

new Americans | Case Study in Colorado



Mexican Immigrant Parents' Perspectives

In the fall of 2010, almost one third (32%) of Colorado's public school students identified as Hispanic (CO Dept of Education, 2011). Although not all of these students were new immigrants, the number of English Language Learners enrolled in Denver County schools was 35%; statewide, 14% of students were ELL (KidsCount, 2010). Almost one quarter (24%) of child care providers surveyed in Colorado reported that two languages were spoken in their classroom, with another 16% saying that between three and eight different languages were spoken. Perspectives below were gathered at focus groups of Mexican immigrant parents in Denver.

*What do Mexican immigrant parents believe about raising their children?
How do they compare their beliefs to those of native born American parents?
What cultural beliefs may influence parents' decisions about child care?*

Mexican immigrant parents noted that in their culture, responsibility for child care falls primarily on the mother. There is a preference for children to stay at home until they reach an age at which the parents determine they are ready for school. Many also emphasized that it was important for parents to care for and teach their children in the same way they were brought up by their parents.

...my husband and I, from the time we got married we talked about educating [the children] and he said, "I'm going to work and I'm the one who's going to provide and you dedicate yourself to taking care of the children. You look to the home—that it lacks for nothing. If I'm going to be away most of the time, they'll learn a little from me and you will teach them the same way that we were taught." We teach them and we do not leave them for someone else to teach.

My husband and I decided that I wasn't going to work so that I could take care of our children, because we've seen cases where women take care of children and we've watched how that they don't pay the kind of attention that a mother does. Mothers have the responsibility to provide their education and take care of them and always be with them.

Be with them, teach them the values the lady is saying, but also be with them, I think it's the most beautiful age because, they're only babies, we see them walk, grow, try to grab things. Teach them a little what is...before taking them to school, teach them the colors, numbers, even if they don't understand, but talk to them about the things they're going to learn at school.

In Mexico, our families, we are accustomed for the parents to be...especially the mother, with the children, their first three years because they say that is where they establish the foundation for life and it's important to be with them, to educate them, guide them, to teach them what is right and what is wrong.

Parents also noted that American families seem to focus more heavily on “work, work, work.” They had mixed feelings about the structure of American children’s life. Some expressed admiration for the emphasis American parents seem to place on educating their children outside of school by enrolling them in classes and taking them to museums and other educational destinations. They commented that American parents seem to have less time to spend with their children but that they are more likely than Mexican immigrant parents to use that time to provide educational experiences for their children. Many possible reasons were given for this practice. Some parents felt that there was a greater emphasis on education in American culture, but others said it was just easier for American families to do these activities because on average, American families work fewer hours and earned higher salaries than do Mexican immigrant families. Other parents pointed to the expectations in their culture that mothers devote substantial time to housecleaning and providing home-cooked meals that require time to prepare and that these expectations limit the time they have to do these activities with their children.

...I say the housework never ends. A lot of Mexicans think that our household responsibility is just to keep the house clean, have the food ready on time and just stay at home. And I say that’s not everything. We have some freedom, the women as well as the children, so that they can learn and do things in their lives. Because if we continue this way, we’re going to stay the same and everything is going to stay the same.

What also happens is the academic level of the parents, because sometimes the mother we try to get her to be active with her kids but the father never had the ...necessity to read about the support they need to give... And the Americans from childhood had the culture ... to read and to go to the library. Because everywhere in every community there are libraries and they’re free. What I mean is there are possibilities available... our culture is ...like it’s just learning.

Americans are very concerned with intellectual development. My son takes classes in swimming and I’ve learned how they worry about their children learning things they will benefit from like swimming, sports, classes in music.

Parents described the style of parenting in their culture as much more protective than the parenting style of American parents. Several parents observed that Latino parents seem to have more difficulty letting go of their children at 18 and that Latino children often don't leave home until they are married. Several mothers worried that what they saw as a tendency toward over-protectiveness was undermining their children's independence.

And if [the children don't get married] they don't leave at all. Because sometimes they want to leave home earlier, to leave home and become independent, but we don't let them. No, no, no.... until they get married, whether it's 15, 16 or 30 years of age that they get married.

The Americans raise them to be more independent. You can see that the children can get around, they're more open in how they talk, in how they play, and we raise them with more fear.

I don't like that children are always depending on you when they have the ability to do certain things. Things that one doesn't think that children are going to be able to do just because of their age and you think they need your help. But as mothers, we say "No, daughter, I'll do it for you," or "No, wait a bit and I'll do it for you." In my opinion, the boys and girls should do things that they want to do, and they can learn with a little discipline and responsibility.

Sometimes I think it's bad that children are too closely tied to the mother, because my first-born daughter is like, if I walk, she walks and if I don't walk, she stands there waiting for me; and the boy, the second born, is more independent. He runs and grabs things, whenever he wants, and she doesn't.

While parents expressed admiration for the independence of American children, they also felt that typically American parents aren't as involved with their children as Mexican immigrant parents are.

I don't have a lot of contact with Americans and how they raise their children, but we Hispanics are generally overprotective of our children. The Anglos are freer, such as now in the cold weather they just give them a coat or sweater, and we put a lot more clothes on our kids. Then that's when the kids feel, I think, that maybe the parents don't care.

Us Mexicans, we are always following [our children] around if, for example, their face is dirty.

One thing I've noticed..., that [American parents] are not there for their children at school. I have attended graduations, and the children are alone, American children, alone without their parents being with them on such an important day. I just see that [American children] are more lonely. We have to work, but a day when the child is going to dance at school, or any event, we even ask for the day off, or as they say, we play "hooky" or we trade the day off, but we try to be there as much as possible. But...also their jobs are different from ours, a lot of times they have more pressure at work, and they're thinking about work all the time.

