



# IOWA KIDS COUNT

## SPECIAL REPORT

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This *Kids Count Special Report* is a publication of the Child and Family Policy Center (CFPC).

## *Dreams and Opportunities: Immigrant Families and Iowa's Future*

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**"Every person who comes to the United States comes here with a dream."**

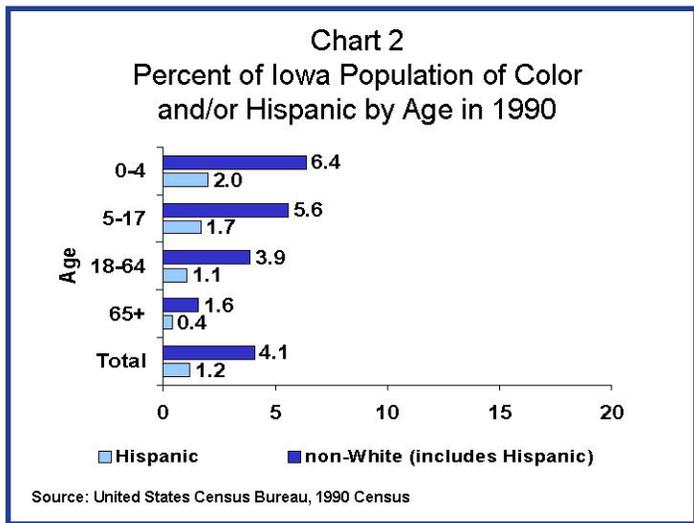
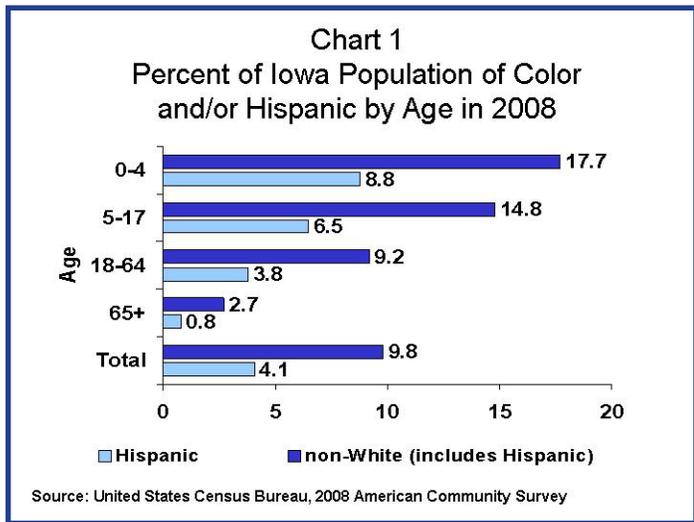
*-Elizabeth, 28, an immigrant to Iowa from Mexico as a teenager.*

*When Lalana<sup>1</sup>, 40, her husband, and three children (13-year-old daughter and 18-month-old twin boys) arrived in Iowa, 18 months ago, from a refugee camp in Thailand there was excitement and nervousness of the unknown. The family currently lives in a two-bedroom apartment in Des Moines. While her husband works in a local meat packing plant, she stays home with her youngest children. The family is working to overcome language barriers, a lack of formal education, health issues and feelings of isolation in their adopted home, all the while focusing on a brighter and safer future for their children. They are proud of having their children grow up in Iowa and want to contribute to their new community, state, and nation.*

*Suku Radia, chief executive officer of Bankers Trust Co. since 2008, was an Iowa college student 38 years ago when the brutal Idi Amin regime in his home country of Uganda acted to drive out all citizens of Indian heritage, which included the Radia family. "A man without a country", Radia chose to stay in Iowa, graduating from Iowa State University in 1974. Since then he has firmly established himself as a business and community leader. He is a former CFO for Meredith Corporation, has chaired the Greater Des Moines Partnership, the Des Moines Rotary Club, and the United Way of Central Iowa Campaign among many other community leadership and service activities. In recent Des Moines Register and Des Moines Magazine articles, Mr. Radia describes the difficulty of "losing everything" and starting over while also praising the generosity of Iowans and the opportunities and quality of life the state offers.*

These are two of many stories about immigrants to Iowa that confirm the statement that “every person comes to the United States (and Iowa) with a dream.” This report focuses on Iowa’s growing diversity, largely through immigration, and the opportunities these shifts present to the state, along with their policy implications in the education and development of Iowa’s youth.

