



Wisconsin Children in Immigrant Families

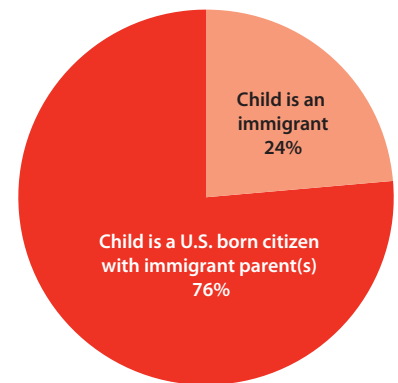


Quick Facts

- 76% of Wisconsin children in immigrant families are native born U.S. Citizens
- 82% live in married couple families
- 80% speak English well
- Three quarters live with a parent who has stable employment
- Close to half live in low-income families
- 80% of children live with a parent who has a high school degree or better.

culture, language and customs of Wisconsin. Today the majority of people in Wisconsin, and in the United States as a whole, can trace their ancestry to an immigrant who left their country of birth to seek the opportunities and freedoms for which America is known. This *WisKids Count* brief presents data on indicators of child and family well-being for Wisconsin's latest wave of immigrant families in order to help inform the public dialogue about new immigrants to our state.

Immigration Status of Children in Immigrant Families, 2006



Source: *The Annie E. Casey Foundation*

Since its early days of statehood, Wisconsin has welcomed waves of immigrants from Germany, Norway, Sweden, Poland, Italy and Mexico. These new residents joined the descendants of the first fur traders, miners, missionaries, pioneers, homesteaders, free African Americans and Native American peoples who preceded them. In the last few decades, Hmong refugees from Laos and immigrants from Latin America have added to the

In 2006 one in 11 children in Wisconsin lived in an immigrant family (114,000). Nationally one in five children is either an immigrant or the child of an immigrant. Three quarters of children in immigrant families in the state are U.S. Citizens born in the United States.¹ Since Wisconsin is not a first destination for most immigrants, the majority of immigrant families in the state are long-term residents of the United States who have relocated here. Only 3 percent of parents in immigrant families with children in Wisconsin arrived in this country less than five years ago.²

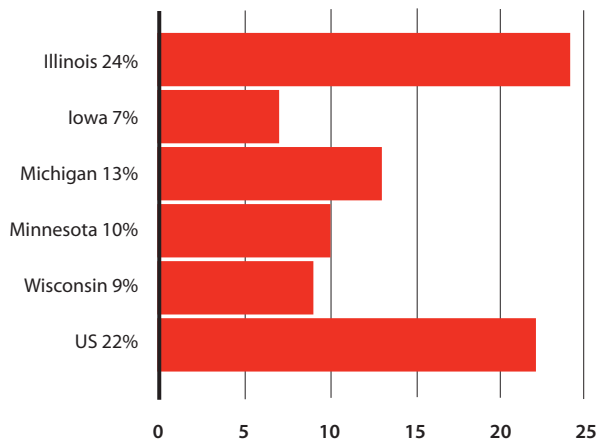
Not surprisingly then, Wisconsin has one of the lowest



rates of children in immigrant families in the Midwest. But that rate is growing; the percentage of children in immigrant families in the state increased from 7 to 9 percent between 2000 and 2006.³

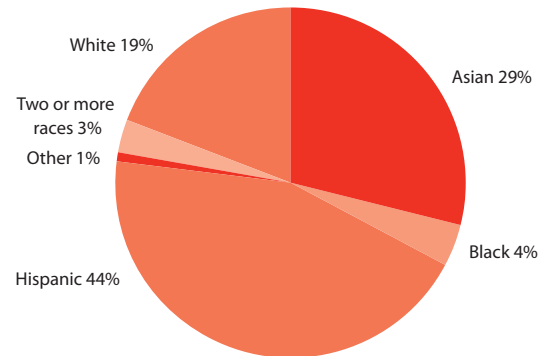
The majority of children in immigrant families have parents who are U.S. citizens, and that percentage was higher in 2006 than it was five years earlier. Citizenship rates are higher in Wisconsin families than nationally (see page 7 for description of the various kinds of legal immigrant status families may obtain).

