

Early Care and Education Experiences for Children of Hispanic Origin in Maryland



July 2012

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CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Language and Literacy Development.....	2
An Urgent Demographic Imperative.....	2
Poverty vs. Early Literacy Development.....	3
Unique Linguistic and Immigration Profile.....	4
Child Care and Early Education Needs	6
Workforce Issues.....	6
Immigration and Early Care and Education.....	9
Educational Challenges.....	10
English Language Fluency and School Performance	11
How Are Hispanic Children Best Served by Early Education Programs?	12
Maryland Model for School Readiness.....	12
Using the MMSR Kindergarten Assessment	13
Collaborative Systems	14
Closing the Gap: Programs that Work	15
The Silver Spring Judy Center/Outreach Effort for Hispanic Families: Montgomery County	16
EBLO/ Education Based Latino Outreach: Baltimore City.....	16
Latino Provider Network: Baltimore City Metro Area	16
Montgomery Housing Partnership: Montgomery County	16
Padres y Alumnos Latinos en Accion (PALA) Latino Parents and Students in Action	17
Mid Atlantic Equity Consortium, Inc.: Mid-Atlantic Region.....	17
Maryland State Parental Information Resource Center	18
CentroNia, Takoma Park.....	18
Vocabulary Improvement and Oral Language Enrichment through Stories (VIOLETS).....	18
Conclusion	20
References	22
Acknowledgments	24



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Dear Colleague:

In the past decade, Hispanics have become the fastest growing and youngest racial/ethnic group in Maryland. The number of Hispanic children as a proportion of all children has been increasing more rapidly than the number of non-Hispanic, White, and African-American children for all age groups. Yet, despite their large numbers at the elementary, middle and high school levels, young children, birth to age five, are underrepresented in early education programs.

This has profound implications for Maryland's public education system as it strives to prepare world-class students and to maintain the status of #1 in the nation. For that reason, it is my pleasure to share with you *Early Care and Education for Children of Hispanic Origin in Maryland: Study on the Context of School Readiness*.

This report:

- Presents research supporting the importance of the connection between early literacy skills development and later literacy achievement and the impact of instructional interventions on children's learning;
- Outlines a cogent case for the "demographic imperative" that Hispanic children age birth to eight years pose for Maryland's public education system's blueprint to maintain its place as a national leader and to strive toward world-class status;
- Reveals the barriers which impede participation in early childhood programs for young children of Hispanic origin;
- Highlights solutions by presenting successful early education programs in Maryland; and
- Proposes policies and research implications to address the educational challenges of young children of Hispanic origin in Maryland.

I am both heartened by our State's progress and motivated to continue actively exploring and developing effective and scalable strategies to increase school engagement and learning for all children. On behalf of all who have worked so hard to see that our children have every possible opportunity to succeed, I urge you to use this indispensable report vigorously to promote school readiness for all of Maryland's young children.

Sincerely,

Lillian M. Lowery, Ed.D.
State Superintendent of Schools

INTRODUCTION

The dramatic growth of the Hispanic population in the state of Maryland has begun to alter the landscape and it has critical implications for the present and future of economic and social policy in the state, with particular emphasis on education. During this first half of the 21st century, we are witnessing a demographic shift that is transforming not only our state but U.S. society as well. In 2004, the U.S. Census Bureau reported that the Hispanic population overtook the African American population as the nation's largest minority group. In the forty years between 1960 and the year 2000, the Hispanic population grew five-fold, from 6.9 to 35.3 million (U.S. Census Bureau, 2002, p.8). By 2002, one in eight people in the United States were of Hispanic origin (Ramirez & de la Cruz, 2003, p.3). Although Maryland's Hispanic population has not yet reached such numbers, there are areas of the state that are impacted quite dramatically and reflect the national trend. Moreover, the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) 2011-2012 student data supports this trend showing steady increases in the Hispanic student population throughout the twenty four school districts (marylandpublicschools.org).

This trend has profound implications for Maryland's public education system's blueprint to maintain its place as a national leader and strive toward world-class status. For the past four years, Maryland's public schools have been ranked as the nation's best. Over the past three decades "Maryland has built a strong foundation, policy by policy, through two waves of reform to achieve national status as a leader in educational excellence." (Maryland's 3rd Wave of Reform, MSDE, 2010, p.1). During the first wave of reform (1989-2002) the State implemented a comprehensive system of public assessment and accountability to hold schools, local school systems, and the state accountable for student achievement. An ambitious second wave of reform (2002-2009) included a significant increase in state funding for all schools, increased accountability, a new early childhood governance and infrastructure, development of a state wide pre-k to 12 curriculum, alternative pathways for High School students, and stronger preparation and development programs for school leaders and teachers. At the present time, Maryland is preparing to launch its third wave of reform—to create a world-class system that prepares students for college and career success in the 21st century. World-class means recognizing and acting on the new reality that a high school diploma is just the starting point; every student must be prepared to



succeed in college or the workplace (Maryland's 3rd Wave of Reform, 2010, p.1).

Yet, how might this transformational demographic shift impact Maryland's plans to retain its #1 status nationally and achieve world-class status?

This demographic shift poses educational challenges that must be addressed to bring Maryland's educational system to the next level. They are manifested first among young children from birth through age 5. In that age range Hispanics are the fastest growing racial/ethnic group in the State (Maryland State Department of Education, Title III/ELL Spring Briefing, May, 2010).

This report explores two major issues.

- ◆ Significant demographic shift which call for a “demographic imperative” that Hispanic children ages birth-8 years pose for Maryland’s public education system’s blueprint to maintain its place as a national leader and strive toward world-class status;
- ◆ Identification of programs that work and outline potential barriers for meeting the “demographic imperative.”

According to this report, the number of Hispanic children as a proportion of all children has been increasing throughout Maryland more rapidly than the number of non-Hispanic White and African-American children for all age groups. This demographic shift defines a new imperative for addressing the needs of Hispanic young children and their families.

Language and Literacy Development

In *Early Beginnings: Early Literacy Knowledge and Instruction*, (2002), the National Early Literacy Panel identifies research evidence that highlights the importance of the connection between early literacy skills development and later literacy achievement, and the impact of instructional interventions on children’s learning. According to the report, “patterns of learning in pre-school are closely linked to later achievement: children who develop more skills in the pre-school years perform better in the primary grades” (p.4). The development of early skills appeared to be particularly important in the area of literacy, especially reading. Providing young children with the critical precursor skills to reading can offer a path to improving overall school achievement later as they learn more complex academic skills (*Children Entering School Ready to Learn: School Readiness Information for School Year 2008-09*, p.3).

