

PREPARING THE CHILDREN OF IMMIGRANTS FOR EARLY ACADEMIC SUCCESS



YOUNG CHILDREN OF IMMIGRANTS: RESEARCH FINDINGS AND POLICY CHOICES

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MIGRATION POLICY INSTITUTE

Preparing the Children of Immigrants for Early Academic Success

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Executive Summary

A preponderance of evidence points to an immigrant paradox in education: the children of immigrants perform better than expected and often even outperform their peers with US-born parents. However, this evidence is largely drawn from high school students. Data on the performance of children entering elementary school is more mixed, often pointing to greater risks among the children of immigrants.

School readiness — the skills children bring with them at kindergarten entry — is a particular cause of concern, especially for those with Latin American origins. Findings regarding the health of young immigrant children are similarly mixed, and also depart from the immigrant paradox. As with educational performance, children of immigrants appear to be more at risk for health problems during the preschool and elementary school years than during adolescence. Health problems during early childhood may be associated with poorer educational performance, as children are more likely to be absent and less likely to be fully attentive in school when sick.

The children of immigrants perform better than expected and often even outperform their peers with US-born parents.

These results raise concerns about the future trajectories of young children of immigrants, especially during the transition between prekindergarten and elementary school — a period critical to a child’s development and academic preparation.

This report addresses three types of interventions that may reduce disparities between the children of US-born parents and their immigrant counterparts: (1) expanded access to early childhood education, (2) policies that promote young children’s physical health, and (3) efforts to forge family-school partnerships. These interventions, if combined, reflect how early learning patterns emerge from the intersection of multiple developmental processes.

I. Introduction

Immigrant families in the United States are concentrated at the lower end of the socioeconomic spectrum, and socioeconomic disadvantages are known to undermine short- and long-term success in school.¹ Thus, children from immigrant families *should* be struggling in the American educational system, but, in reality, they tend to do better academically and behaviorally than their families’ socioeconomic circumstances suggest that they will.² This phenomenon — often referred to as the immigrant paradox in education — has been well documented by social scientists, whose research in academic journals and conferences is filtering into the public domain. Growing awareness of the immigrant paradox, rooted as it is in the strengths and resources of immigrant families and communities (e.g., cohesion, support, a strong work

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- 1 Donald Hernandez, Nancy A. Denton, and Suzanne E. Macartney, “Early Childhood Education Programs: Accounting for Low Enrollment in Newcomer and Native Families,” in *The Next Generation: Immigrants in Europe and North America*, eds. Richard D. Alba and Mary C. Waters (New York: New York University Press, 2010); Doris R. Entwisle, Karl L. Alexander, and Linda S. Olson, “First Grade and Educational Attainment by Age 22: A New Story,” *American Journal of Sociology* 110 (2005): 1458–502.
 - 2 Lingxin Hao and Han Woo, “Distinct Trajectories in the Transition to Adulthood: Are Children of Immigrants Advantaged?” *Child Development* 83 (2012): 1623–39; Tama Leventhal, Yange Xue, and Jeanne Brooks-Gunn, “Immigrant Differences in School-Age Children’s Verbal Trajectories: A Look at Four Racial/Ethnic Groups,” *Child Development* 77 (2006): 1359–74; Grace Kao, “Parental Influences on the Educational Outcomes of Immigrant Youth,” *International Migration Review* 38, no. 1 (2004): 427–749; Jennifer E. Glick and Michael J. White, “The Academic Trajectories of Immigrant Youths: Analysis Within and Across Cohorts,” *Demography* 40 (2003): 589–603.



ethnic), helps to inject a positive and optimistic tone into public discussions of immigration that are otherwise often negative and pessimistic.³

Yet, many of the important nuances of the immigrant paradox get lost in translation. For example, the paradox involves immigrants doing better than expected given their backgrounds, not necessarily outperforming their peers overall. Relatedly, the paradox typically emerges in empirical analyses after socioeconomic circumstances are controlled, a valid statistical strategy that might not always be adequately interpreted outside of research circles. As a result, generalized discussions of the immigrant paradox might have the unintended consequence of diverting attention from the growing population of immigrant children — a population in great need of support.⁴ Conversely, taking a developmental perspective on the schooling of children from immigrant families can shed light on a key source of variation within the immigrant paradox in education. Such research can better inform policies targeting human-capital development in general and immigrant youth in particular.

The immigrant paradox appears to hold better for some age ranges than others.⁵ Although evidence for it is quite strong and consistent among older youth (e.g., high school students), it is weaker and more inconsistent among younger children. In fact, some subsets of the immigrant population have less success than their peers in some outcomes. In particular, school readiness and early achievement — i.e., the skills children bring to kindergarten and how they build on these skills during their first years at school⁶ — are points of concern for children from immigrant families, especially those with roots in Mexico and other parts of Latin America.⁷

*The immigrant paradox appears to hold better
for some age ranges than others.*

The author's purpose here is to explore which factors have the biggest impacts — both positive and negative — on the school readiness and early achievement of children from immigrant families (defined as US- and foreign-born children with at least one foreign-born parent). What factors in early childhood might weaken, eliminate, or reverse the immigrant paradox? Of course, even a cursory review of the literature reveals that the list of factors relevant to this discussion is long — too long to be adequately covered here. The author highlights three types of interventions: prekindergarten (pre-K) enrichment, child-focused health initiatives, and partnerships between schools and families in immigrant communities.

3 Cynthia Garcia-Coll and Amy Marks, eds., *The Immigrant Paradox in Children and Adolescents: Is Becoming an American a Developmental Risk?* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2011).

4 Robert Crosnoe and Ruth Lopez-Turley, "The K-12 Educational Outcomes of Immigrant Youth," *Future of Children* 21 (2011): 129–52; Carola Suárez-Orozco and Marcelo Suárez-Orozco, *Children of Immigration* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 2001).

5 Robert Crosnoe, "Diversity in the Immigrant Paradox in the Mexican-Origin Population," in *The Immigrant Paradox in Children and Adolescents: Is Becoming an American a Developmental Risk?* eds. Cynthia Garcia-Coll and Amy Marks (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2011): 61–76.