Iowa is becoming more diverse, and children are leading the way. Charts 1 and 2 show the composition of Iowa’s population by age groupings in 2008 and 1990. As Chart 1 shows, the young child population is much more diverse than the state population as a whole, and particularly the senior population. Chart 2 shows the Iowa’s population by age groupings in 1990. When taken together they highlight an escalating trend of increased diversity among Iowa’s younger population.



Almost all of Iowa’s growth over the last two decades has been because of the growing diversity of its residents. As Table 1 shows, between 1990 and

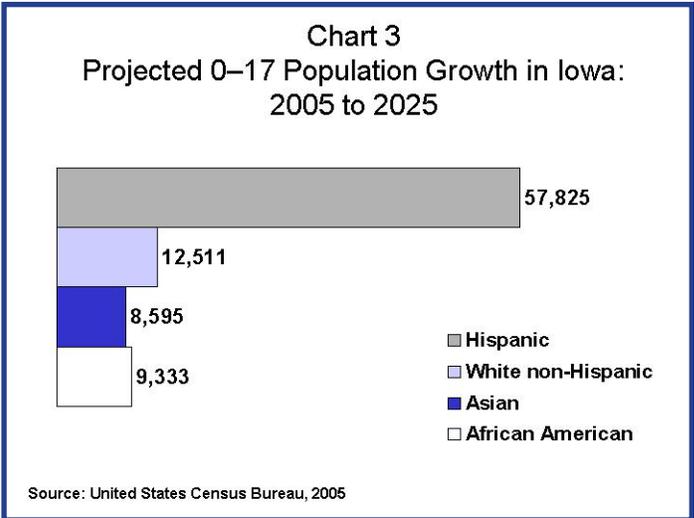
2008, Iowa’s population grew by 8.1 percent, but the growth of the White, non-Hispanic population was only 1.7 percent. Meanwhile, the African American population, the Asian and Pacific Islander population, and the Hispanic population all grew dramatically, with the Hispanic population growing the most dramatically, largely the result of immigration. The number of White, non-Hispanic children declined by over 10 percent during this period, replaced by a growing population of children of color. For Iowa to grow and develop over the next century, it will have to provide strong educational and economic opportunities for immigrants and children and families of color.

**Table 1**  
**Iowa Population Percentage Change by Age and Percentage 1990 to 2008**

|                      | White non-Hispanic | African American | Asian and Pacific Islander | Hispanic      | Total       |
|----------------------|--------------------|------------------|----------------------------|---------------|-------------|
| Age 0–4 Percent      | -9.5%              | 41.6%            | 61.1%                      | 342.6%        | 2.9%        |
| Age 5–17 Percent     | -12.3%             | 46.3%            | 35.5%                      | 272.8%        | -2.9%       |
| Age 18–64 Percent    | 7.1%               | 71.5%            | 97.6%                      | 286.8%        | 13.3%       |
| Age 65+ Percent      | 3.0%               | 23.0%            | 388.9%                     | 94.8%         | 4.1%        |
| <b>Total Percent</b> | <b>1.7%</b>        | <b>58.5%</b>     | <b>85.6%</b>               | <b>279.5%</b> | <b>8.1%</b> |

Source: United States Census Bureau, 1990 Census, Census 2000 and 2008 American Community Survey

These trends are expected to continue. The projected growth in the child (age 0 -17) population in Iowa over the next two decades is shown in Chart 3. Iowa’s increasing diversity is most pronounced among its younger and soon to be working-age populations.