The home setting also plays a pivotal role in the development of important skills that can provide

young children with the cornerstones for the development of later academic skills (The National Early Literacy Panel, p.4). Even before starting school, children can become aware of systematic patterns of sounds in any spoken language. This encompasses learning to manipulate sounds in words, recognizing words and breaking them apart into smaller units, learning the relationship between sounds and letters, and building their oral language and vocabulary skills. These are all skills that the National Early Literacy Panel found to be precursors to children’s later growth in the ability to decode and comprehend text, to write, and to spell.

An Urgent Demographic Imperative

The age distribution and growth of the Hispanic population have critical implications for the present and future of social and economic policy in our state, with particular emphasis on early care and education. Based on on-site visits and interviews with staff from the Maryland Parental Information Resource Center in Montgomery County, the number of Hispanic children as a proportion of all children has been increasing more rapidly than the number of non-Hispanic White and African-American children for all age groups in several areas of the county. According to the Maryland State Department of Education’s (MSDE) 2010 English Language Learner’s (ELLs) Student Population Trend Data, the number of ELL Hispanic students in the state grew from 25,734 in 2008-2009 to 28,610 in 2009-2010 (MSDE, Title III/ELL Spring Briefing, May, 2010).

Young Hispanic children are of particular interest because they constitute an urgent demographic imperative. There are two very important reasons for an increased focus on that population:

- ◆ the size of the group increasingly impacts the results of the overall population;
- ◆ the policy importance of this critical early age range (birth-5 years) is especially relevant in terms of educational, college, and career investments.

According to Gormley, Gayer, Phillips, & Dawson, (2005) “early educational and health disparities related to Hispanic immigrant status are more malleable than they will later be after the highly cumulative effects of social institutions, environmental conditions, and differential opportunity have taken hold.” (p.874). In Maryland, the benefits of early learning and its relation to school readiness has had a profound influence not only on the quality of future adults but also our economy. This notion of preemptive educational intervention is supported in Nobel-Prize winning economist James J. Heckman’s research (2010), which illustrates how effective early care and education can decrease the need for Special Education and remediation, as well as juvenile delinquency, teen pregnancy, and drop-out rates.

Poverty vs. Early Literacy Development

This racial/ethnic group’s unprecedented growth is particularly alarming due to its socio-economic situation. First, in 2008, the average annual personal earning of Hispanics in Maryland was \$24,441.00, compared to \$40,736.00 for Non Hispanic Whites and \$34,218.00 for African-Americans (Pew Hispanic Center Survey, 2008, p.5). Secondly, given the median age of the Hispanic population in Maryland, (28 years old), and its high fertility rate, one can assume a sizable increase in the number of Hispanic children less than five years of age. According to the 2008 Pew Hispanic Center Survey, in Maryland there were more than 9,000 births to Hispanic women during 12 months. This represented 11% of all births in Maryland that year. These trends are also reflected at the national level, whereby the annual personal earning for Hispanics is similar to Maryland’s, if not lower, and the total fertility rate of Hispanic women is also considerably higher than those of Whites and other groups. These conditions will make certain that young Hispanic children under the age of five become the largest racial/ethnic population and are more likely to live in poverty compared to other groups.

The majority of recently arrived Hispanic immigrants in the U.S., as well as Maryland, come from Mexico and Central America (Pew, 2008, p.1). They are often poorly educated, lack literacy skills in their own language and cannot understand nor speak English (Torres, 1998, p.45). Many come here illegally, either alone or with their families, in search of work. In the year 2000, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, 62% of all children of immigrant families in the U.S. were of Hispanic origin (Garcia, & Jensen, 2009, p.3). Furthermore, recent national demographic data indicate that 93% of young children (under 6) of immigrants are Hispanic. Although smaller in number, Hispanics are also considered the largest immigrant population in Maryland (Pew Hispanic Center, 2010, p.2).

Children from these immigrant families are much more likely to live in crowded housing, in poverty, and in linguistically isolated homes where family members may have very limited if any formal education, lack health insurance, and have limited access to high quality early childhood programs. As a result, those children miss out on learning those critical precursor skills which can ultimately offer them a path to success in school as well as overall achievement.

In a similar vein, Robert Crosnoe in his seminal work, *Mexican roots American school: The academic trajectory of immigrant youth*. (2006), points out that we need to focus “on the explicit ways that the outcomes of the child generation in this population are inextricably tied to the circumstances of the parent generation” (p.12). In other words, within the context of education we must also examine the way in which the educational trajectories of parent and child are connected to each other. Therefore, when considering policy recommendations we must not only address interventions targeting the child, but, also think of mechanisms through which improving parents’ lives can help the child as well (p.12).

Unique Linguistic and Immigration Profile

Among racial/ethnic groups Hispanics have a unique immigration and linguistic profile. Hispanic children in the U.S. are not a homogeneous group. They all come from very diverse social, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds. These children, for example, represent various countries-of-origin with many unique combinations of histories, cultural practices, perspectives and traditions. It is also important to recognize that the children in immigrant families are not themselves immigrants. Rather, about three-quarters of the children in immigrant families are American-born; and a large majority of these children are Hispanics (Garcia, & Jensen, 2009, p.3). This phenomenon is also true for Maryland's Hispanic population.

Due to variations in nativity, national origin, and related social factors, receptive and expressive language skills vary within the young Hispanic population. Some young children acquire English as their first language and maintain monolingual proficiency throughout their lives. Usually, these children are more likely to have native (U.S.) born parents who tend to be second generation immigrants. Others speak Spanish as their first language and learn English as they enter school. These children are referred to as “sequential bilinguals” (p.3). The proportional size of this subpopulation has been growing rapidly over the past few decades. A final (and very small) subset of Hispanic children develops English and Spanish fluency simultaneously and at comparable levels in the home and in school (August, & Shanahan, 2006, p.2).

Similarly, differences in language development are most commonly attributable to variations of language practices in the home. Approximately three in four young Hispanic children live in homes in which Spanish is spoken on a regular basis as the primary language. A smaller group lived in homes whereby English was primarily spoken, with some Spanish. The smallest group spoke only Spanish at home. These differences are

attributed to the fact that many parents of young Hispanic children have limited English proficiency (Hernandez, 2006, p.23).

