluent parents only (87%) and more than three in four for children with mixed-fluency parents (76%), but even among children with English language learner parents only, 70% are American citizens.



26% - 49%

14% - 26%

7% - 14%

2% - 7%

Four of every
five children in
immigrant families
in Alabama are
U.S. citizens.

One-half of children
in immigrant
families in Alabama
have parents who
are U.S. citizens.

families in Alabama speak another language at home and speak English very well. Thus, many children in immigrant families are well-positioned to become fluent bilingual speakers, writers, and readers—if they receive formal training in both English and the native language of their parents.

But many children live in linguistically isolated households

Three in ten (31%) children in immigrant families in Alabama live in linguistically isolated households, in which no one over the age of 13 speaks English exclusively or very well.

One-half of children in immigrant families live in family-owned homes

Fifty-five percent of children in immigrant families in Alabama live in family-owned homes. The proportion ranges from 36% for those with English language learner parents only to 58% for those with mixed-fluency parents and 72% for those with English fluent parents only.

Children in immigrant families experience important family strengths

These strengths include having two parents (and often other adult relatives) in the home who have a strong work ethic and are available to care for and nurture their children.

Most children in immigrant families have two parents in the home

Children in immigrant families in Alabama are more likely than children in native-born families to live with two parents. Among children in immigrant families, 82% live with two parents compared to 65% of children in native-born families. About four in five children in immigrant families live with two parents if they have English language learner parents only (77%) or English

fluent parents only (81%), which is similar to the proportion for Whites in native-born families (78%).

Children in immigrant families in Alabama are more likely than Whites in native-born families to have another adult relative in the home (22% vs. 14%).

Children in immigrant families with English language learner parents only are the most likely to have such relatives in the home (33%), followed by those with mixed-fluency parents (16%).

Children in immigrant families experience a strong family work ethic

Nineteen of every twenty (96%) children living with a father have a father who works to support the family, among children in immigrant families and native-born families alike. The proportion is very high (95%–98%) for each parental English language fluency group among children in immigrant families.

Nearly four of every five (77%) children in immigrant families in Alabama with a father in the home have a father working full-time year-round, which is similar to the proportion for children in native-born families (80%). The proportion ranges from 78% for children with English fluent parents only and English language learner parents only to 74% for those with mixed-fluency parents.

Nearly three of every five (58%) children in immigrant families in Alabama with a mother in the home have a mother working to support the family. This is somewhat less than the proportion for children in native-born families (74%). Children in immigrant families with English fluent parents only are less likely than children in native-born families to have a working mother (65% vs. 74%), and the difference is even greater for children with mixed-fluency parents and

One-third of children in immigrant families in Alabama speak another language at home and speak English very well.

English language learner parents only (46% and 53% vs. 74%).

Three of every ten (30%) children in immigrant families in Alabama with a mother in the home have a mother employed full-time year-round. Children in immigrant families are 10 percentage points less likely than those in native-born families to have a mother working full-time (30% vs. 40%).

Children in immigrant families experience important challenges

Many children in immigrant families, especially those living with English language learner parents only, experience the challenges associated with low parental education, low parental hourly earnings, and high family poverty. This can lead to overcrowded housing and limited access to early education programs.

Many children of immigrants have parents with limited education

One of every three (33%) children in immigrant families in Alabama has a father who did not graduate from high school, and the proportion is similar for mothers. There is little difference between children in immigrant families with English fluent parents only and children in native-born families (15% vs. 14%), but the proportion of children in immigrant families whose fathers did not graduate from high school rises to 35% for children with mixed-fluency parents and 54% for those with English language learner parents only.

One in five (20%) children in immigrant families in Alabama has a father who has completed only 8 or fewer years of school. The proportion rises to 39% for children with English language learner parents only.

Parents with little schooling may be less comfortable with the education system, less able to help their children with

school work, and less able to effectively negotiate with teachers and education administrators. It may be especially important for educators to focus attention on the needs of children in immigrant families from Mexico because these children are especially likely to have parents who have completed only a few years of school.

