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Children in Immigrant Families in Arizona 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 Arizona's future

Children with at least one immigrant parent account for 31% of all children in Arizona, and 18% of Arizona's children live with English language learner parents only.

Children in immigrant families have diverse national origins

A substantial majority of children in immigrant families in Arizona have origins in Mexico (76%), but nearly one-fourth (24%) are from other countries and regions of the world.

Children in immigrant families have deep roots in Arizona

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 of every ten (72%) children in immigrant families in Arizona have parents who have lived in the United States 10 or more years. The proportion is two-thirds (66%) for children in

immigrant families with English language learner parents only, and rises to four-fifths (79%–81%) of children in immigrant families with at least one English fluent parent.

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

One-half (49%) of children in immigrant families in Arizona have parents who are U.S. citizens. The proportion rises from 25% for children in immigrant families with English language learner parents only to 72% for those with mixed-fluency parents and 78% for those with English fluent parents only.

Most children in immigrant families are American citizens

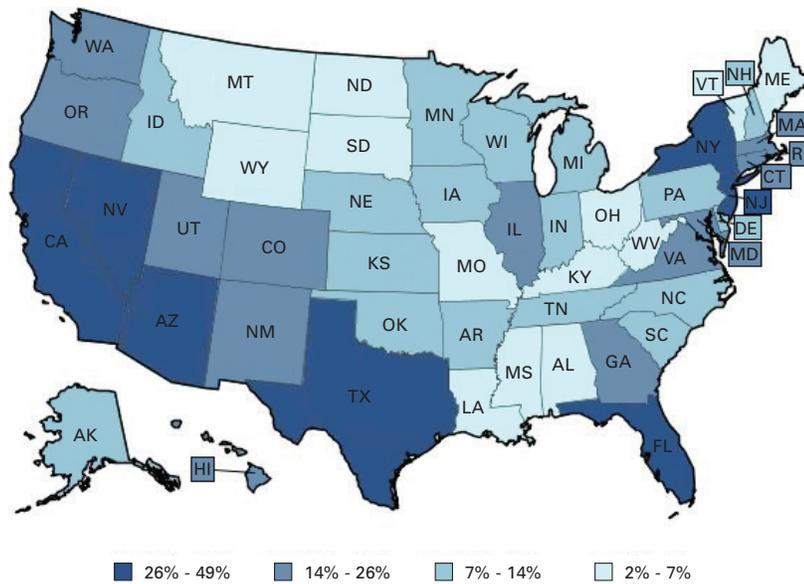
Four in five (80%) children in immigrant families in Arizona are U.S. citizens. The proportion is nearly nine in ten for children with at least one English fluent parent (89%), but even among children with English language learner parents only, 72% are American citizens.

Children in immigrant families have diverse language environments

Most children in immigrant families grow



Children in immigrant families (Percent – 2007)



KIDS COUNT Data Center, www.kidscount.org/datacenter
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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 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. English language learner parents are less likely to find well-paid full-time year-round jobs and may be less able to help their children study for subjects taught in English.

Half of children in immigrant families have an English fluent parent Nearly one-half (47%) of children in immigrant families in Arizona live with at least one English fluent parent, while the others (53%) live with parents who are English language learners only. Of the 47%, three in ten live with English fluent

parents only, and about one-sixth live with mixed-fluency parents, that is, with one English fluent parent and one English language learner parent.

English fluent parents are more likely to have lived longer in the U.S. In all immigrant families, two-thirds (66%) of English language learner parents have lived in the U.S. for 10 or more years, while four-fifths of English fluent (81%) and mixed-fluency parents (79%) have lived in the U.S. for 10 or more years. The relationship also exists for immigrant families with Mexican origins (66% for English language learner parents only vs. 82% of mixed-fluency parents and 88% of English fluent parents only). This pattern reflects, in part, the fact that the longer immigrant parents live in the U.S. the more likely they are to become proficient in English.

Three-fourths of children in immigrant families are English fluent Seventy-five percent of children in immigrant families in Arizona speak English exclusively or very well. Even

Four in five children in immigrant families in Arizona are U.S. citizens.

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

among children in immigrant families with origins in Mexico, the origin group least likely to speak English fluently, a substantial majority (70%) speak English fluently.