As Chart 3 shows, the state's child population, ages 0-17, is projected to grow by 88,264 over the 20-year period from 2005 to 2025, years with a significantly higher growth rate expected among the young non-White populations.<sup>2</sup> Hispanic growth rate is projected to be 143.5 percent, and 65.2 percent of the total growth in the child population. African American growth rate is projected to be 37.4 percent, and 10.5 percent of the total growth. White non-Hispanic growth rate is projected to be 2.1 percent, and 14.2 percent of the total growth.

In the United States, the immigrant community has more than tripled in the last 35 years and along with it the number of children with one or more parents who are immigrants. In 1970, 6 percent of children under the age of 18 had at least one immigrant parent in the United States.<sup>3</sup> In 2005 that number was over 20 percent.<sup>4</sup> While immigration in Iowa has not grown at the national rate (Iowa is 38<sup>th</sup> nationally in the percent foreign-born in the total population<sup>5</sup>), Iowa has seen a steady increase in its immigrant populations.

Between 2000 and 2008, Iowa's foreign-born population increased from 91,085 to 112,289. Going back further, Iowa's foreign-born population has grown over 159 percent since 1990. The state's native-born population has increased only 5.7 percent during that same time frame.

|   | Native-Born | Percent | Foreign-Born  | Percent | Total       |
|---|-------------|---------|---------------|---------|-------------|
| 1990                                    | 2,733,439   | 98.4%   | 43,316        | 1.6%    | 2,776,755   |
| 2000                                    | 2,835,239   | 96.9%   | 91,085        | 3.1%    | 2,926,324   |
| 2008                                    | 2,890,268   | 96.3%   | 112,289       | 3.7%    | 3,002,557   |
| <b>Percent Change from 1990 to 2008</b> | <b>5.7%</b> |         | <b>159.2%</b> |         | <b>8.1%</b> |

Source: United States Census Bureau, 1990 Census, Census 2000 and 2008 American Community Survey

While Iowa's immigrant population has increased, the state's overall population growth has remained relatively stagnant for decades. Iowa's growth over the last eight years is small even when compared to bordering states and, at 2.6 percent, is well below the 8 percent national average.<sup>6</sup> Partnered with a small overall population growth, Iowa has also experienced an aging of its population, a trajectory that is estimated to continue in the future. Population

projections for 2000-2030 estimate a 9.9 increase in Iowa's 65 to 84 years of age population and a 10.2 percent increase among those over 85<sup>7</sup>. During that same time frame, projections show only a 2.3 percent increase among 18- to 64-year-olds and an overall decrease of 2.6 percent among the under-18 population.<sup>8</sup>

The fact that there has been population growth in Iowa at all (about 100,000 growth per decade over the last 50 years<sup>9</sup>) is due in large measure to an increased level of immigration into the state. This immigration has helped to stabilize Iowa's population and workforce. Immigrants bring diverse experiences and backgrounds with them.

### **Who are Iowa's immigrants?**

As represented in naturalization figures, Iowa's immigrants come from locations all around the world. Immigrants who become naturalized as United States citizens predominately come from Europe, Asia and North America. Small populations from Central and South America as well as Africa, the Caribbean Islands and Oceania are also part of Iowa's naturalized population.

|                      | 2008         | 2007         | 2006       | 2005       | 2004         | 2003         | 2002         |
|----------------------|--------------|--------------|------------|------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| <b>All Countries</b> | <b>3,503</b> | <b>2,093</b> | <b>805</b> | <b>234</b> | <b>1,314</b> | <b>1,123</b> | <b>1,465</b> |
| Europe               | 22.8%        | 26.9%        | 28.1%      | 3.4%       | 27.7%        | 29.2%        | 18.4%        |
| Asia                 | 29.7%        | 27.8%        | 29.9%      | 41.5%      | 33.0%        | 39.6%        | 45.1%        |
| Africa               | 7.7%         | 8.4%         | 5.6%       | 3.4%       | 6.9%         | 5.8%         | 5.5%         |
| Oceania              | 0.3%         | 0.4%         | 0.0%       | 0.0%       | 0.2%         | 0.4%         | 0.0%         |
| North America        | 29.1%        | 28.0%        | 28.6%      | 42.7%      | 23.5%        | 18.3%        | 22.9%        |
| Caribbean            | 0.8%         | 0.6%         | 0.4%       | 0.4%       | 1.0%         | 0.7%         | 1.0%         |
| Central America      | 6.5%         | 4.8%         | 4.1%       | 3.0%       | 3.5%         | 2.6%         | 3.5%         |
| South America        | 2.6%         | 2.3%         | 1.9%       | 0.9%       | 2.6%         | 2.0%         | 3.5%         |