6 Greg J. Duncan, Chantelle J. Dowsett, Amy Claessens, Katherine Magnuson, Aletha C. Huston, Pamela Klebanov, Linda S. Pagani, Leon Feinstein, Mimi Engel, Jeanne Brooks-Gunn, Holly Sexton, Kathryn Duckworth, and Crista Japel, "School Readiness and Later Achievement," *Developmental Psychology* 43 (2007): 1428–46.

7 Wen Jui Han, "The Academic Trajectories of Children of Immigrants and their School Environments," *Developmental Psychology* 44 (2008): 1572–90; Ruby Takanishi, "Leveling the Playing Field: Supporting Immigrant Children from Birth to Eight," *Future of Children* 14 (2004): 61–80.



II. Patterns of Early Cognitive Development and Academic Functioning among Children of Immigrant Families

Historically, research on the educational outcomes of children from immigrant families has focused on older youth. There are several explanations for this age focus, one of which is data availability. For some time, researchers had few options; most large-scale data sets that focused on early childhood did not include substantial numbers of immigrant children in their sampling frames. Those that included immigrants focused on adolescents (e.g., the National Education Longitudinal Study, the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health), and thus much of the evidentiary basis of the immigrant paradox reflects the experiences of older youth. As appropriate data on younger children became public (e.g., the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study's Birth and Kindergarten Cohorts, hereafter referred to as ECLS-B and ECLS-K), exceptions and qualifications to the immigrant paradox began to emerge.

When looking at the secondary school outcomes of children from immigrant families, the evidence fairly consistently demonstrates an immigrant paradox. Students with immigrant parents, and/or students who are immigrants themselves, score or rate higher than their peers with native-born parents on a variety of academic indicators, including high school completion, grade point average, and standardized test scores. This paradox is especially likely to be found when socioeconomic circumstances (e.g., parent education, family income) are held constant in group comparisons.⁸ A good example of this pattern is provided by Grace Kao, who estimates immigration-related differences in standardized test performance across numerous racial, ethnic, and national origin groups (using data from the National Education Longitudinal Study).⁹ First- and second-generation immigrants generally tend to outperform the children of US-born parents of the same racial, ethnic, or national background. Overall, the immigrant paradox was stronger among youth from Asian immigrant families (and Asian ancestry more generally) than among youth with family origins in Latin America. These national trends have been generally supported by analyses of specific states and communities (e.g., North Carolina, New York, Florida).¹⁰ Such secondary school outcomes are often explained by the parental support, tight-knit networks, psychological well-being, and adult (versus peer) orientation of immigrant youth.¹¹

Immigrants generally tend to outperform the children of US-born parents of the same racial, ethnic, or national background.

The picture is much less consistent when looking at younger children. Analyses of ECLS-K and, more recently, ECLS-B have revealed lower levels of achievement in early childhood and elementary school for children from immigrant families relative to children with US-born parents. This lower level of achieve-

- 8 Hao and Woo, "Distinct Trajectories in the Transition to Adulthood;" Suet Ling Pong and Lingxin Hao, "Neighborhood and School Factors in the School Performance of Immigrants' Children," *International Migration Review* 41 (2007): 206–41; Robert Crosnoe, Lorena Lopez-Gonzalez, and Chandra Muller, "Immigration from Mexico into the Math/Science Pipeline in American Education," *Social Science Quarterly* 85 (2004): 1208–26; Glick and White, "The Academic Trajectories of Immigrant Youths;" Charles Hirschman, "The Educational Enrollment of Immigrant Youth: A Test of the Segmented-Assimilation Hypothesis," *Demography* 38 (2001): 317–36; Anne K. Driscoll, "Risk of High School Dropout among Immigrant and Native Hispanic Youth," *International Migration Review* 33 (1999): 857–76.
- 9 Grace Kao, "Psychological Well-Being and Educational Achievement among Immigrant Youth," in *Children of Immigrants: Health, Adjustment, and Public Assistance*, ed. Donald J. Hernandez (Washington, DC: National Academy, 1999): 410–77.
- 10 Charles Clotfelter, Helen Ladd, and Jacob Vigdor, "New Destinations, New Trajectories? The Educational Progress of Hispanic Youth in North Carolina," *Child Development* 83 (2012): 1608–22; Amy Schwartz and Leanna Stiefel, "Is There a Nativity Gap? New Evidence on the Academic Performance of Immigrant Students," *Education Finance and Policy* 1 (2006): 17–49; Alejandro Portes and Rubén G. Rumbaut, *Legacies: The Story of the Immigrant Second Generation* (Berkeley, CA: University of California, 2001).
- 11 Robert Crosnoe and Ariel Kalil, "Educational Progress and Parenting among Mexican Immigrant Mothers of Young Children," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 72 (2010): 976–89.

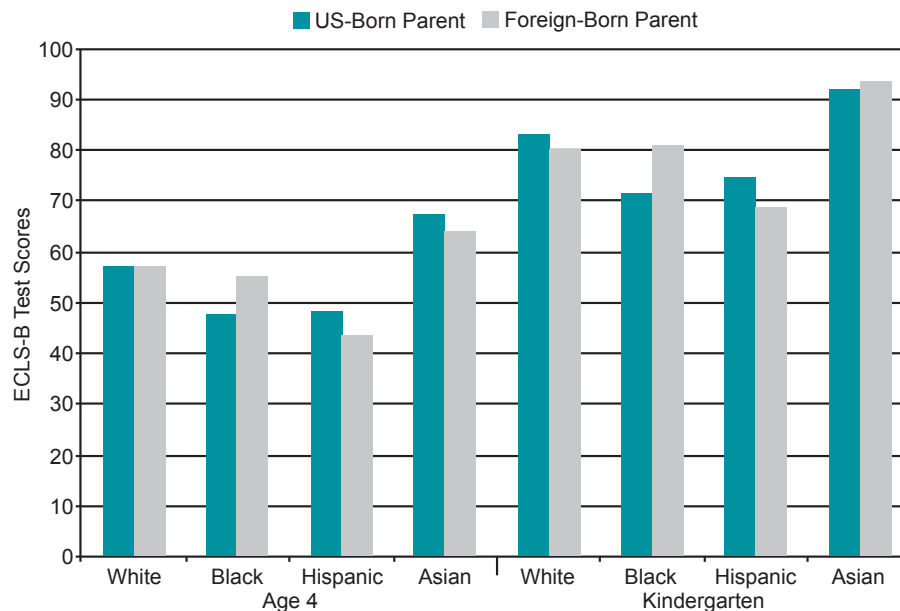


ment, which might be called “immigrant risk,” does not occur across the board.¹² Moreover, it does not apply to all educational outcomes. It tends to be more pronounced in tests of cognitive and academic skills before and after the transition into elementary school, less so among survey or observational measures of more general behavior and functioning in preschool.¹³

The picture is much less consistent when looking at younger children.