Last year when my little girl was in kindergarten, there also was a little girl who, during the whole year it was very seldom that I saw her hair done, or saw her clean. Her little nails were long and full of dirt. And also on her graduation day, she was by herself. And always, as I take my little girl, she is always walking alone. And I think she is too young to walk to school alone.

If you can't go [to a school event] you send your sister, or any relative, a friend, a neighbor to accompany your child, and [American children], I've seen that they're alone, alone.

Several parents noted that in Mexico they have extended family to rely on to watch their children if they go outside and that in this country they are much more reluctant to allow their children to roam. With this lack of freedom and concerns over safety, they felt that their children were better off attending a child care program because otherwise they would be confined indoors.

...They need that, to be with other children. In this country we cannot let the children go out on the street, because any crazy person can pass by. So more than anything, to take them to a safe place, where they can be with other children.

Before in Mexico, I was afraid to put my kids in child care when they were little. I had to take care of his cousins, which was easier, because they protected each other outside playing, but not here. You're at home in your apartment, enclosed with the kids and the kids don't have anything to do. Here I think it's important that children get out [enroll in a child care program] when they're three years old.

The reason I send them is that I prefer they're at school than at home watching TV.

Another mother, however, spoke of feeling *more* secure here. It is likely that her comment has to do with the area where she is from in Mexico compared to where she now lives in the U.S.

...in our country, everything that we're living there, is pure violence. Sometimes here we feel that we're not in our country, but we feel more secure here than we would in our country. Because there is so much violence that you say to yourself, "I'd better stay here."

What is important to parents in raising their children and what do they hope their children will learn before they enter kindergarten?

Parents focused primarily on socio-emotional skills, critical components of school readiness, and had very specific ideas about what they want their children to learn prior to kindergarten, including:

- The basic concepts of numbers and colors and getting along too.
- Knowing how to share, how to pay attention.
- That they feel love toward themselves, respect toward other people.
- Teaching them right from wrong.
- To socialize with other children.
- To learn to be in other places, not just with their mother.
- To respect others.
- To feel trust and confidence.
- That they learn and that learning gives them pleasure.
- The values that were instilled in us we should instill in them, like how to behave at a place, how to respect others and be respected by others.
- Get used to a classroom. To the fact that they ask them to do something, and they have to stay doing it.
- To start forming the idea that they need to go to school, that they need school in their daily life.
- That they are bilingual. That they can read and write [Spanish] so it doesn't get lost.
- To defend themselves.

Parents felt that child care provides a good opportunity for their children to socialize with other children and to become bilingual.

Positive Aspects of Child Care

To learn more about Mexican immigrant parents' views about child care, questions differed for those who had children in care and those who did not. Those parents in the "in-care" focus groups were asked to identify the most important reason why they placed their child in care, what they look for in a child care program, and what makes them comfortable or uncomfortable about a child care setting. Parents in the "not in care" focus groups were asked what they thought about child care in this country, whether there were any circumstances under which they would place their child in a child care program, and what they would look for in a child care setting if they did decide to look for care. The following benefits of enrollment in child care were mentioned by parents:

Child care provides more opportunities to learn. Parents noted that child care allows children the opportunity to learn academic skills (e.g. letters, sounds, holding a pen, etc.) and social skills (e.g. sharing, listening, not interrupting). Children also get used to eating different foods they wouldn't eat at home.

It is very good [child care program] because my children, when they came here they struggled a lot with English, because they came straight to elementary school, but the little one, he understands everything already and it won't be as hard for him as it is for them.

Child care allows children to socialize, learn English, and know what to expect when they go to kindergarten. Parents felt that child care provides a good opportunity for their children to socialize with other children and to become bilingual. They also noted that child care introduces children to rules and schedules similar to those encountered in elementary school.

Child care gives children the chance to become more independent and to learn how to do things for themselves. Parents expressed concern that in Mexican immigrant culture, parents may do too much for children and that could be undermining their independence. Several parents spoke of the role child care played in fostering independence and helping their children to learn basic life skills.

I wanted to put my child in a center because I wanted for her to explore and see other things, because it's not just two hours punch time...I would take her even if it had nothing to do with a job.

Child care can connect parents to other services. Parents acknowledged that having their child in a child care setting meant that their child would be assessed and would receive any services they need. They also mentioned that being a part of a child care setting connected them to additional services, including parenting education (especially when the child care provider is a multi-service agency).

Concerns about Child Care

Some of the concerns about child care noted by Mexican immigrant parents might be expressed by any parent. These included:

Cost of care. This was one of the two most frequently mentioned concerns about child care cited by parents. Parents spoke of having to choose between the ideal child care setting and what they felt they could afford.

I think what we want is one thing and the reality is another.

Logically, you're going to take into account the attitude of your child, to tell you if it is a good place or not. You don't look at price at the beginning, just that your child is happy. But if I don't have the money to pay...

Other parents expressed similar concerns about affordability.



Imagine with three children. And then half my salary was to pay the babysitter and half for me and then the ride and all. I was left with like \$100.

... how am I going to pay for each child with what I make, so I usually take them to be taken care of by their aunt, my mother, my cousin, because it's cheaper, because otherwise you end up paying \$55 for each child.

I think for a lot of people it's a matter of necessity because the majority of Hispanics came here to work and to send something back to Mexico. We both have to work, not just the father, so it's important that neighbors care for children. Because if you're working and you keep from getting pregnant, you're working full-time.

What sometimes limits us is finding a place where the children are going to learn something. But we can't have a place that costs too much. And the truth is that we are at a level that we can't get into one place because we make too much, but at the same time we don't make enough to use other places.

Trust and the warmth of interactions between children and providers. In addition to cost, trust and the warmth of interactions between child care providers and children was the most common aspect of care that parents cited as most important to them.

I feel comfortable because I know the teacher. I know how she treats the children, how she talks to them, and I am calm.

...the trust and confidence you have in the person who's going to take care of them, the security.

It would be with a person that I know, including her morals, a person I could trust.

