

A family of four is walking away from the camera through a park. The father is on the left, wearing a black jacket and light-colored pants. The mother is on the right, wearing a black jacket and blue jeans. Two young children are walking between them, holding hands. The child on the left is wearing a blue and orange jacket, and the child on the right is wearing a blue and green jacket. They are walking on a path covered in yellow autumn leaves. The background is filled with trees with yellow leaves.

INVESTING IN A BRIGHT FUTURE FOR ALL OF COLORADO'S KIDS:

**THE IMPORTANCE OF PROVIDING EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE
AND EDUCATION TO CHILDREN IN IMMIGRANT FAMILIES**

December 2011

COLORADO CHILDREN'S CAMPAIGN

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The Colorado Children's Campaign is a nonprofit, nonpartisan advocacy organization committed for over 25 years to creating hope and opportunity for all of Colorado's more than 1.2 million kids. As the state's most trusted source for data and research on child well-being and backed by an extensive, statewide network of dedicated child advocates, the Children's Campaign champions policies and programs that help lift children out of poverty, improve child health, early childhood learning and development, and K-12 education, and provide all of Colorado's children the opportunity to reach their full potential. For more information, please visit www.coloradokids.org.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Nationally, children in immigrant families (defined as a child who is foreign-born or, in most cases, U.S.-born with at least one foreign-born parent) represent the fastest-growing segment of the U.S. child population. In 2009, nearly one in four U.S. children lived in an immigrant family – more than 17 million children nationwide. Although Colorado ranks behind other Western states like Arizona and Texas in the percentage of children who live in immigrant families, the number of children in our state with at least one immigrant parent is not insignificant; **more than one-fifth of Colorado's 1.2 million children lived in immigrant families in 2009.** The growing number of children in immigrant families is taking place amidst a broader demographic shift unfolding in Colorado and across the nation, as U.S. children become increasingly diverse and children of color make up an ever-larger share of the child population.

The Colorado Children's Campaign works to ensure that Colorado is a great place to be a kid, for *all* kids. **Unfortunately, there are wide gaps in well-being between many of our state's children in immigrant families and their counterparts in U.S.-born families.** *Investing in a Bright Future for All of Colorado's Kids* takes a comprehensive look at key indicators of child well-being to assess how Colorado's 254,000 children in immigrant families are faring in areas such as economic well-being, family structure and English proficiency. While our state's immigrant families are strong in many regards, a number of the report's findings point to the need for increased supports for many children in immigrant families in Colorado.

Key Findings

Some of the strengths noted in the report include:

- The overwhelming **majority of Colorado children in immigrant families (87 percent) were born in the U.S.** and therefore are entitled to all of the rights and privileges that accompany U.S. citizenship. In addition, 98 percent of children in immigrant families in Colorado have parents who have lived in the U.S. for at least five years.
- **Colorado children in immigrant families are more likely than children in U.S.-born families to live in two-parent households** (79 percent versus 70 percent).
- **Four out of five children in immigrant families in Colorado speak English without difficulty.**

However, several of the report's findings point to areas where our state could do more to promote the well-being of kids in immigrant families:

- **Children in immigrant families in Colorado are nearly twice as likely to live in poverty as children in U.S.-born families** (27 percent versus 15 percent). More than half of all Colorado children in immigrant families live in low-income households, compared to about a third of children in U.S.-born families.
- **Children in immigrant families are less likely to be enrolled in early learning programs** than children in U.S.-born families at 3 and 4 years old.
- **Colorado's gap in 4th grade reading proficiency between students who are English Language Learners and those who are fluent in English was the second-largest in the country in 2011.**



Promising Approaches to Improving Well-being

Fortunately, there are many proven strategies that Colorado can pursue to help ensure a bright future for children in immigrant families in our state. Investing in programs that promote healthy development during children's earliest years, increasing support for students who are English Language Learners and expanding access to programs that help immigrant parents learn English all represent strategies to positively impact Colorado's immigrant families.

Perhaps the greatest, most strategic opportunity to improve the well-being of our state's children in immigrant families, however, involves expanding access to high-quality, culturally-competent early childhood care and education. Quality early learning programs have consistently been shown to promote positive short- and long-term outcomes for kids, while providing an impressive return on investment to society as a whole. Children in immigrant families, however, are far less likely to be enrolled in early learning programs than children in U.S.-born families, creating a large "preparation gap" in later years of schooling. Removing barriers to quality early childhood programs for children in immigrant families is a critical step in ensuring that *all* of Colorado's kids enter kindergarten ready to learn and succeed. Therefore, **included in the recommendations section of the report are a number of suggestions for expanding access to early learning programs for children in immigrant families and ensuring these programs are responsive to their needs.** Among other things, we suggest:

- **Strengthening the exchange of information between immigrant-serving organizations and early childhood providers**, particularly surrounding eligibility requirements and availability of early learning and child care assistance programs;
- **Recruiting representatives from immigrant communities to serve on Early Childhood Councils**; and
- **Providing professional development opportunities to train early learning providers in working with students who are English Language Learners.**

Why it Matters

All of Colorado's children deserve the opportunity to reach their full potential – but in addition to the moral reasons for ensuring children in immigrant families in Colorado get a healthy start in life, **there is a practical, economic component to this issue as well.** Colorado's population of children in immigrant families is not small; as one-fifth of the state's child population, the well-being of children in immigrant families will affect *all* Coloradans in the years to come. **These children are the workforce of tomorrow. Whether they are prepared to participate in a 21st century employment market that increasingly demands high levels of skill and education depends largely on whether or not we, as a state, equip them with the tools they need to reach their full potential.**



INTRODUCTION

In recent years, Colorado's population has become increasingly diverse in many ways, especially among our state's children. One significant change that is currently unfolding in Colorado is a rise in the number of children in immigrant families – defined as children who are either foreign-born or, more commonly, U.S.-born with at least one foreign-born parent. In 2009, one-fifth of Colorado's children were children in immigrant families. Although the vast majority of children in immigrant families in Colorado were born in the U.S. and therefore are entitled to all of the rights and privileges that accompany U.S. citizenship, data show they often fare far worse than their peers in U.S.-born families. Children with one or more immigrant parents are significantly more likely than children in U.S.-born families to live in poverty, have parents who lack a high school diploma and live in linguistically-isolated households.

In looking ahead to Colorado's future, it is essential that we consider evidence-based strategies to reduce these disparities and promote the well-being of Colorado's 254,000 children in immigrant families. Research consistently shows that early childhood care and education programs are one of the most effective strategies for mitigating risk factors and putting children on a path to success, while providing a very high return on investment to society as a whole. However, data indicate that children in immigrant families participate in these programs at rates far lower than their peers, making them less likely to reap benefits associated with early learning programs, including improved school readiness and long-term, positive academic outcomes.

If Colorado's existing disparities persist, children in immigrant families will not be the only ones to feel the effects. Today's children are tomorrow's workforce and will be charged with replacing the aging baby boomers' contributions to the state's economy. As the number of children in immigrant families in Colorado continues to grow, decision-makers and community leaders should pursue strategies that expand access to early childhood care and education among this population in order to ensure that *all* of Colorado's kids are equipped with the skills they need to succeed and contribute to a competitive economy.

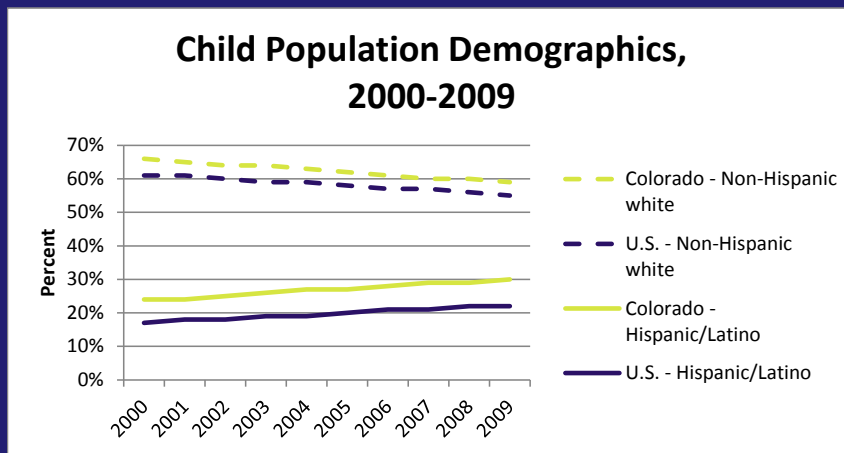
In discussing the growth in the number of children in immigrant families in Colorado, it is also important to examine the larger context in which this change is occurring. Therefore, this report also explores the broader demographic shifts occurring in Colorado's child population, namely an increase in the number of children of color. Since 2000, the portion of the state's children that are non-Hispanic white has declined by eight percentage points, while the share of Hispanic children, in particular, has risen. It is important to note that not all children in immigrant families are Hispanic; nor are all Hispanic children in Colorado the children of immigrants. The issues are different, but the importance of being attentive to these two separate demographic changes is the same. Population projections show that children of color will be a growing portion of our state's child population in the years to come, and, like children in immigrant families, a critical part of Colorado's future workforce. In order for Colorado to support a competitive economy and an aging population, we will need an educated, skilled labor force to draw upon, requiring strong, sustained investments in programs that support all of Colorado's children today.