In most cases the lack of English proficiency will also be accompanied by a lack of native language/literacy skills. According to the U.S. Census in 2010, nearly three fourths of young Hispanic children in immigrant families (71%) live with at least one parent who has limited English proficiency (LEP), not speaking English exclusively or not very well, and one half (49%) live with two such parents. Overall, Hispanics of every age are more likely than other racial/ethnic groups to be LEP, have one or two parents who are also LEP, and live in linguistically isolated homes—households in which no one over the age of 13 speaks English exclusively (Torres, 1998, p. 43).

The quality and quantity of bilingualism or English and Spanish used in the home, is associated with several factors pertaining to immigration, demographics, and socio-economic backgrounds. Associations have been found between the levels of English and Spanish proficiency spoken at home and the immigrant family's country of origin. For example, children of Mexican ancestry are less likely to be bilingual than those from other national origins. Furthermore, Hispanic children from Dominican, Mexican, and Central American backgrounds are more likely than Hispanics from other national origins to be LEP and to have one or two LEP parents. The highest relative proportion of bilingualism among Hispanic children was found among Cubans (Hernandez, 2006, p.12).

It is noteworthy to mention that the reasons behind a group's decision to immigrate to the U.S. can be a determining factor in their socio-economic level. The language proficiency of young Hispanics has been closely associated with household income (Torres, 1998, p.43). For example, Hispanics who immigrate due to political reasons, (e.g., Cubans) enter the country legally, tend to be well educated, and come from the middle or upper middle

socio-economic classes in their native country. They also understand the value, sacrifices, and delayed gratification associated with educational opportunity. Overall, this group's first generation is able to achieve English fluency, assimilate to the American culture, and obtain financial and economic stability. Hispanic children from this group have been exposed more to language and literacy skills (English or Spanish) and therefore, are more likely to be more language proficient before they start school. However, those who immigrate in search of employment tend to enter the country illegally, have a limited education if at all, do not assimilate until the second or third generation, do not achieve English fluency usually until the third generation, and are normally from the low socio-economic class in their native country. For the most part, this group may reach financial and economic stability in their adopted country by the second or third generation. Hispanic children from this group are not as exposed to language, English or Spanish, and lack vocabulary and oral language skills before they enter school (Torres, 1998, p.43).

In Maryland, detailed data pertaining to immigrant student's home language usage or the parent's level of English proficiency is scarce and varies from county to county. (Ideally, this data should reflect all students whose home language is not English. This would include a broader cohort than just those needing English as a Second Language (ESOL) instruction.) However, practitioners from Montgomery County, Baltimore City, and Baltimore County who were interviewed and provided information for this policy brief agreed that the profile of home language practices described above can also be applied to Maryland. Maryland's Hispanic immigrant adult population is mostly from Central America and Mexico. They come from a very low socio-economic background, are poorly educated and most of them lack literacy skills in their native language (Torres, 1998, p.45). Having information pertaining to the child's home language and the parent's level of English provides the school with valuable insight regarding the home setting and its role in the development of important skills needed before the child enters school.



CHILD CARE AND EARLY EDUCATION NEEDS

There are four primary issues influencing the early care and educational needs of Hispanic children and their families in Maryland. These were observed and compiled through a series of site visits, data review, phone interviews, and detailed input from practitioners in three school districts with different levels of impact serving Hispanic children: Montgomery County (High- Impact); Baltimore County (Mid-Impact); and Baltimore City (Low-Impact).

The first issue centers on workforce issues and the demand for child care to support working parents, including those who are transitioning off welfare. The second grows out of the confluence of immigration, workforce status of immigrant families, and the economic hardships faced by their children. The third stems from the educational challenges facing Hispanics throughout their life span. The fourth relates to the difficulties faced by English-language learners whose native or dominant language is other than English. What is relevant about these four issues is that they impact both the adults as well as the children in the family.

Workforce Issues

Hispanic families face the same challenges finding high quality child care as non-Hispanics with comparable socio-economic characteristics (e.g., high incidence of poverty; low wage jobs; and jobs with inflexible work schedule and nontraditional hours, including nights and weekends) and family composition (e.g., large number of children from birth to age 5). In addition, Hispanic families struggle to find childcare that is linguistically and culturally compatible. Despite these challenges, there has been very little research focusing on documenting the workforce issues and childcare needs of Hispanics.

In November 1999, during a National Leadership Forum sponsored by the Child Care Bureau on “Child Care Issues of the Hispanic Community,” participants came to the conclusion that “the Hispanic population is among the fastest growing and youngest segments of American society, yet families confront lower quality and lower supply of available child care in relation to the general



public” (Child Care Bureau, 2001, p.1).

One of the characteristics of Hispanic families which was commonly cited at this forum is the apparent preference for “informal” child care arrangements as opposed to organized child care such as child care centers, non/public nurseries, pre-school, Head Start, or family child care (Child Care Bureau, 2001, p.1). This situation has led some administrators and policymakers to assume that “informal” child care settings-- including family, friend, and neighbor care-- are strongly preferred by Hispanics over child care centers. This may be the case; however, there is no data (state or national) to support it. It is also possible that these statistics may not tell the whole story.

A recent study of Hispanic families and child care centers in Chicago, where Hispanics constitute 26% of the total city population, suggests that availability may be a key factor. Latina mothers needing child care generally viewed child care centers favorably; the fact that few Latinos used child care centers is because affordable center care is not available in their neighborhoods. The

study concluded that the availability of child care arrangements in the city of Chicago may have been underestimated because in the end it failed to meet the demand for center based child care among Latinos (Illinois Facility Fund, 2003, p.3).

In the report, *Children Entering School Ready to Learn-School Year 2010-2011*, published by the Maryland State Department of Education, the percentage of Hispanic children at the age of four that were enrolled in organized child care programs was 14.4% compared to 41.8% participation by Whites and 33.1% participation by African Americans. Given our State's growing Hispanic population, the low numbers of participants enrolled in center-based child care throughout Maryland raises questions of availability to center-based child care in communities with Hispanic populations or any barriers that Hispanic families face when enrolling their children in licensed child care.

In all three Maryland school districts visited, the practitioners and parents submitted responses listing several reasons and concerns for the apparent reluctance of Hispanic families to place their children in center-based care. It is interesting to note that regardless of population size the same concerns were submitted by all three counties.

Here is a list of the most common reasons cited by respondents from Montgomery County, Baltimore County, and Baltimore City:

Popularity of centers: If and when centers are available, space is very limited or there are long waiting lists. There are not enough centers convenient to the home or work place of families.

- ◆ Residency and registration requirements: Requirements are too stringent, thereby dissuading some families from applying. For example, many families live in homes with multiple families sharing the rent, but, there is only one family or adult listed on the lease. The owner or lease holder may be

reluctant to write a letter stating that they are subleasing their home/apartment for fear of repercussions, so county residency requirements cannot be verified.