Source: United States Citizenship and Immigration Services; Yearbook of Immigration Statistics: Supplemental Table 1

Of the total 2007 Iowa immigrant population, which includes all foreign-born individuals, whether naturalized or not, 33 percent were born in Mexico, 5 percent in Korea, and 4.9 percent in Vietnam.<sup>10</sup> In 1990, the top three countries of birth were Germany 10.6 percent, Mexico 8.4 percent, and Laos 6.8 percent.<sup>11</sup>

In 2007, 7.8 percent of Iowa children had one parent born outside the United States.<sup>12</sup> Immigrant families include a large proportion of children, many of whom, like their parents, are English language learners.

These immigrant families have very high rates of work participation, but a large share are working at lower wage jobs and come into the state with lower levels of overall educational status than Iowa's current population. Whether documented or undocumented, immigrant families contribute substantially to the state's economic activity through their employment and the taxes they pay.

### What educational backgrounds do immigrants bring?

Immigrants to Iowa are more likely to bring either very low or quite high educational backgrounds with them, compared with the native-born population. As Table 4 shows, in 1990 almost one-third of foreign-born Iowans had not completed high school, compared with one-fifth of Iowa's native-born population. By 2007, these differences had become more pronounced, with a substantial decline in the percentage of native-born Iowans without a high school diploma. Immigrants represented a much larger overall percentage of the lower educated and, therefore, low-wage workforce. At the other end of the spectrum, approximately three in ten foreign-born Iowans have bachelor's degrees, much higher than for native-born Iowans, although the gap has narrowed. Some immigrants come to the United States and to Iowa because of their high level of education and skills, while some come to the United States and Iowa because of low levels of education and willingness to accept low-skilled and low-wage employment.

**Table 4**  
Educational Attainment of Native- and Foreign-Born Iowa Population by Percentage for 1990, 2000 and 2007

|                                      | 1990 | 2000 | 2007 |
|--------------------------------------|------|------|------|
| <b>Native-Born, Age 25 or Older</b>  |      |      |      |
| Less than High School Diploma        | 20.0 | 13.9 | 10.4 |
| Bachelor's Degree or Higher          | 16.9 | 21.1 | 24.3 |
| <b>Foreign-Born, Age 25 or Older</b> |      |      |      |
| Less than High School Diploma        | 32.8 | 36.5 | 31.2 |
| Bachelor's Degree or Higher          | 31.2 | 27.5 | 29.2 |

Source: United States Census Bureau, 2007 American Community Survey

This is most apparent at very low education levels. While 1.4 percent of children in United States born families have fathers with eight or fewer years in school, 18.9 percent of immigrant children live in a family with that level of paternal educational

attainment. This is also true of only 1.2 percent of United States-born mothers, but 18.1 percent of mothers in immigrant families.<sup>13</sup>

### What are the work participation rates of immigrant families and where do they work?

Immigrant families contribute to the economy. Over 91 percent of children in immigrant families had fathers in the work force in the last year and over 71 percent of them had mothers participating in Iowa's workforce.<sup>14</sup> While immigrants made up only 4.5 percent of Iowa's total workforce, more than 60 percent of immigrants in 2007 were of working age.<sup>15</sup> Immigrants work in a variety of industries. Foreign-born residents are moderately more likely to work in service occupations; farming, fishing and forestry; as well as construction, maintenance and related fields. Those born outside the United States are almost twice as likely to work in the area of production, transportation and material moving.

