

QUALITY EDUCATION AND CARE.

OVERVIEW

Education is a fundamental part of immigrant integration for New Americans and their children. Addressing the needs of immigrant communities also presents challenges to an already-struggling education system. With the numbers of English learners in educational institutions increasing, and a persistent achievement gap for many immigrant and ethnic minority students, educational policies must address the linguistic, cultural, and socioeconomic challenges facing our youngest New Americans.

We can prioritize quality education for New Americans and their families by:

- Expanding access, affordability, and quality to New American children for early childhood education and care
- Increasing investment in outreach and training to address New Americans' education needs
- Introducing proactive structures to make schools centers for integration

BACKGROUND

This year, for the first time in our nation's history, the majority of students enrolled in public schools are students of color, and/or New Americans. Yet around the country, many school systems continue to struggle to successfully support and integrate immigrant children and families and build on the important strengths they bring to their classrooms and communities. More than one in four children under age 6 lives in a household that speaks a language other than English. And over 61 percent of children in immigrant families live below 200 percent of the U.S. poverty line. Older immigrant and refugee youth who enter after interrupted schooling, or without previous schooling, require extra support to catch up. Our education system is taxed and education policy fails to support our most at-risk students, including English learners.

We must address this. Education can serve as a locus of integration for an entire immigrant family, assisting immigrant parents to connect with language and literacy learning opportunities and other community resources, receive encouragement to become involved in a child's education, and achieve greater community and civic participation, confidence and opportunities to practice English. Schools can be trusted community institutions that pave the way for integration.

Early learning programs have been shown to bridge gaps in school readiness and influence long-term outcomes for New American children. Research has shown that early childhood education can positively influence cognitive skills, academic achievement, educational attainment and social behavior. Quality early learning programs bridge gaps in school readiness, and are often the first point of contact for immigrant parents and families with public institutions. Yet, data suggests that dual language learners and children of immigrants are significantly less likely than other children to participate in early education programs.¹

¹ Matthews, H. *Early Education Programs and Children of Immigrants: Learning Each Other's Language*. Urban Institute. 2010.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Expand access, affordability, and quality to New American children for early childhood education and care

- To promote an equitable education system that closes the achievement gap and improves outcomes for children in immigrant and refugee families, a focus on early learning for these children and meaningful engagement of their parents is essential
- We need comprehensive and aligned data collection that identifies English learners and their home language information in early childhood and measures their progress over time
- We can target such care to New American families and accommodate language and other needs in a streamlined way, ensuring that cultural and linguistic competencies and the skills needed to work effectively with Dual Language Learners are woven into our guidelines, standards, and systems
- These programs should be targeted to English learners in particular, including access and advancement for educators whose home language is not English and support for high needs children who are dual language learners

Increase investment in outreach and training to address New Americans' education needs

- We must increase to New American families in order to account for the language and socioeconomic barriers that may prevent full integration into the education system. We need to invest specifically in literacy and education programs that meet New American parents' needs
- As the federal government is responsible for immigration and refugee policies, it should absorb a larger share of the cost of educating newcomer students and providing them with needed nonacademic services which are currently paid for by local school districts or through extremely limited funding streams for recently arrived immigrant students
- School systems should be supported to offer intensive services to immigrant and refugee youth who have experienced interrupted schooling, so that these youth are caught up to grade level and able to successfully complete secondary education.

Introduce proactive structures to make schools centers for integration

- The federal government should work with states and school districts around the country to build a coalition focused on New American integration via schools. Agencies like the Department of Education should identify community partners across the country that can help with outreach in communities and can illuminate local needs related to integration
- Such a coalition can support the use of school spaces for immigrant integration-related information sessions, citizenship workshops, English classes, and more. It would also allow sharing of effective practices from existing models of schools as centers for integration. Furthermore, it should also include interpretation and translation and spaces for shared decision making between New American communities and educational institutions, as well as culturally and linguistically appropriate curriculum and training for education professionals. This body can set goals and create strategies to diversify the teacher workforce to reflect our changing demographics