AMERICAN CHILDREN WITH IMMIGRANT PARENTS MORE LIKELY TO LIVE IN POVERTY, LESS LIKELY TO GRADUATE HIGH SCHOOL


New York, NY -- Though children in immigrant families are tracking fairly evenly with children of U.S.-born parents when it comes to parental employment, and even better in terms of parental presence in the home and early health indicators, many of these children are still facing a lifetime of hardship as a result of poverty, lack of access to health insurance, and limited educational achievement according to a new report, *Children in Immigrant Families: Essential to America’s Future*. The report, by the Foundation for Child Development (FCD), an independent grant making foundation focused on child well-being, is the first ever to provide a detailed assessment of the quality of life of the one in four children in the U.S. who are the sons and daughters of immigrants.

“America has always been a land of immigrants. They bring assets that are essential to our nation’s growth, including optimism and faith in the virtues of work, family, and their adopted communities,” says Ruby Takanishi, president of FCD. “In addition, as evidenced by their high rates of employment, immigrant parents do well when they have some control. However, their children still face huge struggles. Somewhere along the line, the system is failing them.”

Specific findings from the report include:
- 66 percent of children in immigrant families live with at least one securely employed parent, only three percentage points less than children with U.S.-born parents, at 69 percent.
- 30 percent of children in immigrant families live below the federal poverty level, compared to 19 percent of children with U.S.-born parents.
- 25 percent of children in immigrant families do not graduate high school, versus 18 percent of children with U.S.-born parents.
- Only 7 percent of children who are Dual Language Learners become proficient in reading in English by the end of third grade, versus 37 percent for students whose first language is English.
- Children who are Dual Language Learners are only one-third as likely as English Only Learners to be proficient in mathematics by the end of the third grade (14 percent versus 44 percent).
- 15 percent of children in immigrant families are not covered by health insurance, compared to 8 percent of children with U.S.-born parents.
- Only 25 percent of children with immigrant parents are living in a one-parent family, compared to 30 percent of children with U.S.-born parents.

Donald J. Hernandez, author of the report, finds the education statistics particularly troubling. “Studies have found that those who are unable to read by the fourth grade are unlikely to ever catch up, and are four times more likely to drop out of school,” says Hernandez. “These data show us that our education system is failing nine out of ten Dual Language Learner students in the U.S., and even a substantial majority of children whose first language is English. We simply must ensure that Dual Language Learners — and all children — are given a better foundation for learning.”
Children in Immigrant Families also offers specific recommendations for closing the gaps between children of U.S.-born and immigrant parents, and for increasing well-being for all American children.

Recommendations include:

- Federal, state, and local governments should increase their investments in PreK, as well as support an integrated PreK-3rd approach (linking PreK curriculum, standards, and assessment with those of classes from kindergarten through third grade).

- Governments should ensure that schools receive funding to develop and implement effective programs and services for Dual Language Learners, as well as proven models for how to instruct these students and track their progress over time.

- Key health insurance laws should be revised or augmented to allow and facilitate health insurance coverage for children who are not currently covered, including all children in immigrant families, regardless of their documentation status.

- Federal and state governments should invest in policies that increase educational opportunities for immigrant parents to improve job skills, thereby increasing their potential to earn incomes that would lift their families out of poverty.

- Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) should be reformed to allow all non-citizen immigrants to receive benefits.

“One out of four American children are children in immigrant families, and nine out of ten of those children are American citizens,” says Hernandez. “Healthy, well-educated children are critical to a strong, secure, and prosperous nation, because the children of today are the ones who will be joining the labor force, starting their own families, and entering voting booths for the first time during the coming decades. By not investing in these children we not only undermine our future as a country, but also diminish their opportunities to become productive members of their communities.”

ABOUT THE REPORT

Children in Immigrant Families: Essential to America’s Future is based on FCD’s Child Well-Being Index (CWI), the most comprehensive measure of children’s quality of life in the United States. Results are reported for a composite of 17 key indicators in five Quality-of-Life Domains for which it is possible to distinguish children in immigrant families (with at least one foreign-born parent) from children with U.S.-born parents (both parents born in the U.S.).

ABOUT THE FOUNDATION FOR CHILD DEVELOPMENT

The Foundation for Child Development (FCD) is a national private philanthropy in New York City dedicated to promoting a new beginning for American education from PreKindergarten through Third Grade (PreK-3rd). The Foundation promotes the well-being of children, and believes that families, schools, nonprofit organizations, businesses, and government at all levels share complementary responsibilities in the critical task of raising new generations.

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