The following report discusses the demographic changes taking place in Colorado, provides an up-to-date data profile of Colorado's children in immigrant families, analyzes some of the barriers to accessing early learning programs for immigrant families and asserts the critical need to support programs that promote positive educational outcomes among these children – for their own well-being and for the well-being of Colorado.



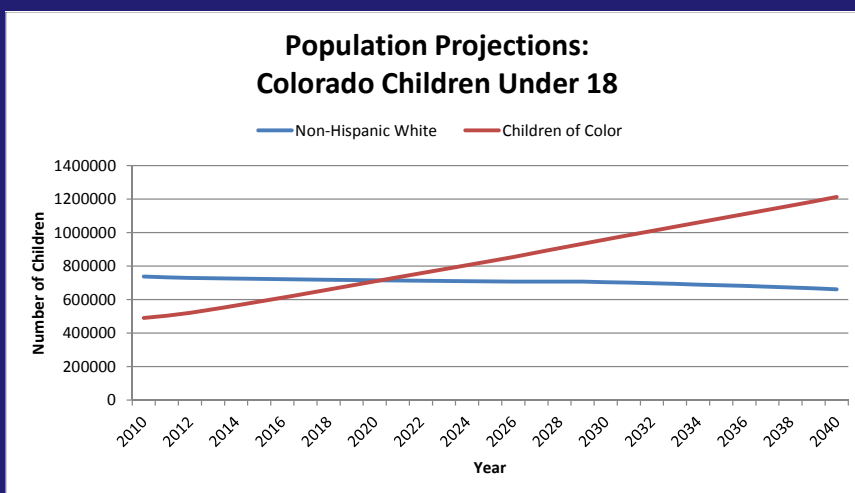
SETTING THE CONTEXT: COLORADO'S CHANGING DEMOGRAPHICS

To set the context for discussing the rise in the number of children in immigrant families in Colorado, it is important to examine the larger demographic changes occurring within the state's child population. Over the last two decades, Colorado, as well as the U.S. as a whole, has seen a significant increase in the number of children of color (defined as a race or ethnicity other than non-Hispanic white). The group with the largest population gain, both nationally and in Colorado, is the Hispanic population. It should be noted that, while Hispanic children do make up the largest portion of children in immigrant families in Colorado, not all Hispanic children are children of immigrants. Throughout the state's history, Colorado has had a large U.S.-born Hispanic population. Since 1990, however, the state's Hispanic child population has grown more rapidly than other groups.



Source: Annie E. Casey Foundation. KIDS COUNT Data Center. Analysis of data from the Population Division, U.S. Census Bureau.

The rise in the number of Colorado children who are children of color is anticipated to continue in the years to come. According to population projections from the State Demography Office, children of color will make up the majority of Colorado's child population in 2021.¹ As of 2010, 15 counties in Colorado already had a child population in which children of color made up at least 50 percent of the population.²



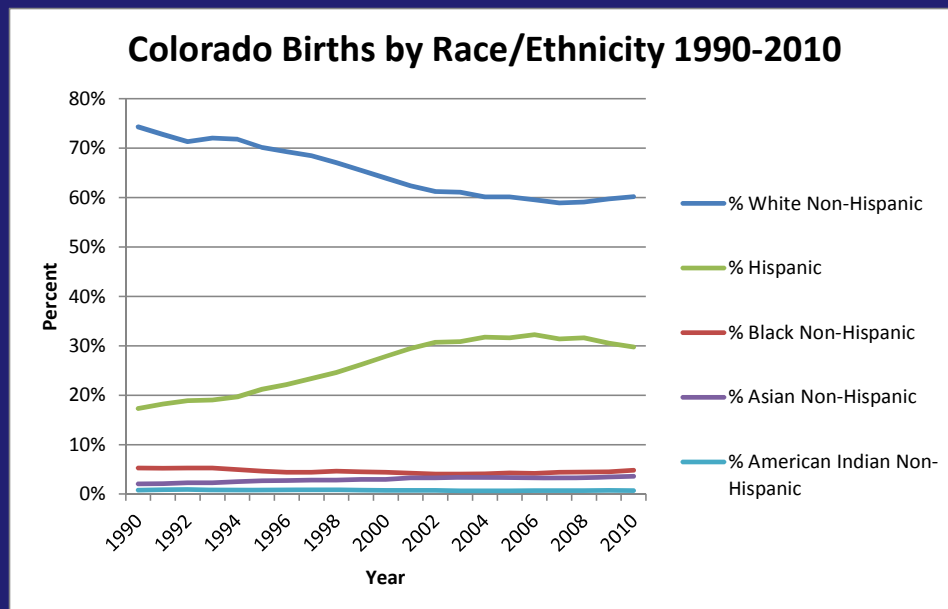
Source: Colorado State Demography Office. Data provided to the Colorado Children's Campaign in November 2011.

The trend toward a child population in which children of color are the majority is not unique to Colorado, but consistent with a change occurring at the national level. A Brookings Institution report that analyzed data from the 2010 U.S. Census found that 10 states and 35 large metropolitan areas in the U.S. already had child populations in which non-Hispanic whites were the minority and suggests non-Hispanic white children may become the minority nationwide before 2020.³

³ Counties with child populations that were at least 50 percent children of color include Costilla, Lake, Alamosa, Conejos, Saguache, Pueblo, Rio Grande, Las Animas, Otero, Denver, Huerfano, Prowers, Adams, Morgan and Arapahoe.

The Role of Immigration in Colorado's Changing Demographics

Although Colorado has experienced waves of immigration in decades past that have contributed to the state's population diversity, the demographic shifts currently taking place in Colorado cannot be entirely explained by immigration trends. Data indicate that the increasing diversity among children observed since 2000 is primarily due to Colorado births – not to an influx of new immigrants. In the 1990s, relatively high levels of immigration were fueled by the state's booming economy and strong demand for low-skill labor. Many of today's children in immigrant families were born in Colorado to parents who came to the state during this wave of immigration, a time period when births to Hispanic women increased significantly. Since 2000, the number of births to Hispanic women in Colorado has continued to rise, although far less dramatically than in the 1990s; in the decade between 2000 and 2010, births to Hispanic women increased by 8.2 percent, while the number of births to non-Hispanic white women has declined slightly.⁴ Findings in a recent report by the Pew Hispanic Center that examined immigration and birth rates at a national level mirror the trends observed in Colorado in recent years; the report notes that, in the U.S., births have now surpassed immigration as the primary factor driving the growth in the Hispanic population.⁵

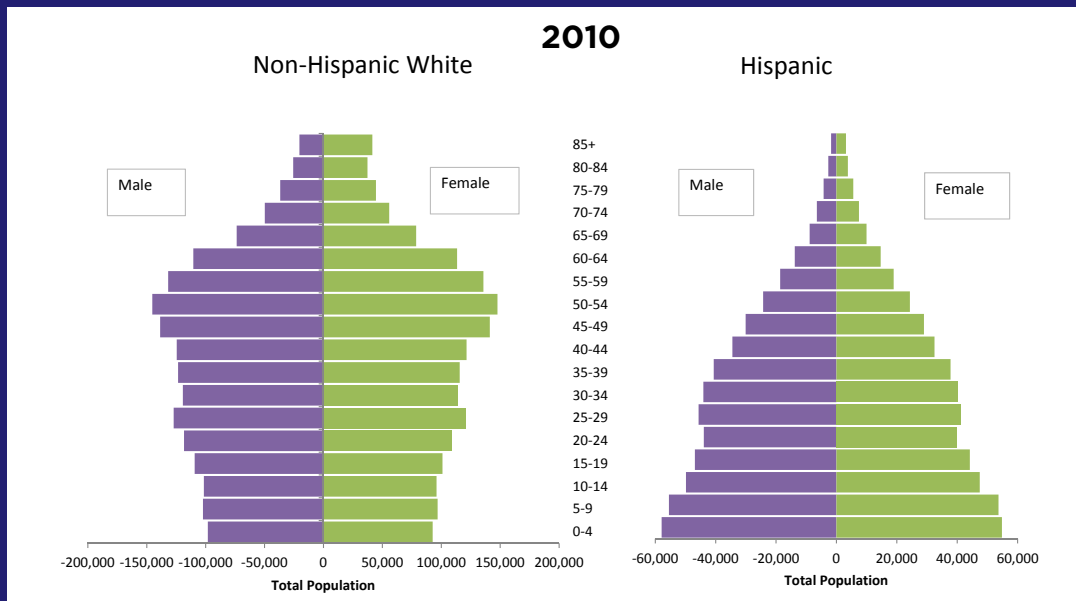


Source: Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, Colorado Health Information Database, Birth Statistics.