Wisconsin Children in Immigrant Families, Midwest and United States, 2006



Source: American Community Survey

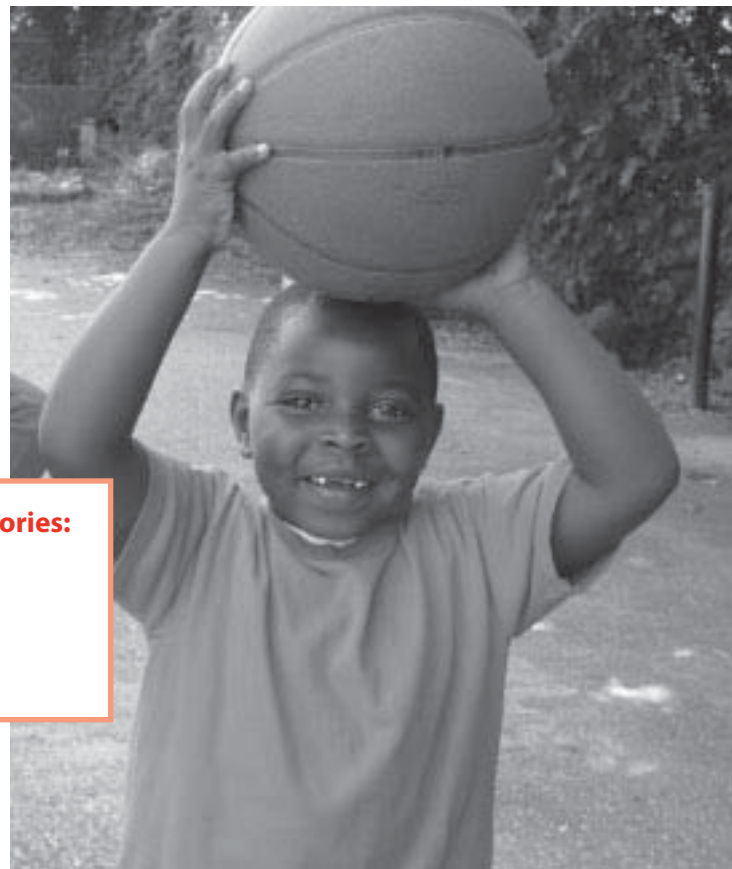
Wisconsin Children in Immigrant Families, by Race and Ethnicity, 2006



Source: American Community Survey

Growing Diversity

Because the majority of the state's population is descended from white European immigrants, Wisconsin's population remains majority-white. Wisconsin's child population is somewhat more diverse in race and ethnicity than the adult population. Nine percent of the adult population in the state are people of color, while more than one in five children (21%) in the state are non-white. Immigrant families contribute to the state's increasing cultural diversity. In 2006 the majority of children in immigrant families were Asian, Black or Hispanic, while about one in five were non-Hispanic white.⁴



Immigrant families include children in one or more categories:

- U.S born children of one or two foreign born parents,
- adopted foreign born children; and
- Foreign born children, regardless of immigration or refugee status.