**Table 5**  
Occupations and Industries of Iowa's Native- and Foreign-Born Workforce by Percentage, 2007

|   | Total Percentage Native-Born, Civilian Employed Population, Age 16 and Over<br>N=1,477,476 | Total Percentage Foreign-Born, Civilian Employed Population, Age 16 and Over<br>N=70,388 |
|---|--|--|
| Management, Professional, and Related Occupations           | 32.8   | 28.3   |
| Service Occupations   | 15.6   | 18.8   |
| Sales and Office Occupations                                | 25.5   | 13.0   |
| Farming, Fishing and Forestry                               | 1.1  | 2.5  |
| Construction, Maintenance, and Related                      | 8.9  | 9.7  |
| Production, Transportation, and Material Moving Occupations | 16.2   | 27.7   |

Source: United States Census Bureau, 2007 American Community Survey

While immigrant workers have very high rates of work participation, they are disproportionately working at lower wage jobs, but also jobs that are essential to society, such as care providers and maintenance workers.<sup>16</sup> Whether documented or undocumented, immigrant families also contribute substantially to the state's economic activity through their employment and the taxes they pay. Foreign-born workers, for instance, contributed 4.5 % of Iowa's Gross Domestic Product (nearly \$5.5 billion) to the state's economy in 2006.<sup>17</sup> Undocumented families in Iowa are estimated to contribute over \$1670 per year in total taxes including property, sales and income. This comes to an overall contribution to Iowa's tax base of between \$40 million and \$62 million a year<sup>18</sup>

## What are the reasons immigrants come to Iowa?

Immigrant families come to Iowa to lay down roots, work and raise families. Almost 8 percent (approximately 53,000) of Iowa's children age 0-17 come from immigrant families (at least one parent is foreign-born)<sup>19</sup>. Over 82 percent of children in immigrant families in Iowa are citizens of the United States. Almost 60 percent of children in these families have at least one parent who is a US citizen, 32.8 percent have at least one parent who is naturalized and 59.9 percent are in families where at least one parent has been in the United States 10 years or longer. The percent of children in immigrant families that are in two parent households is 81.1, which is a higher percentage than among native-born families (79.3 percent). Almost 68 percent of children in immigrant families live in family-owned homes.

**"I want my kids to be educated and to be good people."**

*Mother of three from Burma who has been in the United States for 18 months.*

## How does this relate to Iowa's education system and its English language learner population?

The long-term success of Iowa's ability to grow and develop will be in the success of Iowa's educational system in educating its increasingly diverse population, which includes an increasingly large proportion of English-language learners in its public schools.

Almost two-thirds of children 5-17 years of age in immigrant families are bilingual (speak English and another language) at home, with nearly half of those being fluent in two languages<sup>20</sup>. Eighty-one percent of these children are fluent in English themselves. Many parents in these families also bring bilingual skills to the state, with 62 percent of children in immigrant families living with at least one English fluent parent. This means, however, that a substantial percentage of children live in households that are linguistically isolated. Twenty-six percent of children in immigrant families live in households where there are no adults who speak English exclusively or well.

A little over 47 percent of children live in immigrant

families that earn less than 200 percent of the poverty level<sup>21</sup>. If the parents are fluent in English, this number decreases to 32 percent. Meanwhile, 30 percent of children in native-born families live in families that earn less than 200 percent of the federal poverty level.