Figure 1 presents average test scores across major racial/ethnic groups in the United States, broken down by the nativity of parents. The data come from ECLS-B, a nationally representative sample of children born in 2001. ECLS-B uses specially designed cognitive assessments in reading and math skills that were adapted from widely used standardized tests of preschool children as well as from the achievement tests administered to elementary school students in ECLS-K (a nationally representative sample of kindergartners in 1998) some years before. The tests, with Item Response Theory scores that ranged roughly from 0 to 90, were given to children first at age 4 and then again in kindergarten (regardless of actual age). Here, the author sums the reading and math scores into a composite.

Figure 1. Scores on Standardized Cognitive Assessments across the Transition into Elementary School among Sample of Children Born in 2001, by Race/Ethnicity and Immigration Status



Source: Early Childhood Longitudinal Study’s Birth Cohort (ECLS-B) standardized assessments in math and reading summed into a composite, ranging from 0-180 (across both tests), at each time point.

- 12 Bruce Fuller, Margaret Bridges, Edward Bein, Heeju Jang, Sunyoung Jung, Sophie Rabe-Hesketh, Neal Halfon, and Alice Kuo, “The Health and Cognitive Growth of Latino Toddlers: At Risk or Immigrant Paradox?” *Maternal and Child Health* 13 (2009): 755–68; Han, “The Academic Trajectories of Children of Immigrants;” Sean Reardon and Claudia Galindo, “The Hispanic-White Gap in Math and Reading in the Elementary Grades,” *American Educational Research Journal* 46 (2009): 853–91; Jennifer Glick and Bryndl Hohmann Marriott, “Academic Performance of Young Children in Immigrant Families: The Significance of Race, Ethnicity, and National Origin,” *International Migration Review* 41 (2007): 371–402.
- 13 Jennifer Glick, Laura Hamish, Scott Yabiku, and Robert H. Bradley, “Migration Timing and Parenting Practices: Contributions to Social Development in Preschoolers with Foreign-Born and Native-Born Mothers,” *Child Development* 83 (2012): 1527–42; Sunyoung Jung, Bruce Fuller, and Claudia Galindo, “Family Functioning and Early Learning Practices in Immigrant Homes,” *Child Development* 83 (2012): 1510–26; Crosnoe, “Diversity in the Immigrant Paradox in the Mexican-Origin Population.”



There is one group with a consistent paradox pattern: the children of foreign-born Blacks scored about 8 points higher on the achievement test composite than the children of US-born Blacks — and that gap widened to about 10 points once they had begun kindergarten. Meanwhile, Latinos have a consistent risk pattern. The children of foreign-born Latino families scored about 5 points lower on the achievement test composite than the children of US-born Latinos, and that gap widened slightly once formal schooling started. Patterns shifted from year to year in the two other groups. White children from immigrant and native-born families performed roughly equally before the start of elementary school, but the latter opened up an advantage once elementary school had begun. In contrast, the children of US-born Asians outscored the children of foreign-born Asians by about 3 points when they were age 4, but this switched to a 1-point advantage for the children of foreign-born Asians at the start of elementary school. Thus, an immigrant risk pattern opened up over time for white children during the school transition period, and a risk pattern evolved into a paradox pattern for children of Asian immigrants.

Clearly, the evidence is inconsistent, and often points to a disadvantage among children of immigrants. These descriptive statistics from ECLS-B are consistent with earlier multivariate research on ECLS-K. Analyses of the ECLS-K reveal that even when controlling for a host of socioeconomic characteristics, school features (such as sector or ethnic composition), and other factors, the children of foreign-born Latinos and US-born Blacks scored lower than other groups — especially the children of foreign-born Asians and US-born whites — on standardized tests in kindergarten and had less growth in these tests between kindergarten and first grade. Among children from Latino immigrant families, those with Mexican-born parents seemed to fare especially poorly during this period. Interestingly, expanding the lens beyond test scores, many of these patterns shifted back toward an immigrant paradox. For example, the children of Mexican and other immigrants were often highly rated by teachers on work habits, engagement, and general behavior (as surveyed for the ECLS-K).¹⁴

Given the very strong role that school readiness and early learning play in creating long-term educational disparities,¹⁵ these patterns are significant, as they suggest a very early disadvantage (or advantage) among children from immigrant families as they move through the system. Yet, follow-up analyses of ECLS-K that track children as they age suggest that the cumulative process of (dis)advantage often seen in the general child population does not hold as well among immigrant children.¹⁶ For example, children from Mexican immigrant families gained academic skills (as measured by test scores) at a faster rate than children of other racial/ethnic groups once they were in school. As a result, they made up considerable ground compared with white and Asian children by the end of elementary school — as well as compared with Latino children with US-born parents.¹⁷ More broadly, a comprehensive longitudinal analysis of ELCS-K conducted by Jennifer Glick and Bryndl Marriott¹⁸ reports that, across almost every racial/ethnic and national origin group in the sample, the children of immigrants demonstrated more growth in learning across elementary school grades than the children of native-born parents. Thus, over the course of elementary school, evidence of immigrant risk declines and more consistently points to an immigrant paradox.

14 Crosnoe, “Diversity in the Immigrant Paradox in the Mexican-Origin Population;” Han, “The Academic Trajectories of Children of Immigrants;” Robert Crosnoe, *Mexican Roots, American Schools: Helping Mexican Immigrant Children Succeed* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006).

