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More than nine in ten children in immigrant families in Vermont are U.S. citizens.

Children in Immigrant Families in Vermont

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 Vermont's future

Children with at least one immigrant parent account for 5% of all children in Vermont, and about 1% of Vermont'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 Vermont have origins in Canada (26%), but close behind are children with origins in Western Europe (18%). Many also have origins in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union (14%), East Asia (13%), and South Central Asia (8%).

Children in immigrant families have deep roots in Vermont

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-fifths (62%) of children in immigrant

families in Vermont have parents who have lived in the United States 10 or more years.

Many children in immigrant families have American citizen parents

Four-fifths (82%) of children in immigrant families in Vermont have parents who are U.S. citizens.

Most children in immigrant families are American citizens

Nine in ten (94%) children in immigrant families in Vermont are U.S. citizens. The proportion is even greater for children with English fluent parents only (98%).

Children in immigrant families have diverse language environments

Most children in immigrant families grow up in complex language environments that can help promote the development of English language skills. A smaller proportion lives in linguistically isolated households.

The language skills of parents in immigrant families have important implications for language acquisition among children because parents provide the



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 Vermont are more likely than children in native-born families to live with two parents. Among children in immigrant families, 88% live with two parents, compared to 77% of children in native-born families. Nine in ten children in immigrant families live with two parents if they have English fluent parents only (90%), which is greater than the proportion for Whites in native-born families (77%).

Children in immigrant families in Vermont are about as likely as Whites in native-born families to have another adult relative in the home (10% vs. 11%).

Children in immigrant families experience a strong family work ethic

Almost all (98%) children living with a father have a father who works to support the family, among children in immigrant families and native-born families alike.

Four of every five (78%) children in immigrant families in Vermont with a father in the home have a father working full-time year-round, which is similar to the proportion for native-born families (79%).

Four of every five (81%) children in immigrant families in Vermont with a mother in the home have a mother working to support the family. This is similar to the proportion for children in native-born families (83%).

Nearly two of every five (37%) children

in immigrant families in Vermont with a mother in the home have a mother employed full-time year-round. Children in immigrant families are only 3 percentage points less likely than those in native-born families to have a mother working full-time (37% vs. 40%).

Some children in immigrant families experience important challenges

Some children in immigrant families experience the challenges associated with low parental education, low parental hourly earnings, and high family poverty, which, in turn, can lead to overcrowded housing and limited access to early education programs.

Some children of immigrants have parents with limited education

One of every nine (11%) children in immigrant families in Vermont has a father who did not graduate from high school, but the proportion is similar for mothers (4%). There is little difference between children in immigrant families with English fluent parents only and children in native-born families (9% vs. 6%).

Almost no (1%) children in immigrant families in Vermont have a father who has completed only 8 or fewer years of school.

A few children of immigrants have parents with low hourly earnings

One of every twenty (5%) children in immigrant families in Vermont 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 one-third of the proportion among those in native-born families (15%). A similar difference exists between children in

One-sixth of children (17%) in immigrant families in Vermont speak another language at home and speak English very well.

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immigrant families with English fluent parents only and children in native-born families (4% vs. 15%).

A few children in immigrant families live below the poverty line

Very few (3%) children in immigrant families in Vermont is officially poor.

Overall, children in immigrant families in Vermont are one-fourth as likely as those in native-born families and Whites in native-born families (3% vs. 11% and 11%) to live in poverty.

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 of every eight (13%) children of immigrants in Vermont lives in a family with an income below 200% of the official poverty line. Children in immigrant families are half as likely as those in native-born families to have family incomes below 200% of the official poverty line (13% vs. 29%).

A few 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.

Very few (4%) children in immigrant families in Vermont live in overcrowded housing. Children in immigrant families are about as likely as children in native-born families to live in overcrowded housing (4% vs. 6%). Overcrowding is about as prevalent for children in immigrant families with English fluent parents only as for children in native-born families (2% vs. 6%).

Children in immigrant families have low early education enrollment

Although data on early education enrollment among children in immigrant families in Vermont 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 preschool 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-born families to be enrolled are children in immigrant families from Mexico and Central America, among others.

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).

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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

Vermont 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. ♦

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.

