

...this study attempts to understand refugee and immigrant families' beliefs about and experiences with child care, and how these factors impact their decision-making processes.

Focus groups with parents of young children

Focus groups were conducted in Portland, Maine and Denver, Colorado with refugee and immigrant parents of young children ages 0-6. We contracted with local organizations that have long-standing relationships with the immigrant and refugee communities. In Denver, we contracted with the Latin American Research and Services Agency (LARASA). In Portland, we contracted with the Multilingual and Multicultural Center of the Portland Public Schools. These organizations provided cultural brokers that had long-standing relationships with, or were members of, the communities in the focus groups. The cultural brokers established an appropriate setting and time, invited families and, in some cases, brought the families to the setting for the focus group. They also helped parents fill out forms to gather basic demographic information about their families. In Portland, the cultural broker provided simultaneous translation during the focus group sessions while the researchers facilitated in English. In Denver, the cultural broker facilitated the focus groups directly in Spanish. Finally, the cultural brokers reviewed the transcripts from the focus groups assuring accuracy of translation and meaningful interpretation of findings. In both cities, focus groups were asked questions relating to the following:

- their beliefs about raising children,
- beliefs about child care,
- factors influencing decisions about child care,
- the ease of signing up for child care, and
- perceptions of the quality of child care.

In Portland, Maine, a total of six focus groups were held with three cultural groups: two with Cambodian parents, two with Somali parents, and two with Sudanese parents. For each group, we attempted to conduct one focus group with parents who were using child care and one with parents who were not.

Similarly, in Denver, Colorado, a total of six focus groups were held with Mexican immigrants; three groups with parents who were using child care and three with parents who were not using child care.

Interviews with early care providers and K-2 teachers

In each location, we attempted to schedule interviews with the following groups:

- child care center director and/or teacher,
- Head Start director and/or teacher,
- child care resource and referral,
- public preschool program director and/or teacher,
- family child care provider, and
- elementary teacher.

Table 1

	Maine	Colorado
Child Care Director	3	1
Head Start Director	2	4
Child Care R&R Director	1	1
Public Preschool Director	1	2
Public Preschool Teacher	2	0
Family Child Care Provider	1	1
Kindergarten Teacher	2	0
Training Manager	0	1
Child Care Referral Specialist	0	1

We completed 23 interviews as indicated in Table 1. Interview questions focused on the school readiness of immigrants/refugees, the ability to involve parents in school, the beliefs about integration of immigrants/refugees, and the beliefs about English language acquisition among immigrant/refugees.

Interview questions focused on the type of child care being used by parents/clients, influences on clients choosing child care, barriers to choice of child care, and information offered by agencies on child care/child care choices.

Interviews with service providers interacting with immigrant and refugee parents

In each location, we attempted to schedule interviews with immigrant/refugee services, social service providers and state agency/system key players. We completed 19 interviews. Because in some cases identifying the position of the interviewee would allow for identification of the individual, we will report only broad categories. In Maine we held seven interviews with refugee services staff, TANF/ASPIRE staff and state-level ESL and preschool program staff. In Colorado we held 12 interviews with state level preschool, child care, human services and language acquisition staff; legal services staff; and immigrant service provider staff. Interview questions focused on the type of child care being used by parents/clients, influences on clients choosing child care, barriers to choice of child care, and information offered by agencies on child care/child care choices.

Child care provider surveys

We designed a survey to be administered to early care and education providers. Because of concerns about length, we divided the survey into two sections, one longer survey (the Main Survey) and a brief survey asking questions specifically about training on immigrant and refugee issues in child care. The longer survey was sent by mail and email to a list of providers supplied by local child care resource and referral agencies. The survey asked questions relating to the following:

- experience serving immigrant/refugee families,
- challenges expected and experienced,
- accommodations made for families,

A survey was designed for kindergarten, first and second grade teachers to obtain their perceptions about the impact of attendance in early care and education programs on the school readiness of children from these populations.

- communication with families,
- level of parent involvement,
- concerns about and opportunities to serve immigrant/refugee families, and
- expanding child care choices for immigrant/refugee families.

The brief survey, with questions pertaining to training and beliefs about English language acquisition, was administered over a three-month period to all providers that attended regularly scheduled training sessions. The brief survey was only administered in Maine as we were unable to obtain permission to administer the survey at training sites in Colorado. Because the brief survey was handed out at training sessions, the responses are more representative of providers who are likely to seek out and attend training.

Surveys were sent with a cover letter twice, with a month between the mailings. To increase the response rate in Colorado, the Colorado Division of Child Care agreed to have the cover letter printed on their letterhead and signed by the director of the division. As incentive, we also offered a drawing for one of five \$100 gift cards. Of the 144 surveys sent out in Maine, 95 were returned for a response rate of 65.9%. Of the 312 surveys sent out in Colorado, 94 were returned for a response rate of 30.1%.

K-2 teacher surveys

A survey was designed for kindergarten, first and second grade teachers to obtain their perceptions about the impact of attendance in early care and education programs on the school readiness of children from these populations. The survey was sent by mail to a list of teachers retrieved from elementary school websites. The survey asked teachers about the following:

- experience with teaching immigrant/refugee children,
- efficacy of ELL instruction currently provided,
- knowledge about the cultures of families,
- interactions with and accommodations for immigrant/refugee families,
- influence of preschool on school performance,
- expected and encountered challenges with teaching ELL students,
- knowledge of English language acquisition, and
- related training received.