15 Robert C. Pianta, Martha J. Cox, and Kyle L. Snow, eds., *School Readiness and the Transition to Kindergarten in the Era of Accountability* (Baltimore, MD: Brookes, 2007); Entwisle, Alexander, and Olson, “First Grade and Educational Attainment by Age 22.”

16 Han, “The Academic Trajectories of Children of Immigrants;” Glick and Marriott, “Academic Performance of Young Children in Immigrant Families.”

17 Crosnoe, “Diversity in the Immigrant Paradox in the Mexican-Origin Population.”

18 Glick and Marriott, “Academic Performance of Young Children in Immigrant Families.”



III. Proposals for Mitigating Immigrant Risk

The bottom line, then, is that the immigrant paradox pattern that is so strong in secondary school is weaker in elementary school, in particular during the years surrounding the transition into formal schooling. Why might the patterns be different in elementary than in secondary school? This is certainly — at least in part — a function of differences in who is included in high school samples compared to elementary school samples. As an example, high school samples tend to exclude dropouts or nonenrollees more than elementary school samples. However, some immigrant groups have high dropout rates, and, in others, many first-generation youth do not enroll in school at all. Thus, high school samples may not capture the true variation among immigrant youth.¹⁹ Yet, something meaningful could also be occurring, as young people adapt to the educational system and realize new opportunities for learning and achievement as school unfolds.²⁰

Meanwhile, the disadvantages demonstrated by some segments of the immigrant population in early learning and school readiness are likely constraining later educational outcomes. Thus, the mechanisms of those early risks need to be better understood and addressed. The list of potential ways to accomplish this is long. Because of space constraints, the author focuses on three that he has personally researched in recent years and that are both high impact and amenable to policy intervention.

A. Pre-K Enrollment

Investments in early education programs, especially those targeting disadvantaged segments of the population, are among the most popular strategies to reduce demographic and socioeconomic disparities in educational attainment. This focus is motivated by evidence suggesting that early human-capital interventions typically bring greater long-term returns on investment than those in later stages of schooling. In other words, it's smart to act early.²¹ This applies to children from immigrant families, especially those at the lower end of the socioeconomic spectrum.²²

Early human-capital interventions typically bring greater long-term returns on investment than those in later stages of schooling.

The basic argument is that exposure to educational programs in the years before formal schooling can help children from more disadvantaged groups narrow the school readiness gap — with a large impact on school success. These programs provide structured learning opportunities, cognitive stimulation, and skill development, helping to counterbalance group differences in language/literacy and enrichment and general learning activities at home and in the community.²³

Yet, children from immigrant families are less likely than the children of US-born parents to attend such

19 Crosnoe and Lopez-Turley, “The K-12 Educational Outcomes of Immigrant Youth;” Ralph S. Oropesa and Nancy Landale, “Why Do Immigrant Youths who Never Enroll in US Schools Matter? School Enrollment among Mexicans and non-Hispanic Whites,” *Sociology of Education* 82 (2009): 240–66.

20 Crosnoe, “Diversity in the Immigrant Paradox in the Mexican-Origin Population;” Reardon and Galindo, “The Hispanic-White Gap in Math and Reading in the Elementary Grades.”

21 Jens Ludwig and Isabel Sawhill, *Success by Ten: Intervention Early, Often, and Effectively in the Education of Young Children* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institute, 2007), www.brookings.edu/research/papers/2007/02/education-ludwig; James Heckman, “Skill Formation and the Economics of Investing in Disadvantaged Children,” *Science* 312 (2006): 1900–02.

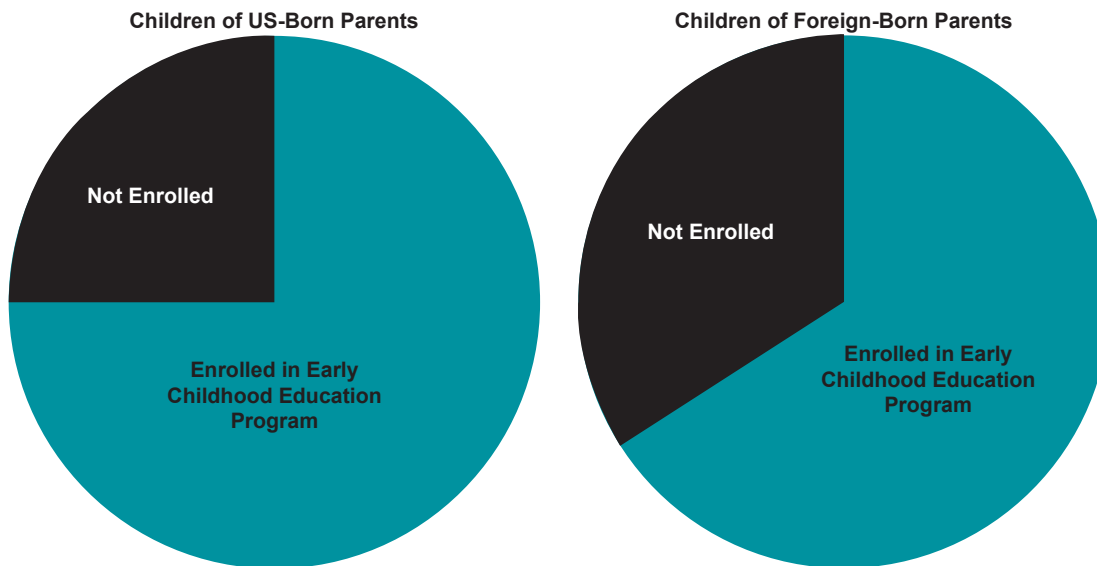
22 Bruce Fuller, *Standardized Childhood: The Political and Cultural Struggle over Early Education* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007).