I just don't have much confidence in many child care centers, and that's what I would base my opinion on. I just don't trust them. Because someone who is a stranger... it's not like I was going to be supervising.

Center hours that do not match work schedules. Some parents expressed frustration that they were unable to find child care that matched their work schedules so they had to place their children in care situations which they did not think were safe.

When I was working, since I don't drive they have to take me very early, and my only option is to leave them with the neighbor because by bus I made two hours to where I used to work. Even though I knew she didn't take good care of him what option did I have, if I had to leave at six in the morning? When I got back one time, she was locked in her house and my kids were outside, across the street, alone. They were 5 and 6 and they were playing alone at my house.

I had to take her to houses and I knew she wasn't taken care of properly, because she would cry, she would cry a lot but what could I do?

Loss of the freedom of an unstructured childhood. Several parents expressed a strong desire to be with their children and give their children a childhood free of schedules before kindergarten. They felt that enrolling their children in a child care program would deny their children that experience.

... my goal is for my son to live his childhood without obligation to get up at 8:00. I want him to have my affection and to have all his mother's love before he gets into kindergarten.

It's very important that I don't have to work and take him there [child care program] then. No, let him enjoy his childhood.

Safety and the level of attention provided in child care. Safety issues and the amount of attention paid to the children were also concerns.

It's that they can fall, or have some sort of accident, maybe on the stairs, or for example, the door to the street, or the other door leading out to the parking lot. I always see that the door is open and it always makes me a little nervous, someone might come in and they [the teachers] are with the children and who knows what happens."

You could be waiting up there [gesturing to a balcony in a child care center] and no one would see you, and you would wait for your chance...and there was that teacher who used to hit the children, and one of the mothers complained and they got rid of that teacher.

I had my little girl at another school and I felt like over there she was from 8:00 in the morning until 3 in the afternoon, most of the time sleeping and I think she is learning a bit more, in fact she already sings in English and everything, and I got her out of the program to bring her here.

Children not being old enough to convey how they feel about a child care program. Parents emphasized the importance of listening to their children to determine if there are issues at the child care program they attend. When asked at what age parents would feel comfortable leaving their child, several parents cited the ability of a child to be old enough to articulate what they were feeling about the program as an important factor influencing their decision.

I believe, more than anything, the well-being of the children. We come to pick them up and they're happy, and we bring them, and they go inside right away, I mean, they already know what to do. And in a place where the kid doesn't feel good, that kid doesn't want to stay.

You can tell if this sort of thing is happening, because the child doesn't want to go to school. And sometimes you're struggling with the children because they don't want to go, they can feel they are being rejected, and eventually they'll tell you, "Mommy, they did this or that to me."

...they can't talk. And the older ones can now express themselves well...they tell you what they're feeling.

Perceptions of quality based on type of child care setting. Many parents drew distinctions between Head Start/preschool and a child care center.

Other concerns expressed, however, seemed more tied to language and cultural considerations and should be considered in the context of a complex set of circumstances in Colorado. Colorado is a state in which the Mexican culture has existed for over four hundred years but it is also a state that has become increasingly divided on issues related to illegal immigration, particularly from Mexico. Those hostile to immigration have enacted new laws at the state level that have caused fear among some Mexican immigrant families.

I don't see it [Head Start] as taking care of children. I see it as a school where you learn. It's one thing to take your child to learn and another to take him to be taken care of because you work. So you don't do it [enroll in Head Start] because they take care of them but because they teach them, maybe better than you can.

For me child care means always going and leaving your children where all they need to do is take care of them, not teach them exactly. It's not just a question that they are taught academically to take care of children. In a Head Start, the child is learning.

...you work and you try to take your child in spite of everything. it's better to know some family member who takes care of them or a child can go into a program to stay there but if you don't work, you see it more like a place for your child to be cared for and not like a school.

Children being separated from their culture and religion and not being taught the same values as are taught in the Mexican culture. Some parents expressed a preference for care by family or friends because they believed there weren't any Hispanic children at the child care programs in their community. They also felt it was important to be with their children during the years before kindergarten to teach them the same values their parents had taught them.

I would take them to a friend or family member because the day care centers are full of American children, no Hispanics.

It turns out the woman belonged to a different church than me and we had some problems because of this, and you can see that even this sort of thing can be a problem. I mean what is a child going to know about religion, but you have to be careful even about something like that.

In many ways, the parents in the focus groups seemed to struggle with the desire to maintain the positive aspects of their own culture but also to adopt aspects of the American culture that they seemed to admire.

What I try to understand in this concept is that sometimes, unfortunately, in our culture we have the tendency to teach them what our parents and grandparents taught us, so this concept that I want to teach my children is not to be the same as them. That culture was very beautiful but some of the teachings were very different.

I believe that we want to raise them in our culture. But we should know that there are a lot of things we don't know about our culture.

...the majority of Hispanics in our country don't learn things like in the United States. There is nothing more than take care of the baby until they go to school, which is when they start learning, nothing more. Here it's a baby in the womb and it begins to learn things.

Children being cared for by providers who do not speak Spanish. Many parents said they would not want to send their children to a provider who didn't speak Spanish, both for the comfort of their child and because of their own desire to be able to talk to the provider about their child's progress.

It [having them speak Spanish] would make it easier to communicate with the teachers.

The teachers, as well as the workers, speak Spanish and you can tell how well they get along with the children.

Since my oldest daughter came here, I like it better in the way the teachers treat them because in fact they spoke very little Spanish. They would always speak to her in English, and here, the teachers are bilingual.

Legal status and documentation issues as a barrier. Parents were divided on whether legal status issues made Mexican immigrant parents reluctant to enroll their children in child care programs. While some said they did not think that was a factor, others acknowledged that some parents are fearful and faced difficulty acquiring the documentation some child care programs required.

I think for people who are here illegally, they might be afraid [to enroll in a child care program].

