

# CLASP

CENTER FOR LAW AND SOCIAL POLICY

## ***Reaching All Children? Understanding Early Care and Education Participation Among Immigrant Families: A Brief***

As communities strive to ensure the success of all children, it is important that policymakers and early education professionals identify and respond to the needs of immigrant families so that teachers, schools, and early childhood programs are prepared to serve these children.

**High-quality, early education is critical to prepare children to succeed in kindergarten and beyond.** Research shows that high-quality, early education programs can particularly benefit low-income children and those most at risk of school failure by supporting their healthy development across a range of measures.

**One out of every five children in the United States is the child of an immigrant—and many of these children are at risk of school failure.** Children in immigrant families are the fastest growing segment of the nation's child population. Participation in quality early education programs could be particularly beneficial for children of immigrants who face multiple risk factors; yet these children appear less likely to participate in such programs.

This brief summarizes the 26-page paper, [\*Reaching All Children? Understanding Early Care and Education Participation Among Immigrant Families\*](#), part of CLASP's *Breaking Down Barriers* project intended to better understand and remedy the barriers immigrant families face to accessing high-quality early education programs. The full report is available at [www.clasp.org](http://www.clasp.org).

### **Young Children of Immigrants Appear Less Likely to Participate in Early Care and Education Programs**

**Young children of immigrants are less likely to participate in every type of non-parental care arrangement than children of U.S.-born citizens and are more likely to be in the care of a parent.** Even when both parents work at least part-time, young children of immigrants remain more likely to be in parental care or without a regular child care arrangement. When immigrant families use non-parental care, infants and toddlers are more likely to be in relative care and 3- to 5-year-olds are more likely to be in center-based care, as are children of U.S.-born citizens. Children of immigrants are less likely to attend preschool compared to children of U.S.-born citizens.

### **Factors Affecting Participation in Preschool and Center-based Care**

Multiple factors likely contribute to the lower participation of immigrant families in early education:

- **Over a quarter of all young children of immigrants are poor and over one-half live in low-income households** (below 200 percent of the federal poverty threshold). Children in low-income families are less likely to attend early education than are children in higher-income families.

- **Children of immigrants are *more* likely to live in two-parent households but *less* likely to have two working parents;** therefore, child care may not be necessary as a work support.
- **The nature of immigrant employment may limit child care options.** Immigrants are over-represented among the low-wage workforce and are likely to be working irregular and non-traditional shifts, nights, and weekends which makes securing child care even more difficult.
- **Children of immigrants are more likely to have parents with less formal education.** Parents with fewer years of formal education are less likely to enroll their children in early education programs.
- **Over half of all young children of immigrants have at least one parent who is limited English proficient,** which is associated with increased rates of poverty, food insecurity, and other hardships that are detrimental for children and can make it difficult for parents to find information about early care and education opportunities.
- **Most young children of immigrants live in mixed-status families** (with at least one non-citizen parent), even though they themselves are likely to be citizens. Program rules regarding immigration status vary; non-citizen parents may feel uncomfortable accessing federal benefits, even if their child is a U.S. citizen.

## **Policy Recommendations for States and Local Communities**

To ensure that immigrant families are served by quality early education programs, states and local communities could:

- Create partnerships with community organizations serving immigrants to link families to early education.
- Create a demographic profile of young children in the community;
- Conduct a community needs assessment in cooperation with local immigrant organizations to identify the early care and education needs of immigrant families in their communities and the gaps in service provision;
- Recruit bilingual staff and increase training for staff working with young children of immigrants;
- Assess how current enrollment requirements—for example, using social security numbers, or proof of employment or U.S. citizenship—discourage immigrant families from participating;
- Provide guidance to community organizations serving immigrants on eligibility and availability of early childhood programs;
- Disseminate program information within local immigrant communities;
- Include all settings in early education initiatives;
- Encourage early education programs to promote parent involvement.

## **Questions for Further Research**

Additional research is needed to determine why young children of immigrants are under-served in early care and education programs, and identify effective practices and policies for ensuring that immigrant families are able to access culturally appropriate, quality programs that fit their needs. *Reaching All Families?* identifies several questions to guide future research in this area.