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# Children in Immigrant Families in Iowa

## 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 Iowa's future

Children with at least one immigrant parent account for 8% of all children in Iowa, and 3% of Iowa's children live with English language learner parents only.

and English fluent parents only and 63% for those with English language learner parents only.

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

**Three-fifths (59%) of children in immigrant families in Iowa have parents who are U.S. citizens.** The proportion rises from 35% for children with English language learner parents only to 74% for children with mixed-fluency parents only and 73% for those with English fluent parents only.

### Children in immigrant families have diverse national origins

The largest proportion of children in immigrant families in Iowa have origins in Mexico (43%), followed by those with origins in Korea (6%).

### Most children in immigrant families are American citizens

**More than four in five (82%) children in immigrant families in Iowa are U.S. citizens.** The proportion is similar for children with English fluent parents only and mixed-fluency parents (86% each), but even among children with English language learner parents only, 76% are American citizens.

### Children in immigrant families have deep roots in Iowa

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

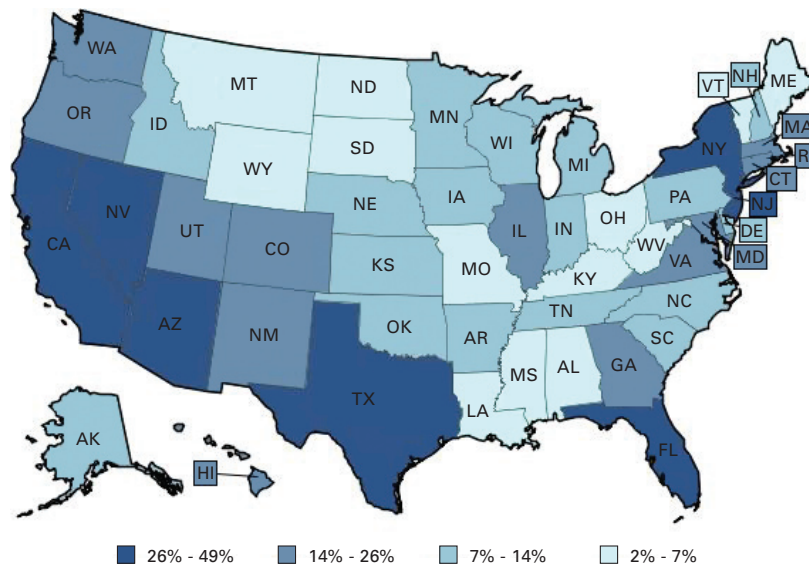
**Three-fifths (60%) of children in immigrant families in Iowa have parents who have lived in the United States 10 or more years.** The proportion is 58% for children with mixed-fluency parents

### Children in immigrant families have diverse language environments

Most children in immigrant families grow up in complex language environments



## Children in immigrant families (Percent – 2007)



KIDS COUNT Data Center, [www.kidscount.org/datacenter](http://www.kidscount.org/datacenter)  
A Project of the Annie E. Casey Foundation

More than four in five children in immigrant families in Iowa are U.S. citizens.

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.

### Most children in immigrant families have an English fluent parent

**Three-fifths (62%) of children in immigrant families in Iowa live with at least one English fluent parent**, while the others (38%) live with parents who are English language learners only. Of the 62%, two-thirds live with English flu-

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

### Four-fifths of children in immigrant families are English fluent

**Eighty-one percent of children in immigrant families in Iowa speak English exclusively or very well.** Even among children in immigrant families with origins in Mexico, the origin group least likely to speak English fluently, a substantial majority (72%) speak English fluently.

**One-half (48%) of children in immigrant families in Iowa 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

**One in four (26%) children in immigrant**

Three-fifths of children (59%) in immigrant families in Iowa have parents who are U.S. citizens.

**families in Iowa live in linguistically isolated households**, in which no one over the age of 13 speaks English exclusively or very well.