Here we're afraid sometimes or at least I am afraid that the police will capture me, or that they will capture my husband, and then what will I do?

They [people in the community] scare them, so they don't go. "Because if you go, they're going to turn you in to Immigration."

I was one of them [afraid to enroll child because of legal status], because I used to think...well, they're urban legends that say: no, you can't go, they will not accept him because you don't have papers, some people would tell me. But she said: yes, yes, you can go and take him, take him, so then, that's how you get it out of your mind and the worst thing they can say is "no."

... service providers reported that the application process for the Colorado Child Care Assistance Program (CCCAP) has created significant obstacles for parents because of documentation requirements that have raised fears related to legal status.

... once a parent has successfully navigated the application process without encountering any problems, word gets out and others are less afraid to come forward.

However, service providers reported that the application process for the Colorado Child Care Assistance Program (CCCAP) has created significant obstacles for parents because of documentation requirements that have raised fears related to legal status. Since child care assistance under CCCAP is for the child, proof of the citizenship of the parents is not required. However, the program does require a birth certificate for the child. Recent legislation at the state level prohibits non-profits from using public funding to provide any services to illegal immigrants such as helping them obtain the required documents and the Department of Vital Statistics has become stricter in what documentation parents must produce to obtain a birth certificate for their child. All of this has made it challenging for child care programs and service agencies to manage their funding and avoid violating this law while still providing help to parents. Several parents confirmed that gathering the paperwork necessary to apply acted as a barrier.

CCCAP also requires documentation of the income and employment of parents which is difficult for parents who are here illegally. Parents must produce three months of wage stubs, proof of residency, a photo ID, and employer verification of hours (funding is only for care provided while a parent is working or in school). Employers are reluctant to supply any documentation that might make them liable and employees are reluctant to request that information thinking it might jeopardize their jobs. New documentation for self-employed parents has also made applying more difficult for Mexican immigrant parents. They need to bring in their business ledgers and tax returns to prove they pay taxes.

These requirements have caused difficulties for parents not only because of the challenges in obtaining the necessary papers, but also because interpretation of these requirements has varied from county to county creating widespread confusion and misinformation. Child care providers reported that because of these changes, the political climate in Colorado and the economic downturn, they are seeing fewer Mexican immigrant children in their child care programs. However, some service providers noted that because of the heavy reliance on word of mouth in the Mexican immigrant community, they have found that once a parent has successfully navigated the application process without encountering any problems, word gets out and others are less afraid to come forward.

Lastly, service providers expressed concern about the implications for CCCAP assistance when several families live together in the same household to save money—a common occurrence in the immigrant population. This skews the income level that is considered for eligibility.

What access do parents have to information about child care where they live?

Do parents know about the availability of assistance with child care costs?

Do these factors affect or constrain their child care choices?

The child care resource and referral (R&R) agency did not seem to be a major source of information for the parents in our focus groups.

Limited access to information on child care options. The availability of information about child care options is an important aspect of child care decision making. Parents and service providers were asked about the information sources Mexican immigrant parents use to learn about child care programs, as well as their experiences applying for child care assistance. While parents from any culture can lack access to information about child care, parents from immigrant communities may face additional challenges in making informed child care decisions because of language barriers and social isolation.

Those parents who had looked for child care in this country were asked how they heard about available programs. The vast majority of parents responded that they heard about the program through a relative or friend. Very few reported hearing about a program through an agency or organization serving immigrant families. Once they enrolled one child, many reported continuing to use that program when their other children became old enough to attend. One parent reported being referred to a program by a child care director after inquiring about a center and discovering that it was too expensive. Another reported walking into a “government building,” inquiring about child care programs and being given a list of programs near her home. However, these sources of information were the exception. The overwhelming majority reported relying on word of mouth in their communities. These findings were corroborated by the child care and service providers interviewed in the field study.

The child care resource and referral (R&R) agency did not seem to be a major source of information for the parents in our focus groups. The child care R&R in Colorado reported that only about 5% to 10% of the calls they receive are from Spanish speaking parents. The R&R does have some staff who speak Spanish although they cite underfunding as a barrier to hiring more bilingual staff. The R&Rs have placed some ads on Spanish radio stations. They have also made available written materials in Spanish and have a Spanish version of their consumer information available on their web site. In their database of available child care programs, providers indicate what languages are spoken by the staff. Staff at the R&R cite fears about legal status and a political climate hostile toward immigrants as reasons why parents do not come forward and seek help but instead rely on word of mouth in their own communities.

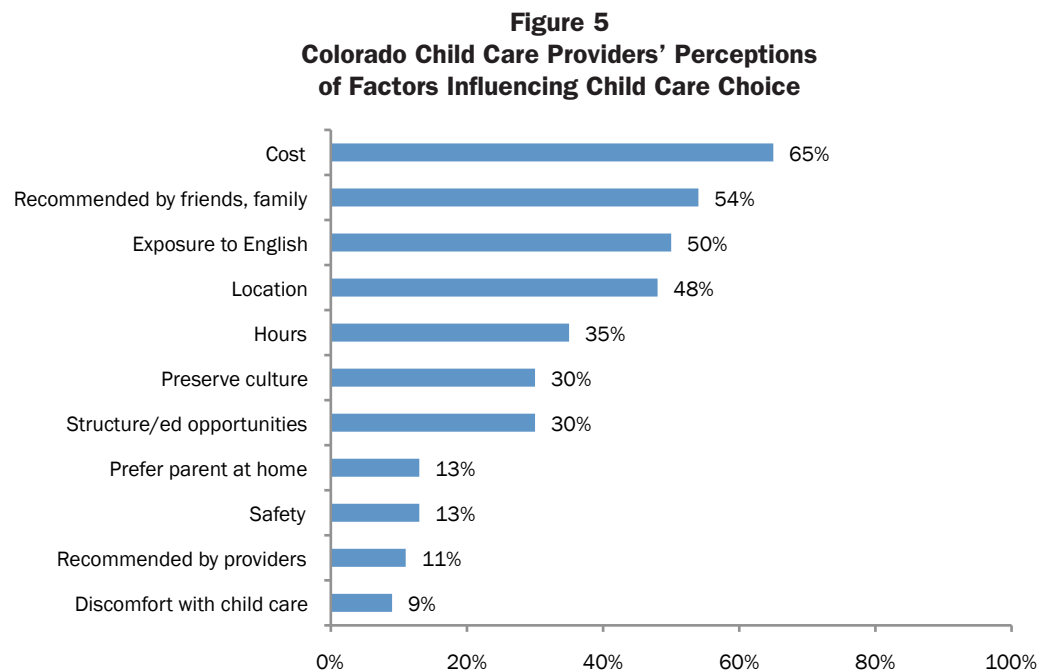
Child Care Providers' and Teachers' Perspectives