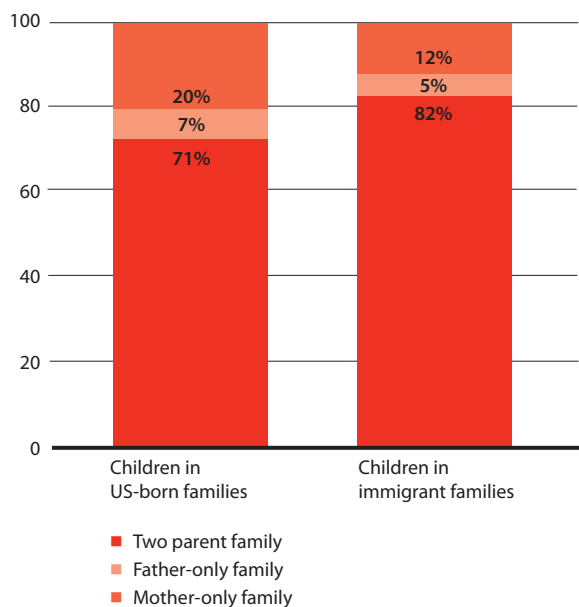
Family Economic Well-Being

Family economic stability is a critical component in the success of children in school, community and family life. The ability of families to afford healthy meals, find safe and affordable housing, obtain health care coverage, secure quality child care and live in safe neighborhoods with good schools all contribute toward children's ability to thrive and become successful adults.

Parents' educational attainment

A parent's educational level has a direct bearing on current employment opportunities as well as future advancement and earnings potential. A parent's educational level also has implications for the success of his or her children. Children of parents with high levels of education generally have stronger school readiness skills, more success in school and positive health outcomes. Four of five children in immigrant families live with parents who hold a high school degree or better. However, they are more likely than children in native-born families to have a parent without a high school degree, often due to circumstances in the parent's country of origin. Six percent of children in US-born families have parents without a high school education.

Wisconsin Family Composition, 2006

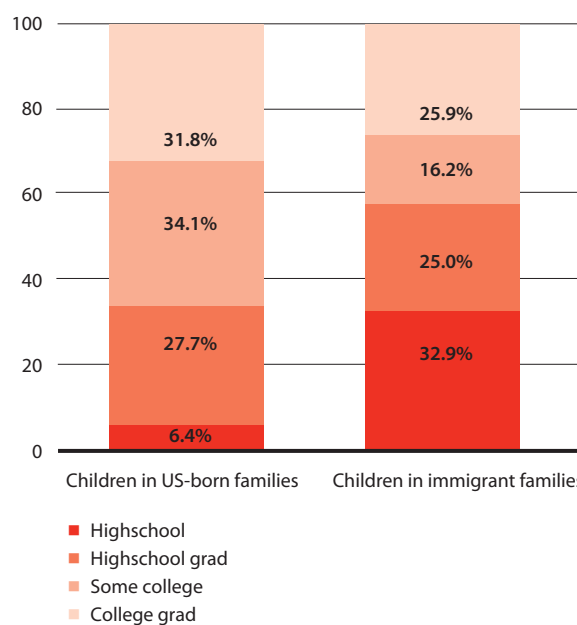


Source: Population Reference Bureau analysis of ACS Data

Family Composition

Research confirms that children in two-parent families generally have more assets available to them both emotionally and economically. Children in immigrant families in Wisconsin are more likely than children in US-born families to live in two-parent households. Eighty-two percent of children in immigrant families are living in a married couple family; for children in US-born families that rate is 71 percent.

Wisconsin Children by Parents Educational Attainment



Source: Population Reference Bureau analysis of ACS Data, 2006

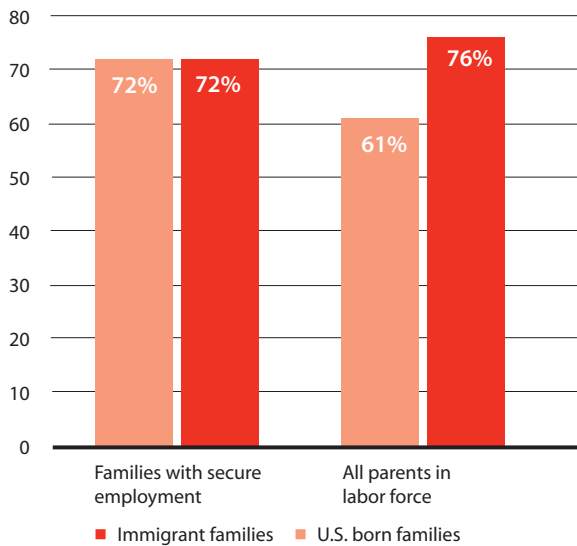
Employment

Employers benefit from hiring multi-lingual, multi-cultural employees. In addition, employment links parents with the larger community in which their families live.