More than one-half (55%) of children in immigrant families in Arizona 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

More than one-third (36%) of children in immigrant families in Arizona 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-one percent of children in immigrant families in Arizona live in family-owned homes. The proportion ranges from 53% for those with English language learner parents only to 68% for those with mixed-fluency parents and 73% 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 Arizona 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 70% of children in native-born families. Nearly four in five children in immigrant families live with two parents if they have English language learner parents only (78%) or English fluent parents only (77%), which is similar to the proportion for Whites in native-born families (78%).

Children in immigrant families in Arizona are nearly two times more likely than Whites in native-born families to have another adult relative in the home (24% vs. 13%).

Children in immigrant families with English language learner parents only are the most likely to have such relatives in the home (29%), followed by those with mixed-fluency parents (21%) and English fluent parents only (18%).

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%–96%) for each parental English language fluency group among children in immigrant families.

Four of every five (81%) children in immigrant families in Arizona 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 (79%). The narrow range is 80% for children with English fluent parents only, 79% for those with mixed-fluency parents, and 81% for those English language learner parents only.

More than one-half (55%) of children in immigrant families in Arizona 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 (73%).

More than one-half of children (55%) in immigrant families in Arizona speak another language at home and speak English very well.

Children in immigrant families with English fluent parents only and children in native-born families are about equally likely to have a working mother (71% vs. 73%), 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 (54% and 47% vs. 73%).

More than one of every four (28%) children in immigrant families in Arizona with a mother in the home has a mother employed full-time year-round.

Children in immigrant families are 11 percentage points less likely than those in native-born families to have a mother working full-time (28% vs. 39%).

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, which, in turn, can lead to overcrowded housing and limited access to early education programs.

Many children of immigrants have parents with limited education

More than two of every five (44%) children in immigrant families in Arizona have a father who did not graduate from high school, and the proportion is similar for mothers.

There is only a small difference between children in immigrant families with English fluent parents only and children in native-born families (15% vs. 9%), but the proportion of children in immigrant families whose fathers did not graduate from high school rises to 37% for children with mixed-fluency parents and 62% for those with English language learner parents only.

Nearly one in four (24%) children in immigrant families in Arizona 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.

Many children of immigrants have parents with low hourly earnings

Three in ten (30%) children in immigrant families in Arizona with a father in the home have 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 three times greater than the proportion among those in native-born families (12%). There is little difference between the children in native-born families or children in immigrant families with English fluent parents only (12% vs. 13%), but the proportion of children in immigrant families whose fathers earn less than 200% of minimum wage rises sharply to 25% for children with mixed-fluency parents and 41% for those with English language learner parents only.

Many children in immigrant families live below the poverty line

One in four (25%) children in immigrant families in Arizona is officially poor, and the proportion rises to more than one in three (36%) for those with English language learner parents only. Overall, children in immigrant families in Arizona are two times more likely than those in native-born families to be poor (25% vs. 13%) and three times more likely than

Whites in native-born families to live in poverty (25% vs. 7%). The 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 (12% and 15% vs. 13%), but the rate rises to 36% 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.

Three of five children of immigrants in Arizona live in a family with an income below 200% of the official poverty line. Children in immigrant families are nearly two times more likely than those in native-born families to have family incomes below 200% of the official poverty line (61% vs. 33%). Among children of immigrants with English fluent parents only, 34% live below the 200% poverty line, which is similar to the proportion for children in native-born families (33%), but the proportion rises to 53% of children with mixed-fluency parents and to a very high 78% of children 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 three children in immigrant families in Arizona lives in overcrowded housing. Children in immigrant families are more than two times more likely than children in native-born families to live in overcrowded housing (33% vs. 14%). Overcrowding for children in immigrant families with English fluent parents only is about the same as for children in native-born families (15% vs. 14%), but as with poverty indicators, the proportion rises greatly for children with mixed-fluency parents (33%) and English language learner parents only (43%).

Children in immigrant families have low early education enrollment

Children in immigrant families in Arizona are less likely than children in native-born families to be enrolled in pre-k/nursery school at age 3 (16% vs. 29%) and at age 4 (34% vs. 48%).

At age 3, the proportion of children in immigrant families enrolled in pre-school programs declines from 27% for those with English fluent parents only to 11% for those with mixed-fluency parents and 10% for those with English language learner parents only. Similarly, at age 4, the proportion enrolled declines across the three parental language groups. Among children in immigrant families with origins in Mexico, enrollment in early education programs is even lower at age 3 (10%) and age 4 (30%).

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

78% of children in immigrant families with English language learner parents only are living below the 200% poverty level.

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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

Arizona 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, 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.