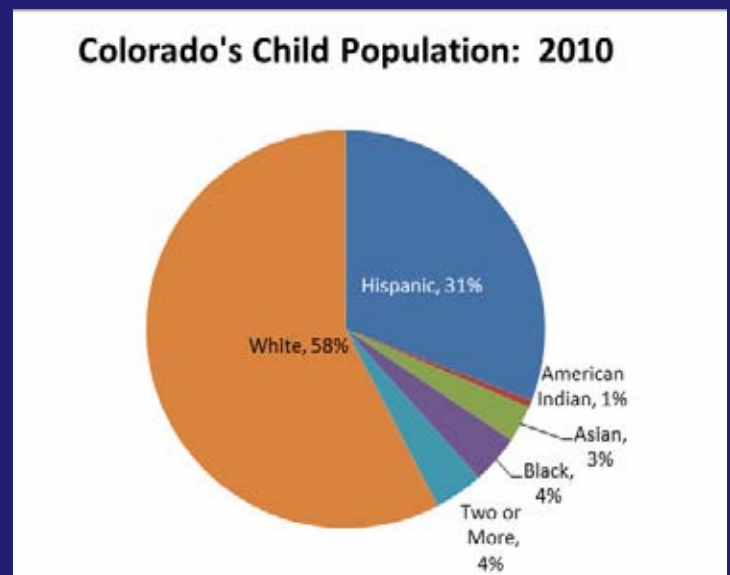
Colorado's Cultural Generation Gap

Also contributing to the demographic shift toward a more diverse population in Colorado is the fact that the state's non-Hispanic white population is aging, as the below population pyramids indicate. Data from the U.S. Census show that Coloradans between the ages of 50 to 54 made up the largest portion of the state's non-Hispanic white population in 2010. In contrast, Colorado's Hispanic population is a very young one, with children between birth and age four representing the largest segment of that ethnic group



The combination of these two factors – an increase in the proportion of children of color and the aging of the state's non-Hispanic white population – has resulted in a large “cultural generation gap” in Colorado.⁶ According to a report from the Brookings Institution, Colorado has the ninth-largest cultural generation gap in the nation, meaning the disparity between the percentage of the child and adult populations that is non-Hispanic white is substantial. In 2010, nearly 74 percent of Colorado adults were non-Hispanic white, while only 58 percent Colorado's child population was non-Hispanic white.

As Colorado's non-Hispanic white population ages while its child population becomes increasingly diverse, different social and economic interests will undoubtedly arise between the two groups. In order for Colorado to thrive, however, it is important to recognize that the well-being of these two segments of the population is intricately connected. Every child in Colorado deserves the opportunity to grow up healthy and strong, and providing Colorado's children with the supports they need to reach their full potential benefits all Coloradans. A healthy, well-educated child population that is prepared for success in the workforce and in life will help the state's economy remain competitive in the future, while also ensuring Colorado is able to provide for its older citizens.



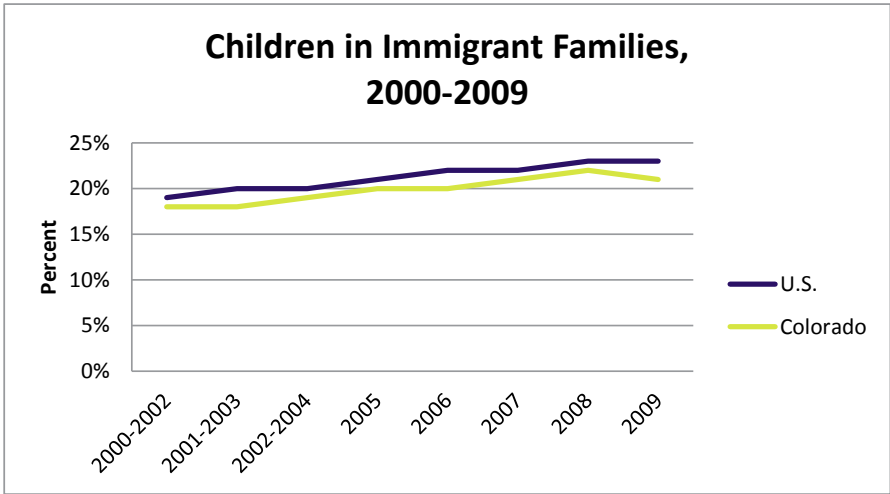
Source: U.S. Census Bureau. 2010 Census.

THE STATE OF COLORADO CHILDREN IN IMMIGRANT FAMILIES

The following section outlines data and research on how Colorado’s children in immigrant families are faring, in comparison to their peers in U.S.-born families and to children in immigrant families nationally and in other states.

Demographics

Although the number of children in immigrant families in Colorado grew by approximately 26 percent between 2000-2002 and 2009, the proportion of the state’s child population made up of children in immigrant families remains slightly below the national average. In 2009, 21 percent of Colorado’s child population (approximately 254,000 kids) were children in immigrant families, compared to 23 percent nationally.⁷

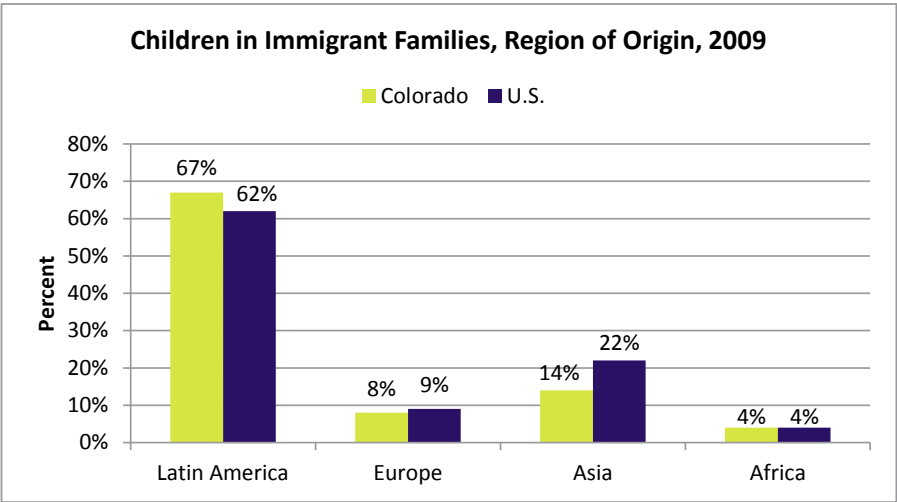


Source: Population Reference Bureau, U.S. Census Bureau. 2000 and 2001 Supplemental Survey and 2002-2009 American Community Survey.



Region of Origin

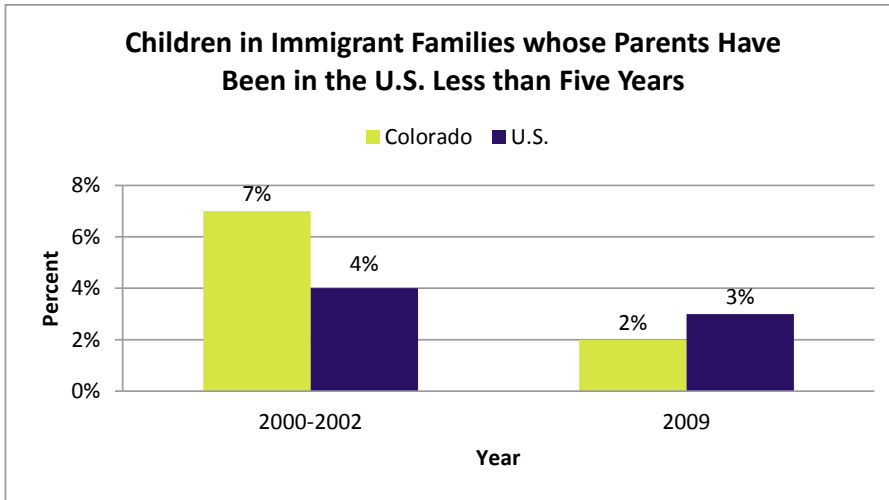
Children in immigrant families in Colorado have parents who originate from countries all over the world. At 67 percent, the largest share of Colorado children in immigrant families live in families who originate from Latin America. Of the remaining portion of children in immigrant families in Colorado, 14 percent are in families originating from Asia, 8 percent from Europe and 4 percent from Africa. Nationally, 62 percent of children from immigrant families originate from Latin America, 22 percent from Asia, 9 percent from Europe and 4 percent from Africa.⁸



Source: Annie E. Casey Foundation. KIDS COUNT Data Center. Analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau 2009 American Community Survey.