Most children in immigrant families live in a household in which one or both parents are employed. Close to three quarters of all children—both in immigrant families and U.S.-born families—live in families in which at least one parent is considered to be securely employed (full-time, year-round employment). In 2006, 69 percent of children in immigrant families had fathers who work full-time and 31 percent had mothers working full-time.

Like children in US born families, 6 percent of all children in immigrant families live in a household in which no available parent is working. Twenty-eight percent of all Wisconsin children, in both immigrant families and non-immigrant families, live in a family where no parent has a secure job.

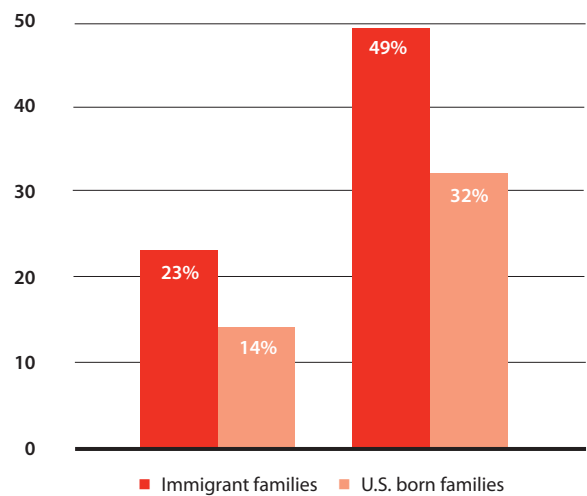
Wisconsin Children Living with Employed Parents



Poverty

Despite high levels of employment, children living in immigrant families in Wisconsin are more likely to be living in low-income and poor households. Children who grow up in poverty disproportionately experience a number of barriers, including poor health, exposure to environmental toxins, lower academic success and a myriad of other hardships.

Wisconsin Children Living Below Poverty & in Low Income Families



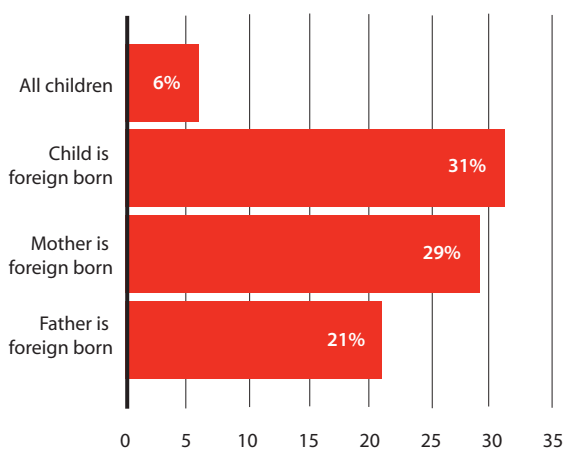
Source: American Community Survey, 2006

Access to Health Care

All Wisconsin children benefit from the ability to see a doctor for regular checkups and urgent concerns. The vast majority of Wisconsin children are covered by health insurance. The state's publicly funded insurance programs, Medicaid and BadgerCare (and now BadgerCare Plus), have succeeded in covering all but a small fraction of children in low-income families. And while health insurance is not the only factor in keeping children healthy, it plays a critical role in shielding families from potentially devastating financial risks while enabling them to access important preventive health care services. Children who are foreign born or have a foreign-born parent are much less likely to be covered by health insurance due, in part, to the lack of availability of insurance through their employers or because they do not qualify for public programs.⁵



