

CRITICAL GENERATION

IMPROVING THE WELL-BEING OF CHILDREN OF IMMIGRANTS IN ARKANSAS



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ARKANSAS ADVOCATES FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES (AACF) STRIVES TO PROVIDE ACCURATE, INDEPENDENT RESEARCH THAT OUTLINES THE NEEDS OF CHILDREN IN OUR STATE AND HOW WE CAN ALL WORK TOGETHER TO HELP MEET THOSE NEEDS. MUCH OF THE DATA FOR THIS REPORT IS DERIVED FROM THE U.S. CENSUS AND ITS AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY (ACS), WHICH IDENTIFIES FAMILIES IN ETHNIC AND RACIAL CATEGORIES. THE CENSUS AND ACS DESCRIBE CHILDREN OF LATIN AMERICAN DESCENT AS “HISPANIC,” AND SO AACF USED THE SAME TERM FOR CONSISTENCY WITH THE DATA. WHILE MOST IMMIGRANT FAMILIES IN ARKANSAS ARE HISPANIC, AACF SEEKS TO EMPHASIZE IN THIS REPORT THAT NOT ALL HISPANIC CHILDREN HAVE IMMIGRANT PARENTS AND NOT ALL CHILDREN OF IMMIGRANTS ARE HISPANIC.

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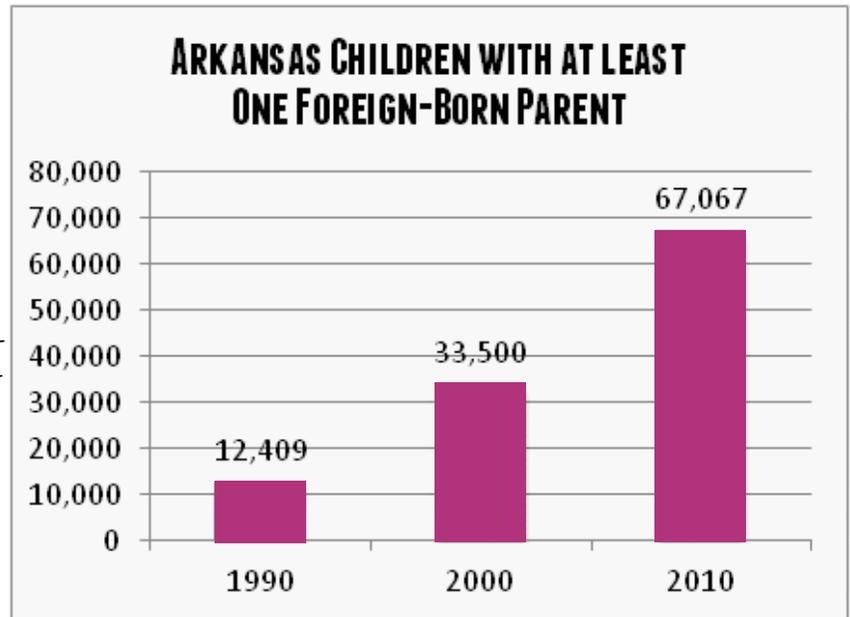


CRITICAL GENERATION: IMPROVING THE WELL BEING OF CHILDREN OF IMMIGRANTS IN ARKANSAS

Any discussion of Arkansas's future is incomplete without understanding the challenges faced by children in immigrant families. They account for the majority of growth in Arkansas' child population in the last decade. This new population, mostly Hispanic and almost all U.S. citizens, presents new opportunities in our effort to ensure that all children in Arkansas reach their full potential.

Our state's economic future depends on our success at meeting this challenge. The number of children with foreign-born parents quadrupled over the last two decades. In comparison, the growth rate for children of native born parents was about 15 percent. Children of immigrants are key to our state's long-term economic outlook, and their opportunity to learn and flourish is central to our state's interest.

