

Rhode Island



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**Rhode Island KIDS COUNT releases new Issue Brief:
Rhode Island Children in Immigrant Families**

***24% of Rhode Island children are living in immigrant families,
mirroring national rate of 23%***

***Increasing access to high-quality educational opportunities and
enhancing English Language Learner (ELL) programs can
improve outcomes for children from families with diverse cultural
and language backgrounds***



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Providence, RI (August 1, 2012) – Rhode Island KIDS COUNT released a new Issue Brief – ***Rhode Island Children in Immigrant Families*** – at a policy roundtable attended by policy makers, education and health leaders and community members. The event was held on Wednesday, August 1, 2012 from 10:30 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. at Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, One Union Station, in Providence. Speakers included William Shuey, Executive Director of the International Institute Rhode Island, Carol Holmquist, President and CEO of Dorcas Place, and Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Policy Analyst John Neubauer presented the findings.

Percentage of Rhode Island children living in immigrant families mirrors the United States

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 24% (54,000) of Rhode Island children were living in immigrant families in 2010, comparable to the U.S. rate of 23%. Children in immigrant families are defined as children under age 18 who are foreign-born or have at least one parent who is foreign-born, regardless of citizenship status or year of arrival in the United States. Rhode Island is one of three New England states with more than 20% of children living in immigrant families (Massachusetts - 26%, Rhode Island - 24%, and Connecticut - 23%).

According to the Population Reference Bureau, of the 54,000 Rhode Island children in immigrant families in 2010, 98% had parents who had been living in the United States for more than five years. Eighty-nine percent of Rhode Island children in immigrant families are U.S. citizens.

“In order to ensure a prosperous future, we need to make sure all Rhode Island children, including children in immigrant families, grow up healthy and well-educated with the skills needed to contribute to Rhode Island’s economy,” said Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT.

Rhode Island’s foreign-born children originate from countries worldwide

Between 2008 and 2010, 3% (7,938) of Rhode Island’s children under age 18 were foreign-born. Foreign-born children made up 15% of Rhode Island’s children living in immigrant families. Of foreign-born children living in Rhode Island between 2008 and 2010, 24% were born in the Caribbean, 22% were born in Central America, 19% were born in Africa, 16% were born in Asia, 10% were born in South America, and 6% were born in Canada, Bermuda, or Mexico. Children born in Puerto Rico are U.S. citizens and are not counted as foreign-born.

Children in immigrant families in Rhode Island face distinct challenges

While similar to children in U.S.-born families in many ways, including family structure and parental work force participation, Rhode Island children in immigrant families face distinct educational, economic and health challenges.

Parental education levels

In Rhode Island between 2008 and 2010, 19% of children with immigrant parents lived in families where all resident parents had less than a high school degree, compared to 7% of children with U.S.-born parents. Parental educational attainment can impact many aspects of child well-being, including health, education and material resources.

Linguistically isolated households

In Rhode Island in 2010, twenty-three percent of children in immigrant families lived in linguistically isolated households, which are households in which no one over the age of 14 either only speaks English or speaks English “very well.” “Linguistic isolation contributes to family economic barriers and impacts parents’ ability to find higher paying jobs and communicate effectively with their children’s teachers and health care providers,” noted John Neubauer, Policy Analyst at Rhode Island KIDS COUNT.

Family income

Nearly all immigrant families with children are working families, with 95% labor force participation. In Rhode Island in 2008, children in immigrant families had higher parental

labor force participation rate than children in U.S.-born families. Despite the high percentage of parental labor force participation, children in immigrant families are more likely to be poor or low-income than children in U.S.-born families. Nationally, more than half (54%) of all children in immigrant families live in low-income families, compared to 41% of children in U.S.-born families. In 2008, Rhode Island's child poverty rate among children in U.S.-born families was 14%, compared with 19% of children living in immigrant families.

Access to health coverage

According to the *2007 National Survey of Children's Health*, 18.8% of foreign-born children in Rhode Island lacked health insurance, compared with 6.4% of Rhode Island children with one or both parents born outside of the U.S., and 4.2% of children with U.S.-born parents. Children who lack health insurance are more likely to have poorer health outcomes, have fewer well-child visits, and are more likely to delay seeking medical care.

Access to early care and quality education

Between 2008 and 2010, 37% of 3- and 4-year-old children in immigrant families in Rhode Island attended child care or preschool compared to 55% of their U.S.-born peers.

"High-quality early learning programs improve the odds that children will succeed in school and in life," noted Bryant. "Children who attend these programs are less likely to repeat grades, drop out, or require special education than children who have not had high-quality early learning experiences. It is important to continue the work being done to expand access to early learning and pre-kindergarten programs across Rhode Island."

National research shows that children in immigrant families are more likely to attend under-resourced schools in high-poverty areas. In Rhode Island, students in the four core cities with the highest poverty rates (Central Falls, Providence, Pawtucket and Woonsocket) consistently have lower reading proficiency, attend lower performing schools and have lower graduation rates than students in the remainder of the state.

English Language Learners in Rhode Island

During the 2010-2011 school year, there were 8,307 English Language Learner (ELL) students in Rhode Island public schools. Seventy-five percent of those students lived in the four core cities. During that same school year, ELL students in Rhode Island spoke 77 different languages. The majority (75%) spoke Spanish. Other languages spoken by ELL students include Creole/Patois, Asian/Pacific Island languages, Portuguese, Arabic, and African languages.

Nationally and in Rhode Island, ELL students score significantly lower on standardized tests and graduate high school at lower rates than their peers. Added Bryant, “ELL students face diverse challenges based on their country of origin, family situation and age. School districts can address these challenges by tailoring instruction to meet students’ needs, using data to assess student progress, and recruiting highly skilled teachers and administrators.”

Recommendations

There are several strategies that can help improve outcomes for Rhode Island children in immigrant families.

- Increase access to high-quality child care and early education programs for children in families from diverse cultural and language backgrounds.
- Ensure that English as a Second Language (ESL) and bilingual education programs in public schools provide high-level academic content and improve English proficiency.
- Use the new student identifier and the Rhode Island Department of Education data warehouse to track the academic proficiency levels, academic progress and graduation rates of students who are English Language Learners and use the data to improve academic supports for these students.
- Maintain access to in-state tuition for undocumented students who have lived in the state for at least three years, graduated from Rhode Island high schools and been admitted to public colleges and universities.
- Increase the availability of high-quality adult basic education and English-language classes, with special attention to communities with waiting lists.
- Improve access to college transition services and financial aid for full-time and part-time adult students, including parents in immigrant families.
- Restore access to RIte Care health insurance for income-eligible children who are undocumented immigrants.
- Support federal efforts to achieve comprehensive immigration reform.

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Rhode Island KIDS COUNT is a statewide children’s policy organization that works to improve the health, economic well-being, safety, education and development of Rhode Island children.