Wisconsin Children Without Health Insurance by Nativity, 2003

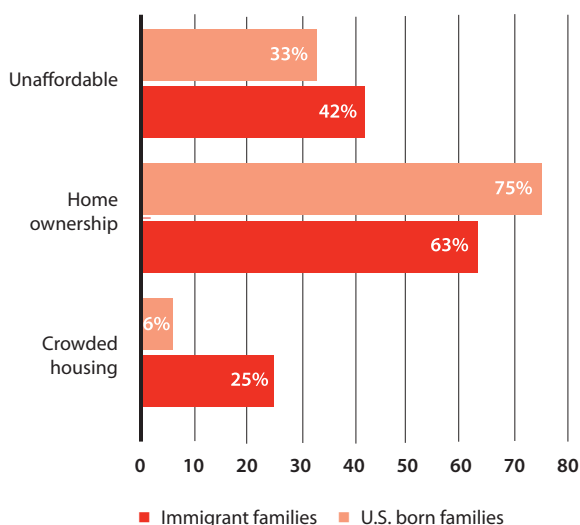


Source: National Childrens Health Survey, 2003

Housing

Home ownership provides a critical link between families and their communities. In Wisconsin 63 percent of immigrant families own their own home. For non-immigrant families, that figure is 75 percent. However, housing costs are an increasing burden on immigrant families with children. Forty-two percent of immigrant families with children spend more than 30 percent of their income on housing. In addition, one in four children in immigrant families live in crowded housing, while only 6 percent of children in non-immigrant families experience crowding.⁶

Housing



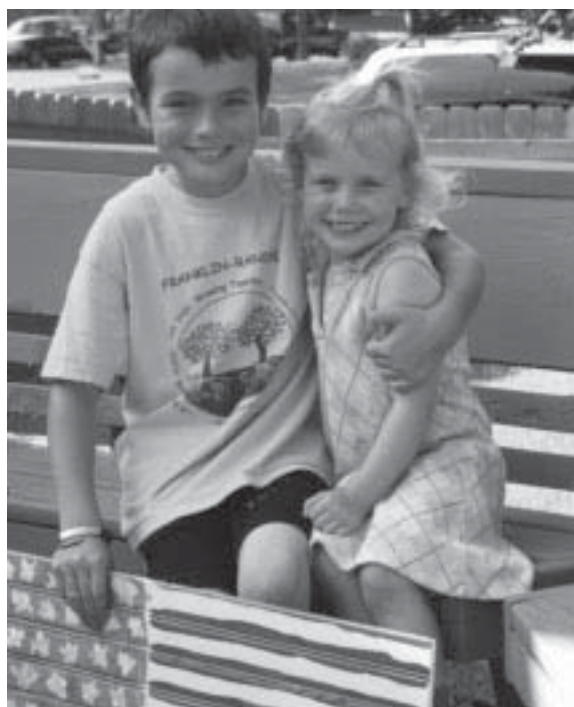
Source: American Community Survey, 2006

Education

Throughout Wisconsin's history, education has been a key to connecting immigrants to the larger community, and has been integral to families' economic success.

Early childhood education

Long before it is time to shop for the brand new backpack, pencil case and lunchbox, the experiences and relationships that form the basis for a child's success are taking shape. Early childhood experiences that engage children and provide stable, nurturing environments have an enormous impact on children's well-being, including their school success, future employment and earning potential, and their capacity to be productive citizens. Early care and education programming that includes highly qualified teachers, small class sizes, and parent engagement also benefits the wider community by yielding higher educational attainment, reducing the achievement gap and reducing special education costs. For children in immigrant families, preschool programs can play an important roll in English language acquisition. National data indicates that children in immigrant families are less likely to participate in preschool or center-based early education programs.⁷ In Wisconsin a slightly higher percentage of 3-year-old children in immigrant families are enrolled in early childhood programs, while a smaller percentage of 4-year-olds are enrolled.