- ◆ Health insurance information: Families may not have health insurance—since a physical is required for registration, the family may not be able to meet those requirements.
- ◆ Lack of public outreach: Information on early care and education programs may not be getting to the parents which could lead family members to miss enrollment deadlines. There have been times when staff from early care and education programs misinformed the parent regarding availability or even immigration status requirements. Many times the front office staff cannot understand the parent's language and they might misinform parents.
- ◆ Lack of information in Spanish: Most times information is not available in Spanish, or it is not accurately translated, so important details or information from providers is left out. In some cases the families are just not aware that pre-school, center, or school staff may be bilingual.
- ◆ Cost of care: The cost of enrolling children in early care and education programs, when low cost options (i.e., child care subsidy) are not available, or families cannot meet the income requirement for the no-cost option (i.e., Head Start or public school prekindergarten).
- ◆ Importance of early education: Lack of awareness about why early childhood education is so important for later school success. The awareness of early education and what high quality programs look like is less of a topic in Hispanic communities

than in non-Hispanic communities.

- ◆ All-day care arrangements: Need for full-day or extended hour program, especially given their need to work.
- ◆ Logistical impediments: Lack of transportation to the center, or even pre or after care for the child while the parent works.
- ◆ Risk for legal entrapment or deportation: Maryland does not include requirements to verify the immigration status as part of a school, child care subsidy, or child care center enrollment. However, over the past few years, there has been increased fear regarding the Federal government's enforcement regarding illegal entry into the country, assuming that local or state bureaucracies openly or covertly report on undocumented immigrants.
- ◆ Cultural barriers: Parents may, on philosophical grounds, have objections to enrolling their children in early childhood programs, among them: a sense of "protectiveness" for their young children, not letting "strangers" care for their children because they see their children as being vulnerable to exploitation or harm. Also, parents with strong cultural roots are concerned about their children becoming too "American" too quickly or schools showing a lack of cultural competence and appreciation for children's heritage.
- ◆ Informal family care may be seen as more convenient, effective, and nurturing than sending children to school at such a young age.

Early childhood center administrators and providers from Montgomery, Baltimore County and Baltimore City, also agreed on the following set of strategies which childhood programs, school

districts, or schools could use to recruit more Hispanic parents into enrolling their children in early childhood programs. The following is a list of strategies that have worked:

Spanish-speakers as emissaries: Use other Latino parents who have already enrolled their children in early childhood programs to do outreach to the next generation of applicants. This builds parent leadership and also allows parents to serve as ambassadors to each other.

Information at public places: Post informational fliers in apartments/malls/churches/restaurants/bus stops, or make PSA's for Spanish speaking radio stations. Share important registration/enrollment information with churches and other community-based organizations to ensure that families are aware of opportunities.

Family support meetings on child rearing and early education: Conduct parent workshops (in Spanish) on the importance of early childhood development so parents learn about the importance of enrolling their children early.

Early childhood fairs: Host early childhood education fairs in locations where high concentrations of Latino families live and where the location is accessible to public transportation. Make sure fairs are staffed with people who speak Spanish and can offer accurate information about early childhood options for families of all income levels.

Bilingual liaisons: Employ bilingual staff to work with the family as well as the child enrolled in the program. In schools where this has been done the enrollment has increased Latino participation in events and registration in early childhood programs.

High quality programs: Offer more high quality early care and education programs in areas with high Latino populations served by organizations that have a track record serving that community

and who are committed to a strong partnership/ transition process with public schools or early Head Start classrooms. The transition to public school is critical to build upon the work already done by the early childhood education providers.

In addition, these same early childhood center administrators and providers submitted recommendations for state policymakers to help increase the enrollment of Hispanic children in early childhood education programs.

- ◆ Support policies that encourage and facilitate hiring bilingual staff in early childhood education programs. This will remove the most egregious impediment to participation in early childhood education programs by improving communication and promoting the benefits of these programs.
- ◆ Promote policies which streamline the registration requirements for these programs. This will help address the fears and special circumstances (such as multiple families living in a single dwelling) of Latino parents. Moreover, it would alleviate the suspicions and perceptions about schools being tied to immigration enforcement.
- ◆ Support the launching of Public Service Announcements (PSAs) through local Spanish speaking radio stations/ newspapers/magazines/community service organizations/government agencies during the summer months to inform, educate the community, and ensure participation in early childhood education programs.
- ◆ Facilitate and incentivize programs to recruit bilingual Early Childhood Education Teachers to increase the pool of qualified teachers from which school districts can choose.

- ◆ Support policies and programs that encourage early childhood providers to offer parent workshops addressing the importance of early childhood development and to work collaboratively with elementary schools to ensure successful transitions into Kindergarten.
- ◆ Lastly, policymakers must not only address interventions targeting the child. Instead, they also need to think of mechanisms through which improving parent's lives can help the child through the coordination of services such as parenting classes, job skills training, or Adult Education ESOL.

Immigration and Early Care and Education

Data from The National Center for Children in Poverty (2002) provided important insights into the demographic implications of immigration for child care and related issues. Recently, the Center completed a comprehensive analysis of the children of immigrants, two thirds of whom were Hispanic. The demographic and economic data provided illuminating insights into the lives of immigrants, particularly in respect to child poverty, workforce status, and family composition.

For example, one in four poor children has at least one foreign-born parent, and approximately two thirds of first-generation poor children are Hispanic (Elmelech; McCaskey; Lennon; & Lu. 2002, p. 5). Although non-Hispanic White children of immigrants are less likely to be poor than either Hispanic or African American children, first-generation children of Hispanic origin are the most likely to live in poverty (nearly 45%) (Elmelech, Yuval, et. al., 2002, p.2).

In 2004, a national study on child-care arrangements of preschool children in Hispanic immigrant families by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Child Care Bureau, Administration for Children and Families,

showed that the primary child care arrangements for preschoolers were relatives (36.6%), non relative (27%), parent (22.8%) and center-based (18.2%) (Collins & Wilson-Quayle, 2004 p. 3). In Maryland, this situation looks much different due to the State's strong commitment to public pre-k. For example, the 2010 state-wide data (MMSR, 2010) describing child-care arrangements among Hispanics in Maryland shows that 22.5% of the 9,002 Hispanic Kindergarten entrant children were reported as predominantly in home/informal care in the year prior to Kindergarten entry. According to the same source, 6% were predominantly in non-public center care, but 51% were predominantly in public pre-k.