23 Edward Zigler, Walter S. Gilliam, and Stephanie M. Jones, *A Vision for Universal Preschool Education* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Allison Clarke-Stewart and Virginia Allhusen, *What We Know about Childcare* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005).



early education programs.²⁴ Figure 2 depicts program participation rates among these two groups of children, based on data from the National Household Education Survey, as analyzed by Lynn Karoly and Gabrielle Gonzalez.²⁵ Three-quarters of American 4-year-olds with US-born parents were enrolled in an early childhood education program; this proportion falls to two-thirds among the children of foreign-born parents. While the second proportion is still high in absolute terms, it suggests a significant disparity. Meanwhile, a closer look reveals a great deal of variation in the gap, with some segments of the immigrant population enrolling at far lower rates. The lower participation rate among children from immigrant families is likely rooted in several factors, including immigration-related differences in socioeconomic circumstances, language, maternal employment, and perceptions of early education's necessity.²⁶

Figure 2. Preschool Enrollment in the Year before Kindergarten, by Race/Ethnicity and Immigration Status, 2005



Source: Adapted from calculations using National Household Education Survey data by Lynn A. Karoly and Gabrielle Gonzalez, "Early Care and Education for Children in Immigrant Families," *Future of Children* 21 (2011): 71–101.

The policy response to this issue has been to increase immigrant enrollment in early education programs, which is part of a much larger push to expand preschool options and reach among disadvantaged communities and groups.²⁷ Many states have taken the lead in this movement by creating or expanding public preschool systems, which supplement and complement the federal Head Start and Early Head Start programs. These state programs either fund enrollment in early education programs outside of schools or expand elementary schools to incorporate preschool programs. Importantly, many states with such programs are either traditional or "new" immigrant destinations (according to how long they have experienced high rates of growth in their immigrant populations). Texas and California are examples of

24 Hernandez, Denton, and Macartney, "Early Childhood Education Programs;" Takanishi, "Leveling the Playing Field."

25 Lynn A. Karoly and Gabrielle Gonzalez, "Early Care and Education for Children in Immigrant Families," *Future of Children* 21 (2011): 71–101.

26 Kristin Turney and Grace Kao, "Pre-Kindergarten Child Care and Social and Behavioral Outcomes among Children of Immigrants," *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* 24 (2009): 432–44; Katherine Magnuson, Claudia Lahaie, and Jane Waldfogel, "Preschool- and School Readiness of Children of Immigrants," *Social Science Quarterly* 87 (2006): 1241–62; Robert Crosnoe, "Early Child Care and the School Readiness of Children from Mexican Immigrant Families," *International Migration Review* 41 (2007): 152–81; Peter Brandon, "The Child Care Arrangements of Preschool-Age Children in Immigrant Families in the United States," *International Migration* 42 (2004): 65–87.

27 Takanishi, "Leveling the Playing Field."



the former, Georgia and Oklahoma of the latter.²⁸ While these initiatives have increased immigrant families' access, they also face some challenges, including the fadeout of benefits after program exit, variable quality among programs, and tensions between communities and schools (e.g., differences in views about parental involvement or about the balance between cognitive and socioemotional development in preschool).²⁹ Still, they represent progress on an important issue.

Over the past several years, the author has collected data — on children, families, and schools — related to the state-funded public prekindergarten program in central Texas. One theme that has emerged from this mixed-method data collection is that awareness of the program among immigrant parents is largely a function of a twofold process: First, district-level outreach efforts target (primarily Mexican) immigrant communities. Second, information is shared among immigrant families. Thus, communities with dense networks of interconnected families are the most likely to be aware of preschool enrollment opportunities and the programs' educational value.

B. Health

Physical and mental well-being has long been a concern of social scientists studying children, as well as of policy interventions targeting youth in the United States.³⁰ Historically, however, relevant research and initiatives have been somewhat disconnected from educational policy. This disconnect is problematic given the interplay between health and education across the life course,³¹ and may be especially so in the case of immigrant children.³²

The underlying logic is that feeling well physically and doing well academically are intertwined; health problems disrupt the learning process by keeping children out of school and preschool (e.g., through absence, tardiness) or, when the children are present, by distracting them, reducing their concentration, and constraining their full engagement. These implications are far-reaching: early health is associated with socioeconomic attainment through adulthood.³³ As demonstrated by the author's mixed-methods research in Texas, this point is especially relevant to the children of immigrants.

The children of immigrants tend to have *mental* health profiles similar to or better than the children of natives. The link between immigration and *physical* health is more complicated.³⁴ Some evidence suggests that early childhood may be an at-risk period for immigrants in terms of physical health. Meanwhile, infant mortality rates are far lower (and positive birth outcomes far higher) among immigrants than might be expected given their general socioeconomic circumstances, a paradox that is particularly evident among Latin American immigrants.³⁵ At the same time, immigrant adolescents tend to avoid unhealthy behavior more than peers from native-born families, and immigrant adults tend to live longer than their native-born counterparts. Again, these patterns are evident even among Latin American immigrants, who tend to be socioeconomically disadvantaged. Such patterns are often attributed to health-promoting cul-

28 Donald J. Hernandez, Suzanne Macartney, Victoria Blanchard, and Nancy Denton, "Mexican-Origin Children in the United States: Language, Family Circumstances, and Public Policy," in *Growing up Hispanic: Health and Development of Children of Immigrants*, eds. Nancy Landale, Susan McHale, and Alan Booth (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, 2010), 169–85; Susan Landry, Jason Anthony, Paul Swank, and Pauline Monseque-Bailey, "Effectiveness of Comprehensive Professional Development for Teachers of At-Risk Preschoolers," *Journal of Educational Psychology* 101 (2009): 448–65; William T. Gormley, Ted Gayer, Deborah Phillips, and Brittany Dawson, "The Effects of Universal Pre-K on Cognitive Development," *Developmental Psychology* 41 (2005): 872–84.

29 Fuller, *Standardized Childhood*.

30 Krista Perreira and India J. Ornelas, "The Physical and Psychological Well-Being of Immigrant Children," *Future of Children* 21 (2011): 195–218.

31 John Mirowsky and Catherine E. Ross, *Education, Social Status, and Health* (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 2003).

32 Robert Crosnoe, "Health and the Education of Children from Racial/Ethnic Minority and Immigrant Families," *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 47 (2006): 77–93.

33 Ibid.

34 Crosnoe, "Health and the Education of Children from Racial/Ethnic Minority and Immigrant Families;" Perreira and Ornelas, "The Physical and Psychological Well-Being of Immigrant Children."

