

## Early Ed Watch

A Blog from New America's Early Education Initiative

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# Study Finds Drop in Preschool Enrollment for Latino Children

Author(s): [Laura Bornfreund](#)

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Between 2005 and 2009, the percentage of Latino children attending preschool across the country declined, according to new research out of the University of California, Berkeley.

According to the report, "[Latino Access to Preschool Stalls after Early Gains](#)," since the early 1990s, the percentage of Latino 4-year-olds attending preschool grew significantly – peaking in 2005 at 53 percent. By 2009, however, Latino enrollment in preschool had dropped to 48 percent.

Bruce Fuller, co-director of Berkeley's Institute for Human Development, and researcher Anthony Y. Kim used data from several population surveys including census data from 1982 and 1990 to conduct the analysis of preschool enrollment. Data came from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study- Birth Cohort (ECLS-B) for 2005, the 2005 National Household Education Survey (NHES) and the 2009 Current Population survey (CPS).

The drop from 2005 to 2009 could be even greater for children of immigrants – as much as 10 percent, Fuller said in an interview with *Early Ed Watch*. The size of the drop depends on how immigrant families responded to questions on the multiple national surveys Fuller and Kim analyzed. For example, the ECLS-B and CPS varied in how they asked parents about enrollment, with one using words like "preschool" and the other "nursery school." Fuller and Kim found no change in enrollment rates for white and African American peers.

Why the decline in enrollment? One reason, Fuller argues, is "the lack of government capacity to keep pace with Latino population growth." Other possible reasons: Latino mothers who lost jobs may have elected to keep their children at home instead of enrolling them in preschool. State reductions in aid for publicly funded preschool may also have led to the drop.

Another possibility is that immigrant families, many of whom are undocumented, often avoid filling out forms with official agencies and the current political climate may be keeping them away in greater numbers. A new book by Harvard Professor Hirokazu Yoshikawa – *Immigrants Raising Citizens* – shows that immigrant parents avoid programs such as publicly funded pre-k due to fear of deportation. (Yoshikawa's book examines the lives of Mexican, Dominican, and Chinese immigrants living in New York and explores three commonalities across the groups that may adversely influence their children's development: avoidance of programs and authorities, isolated social networks, and poor work conditions.)

In Fuller and Kim's research, another concern is whether Latino children who *do* attend early education programs are attending centers of high-quality. While Fuller and Kim found that Latino

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children attended “academically focused” preschools at about the same rates as their white counterparts, some features of the Latino-attended schools appeared to be of lower quality.

Based on an analysis of a study on 615 California preschools serving Latino children of immigrant and non-immigrant parents conducted by the Rand Corporation earlier this year, Fuller and Kim found disparities in quality between California preschools serving children of immigrant and nonimmigrant parents. For example, the quality of classroom materials was found to be slightly lower and the adequacy of space slightly less in centers serving immigrant families.

Fuller told *Early Ed Watch* that conventional wisdom has led people to think that the quality of programs is lower in high-poverty neighborhoods, but this is not necessarily the case anymore. As requirements for Head Start programs, for example, expand and focus on improving quality, early education programs located in low-income communities can improve to the point of either being on par or of higher quality than offerings in middle class neighborhoods, which may not require the same training or credentials for teachers. “When it comes to low-income – often immigrant – Latino communities, though, it appears the old conventional wisdom still holds true,” asserted Fuller.

*Early Ed Watch* asked Fuller about policy changes that would need to be made to improve access to and the quality of early education programs for Latino children of both immigrant and non-immigrant status. “There’s a nagging policy dilemma about whether we should focus on equalizing access or put our eggs in the basket of improving quality,” he said.

Fuller said that funding mechanisms should be sensitive to where the Latino child population is growing. Money for new early education programs should flow based on this growth.

He also suggested that we need to figure out ways for preschools to be more inviting organizations for Latino families in general. Latino parents often face language barriers and a lack of cultural sensitivity when they visit centers. More bilingual early education teachers, and this means that more bright and committed Latino students need to be recruited into early childhood preparation programs.

“We do know that second and third generation parents are more likely to enroll their children, but we can certainly hurry that process along by making parents more welcome and feel more comfortable with formal preschool institutions,” Fuller said.

If you are interested in learning more about the well-being of immigrant children in the United States, the Brookings Institution and Princeton University are holding an [event](#) on April 20 in Washington, DC.

## Suggested Reading

[Dual Language Learners: What Early Educators Need to Know Report: When Young Spanish-Speaking Students are Tested in Spanish, Math Scores Improve](#)  
[What English Proficiency Means in Arizona](#)  
[Illinois Poised for the First Statewide Regulations on Dual Language Learners in Pre-K](#)  
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- National Association for the Education of YoungChildren
- National Early Childhood Accountability Task Force
- National Head Start Association
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- Research Connections
- Society for Research in Child Development
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- National Center for Education Statistics
- National Institute for Early Education Research

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The [Early Education Initiative](#) seeks to promote a high-quality and continuous system of early care and education for all children, birth to age 8. While much of our focus is on pre-K up through 3rd grade, we also examine the need for high-quality infant and toddler care and better policies to support new parents.

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