

Overview

The demographics of Virginia are changing and Virginia's commitment to providing tools for success to the complex, varied and dynamic population of children growing up here today will have a significant impact on the Virginia of tomorrow.

In 2005, 16% of Virginia's children lived in immigrant families.¹ Eighty-one percent of those children were born in the United States and are U.S. citizens. The number of children in immigrant families varies around the state but immigrants are showing up in many more communities in Virginia than ever before. For example, in Albemarle County, 13% of children live in immigrant families; in Henrico County - 14%; and in Shenandoah County - 18%. Considering the numbers, the entire state of Virginia is poised to benefit from policies that intentionally integrate, educate and engage all of our children. (See Table 1 on page 4 for a list of the percent of children in immigrant families for 38 Virginia localities)

Northern Virginia stands out as the area of the state with not only the lion's share of Virginia's overall population but a larger proportion of children in immigrant families (39%). As the economic engine of the state, Northern Virginia is particularly situated to benefit from the development of a diverse, multi-lingual, and well-educated workforce who can provide leadership in an increasingly global environment. Thus, we have chosen to highlight the Northern Virginia region in this brief.

Virginia's Economy: Workers, Consumers, Taxpayers, and Homebuyers

Immigrants are a central component of Virginia's economy and they participate in every major sector of the market.² Generally, they fall into two categories: 1) unskilled labor with less than a high school diploma and 2) skilled professionals with advanced degrees.³ Immigrants are a vital component of the Virginia workforce, filling low skill and high tech jobs that would otherwise be difficult to fill.⁴

Immigrant families come to America eager to improve their standard of living. Children in immigrant families benefit from having families with a strong work ethic; they see their parents working hard and they know that their parents expect them to do the same.⁵

Most children in Virginia, including those in immigrant families, live with at least one parent who works full-time, year-round. In fact, children in immigrant families, both in Virginia and in the U.S., are more likely than children in U.S.-born families to have parents with secure employment (Chart 1).

Immigrants are also entrepreneurs who start businesses, invest in and revitalize communities, and contribute to the economic vitality of the community in other ways. For example, 69% of immigrants live in homes they own, a rate close to that of their native-born counterparts in Virginia (Chart 2).

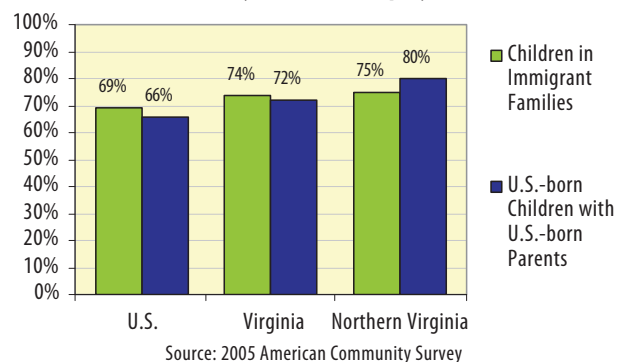
The Assets: Hardworking, Stable Virginians

Despite public perception to the contrary in some communities, statistical data reveal that most immigrant families are hard-working, stable contributors to the economy.

Secure Parental Employment

Secure parental employment is defined as working at least 35 hours a week for 50 weeks per year.

Chart 1. Children Living with Secure Parental Employment (full-time, year-round employment)



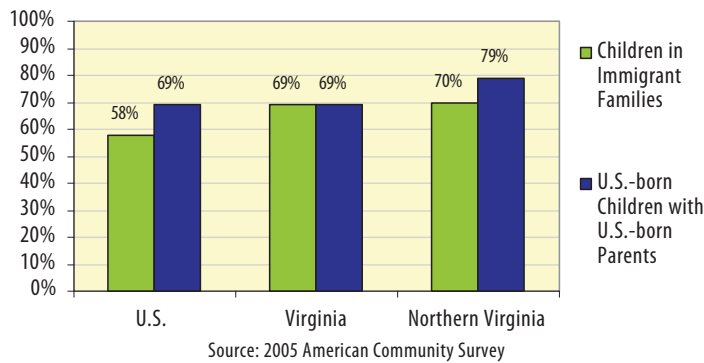
Secure parental employment improves family functioning by reducing the stress brought on by unemployment.⁶ In addition, children with parents who have steady employment are more likely to have access to health care.⁷ Appropriate health care plays an important role in controlling communicable diseases and in ensuring healthy communities. Seventy-five percent of children in Northern Virginia who live in immigrant families have at least one parent who works full-time, year round (Chart 1). In Virginia, about 74% of immigrant children have parents with secure employment, higher than the national average of 69%.