Many children of immigrants have parents with low hourly earnings

One of every three (35%) children in immigrant families in Alabama with a father in the home has a father earning less than 200% of the minimum wage, that is, less than \$10.30 per hour. (The Federal Minimum Wage increased from \$5.15 to \$5.85 on July 24, 2007 and to \$7.25 on July 24, 2009.) This is nearly two times greater than the proportion for those in native-born families (19%). There is little difference between children in native-born families or children in immigrant families with English fluent parents only (19% vs. 15%), but the proportion of children in immigrant families whose fathers earn less than 200% of minimum wage rises sharply to 38% for children with mixed-fluency parents and 58% for those with English language learner parents only.

Immigrant groups with high proportions of fathers who have limited educational attainments also tend to have fathers with low hourly wages. Children in immigrant families from Mexico have fathers with especially low levels of education among fathers and also have the highest proportion of fathers earning less than 200% of the federal minimum wage (51%).

Many children in immigrant families live below the poverty line

Almost one in four (23%) children in immigrant families in Alabama is officially poor, and the proportion rises to one in three (34%) for those with

74% of children in immigrant families with English language learner parents only are living below the 200% poverty level.

About This Series

The Center for Social and Demographic Analysis (CSDA) of the University at Albany, State University of New York, collaborated with the Annie E. Casey Foundation on this project. The Center supports the efforts of population scientists at the University at Albany to conduct innovative research on such demographic topics as immigration, residential segregation, and health disparities. CSDA researchers Donald J. Hernandez, Ph.D., Victoria L. Blanchard, M.S., Nancy A. Denton, Ph.D., and Suzanne E. Macartney, M.A. conducted the analyses on which the series is based and wrote the briefs while the Annie E. Casey Foundation edited, designed and disseminated them.

English language learner parents only.

Overall, children in immigrant families in Alabama are about as likely as those in native-born families to be poor (23% vs. 21%), but they are almost two times more likely than Whites in native-born families to live in poverty (23% vs. 12%). Official poverty rates for children in immigrant families with English fluent parents only and mixed-fluency parents are less than the rate for children in native-born families (14% and 19% vs. 21%), but the rate rises to 34% for those with English language learner parents only.

Children in immigrant families from Mexico have an even higher poverty rate of 39%, and the proportion rises to 43% for those with English language learner parents only.

The official poverty measure is used most often to assess economic deprivation in the U.S., but more than a decade ago a National Research Council (NRC) report urged that the official measure be revised because "...it no longer provides an accurate picture of the differences in the extent of economic poverty among population groups or geographic areas of the country, nor an accurate picture of trends over time" (Citro & Michael, 1995, p. 1). The proportion of families with incomes below 200% of the poverty line is often used in policy discussions.

One-half (52%) of children of immigrants in Alabama live in a family with an income below 200% of the official poverty line.

Children in immigrant families are one-fifth more likely than those in native-born families to have family incomes below 200% of the official poverty line (52% vs. 43%). Among children of immigrants with English fluent parents only, 32% live below the 200% poverty line compared to 43% of children in native-born families, but the proportion rises to 54% for children of immigrants with mixed-fluency parents

and to a very high 74% for those with English language learner parents only.

Many children in immigrant families live in overcrowded housing

Families with low wages and below-poverty-line incomes may live with other family members or nonrelatives to share housing costs and make scarce resources go further, leading to overcrowded housing conditions.

One of every four (25%) children in immigrant families in Alabama lives in overcrowded housing. Children in immigrant families are three times more likely than children in native-born families to live in overcrowded housing (25% vs. 8%). Overcrowding is as prevalent for children in immigrant families with English fluent parents only as for children in native-born families (8% each), but as with poverty indicators, the proportion rises greatly for children in immigrant families with mixed-fluency parents (28%) and English language learner parents only (43%).