Citizenship & Residency

In 2009, the overwhelming majority of Colorado children in immigrant families – 87 percent – were born in the U.S. Additionally, nearly all of the children in this group have parents who have been in the U.S. for more than five years. Only 2 percent of Colorado’s children in immigrant families have parents who arrived in the U.S. less than five years ago, and this percentage has decreased considerably over the past ten years.⁹



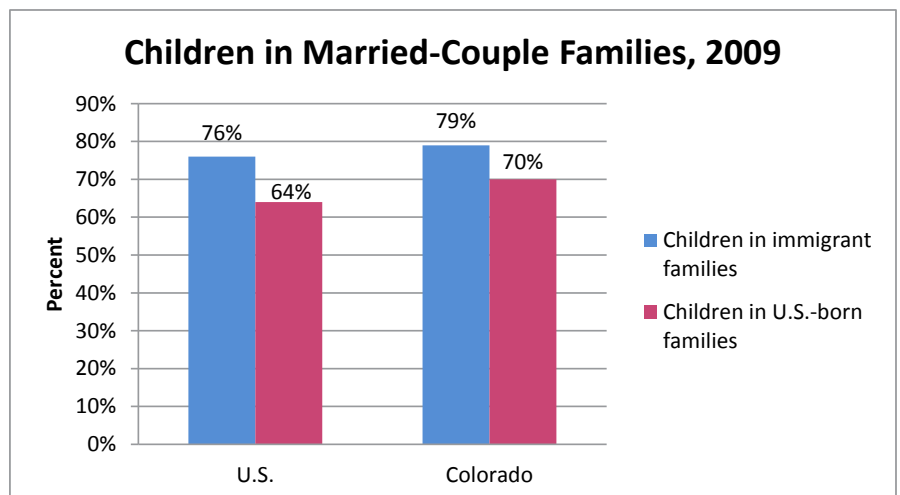
Source: Annie E. Casey Foundation. KIDS COUNT Data Center. Analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau 2000-2001 Supplementary Survey and 2009 American Community Survey.



This decline in the number of immigrant parents who are recent arrivals to the U.S. is likely due to changing economic conditions. During economic downturns, like the 2007-2009 recession, immigration to the U.S. typically slows due to very limited opportunities for employment.¹⁰ Industries that traditionally hired large numbers of immigrants, such as the construction and hospitality industries, were among those hardest-hit by the recent recession, which may account for the lower numbers of recently-arrived immigrants observed in Colorado and nationwide.¹¹

Family Structure and Strength

Colorado children in immigrant families generally have strong, stable family units. In both the U.S. as a whole and in Colorado, children in immigrant families are more likely to live in two-parent families than children in U.S.-born families. In 2009, 79 percent of Colorado’s children in immigrant families lived in married-couple families, compared to 70 percent of kids in U.S.-born families. Living in a two-parent household is associated with several positive effects for children, including improved economic prospects.¹²

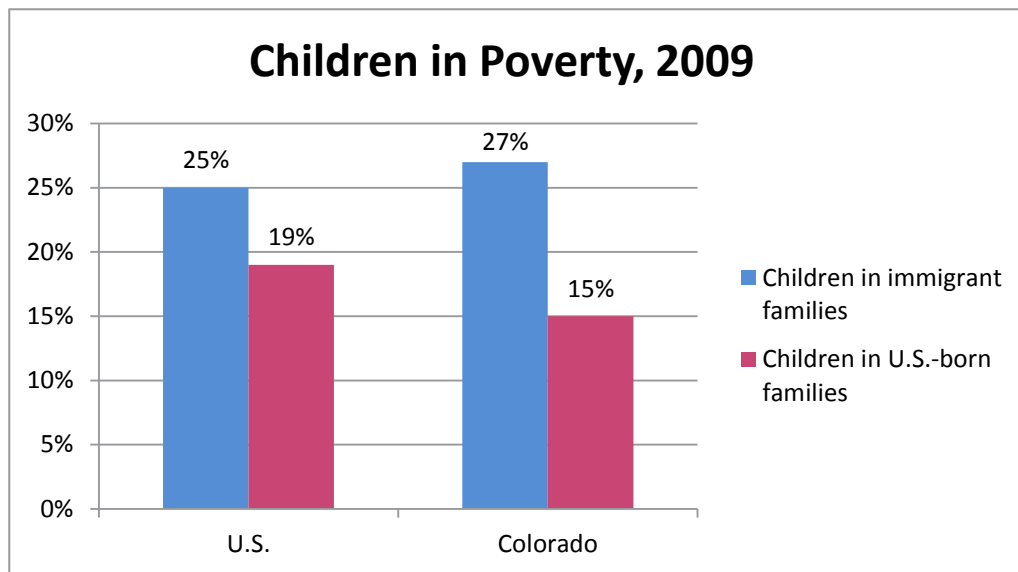


Source: Annie E. Casey Foundation. KIDS COUNT Data Center. Analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau 2009 American Community Survey.

Gaps in Economic Status

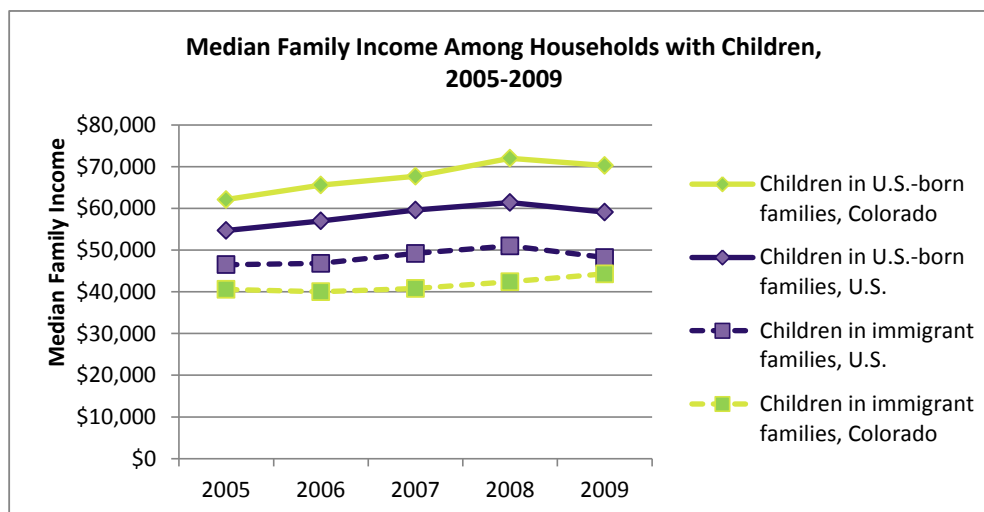
Between 2000 and 2010, Colorado had one of the fastest-growing rates of childhood poverty in the nation. Poverty poses a significant threat to a child's healthy development, impacting nearly every aspect of their life, including access to health care, access to high-quality early childhood development programs and educational outcomes. The proportion of children in immigrant families in Colorado that lives in poverty is particularly troubling. Children in immigrant families are significantly more likely to live in poverty than their peers in U.S.-born families for a variety of reasons, including lower parental education levels and the fact that immigrants are often concentrated in low-wage jobs.¹³

In Colorado, the percentage of children in immigrant families who live in poverty exceeds the national average. In 2009, 27 percent of Colorado children in immigrant families lived in poverty (defined by the 2009 federal poverty guidelines as an annual income at or below \$22,050 for a family of four), compared to 25 percent nationwide. The poverty rate for Colorado's children in immigrant families is nearly twice as high as the rate for Colorado children in U.S.-born families. Additionally, more than half of the state's children with immigrant parents were living in low-income families in 2009 (at or below \$44,000 in annual income for a family of four), compared to approximately a third of Colorado children in U.S.-born families.¹⁴



Source: Annie E. Casey Foundation. KIDS COUNT Data Center. Analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau 2009 American Community Survey.

The disparity in poverty rates between children in immigrant families and children in U.S.-born families is related to the significant gap in median family incomes between the two groups. In Colorado, the median income for immigrant families with children was \$44,300 in 2009 – only 63 percent of the median family income for U.S.-born families. As of 2009, Colorado's gap in income between the two groups is one of the largest in the country.



