



The Challenges of Change

Learning from the Child Care and Early Education
Experiences of Immigrant Families

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5. Accessibility of Child Care and Early Education for Immigrant Families

Immigrant families seeking child care and early education for their young children face many of the same barriers faced by other families. In our research, we found that the following barriers affect immigrant families in unique ways:

- Affordability for immigrant families,
- Availability in immigrant communities,
- Strict eligibility criteria and complex enrollment processes,
- Fear of accessing federal programs, and
- Inadequate language access.

Affordability for Immigrant Families

High-quality child care and early education is often unaffordable for immigrant families. Immigrants are overrepresented in low-wage work, making the high costs of child care particularly difficult to meet (see Table 6 for average state costs of child care). In 2005, immigrants comprised 12 percent of the total U.S. population, 15 percent of all workers, and 21 percent of all low-wage workers—those earning less than 200 percent of the federal minimum wage. In 2004, 35 percent of male immigrant workers and 38 percent of female immigrant workers earned less than 200 percent of the federal minimum wage, compared to 21 percent and 30 percent of their male and female U.S.-born citizen counterparts.¹



¹ Capps et al., *Trends in the Low-Wage Immigrant Labor Force, 2000-2005*.

Low-wage workers are more likely to work irregular and non-traditional shifts, nights, and weekends—making it even more difficult to secure child care.² Many providers told us that working immigrant families often turn to family, friend, and neighbor caregivers or utilize shift work in order to patch together child care arrangements. Parents’ use of family, friend, and neighbor care reflects both choices and constraints. Children in low-income families are more likely than those in upper-income families to be in family, friend, and neighbor care.³ Some immigrant families may choose family, friend, and neighbor care for reasons related to trust. They may seek caregivers who are culturally and linguistically similar to them and who share cultural views on child rearing. Other families may rely on family, friend, and neighbor caregivers because other child care options are unaffordable or unavailable in their neighborhoods.

Child care subsidies can help low-income, working families afford the child care they need. Yet, in most states, child care subsidies are underfunded.⁴ In every community we visited, there were waiting lists for child care assistance. Many places had frozen enrollment. Waiting lists, which sometimes require more than six months of waiting, are not an option for immigrant families who need to arrange care immediately in order to secure employment—particularly when legal status or residency in the U.S. is dependent upon employment. Refugee families, in particular, must make child care arrangements more rapidly than other groups, as during the resettlement process they must move swiftly into employment and toward self-sufficiency.⁵

TABLE 6. ANNUAL CHILD CARE COSTS IN SELECTED STATES

| State | Average Cost of Infant Care | Average Cost of Four-Year-Old Care |
|------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Arkansas | \$4,020 | \$3,384 |
| California | \$9,691 | \$7,622 |
| Colorado | \$8,892 | \$7,020 |
| Florida | \$6,342 | \$4,948 |
| Georgia | \$4,878 | \$4,025 |
| Maryland | \$10,314 | \$6,515 |
| New York | \$10,185 | \$8,530 |
| Oklahoma | \$4,423 | \$3,940 |

Source: National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies, *Breaking the Piggy Bank*. Costs are based on the cost of care in a licensed child care center.

- 2 Presser, *Working in a 24/7 Economy: Challenges for American Families*.
- 3 Capizzano and Adams, *Children in Low-Income Families are Less Likely to be in Center-Based Child Care*.
- 4 See Matthews and Ewen, *Child Care Assistance in 2005*; Ewen and Matthews, *Families Forgotten*; Schulman and Blank, *State Child Care Assistance Policies 2006*.
- 5 Fidazzo et al., *Enhancing Child Care for Refugee Self-Sufficiency*.

Across the sites visited, we heard about the need for affordable child care. In Morrow, Georgia, a group of Latina immigrant mothers with young children told us each of them at some point had sought child care in order to work but had found that care was too expensive. Whatever they would earn, they told us, they would have to turn over to a child care provider. Consequently, at the time of the interview most were not working. Only one mother was aware of child care subsidies, and she was misinformed regarding immigrant eligibility.⁶

In San Jose, California, immigrant parents reported in focus groups that the shortage and high cost of licensed and center-based care were barriers to their employment. They did not think that licensed child care was available in their neighborhood; and they said that, when it was available, it was too expensive.⁷

Many of the licensed immigrant family child care providers we interviewed were caring not for young children of immigrants but for children of U.S.-born parents. Once these immigrant providers had obtained licensure, they were able to increase rates; and they priced themselves out of the lower-paying, informal child care market. Family child care providers told us that U.S.-born parents can afford to pay more for the care and that they are interested in their children learning another language.

Most families are working and cannot pay the cost of child care with their wages. Minimum wage, even with dual incomes, can't pay for child care. When you have multiple children it becomes impossible.

—Child care resource and referral provider, Springdale, Arkansas

Availability in Immigrant Communities

High-quality child care and early education programs are insufficiently available for all families. In particular, our research found:

- An inadequate supply of high-quality slots for young children in immigrant communities,
- Barriers to accessing programs outside immigrant communities, and
- Program hours that may not meet the needs of working immigrant families.

An Inadequate Supply of High-quality Slots for Young Children in Immigrant Communities

In every community we visited, children of immigrants and children of U.S.-born citizens alike face an inadequate supply of publicly funded programs. Overall, the supply of child care in an area is influenced by the wealth of a neighborhood, maternal employment and education levels, and the presence of community-based organizations that advocate for state and federal

6 Interview with mothers at Tara Elementary School, Morrow, Georgia, October 27, 2005.

7 City of San Jose, California, *Exempt Care Collaborative*.

funding to increase the supply.⁸ The supply of high-quality child care options generally is limited in poor and low-income neighborhoods, oftentimes where immigrants are concentrated.⁹ When the supply of affordable, high-quality child care and early education is inadequate, language barriers and unfamiliarity with enrollment procedures put immigrant families at a disadvantage competing for limited slots.

The supply of high-quality child care and early education may be less available in neighborhoods with high proportions of speakers of languages other than English.¹⁰ In a multilingual poll in California, 40 percent of Latino parents and 23 percent of Asian parents responded that there were not quality, affordable child care centers in their neighborhoods.¹¹

I need to work to support our five children but can't find child care that I can afford, and I don't have transportation.

