

**CLASP**  
CENTER FOR LAW AND SOCIAL POLICY



# The Challenges of Change

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

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## **PART IV.** Promoting Awareness, Accessibility, and Responsiveness for Immigrant Families in Child Care and Early Education

The rapid growth in diverse immigrant populations brings new challenges to many communities. It also brings a sense of urgency to respond to changing demographics to ensure that young children of immigrants—the vast majority of whom are U.S. citizens—have access to high-quality child care and early education, which is critical for their later school success. While CLASP’s research identified a number of barriers to immigrant families’ participation in child care and early education, it also uncovered a wide range of promising strategies being used to create meaningful connections between immigrant families and child care and early education and to break down those barriers to access. In this section, we put forward a set of recommendations for federal, state, and local policymakers, advocates, private foundations, and researchers in order to improve the quality of child care and early education and make it more accessible for all children.



## 7. Recommendations

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In the research presented in this report, we identified three main areas serving as barriers to the participation of immigrant families with young children in high-quality child care and early education: 1) awareness, 2) accessibility, and 3) responsiveness. To address these areas, we make the following recommendations for federal, state, and local policymakers and other actors:

1. Promote coordination and collaboration between the child care and early education and the immigrant- and refugee-serving communities.
2. Design child care and early education programs and policies that intentionally address the needs of immigrant families with young children.
3. Strengthen child care and early education systems to improve and expand access to high-quality services for young children in immigrant families.
4. Build the linguistic and cultural competency of state and local agencies and child care and early education programs.



Within these four broad recommendations are a number of more specific recommendations relevant to policymakers, administrators, providers, private foundations, researchers, and advocates. Communities have different histories, immigrant population demographics, available resources and infrastructure to support immigrant families with young children, and governance structures. Thus implementation of the following recommendations will vary by community.

## 1. Promote Coordination and Collaboration Between the Child Care and Early Education and the Immigrant- and Refugee-serving Communities.

**States and localities should provide leadership and commitment to ensure access to programs and services, including high-quality child care and early education.** The integration of immigrant families into local communities should be a governance function of state, county, and local governments, which should form interagency workgroups to develop plans to ensure immigrant families' access to state and local programs and services, including child care and early education. Possible models for other states and communities include Illinois's Office of New Americans Policy and Advocacy, Santa Clara's Immigrant Relations and Integration Services project in the Office of Human Relations, and New York City's Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs. Cities and counties can create multicultural or diversity plans to guide them toward comprehensive, culturally competent service provision.

**States should establish Early Learning Councils or other coordinating bodies to create a unified child care and early education system.** These bodies should create immigrant task forces, comprised of child care and early education providers and immigrant representation from diverse communities, to form policy and guide development of technical assistance, outreach, and professional development opportunities. Task forces should include decision makers at the highest possible levels and should be involved in all aspects of policymaking.

**States should support local coordination and collaboration.** They can do this by providing resources, as well as by creating incentives that reward local child care and early education programs that show they have formed strong partnerships with immigrant-serving organizations or can demonstrate in other ways that they are collaborating with trusted messengers within immigrant communities in their area.

**Localities should increase collaborations between child care and early education and immigrant-serving organizations, providers, administrators, and advocates.** The child care and early education community and the immigrant-serving community often operate independently of each other. Formal and informal collaborations can take many forms, including:

- Ensuring that immigrant leaders are represented on the governing boards of child care and early education programs;
- Entering into memoranda of understanding regarding referrals and provision of mutual in-service training;

- Joint development and review of documents, materials, and information developed for immigrant families; and
- Joint application for funds to create and expand quality programs, including parental supports such as cultural mediators and targeted outreach.

**Localities should establish partnerships between child care and early education programs, early elementary schools, and immigrant parents.** These groups should work collaboratively to develop mechanisms and programs to support the smooth transition of young children in immigrant families to kindergarten, including supporting and promoting the involvement of immigrant parents. Local programs may look to the Head Start Program Performance Standards on transition for guidance in developing transition plans.