Source: Annie E. Casey Foundation. KIDS COUNT Data Center. Analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau 2005-2009 American Community Survey.

Median Family Income Disparities by State (2009)			
State	Children in U.S.-born Families	Children in Immigrant Families	Difference between Incomes
Nebraska	\$62,100	\$34,200	\$27,900
Colorado	\$70,300	\$44,300	\$26,000
Wyoming	\$64,000	\$39,200	\$24,800
Arizona	\$60,300	\$36,500	\$23,800
U.S.	\$59,100	\$48,200	\$10,900

Source: Annie E. Casey Foundation. KIDS COUNT Data Center. Analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau 2009 American Community Survey.

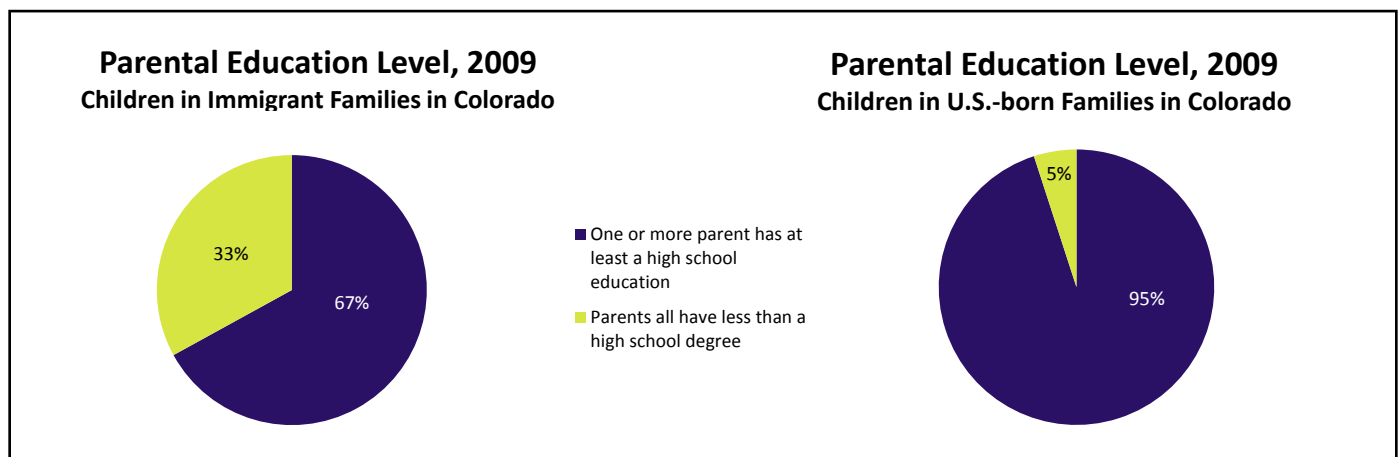


Parental Education: Gaps and Consequences

Parental education level can impact child well-being in a number of ways. In addition to the economic benefits associated with higher educational attainment, parental education level has been found to influence children's vocabulary and language development.¹⁵ The language skills developed early in a child's life are important building blocks for later school success. Without them, children are likely to begin elementary school lacking the tools they need to develop more advanced capabilities like reading proficiency.

Data show that, in general, children in immigrant families are more likely to have parents with low educational attainment, as compared to children whose parents were born in the U.S.¹⁶ In 2009, 33 percent of Colorado children in immigrant families (approximately 84,000 kids) lived in households where all parents had less than a high school degree – the fourth-highest proportion in the country behind only New Mexico, Texas and Oklahoma. In contrast, only 5 percent of Colorado children in U.S.-born families (approximately 49,000 children) had parents who all had less than a high school education.

In Colorado, the lower levels of education observed among immigrant parents are likely due to the fact that many immigrants who came to the state in the 1990s were drawn by the rapidly increasing employment opportunities in industries like agriculture and construction, which often require less formal education than other fields.

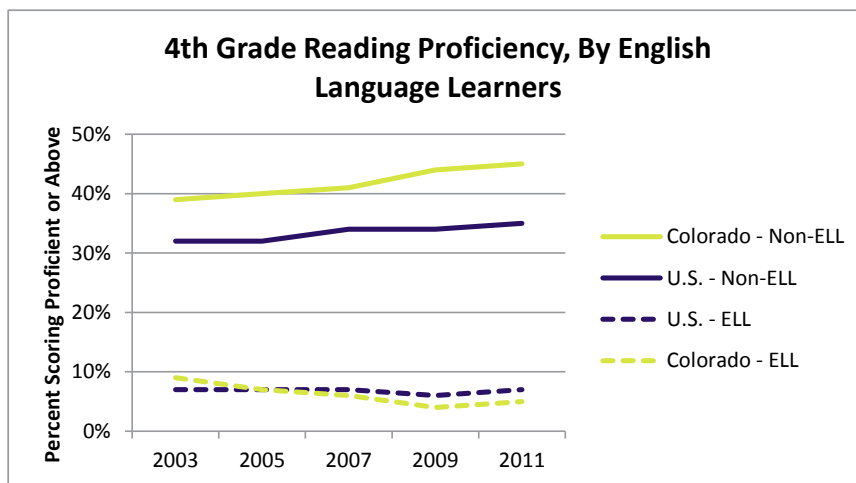


Source: Annie E. Casey Foundation. KIDS COUNT Data Center. Analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau 2009 American Community Survey



English Language Proficiency

The majority of children in immigrant families can speak English without difficulty. In Colorado, only one in five children in an immigrant family has difficulty speaking English, and the same is true nationally. However, children in immigrant families who do struggle with English face significant barriers to academic success. Both nationally and in Colorado, there exists a substantial achievement gap in standardized test scores between students who are English Language Learners (ELLs) and those who are not.^b Among fourth-grade ELLs in Colorado, only 5 percent scored proficient in reading on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in 2011, compared to 45 percent of students who were not ELLs. Between 2003 and 2011, reading proficiency levels for non-ELL 4th graders in Colorado improved year after year, while proficiency levels among ELL students have largely declined, with the exception of a slight increase in 2011. Among the 46 states with available data, Colorado's gap in 4th grade reading proficiency between these two groups was the second-largest in the nation in 2011.¹⁷

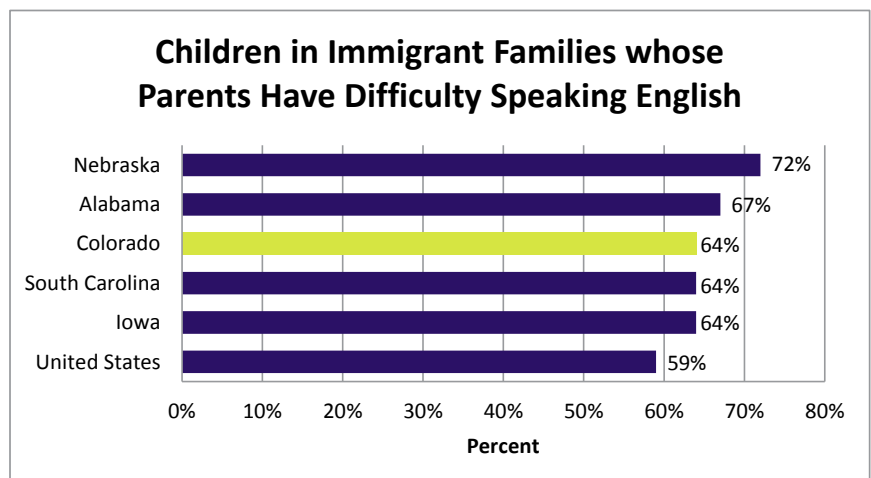


Source: Annie E. Casey Foundation. KIDS COUNT Data Center. Analysis of data from the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).



Parental English Proficiency

Immigrant parents are much more likely to have difficulty speaking English than their children. In 2009, 30 percent of Colorado children with at least one immigrant parent lived in a linguistically-isolated household (defined as a household in which no one over the age of 14 speaks English fluently), and 64 percent of children in immigrant families had parents who had trouble speaking English – the third-highest rate in the nation.