K-12 Education

Successful schools give all students the ability to achieve at their highest potential. National research shows that children in immigrant families are more likely to be concentrated in under-resourced schools.⁸ In 2005, the funding gap between Wisconsin school districts with the largest and smallest percentages of children of color was \$1,102 per student.⁹ This is particularly problematic for schools seeking to address the needs of a growing population of English language learners. Programs that are successful at assisting English language learners teach language in an academic context. Research has confirmed that students who learn the language required to be successful in school through context based curriculum don't lose valuable time studying language in a vacuum while their classmates learn geography and math, however promising approaches used in several Wisconsin school districts demonstrate that students close the gap in their knowledge within several years if they receive sustained services and support. (Recent standardized test scores continue to reflect a sizable gap between the scores of children with limited English proficiency and their English-proficient classmates).

% Wisconsin Students Proficient & Advanced

	Limited English Proficient	English Proficient
3rd grade reading	56%	83%
3rd grade math	56%	76%
6th grade reading	57%	87%
6th grade math	55%	77%
8th grade reading	28%	77%
8th grade math	37%	72%



English Language Acquisition

Strong language skills in multiple languages are an economic asset for individuals and their communities. In Wisconsin, 10 percent of children between the ages of 5 and 17 speak a language other than English at home.¹⁰

Wisconsin Children Ages 5 to 17 Who Speak a Language Other Than English, 2006

	Speak English very well	Less than very well
Spanish or Spanish Creole	70.8%	29.2%
Indo European Languages	79.8%	20.2%
Asian & Pacific Island Languages	66.7%	33.3%
Other Language	77.8%	22.2%

Source: American Community Survey, 2006

- Children in immigrant families are a good deal more likely to speak English than their parents. Sixty percent live in families in which one parent has difficulty with English, while 20 percent of children have difficulty speaking English themselves.¹¹
- According to the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, in March 2007 there were 40,752 Limited English Proficient (LEP) students enrolled in public schools. These students represent 114 different languages. The majority of them spoke Spanish (60%) and one in four (25 %) spoke Hmong.¹²

Linguistic Isolation

Linguistic isolation can present an obstacle to immigrant families' success in their new state. Children living in families in which no one over the age of 14 speaks English very well are considered to be linguistically isolated. This isolation contributes significantly to many families' economic and social barriers, limiting parents' ability to gain family supporting employment and effectively communicate with their children's health care providers, teachers and neighbors who speak only English. In Wisconsin 23 percent of children in immigrant families live in linguistically isolated households.



Conclusion

Immigrants to Wisconsin increase the cultural diversity of the state, bringing new ideas, energy and talents. They create new business, own homes and work hard. Wisconsin benefits when all families are successful. However, for new families with low levels of education and difficulty speaking English, there are a number of barriers to success which many of the state's current public systems are not adequately prepared to address. Although the majority of immigrant families are working, close to half are considered low-income. Jobs without health insurance, career ladders or paid time off are often all that is available to parents without a high school degree or with limited ability to speak English. Early childhood programs that emphasize culturally appropriate early literacy and language development are difficult to find and afford, but are essential for children of working families. Like other immigrant families before them, this most recent group of newcomers will contribute in meaningful ways to their new communities despite unique barriers.

Foreign Born People in the United States

- **Legal permanent residents (LPRs)** are persons who have been granted permission to live and work permanently in the United States. They may apply for citizenship after five years.
- **Refugees and asylees and other humanitarian immigrants** are persons who sought residence in the United States in order to avoid persecution in their own country. Persons granted refugee status applied for admission while outside the United States. Persons granted asylum applied either at the port of entry or at some point after their arrival in the United States. Refugees and asylees may apply to adjust their status to LPR after 1 year.
- **Naturalized citizens** are persons aged 18 and over who become citizens of the United States. Most legal permanent residents are eligible to apply for naturalization within five years after obtaining legal permanent resident status. Immigrant children generally become citizens automatically when their parents become citizens.
- **Non-immigrant admission** refers to arrivals of persons who are authorized to stay in the United States for a limited period of time. Most non-immigrants enter the United States as tourists or business travelers, but some come to work, attend school or engage in cultural exchange programs.
- **Unauthorized migrants (sometimes referred to as undocumented or illegal immigrants)** refer to persons who entered the country without permission or who entered through legal channels but then violated the terms of entry by staying past his or her visa expiration date or by engaging in unauthorized work.

