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# Children in Immigrant Families in West Virginia 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 West Virginia's future**

Children with at least one immigrant parent account for 2% of all children in West Virginia, and less than 1% of West Virginia'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 West Virginia have origins in Mexico (17%), but close behind are children with origins in Western Europe (13%) and East Asia (12%). Many also have origins in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union (10%), South Central Asia (9%), and Africa (8%).

## **Children in immigrant families have deep roots in West Virginia**

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 (59%) children in immigrant**

**families in West Virginia have parents  
who have lived in the United States 10  
or more years.**

## **Many children in immigrant families have American citizen parents**

**Four-fifths (79%) of children in immigrant  
families in West Virginia have parents  
who are U.S. citizens.**

## **Most children in immigrant families are American citizens**

**Nine in ten (89%) children in immigrant  
families in West Virginia are U.S. citizens.**

## **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 immi- grant families have important implications for language acquisition among children**

because parents provide the earliest environment in which children learn to speak. The English language skills of parents may also have important implications beyond the role in children's language acquisition.



26% - 49%

14% - 26%

7% - 14%

2% - 7%



Almost three in ten children (29%) in immigrant families in West Virginia speak another language at home and speak English very well.

Virginia are more likely than children in native-born families to live with two parents. Among children in immigrant families, 84% live with two parents, compared to 75% of children in native-born families. The proportion is 100% for children in immigrant families with mixed-fluency parents, a group that by definition has two parents in the home. About four in five children in immigrant families live with two parents if they have English fluent parents only (82%), which is similar to the proportion for Whites in native-born families (77%).

**Children in immigrant families in West Virginia are about as likely Whites in native-born families to have another adult relative in the home (10% vs. 12%).**

### **Children in immigrant families experience a strong family work ethic**

Nine of every ten (90%) 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 (99%) for English fluent parents only.

Seven in ten (73%) children in immigrant families in West Virginia 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 (71%).

About two-thirds (64%) of children in immigrant families in West Virginia 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 (67%). Children in immigrant families with English fluent parents only and children in native-born families are about equally likely to have a working mother (66% vs. 67%).

Three of every ten (30%) children in

immigrant families in West Virginia with a mother in the home have a mother employed full-time year-round. Children in immigrant families are only 4 percentage points less likely than those in native-born families to have a mother working full-time (30% vs. 34%).

### **Children in immigrant families experience important challenges**

A number of 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 West Virginia has a father who did not graduate from high school, and the proportion is similar for mothers. Children in immigrant families with English fluent parents only are half as likely as children in native-born families to have fathers who did not graduate from high school (7% vs. 14%).

Very few (3%) children in immigrant families in West Virginia have a father who has completed only 8 or fewer years of school.

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.

### **Some children of immigrants have parents with low hourly earnings**

One of every six (16%) children in immigrant families in West Virginia with a father in the home has a father earning less than 200% of the minimum wage,

**One in five  
children (19%) in  
immigrant families  
in West Virginia is  
officially poor.**

### 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.

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 about one-fourth less than the proportion among those in native-born families (22%). The same difference exists between children in native-born families and immigrant families with English fluent parents only (22% vs. 14%).

### Many children in immigrant families live below the poverty line

**One in five (19%) children in immigrant families in West Virginia is officially poor.** Overall, children in immigrant families in West Virginia are about as likely as those in native-born families (19% vs. 23%) and Whites in native-born families (19% vs. 22%) to live in poverty. The official poverty rate for children in immigrant families with English fluent parents only is less than the rate for children in native-born families (14% vs. 23%).

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.

**Two of every five (39%) children of immigrants in West Virginia live in a family with an income below 200% of the official poverty line.** Children in immigrant families are less likely than those in native-born families to have family incomes below 200% of the official poverty line (39% vs. 46%). Among children

of immigrants with English fluent parents only, 34% live below the 200% poverty line, compared to 46% for children in native-born families.

### 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 eleven (9%) children in immigrant families in West Virginia lives in overcrowded housing.** Children in immigrant families are slightly more likely than children in native-born families to live in overcrowded housing (9% vs. 6%). Overcrowding for children in immigrant families with English fluent parents only is about the same as for children in native-born families (7% vs. 6%).

### Children in immigrant families have low early education enrollment

**Although data on early education enrollment among children in immigrant families in West Virginia 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



## Citations

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Mexico and Central America, among others. Because 17% of children in immigrant families in West Virginia 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

**West Virginia 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.** ♦