In addition to hearing from Mexican immigrant parents, the views of child care providers and K-2 teachers provided insight into their understanding and impressions of how these parents make child care decisions, as well as their experiences and challenges in serving this population. As explained earlier, we are only reporting qualitative data from interviews with teachers and the responses to open-ended survey questions due to a low response rate on our teacher survey in Colorado. Quantitative data from the survey of child care providers in Colorado are included here.

Are child care providers aware of the factors parents identified as influencing their child care choices?

Figure 5 below represents providers' responses to the question:

Do parents ever express the following preferences or concerns regarding what they think about when they choose care for their children? (Providers could check all that applied.)



The child care and service providers interviewed in the field study identified the following factors affecting child care use and decision making for the Mexican immigrant population.

Because of cost, families either don't enroll children at all or they wait until the child is four so they only have to pay for one year before the child enters kindergarten.

Cost and the need for coverage of non-traditional hours

- Cost is a major factor; parents cannot afford child care and choose instead to arrange for relatives to care for their children. Because of cost, families either don't enroll children at all or they wait until the child is four so they only have to pay for one year before the child enters kindergarten.
- Many parents work in construction and/or as day laborers with unpredictable incomes—when work is scarce they fall behind in their child care payments and can incur large fees which cause hardship and make parents reluctant to enroll their children.
- More parents work part-time and take multiple part-time jobs, with non-traditional and often unpredictable hours, to make ends meet.

Trust issues and a preference for informal child care arrangements to preserve culture

- There is a strong preference for infants and toddlers to be cared for by family.
- The degree of trust parents have in a provider is a significant factor in child care decision-making for this population. Parents tend not to have these trust issues when their child is old enough to go to school but do when their child is a preschooler or younger.
- Location is a key factor because mothers have a strong preference for keeping their children close to home.
- Parents choose informal care, mostly with family members, to preserve their culture and feel a sense of trust.
- Lack of teachers certified in Early Care and Education (which requires proficiency in English) who also speak Spanish has decreased the availability of bilingual staff at child care centers or has meant that only teacher aides are bilingual, making communication more difficult and child care less comfortable for parents.
- Parents would like to see their culture preserved in the child care setting, but they also want their children to assimilate and they see the value of their children becoming bilingual.

Access to care and legal status issues

- Waiting lists and barriers to child care assistance, such as requiring a birth certificate or getting proof of income from employers, create difficulties because of legal status issues. (See above for more on this topic).

- Recent raids and deportations in Colorado by the Immigration and Naturalization Service have created a chilling effect on families seeking enrollment and services. They have also made parents reluctant to be physically separated from their children.
- Transportation problems have increased because as the economy has weakened, more fathers are traveling greater distances for work, leaving mothers isolated at home with no car.

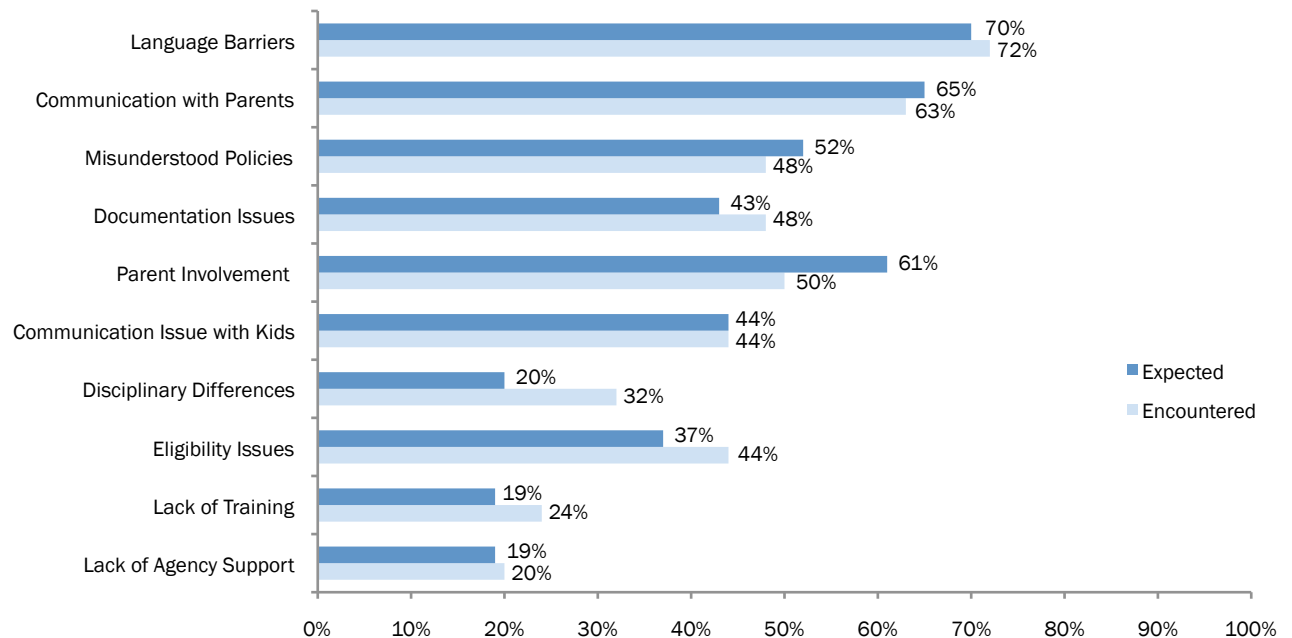
For the most part, these factors cited by the child care providers and service providers interviewed in Colorado mirrored what parents raised as factors in their child care decision making in the focus groups. The only exceptions were that parents emphasized a desire to preserve their culture as a factor more and, conversely, child care and service providers identified legal status and documentation issues more than parents did.