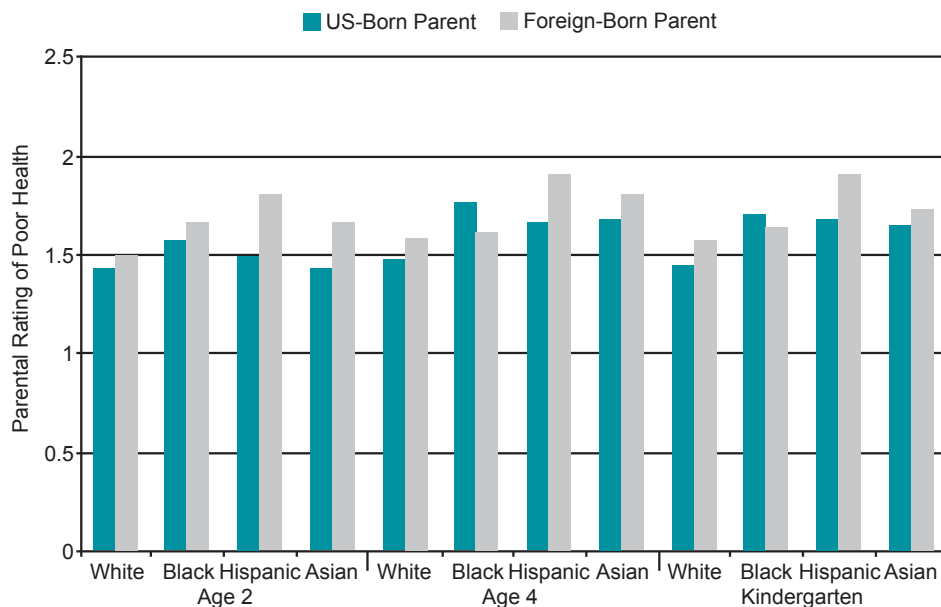
35 Robert A. Hummer, Daniel Powers, Ginger Gossman, Starling Pullum, and W. Parker Frisbie, "Paradox Found (Again): Infant Mortality among the Mexican Origin Population of the United States," *Demography* 44 (2007): 441–57.



tural factors like strong social ties and avoidance of behavioral health risks.³⁶ In early childhood, however, a period during which health and illness is more related to health care and exposure to pathogens than to behavior, the health profiles of the children of immigrants are not as positive relative to their peers with US-born parents. Some evidence suggests that they are more likely to experience common childhood illnesses, such as ear infections and respiratory illnesses.³⁷ Moreover, as demonstrated by the ECLS-B data presented in Figure 3, foreign-born parents rate the overall health of their children lower than US-born-parents do. This ECLS-B pattern is significant given how well parent ratings predict health and health-care use in the long term.³⁸ Although evidence of immigrants' early physical health risks is by no means consistent, it stands in stark contrast to the research on other stages of life, which provides a more positive picture of immigrant health.

Early childhood may be an at-risk period for immigrants in terms of physical health.

Figure 3. Parent Ratings of Poor Child Health across the Transition into Elementary School, by Race/Ethnicity and Immigration Status



Note: The surveyed parents rated their children's overall health on a scale from 1 (excellent) to 5 (poor).

Source: Analysis of ELCS-B data.

- 36 Perreira and Ornelas, "The Physical and Psychological Well-Being of Immigrant Children;" Ana F. Abraído-Lanza, Bruce P. Dohrenwend, Daisy S. Ng-Mak, and J. Blake Turner, "The Latino Mortality Paradox: A Test of the 'Salmon Bias' and Healthy Migrant Hypotheses," *American Journal of Public Health* 89 (1999): 1543-48; Kathleen M. Harris, "The Health Status and Risk Behaviors of Adolescents in Immigrant Families," in *Children of Immigrants: Health, Adjustment, and Public Assistance*, ed. Donald J. Hernandez (Washington, DC: National Academy, 1999): 286-347.
- 37 Fuller et al., "The Health and Cognitive Growth of Latino Toddlers;" Lisa J. Nelson, Eileen Schneider, Charles D. Wells, and Marisa Moore, "Epidemiology of Childhood Tuberculosis in the United States, 1993-2001: The Need for Continued Vigilance," *Pediatrics* 114 (2004): 333-41; Stella M. Yu, Juang Zhihuan, and Gopal Singh, "Health Status and Health Services Utilization among US Chinese, Asian Indian, Filipino, and Other Asian/Pacific Islander Children," *Pediatrics* 113 (2004): 101-07; Fernando S. Mendoza and Lori B. Dixon, "The Health and Nutritional Status of Immigrant Hispanic Children: Analyses of the Hispanic Health and Nutrition Examination Survey," in *Children of Immigrants: Health, Adjustment, and Public Assistance*, ed. Donald J. Hernandez (Washington, DC: National Academy, 1999), 187-243; Sylvia Guendelman, Paul English, and Gilberto Chavez, "Infants of Mexican Immigrants: Health Status of an Emerging Population," *Medical Care* 33 (1995): 41-52.
- 38 Ann Case, Darren Lubotsky, and Christina Paxson, "Economic Status and Health in Childhood: The Origins of the Gradient," *American Economic Review* 92 (2002): 1308-34.



Given that early childhood health risks are likely rooted in socioeconomic disadvantage and inadequate health-care access, policy approaches to counteracting such risk might involve socioeconomic support or increasing health-care access. Yet, both approaches are problematic when dealing with the immigrant population, as large segments — including many recently arrived legal permanent residents (LPRs) — are excluded from major health and human services programs. On the federal level, immigration-related restrictions on programs such as Temporary Aid to Needy Families, Medicaid, and the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP) are often severe. Unauthorized immigrants are generally excluded, but due to state discretion in offering services to immigrants based on their time in the United States, so too are many LPRs who have arrived more recently. Florida, for example — a major immigration state with a large low-income immigrant population — has traditionally taken the most immigrant-restrictive options in implementing public health and benefit programs. Across states, LPR families are less likely than their US-born counterparts to participate in public programs (with the exception of Medicaid/CHIP).³⁹