**Private funders—including foundations, corporations, and others—should support collaboration and partnerships between immigrant-serving organizations and the child care and early education community.** Immigrant-serving organizations and local child care and early education organizations are rarely funded to participate in collaborative activities, which can take substantial staff time and organizational resources. Private foundations, corporations, and other funders can provide seed money to leverage additional funds for collaborative efforts at the local level, along with helping to facilitate collaborative efforts across communities.

## 2. Design Child Care and Early Education Programs and Policies That Intentionally Address the Needs of Immigrant Families With Young Children.

**The federal government—including the U.S. Department of Education and the Child Care Bureau in the Office of Family Assistance, the Office of Head Start, and the Office of Civil Rights in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services—should provide guidance, technical assistance, oversight, and information on best practices, including but not limited to:**

- Implementation of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 regulations as they relate to ensuring access to child care and early education for persons with limited English proficiency. Guidance should provide specific steps for child care and early education administrators and providers to take to comply with Title VI requirements. The guidance should encourage the development of language assistance plans and inclusion of language assistance costs as part of a program’s administrative or program costs for purposes of applications for federal assistance.
- Guidance on other policies that serve as potential barriers to immigrant families, such as methods to verify income and child support cooperation

- Guidance for early childhood programs in schools, clarifying whether it is permissible under the Privacy Act of 1974 for such programs to request Social Security numbers
- Guidance to state and local program administrators on collecting better data on languages spoken at home by immigrant families with young children and on staff language proficiency for child care and early education providers, through improvements to the Head Start Program Information Report and Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) state reports. As necessary, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) should provide guidance on definitional issues related to the collection of data and recommendations for statutory changes that will allow the agency and state grantees to collect this information.

**Federal agencies should improve data collection and reporting on young children in immigrant families.** The Census and the American Community Survey include information on place of birth, citizenship status, and language spoken at home.<sup>1</sup> In order to support research and analysis, the U.S. Census Bureau should make this information accessible and easily understood to all data users. Census data on young children of immigrants—in particular, U.S.-born citizen children born to immigrants—should be available, and all immigrant family data should include information by age group. The Census Bureau, HHS, and the Department of Education should provide grants to support analysis of these data sets.

**The federal and state governments, as well as other funders, should support research to create developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate curricula and assessment tools.** There is a deficit of curricula and assessment tools that are appropriate for speakers of languages other than English and for children from diverse cultures. The federal Child Care Bureau, the Office of Head Start, and the Institute on Education Sciences—as well as state agencies implementing pre-kindergarten programs and private foundations—should invest in long-term research and evaluation studies designed to identify best practices in curriculum and assessment, foster new methods of data collection and evaluation, and incorporate limited English proficient (LEP) parents and other community partners into the design and implementation of assessments.

**The federal government and private funders should support research to better understand the child care and early education experiences of young children of immigrants.** There is a critical need for continued research on participation, family preferences, and ongoing access barriers, research that examines the important variations that exist within the heterogeneous immigrant population. Future evaluations of child care and early education programs should include a focus on outcomes across the range of developmental domains for children of immigrants and English language learners. Promising

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1 The American Community Survey is intended to replace the “long form” U.S. Census in 2010.

strategies and models for better responding to the needs of different subpopulations of immigrant children and families are emerging, and future research should test their effectiveness and impact.

**Federal and state governments should provide resources for targeted child care and early education outreach to immigrant families.**

Outreach should include activities in immigrant neighborhoods, face-to-face information sharing with families, and using appropriate ethnic media. It also includes recruitment and hiring of bilingual, culturally competent outreach staff. Federal and state agencies administering programs should assist local providers by providing funding for immigrant-serving organizations to partner with child care and early education programs to conduct outreach and develop general information about child care and early education programs in appropriate formats and in the primary languages of immigrant communities in the state.

**Federal, state, and local governments should expand access to programs that support children and families, including Head Start, Early Head Start, Even Start, Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters, and Parents as Teachers.**

Home-visiting models, family literacy programs, and child care and early education programs with comprehensive services and strong family support components are important for immigrant families. State and local administrators of child care and early education programs should consider funding such programs, through contracts or other dedicated resources, in order to help expand immigrant families' access to high-quality child care and early education programs. Immigrant-serving organizations may consider adapting their current services to include these program models or partnering with existing programs in their communities.