It is important to stress the strong correlation between immigration status and poverty which is synonymous with low wage jobs or jobs with inflexible work schedules and nontraditional hours. In Maryland the immigrant population, whose overwhelming majority is Hispanic, poses a major challenge for administrators and policy makers addressing early care and education issues. On the one hand, they are the wellspring of population growth and represent a major component of the labor force at a time when the baby boom generation is reaching retirement age. On the other hand, they are underserved by quality early care and education programs as the State is developing early education and education reform policies to improve its competitive workforce.

Another condition often overlooked when addressing immigrant issues is the notion of "adjustment" or "adaptation" to life in the U.S. as newly arrived Hispanic children and their families experience once they enter the country. This experience is very much affected by their immigration status, poverty, and low wage jobs, which shape the perception of early learning among immigrant parents. A recent study by Colleen K. Vesely (2011) points out how the experience of adaptation and adjustment to life in the U.S. shapes parenting practices for young immigrant mothers (Vesely, 2010, p. 3). The study

included 22 Hispanic immigrant mothers and showed how their reasons for coming to a new host society, their journey, and adjustment to life in the new country shaped their expectations of life in the U.S. This adjustment forced them to negate some of the parenting ideas and practices in both the U.S. and their home countries, and led them to create their own social framework for parenting. This new parenting framework was totally distinct from parenting practices here and in their home countries. This adjustment or adaptation process, often ignored, influences greatly the immigrant mothers' perception of early care and education services as well as their ability to navigate the system (Vesely, 2010, p. 3).

Educational Challenges

A comprehensive study by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) on the status and trends in the education of Hispanics, points out the disparity in many key areas between Hispanics and non-Hispanic Whites, and African-Americans. According to the study, the disparities span from early childhood through elementary and secondary education as well as higher education (Smith, 2003, p.6). Although the study findings describe the national status and trends in education of Hispanics, much of the information gathered can be applied to Maryland. Several findings listed below are worth noting:

- ◆ **Family Literacy** Hispanic children were less likely than non-Hispanic Whites or African American children to be read to or visit a library.
- ◆ **Reading** Hispanic 9-year-olds' scores on National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reading tests were 13% behind scores of non-Hispanic Whites, a gap of 28 points.
- ◆ **Grade Retention, Suspension, and Expulsion** Hispanic students had higher retention and suspension/expulsion rates (20%) than non-Hispanic Whites (15%).

- ◆ **Dropout Rate** Hispanic students have the highest high school dropout rate (28%). This figure is more than double those of African American students, and four times the dropout rate of non-Hispanic White students.
- ◆ **Higher Education** Between 1980-2000, Hispanics fell even further behind at the higher education level. Only 22% of Hispanics 18-24 years old were enrolled in colleges and universities (including two year degree-granting post secondary institutions) in 2000 compared with 39% of Whites non-Hispanics and 31% African Americans.

able to speak English when entering kindergarten is most at-risk for academic failure and school dropout (Espinosa, 2003, p.7).

There are different schools of thought on how to best serve English language learners during the K-12 period of formal schooling such as Bilingual Education (instruction in both, English and Spanish) or English as a Second Language (ESL) (instructional support only in English). However, there is a great amount of consensus about culturally and linguistically appropriate early education strategies for children from birth to age 5. In particular, evidence suggests that preschool Hispanic children are more likely to become fluent and to acquire literacy skills in English if they have a strong foundation in their home language (Espinosa, 2003, p.7).

English Language Fluency and School Performance

A central issue in providing early care and education services to Hispanic children from birth through age 5 is the high proportion of English language learner (ELL), children whose home or dominant language is not English. A child not



HOW ARE HISPANIC CHILDREN BEST SERVED BY EARLY CARE EDUCATION PROGRAMS?

High quality early care and education programs can greatly contribute to later educational attainment and life success, including economic and social benefits to the individual and the larger society. Furthermore, high quality programs tend to yield greatest gains for at-risk children, including Hispanics.

Maryland's current early childhood infrastructure provides a strong foundation and potential for meeting the early care and education needs of Hispanic children. However the context of school readiness, including workforce, immigration, and educational challenges, remain strong headwinds as the State's effort to narrow the school readiness gap for Hispanics proceeds.

Maryland Model for School Readiness

Early Childhood Education has been an education priority in Maryland for many years. Maryland took the lead in providing evidence that children's early learning affects their school success well beyond Kindergarten. State kindergarten assessment data suggests that as Kindergarten school readiness improved, third grade reading and math scores rose correspondingly. Therefore, a child's readiness to start Kindergarten is one of the most important educational milestones in his or her life.

Ensuring that there is an accurate understanding annually of the level of school readiness of every child entering Kindergarten in Maryland, the Maryland State Department of Education developed *The Maryland Model for School Readiness* (MMSR) Kindergarten Assessment, a customized version of the Work Sampling System. The kindergarten assessment evaluates what each child knows and is able to do in the seven "domains of learning:" *language and literacy; mathematical thinking; scientific thinking; social studies; the Arts; physical development; and social and personal development* (Maryland School Readiness Report, 2011, p.4).

Kindergarten teachers throughout the state use the MMSR every year to individually assess the readiness of each of their students in those seven essential areas of learning. Orientation and

professional development for this assessment has been coordinated by the Maryland State Department of Education. The MMSR is a developmentally appropriate portfolio assessment including a set of systematic and carefully designed daily observation, work samples, and age appropriate guidelines by which a teacher assesses the skills of each entering kindergartener (Maryland School Readiness Report, 2011, p.3).

The MMSR is capable of identifying three levels of school readiness:

- ♦ **Fully Ready:** The student consistently demonstrates the skills, behaviors, and abilities needed to meet kindergarten expectations.
- ♦ **Approaching Readiness:** The student inconsistently demonstrates the skills, behaviors, and abilities needed to meet kindergarten expectations successfully and requires targeted instructional support in specific areas.
- ♦ **Developing Readiness:** The student inconsistently demonstrates the skills, behaviors, and abilities needed to meet kindergarten expectations successfully and requires considerable instructional support in specific areas.

Using the MMSR Kindergarten Assessment

The MMSR has many uses. It is not just an assessment tool for children’s skills and abilities. It is used by kindergarten teachers to inform classroom instruction, provide appropriate support for individual students, and promote better communication with parents about children’s abilities. Local school systems use the findings to guide professional development opportunities for teachers, inform strategic planning, target resources, and successfully help children make the transition from early childhood to school (MMSR, 2011, p.4). The combined state and county school readiness data report, known as the *Maryland School Readiness Report* is released annually by the Maryland State Department of Education. This annual report highlights what has been learned from the results of the previous year’s MMSR providing a valuable source of information and insight for early educators, schools, legislators, public libraries, and business and community leaders.