### Two-thirds of children in immigrant families live in family-owned homes

**Sixty-eight percent of children in immigrant families in Iowa live in family-owned homes.** The proportion ranges from 61% for those with English language learner parents only to 64% for those with mixed-fluency parents and 75% 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 Iowa are about as likely as children in native-born families to live with two parents.** Among children in immigrant families, 81% live with two parents, compared to 79% of children in native-born families. About three-fifths of children in immigrant families live with two parents if they have English language learner parents only (68%), but the proportion rises to 84% for children with English fluent parents only, which is slightly greater than the proportion for Whites in native-born families (79%).

**Children in immigrant families in Iowa are two times more likely than Whites in native-born families to have another adult relative in the home (19% vs. 10%).** Children in immigrant families with English language learner parents only are

the most likely to have such relatives in the home (30%), followed by those with mixed-fluency parents (18%) and English fluent parents only (11%).

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

**Nine of every ten (91%) 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 high (88%–94%) for each parental English language fluency group among children in immigrant families.

**Three of every four (73%) children in immigrant families in Iowa with a father in the home have a father working full-time year-round, compared to 81% in native-born families.** The proportion ranges from 76% for children with English fluent parents only to 65% for those with mixed-fluency parents and 75% for those English language learner parents only.

**Seven of every ten (71%) children in immigrant families in Iowa 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 (85%). Children in immigrant families with English fluent parents only are less likely than those in native-born families to have a working mother (71% vs. 85%), and this pattern exists for children with mixed-fluency parents and English language learner parents only (65% and 76% vs. 85%).

**One-third (35%) of children in immigrant families in Iowa with a mother in the home have a mother employed full-time year-round.** Children in immigrant families are 12 percentage points less likely than those in native-born families to have a mother working full-time (35% vs. 47%).

Almost one-half of children (48%) in immigrant families in Iowa speak another language at home and speak English very well.

### 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

**One of every three (36%) children in immigrant families in Iowa 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 (10% vs. 7%), but the proportion of children in immigrant families whose fathers did not graduate from high school rises to 36% for children with mixed-fluency parents and 67% for those with English language learner parents only.

**One in five (19%) children in immigrant families in Iowa 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 children in each of these groups 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 Iowa 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 60% greater than the proportion among those in native-born families (15%). There is little difference between the children in native-born or immigrant families with English fluent parents only (15% vs. 17%), but the proportion of children in immigrant families whose fathers earn less than 200% of minimum wage rises to 20% for children with mixed-fluency parents and 36% 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 Iowa is officially poor, and the proportion rises to one in four (26%) for those with English language learner parents only.** Overall, children in immigrant families in Iowa are six-tenths more likely than those in native-born families (19% vs. 12%) and two times more likely than Whites in native-born families (19% vs. 9%) to live in poverty. Official poverty rates for children in immigrant families with English fluent parents only and mixed-fluency parents are slightly higher than the rate for children in native-born families (13% and 16% vs. 12%), but the rate rises to 26% 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.

**Almost one-half (47%) of children of immigrants in Iowa live in a family with an income below 200% of the official poverty line.** Children in immigrant families are more likely than those in native-born families to have family incomes below 200% of the official poverty line (47% vs. 30%). Among children of immigrants with English fluent parents only, 32% live below the 200% poverty line, compared to 30% for children in native-born families, but the proportion rises to 46% for children of immigrants with mixed-fluency parents and to a very high 65% 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 Iowa lives in overcrowded housing.** Children in immigrant families are about four times more likely than children in native-born families to live in overcrowded housing (23% vs. 5%). Overcrowding is slightly more prevalent for children in immigrant families with English fluent parents only than for children in native-born families (9% vs. 5%), but as with poverty

indicators, the proportion rises greatly for children with mixed-fluency parents (35%) and English language learner parents only (31%).

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

**Although data on early education enrollment among children in immigrant families in Iowa 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. Because 43% of children in immigrant families in Iowa 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).

**65% of children in immigrant families with English language learner parents only are living below the 200% poverty level.**

## Citations

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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

**Iowa 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 encour-**

**age 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.