Children in immigrant families have low early education enrollment

Although data on early education enrollment among children in immigrant families in Alabama is not available, in the United States overall, children in immigrant families are less likely than children in native-born families to be enrolled in pre-k/nursery school at age 3 (28% vs. 35%) and at age 4 (56% vs. 60%). At age 3, the proportion of children in immigrant families enrolled in pre-school programs declines from 40% for those with English fluent parents only to 25% for those with mixed-fluency parents and 19% for those with English language learner parents only. Similarly, at age 4, the proportion of children in immigrant families enrolled in preschool programs declines across the three language groups. Groups less likely than Whites in native-

Citations

Espinosa, L.M. (2007). English-language learners as they enter school; Espinosa, L.M. (2008). Challenging Common Myths about Young English Language Learners; Fuller, B. (2007). Standardized Childhood: The Political and Cultural Struggle over Early Education; Gormley, W.T. (2007). Early childhood care and education: Lessons and puzzles; Gormley, W.T. (2008). The effect of Oklahoma's pre-k program on Hispanic children; Hernandez, D.J., et al (in press), Early childhood education programs: Accounting for low enrollment in newcomer and native families; OECD. (2006). Early childhood education and care policy: Country note for Mexico; Portes, A., and Rumbaut, R.G. (2001). Legacies: The story of the immigrant generation; Ruggles, S., et al (2004). Integrated Public Use Microdata Series: Version 3.0; Sam, D.L., et al Psychological and Sociocultural Adaptation of Immigrant Youth; Yoshikawa, et al (2006). Educacion Preescolar en Mexico (Preschool Education in Mexico).

Acknowledgements

The authors appreciate support provided by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the Foundation for Child Development, and the National Institute of Child Health & Human Development. The authors alone are responsible for the content and any errors of fact or interpretation. The American Community Survey data file used in this research was prepared by Ruggles, et al (2008).

born families to be enrolled are children in immigrant families from Mexico and Central America, among others. Because 40% of children in immigrant families in Alabama have origins in Mexico, low enrollment in early education programs is likely a concern for this group of children.

Cultural preferences are sometimes cited as a reason for lower enrollment in early education programs among immigrant groups, especially among Hispanics. But recent research indicates that socioeconomic barriers can account for at least one-half and perhaps the entire enrollment gap in early education that separates children in immigrant families from Mexico, for example, and White children in native-born families (Hernandez, Denton, & Macartney, in press).

These results may be surprising, but it is important to note that these estimates are consistent with the strong commitment to early education in contemporary Mexico, where universal enrollment at age 3 is becoming obligatory in 2008–2009 (OECD, 2006). In fact, in Mexico where preschool is free, 81% of children age 4 were enrolled in 2005, compared to only 71% of White children in U.S. native-born families and 55% of children in U.S. immigrant families from Mexico in 2004 (Yoshikawa et al., 2006).

Policies and programs to foster children's success

Alabama and its local governments, including counties, cities, and school districts, as well as the Federal Government, pursue many policies and programs to foster positive development among children. Such government activities are no less important for children in immigrant families than for those in native-born families, but particularly for children with English language learner parents only, special features may be required to

assure that children in immigrant families have the same opportunities to succeed as all children.

Early education programs are important for all children, but may be particularly valuable for the cognitive and language development of children in English language learner families (Gormley, 2007, 2008; Gormley & Gayer, 2005; Gormley et al., 2005). Insofar as socioeconomic barriers play a critical role in limiting access of key immigrant groups to early education, additional resources would help these and other parents to achieve their hope of enrolling their children in early education programs.

There is a need for education policies, programs, and curricula that encourage fluency not only in English but also in the home languages of children and that foster bilingual spoken fluency and literacy (reading and writing). This need exists because language development is critical to the success of children in school, and research has shown that the development of bicultural language skills and identity is related to the successful educational and social integration of children in immigrant families (Espinosa 2007, 2008; Fuller, 2007; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Sam et al., 2006). Two-generation family literacy programs could also foster the educational, economic, and social integration of children and parents in immigrant families.

The successful integration of many children and parents in immigrant families in some communities may require active outreach in the home languages of families by schools, health care facilities, and other organizations and institutions serving children and families. The successful integration of these children and parents will also be fostered by the development of a culturally competent workforce in these organizations and institutions. ♦