Children Living in an Owned Residence

Homeownership is the primary way to build wealth in American society, giving homeowners the opportunity to leverage their home equity to send their children to college, open new businesses, save for retirement, and enjoy significant tax relief.⁸ Homeownership also encourages recently arrived immigrants to be an integral part of the community⁹ and gives them access to more stable neighborhoods with better community services and schools.¹⁰

High homeownership rates for immigrants in the Northern Virginia region reflect the region's affluence and intentional efforts by local governments, nonprofits and the banking community to make key financial services, such as mortgage financing and homeownership education programs, accessible to the immigrant community. In Virginia, about 69% of immigrant children live in an owned residence, higher than the national average of 58% percent (Chart 2).

Chart 2. Children Living in an Owned Residence



The Challenge: Providing Tools for Educational Success

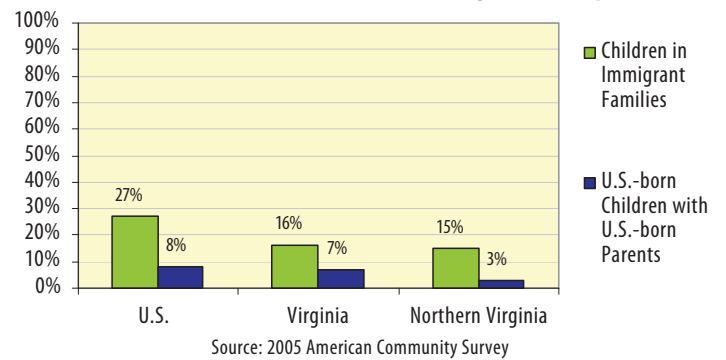
Despite the relative economic and employment stability indicated above, some immigrant families are faced with financial and other struggles, and their children therefore are at greater risk of growing up without all the skills and resources needed to succeed.

Children Whose Parent(s) Lack a High School Diploma

This data includes children who live in a married-couple family where neither parent has a high school diploma or the equivalent and children who live in a single-parent family or subfamily, where the one resident parent does not have a high school diploma or the equivalent.

Parents without a high school diploma are less likely to obtain a good job. Higher levels of parent educational attainment are strongly associated with positive outcomes for children in many areas. Children of parents with higher levels of education are more likely to have access to greater material, human, and social resources that lead to school readiness and higher educational achievement, better health and health-related behaviors, and involvement in more pro-social activities such as volunteering.¹¹ Children in immigrant families are more likely than children in U.S. born families to have parents who lack a high school diploma (Chart 3).

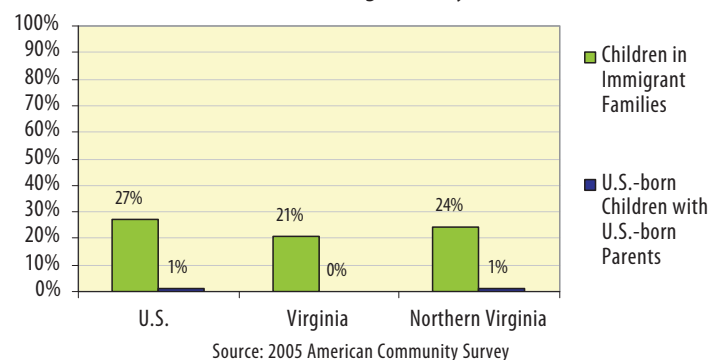
Chart 3. Children Whose Parents Lack a High School Diploma



Children Who Live in Linguistically Isolated Households

Contrary to the assumptions held by many, the great majority of children in immigrant families learn English fairly readily, so that less than one quarter of these families are considered "linguistically isolated" (Chart 4). (A linguistically

Chart 4. Children Who Live in Linguistically Isolated Households



All of Our Children: Ensuring a Bright Future for Virginia



isolated household is one in which no person 14 years old and over speaks only English and no person 14 years old and over who speaks a language other than English, speaks English “very well”.) Children in linguistically isolated households may spend more time mastering English skills in school, potentially putting them behind in other learning. These children and their families also may experience barriers in communicating with health and other service providers that are not prepared to function in a variety of languages.¹²

What Can Virginia Do to Support the Development and Success of All Its Children?