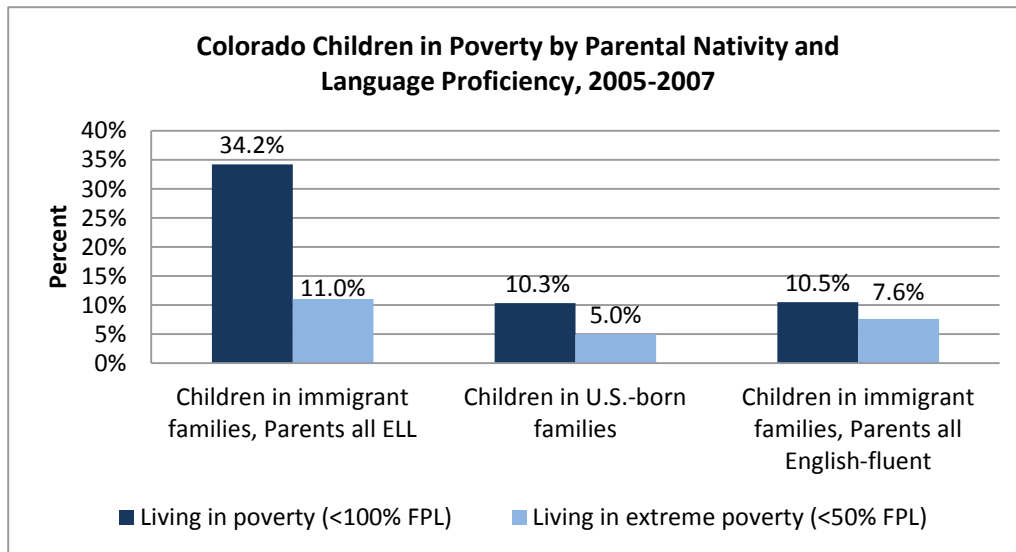


Source: Annie E. Casey Foundation. KIDS COUNT Data Center. Analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau 2009 American Community Survey.

^b It is important to note that not all students who are English Language Learners are children in immigrant families. In 2009, 17 percent of U.S. students identified as ELLs were third-generation children with parents who were both born in the U.S. (EPE Research Center, analysis of data from the 2009 American Community Survey).

Language Matters

Parental English proficiency is significant for several reasons. First, parents who speak English well are more likely to feel comfortable navigating various systems in American society, such as enrolling their children in early education programs or speaking with their child's health care provider. Secondly, immigrant parents who are proficient in English have a greater likelihood of securing higher paying jobs, thereby increasing their family's economic security. Data from the 2005-2007 American Community Survey 3-Year Estimates indicate that Colorado children in immigrant families whose parents are all English Language Learners were three times as likely to live in poverty as their counterparts in U.S.-born families, while those children in immigrant families in Colorado whose parents were all fluent in English were almost equally as likely to live in poverty as children in U.S.-born families.¹⁸



Source: Calculated by Donald J. Hernandez, et al., Center for Social and Demographic Analysis, University at Albany, SUNY, with support from the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

Furthermore, parental English proficiency has the ability to influence children's English language development, and, consequently, their educational outcomes. Children who live in linguistically-isolated households and have little formal exposure to English may start school at a disadvantage. Research has found achievement gaps in reading and math between children who hear English at home and those who hear only another language; those gaps existed when the children entered kindergarten and persisted through at least the fifth grade.¹⁹

To be clear, parents should never be discouraged from speaking their native language to their children. Research shows that the knowledge and skills children develop in one language often transfer when learning a second language.²⁰ Studies also suggest that the *amount* of words spoken to a child is one of the most important predictors of later language and vocabulary development.²¹ Therefore, if parents are more comfortable speaking to their children in their native language, they should be encouraged to do so, since the vocabulary they use in their first language is likely to be richer and more complex. However, for children who hear no English at home, formal exposure to the English language at an early age can be beneficial in helping them develop an understanding of the language that will benefit them upon entering kindergarten.



PREVENTING DISPARITIES BEFORE THEY BEGIN: THE BENEFITS OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

The previous section established that Colorado children in immigrant families are more likely than their peers to live in poverty and have parents with low levels of formal education and less likely to hear English spoken at home. Many children who experience risk factors like these are in jeopardy of starting school without the skills they need to be successful. Without strategic, evidence-based interventions that promote school readiness among children in immigrant families, many of whom have little exposure to English before starting school, the disparities that exist as early as kindergarten can persist for years to come. High-quality early childhood programs equip children with fundamental language and literacy skills that can be built upon in elementary school and are a key strategy for setting children in immigrant families on a path to success.

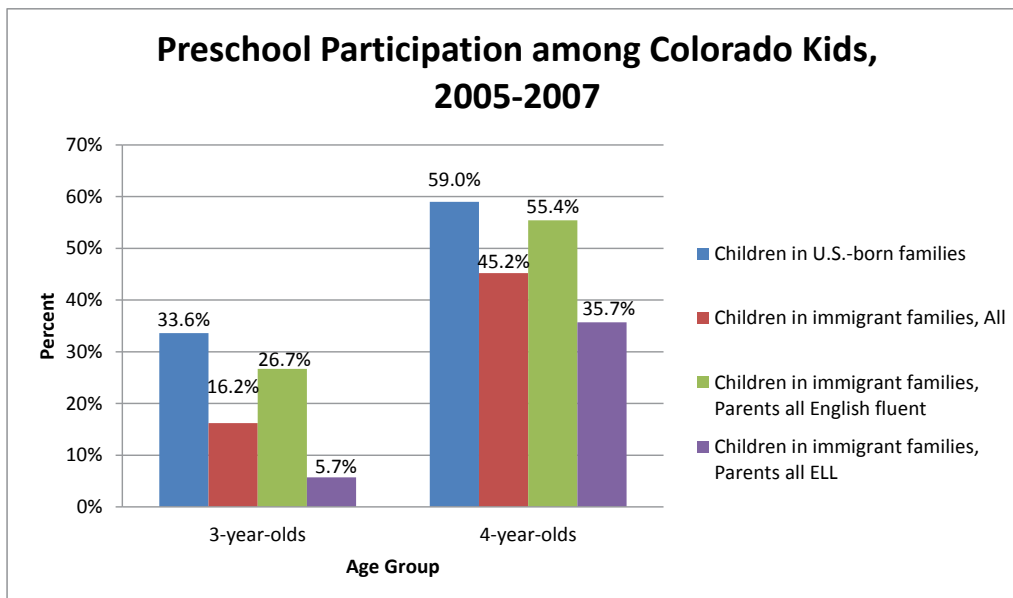
Although research on the benefits of early childhood programs for children in immigrant families, specifically, is somewhat limited, studies have consistently demonstrated that participation in early education programs can have extremely positive outcomes for children with risk factors that threaten their developmental and academic success.^{22,23} Among vulnerable children, participation in early childhood care and development programs has been associated with improved school readiness, greater academic achievement, improved cognitive and language development and better social skills.²⁴ Assessments of the Colorado Preschool Program (CPP), for example, found that children who participate in CPP are consistently more likely to receive higher scores across all subject areas on the Colorado Student Assessment Program (CSAP) than at-risk children who did not participate in CPP.²⁵

Investments in high-quality early childhood programs have also been found to produce significant results for society as a whole. A study by the RAND Corporation found that every dollar invested in effective early education programs yielded a return on investment ranging from \$1.80 to \$17.07 in benefits to society, including improved school outcomes, fewer costs related to grade repetition and higher tax revenues.²⁶

Participation in Early Childhood Education Programs among Colorado Children in Immigrant Families

Despite the documented benefits that children can gain from participation in high-quality early childhood programs, data indicate that children in immigrant families are substantially less likely to participate in such programs than their peers. An analysis of American Community Survey data from 2005 to 2007 found that, among 3-year-olds in Colorado, children in U.S.-born families were twice as likely to attend preschool as children in immigrant families (33.6 percent versus 16.2 percent). Although the gap narrows for 4-year-olds, Colorado children in immigrant families are still less likely to participate in preschool programs than their peers, with 45 percent of 4-year-old children in immigrant families in Colorado enrolled in a preschool program, compared to 59 percent of children whose parents were born in the U.S.²⁷

In addition to the disparities between children in immigrant families and children in U.S.-born families, participation gaps exist *within* the immigrant population based on parental English proficiency. Colorado children with immigrant parents who are fluent in English are five times more likely to be enrolled in preschool at 3 years old than those children whose immigrant parents are both English Language Learners.²⁸ This gap is particularly startling. Children whose parents have difficulty speaking English could derive tremendous benefits from participation in early learning programs and early exposure to the English language, yet in Colorado, only one in 20 3-year-olds and one in three 4-year-olds in this population accessed preschool programs.²⁹



Source: Calculated by Donald J. Hernandez, et al., Center for Social and Demographic Analysis, University at Albany, SUNY, with support from the Annie E. Casey Foundation.



In order to ensure these children start school with equal opportunities to succeed, efforts must be undertaken to increase access to and participation in high-quality early learning programs among Colorado's children in immigrant families. Expanding access to early learning programs will require addressing a number of structural and cultural barriers, including a lack of awareness about early childhood programs in immigrant communities, availability of subsidized program slots, misperceptions about eligibility requirements and affordability.