**State licensing agencies should evaluate materials, regulations, and policies and ensure that immigrant providers have meaningful access to the licensing process.**

Licensing agencies should translate information, regulations, applications, preparatory materials and classes, and examinations for licensing, as well as provide training and technical assistance to immigrant providers working towards licensure.

**State administrators of child care and early education programs should incorporate cultural and linguistic competency in existing program and content standards.**

Attention to the diverse needs of children of immigrants can be included within existing state standards, including licensing, monitoring and technical assistance, early learning guidelines, quality rating systems, competencies for qualified and competent child care and early education teachers, and state pre-kindergarten program standards. Representatives of immigrant-serving organizations should be involved in the design of policies.



**Local government agencies, including local planning councils and economic development agencies, should conduct assessments of the demographics and child care and early education needs of immigrant families with young children.** The starting point for developing child care and early education policies and programs that are responsive to the needs of immigrant communities is a community assessment. Local assessments can draw upon national and local data sources,<sup>2</sup> and they should be done in concert with immigrant-serving organizations. An assessment can be used to identify:

- Demographics of young children of immigrants, including languages spoken, and concentrations of particular immigrant groups;
- Resources and community-based organizations within immigrant communities;
- Immigrant community leaders and trusted messengers;
- Early childhood providers serving immigrant families; and
- Service gaps.

### **3. Strengthen Child Care and Early Education Systems to Improve and Expand Access to High-quality Services for Young Children in Immigrant Families.**

**Federal, state, and local governments—and other funders—should increase resources for high-quality child care and early education.** In many communities, state and federal programs lack sufficient funding to serve all eligible children, which results in fewer children of immigrants participating. Funding for state pre-kindergarten, Head Start, Early Head Start, Even Start, and CCDBG should be increased. In addition, funding should be targeted for development of new or expanded high-quality comprehensive programs that are located in immigrant communities.

**States should establish a centralized and coordinated system to help all families access the array of child care and early education programs in their communities.** A unified, coordinated, and centralized system, developed in partnership with local child care resource and referral agencies (CCR&Rs) could help families identify and access high-quality linguistically and culturally competent child care and early education in their neighborhoods. Entry points should be located throughout communities, including in immigrant neighborhoods, and might include immigrant-serving organizations.

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2 Demographers at the Center for Social and Demographic Analysis, University at Albany, SUNY, have developed a set of indicators to demonstrate the characteristics of children in immigrant and U.S.-born citizen families, based on data from Census 2000. Data is available for the U.S., 50 states, and selected metropolitan areas. <http://www.albany.edu/csda/children/>.

**State and local child care and early education agencies should build the supply of high-quality child care and early education in immigrant communities.** States can use financial incentives tied to high-quality program standards within the pre-kindergarten and child care subsidy programs to encourage community-based providers and schools to develop increased early childhood capacity in communities with high populations of immigrant families.

**States and other funders should provide sustainable resources to increase the capacity of immigrant-serving organizations to participate in and support child care and early education.** Through CCDBG contracts and quality funds, as well as state pre-kindergarten grants and contracts, states can support immigrant-serving organizations' efforts to develop high-quality child care and early education programs or to build their capacity to work in partnership with existing providers. States may also include immigrant-serving organizations in statewide convenings of child care and early education providers for professional development.

**State and local child care and early education agencies—as well as local planning councils, other community agencies, and private funders—should fund cultural mediators.** Cultural mediators have the trust of the immigrant community from which they come and can serve as a bridge to supportive services for families. Using CCDBG quality dollars and state pre-kindergarten funds, local programs can recruit cultural mediators to oversee outreach for immigrant families, facilitate enrollment, and work with families to get the additional support services they may need. Cultural mediators can also help translate child care and early education practices for immigrant families, and they can provide relevant cultural information for teachers and program staff. Foundations and other private funders may also support the recruitment of cultural mediators in individual communities.