**"So far my biggest success is learning the English language."**

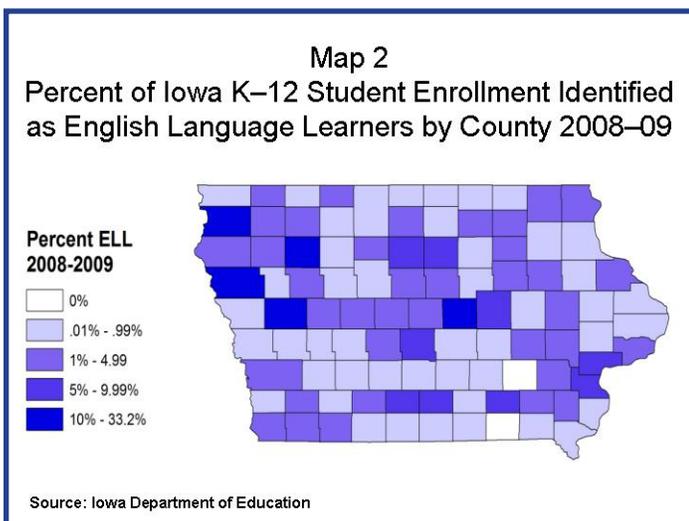
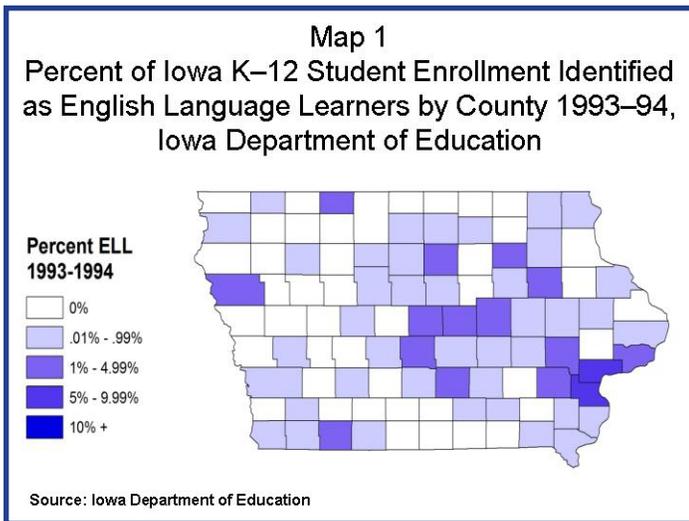
*Elizabeth, 28, immigrated from Mexico to Iowa as a teenager.*

Both the parents and their children seek to acquire proficiency in English. It is particularly important for young children to acquire reading proficiency in English by the end of third grade—but this also requires additional attention to strengthening their early learning in their home language, dual language capacity for instruction and support in the early years, and strong ELL programs in the early grades. Dual language learning is an asset for children—both in equipping individuals to live in an increasingly international world and assuring not only smoother integration into the Iowa community but also a way to stay connected to their family and that culture as well.

This, however, also presents additional challenges to school districts in responding to English language learners. While responding to the needs of English language learners generally is faced by all school districts in the state, it is particularly pronounced in some districts, where immigrants have settled in large numbers due to employment opportunities.

Iowa's public school system has seen a steady and marked increase in students enrolled as English Language Learners (ELL) over the last two decades. Map One on page 6 shows the percentages of ELL students by county during the 1993–1994 school year, when about 1 percent of all students were enrolled as English Language Learners. The southeast counties of Louisa and Muscatine ranked highest with percentages just above 7 percent. By 2008–2009 those two counties would not even rank in the top ten in the state. Forty-three counties reported no ELL enrollment in 1993–94.

Map Two on page 6 illustrates that enrollment for the 2008–2009 year and shows a four-fold statewide increase of ELL enrollment, with over 4 percent (app. 14,500 students) of students in Iowa's public schools in ELL.<sup>22</sup> Thirty counties reported over two percent ELL total enrollment and only two counties



had no ELL students by the 2008–09, school year. These increases are clearly not restricted to certain geographic or urban areas in Iowa.

Polk County has the largest population of ELL students (5,646). Crawford County is notable, although by no means strictly unique. That area went from no ELL students in 1993-94 to being the second highest ELL by percentage in Iowa only 15 years later. Marshall, Woodbury, Sioux, Louisa, and Muscatine counties were also top counties by population of ELL students in 2008–09. In 2008–09 only, Davis and Keokuk counties report no ELL students, in contrast 43 counties reported the same less than two decades ago.