What challenges in serving these families did providers and teachers anticipate and what challenges were actually encountered?

Documentation issues were experienced by almost half of providers (48%) but had been anticipated by fewer (43%).

In our child care provider survey, we listed a series of potential challenges, drawn from our findings in the qualitative phase of our research, and asked respondents to tell us which challenges they anticipated before serving this population and which ones they actually experienced. This examination was relevant to our study of child care decision making because the degree to which providers experience these challenges is related to the comfort level parents feel with a child care setting. As seen in Figure 6, language barriers were anticipated as a challenge by 70% of providers and were encountered by slightly more (72%). Documentation issues were experienced by almost half of providers (48%) but had been anticipated by fewer (43%). Eligibility issues were another area where more providers encountered problems (44%) than had expected (37%).

Figure 6
Colorado Child Care Providers' Expected and Encountered Challenges Serving Immigrant Children



To address these challenges and better serve this population, providers made a variety of accommodations. In addition to bilingual staff, these included materials printed in the child's native language (56%), events to encourage parent involvement (50%), and learning communication customs (44%).

What experiences do child care providers have in encouraging parental involvement among Mexican immigrant families and making these parents feel comfortable in child care settings?

The issues providers face specifically in encouraging parental involvement were a focus of our study because they are so closely related to the level of comfort parents feel with a child care setting and, in turn, whether the program is one they would recommend to their friends.

Several providers reported that in their experience, Mexican immigrant parents are more likely to attend parent/teacher conferences, classes and family events than are non-immigrant families.

Mexican immigrants are very enthusiastic about coming to events. The only thing that interferes sometimes is work. –Child care provider

These providers attributed this higher attendance to the importance Mexican immigrant culture attaches to family.

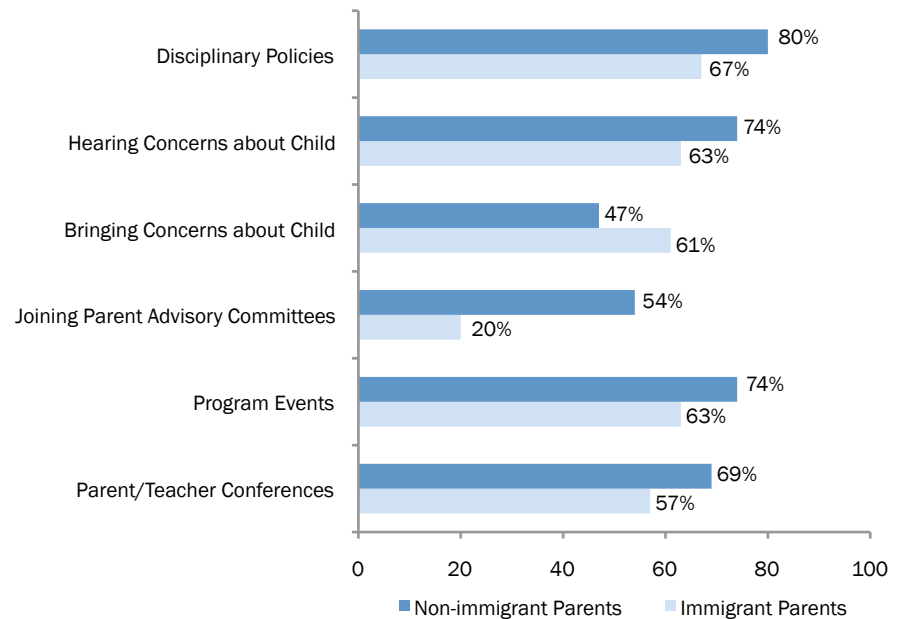
Mexican immigrant families are very family-focused and very focused on their kids. When they come to events, everyone is all dressed up. They go home after work and change.
–Child care provider

According to child care providers another reason may be that Mexican immigrant parents are more likely to rely on their child care program as the sole source of information about parenting, programs and services. Less information is “coming at them” because of language barriers so they may be more apt to respond to an invitation to meet with teachers or take a class than non-immigrant parents.

Half (50%) of child care providers surveyed report holding parent involvement events. Providers surveyed were asked how they would rate the comfort level of non-immigrant and immigrant parents with participating in a variety of activities at their school. Respondents selected from a five-point scale; results in Figure 7 below include the percentage of those selecting “comfortable,” “mostly comfortable” and “very comfortable.” Providers rate non-immigrant parents as more comfortable than immigrant parents with disciplinary policies, hearing concerns about their child, joining parent advisory committees, attending program events and attending parent-teacher conferences. Providers rate immigrant parents as more comfortable than non-immigrant parents with bringing concerns about their child to the provider. Of note is the very low comfort level providers report for immigrant parents joining parent advisory committees (20%).

Providers surveyed were asked how they would rate the comfort level of non-immigrant and immigrant parents with participating in a variety of activities at their school.

Figure 7
Providers Report Parents' Comfort Level with...



Barriers to Meaningful Parent Involvement

Child care providers and teachers noted that a high quality education is very important to Mexican immigrant parents. However, although they reported that Mexican immigrant parents are more likely to tell teachers about any concerns they have about their child than non-immigrant parents are, they may be less comfortable asking questions about the care their child is receiving because they see teachers as authority figures.