—Sudanese mother, Atlanta

One study of California parents leaving welfare found that limited English proficient (LEP) parents are more likely to secure a child care slot when there is a larger supply of care in a neighborhood.¹²

In many low-income neighborhoods in the sites CLASP visited, there were few quality child care spaces. For example, there is only one Head Start center in Miami's "Little Haiti" area.¹³ In the Mayfair neighborhood of San Jose—which includes a transitory population of immigrants—there are many immigrant-serving organizations but few quality child care spaces. Mayfair has too few Head Start programs to meet demand and no licensed family child care providers.¹⁴ Some providers reported that it can be difficult in some immigrant communities to find a child care provider who accepts child care subsidies.¹⁵

A shortage of programs for infants and toddlers is common in all communities. For example, there is no Early Head Start program in the Rogers and Bentonville area of Northwest Arkansas and only a small number of slots in Springdale and Fayetteville. In Gilroy, California, women reported bringing their babies with them to English as a Second Language (ESL) classes. They find it distracting and would like to have child care for their very young children, but the family literacy program through which they attend ESL does not have the space to care for children under age three, and other child care providers are not available in the community.¹⁶

8 Chang et al., *Deepening the Dialogue*.

9 Fuller et al., "Welfare Reform and Child Care Options for Low-Income Families."

10 Hernandez et al., "Early Childhood Education Programs."

11 New America Media, *Great Expectations*.

12 Hirshberg et al., "Which Low-income Parents Select Child Care?"

13 Interview with Sophia Lacroix, Sant La Haitian Neighborhood Center, Miami, December 15, 2005.

14 City of San Jose, California, *Exempt Care Collaborative*.

15 Interviews with Jessyca Feliciano, Committee for Hispanic Children and Families, New York, New York, October 20, 2005 and Ellen Beattie, International Rescue Committee, Decatur, Georgia, October 24, 2005.

16 Interview with staff and parents at Mexican American Community Service Agency (MACSA), MACSA Family Literacy Center, Gilroy, California, February 9, 2006.

Even recent attention to four-year-old pre-kindergarten programs does not appear to have sufficiently addressed the issue of inadequate supply in immigrant communities. Most state pre-kindergarten programs have waiting lists or cannot serve all eligible children.¹⁷

For example, Georgia has a pre-kindergarten program universally available to four-year-olds in the state, regardless of income or other risk factors. In reality, however, some four-year-olds are denied on the basis of an inadequate supply of slots in their neighborhood.¹⁸ Providers—which include public schools, private child care centers, and Head Start centers—are funded for a certain number of slots and cannot necessarily provide pre-kindergarten services to all children who apply to their program. Registration is typically held in the spring prior to the fall semester, which, once slots are filled, virtually eliminates newcomer families from participating in pre-kindergarten in public schools. Providers in Atlanta noted that immigrant and refugee families who arrive midyear may have trouble finding a slot in Georgia Pre-K.¹⁹

In DeKalb County schools, there is a one-day lottery for public school slots. While community-based pre-kindergarten providers offer enrollment all year long, slots fill up quickly, particularly in neighborhoods with high concentrations of four-year-olds. In one community in Gwinnett County, the increase in the number of Georgia Pre-K slots allocated to the centers serving that county did not keep pace with the number of four-year-old children in refugee and immigrant families. Furthermore, Gwinnett public schools do not provide Georgia Pre-K. Despite some increases in pre-kindergarten slots in this area, made by the Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning, it remains difficult for some immigrant families to secure an open space with a community-based provider.²⁰

In Northwest Arkansas, there are waiting lists for all programs—including the Arkansas Better Chance (ABC) pre-kindergarten program, Head Start, and private programs. Often, if a family arrives after the school year has started, all the slots are full. While private funds are helping to fill the gap, there is still unmet need. A report by Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families projected the unmet need for slots in the ABC program to be over 1,400 in Washington County and over 1,100 in Benton County, two counties in the Northwest Arkansas area that CLASP visited.²¹

17 An exception is Oklahoma, where 70 percent of four-year-olds attend the state pre-kindergarten program.

18 Meeting with immigrant and refugee service providers at Refugee Family Services, Clarkston, Georgia, October 28, 2005; meeting with parents and SPARK Hub coordinators, La Escuelita, Norcross, Georgia, October 25, 2005.

19 Interview with Ellen Beattie, International Rescue Committee, Decatur, Georgia, October 24, 2005; meeting with immigrant and refugee service providers at Refugee Family Services, Clarkston, Georgia, October 28, 2005.

20 Roberta Malavenda, e-mail to authors, March 25, 2007.

21 Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families, *Quality Pre-K Expansion in Arkansas*.

Barriers to Accessing Programs Outside Immigrant Communities

There are two primary reasons that the location of child care and early education matters to immigrant families: transportation difficulties and trust. When programs are located in proximity of immigrant communities, families are more comfortable using them. Many early childhood programs are unable to provide transportation for families, which also affects access. If programs are not within walking distance, many families cannot use them. Transportation was mentioned repeatedly to CLASP as a barrier to finding or participating in any early childhood program, including parent involvement in early childhood settings. Recent immigrants, particularly LEP parents, face additional challenges accessing information about public transportation systems and routes.²² Furthermore, most of the sites we visited had either inadequate or nonexistent transportation systems. In many areas, families have only one car, which the working parent takes to work. In many cases, mothers stay at home and care for young children without access to transportation.²³

In Atlanta, La Escuelita, a play and learn group, provides bilingual social and cultural activities, as well as cognitive skill development, for primarily three-year-old children and their caregivers prior to enrollment in Georgia Pre-K. SPARK Georgia helps these families access Georgia Pre-K when the children are four years old. La Escuelita (“the little school”) was designed by families in an apartment complex where many immigrant families live in order to provide a preschool experience prior to pre-kindergarten, to alleviate transportation issues, and to facilitate parent involvement.

Immigrant families go through frequent transitions. In some communities, immigrant families first arrive in one neighborhood and, as they get more established, move to another, where they can get better housing. Often, the new neighborhood is not close to immigrant-serving organizations or other services with bilingual staff.²⁴

In communities in which the population is changing or transitioning, programs that are available to low-income families may be located in neighborhoods that are no longer low income. A center, for example, may not have the capacity to move with the changing demographics. In Oklahoma, where a

large number of four-year-olds are enrolled in state pre-kindergarten, some Head Start centers lack the capacity to move and open new centers. Instead, they serve three-year-olds in their present location—while there are underserved locations and areas where four-year-olds are still in need of the comprehensive services provided by Head Start (even if they are enrolled in Oklahoma pre-kindergarten). Without resources, Head Start cannot reach the communities that are in need of its services, including recent immigrant populations in new locations.²⁵

22 U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Transportation Services*.

23 Interviews with staff at YWCA, Tulsa, Oklahoma, March 14, 2006; Irma Chajecki, Catholic Charities, Tulsa, Oklahoma, March 15, 2006.

24 Interview with staff at Child Care Resource Center, Tulsa, Oklahoma, March 13, 2006.

25 Interview with Kay Floyd, Head Start State Collaboration Office, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, March 16, 2006.