Virginia can shape a bright future by promoting policies that improve outcomes for all children and their families in the areas of education, health and self-sufficiency. Some policies below are specifically targeted to children in low-income families, whether they are U.S. born or immigrant families. Other policy recommendations are targeted to immigrant families at all socio-economic levels.

Open Doors to Learning:

Early learning experiences are important for all children but particularly important to disadvantaged children, such as children with disabilities or those who live in low-income families. Research shows that early education programs can have beneficial outcomes for low-income children who are at risk of school failure.¹³ Policies that increase the affordability, accessibility, and attractiveness of early learning increase participation rates among immigrant groups.¹⁴ Subsidized child-care programs; locating early education and after-school programs in neighborhood public schools; and assisting immigrant parents to learn English as part of an early education/family literacy program are examples of effective policies.

Access to higher education and technical training for older youth keeps the doors open to opportunity for immigrant youth who will play an increasingly important role in Virginia’s workforce and will lead the way in an increasingly global economy. The entire community will benefit from the creativity and productivity of a diverse workforce.

Increase Access to Appropriate Health Care:

Failure to address preventable problems such as tuberculosis can compromise all of us. Identifying and treating communicable diseases keeps all our children safe in schools, on playgrounds, in libraries and anyplace they come in contact with the public. Safety net health care programs, like free clinics, play an important role in controlling communicable diseases and a vital role in ensuring healthy outcomes for babies in low-income families by providing prenatal care. Prevention and early detection of illnesses and problems will ensure a healthier community and save money long-term.

Ensure Family Economic Success:

Children’s prospects are affected by the economic resources of their families.¹⁵ Investments in ensuring family economic success are an important complement to investments in children.¹⁶ Supporting and promoting programs such as alternative mortgage financing and homeownership education programs for first time buyers provide families with the opportunity to build wealth.

Workforce development strategies are another important component of economic success. Access to a job with sufficient incomes, security, benefits and career advancement can make the difference between a family that is thriving and moving up the economic ladder and one that is just surviving.

Voices for Virginia’s Children recognizes the national debate on immigration policy. However, Voices also recognizes that low-income children, no matter what their immigrant status, benefit from increased access to educational opportunities, appropriate health care and programs that improve the chances for family economic success. Public benefits such as child care subsidies, food stamps, the State Children’s Health Insurance Program (SCHIP), Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), child tax credit, and free tax assistance can help low-income families fill the gap between their earnings and their expenses. Access to these programs should be promoted and preserved for all low-income families in our communities.

Conclusion

Regardless of how the national debate on immigration policy is resolved, states and localities have the day-to-day challenge of integrating immigrants in neighborhoods, local labor markets, and schools. The purpose of this brief is to better understand the assets and challenges all immigrant families in Virginia face today and to consider the best ways to meet the needs of children and families who will play a role in Virginia’s future.

In spite of unique challenges, immigrants are huge contributors to Virginia’s economy and they are climbing the socio-economic ladder. They are becoming increasingly important to the Virginia economy as workers, taxpayers, and homebuyers.¹⁷ The large number of children in immigrant families in Virginia (16%) means that these children will play a vital role in Virginia’s economic future. Immigrant children and their parents will fill anticipated workforce losses due to baby boomer retirements and be one in seven buyers of homes currently owned by aging Virginians. Communities that strive to meet the wide-ranging and complex needs of all children—including immigrant children—are stronger and provide fertile ground for a productive and robust economy.

Acknowledgements

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Endnotes

¹ These included both children who were born outside the United States and children born in the United States to at least one foreign-born parent.

² JLARC briefing to Virginia Immigration Commission, 9/25/2007. Available at <http://www.hhr.virginia.gov/Initiatives/ImmigrationCommission/01-04-08/VESIP%20presentation%20to%20Immigration%20Commission%20.PPT>. Accessed January 29, 2008.

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⁶ *America's Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being* (2002). Washington, DC: Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics. Available at <http://www.childstats.gov/americaschildren/eco2.asp#40>. Accessed February 7, 2008.

