

Introduction

In 2006, the National Council of La Raza (NCLR) released a report titled *Buenos Principios: Latino Children in the Earliest Years of Life*, which examines key indicators associated with how well Latino children are prepared for the first day of school. The report found that Latino children under age three face numerous barriers to school success, such as poverty and linguistic isolation. Research indicates that these barriers contribute to a gap in the early literacy skills between Latino children and their White peers upon entry into kindergarten, which is particularly relevant in states with large Latino populations such as Illinois. In addition, the report shows that Latino children represent a large and growing segment of the United States child population, suggesting that these demographic trends have important implications for the success of our public schools, the U.S. workforce, and our nation's future.

Key Socio-Demographic Indicators in Illinois

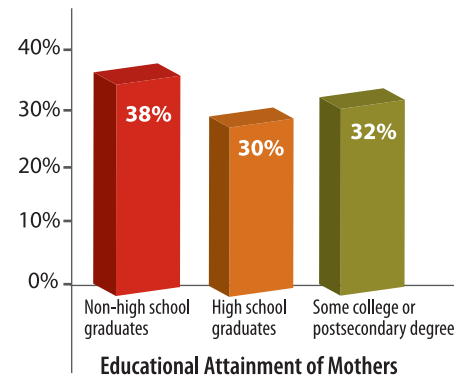
Young Latino children account for 23% (245,721) of Illinois's child population under the age of six, a growing population that will undoubtedly play a pivotal role in the state's future. As with Latino children nationally, young Latino children in Illinois face considerable challenges in the early years that adversely impact their ability to succeed in school. The data below provide a snapshot of how young Latino children in Illinois fare in several key indicators.

- **More than two-thirds of young Latino children have mothers with low levels of educational attainment.** Maternal education levels correlate strongly with a child's school readiness, notably in the development of early language and literacy skills. In Illinois, 152,353 (68%) Latino children have mothers with a high school degree or less (see Figure 1).
- **More than four in ten young Latino children's mothers do not speak English well.** The degree to which children are exposed to English at home has implications for their preparedness for the first day of school. Additionally, evidence shows that limited-English-proficient parents may have difficulty enrolling their children in early learning programs. In Illinois, 82,269 (44%) Latino children have mothers with limited English-language skills, and 16% of these children live in households where no one speaks English well.
- **Almost six in ten young Latino children reside in low-income households.** Economic hardship can adversely affect a child's development in domains that are fundamental to school readiness. In Illinois, 146,754 (59%) young Latino children live in families with income levels below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level (see Figure 2).
- **More than two-thirds of young Latino children have at least one parent born outside the U.S.** A growing body of evidence demonstrates that having an immigrant parent can serve as a barrier to a child's participation in early care and education programs, despite the fact that many children are themselves citizens and therefore eligible for these services. In Illinois, 238,537 (97%) Latino children under age six are U.S. citizens, and more than two-thirds (69%) of them have at least one parent who was born outside the U.S. (see Figure 3).

Conclusion

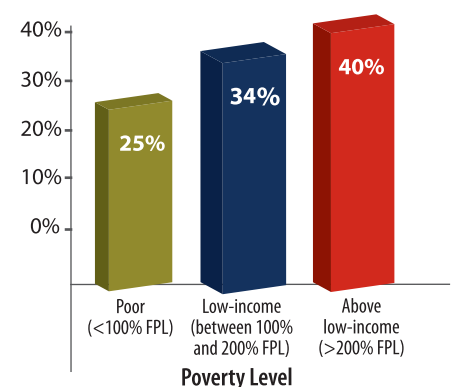
Many young Latino children live in families that provide them with a safe, nurturing environment. These families, however, often encounter considerable challenges that their children must overcome to realize their full potential. Research shows that high-quality early care and education services can support families and equip children to succeed in school and life. At the federal level, NCLR urges Congress and the Administration to expand access for Latinos to key federal programs such as Head Start, Early Head Start, and the Even Start Family Literacy programs. States also have an important role to play by increasing investments in early care and education services and supporting policies that address the needs of Latinos. Over the next few decades, the Latino population is expected to grow considerably in Illinois and throughout the nation. Therefore, the nation's economic and social potential is inextricably linked to the developmental experiences of Latino children.

Figure 1:
Latino Children Ages 0–5 in Illinois
by Mother's Educational Attainment



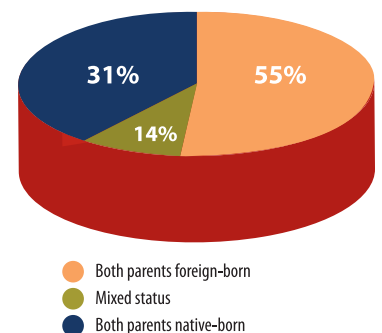
Source: Data collected by the National Center for Children in Poverty for the National Council of La Raza from U.S. Census Bureau, 2006 *American Community Survey*.

Figure 2:
Latino Children Ages 0–5 in Illinois
by Federal Poverty Level (FPL)



Source: Data collected by the National Center for Children in Poverty for the National Council of La Raza from U.S. Census Bureau, 2006 *American Community Survey*. Washington, DC, 2007.

Figure 3:
Latino Children Ages 0–5 in Illinois
by Parental Nativity



Source: Data collected by the National Center for Children in Poverty for the National Council of La Raza from U.S. Census Bureau, 2006 *American Community Survey*. Washington, DC, 2007.