Many families do not access child care and early education programs outside their neighborhood because they are unlikely to travel outside their comfort zone.²⁶ One provider in San Jose told us that the experience of some recent immigrants in the U.S. may be as small as a five-block radius. For this reason, immigrants have more difficulty accessing programs that are not in their community.²⁷ Many immigrant-serving organizations report that immigrants—especially LEP individuals—are unlikely to access programs that are outside their neighborhood due to fear or to a hesitancy to navigate an unfamiliar culture.



Families may distrust unfamiliar providers and fear immigration consequences or anti-immigrant sentiment. Latina immigrant mothers in Gilroy, California told us that they do not trust child care centers outside their community. They do not know them, and they are unfamiliar with what services they offer.²⁸ In the Atlanta area, immigrant families who are unable to secure a pre-kindergarten slot with one of the limited number of providers located within proximity of their neighborhoods are unlikely to attend pre-kindergarten in another setting, due to issues of both transportation and fear. Immigrant families are more likely to trust providers who they know within their community and who are currently serving other immigrant families in their community.

One strategy to reach immigrant families is through programs targeted to particular immigrant groups in communities where those groups are concentrated. For example, it is possible for an immigrant-serving organization to develop an early learning program as part of its array of services, or for a program to target immigrant families who may be underrepresented in other programs:

- The Latino Community Development Agency (LCDA), located in a predominantly Latino neighborhood in Oklahoma City, has a multitude of programs addressing family education and support, youth prevention and growth, housing, and community health. LCDA also houses an Early Head Start program that serves 30 children from birth through three years of age. This center is the only bilingual, three-star-rated child care facility in Oklahoma.²⁹ Other services include evening ESL and computer classes, which

26 Interview with staff at Choices for Children, San Jose, California, February 8, 2006.

27 Interview with Paul Miller, Kidango, San Jose, California, February 6, 2006.

28 Interview with staff and mothers at Mexican American Community Service Agency (MACSA), MACSA Family Literacy Center, Gilroy, California, February 9, 2006.

29 Oklahoma uses a statewide quality rating system, “Reaching for the Stars,” to rate licensed child care facilities, in order to improve child care quality. The minimum level of quality (one star) is equivalent to basic licensing. Three stars is the highest ranking a facility can receive and indicates that the program meets quality standards above basic licensing criteria and is nationally accredited.

offer child care, and a family resource program that provides home visits and parenting classes. The LCDA building also houses a community health center.³⁰

- The Chinese-American Planning Council (CPC) in New York City coordinates over 70 programs at 33 locations citywide, including 12 child care centers that serve children from six months to 12 years. Child care centers emphasize developing English language skills, along with a multicultural curriculum to help children transition from home to school. CPC also offers child care resource and referral and interpreter services.³¹
- In Montgomery County, Maryland, Centro Familia runs a demonstration model preschool targeted to low-income children from several different immigrant groups. It serves about 30 children from LEP families. Centro Familia's "La Escuelita" is designed as a cooping school. This supports the family's involvement in their children's education, provides family literacy, and helps parents understand the importance of early childhood development and their role in their child's education. La Escuelita also serves as a training center for parents who wish to become community teachers. La Escuelita's curriculum is aligned with the local school system; the instructional time is in English, but the school-day is bilingual. Children's progress is measured three times a year with ECOR (Early Childhood Observation Record). A family support specialist works with families to create a family development plan, provides comprehensive services (such as medical screenings and developmental assessments), and coordinates extra-curricular activities.³²

Location and time are barriers. We just cannot find child care that offer[s] care besides nine to five in our neighborhood. Basically, you have to travel three hours everyday. So even if you want to utilize, it is hard when you work.

—Bangladeshi parent,
New York City

Program Hours May Not Meet the Needs of Working Immigrant Families.

There are not enough full-day and full-year state pre-kindergarten and Head Start programs, yet parents need access to settings that support their work hours. According to the National Institute for Early Education Research, only eight states require their pre-kindergarten programs to be a full school day, and most state programs operate only during the school year.³³ Head Start programs may operate for as little as 3.5 hours a day. Nationally, fewer than half of Head Start slots (47 percent) provide services for at least six hours per day, five days per

week.³⁴ Community-based child care centers may do better at catering to nine-to-five workers, but rarely do they accommodate shift workers and night hours. Many providers reported that

30 Interview with Patricia Fennel, Latino Community Development Agency, Oklahoma City, April 24, 2006.

31 Interview with Lois Lee, Queens School Age Day Care Center, Chinese-American Planning Council, New York, October 19, 2005.

32 Pilar Torres, e-mail to Hannah Matthews, May 3, 2007.

33 Barnett et al., *The State of Preschool*.

34 Head Start PIR 2006.

immigrant families, like many other working families, often are juggling multiple jobs and are unable to use part-day programs.

An immigrant mother in Clayton County, Georgia told us that she tried to enroll her younger child in Head Start but was unable to participate because the hours were different from those of state pre-kindergarten, which her four-year-old child attended.³⁵ In Miami, Latino immigrants described being happy with the services offered by Head Start. Yet, they reported having to take seasonal work during the summer in order to stay home with their children when Head Start was not operating.³⁶

There are almost no options outside of 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. Parents need to drop off their children before 7 a.m. and pick them up after 6:30 p.m. Parents are in entry-level jobs; lots of them are working two to three shifts. There are no child care options. They have to take trains across town and be at work by 7 a.m. or 8 a.m. Child care is not usable in a 24/7 economy.

—Immigrant service provider, Atlanta

In Broward County, Florida, fewer than half of the four-year-olds eligible for Voluntary Pre-kindergarten (VPK) were served in the first year of the program. The Broward school board has attributed the low take-up rate to working families' need for full-day services and has recommended expanding the program to better meet this need.³⁷

Child care programs also may not be able to provide sufficient hours for low-income working families. Families working in entry-level jobs with early mornings or late nights may find themselves with few or no child care options. In California, only 3 percent of centers and 39 percent of family child care homes provide care during nontraditional hours.³⁸ For parents who work rotating schedules, securing stable child care can be even more difficult.

Redlands Christian Migrant Association (RCMA) in Homestead, Florida is a Florida Voluntary Pre-kindergarten (VPK) provider. Florida VPK funds slots for three and one-half hours per day, 180 days per year. RCMA uses additional funds to provide a full-year, full-day program from 7 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., to meet the needs of children with working parents.