The hours parents work and transportation issues also get in the way of parents attending events. In addition, according to one program administrator, Mexican immigrant parents and non-immigrant parents tend to ask for different start times for events so it's hard to accommodate both populations.

One teacher reported that her school has a parent committee but that in meetings the immigrant parents tend to be intimidated by the non-immigrant parents. They've addressed this by matching parents who are immigrants with non-immigrant parents so that the immigrant parents feel more welcome and a part of the group.

Several providers cited the high cost of interpretation services for large group meetings as a barrier to participation by parents. They see the need for more professional simultaneous translators but cannot afford the cost.

Colorado Focus Group Participants

The New Americans focus groups held in Denver, Colorado were attended by 43 parents of 86 children ranging in age from one to 11 years old. The child(ren) they were asked to report on and discuss in the group were those from 0-6 years old that live in their home for whom they make child care decisions. In a few cases, both the mother and father of a child attended the group but their child information is only reported once.

Of those attending the focus groups, 60% (43) were living in Colorado, all of whom were Hispanic or Latino.

64% (27) of Colorado parents report having their child cared for outside of the home. 36% (15) of parents report not using any child care. Parents use multiple care settings; the distribution of settings in Colorado:

- Head Start 33% (14)
- Family, friend or neighbor care 30% (13)
- Preschool 2% (1)
- Kindergarten 2% (1)
- Afterschool Care 2% (1)
- Child Care Center 0%
- Family Child Care Home 0%

When asked to rate their child's fluency in English, parents living in Colorado were much more likely to rank their child's fluency in English as "poor" than parents in Maine. 15% rated their child's English as "good," 10% as "fair" and 75% as "poor."

Parents ranged in age from 22 to 40 years old and 98% (42) were female.

Almost a quarter of the focus group participants (22%) had attended college. Another quarter attended high school. About half of the participants had not completed high school.

- 0% had no education
- 2% (1) attended kindergarten – 6th grade
- 22% (9) attended 7th – 8th grade
- 27% (11) attended 9th – 11th grade
- 27% (11) completed high school
- 0% attended Adult Education
- 22% (9) attended college

More than three quarters (85%) were married, 10% divorced and 5% single. The parent's duration in the US ranged from one to 33 years, with an average of 9.0 years.

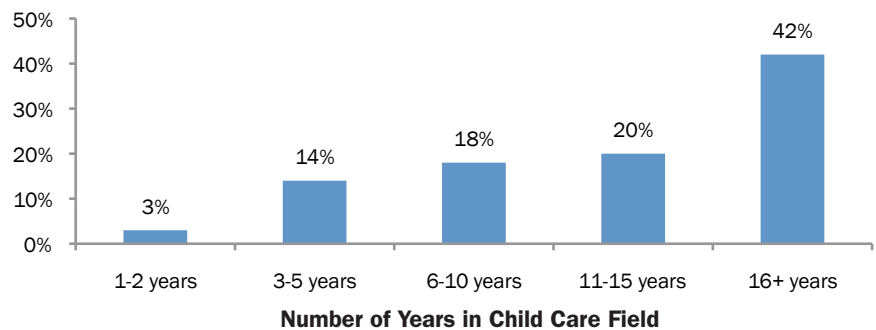
When asked about employment:

- 80% (33) were not employed outside the home
- Of those working (20%):
- 2 were employed full-time
- 6 were employed part-time
- 0% had a partner/spouse who was not working

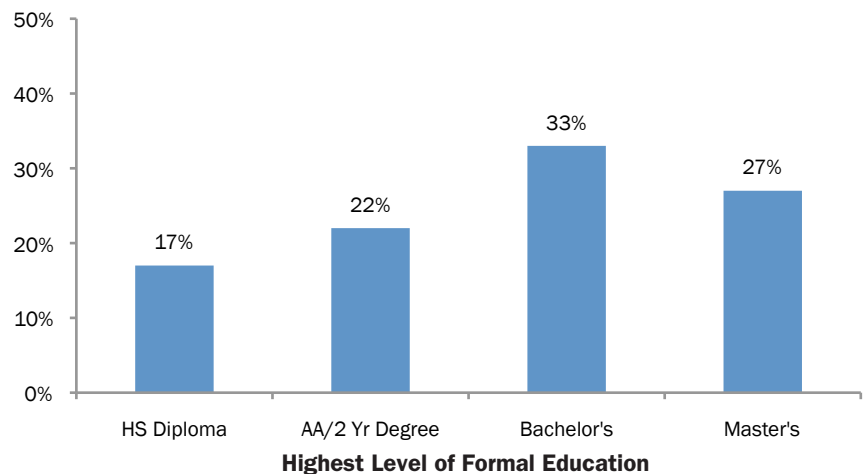
None of the participants reported receiving child care subsidies, although many of their children attended Head Start programs. 19% (8) received TANF and 16% (7) received food stamp assistance. 37% received subsidized health insurance.

Colorado Child Care Provider Demographics

Surveys were completed by 94 licensed Colorado child care providers: 92 female and 2 male respondents. Almost two thirds (62%) of the providers have been in the field for more than ten years.