While language and cultural diversity have increased among Iowa’s student population, a commensurate increase has not been reflected in Iowa’s full time teachers. During the 2008–09 school year, two percent of the full-time teachers in Iowa’s public schools were described as minority or non-White,

a number that has remained largely unchanged in the last 10 years. Beginning teachers are a bit more diverse. During the 2008-09 school year, 3.1 percent of beginning teachers were Hispanic or of color.

***What are the policy implications for the growth in Iowa’s immigrant population?***

Iowa’s economic future depends upon the education, well-being, and workforce participation of its immigrant population. As with other segments of Iowa society, immigrants bring a diversity of experiences, strengths and needed support. There are opportunities for Iowa’s education system and its other institutions to support the education and productivity of Iowa’s immigrant population. This will require that state and community policies and practices are designed to meet this diversity. The following are a beginning list of policy implications both for the state’s educational system and for other institutions serving Iowans.

**Policy Implications for Iowa’s Education System:**

- Public education data collection that recognizes the racial, ethnic and special needs characteristics of students;
- Financing and school aid formula calculations that take into account ELL and dual language costs and special needs of districts with high proportions of immigrant students;
- Professional development and educational activities that focus upon cultural and language competence and create additional career pathways for immigrant and minority students to become educators;
- Support for a culturally competent and accessible early childhood education system; and
- An Iowa Dream Act, that would allow undocumented students the opportunity to qualify for in-state college tuition and some financial aid.

**Policy Implications for Other Institutions Serving Immigrant and Refugee Families:**

- Translation services to support English language learning for adults and to assure safe and appropriate interactions with the health and educational systems for the family. Children should not be put in the position to be a primary translator for their parents;
- Public services that are welcoming to

immigrants and refugees and ensure they can transition to life in Iowa and be accepted as part of the community;

- Legal assistance for refugees in their application for permanent residency increased funding and support for English language classes or resources for adults; and
- Support for a culturally competent and accessible comprehensive early childhood system (health, special needs, family support, and early care and education).

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>Name changed to protect privacy.

<sup>2</sup>U.S. Census Bureau, 2005.

<sup>3</sup>Randy Capps, R and Fortuny, K (2006). Immigration and Child and Family Policy. Prepared for The Urban Institute and Child Trend: Roundtable on Children in Low-Income Families.

<sup>4</sup>ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Migration Policy Institute, Iowa: Social and Demographic Characteristics, 2007.

<sup>6</sup>U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division. Iowa Department of Education, State of Education report.

<sup>7</sup>U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division, Interim State Population Projections, 2005.

<sup>8</sup>ibid.

<sup>9</sup>U.S. Bureau of the Census, Decennial Censuses.

<sup>10</sup>US Census Bureau, 2007 American Community Survey (ACS). Migration Policy Institute, Iowa Data Profile.

<sup>11</sup>Migrant Policy Institute, Iowa Data Profile.

<sup>12</sup>U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2005-07.

<sup>13</sup>ibid.

<sup>14</sup> ibid.

<sup>15</sup>Batalova, J. (2008), "Immigrants in the U.S. Armed Forces." Migration Policy Institute.

<sup>16</sup>Iowa Immigrant Education Coalition. 2008 Issue Brief 2: Immigration and Iowa's Workforce.

<sup>17</sup>Swenson, D. & Eathington, L. (2008). Iowa's Native-Born and Foreign Participants in the Economy: Analysis of Public-Use Micro-Sample Data from the 2006 American Community Survey.

<sup>18</sup>Pearson. B. & Sheehan, M. (2007). Undocumented Immigrants in Iowa: Estimated Tax Contributions and Fiscal Impact. The Iowa Policy Project. Mount Vernon, Iowa.

<sup>19</sup>All statistics in this paragraph came from the U.S. Census Bureau, America Community Survey, 2005-2007

<sup>20</sup>ibid

<sup>21</sup>ibid

<sup>22</sup>Iowa Department of Education, Division of School Support and Information.

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