Strict Eligibility Criteria and Complex Enrollment Processes

Strict eligibility criteria and complex enrollment processes pose significant barriers to enrollment for immigrants. Research on access to public benefits show that immigrants may be deterred from applying for benefits for themselves or for their children for a variety of reasons, including

35 Interview with mothers at Tara Elementary School, Morrow, Georgia, October 27, 2005.

36 Florida Immigrant Advocacy Center, *Final Report for Breaking Down Barriers*.

37 Nancy Lieberman, Power Point Presentation for Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten, 2007, <http://eagenda3.broward.k12.fl.us/eAgenda/1004/29279/Files/01230701.pdf>.

38 California Child Care Resource and Referral Network, *The 2005 California Child Care Portfolio*.

confusion over complicated eligibility rules.³⁹ CLASP found that the following serve as barriers and may prevent immigrants from applying for and enrolling in child care and early education:

- Complex enrollment processes and systems navigation;
- Immigrant status, employment, and income-eligibility criteria; and
- Insufficient information in program materials.

Complex Enrollment Processes and Systems Navigation

Enrolling in an affordable, high-quality program is a challenge for many families. For immigrant families with little knowledge of the various systems, navigating the patchwork of programs and understanding and meeting the sometimes complex requirements for enrollment can be an insurmountable barrier. This is especially true for immigrant parents with limited English skills. Since the number of slots is limited for some programs, the families who are most successful in obtaining those slots are those who are the most assertive and knowledgeable about enrollment processes—often as a result of having been in the United States for a longer period of time or being connected to a larger network of more established immigrants. Often, securing enrollment requires knowing when a waiting list will be opened up or being available to register at a single place and time. Immigrant families that are disconnected from information about enrollment are at a disadvantage to other families without similar cultural and linguistic barriers. In its report for the Breaking Down Barriers study, Refugee Family Services wrote:

Refugee Family Services, through SPARK Georgia, and other programs, helps many families apply for Head Start. However, the process is complicated and there is a waiting list. Many refugee and immigrant families are unaware of the availability of Head Start or how to enroll, are often over-income, and may be too late to obtain a slot.⁴⁰

Complex enrollment processes put immigrant families at a disadvantage. Families that attempt to enroll but either are confused by the process or ultimately are unable to secure an available slot can be discouraged from trying again. This frustration is intensified for families that have difficulty getting to appointments due to transportation barriers or inflexible employment. The failure to secure a slot in a particular program can have a snowball effect in immigrant communities, as families will tell their relatives, friends, and neighbors about their difficult experiences.⁴¹

39 Holcomb et al., *The Application Process for TANF, Food Stamps, Medicaid and SCHIP*.

40 Refugee Family Services, *Immigrant and Refugee Family Voices*.

41 Meeting with immigrant and refugee service providers at Refugee Family Services, Clarkston, Georgia, October 28, 2005.

State pre-kindergarten. The state pre-kindergarten programs at the sites we visited vary considerably in their enrollment process. In Georgia, instead of using a centralized registration system, families register at the location where they want their child to attend. Each individual pre-kindergarten provider sets its own registration date and time. Thus immigrant families must have access to information regarding what providers are available in their communities and when they will hold registration. In order to secure a space, a family may need to be on waiting lists at several different sites.

In April, Georgia Pre-K has a lottery for the slots in public schools, to start in September. After April, no one can sign up, because the slots are already taken. Families may be able to get a pre-kindergarten slot with a community-based provider as they become available throughout the year, but it is difficult to predict where and when this will happen. One Atlanta-area immigrant mother, whose four-year-old child was not enrolled in Georgia Pre-K, told us that she was on the waiting list for three different pre-kindergarten sites.⁴² Every year, Refugee Family Services in Stone Mountain, Georgia, assists and registers more than 60 refugee children in Georgia Pre-K—but they are able to serve only a fraction of the families that need support.⁴³

The first year of Florida VPK—which is delivered in both public schools and community-based settings—was the 2005-2006 school year. While there was an initial pre-registration period for families, pre-registering did not guarantee placement with a family's preferred pre-kindergarten provider. Immigrant service providers in Miami's Haitian community reported that families mistakenly thought they had enrolled their children after the initial registration and were not aware of the need to do a final registration. Language and literacy barriers within the community exacerbated confusion about an unfamiliar program. Haitian parents were also discouraged by the fact that the program was only available for three hours per day, especially because they would be required to pay out of pocket for any additional hours of wrap-around child care.⁴⁴

I didn't know about pre-K registration, and when I tried to get in there were no more openings at the school. Refugee Family Services helped me find Stella Child Care Center [a community-based pre-kindergarten provider] and my child is enrolled there. We are so happy!

—Kurdistani mother, Atlanta

I did not know that there is public child care assistance. But I think I would prefer to use a private Korean child care, because it is an easier process and I don't feel comfortable disclosing personal information. If I use any public assistance it could jeopardize my citizenship.

– Korean parent, New York City

42 Meeting with parents and SPARK Hub coordinators, La Escuelita, Norcross, Georgia, October, 25, 2005.

43 Refugee Family Services, *Immigrant and Refugee Family Voices*.

44 Interview with Sophia Lacroix, Sant La Haitian Neighborhood Center, Miami, December 15, 2005. Florida VPK offers two options for four-year-olds: a school-year program totaling 540 hours or a summer program totaling 300 hours.

Child care assistance. Subsidy policies and practices, including application processes and interactions with subsidy agencies, affect whether eligible families use subsidies.⁴⁵ Families are often subjected to a complex set of steps in order to access a program. Immigrants may be uninformed about each step in the application process, and LEP individuals are likely to face additional barriers securing child care subsidies.⁴⁶

Very few immigrant families are using child care subsidies. They probably are avoiding the system. Typically, navigating the system is very time consuming. It's easier to find relative care than to navigate the voucher system.

—Head Start provider,
Fayetteville, Arkansas

Some child care programs offer only one location at which parents can apply for the program, a place that may not be accessible for all families. In Montgomery County, Maryland, working families who are not receiving public assistance have to travel to the county Department of Health and Human Services office, which is not easily accessible without a car, to apply for a child care subsidy.

On the other hand, co-location of services can be beneficial to families. In Boulder, Colorado and Springdale, Arkansas, health and human service offices are co-located in one building. An accessible point of entry that is co-located with other services a family may need—for example, county health departments at which children receive immunizations and parents receive job resources and referrals—provides some convenience to families with limited transportation options. It may also be an additional opportunity to provide families with accurate information about high-quality child care and early education.

Immigrant Status, Employment, and Income-eligibility Criteria

Although most state early education programs do not have immigration status restrictions, we found that some families—as well as some providers—mistakenly believe that young children of immigrants are not eligible for government-funded programs. Ninety-three percent of children of immigrants under age six are U.S. citizens; another 4 percent are legal noncitizens.⁴⁷ Therefore, nearly all children of immigrants should be eligible for most government-funded programs.