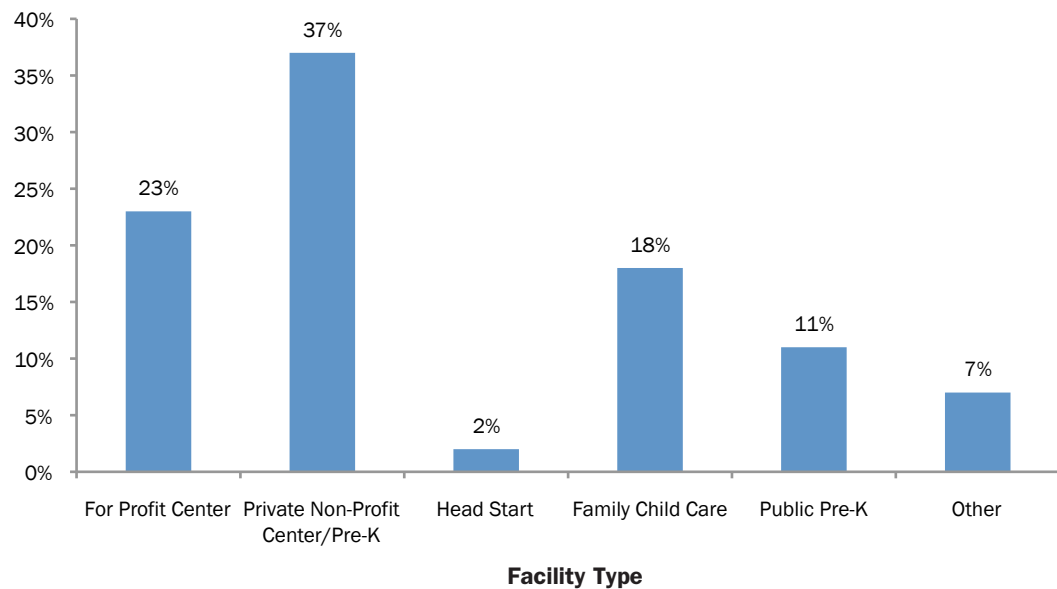


60% have a Bachelor's or Master's Degree.

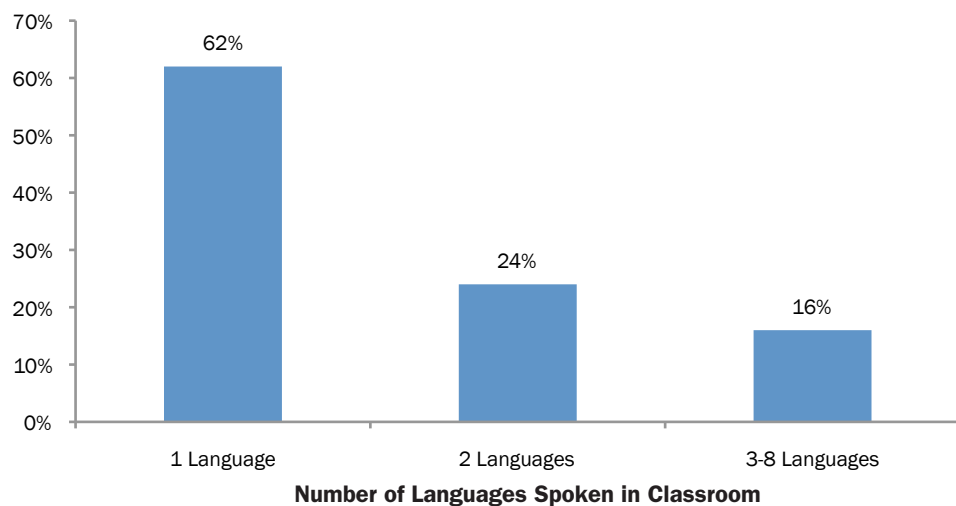


82% of the responding providers are white, with most of the remaining percentage (15%) identifying as Hispanic or Latino.

Responding providers represented a number of facility types. “Other” facilities included faith-based centers, in-home preschool and full-immersion private schools.

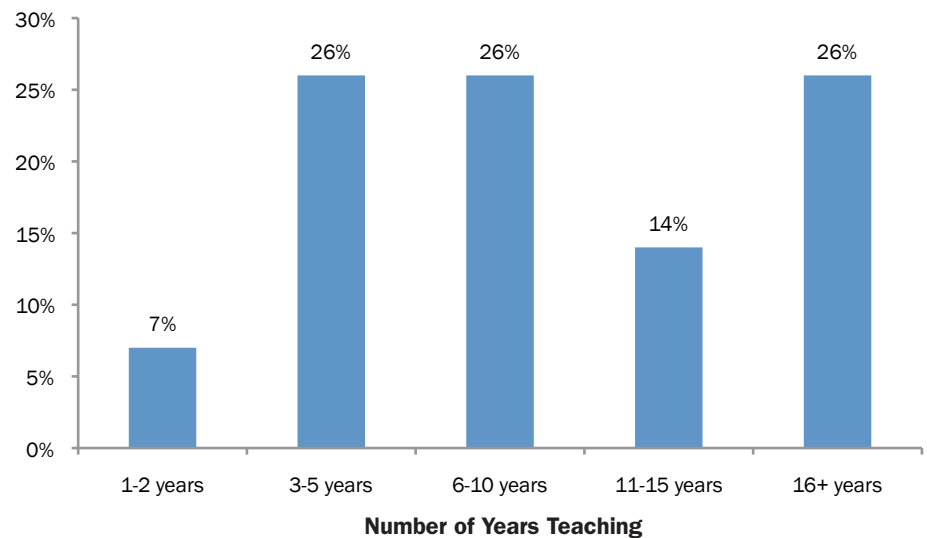


We also asked providers for some information on the population of children and families they serve. More than half (57%) reported serving children from Mexican immigrant families now or in the past three years. The number of immigrant children in their classroom varied, with 1-2 children most common (28%). We also asked about the number of languages spoken in their classroom. 62% of teachers stated that only one language was spoken in their classroom (which could have been either Spanish or English), a quarter of teachers reported two languages and 16% reported that three or more languages were spoken in their classroom.



Colorado Teacher Demographics

42 surveys were completed by Colorado kindergarten through 2nd grade teachers: 39 female respondents and 3 male. 40% of responding teachers have taught for more than ten years. One third (66%) of teachers have taught for more than 5 years.



95% of teachers responding to the survey have at least a Bachelor's Degree.

93% of teachers were white, with 17% identifying as Hispanic or Latino.

All responding teachers (100%) reported having Mexican immigrant children in their classroom.