While expanding access to early learning programs is an essential step toward increasing participation among immigrant families, it is equally important to ensure that early childhood programs are culturally competent and responsive to the unique needs of immigrant families from diverse backgrounds. The National Center for Cultural Competence defines a culturally competent organization as one that has “a defined set of values and principles, and demonstrate[s] behaviors, attitudes, policies, and structures that enable them to work effectively cross-culturally.”³⁰ Examples of culturally competent practices in an early childhood setting include hiring staff members who reflect the children and community they serve, incorporating children's home culture into the program's curriculum, supporting children's home language development and offering opportunities for parents to be involved in a meaningful way.³¹ By making efforts to understand, value and incorporate the cultures of all children into the early learning setting, early childhood providers can ensure they create a welcoming environment for all families.

BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION IN EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS AMONG IMMIGRANT FAMILIES

A number of the barriers immigrant families face in accessing high-quality early childhood care and development programs are the same as those encountered by U.S.-born families – affordability, availability of subsidized program slots and transportation barriers, to name a few. Other challenges, however, including language barriers and misgivings surrounding participation in government-funded programs, are often unique to immigrant families. Understanding the barriers that immigrant families face in enrolling their children in early childhood programs is critical in developing strategies to increase participation among this population.

Awareness of Child Care Assistance and Early Learning Programs

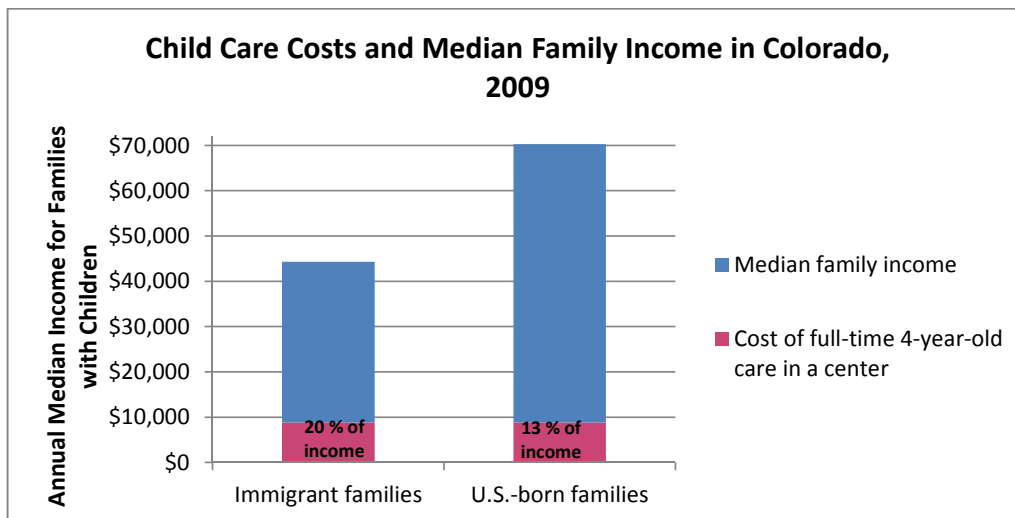
One of the first steps to increasing participation in early childhood programs among children in immigrant families involves generating awareness of such programs – within immigrant communities, as well as among organizations that serve immigrant populations. A report published by the Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) found that many immigrant parents – particularly those in states considered “new destinations” for immigrants – lack awareness of available child care and preschool programs in their communities.³² The report noted that the degree to which immigrant parents were cognizant of early childhood programs was dependent upon several factors, including how long the parents had been living in the United States, their country of origin, education level and English proficiency. Recent immigrants, those with low levels of education and those with limited English proficiency (LEP) were all significantly less likely to be aware of early childhood programs or opportunities for child care assistance in their communities. Similarly, organizations that provide services to the immigrant population also were found to be unfamiliar with child care assistance and early learning programs in their communities in many instances. These organizations often are viewed as trusted sources of information among immigrant communities and, if provided with information about child care and early education programs, could serve as valuable sources of referrals for immigrant parents wishing to enroll their children in early childhood programs.

Availability of Affordable Child Care: A Struggle for Many Colorado Families

Finding slots in high-quality, affordable child care and development programs is a challenge for immigrant families and U.S.-born families alike. Investments in many public child care assistance and early learning programs have declined considerably in recent years. With limited financial resources from which to draw, public early childhood programs struggle to serve all of the children who are eligible. For example, the Colorado Preschool Program (CPP) was funded for 20,160 slots during the 2008-09 school year, but the program estimated that serving all at-risk 4-year-olds in Colorado would require funding for 8,641 additional slots.³³

The shortage of slots in high-quality public child care and development programs places children in immigrant families, whose parents may be less familiar with the enrollment process, at a serious disadvantage. Strong, sustained investments in programs like the Colorado Preschool Program and Colorado Child Care Assistance Program are necessary in order to ensure these programs can meet the needs of all vulnerable children in Colorado and prepare them for academic success.

Even when program slots are available, the affordability of quality child care and development programs can be a concern for many Colorado families. Child care costs in Colorado are among the highest in the country; in 2009, Colorado was the fourth-least affordable state for full-time infant care in a child care center and the fifth-least affordable state for 4-year-old care in a center.³⁴ The high cost of such programs may be particularly burdensome for immigrant parents, who generally earn lower annual incomes than U.S.-born parents. The average annual cost of 4-year-old center-based care in Colorado was nearly 20 percent of the median income for immigrant families with children in 2009.^{35,36}



Source: Annie E. Casey Foundation, KIDS COUNT Data Center. Analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau 2009 American Community Survey, and the National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (NACCRRA). *Parents and the High Cost of Child Care: 2010 Update*.

Although resources like the Colorado Child Care Assistance Program (CCCAP) exist to help families pay for child care, the challenging fiscal environment in recent years has made the program less accessible to many families. Using FY2011-12 appropriation data, the *Colorado Children's Budget 2011*, a forthcoming report by the Colorado Children's Campaign that tracks investments in children's programs over time, found that total appropriations for CCCAP fell by nearly 3 percent between FY2007-08 and FY2011-12 (adjusted for inflation).³⁷ Meanwhile, demand for the program continues to increase.

Funding for CCCAP is currently allocated to each county on an annual basis, based on anticipated need and the number of low-income families in the county.³⁸ While counties are required to serve families with annual incomes at or below 130 percent of the federal poverty level (\$28,665 for a family of four in 2010), they are allowed to serve families with incomes up to approximately 300 percent of the federal poverty line (about \$66,000 per year for a family of four). Faced with increasing need, with which funding has not kept pace, many counties have been forced to cut eligibility levels in recent years, making it more difficult for many families to access the program. Between November 2008 and November 2010, 21 counties in Colorado reduced their eligibility levels for CCCAP, with seven counties cutting their rates to the minimum income level allowed by federal law.³⁹

Precisely at the time when the need for child care assistance is increasing, access is decreasing for Colorado families. Limited funding for child care subsidies, coupled with the rising costs of child care and development programs, may disproportionately affect children in immigrant families, who are more likely than their peers to live in poverty or in low-income families. Promoting access to beneficial early learning programs will ensure that all of Colorado's children – including children in immigrant families – have the tools they need to succeed in school, in the workforce and in life.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Although children in immigrant families stand to gain great benefits from participation in early childhood care and development programs, enrollment among this population remains very low in comparison to children in U.S.-born families. Removing barriers to such programs and facilitating access for Colorado's immigrant families will require collaboration among a diverse range of stakeholders, including local and state governments, the early childhood community and organizations that serve immigrant populations. Programs that foster English language acquisition among children and their parents are also an important approach to helping immigrant families succeed. As the existing disparities in poverty rates and academic achievement demonstrate, efforts to support the well-being of Colorado's 254,000 children in immigrant families are much-needed.

It should be noted that several of the recommendations below were developed while keeping in mind that many early childhood programs in Colorado are operating on tight budgets as a result of effects from the recent economic downturn. While efforts like hiring additional bilingual staff or implementing outreach programs that target immigrant families would help increase participation in early learning programs and ensure they are responsive to families' needs, we recognize that many providers may lack the means necessary to implement strategies that are resource-intensive. Several of the recommendations below therefore focus on efforts that can be accomplished through collaboration and information-sharing among early childhood providers and organizations in the immigrant community.

1. Support programs that assist families in establishing a strong foundation for learning.

Home Visitor Programs

Although many children do not enter formal early education programs until they reach 3 or 4 years old, home visiting programs can provide an early opportunity for families to learn about healthy child development. The Nurse Family Partnership (NFP), for example, provides regular home visits conducted by trained nurses from early in a woman's pregnancy until her child's second birthday. In addition to NFP, home visiting programs such as Parents as Teachers (PAT) and Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY) work to bring parents the information and support they need to promote their child's healthy development. PAT includes monthly visits that begin during the prenatal period and continue until the child enters kindergarten, while HIPPY offers weekly visits to parents of preschool-aged children (ages 3 to 5). Both programs are available in English and Spanish. Among other things, programs like these encourage parents to be their child's first teacher by talking, singing and reading to their children in the language in which they feel most comfortable in order to support their children in developing language and literacy skills during their earliest years.