State pre-kindergarten. Most states—perhaps all of them—do not require a Social Security number (SSN) for the purpose of enrolling in pre-kindergarten.⁴⁸ In practice, however, many

45 Adams et al., *Getting and Retaining Child Care Assistance*.

46 Snyder et al., *Strategies to Support Child Care Subsidy Access and Retention*.

47 Capps et al., *The Health and Well-Being of Young Children of Immigrants*.

48 The Privacy Act of 1974, section 7(a), prohibits states from denying an individual a right, benefit, or privilege provided by law because the individual refuses to disclose his or her SSN, unless the disclosure is required by federal statute. When a state requests that an SSN be provided, the state, under section 7(b) of the Privacy Act, must inform the individual whether the disclosure is voluntary or mandatory, by what statutory or other authority the SSN is solicited, and what uses will be made of it.

school districts may request an SSN at the time of enrollment. The Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning explicitly states that SSNs are not required for participation in the state pre-kindergarten program.⁴⁹ Each state, however, handles enrollment procedures differently, and some states appear to have procedures that would present challenges for immigrant families.

Head Start. In a few sites, providers and parents believed that the children of undocumented parents could not enroll in Head Start. We found that enrollment procedures sometimes compound confusion among immigrant families. While Head Start programs request an SSN at enrollment, it is optional for families to provide it. Yet, families do not always realize this. A group of Latina mothers in Atlanta was under the impression that undocumented children were not allowed to attend Head Start and that the program requires an SSN. Requesting (optional) SSNs on enrollment forms created widespread misunderstanding of actual eligibility rules.⁵⁰ Asking families to provide an SSN—even if it is voluntary—can deter immigrants from applying, regardless of whether a program has explicit immigration restrictions. Since in most cases SSNs cannot be obtained for immigrants who do not have permission to work in the United States—even for some who are residing in the U.S. *legally*—SSNs can be used, wrongly, as a proxy for immigration status.⁵¹ Parents may be reluctant to enroll in a program if they fear that it is using information to make determinations about immigration status or that it may report information about immigration status to other agencies.

I enrolled my child in Head Start. It was complicated, but I got help. My child is doing very well. It is important for him to learn English and to learn how to play with other children.

- Afghani mother, Atlanta

Chapter 5
Accessibility

Head Start requires families to provide proof of income upon enrollment. If a family is paid in cash or does not have paycheck stubs or other documentation, programs are permitted to accept a letter from an employer verifying the worker's income.⁵² We found that some programs have taken an additional step of calling employers to verify the letter. Some employers are reluctant to disclose that they are paying someone in cash—and possibly not paying Social Security or other taxes—and so will not cooperate to verify the employment. Some Head Start programs had the misconception that without this verification, a family's eligibility cannot be determined.

49 See FAQs at <http://www.decal.state.ga.us/PreK/Prekservices.aspx?page=mainfaqs>.

50 Meeting with parents and SPARK Hub coordinators, La Escuelita, Norcross, Georgia, October, 25, 2005.

51 Some applicants for permanent residency—such as battered women, trafficking victims, and those with Temporary Protected Status—are eligible to receive permission to work but may not yet have work authorization granted. Applicants for asylum must wait five months before they can apply for permission to work. Immigrants who are not permanent residents, refugees, or asylees must get permission to work from the Department of Homeland Security before they can apply for an SSN.

52 Head Start Program Performance Standards, 45 CFR, 1305.4 (b)(4)(d).

Child care assistance. Eligibility for Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) funded child care subsidies is based on a child’s immigration status, not a parent’s.⁵³ Since nearly all young children of immigrants are citizens, most immigrant families should be eligible for child care subsidies, provided they meet other eligibility criteria. According to the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO), at least one of the states we visited had a child care subsidy policy that was clearly not in compliance with U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) policy. At the time of our site visit, the Arkansas policy stated that if neither parent is a citizen or legal resident, then the application must be denied.⁵⁴ We found that the Arkansas application asked for the SSN and immigration status of every member of the

The cities of Boulder and Longmont, Colorado use local funds to expand eligibility for child care subsidies to families who may not qualify for federal child care subsidies for reasons other than income, including immigration restrictions or inability to document income.

household. Even in some states with policies consistent with HHS policy, other eligibility requirements—such as documenting parental employment and child support enforcement cooperation—disproportionately impact immigrant families accessing child care subsidies.

Child support cooperation requirements involve providing information about the non-custodial parent’s employment, which again could be problematic if that parent is being paid in cash or is working without permission. Child support cooperation requirements may also deter survivors of domestic violence—who may not want contact, direct or indirect, with the non-custodial, abusive parent—from seeking assistance.⁵⁵

Unlike in Head Start and pre-kindergarten, parental work status is a factor in determining CCDBG eligibility. We were told that work eligibility and verification requirements for child care subsidies create barriers for immigrant families and are too complicated and restrictive. A focus group of child care providers in Miami’s Little Haiti indicated that “many needy families were unable to access free or low-cost [child care] services because of certain eligibility requirements.”⁵⁶ Many Haitians are employed in seasonal work and therefore may not be able

53 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, *Clarification of Interpretation of “Federal Public Benefit” Regarding CCDF Services*, Program Instruction, Log. No. ACYF-PI-CC-98-08, 1998, http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ccbf/law/state_topic_eligibility.htm.

54 Family Support Unit Policy Manual, p. 17, Section 3.1.1. The GAO found during its site visit to Arkansas that the state’s eligibility requirements appeared to violate the HHS guidance. HHS told the GAO that it was unaware of the problem and was discussing it with the state to resolve it. HHS said it had received no complaints about it from families. U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Report to Congressional Requestors, Child Care and Early Childhood Education*.

55 Federal law does not require parents to seek child support from the non-custodial parent in order to obtain a child care subsidy. However, several states—including Arkansas, Maryland, New York, and Oklahoma—have state requirements. While states may require cooperation with child support, they may not withhold collected support to repay the costs of child care. See Paula Roberts, *Child Support Cooperation Requirements and Public Benefit Programs: An Overview of Issues and Recommendations for Change*, Center for Law and Social Policy, 2005.

56 Letter from Gepsie Metellus, Executive Director of Sant la Haitian Neighborhood Center, Miami, to Miami-Dade County Legislative Delegation, November 29, 2005.

to access a child care subsidy. In order to receive a subsidy, both parents must be working—although in many families, employment status fluctuates.