The survey was sent out twice with a month between mailings: one before the winter holidays and one after. As incentive, we offered a drawing for one of ten \$50 gift cards. Of the 426 surveys sent out in Maine, 137 were returned for a 32.1% response rate. Of the 233 surveys sent out in Colorado, only 42 were returned for an 18.0% response rate. (See below for a fuller discussion of the potential reasons for this low response rate.) In light of this low response rate, we only report relevant *qualitative* data (answers to open-ended questions) from the survey of teachers in Colorado.

Methodological Limitations

We address methodological limitations in four areas: focus group recruitment, focus group findings, representativeness of focus group findings, and survey response rate.

Many focus groups are essentially a “conversation among strangers” to elicit a diversity of opinions. In these focus groups, the dynamic was very different and this dynamic may have affected the amount and substance of information gathered.

Focus Group Recruitment in Maine ---

We worked with cultural brokers to recruit participants for the focus groups. We explained the purpose of the study and our desire for particular study participants. Our initial concept was to have one focus group within each cultural group for parents who had children ages 0-6 in child care and another for parents whose children were not in care. However, during the focus group sessions, it was apparent that there were a multitude of child care arrangements in each grouping and not a clear “in care” or “not in care” grouping. Thus, we adjusted the focus group questions to match the participants.

It is also important to note that the cultural groups in Maine are relatively small. Thus, many of the focus group participants knew each other and most knew the cultural broker, who also served as the translator during the session. Many focus groups are essentially a “conversation among strangers” to elicit a diversity of opinions. In these focus groups, the dynamic was very different and this dynamic may have affected the amount and substance of information gathered.

Focus Group Recruitment in Colorado ---

In Colorado, due to the assistance of cultural brokers familiar with research and child care we were able to achieve a distinction between groups: parents in half of the groups had children in child care and parents in the other groups did not.

... parents in the in-care groups [In Maine] may not be typical of refugee parents in general both in the cultural competence of the child care settings they use and in their own level of sophistication about child development and school readiness.

Focus Group Findings in Maine

Aside from the lack of clear distinctions between focus groups within each cultural group, it was also apparent that a child being “in care” or “not in care” was not always the result of a *preference* for one type of care or the other on the parents’ part. For some parents, having children at home was a clear choice rising from a belief that their child was better off being cared for by the parent, a member of the extended family or by someone from their own community until the child was old enough to enter kindergarten. However, the children of other focus group participants were not in care because they hadn’t reached the age at which their parents felt they were ready for a child care program. When they reached the age of three or four, the parents said that they planned to enroll them. Still others in the “not in care” groups said that they would like to enroll their children but felt that child care was too expensive. Having the children stay with their grandmother was cheaper and they didn’t know that Head Start was free. Thus, views of child care did not differ as much as we expected between the in-care and out-of-care groups.

In addition, because refugee populations in Portland are so small, and so dependent on the few interpreters available to learn about child care options, families are often told about only one or two child care programs. These programs tend to be fairly sophisticated in the level of care and support, including parent education, which they provide. Thus, parents in the in-care groups may not be typical of refugee parents in general both in the cultural competence of the child care settings they use and in their own level of sophistication about child development and school readiness.

This information should be taken into account when considering the findings.

Representativeness of the Focus Group Findings in Maine and Colorado

Caution should be taken not to ascribe our findings from the parent focus groups to any larger population. They reflect only the opinions of those parents who participated in the focus groups. It is particularly important to keep this in mind when studying linguistically and culturally diverse populations to avoid attributing behaviors, opinions and preferences to whole cultures of individuals. Indeed, as mentioned earlier, we found as much variation within each of the cultural groups in our study population as we did between parents from different cultural groups.

Survey Response Rate in Colorado

The response rate for the Colorado child care survey, and especially the teacher survey, was particularly low. Multiple methodological strategies were employed, including two mailings of the survey, using an envelope and letterhead from the Colorado Office of Child Care for the second mailing to increase the likelihood that the mailing would be opened and read, and two emails with a link to complete the survey online. A multitude of factors may have contributed to the low response rate.

The topic of the survey in Colorado, Mexican immigrant child care decisions and use, may have been a deterrent. We heard from child care providers and state employees that the negative climate towards Mexican immigrants in Colorado may have kept people from filling out the survey. Because of the fear of being identified without legal papers, coupled with the poor economic climate, we also heard reports that the number of immigrants in child care was declining. Thus, some child care providers receiving the survey may have felt the topic wasn't relevant to them.

We had an even more challenging time getting K-2 teachers in Colorado to respond to the survey intended for them. Significant budget cuts were happening within the school system at the time of the survey. That, coupled with the fact that we were not well-known in the Colorado school districts, and the extremely limited time of teachers may have resulted in a low response rate. Therefore, as mentioned earlier, quantitative data from the teacher survey in Colorado is not reported here.

Lastly, as mentioned, we were not able to obtain permission to administer the short survey on training needs at training sites in Colorado and therefore we are only able to report the results of that survey for respondents in Maine.

The following sections outline the individual results from the Maine and Colorado case studies. In order to respect the differences between and among immigrant and refugee communities, the information is presented by community with no attempt to generalize findings between populations. As policies and practices differ regionally and from state to state, the participant responses are embedded in that context, and while they offer illustrative lessons, cannot be generalized to other locations.

We heard from child care providers and state employees that the negative climate towards Mexican immigrants in Colorado may have kept people from filling out the survey.