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Children in Immigrant Families in Washington

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 are key to Washington's future

Children with at least one immigrant parent account for 24% of all children in Washington, and 11% of Washington'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 Washington have origins in Mexico (37%), but many have origins in East Asia (17%), Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union (11%), and Indochina (9%).

Children in immigrant families have deep roots in Washington

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

Seven in ten (70%) children in immigrant

families in Washington have parents who have lived in the United States 10 or more years. The proportion ranges from 64% for children with English language learner parents only to 72% for those with mixed-fluency parents and 76% for those with English fluent parents only.

Most children in immigrant families have American citizen parents

Three-fifths (59%) of children in immigrant families in Washington have parents who are U.S. citizens. The proportion rises from 34% for children with English language learner parents only to 70% for children with mixed-fluency parents and 82% for those with English fluent parents only.

Most children in immigrant families are American citizens

More than four in five (83%) children in immigrant families in Washington are U.S. citizens. The proportion is more than four in five for children with at least one English fluent parent (88%–93%), but even among children with English language learner parents only, 73% are American citizens.



Legend:

- 26% - 49%
- 14% - 26%
- 7% - 14%
- 2% - 7%



Three-fifths
of children in
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origin group least likely to speak English fluently, a substantial majority are English fluent (69%).

Nearly one-half (47%) of children in immigrant families in Washington 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

About three in ten (28%) children in immigrant families in Washington live in linguistically isolated households, in which no one over the age of 13 speaks English exclusively or very well.

Most children in immigrant families live in family-owned homes

Sixty-two percent of children in immigrant families in Washington live in family-owned homes. The proportion ranges from 48% for those with English language learner parents only to 61% for those with mixed-fluency parents and 76% 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 Washington are more likely than children in native-born families to live with two parents. Among children in immigrant families, 83% live with two parents, compared to 75% 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 (84%), which is similar to the proportion for Whites in native-born families (79%).

Children in immigrant families in Washington are more likely than Whites in native-born families to have another adult relative in the home (20% vs. 13%).

Children in immigrant families with English language learner parents only are the most likely to have such relatives in the home (28%), followed by those with mixed-fluency parents (17%) and English fluent parents only (14%).

Children in immigrant families experience a strong family work ethic

Nineteen of every twenty (95%) 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 (94%–96%) for each parental English language fluency group among children in immigrant families.

Nearly three of every four (73%) children in immigrant families in Washington 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 (77%). The proportion ranges from 80% for children with English fluent parents only to 73% for those with mixed-fluency parents and 67% for those with English language learner parents only.

Two of every three (68%) children in immigrant families in Washington 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

Nearly one-half of children (47%) in immigrant families in Washington speak another language at home and speak English very well.

parents only and children in native-born families are about equally likely to have a working mother (71% vs. 74%), but children with mixed-fluency parents and English language learner parents only are less likely than children in native-born families to have a working mother (66% and 65% vs. 74%).

One of every three (32%) children in immigrant families in Washington with a mother in the home has a mother employed full-time year-round. Children in immigrant families are as likely as those in native-born families to have a mother working full-time (32% each).

Children in immigrant families experience important challenges

Many children in immigrant families, especially those with English language learner parents only, 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.

Many children of immigrants have parents with limited education

Three of every ten (30%) children in immigrant families in Washington have 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 (9% vs. 6%), but the proportion of children in immigrant families whose fathers did not graduate from high school rises to 27% for children with mixed-fluency parents and 52% for those with English language learner parents only.

One in five (19%) children in immigrant families in Washington has a father who has completed only 8 or fewer years of

school. The proportion rises to 37% 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 four (24%) children in immigrant families in Washington 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 more than two times greater than the proportion among those in native-born families (10%). There is no difference between the children in native-born or immigrant families with English fluent parents only (10% each), but the proportion of children in immigrant families whose fathers earn less than 200% of minimum wage rises sharply to 24% for children with mixed-fluency parents and 39% for those with English language learner parents only.

Many children in immigrant families live below the poverty line

One in five (19%) children in immigrant families in Washington is officially poor, and the proportion rises to one in three (33%) for those with English language learner parents only. Overall, children in immigrant families in Washington are

71% of children in immigrant families with English language learner parents only are living below the 200% poverty level.

three-fourths more likely than those in native-born families (19% vs. 11%) and two times more likely than Whites in native-born families (19% vs. 8%) to live in poverty. Official poverty rates for children in immigrant families with English fluent parents only and mixed-fluency parents are similar to the rate for children in native-born families (7% and 10% vs. 11%), but the rate rises to 33% 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.

Nearly one-half (47%) of children of immigrants in Washington live in a family with an income below 200% of the official poverty line. Children in immigrant families are two-thirds more likely than those in native-born families to have family incomes below 200% of the official poverty line (47% vs. 28%). Among children of immigrants with English fluent parents only, 23% live below the 200% poverty line compared to 28% for children in native-born families, but the proportion rises to 42% for children of immigrants with mixed-fluency parents and to a very high 71% for children of immigrants 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.

Nearly one of every four (23%) children in immigrant families in Washington live in overcrowded housing. Children in immigrant families are three times more likely than children in native-born families to live in overcrowded housing (23% vs. 7%). Overcrowding for children in immigrant families with English fluent parents is about the same as for children in native-born families (9% vs. 7%), but as with poverty indicators, the proportion rises greatly for children with mixed-fluency parents (24%) and English language learner parents only (36%).

Children in immigrant families have low early education enrollment

Children in immigrant families in Washington are less likely than in native-born families to be enrolled in pre-k/nursery school at age 3 (22% vs. 33%) and at age 4 (41% vs. 51%). At age 3, the proportion of children in immigrant families enrolled in preschool programs declines from 33% for those with English fluent parents only to 13% for those with English language learner parents only. Similarly, at age 4, the proportion enrolled declines across the parental language groups. Among children in immigrant families with origins in Mexico, enrollment in early education programs is even lower at age 3 (8%) and age 4 (28%).

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

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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

Washington 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.