When it is implemented in 2013 and 2014, the *Affordable Care Act* (ACA) is likely to increase access among eligible immigrants by, for instance, expanding Medicaid income standards. Yet, even eligible immigrants still have difficulty accessing health care and other public benefit programs due to fears about deportation, lack of awareness, and confusion about the status of US-born children with foreign-born parents.⁴⁰ Partnerships between state officials and community-based organizations targeting immigrant communities are addressing some of these problems. Health and related programs run through schools by various health-care providers and organizations represent another promising practice.⁴¹ Notably, attempts to address the physical health disadvantage of immigrant children should also protect their previously mentioned mental health advantage over (or parity with) peers from native-born families.⁴²

C. Family-School Partnerships

Parental involvement in education is one component of family-school partnerships. These partnerships have been a central feature in theoretical models of learning and achievement; meanwhile, their lack is correlated with socioeconomic and demographic disparities.⁴³ In discussions of early learning and school readiness among the children of immigrants, focusing on parenting behavior is somewhat controversial and raises difficult questions about differences in cultural values.⁴⁴ Still, parental involvement needs to be considered, if only because it is featured prominently in major educational policies aiming to reduce achievement gaps, as exemplified by the family-school compact provision of the *No Child Left Behind Act*.⁴⁵ At the same time, focusing on family-school partnerships more broadly (instead of parental involvement alone) can address some of these concerns, as doing so places attention on how schools receive and elicit parental actions and not just on the parents themselves.

Evidence indicates that parents’ construction of home-learning environments, interactions with school personnel, and participation in school activities can promote learning and achievement. Such actions

39 Karina Fortuny and Ajay Chaudry, *Immigrant Access to Health and Human Services: Comprehensive Review of Existing Information* (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, 2011), <http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/11/ImmigrantAccess/Review/index.shtml>.

40 Ibid.

41 Robert Crosnoe, Juan Manuel Pedroza, Kelly Purtell, Karina Fortuny, Krista Perreira, Kiersti Ulvestad, Christina Weiland, Hirokazu Yoshikaw, and Ajay Chaudry, “Promising Practices for Increasing Immigrants’ Access to Health and Human Services” (ASPE Issue Brief, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, US Department of Health and Human Services, Washington, DC, May 2012), <http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/11/immigrantaccess/practices/rb.shtml>; Krista Perreira, Robert Crosnoe, Karina Fortuny, Juan Manuel Pedroza, Kiersti Ulvestad, Christina Weiland, Hirokazu Yoshikaw, and Ajay Chaudry, “Barriers to Immigrants’ Access to Health and Human Services Programs” (ASPE Issue Brief, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, US Department of Health and Human Services, May 2012), <http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/11/ImmigrantAccess/Barriers/rb.shtml>.

42 Crosnoe, “Health and the Education of Children from Racial/Ethnic Minority and Immigrant Families.”

43 Joyce L. Epstein, Mavis G. Sanders, Beth S. Simon, Karen C. Salinas, Natalie R. Jansorn, and Frances L. Van Voorhis, *School, Family, and Community Partnerships: Your Handbook for Action* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, 2002).

44 Crosnoe and Lopez-Turley, “The K-12 Educational Outcomes of Immigrant Youth.”

45 Joyce L. Epstein, “Attainable Goals? The Spirit and Letter of the No Child Left Behind Act on Parental Involvement,” *Sociology of Education* 78 (2005): 179–82.



demonstrate to children that their parents value education; they also stimulate cognitive development, increase parents' understanding of the inner workings of schools, and give parents a standing in schools that enables them to advocate for their children.⁴⁶

Immigrant parents, however, often score lower on conventional measures of involvement, especially those that tap visible, school-based activities.⁴⁷ Figure 4 shows the means for school- and home-based activities of children in kindergarten (using the ECLS-K). The two major immigrant groups (Latino, Asian) are compared to their US-born same-ethnicity peers as well as US-born whites. US-born white parents' *school involvement* is significantly higher than all other groups. Among Latinos, a clear split favors US-born parents; among Asian parents, there is no difference between immigrants and the US-born. For *home involvement*, differences across groups are smaller, but US-born parents score better among both Latinos and Asians.

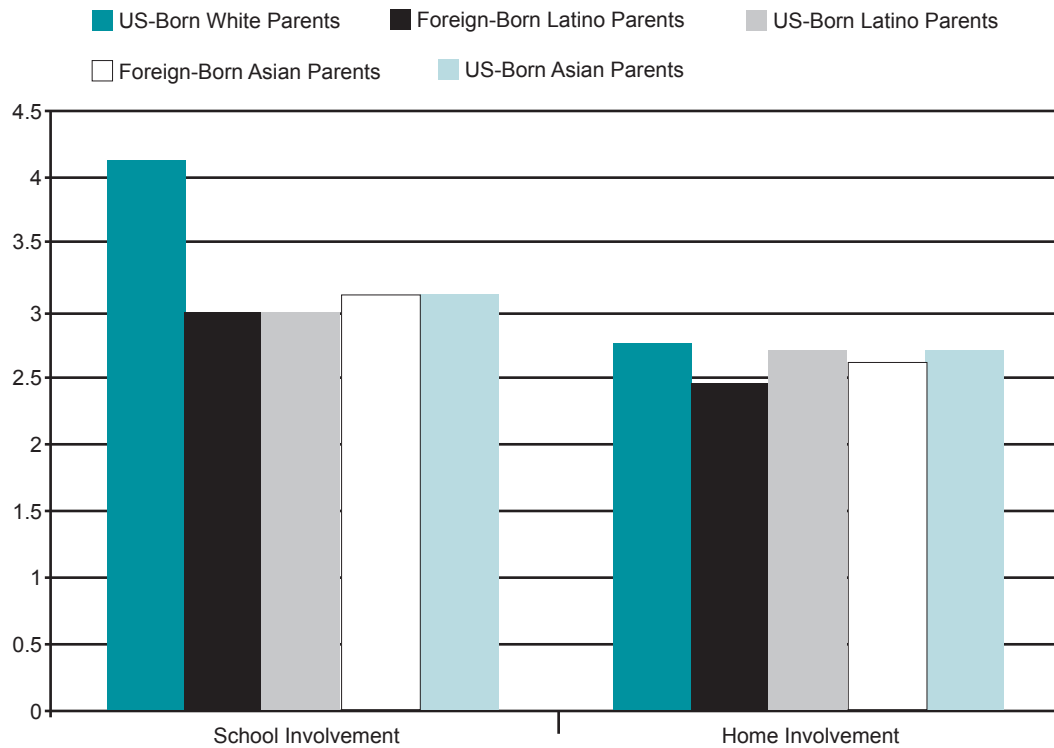
Immigrant parents often score lower on conventional measures of involvement.