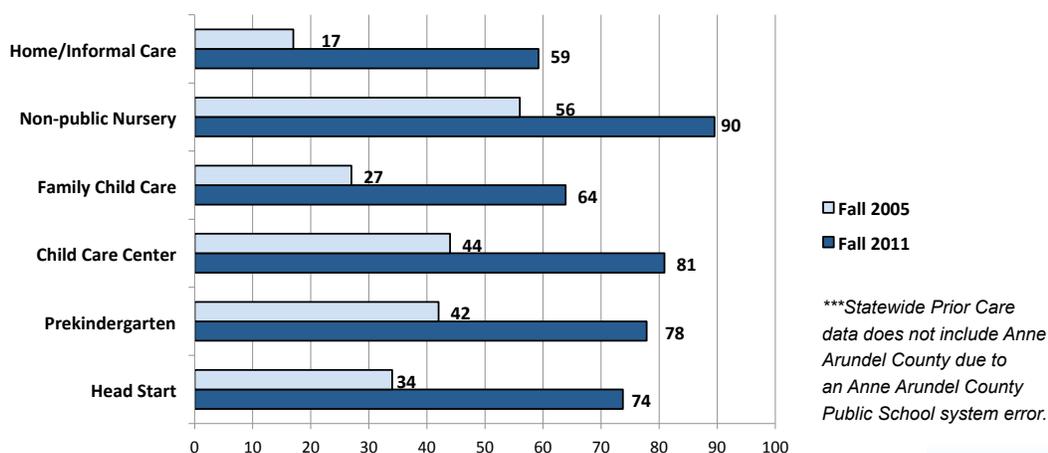
While improving over time, Hispanic and English Language Learners (ELL) statewide have consistently had significant lower school readiness scores than Maryland kindergarteners as a whole and are considered more at risk of not being successful in school as their peers. However, the 2011-2012 data show that levels of school readiness are substantially improving for Hispanic and ELL children statewide when enrolled in some

form of early education program. For example, 70% of Hispanic Children are fully school-ready, a 31-point readiness gain from 2001-2002 and 4 points more than last year (MMSR, 2011, p.4).

In addition, 73% of kindergarteners from low-income households (as indicated by Free and Reduced Price Meal status) rose to “full readiness,” up from 34% in 2001-2002 and 69% in 2009-2010. Of the three counties visited, only Montgomery County had a substantial number of Hispanic children taking part in the Free and Reduced Price Meal program. In 2009-2010, Montgomery County had over 20% of Hispanic children enrolled in early education programs under 5 years and being eligible for the Free and Reduced Price Meal program (Race, 201, p.1). Sixty eight percent of English Language Learners (i.e., children whose first language is not English) were fully ready. This group was up from 35% in 2001-2002 and 65% in 2009-2010 (MMSR, 2011, p.4).

The chart below reflects 2012 MMSR data showing the impressive gains attained by those Hispanic children who attended an early learning program (such as child care, Head Start, Pre-K, or non Public nursery school) one year prior to Kindergarten. According to the same report, Hispanics represented only 14.4% of the total MSDE Kindergarten School Enrollment Data for 2010-2011(MMSR, 2011, p.4).

Full School Readiness by Prior Care of Hispanic Kindergarten Students



Collaborative Systems

MMSR data also illustrates that creating a streamlined birth-to-kindergarten continuum of support for young children greatly improves school readiness. Dr. Sharon Lynn Kagan, Co-Director, National Center for Children and Families at Columbia University, calls this continuum a “system of services” (Keynoter at Ready at Five’s December, 2010, School Readiness Symposium). Maryland has in place the necessary elements for such a collaborative system, which include Head Start; public prekindergarten; accredited early childhood services; credentialed early care and education professionals; and new statewide prekindergarten curricula.

The Judith P. Hoyer Early Child Care and Education Enhancement Program (which includes the Judy Centers) is an example of such a collaborative approach. The Judy Centers comprise a network of 25 school-based or school-

linked partnerships in 22 counties, administered by the Maryland State Department of Education. The Judy Centers partner and collaborate with child care centers, Head Start, family support centers, resource and referral agencies, early childhood programs serving children with disabilities and parents to provide wide ranging-services for at risk children, birth through 5 and their families. The Judy Centers also use the MMSR to assess school readiness outcomes. Children with significant risk factors, such as ELL/Hispanic, and low income Hispanics, who participate in these programs, are able to achieve higher levels in all seven domains of school readiness than those who did not participate (MMSR, 2011, p.7).



CLOSING THE GAP: PROGRAMS THAT WORK

Despite the growth of the Hispanic population in Maryland, the low enrollment of Hispanic four year-olds and younger in early learning programs still persists. However, there are other programs and services here in Maryland which had much success with this population. These programs focus on the families 'cultural sensibilities' as they adapt to a new country and a new language. This awareness is reflected in the recruitment of bilingual staff and outreach activities throughout the community. For example, these centers/organizations are doing the following:

- ◆ Use Latino parents who have already enrolled their children in early childhood programs to do outreach in Spanish to the next generation of applicants. This builds parent leadership and also allows parents to serve as ambassadors to each other.
- ◆ Post informational fliers in apartments/malls/churches/restaurants/bus stops, or make PSA's for Spanish speaking radio stations.
- ◆ Address the needs of both the parents and the child by offering English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction, work skills training, work referrals as well as parenting classes to teach parents to become involved with their children's education. In addition, classes are offered for parents regarding financial survival skills, literacy, math, science, and health/nutrition.
- ◆ Conduct parent workshops (in Spanish) on the importance of early childhood development so parents learn about the value of education and importance of enrolling their children in school early.
- ◆ Host early childhood education fairs in locations where high concentrations of Latino families live and where the location is accessible to public transportation. Make sure fairs are staffed with people who speak Spanish and can offer accurate information about early childhood options for families of all income levels.



- ◆ Share important registration/enrollment information with churches and other community-based organizations to ensure that families know of schooling and learning opportunities.
- ◆ Employ bilingual staff to work with the family as well as the child enrolled in the program. In schools where this has been done the enrollment has increased Latino participation in events and registration in early childhood programs.
- ◆ Offer services and provide Pre-K classes in areas with high Latino population.
- ◆ When feasible, these organizations also consider the need of the work schedules of Hispanic parents and offer full day or extended hour programs. Therefore, parents are able to access services during the day and evening hours.