A study of the child care arrangements of children in Migrant and Seasonal Head Start programs found that fluctuation in migrant families' income during the summer months also results in families losing their child care subsidies, or in an increase in required co-payments. Sometimes, families are forced to withdraw their children from child care.⁵⁷

Unsubsidized child care. There is also confusion about eligibility for *unsubsidized* private child care. Because most providers ask for a child's birth certificate—in order to document age—some immigrant families believe that they are required to be citizens or have lawful status. Advocates told the Florida Immigrant Advocacy Center (FIAC) that child care centers require parents to have lawful immigration status. However, when FIAC called child care centers in areas with high concentrations of immigrants, they found that most of the centers require only the child's birth certificate, as proof of age.⁵⁸ Immigrant-serving organizations can play a mediating role by conveying accurate information to families.

Insufficient Information in Program Materials

Program materials sometimes leave out important eligibility information, focusing instead on persuading families to apply. Application forms and other materials that are missing information can ultimately lead to frustration for families. For example, Head Start, child care subsidies, and some state pre-kindergarten programs might not advertise detailed income-eligibility requirements up front. But providers mentioned that families need to know what the income restrictions are before they apply, so they have some idea of whether they are eligible.

We also found that outreach and enrollment materials for child care assistance often do not directly address immigrant eligibility.⁵⁹ In some communities, programs may not want to call attention to the fact that a parent's immigration status is not required for determining eligibility, so they intentionally omit this from outreach materials. However, we also found that a simple lack of explicit mention of immigrant eligibility can reinforce immigrants' misunderstanding that they do not qualify.

57 Kloosterman et al., *Migrant and Seasonal Head Start and Child Care Partnerships*.

58 Florida Immigrant Advocacy Center, *Final Report for Breaking Down Barriers*.

59 See, for example, flyer, "Boulder County, Colorado Child Care Assistance Program," Aspen Family Services, Inc., Boulder, Colorado, April 2005; and flyer, "Is the Cost of Child Care a Problem for You?" City of Boulder, Housing and Human Services, Boulder, Colorado, Rev. April 2005. Both flyers are in English and Spanish and provide general information about the Colorado Child Care Assistance Program and the Boulder Child Care Certificate Program (which provides Gap or Cliff benefits). They do not include information related to immigrant eligibility.

Other important information to include in outreach is whether parents are required to be working and whether the program has limited space. The Montgomery County, Maryland Department of Health and Human Services has bus advertisements in English and Spanish that ask, “Do you need help to pay for child care?” The advertisement includes the subsidy office’s address and hours, a chart listing the gross income levels for various household sizes, and a phone number to call for more information. Another Montgomery County bus sign in English and Spanish provides more general information about Head Start and the targeted pre-kindergarten program. This sign states that if you are low income, bilingual, and a resident of the county, you may be eligible for pre-kindergarten and should contact the agency to learn more about eligibility.

Fear of Accessing Federal Programs

Many immigrant families fear consequences of accessing federal programs. Fear of being reported to immigration authorities or of affecting immigration status, future citizenship, or

Immigrant parents, including those with lawful status, may avoid applying for child care and early education programs for their young children for fear of issues related to immigration or distrust of government.

petitions for family members contributes to immigrants’ lower use of public benefits.⁶⁰ Our site visits confirmed that immigrant parents, including those with lawful status, may avoid applying for child care and early education programs for their young children for fear of issues related to immigration or distrust of government.

Even immigrant families with citizen children or legal resident children are often afraid to apply for child care subsidies.⁶¹ While less than one-third of young children of immigrants have at least one parent

who is in this country unlawfully, many immigrant families are mixed status. Parents may fear that they or other household members may be reported to immigration authorities. Only four agencies are required by federal law to report those whom they know are in the United States unlawfully—and only under very limited circumstances.⁶² However, at the local level, some eligibility workers may feel an obligation to report parents, especially if the parents are not willing to disclose their immigration status or SSNs. In Tulsa, early education providers told us that they advised immigrant families not to apply for Food Stamps or other government-funded benefits—even for their citizen children—as some county social service eligibility workers, at least in the past, have reported individuals to the Department of Homeland Security. In 2000, HHS and the U.S. Department of Agriculture issued guidance that state applications and processes for accessing public benefits that have the effect of deterring

60 Holcomb et al., *The Application Process for TANF, Food Stamps, Medicaid and SCHIP*; Fremstad and Cox, *Covering New Americans*.

61 Coalition for Asian American Children and Families, *Breaking Down Barriers*; interview with staff at YWCA, Tulsa, Oklahoma, March 14, 2006.

62 The four agencies are the Social Security Administration, HHS, the U.S. Department of Labor, and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Immigration and Naturalization Service, 65 Fed. Reg. 58301-03 (September 28, 2000).

eligible applicants and recipients based on their national origin may violate Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.⁶³ Title VI requires agencies that receive federal financial assistance to take reasonable steps to provide meaningful access to their programs, activities, and services.

In Florida's Miami-Dade and Broward Counties, there is an atmosphere of heightened fear due to increased enforcement activity by the Department of Homeland Security, which has included immigrants being pulled off city buses for questioning.⁶⁴ FIAC received a call from a private child care provider asking what should be done if the parent of one of their children is detained by Homeland Security. The provider said that some parents withdrew their children from child care because of fear of immigration raids. In their report for the Breaking Down Barriers study, FIAC wrote:

*Parents fear that they will be asked for documents in all settings, including when they try to place their child in child care or early childhood education programs. Many live in fear of even leaving their home and being permanently separated from their children. Moreover, immigrants are afraid to seek help for their most basic needs, and quality child care is not a high priority under these circumstances.*⁶⁵

Many immigrant families, including legal immigrants and naturalized citizens, fear that accessing federal benefits might impact either a parent's application for permanent residency or citizenship or the family's ability to bring other family members to the United States. Under the Immigration and Nationality Act, the United States can exclude people from immigrating to the United States or subject them to deportation if they are likely to become or have become a "public charge."⁶⁶ Although guidance from the U.S. Department of Justice clarifies that immigrants should feel safe accessing almost all forms of non-cash assistance and that receipt of public benefits does not affect eligibility for citizenship, many immigrants, including those lawfully present, do not want to risk jeopardizing their immigration status.⁶⁷ A Head Start program in San Jose told CLASP about an immigrant mother of a child with special needs who was referred by the school district to Head Start and withdrew the application once she found

63 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and U.S. Department of Agriculture, *Policy Guidance Regarding Inquiries into Citizenship, Immigration Status and Social Security Numbers in State Applications for Medicaid, State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), and Food Stamp Benefits*, http://www.hhs.gov/ocr/national_origin/triagency.html.