#### **4. Build the Linguistic and Cultural Competency of State and Local Child Care and Early Education Agencies and Programs.**

**Federal, state, and local governments and other actors can work together to build a high-quality, multilingual, culturally competent child care and early education workforce.** Improving the capacity of the early childhood workforce to effectively serve immigrant families requires the collaboration of many actors. Federal and state child care and early education and higher education agencies can play a key role—in partnership with CCR&Rs, child care and early education programs, institutions of higher education (IHE), and immigrant-serving organizations—in addressing the shortage of bilingual and culturally competent child care and early education providers.

- ***State and local child care and early education agencies and programs should have language assistance plans to ensure effective communication with LEP***

**persons, along with plans to ensure the cultural competency of staff and the diversity of the workforce.** The plans need to include recruiting and hiring bilingual staff, ensuring language assistance is available at all points of contact (including in person and by telephone), and ensuring that important documents and outreach materials are competently translated into the primary languages spoken in the communities served. All staff should be trained providing language assistance; and the training should include how to responsively serve diverse communities, including immigrants. Staff should receive training in cultural competency. All agencies should conduct a workforce analysis to help ensure that the workforce reflects the communities served.

- **Federal and state agencies should recruit, hire, and retain bilingual, culturally competent staff.** Federal and states agencies administering child care and early education programs should intentionally seek staff who are bilingual and have experience working with immigrant families or in immigrant communities by including such requirements in job descriptions, offering bilingual pay differentials, providing access to professional development that supports cultural competency, and advertising in areas with high concentrations of bilingual providers.
- **Federal and state agencies administering child care and early education programs should support the increased linguistic and cultural competency of the workforce.** The state child care subsidy agency, state pre-kindergarten programs, and state higher education agencies should support the professional development of immigrant providers through scholarships and stipends, increased reimbursement rates for programs that have multilingual capacity, access to professional development opportunities and information (in multiple languages) that support cultural competency, support to CCR&Rs to provide training to immigrant providers, and assistance to immigrant providers with early childhood education coursework or degrees to have their education validated in the United States.
- **Local programs can implement policies to recruit, hire, and retain bilingual, culturally competent providers.** Programs should support increased diversity in their staff by including cultural competency requirements and experience with immigrant communities in job descriptions; offering bilingual pay differentials; conducting targeted outreach to recruit staff from immigrant- and language-minority communities; and partnering with immigrant-serving organizations to identify family, friend, and neighbor caregivers and opportunities for joint professional development.
- **Local CCR&Rs can help identify and coordinate the professional development needs of immigrant providers.** Immigrant providers have a range of experiences that they bring to their work with young children. Some may have early childhood degrees in their home countries, while others may have limited formal education. Professional

development strategies should support all caregivers, including family, friend, and neighbor providers. CCR&Rs can work with immigrant-serving organizations to disseminate information to immigrant providers on child development and training opportunities. They can also work with these agencies to create community-based professional development plans that incorporate culturally and linguistically appropriate training on child development, health and safety, and the basic components of state licensing. CCR&Rs can also work with interested providers to develop plans for more formal training—including access to GED and English as a Second Language classes, as well as community colleges and two- and four-year universities—and opportunities to mentor and be mentored in the early childhood field.

- ***IHE can play a role in helping the early childhood workforce move toward greater cultural competency and diversity.*** Early childhood diversity task forces should be created with representatives of IHE to address issues including but not limited to immigrant access to IHE, scholarships and incentives for immigrant providers, barriers to enrollment for immigrant providers, language access, recognition of early childhood education credentialing from foreign institutions, and the development of cultural competency standards and training for child care and early education providers that address the needs of young children of immigrants and second-language acquisition.

**State child care and early education agencies, state early learning councils, and CCR&Rs should support family, friend, and neighbor caregivers in immigrant communities.** State program administrators should use trusted messengers to improve outreach to family, friend, and neighbor caregivers, in order to include them in training and technical assistance initiatives. Information and training should be culturally and linguistically appropriate for diverse providers and should provide a continuum of supports for providers, both those who are seeking entry into the formal child care system and those who are not.

**State child care administrators and private funders can promote community-based networks of immigrant child care and early education providers.** Such networks of providers, in all settings, can provide mutual support and assist with access to professional development, training, and technical assistance. They can help create linkages between all providers, including immigrant providers, and can help immigrant providers link to existing child care and early education agencies for training and support.