Family Resource Centers

Family resource centers connect families with vital services and support in their communities, focusing on issues such as parenting skills, housing, education, employment and finances.⁴⁰ Many immigrant families with young children may benefit from services offered through these centers, including classes for adult English Language Learners.

Reach Out and Read

Reach Out and Read, a program which aims to promote school readiness among young children by partnering with pediatric health care providers who "prescribe" free, developmentally-appropriate books during well-child visits, is another key program that can support immigrant families in setting their young children up for success in school.⁴¹ One study that examined Reach Out and Read's impact on Hispanic immigrant families found that parents who received even one book from the program were significantly more likely to report sharing books with their children.⁴² The program catalog offers books in 13 languages to address the needs of bilingual families and encourages parents to read to their children in the language with which they feel most comfortable. Reading aloud, talking or singing to children – in any language – has been proven to promote language development and stimulate growth in vocabulary – two critical building blocks for reading proficiency and school readiness.

2. Strengthen the exchange of information between immigrant service providers and early childhood programs.

Organizations that serve immigrants typically have a high degree of trust among immigrant communities and therefore can be valuable partners in disseminating information about early childhood programs to their clients. Research conducted for a report published by the Center for Law and Social Policy found that immigrant service providers are interested in knowledge and materials about early childhood programs but are frequently unaware of programs in their communities.⁴³ Moreover, they often have misperceptions about children of immigrants' eligibility for such programs. There exists a great opportunity for partnership between agencies that serve immigrant populations and early childhood programs and child care resource and referral agencies (CCR&Rs). Strong relationships with early childhood providers would allow immigrant service organizations to provide their clients with information about the availability of child care and development programs in their community, help them navigate the enrollment processes and communicate the importance of early learning programs in promoting school readiness. Such partnerships would be mutually beneficial; early education programs and CCR&Rs can provide immigrant service providers with translated materials and accurate information about eligibility requirements and in turn, these service providers can be valuable resources for learning more about strategies for working with immigrant families.

3. Early childhood providers should ensure that family engagement practices include efforts to involve parents who are immigrants.

Parental involvement has long been considered critical to a child's educational success, and most early childhood providers put a great deal of emphasis on developing and sustaining family partnerships. Depending on the parents' country of origin, however, communicating with their child's teacher may not be considered the norm. Therefore, it may be important for staff members to initiate regular contact with parents and encourage them to ask questions or offer suggestions about their child's learning style.⁴⁴ Cultural or language barriers may also limit opportunities for some immigrant parents to engage in their children's early education. Efforts such as translating materials into parents' home language or providing opportunities for them to share their culture and traditions with the classroom may help to foster a sense of inclusiveness.



4. Increase support for P-3 programs that serve English Language Learners and promote language and literacy development.

Although most children in immigrant families in Colorado are fluent in English, those who have difficulty speaking English face significant obstacles to developing the reading proficiency necessary to succeed in school. The large gap in reading proficiency that exists between Colorado students who are English Language Learners and those who are fluent in English points to the need for increased resources to support English language development among ELLs, particularly during their early years when fundamental literacy skills are established.

Currently, funding for programs in Colorado public schools that serve English Language Learners comes from a few sources. At the state level, funding for programs that serve students whose dominant language is not English is provided on a per-pupil basis through the English Language Proficiency Act (ELPA) Program.⁴⁵ Each student is eligible for ELPA funds for only two years, though many require services for longer periods of time, and districts are obligated to continue to serve these students. Preschool students who are English Language Learners receive no ELPA funding.^c

At the federal level, funding for ELL students is allocated through Title III English Language Acquisition Grants and is based on the number of limited English proficient students and the number of immigrant children and youth in the state.⁴⁶ Between FY 2002 and FY 2010, total appropriations for the English Language Acquisition Grants have seen only modest increases, despite the fact that English Language Learners represent the fastest-growing group of students in the U.S.⁴⁷

Early and continued interventions among students with limited English proficiency are crucial to closing the achievement gaps that currently exist between ELL and non-ELL students. School districts across Colorado must receive adequate funding to serve students, including preschoolers, who have difficulty speaking, reading or writing English, as these skills are vital to academic success.

5. Expand access to programs that promote English language acquisition for the whole family.

Helping immigrant parents learn English can have a tremendous impact on the well-being of their children. As noted previously, children whose immigrant parents speak English fluently generally fare far better than their peers whose parents have limited proficiency in English.

Family literacy programs represent one strategy that can help all family members develop literacy skills and reach goals pertaining to education and economic self-sufficiency. Programs that focus on increasing literacy among families often offer English language or adult education classes for parents and early childhood education programs for children, as well as a component that promotes interaction between the parent and child to help parents support their child in developing early literacy skills.⁴⁸ Many family literacy programs are housed in family resource centers or community colleges; in addition to these locations, embedding programs within immigrant service providers could also help ensure that immigrant families can readily access supportive services that will aid them in establishing language and literacy skills.



^c In addition to funding allocated through the English Language Proficiency Act, a very small number of ELL students are funded through a district-specific adjustment to the per-pupil amount that reflects the number of “at-risk” students in a district.

6. Recruit representatives from immigrant service providers to serve on Early Childhood Councils.

Currently, there are 30 Early Childhood Councils located in communities around Colorado. Created by the state legislature in 2007, the Councils bring together leaders from diverse service areas to “improve and sustain the availability, accessibility, capacity and quality of early childhood services for children and families throughout the state.”⁴⁹ Early Childhood Councils typically include representatives from local child care providers, health and mental health care agencies, and child care resource and referral agencies (CCR&Rs), as well as local government officials and parents, but membership is not limited to these stakeholder groups. In communities with sizeable immigrant populations, recruiting representatives from local immigrant service providers to serve on Early Childhood Councils could help identify areas of need within the immigrant community pertaining to child care and development that are not currently being met. In addition, leaders in the immigrant community could serve as trusted sources through which early childhood programs can conduct outreach efforts targeted to immigrant parents with young children.

7. Create linkages between immigrant service providers and early childhood provider organizations.

Just as including leaders from immigrant service providers on Early Childhood Councils can help address barriers to accessing child care and development programs on a local level, partnerships between immigrant-serving organizations and statewide early childhood provider organizations could help address some of the larger systemic issues pertaining to access to affordable, culturally-competent care among immigrant families. Organizations like the Early Childhood Education Association of Colorado, the Colorado Association for the Education of Young Children and the Colorado Association of Family Child Care focus on access and quality issues surrounding child care and education programs across the state. Collaboration between these professional associations and organizations that serve immigrant populations would allow for an exchange of ideas as to how to increase participation in early childhood programs among children in immigrant families.



8. Offer professional development and training opportunities to help providers learn strategies for working with students who are English Language Learners (ELLs).

Preschool and other early education programs present an early opportunity to help children in immigrant families develop important English language skills before they enter kindergarten, and participation in such programs may help narrow the significant achievement gap observed between students who are English Language Learners and those who are not. Effectively teaching children who are English Language Learners, however, requires specific skills and abilities that differ from those needed to teach English-fluent children, and many providers may not have had opportunities to be formally trained in these skills. Providing training and professional development in working with English Language Learners can help child care and development program staff feel better equipped to meet their ELL students' needs.

CONCLUSION

As we look toward Colorado's future, it is critical that we pay due attention to the needs and well-being of children in immigrant families. While immigrant families have many strengths, data and research indicate that children in immigrant families are more likely to experience numerous risk factors that jeopardize their opportunities for success. If the existing gaps in poverty rates and academic achievement persist, many children in this group will lack the tools they need to enter an employment market that increasingly demands a skilled, educated workforce, and, in turn, Colorado will feel the effects – with lower tax revenues, increased demand for public safety net programs and difficulty competing to attract businesses in a global economy. The cost of doing nothing is simply too high.

Fortunately, research tells us there are effective programs that can help close the achievement gaps between children in immigrant families and their peers in U.S.-born families. In addition to giving these children the best chance for a successful, fulfilling life, investing in programs that promote academic achievement among children in immigrant families today is a smart strategy that will help ensure that Colorado has an educated, skilled workforce to draw upon in the future. Early childhood care and development programs can help bolster school readiness skills and English language acquisition among children in immigrant families, ensuring all of Colorado's 1.2 million children start school ready to succeed and reach their full potential.



END NOTES

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