Listed below are the names of representative centers and organizations which provide these services and exhibit the appropriate cultural sensibilities toward the Hispanic communities in their area:

♦ **The Silver Spring Judy Center / Outreach Effort for Hispanic Families (Montgomery County)**

In Montgomery County, the Silver Spring Judy Center/Outreach Effort at Rolling Terrace Elementary School has been providing culturally appropriate birth-to-kindergarten support services in English and Spanish to prekindergarten students and their families. It also offers kindergarten classrooms with Spanish immersion instruction, and fosters culturally sensitive activities for all families of the Prek to grade 5 school population. The Judy Center also works in partnership with Centro Nia, an early learning program for mostly Spanish speaking children from surrounding communities.

♦ **EBLO/ Education Based Latino Outreach (Baltimore City)**

Founded in 1980, the Education Based Latino Outreach (EBLO) was the first organization in Baltimore City established to address the lack of services available to Latinos in Baltimore. At the time, the group's greatest concern was the absence of educational services provided to Spanish speaking children living in the O'Donnell Heights Housing Project by the Baltimore City Schools. EBLO's goal has been to improve the lives of Hispanic children and their families by providing educational, job skills training, and cultural activities. Today EBLO has expanded its services to include English as a Second Language (ESL) classes for the parents as well as dance,

art, and music programs for the entire family. After school programs for Hispanic children, in partnership with the Baltimore City Public Schools (BCPS), has been added as part of their overall services. The Digital Village Hub, a computer literacy program and Spanish classes for adults are just a few of the additional programs EBLO has added as the educational needs and aspirations of the Hispanic community continue to expand in the Baltimore metropolitan area.

♦ **Latino Provider Network (Baltimore City Metro Area)**

The Latino Providers Network, Inc. (LPN) was established in 1992, to better assist meeting the human, education, and social service needs of greater Baltimore's burgeoning Latino community. LPN is an umbrella organization which functions as a central focus point for Latino service providers in Baltimore City and the surrounding areas. LPN provides networking, technical assistance and capacity building to over 70 agency-community partnership enterprises that provide direct services such as counseling, education, health care, and job training to the Latino population.

♦ **Montgomery Housing Partnership [MHP] (Montgomery County)**

Established in 1998, Montgomery Housing Partnership (MHP) is a private, nonprofit real estate development partnership in Montgomery County providing revitalization efforts in troubled neighborhoods impacted by foreclosures and the downturn in the economy. MHP's main focus is to improve the lives of Latino families in the community by providing affordable housing and educational programs for residents and their families.

These services are designed to help adult learners develop skills that expand their opportunities and balance their lives. MHP's Community Life Programs provide supplemental education services for residents' children throughout the year. Listed below are examples of these programs:

Homework Club: Elementary-aged children 6-12 years old are provided with a structured, supportive atmosphere for completing school assignments in the community centers' computer labs.

Summer Enrichment Program: The purpose of the Summer Program is to provide an array of structured activities for the children during the summer so they can maintain their academic standing at school while having positive experiences. The Camp meets 5 hours a day, five days a week during the month of July.

Preschool Group: The purpose of the group is to help pre-school age children get ready for kindergarten.

Preschool Group Summer Program: The purpose of the group is to nurture the children's natural curiosity and to engage them in creativity projects and field trips. The children also have activities such as reading, coloring, and listening and playing as part of their daily activities.

Teen Program: Teenagers have a critical need for strong support in their communities. MHP's Teen Program helps young adults learn to handle peer pressure, social-economic needs and develop leadership in their communities.

- ◆ **Padres y Alumnos Latinos en Accion (PALA)
*Latino Parents and Students in Action***

This program is designed for students and parents of White Oak Middle School (WOMS) in Montgomery County. Its main goal is to promote academic and social achievement for White Oak Middle School's Latino students by improving their educational and social opportunities as well as promoting parental involvement. In addition, together with the PTSA and school staff, special efforts are in place to ensure that all Latino families in the WOMS community are welcomed and participate in PALA activities. The organization features monthly meetings on topics of interest to parents and students. Some topics include: supporting student success, navigating through the school system, health information and MSA/Advanced Classes.

- ◆ **Mid Atlantic Equity Consortium, Inc. (Mid-Atlantic Region)**

The Mid-Atlantic Equity Center (MAEC) is one of ten equity assistance centers funded by the U.S. Department of Education under Title IV of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The Center provides technical assistance and training services in the areas of race, gender, and national origin (English Language Learners/ESL) free of charge to public school districts and other governmental agencies in federally-designated Region III, which includes: Delaware, the District of Columbia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and West Virginia. The goal of the Center is to ensure that all children have access to equitable education opportunities to complete college and succeed in their careers.

Through partnerships with the Maryland State Department of Education's Early Childhood Division, the Maryland Family Network, the Maryland Family Support

Centers, HIPPY International, the Judith P. Hoyer Early Childhood and Family Education Centers, and Head Start, MAEC has gathered evidenced-based best practices to best serve Hispanic families.

MAEC also works with school districts, schools, organized parent groups (PTA/PTOs, etc.), community organizations, and faith based organizations to develop systems and programs to advance school improvement and increase student achievement through collaboration between school, family and community. These include transition assistance to child care centers, pre-schools, Judy Centers, and elementary schools to ease the transition from pre-K to Kindergarten and maximize family involvement for student readiness and success. These services are provided in Spanish.

◆ **Maryland State Parental Information Resource Center [PIRC] (Statewide)**

Maryland PIRC is a project funded by the U.S. Department of Education through its Office of Innovation and Improvement [OII]. Its mission is to help parents, community members, and educators in Maryland work together to increase family involvement and improve student achievement. MD PIRC collaborates with the Maryland State Department of Education, Judy Centers, and the Family Support Centers---coordinated by the Maryland Family Network---that work with low-income parents and children 0-5 years old throughout Maryland. By using existing networks, proven programs and strategies, the MD PIRC provides a cultural bridge for building a positive connection between families and school. Many of their services and outreach efforts are conducted in Spanish and English.

◆ **CentroNia, Takoma Park**

CentroNia is a nationally recognized non-profit multicultural learning community for the entire family. Their centers, located in Takoma Park and the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area, offer a pioneering approach to bilingual education. Their largest and most successful program is their Early Childhood Education Program through Head Start. It is a full-day program for children from birth through age 5, laying the foundation for school readiness by working to develop the whole child in a dual-language environment. On any given day a child will learn through music, movement, science, technology and the visual arts. The program also includes a parent training component which educates parents on the importance of early learning. It also provides literacy classes and English as a Second Language instruction.