Eligibility of Non-Citizens for Public Benefits in Wisconsin

The eligibility of immigrants for public benefit programs is a complex topic, and any brief summary will be guilty of oversimplification. With that caveat, the following is a general overview of the subject.

For most benefit programs, state and federal law limit eligibility to U.S. citizens and “qualified” immigrants. The term “qualified” immigrant is defined by federal law and encompasses a number of groups, including: lawful permanent residents (people with green cards), certain battered spouses or children, refugees, asylees, and entrants from Cuba and Haiti. Immigrants who are not “qualified” are ineligible for most benefits. The not “qualified” immigrants include: undocumented immigrants, temporary agricultural workers, asylum applicants, and persons with temporary protected status.

Within those general parameters there are numerous exceptions, and each program has somewhat different rules. The following are some of the more significant differences:

Health Care – Eligibility policies for Medicaid and BadgerCare Plus are somewhat more restrictive than most other programs. Some “qualified” immigrants (including lawful permanent residents and battered spouses or children) who entered the U.S. after August 22, 1996, are ineligible until they have lived in the U.S. and have been in qualified status for 5 years.¹³ However, people who are ineligible solely because of their citizenship or immigration status are eligible for BadgerCare Plus emergency services, and pregnant immigrants are eligible for BadgerCare Plus Prenatal.

Food Share – In addition to covering “qualified” immigrants, the Food Share (food stamp) program covers lawfully residing Hmong or Laotian tribal members.¹⁴

Child Care – Immigrant families are eligible for the Wisconsin Shares child care subsidy program if the child is a citizen or “qualified” immigrant (notwithstanding the status of parents).

For a more detailed description of federal rules on eligibility of immigrants, see the comprehensive table prepared by the National Immigration Law Center: http://www.nilc.org/pubs/guideupdates/tbl1_ovrvw_fed_pgms_032505.pdf



End Notes

¹ Analysis of American Community Survey data by the Population Reference Bureau

² *2006 Yearbook of Immigration Statistics*, US Department of Homeland Security, <http://www.dhs.gov/index.shtm>

³ The Annie E. Casey Foundation, analysis of Census Bureau Data by Population Reference Bureau. www.aecf.org,

⁴ Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2006, Analysis by the Population Reference Bureau

⁵ The Child and Adolescent Health Measures Initiative, analysis of the National Survey of Children's Health.

⁶ The ratio of occupants per room is derived by dividing the number of persons in the housing unit by the number of rooms in the housing unit. A housing unit is considered crowded if there is more than 1.00 persons per room.

⁷ Census Bureau American Community Survey www.census.gov

⁸ *Putting English Language Learners on the Educational Map, The No Child Left Behind Act Implemented*, Clemencia Cosentino De Cohen and Beatriz Chu Clewell

⁹ *The funding Gap, Low Income and Minority Students Short Changed by Most States*, The Education Trust, www2.edtrust.org

¹⁰ The Annie E. Casey Foundation, analysis of Census Bureau Data by Population Reference Bureau. www.aecf.org

¹¹ Ibid

¹² Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, data from unpublished reports.

¹³ The 5-year requirement does not apply to veterans or active duty military families, refugees, asylees, or Cuban/Haitian entrants.

¹⁴ Hmong and Laotian tribal members may qualify for other benefits as refugees or asylees, but some who do not fit into those categories are eligible for food stamps, but not for some of the other public benefits.

Acknowledgements

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