⁷ *America's Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being* (2002). Washington, DC: Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics. Available at <http://www.childstats.gov/americaschildren/eco2.asp#40>. Accessed February 7, 2008.

⁸ National Council of LaRaza, n.d., "Homeownership". Available at <http://www.nclr.org/content/policy/detail/2564/>. Accessed January 22, 2008.

⁹ Torres, Gustav, "For Latino Immigrants, A Stake in the Dream", *The Washington Post*, Sunday, October 8, 2006. Available at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/10/06/AR2006100601258.html>. Accessed February 7, 2008.

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¹¹ Child Trends Data Bank, 2003, "Parental Education". Available at <http://www.childtrendsdatabank.org/indicators/67ParentalEducation.cfm>. Accessed January 22, 2008.

¹² Donald J. Hernandez, Ph.D., "Demographic Change and the Life Circumstances of Immigrant Families", *The Future of Children*, Volume 14, Number 2 - Summer 2004. Available at http://www.futureofchildren.org/information2827/information_show.htm?doc_id=241529. Accessed January 22, 2008.

¹³ Takanishi, Ruby. N.d., "Leveling the Playing Field: Supporting Immigrant Children From Birth to Eight". Available at www.futureofchildren.org. Accessed February 6, 2008.

¹⁴ Takanishi, Ruby. N.d., "Leveling the Playing Field: Supporting Immigrant Children From Birth to Eight". Available at www.futureofchildren.org. Accessed February 6, 2008.

¹⁵ Duncan, G.J., and Brooks-Gunn, J., and Klebanov, Pl., Economic Deprivation and Early Childhood Development. *Child Development*. (1994) 65:296-318.

¹⁶ Smith-Nightingale, Demetra, Fix, Michael, Economic and Labor Market Trends, *The Future of Children*, Vol. 14, No. 2, Children of Immigrant Families (Summer, 2004), pp. 48-59.

¹⁷ Myers, Myer, January 24, 2008, *Thinking Ahead About Our Immigrant Future: New Trends and Mutual Benefits in Our Aging Society*, Immigration Policy Center. Available at http://www.aifl.org/ipc/infocus/ipc_infocus_080122.shtml. Accessed January 24, 2008.

**Table 1. Children in Immigrant Families
(who are Foreign-Born or have at Least One Foreign-born Parent)**

Region	Number	Percent	Rank
U.S.	15,657,000	21%	
Virginia	294,440	16%	
Northern Virginia	200,025	39%	
Alexandria City	13,285	50%	1
Arlington County	15,040	43%	2
Fairfax County	107,800	42%	3
Prince William County	31,890	31%	4
Loudoun County	22,500	30%	5
Shenandoah County	1,540	18%	6
Henrico County	9,925	14%	7
Albemarle County	2,550	13%	8
Fauquier County	1,920	12%	9
Virginia Beach City	12,640	11%	10
Chesterfield County	8,425	11%	10
Stafford County	3,505	10%	12
Rockingham County	1,660	10%	12
Spotsylvania County	2,950	9%	14
Montgomery County	1,190	9%	14
James City County	1,065	9%	14
Chesapeake City	4,750	8%	17
Norfolk City	4,450	8%	17
Newport News City	4,325	8%	17
Richmond City	3,470	8%	17
Roanoke County	1,495	8%	17
Hampton City	2,255	7%	22
Roanoke City	1,425	7%	22
Culpeper County	745	7%	22
Franklin County	750	7%	22
Mecklenburg County	490	7%	22
Frederick County	955	6%	27
York County	960	6%	27
Lynchburg City	855	6%	27
Suffolk City	980	5%	30
Henry County	630	5%	30
Hanover County	960	4%	32
Pittsylvania County	585	4%	32
Portsmouth City	435	2%	34
Augusta County	250	2%	34
Washington County	185	2%	34
Campbell County	230	2%	34
Bedford County	200	1%	38

Source: 2005 American Community Survey microdata

*Northern Virginia grouping includes: Alexandria, Arlington, Fairfax City, Fairfax County, Falls Church, Loudoun, Manassas, Manassas Park, and Prince William

A sample size of 120 was used as a cut off for inclusion in this table.