CentroNia's success is due in part to its mission to provide resources and services catering to the entire family. Some of the many programs found through CentroNia provide dual language training and educational services in the areas of Community Education, engaging children and adults in their communities; Food and Nutrition, encouraging wholesome lifestyles for children and their families; D.C. Bilingual Public Charter School, providing quality K-12th grade education to ensure high academic achievement; CentroNia Institute, providing professional development and resources to educators in the community who are working with this target population.

◆ **Vocabulary Improvement and Oral Language Enrichment through Stories (VIOLETS)**

One of the targeted language-based programs, promoted by Ready at Five and funded by MSDE's Division of Early Childhood Development, is designed to enhance oral language and vocabulary enrichment developed by this organization is *The Vocabulary Improvement and Oral Language Enrichment through Stories (VIOLETS)* program. VIOLETS is an early childhood program, developed by Diane August, senior research scientist with the Center for Applied Linguistics, to develop oral language, pre-literacy skills, and background knowledge in young English-language learner (ELL) children and children with low expressive language skills (typically low-income youngsters). The curriculum uses 12 Big Book versions of popular children's books, chosen on the basis of their quality, their appeal to young children, and the extent to which their content aligns with the Pre-K Maryland Model for School Readiness (MMSR) standards in the domains of physical development, language and literacy, social and emotional development, mathematical thinking, scientific thinking, social studies, and the arts.

In the VIOLETS approach, carefully selected vocabulary words and idiomatic expressions that occur in the stories are taught before, during and after story reading. In addition, paraphrasing and questioning techniques are employed during reading to further develop students' oral language proficiency and build children's background knowledge. The program also includes the presentation of 'core knowledge' themes that tie the book to state standards and a language awareness component in which pre-reading skills and concepts of print are

introduced. Audio versions of the children's books read in Spanish are included on CDs so that they can be used in a listening center with smaller copies of the books to help Spanish-speaking ELLs prepare for the English read-aloud. The vocabulary and concepts introduced during the week are reinforced through additional engaging activities that involve writing, drawing, singing, and games.

An evaluation of the VIOLETS program's approach indicated that there were large and significant gains for both key and basic words between the pretest and post-test; both native-English-speaking students and ELLs showed overall gains in their vocabulary knowledge.

Time constraints limited visits and one-on-one conversations with other Early Childhood Centers and services in Maryland which have been also providing programs for Hispanics in their communities. The main purpose of this report was not to evaluate all such programs in the state, but to address the reasons for the lack of participation in Early Childhood Education programs by Hispanics in Maryland.

One of the presumed characteristics of Hispanic families commonly cited by educators and policymakers is the apparent preference for "informal" child care arrangements as opposed to organized child care such as child care centers, non/public nurseries, pre-school, Head Start, or family child care. Perhaps in some instances this may be the case; however no data (state or national) was found to support it. Hopefully, this report has helped to reveal the whole story.

CONCLUSION

The goal of this report has been twofold:

- ◆ Outline a cogent case for the “demographic imperative” that Hispanic children ages birth - 8 years pose for Maryland’s public education system’s blueprint to maintain its place as a national leader and strive toward world-class status;
- ◆ Reveal those barriers throughout the state which impede participation in early childhood programs by Hispanic origin children’s families.

Hispanics are the fastest growing and youngest racial/ethnic group in Maryland. The number of Hispanic children as a proportion of all children has been increasing more rapidly than the number of non-Hispanic White and African American children for all age groups. Yet, as the data shows, they are underrepresented in early education programs throughout the state. This report has presented some of the research that supports the importance of the connection between early literacy skills development and later literacy achievement, and the impact of instructional interventions on children’s learning. Given the educational challenges that this population poses, it is recommended that Maryland focuses on this critical period of early years (birth to 8 years) to address young Hispanic children’s educational needs to strategically take Maryland’s educational system to the next level.

Another important point highlighted in this report is the notion that the multifaceted nature of this problem must also take into account new policies and systems of academic intervention. Hispanic children are not a homogeneous group for they are products of diverse immigration histories and linguistic profiles. Thus, a variety of approaches need to be considered to address the linguistic and cultural elements of learning and early intervention within the context of a multi-generational service approach. Research, policy, and practice must address the multi-faceted opportunities and challenges that are typical of this demographic



group. In particular, we must focus on the youngest segment of this group because we have not gone far enough in documenting their needs, due to the paucity of research on effective interventions.

The urgency to address the educational challenges of young children of Hispanic origin in Maryland, as well as its policies and research implications, is entirely appropriate for four very practical reasons.

First, the policy importance of this age group is rooted in the notions of critical periods of intervention and rates of return to investment. In other words, efforts to support historically disadvantaged groups have the biggest payoff when targeted at the young.

A **second reason** is to study Hispanic children’s family socioeconomic status (SES) as a fundamental cause of race /ethnic disparities. Hispanic children are the most socioeconomically

disadvantaged group in the U.S. Therefore, when considering interventions, we must also consider economic disadvantage as much as language proficiency for the disparities related to Hispanic status which is underlining the importance of how the two are highly conflated (Glick, & White, 2003, p. 589).

Third, research in this area needs to keep the focus on the explicit ways that the outcomes of the child generation in this population are tied to the circumstances of the parent generation. In other words, policy recommendations need not concern only interventions targeting children. Instead, we need to think of ways through which improving their parents' lives may also help the children.

Last but not least we must consider interventions designed to address two stages of the challenges facing young children of Hispanic origin: one rooted in social demography; *the migration process*, and another in developmental psychology; *the processes of adaptation that newcomer Hispanic youth and their parents undergo once they are here* (Crosnoe, 2002, p. 12). We have always applied interventions that address only the “arriving here” or the “migration process.”

These notions tend to represent a onetime short-term band-aid that overlooks the “adaptation process”. The latter is more complex and requires a greater understanding of how immigrant families with young children adjust to life in the U.S., experience parenting, and learn to navigate the U.S. Early Childhood Care and Education system. If the “adaptation process” is not considered it could undercut our ability to create the most effective programs, studies, and policies that will adequately address and support immigrant families.

Finally, as Maryland prepares to launch its third wave of reform in pursuit of establishing a world-class education system, it must also take into account the opportunities to explore, develop, and determine effective and scalable strategies to increase school engagement and learning for children of Hispanic origin. As a result, this production of new knowledge and cutting-edge, innovative practices will not only provide opportunities and continued academic improvement for these children, but also cement Maryland's status as a national leader with a World Class Education System.



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