64 Interview with Cheryl Little and Mary Gundrum, Florida Immigrant Advocacy Center, Miami, December 13, 2005.

65 Florida Immigrant Advocacy Center, *Final Report for Breaking Down Barriers*.

66 *Classes of aliens ineligible for visas or admission*, 8 U.S.C. 1182(a)(4); *Classes of deportable aliens*, 8 U.S.C. 1227(a)(5).

67 U.S. Department of Justice, *Field Guidance on Deportability and Inadmissibility on Public Charge Grounds*, 64 Fed Reg. 28689, March 26, 1999.

out that Head Start was federally funded.⁶⁸ Confusion about the effect of public charge and about what benefits might trigger a public charge-related consequence was cited by a number of immigrant-serving providers.

States can issue guidance to clarify immigrant eligibility and immigration consequences for programs. For example:

Guidance from the U.S. Department of Justice clarifies that immigrants should feel safe accessing almost all forms of non-cash assistance and that receipt of public benefits does not affect eligibility for citizenship. Yet, many immigrants do not want to risk jeopardizing their immigration status.

- The 2005 Oklahoma Department of Human Services' (OKDHS) Public Assistance Procedures clarify that it is the responsibility of the U.S. Customs and Immigration Services (USCIS) to determine immigration status. The policy states that OKDHS employees should not report applicants and/or recipients to USCIS and clarifies that persons who are not applicants and/or recipients should not be asked about their citizenship status. Workers are directed to report to the state those individuals who admit that undocumented immigrants are part of the household, who present forged information, or who present a formal order of deportation or removal.⁶⁹ OKDHS workers who provide information to an outside agency may be in violation of privacy protections. Oklahoma specifically "restricts the use or disclosure of information concerning applicants or recipients of child care services to purposes directly connected with the administration of the program."⁷⁰ The policy also states that the child is considered the applicant/recipient of child care assistance and that the applicant is not required to provide SSNs for any member of the household in order to receive child care assistance.⁷¹
- The New York Bureau of Early Childhood Services has issued a policy statement related to compliance with the Privacy Act. The statement clarifies the narrow circumstances in which SSNs are to be collected from family child care providers and centers and what the procedures are when an SSN is not available. It clarifies that assistants and substitutes are not required to provide SSNs.⁷²

68 Interview with Adolfo Pando, Head Start, Santa Clara and San Benito Counties, San Jose, California, February 8, 2006.

69 See *Public Assistance Procedures, Eligibility for Benefits*, OAC 340:65-3-4 (p10), revised 5-12-05.

70 See OAC 340:40-1-5.

71 Id, OAC 340:40-7-5, revised 7-1-04. OKDHS guidance was issued prior to passage of Oklahoma HB 1804 in May 2007.

72 See Policy Statement, ID Number: 96-5 (updated May 2005).

Inadequate Language Access

Head Start, child care subsidy administration agencies, and school districts are all recipients of federal funds and therefore are required to comply with Title VI. Yet, language access remains a barrier, particularly for immigrants who speak languages other than English or Spanish.

Language access affects immigrant groups differently. In New York City, immigrants from the Dominican Republic reported few issues accessing services in Spanish, but Korean immigrants experienced difficulties related to language.⁷³

Bilingual and bicultural providers can facilitate access to programs. At some sites we visited, county agencies had no staff, or insufficient numbers, proficient in the languages spoken by LEP families in the community. CLASP found that many local agencies that are responsible for assisting families and determining their eligibility for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, Medicaid, Food Stamps, Head Start, and child care subsidies do not have bilingual capabilities—such as interpreters or translated applications, forms, or other written information. In addition to Title VI requirements, city agencies in New York are required to translate forms into nine major languages. At the time of our site visit, providers reported that the Administration for Children’s Services and the Human Resources Administration had not done most of the translations and that the 211 call line for information about public services only had two Spanish speakers and no access to a line for other languages.⁷⁴

The New York Department of Education has an interpreter and translation unit that provides language assistance to individual school sites, including preschools. The Oklahoma Department of Human Services (OKDHS) provides a language line for its field offices to access when they have a client with limited English proficiency. OKDHS has also translated its application for child care assistance into Spanish. However, at the time of our site visit, OKDHS did not translate re-

In response to changing demographics, the Oklahoma Child Care Resource and Referral Association in Oklahoma City hired its first Hispanic services coordinator in 2005. The coordinator position is funded through the Oklahoma Department of Human Services. The coordinator is bilingual and bicultural, representing the Mexican majority immigrant population in that area. She works with local child care resource and referral agencies to develop language-access plans for serving Spanish-speaking families. She also provides direct referrals for Spanish-speaking families, conveying information on the importance of early childhood development, quality child care, and the maintenance of home language. Since hiring the bilingual coordinator, the agency has experienced an approximately 60 percent increase in Spanish-speaking callers, particularly in Oklahoma City.

73 Coalition for Asian American Children and Families, *Breaking Down Barriers*.

74 Interview with Jessyca Feliciano, Committee for Hispanic Children and Families, New York, October 20, 2005.

determination letters sent to clients, which are generated by computers. Therefore, minority-language speakers who are successful in obtaining a subsidy may risk losing it unless they have

The greatest need is to hire more bilingual staff. We saw a dramatic increase [in enrollment] when bilingual staff was hired, materials were translated, and staff represented the community.

—Child care center administrator,
New York City

translated information on what steps they must take during the redetermination process in order to maintain the subsidy.⁷⁵

An HHS report on the issue of cultural and linguistic diversity in Head Start found that many communities reported difficulty in recruiting and enrolling families who speak languages other than English, due to language and cultural barriers. Head Start programs also reported difficulty in finding interpreters of specific languages to help with recruitment. Other difficulties in some areas include recruitment of well-trained bilingual staff and maintaining a staff that includes people

who speak all languages represented among students in a program. Programs also reported communication problems between staff and parents who do not speak English.⁷⁶

Boulder, Colorado's Kids Connections ran a cultural mediation program to serve monolingual Spanish-speaking families receiving early intervention services in the cities of Boulder and Longmont. Bilingual and bicultural mediators did more than just interpretation—they also served as a bridge to services by translating the concept and practices of early intervention, and they helped to build trust with families. Cultural mediators also shared information with families on early childhood development and assisted them in accessing local resources.⁷⁷

School districts are required to comply with Title VI, even if the state does not have a bilingual education program. CLASP found that many school districts lack adequate bilingual staff—even in communities that are traditional gateways for immigrants—and that parents face difficulties in receiving information from schools in their native languages. The New York Department of Education's Web site has been translated into eight different languages—Arabic, Bengali, Chinese, Haitian Creole, Korean, Russian, Spanish, and Urdu. Its Translation and Interpretation Unit provides translation services and interpreters for schools and offices. It also provides an archive of translations of common forms and notices that schools and offices can download, as well as glossaries, signage indicating that interpreter services

are available, and sample tags that let LEP parents know that they can get a document translated and get interpreter services.⁷⁸

75 Interview with Division of Child Care staff, Oklahoma Department of Human Services, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, March 16, 2006.