Similar trends have been found by other studies. These patterns do not speak to differences in parents' values or motivations. Instead, they reflect socioeconomic and language differences: socioeconomic standing empowers parents to be more involved and language barriers reduce participation. They also reflect immigrant parents' more limited knowledge of American schools, the ways in which the US system emphasizes and rewards visible involvement, and cultural differences in how people defer to authority. "Demand" also plays a part, as when school personnel do less to elicit and support the involvement of immigrant parents, perhaps because of biased expectations.⁴⁸

46 Eva Pomerantz, Elizabeth Moorman, and Scott Litwack, "The How, Whom, and Why of Parents' Involvement in Children's Academic Lives: More is Not Always Better," *Review of Educational Research* 77 (2007): 373–410; Annette Lareau, *Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race, and Family Life* (Berkeley, CA: University of California, 2003); Kathleen Hoover-Dempsey and Howard M. Sandler, "Why Do Parents Become Involved in Their Children's Education," *Review of Educational Research* 67 (1997): 3–42.

47 Crosnoe, *Mexican Roots, American Schools*.

48 Crosnoe and Kalil, "Educational Progress and Parenting among Mexican Immigrant Mothers of Young Children;" Jennifer Glick, Littisha Bates, and Scott Yabiku, "Mother's Age at Arrival in the United States and Early Cognitive Development," *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* 24 (2009): 367–80; Min Zhou and Susan S. Kim, "Community Forces, Social Capital, and Educational Achievement: The Case of Supplementary Education in the Chinese and Korean Immigrant Communities," *Harvard Educational Review* 76 (2006): 1–29; Gerardo Lopez, "The Value of Hard Work: Lessons on Parent Involvement from an (Im)migrant Household," *Harvard Educational Review* 71 (2001): 416–37; Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco, *Children of Immigration*.

**Figure 4. Mean Involvement in Education among Parents of Kindergarteners, by Race/Ethnicity and Immigration Status, 1999**

Notes: School involvement based on seven activities in the past year (e.g., attended PTA meeting, attended parental advisory meeting). Each item scored 1/0 and summed. Home involvement based on six activities (e.g., reading, working with art). Each item was on 4-point scale (1, not at all; 4, every day) and averaged.

Source: Data come from Early Childhood Longitudinal Study Kindergarten (ECLS-K) cohort.

Although cases can certainly be made for and against the inherent value and policy impact of parental involvement in education,⁴⁹ the value placed on them by American schools is undeniable. Consequently, fostering family-school partnerships might help immigrant children during the critical transition period from preschool to elementary school. Models for doing so can be found in schools that have developed parental involvement programs designed for the schedules of migrant workers, community-based organizations that provide immigrant parents with information about school expectations of their involvement, and advocacy organizations that promote the “parent as teacher” by helping parents build home-learning environments for young children.⁵⁰ The author’s own mixed-methods research in central Texas has revealed a potentially powerful role of parent support specialists — liaisons between home and school supported by Title I funds — in linking immigrant (and often non-English speaking) parents to school personnel. These parent support specialists often have the ear of teachers and administrators and are viewed by parents as their advocates.

49 Thurston Domina, “Leveling the Home Advantage: Assessing the Effectiveness of Parental Involvement,” *Sociology of Education* 78 (2005): 233–49.

50 Margaret Bridges, Shana R. Cohen, and Bruce Fuller, *Abriendo Puertas: Opening Doors to Opportunity. A National Evaluation of Second-Generation Trainers* (Berkeley, CA: Institute of Human Development, University of California, Berkeley, 2012), http://ihd.berkeley.edu/AP_OD%20Brief%20101212%20FINAL.pdf; Lauren Goldenberg and Daniel Light, *Lee y Seras: Evaluation Report* (New York: Education Development Center, Inc., 2009), <http://teacher.scholastic.com/products/face/lib/funding/LEEYSERASOSCEOLAFEVALAUTIONREPORT.PDF>; Gerardo Lopez, Jay D. Scribner, and Kanya Mahitivanichcha, “Redefining Parental Involvement: Lessons from High-Performing Migrant-Impacted Schools,” *American Educational Research Journal* 38 (2001): 253–88.



IV. Conclusions

Overall, the children of immigrants in the United States are doing better than expected in the educational system, given the many disadvantages they face. Yet, in relative terms, the transition into elementary school may be a challenging time for them and, as such, a critical point of intervention. Any disparities in school readiness may carry through the rest of K-12 education, lowering the educational and socioeconomic attainment of the growing number of children from immigrant families.

Here, the report has focused on three — and only three — ways to possibly reduce disparities between the educational outcomes of the children of immigrants and their US-born counterparts. These three were chosen not only because of their potential efficacy but also because they are feasible targets of policy intervention. Because disparities are educational, the first point of action would seem to be the school: i.e., pre-K expansion and parent-engagement strategies. Yet, research clearly shows that immigration-related disparities emerge from a complex web of influences across systems. Thus, focusing on other aspects of children's development with a history of policy action (e.g., health) expands the range of policy options.

Overall, the children of immigrants in the United States are doing better than expected in the educational system, given the many disadvantages they face.

The three options explored in this report are all areas of significant current national, state, and local policy activity. Ongoing ACA implementation promises to improve the health-care coverage of many immigrant parents and their children — albeit with exclusions for those who are unauthorized. Early education expansion has opened opportunities to improve the school readiness of immigrants' children across a number of states, even when constrained by tight budgets —including the federal budget sequester that has cut Head Start enrollment. Maintaining and improving such investments during the critical phases of early childhood will be the key to promoting their future academic achievement and productivity as adults in the workforce.



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