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Amid growing diversity of U.S. young child population, early childhood education and care programs & schools challenged in addressing multiple languages and cultures [1]

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EXCERPTS

WASHINGTON — Diversity is on the rise across the United States, where young children growing up with one or more parents speaking a language other than English at home now make up nearly one-third of the U.S. child population age 8 and under. With growing numbers of languages spoken in these homes and greater variation in origins, race/ethnicity and socioeconomic status, this "superdiversity" has significant implications for the early childhood education and care (ECEC) programs, schools and other systems that serve Dual Language Learners (DLLs).

While there is considerable evidence that points to the effectiveness of bilingual education models in classrooms where a single non-English language is dominant, much less is known about what works well for DLLs in superdiverse settings. A new report from the Migration Policy Institute's National Center on Immigrant Integration Policy offers a demographic portrait of the DLL population at the national, state and local levels, with a particular focus on those in black immigrant families, refugee households and in Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) homes.

The report, Growing Superdiversity among Young U.S. Dual Language Learners and Its Implications, also examines the implications of this diversity for ECEC and K-12 programs. "Many communities across the United States are experiencing classroom superdiversity with little to no guidance on effective practices for promoting their cognitive and socioemotional development," the authors write. "As this diversity continues to grow and shift, ECEC systems and programs will need to build strategies to effectively meet the learning needs of these children and support their parents in doing the same."

Drawing from MPI analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data, the report finds that 95 percent of DLLs are U.S. born. The top countries of origin for the parents of these children are: Mexico (41 percent), India (7percent), El Salvador (4 percent), and China and the Philippines (3 percent each).

Spanish is by far the most prevalent language, spoken by about 60 percent of parents of DLLs, followed by Chinese (3 percent), and Tagalog, Vietnamese and Arabic (2 percent each). However, with the proportion of Spanish speakers much lower among more recent immigrants, the report shows other languages, such as Arabic, Hindi, Telugu, Tamil and Kru rising significantly in number among parents of young children.

Overall, DLLs are significantly more likely to live in poverty, with 31 percent living in families with incomes below the federal poverty level, compared to 22 percent of non-DLL children. Their parents are more likely to have lower levels of education, and because of linguistic isolation the families may have more limited access to educational, medical and other critical services.

Building on this demographic analysis, the report identifies some of the key challenges ECEC systems and K-12 schools experiencing superdiversity face, including the need to:

improve the collection of state-level data on young DLLs to ensure their learning strengths and needs are visible to state policymakers and program administrators

undertake research to develop effective instructional approaches for superdiverse classrooms

support and retain linguistic and cultural skills and diversity in the ECEC workforce

implement family engagement strategies and cultivate a workforce with the linguistic and cultural skills to work effectively with DLLs' families

expand language-access services, including translation and interpretation capacity, in ECEC and human services agencies that deal with the families of DLLs

The report is the first in a series of three examining superdiversity. In late March, two papers that draw from fieldwork and interviews to identify program models and teaching practices that are proving promising in superdiverse pre-K-grade 3 settings will be published.

Read the report here: www.migrationpolicy.org/research/growing-superdiversity-among-young-us-d... [3]

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