76 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Commissioner's Office of Research and Evaluation and the Office of Head Start, *Celebrating Cultural and Linguistic Diversity in Head Start*.

77 In 2006, Kids Connections folded due to state funding changes to Part C services delivery and withdrawal of the grant for the cultural mediation program.

78 See <http://schools.nyc.gov/Offices/Translation/default.htm>.

As of September 5, 2006, a chancellor’s regulation is in effect that requires all schools and central and regional offices in New York to provide LEP parents with “a meaningful opportunity to participate in and have access to programs and services critical to their child’s education.”⁷⁹ Implementation of the regulation included information about how schools and offices can budget for the cost of the language assistance. Yet, after the regulation was issued, few immigrant parents and individual schools sites were aware of it—so problems continued. Still, with more community education and advocacy, this may be a promising model.

The Child Care Resource Center, a child care resource and referral agency in Tulsa, Oklahoma, experienced a significant increase in Spanish-speaking callers after hiring a bilingual referral specialist and increasing marketing.

An early education provider in New York reported a dramatic increase in enrollment after translating materials and hiring bilingual staff who represent the community.⁸⁰ In the Atlanta area, the DeKalb County School District’s International Student Center has bilingual staff, headsets for interpreters, and other resources that schools in the district can access to help with translation and interpretation. DeKalb County has staff interpreters onsite for most pre-kindergarten registration; it also has pre-kindergarten application forms in Spanish and Vietnamese.⁸¹ Going forward, DeKalb schools will be distributing flyers in multiple languages to key agencies in the community—including immigrant-serving organizations—to increase outreach among immigrant and refugee families.⁸²

Literacy issues add another layer of difficulty to language access. Parents with low literacy in their home language may not be able to read translated materials. Some immigrants, particularly those who have arrived most recently, have had only a few years or even no formal education in their home countries.⁸³ Many providers emphasized the importance of face-to-face contact with parents and the fact that information needs to be received orally. Head Start in Santa Clara County, California can send a staff person to a family’s home to help families with low literacy complete application forms.

79 See *Regulation of the Chancellor, Number A-663*, issued June 7, 2006, New York City Department of Education.

80 Coalition for Asian American Children and Families, *Breaking Down Barriers*.

81 Interview with administrators at International Community School, DeKalb County School District, Decatur, Georgia, October 26, 2005.

82 Refugee Family Services, *Immigrant and Refugee Family Voices*.

83 Interview with staff at YWCA, Tulsa, Oklahoma, March 14, 2006.

Strategies That Work

Several communities have come up with strategies to increase the supply of high-quality child care and early education available in immigrant communities and to make early education more accessible to immigrant families:

- **Targeted programs in immigrant communities.** One strategy to reach immigrant families is to target programs to particular immigrant groups in communities where they are concentrated. For example, an immigrant-serving organization might develop an early education program as part of its array of services; or an early education program might target immigrant families that are underrepresented in other programs. In order to be able to provide these additional services, such agencies need resources and support for capacity building.
- **Reaching families where they are.** All settings, including informal settings, can be included in early education initiatives. Opportunities to reach parents as well as family, friend, and neighbor caregivers should be sought, particularly in areas where transportation is difficult and where immigrant women in particular may be isolated with their young children.
- **Increasing the supply of child care through contracts.** While most states provide child care assistance to families through vouchers or certificates, states may also provide assistance through grants or contracts—formal agreements between a state and a provider to serve a set number of children, thus guaranteeing that those slots exist. Contracts are a way to build the supply of child care accessible to low-income families in specific neighborhoods with concentrations of immigrant families. States may also require that child care services provided through direct contracts with local programs be enhanced and tailored to meet the needs of these children and families.⁸⁴
- **Providing access to full-day, full-year programs.** Many working immigrant parents need access to full-day and full-year child care for their young children. Providers may braid together multiple funding sources—including child care subsidies and state pre-kindergarten—in order to provide families with full-day, full-year services.
- **Expanding eligibility for child care subsidies.** States have tremendous flexibility in setting policies for child care subsidies. In addition, localities can use their own funding to go beyond eligibility determined by the state.
- **Clarifying immigrant eligibility rules and simplifying enrollment.** Administrators can issue guidance to local programs on immigrant eligibility for public programs. They

⁸⁴ Schumacher et al., *Untapped Potential*. In 2003, several states used contracts to meet the child care needs of specific populations, including migrant workers.



can also review enrollment requirements and forms to simplify and thus encourage immigrant families to apply.

- **Using trusted messengers.** Families may fear that accessing any public programs, including child care and early education, will have immigration consequences. Successful programs are able to help immigrant families access programs by establishing trust through the use of trusted messengers. At all levels, programs can work to create relationships and partnerships with local organizations serving immigrant families. These partners can also help immigrant families navigate complex enrollment systems.
- **Creating a language access plan.** Federally funded programs are required to provide meaningful access to LEP families. Language access is about more than just translating documents and using interpreters. Child care and early education programs can elicit the help of immigrant-serving organizations, cultural mediators, and leaders representative of immigrant communities to ensure that language needs are adequately addressed, as well as to access translation services.
- **Co-locating services.** Access to services for immigrant families—and for all working families—can be facilitated by co-locating multiple services and/or agencies in the proximity of immigrant neighborhoods. This reduces potential transportation issues and eases systems navigation for immigrant families; it also can provide the opportunity to inform immigrant families about high-quality child care and early education when they are accessing other services.

Key Findings: ACCESSIBILITY

CLASP found that many child care and early education programs are unavailable or inaccessible for immigrant families:

- High-quality child care and early education is insufficiently available in immigrant communities.
 - There is a lack of affordable, high-quality child care and early education opportunities; and what programs do exist often have waiting lists or cannot serve all eligible children.
 - Programs that are located outside immigrant neighborhoods are often unavailable, due to both transportation barriers and issues related to fear.
 - Part-day pre-kindergarten programs may be unusable for working families.
 - Strict eligibility criteria, paperwork requirements, and complex enrollment processes serve as further barriers for immigrants attempting to access child care and early education programs.
 - Immigrant families often have a difficult time navigating complex systems—particularly when language access is inadequately addressed—and therefore are less likely to secure enrollment in programs with limited slots.
 - Many immigrant families avoid publicly funded programs for fear, grounded or otherwise, of immigration consequences. This is true of families of all immigration statuses.
-