



The Independent Voice for Kentucky's Children

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**BETTER ACCESS TO EARLY CHILD CARE AND EDUCATION TRANSLATES INTO GREATER
SCHOOL SUCCESS FOR CHILDREN IN IMMIGRANT FAMILIES**

Louisville, KY – For young children in immigrant families, quality early child care and education can improve English proficiency and cultural skills necessary to succeed in school and become productive adults. Despite the clear benefits, however, immigrant families face several barriers to enrollment in these programs, according to an issue brief released today by Kentucky Youth Advocates entitled *Setting the Stage for School Readiness: Early Childhood Education Among Children in Immigrant Families*.

Since many immigrant parents work, their children need access to quality child care and preschool. The brief found that 52 percent of Kentucky children in immigrant families – or more than 8,800 – have both parents in the workforce and are likely to need child care outside the home. However, national trends indicate just 17 percent of young children in immigrant families are enrolled in center-based care, compared with 26 percent of U.S.-born children.

The brief cites national research around three obstacles to early care and education for children in immigrant families: awareness of programs and eligibility; program accessibility; and the program's responsiveness to the child's culture and language.

For immigrant parents who often hold down several jobs to make ends meet, the barriers to center-based care can be a particular burden. What's more, by not placing their children in quality child care settings, immigrant families are missing out on the more formal network of supports these centers offer including cultural transitioning and integration into the American school system.

"All children benefit from quality early child care and education programs in terms of greater readiness for school and improved success later in life," said Terry Brooks, executive director of Kentucky Youth Advocates. "Children in immigrant families benefit even more because these programs give them the early boost they need to overcome language and cultural barriers and become fully integrated, productive members of American society."

The report found, however, that young children in immigrant families are less likely to participate in every type of non-parental child care arrangement, including center-based, relative and family child care, according to national data. Research suggests that use of center-based care is lowest among children of immigrants whose parents have low educational attainment levels.

By contrast, preschool enrollment among immigrant children in Kentucky, as opposed to center-based child care, was actually higher than national rates for immigrant kids and similar to the rates for children in U.S.-born Kentucky families. In 2006, 41 percent of Kentucky three- and- four-year olds in immigrant families were enrolled in preschool compared with 40 percent of children in U.S.-born families. The report notes that programs like Head Start and the Kentucky Preschool Program have been effective in enrolling low-income children throughout the state, regardless of immigrant status.

"While Kentucky's preschool programs show some success, more work is needed to ensure that all children are benefiting from early education," said Jenessa Bryan, policy analyst for Kentucky Youth Advocates and the report's author. "Preschool enrollment, for example, is especially low among Asian and Hispanic children in immigrant families. Kentucky needs to make every effort to reach out to all families."

The brief offers a variety of solutions for improving access and enrollment for both child care and preschool programs. These include:

- Strengthening partnerships between early child care and education organizations and the community centers that serve immigrant and refugee populations. By partnering with schools, community centers, faith-based organizations and employers, early childhood groups can better educate parents about their options.
- Increasing outreach to low-income working immigrant families who are eligible for child care subsidies
- Expanding enrollment outreach for public preschool to consistently include English language learner children.

To read the issue brief, go to www.kyyouth.org.

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***Kentucky Youth Advocates** is a non-partisan, non-profit, children's advocacy organization. KYA represents a voice for Kentucky's most precious asset – its youth. We believe that Kentucky's youth deserve the opportunities and resources necessary to ensure their productive development and health.*