



Sociodemographic Portrait of Immigrant and U.S.-Born Parents of Young Children in Massachusetts

By Maki Park, Margie McHugh, and Caitlin Katsiaficas

This fact sheet provides a sociodemographic sketch of foreign- and U.S.-born parents with young children (ages 0 to 8) in Massachusetts, based on Migration Policy Institute (MPI) analysis of U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey (ACS) data pooled over the 2010-14 period.¹ The analysis offered here, while not intended to be exhaustive, aims to help local stakeholders understand the various socioeconomic disparities between families led by immigrant and native-born parents, and the potential utility of two-generation services² in addressing them. This state fact sheet accompanies a national report that examines the success of a select number of two-generation programs aimed at immigrants and refugees—who comprise almost one-quarter of all parents with young children in the United States. The report also provides a population analysis of immigrant and native-born families with young children at the U.S. level.³

I. Income, Poverty, Family Structure, Employment Status, and Health Insurance Coverage

Poverty and related obstacles can negatively impact the cognitive, physical, and socioemotional developmental outcomes of young children. Family structure is another important consideration for antipoverty programs: children in single-parent families are at greater risk for poor academic outcomes. Parents without family-sustaining jobs, let alone those who are unemployed altogether, often experience heightened risk; two-generation programs have the potential to address this by increasing workforce readiness and employment rates. A lack of health insurance poses a risk to parents' physical health and well-being, as well as family finances.

Table 1 highlights indicators commonly used to measure a family's vulnerability.

- 1 Using several years of pooled American Community Survey (ACS) data permits an increased degree of accuracy.
- 2 For the purposes of the study, two-generation programs are defined as those that (1) provide services to both children and parents, whether simultaneously or in parallel via co-location; and (2) track outcomes for both children and parents.
- 3 See Maki Park, Margie McHugh, and Caitlin Katsiaficas, *Serving Immigrant Families through Two-Generation Programs: Identifying Family Needs and Responsive Program Approaches* (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2016), www.migrationpolicy.org/research/serving-immigrant-families-through-two-generation-programs-identifying-family-needs-and.

Table 1. Income, Poverty, Family Structure, Employment Status, and Health Insurance Coverage of Parents of Young Children in Massachusetts (ages 0 to 8), by Nativity, 2010-14

Parents of Young Children in Massachusetts	Total	Foreign Born	Native Born
Total parent population	724,000	194,000	530,000
Share parent population	100%	27%	73%
Income and Poverty			
Below 100% of poverty level	11%	14%	10%
100-184% of poverty level	11%	18%	9%
At or above 185% of poverty level	77%	67%	81%
Family structure			
Two parents	79%	81%	79%
Single mother	16%	14%	17%
Single father	4%	4%	4%
Employment status			
Parent population ages 16 and older*	723,000	194,000	528,000
Employed	78%	75%	79%
Self-employed	6%	7%	5%
Unemployed	6%	6%	6%
Not in the labor force	16%	18%	15%
Men not in the labor force	4%	5%	4%
Women not in the labor force	26%	30%	24%
Health insurance coverage			
Total parent population	724,000	194,000	530,000
Public health insurance only	20%	30%	17%
Private health insurance	77%	64%	81%
No insurance	3%	6%	2%

* As is customary, only the civilian parent population is counted in this indicator.

Notes: Here, the poverty level refers to the poverty thresholds used by the Census Bureau to measure the share of the population living in poverty. The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) uses poverty guidelines, based on the poverty thresholds, to determine eligibility for several federal antipoverty programs. See HHS, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, "Poverty Guidelines," updated January 25, 2016, <https://aspe.hhs.gov/poverty-guidelines>.

Source: Migration Policy Institute (MPI) analysis of U.S. Census Bureau pooled 2010-14 American Community Survey (ACS) data.

II. English Proficiency, Educational Attainment, and LEP Status

Table 2 highlights unique educational obstacles faced by many immigrant parents, including limited English proficiency (LEP). Two-generation services must recognize unique education and language learning needs

in order to better support families in their educational attainment and economic and civic integration goals.

As one to two years of postsecondary education are generally required as a minimum qualification for jobs that pay a family-sustaining wage, immigrant families, who have disproportionately low levels of educational attainment, face tremendous barriers in obtaining such

Table 2. English Proficiency, Educational Attainment, and LEP Status of Parents of Young Children in Massachusetts (ages 0 to 8), by Nativity, 2010-14

Parents of Young Children in Massachusetts	Total	Foreign Born	Native Born
English proficiency			
Total parent population	724,000	194,000	530,000
LEP (Speak English less than “very well”)	13%	41%	2%
Low LEP (Speak English less than “well”)	5%	17%	1%
Educational attainment			
Parent population ages 25 and older	693,000	189,000	504,000
0-8th grade	3%	8%	1%
9th-12th grade	4%	6%	3%
High school diploma or equivalent	18%	22%	17%
Some college	24%	20%	25%
Bachelor’s degree or higher	52%	44%	55%
LEP status of low-educated parents (ages 25+)			
Less than high school diploma or equivalent	46,000	27,000	19,000
Share LEP	53%	79%	16%

LEP = Limited English Proficient.

Note: English proficiency is self-reported; ACS respondents must indicate whether they speak English “very well,” “well,” “not well,” or “not at all.”

Source: MPI analysis of U.S. Census Bureau pooled 2010-14 ACS data.

jobs. These obstacles include the effort and costs involved in completing potentially many years of English and adult basic and secondary education classes before progressing to postsecondary and workforce training. It is important to note, however, that not all LEP parents of young children have the goal of workforce participation or postsecondary education, and may instead desire to enroll in family literacy or English classes for the purposes of navigating daily life and local systems and services or for engaging in their children’s education.

Diversity in Languages Spoken at Home

The top five languages spoken at home by foreign-born LEP parents of young children in Massachusetts are Spanish (which comprises 37 percent of the share of all languages spoken at home by this population), Portuguese (16

percent), Chinese⁴ (10 percent), French Creole (6 percent), and Vietnamese (6 percent). LEP parents can face language access challenges related to both the navigation and provision of services. This challenge is compounded for speakers of lower-incidence languages other than Spanish, for which programs may lack translated materials or interpreters.

III. Conclusion

Immigrant parents lead an increasingly large proportion of Massachusetts and U.S. families with young children living in poverty, making them an important target of two-generation programs. By addressing the needs of poor or low-income parents and their children simultaneously, two-generation programs have great potential to uplift whole families and break cycles of intergenerational poverty.

⁴ Chinese includes Cantonese, Mandarin, and other Chinese languages.

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