Again and again in Arkansas, we've learned that investment in children pays off and that failure to meet their needs – in particular in education and health – holds us back economically. That's because healthy



and well-educated children are more likely to succeed in school and are less likely to need remediation or wind up in the juvenile justice system. Because children of immigrants face more barriers than others – higher poverty, uninsured, and school dropout rates than the overall population – we must find ways to overcome these obstacles with policies that give all children a chance to meet their full potential.

Children of immigrants are not just the fastest-growing segment of Arkansas's child population, but also the nation's.¹ Children in immigrant families are people under age 18 who are foreign-born or who live with at least one foreign-born parent. Since 1990, the number of children in Arkansas with at least one foreign-born parent has grown 440 percent to 67,067. The overwhelming majority of these children, more than 88 percent, are U.S. citizens.²

They're changing the face of Arkansas and contributing to our growth, but they're often ignored in our state's conversation about immigration. There is much discussion at the state and national level about the appropriate level of immigration and who should be permitted to live and work in the United States. But there's no debating that the growing number of children of immigrants in Arkansas are here to stay – living in geographically stable families, educated in our public schools, and making up a growing proportion of our state's current and future workforce. Arkansas still has about half the Hispanic child population of the nation, at about 10 percent, but the public school populations in five counties exceed the national average of 23 percent. In Sevier County in southwest Arkansas, Hispanic students made up half the school population in 2011-2012. Were it not for Hispanic children in Arkansas, our child population would have declined over the last decade.

This report outlines the challenges children of immigrants face as well as our state's unique opportunities to remove some of the barriers to their success. Through a number of policy changes Arkansas can undertake without change to federal law, the state can improve the opportunities for children of immigrants. Key changes include:

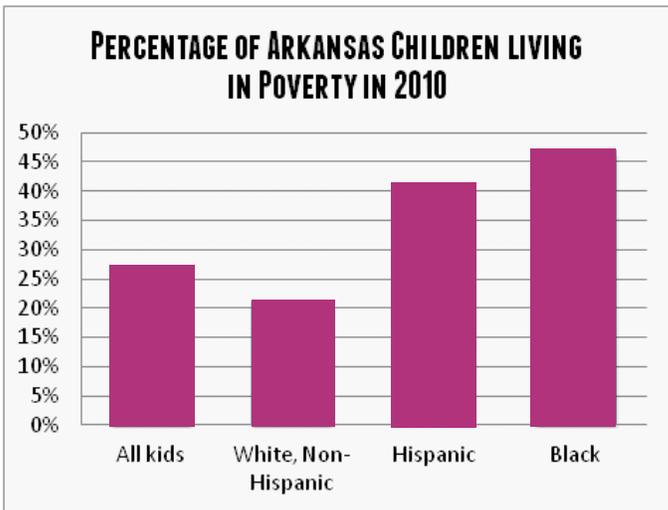
- Extending ARKids health insurance to all lawfully residing children who weren't born here, including children of Marshallese migrants.
- Passing a state-level DREAM Act, which would allow undocumented Arkansas high school graduates the opportunity to pay in-state tuition rates at state colleges and universities.³
- More funding for high quality pre-school programs, which are key for children of immigrants to learn English before starting kindergarten, and more outreach to immigrant families whose children will benefit.

*Source information for graphs on page 15.

GRAPH 2



GRAPH 3



POVERTY AMONG CHILDREN OF IMMIGRANTS AND HISPANICS

Immigrant families have moved to Arkansas, most notably the northwest part of the state, to fill a workforce need.⁴ Without immigrant workers, the state’s manufacturing industry output would have decreased by about \$1.4 billion—or about 8 percent – in 2004, according to a study by the Urban Institute. While our economy increasingly depends on this labor force, children of immigrants in Arkansas are 40 percent more likely to live in poverty or in low-income households than the children of native U.S. citizens. These numbers matter not only for those individual children’s well-being but for our state’s economic future. Children who live in poverty are more likely to start out or fall behind their peers in school, less likely to have access to health care and more likely to end up incarcerated or the victim of crime themselves.⁵ But as a state, we can and should work to change public policy in ways that make it more likely for kids in poverty to overcome those statistics and live up to their full potential.

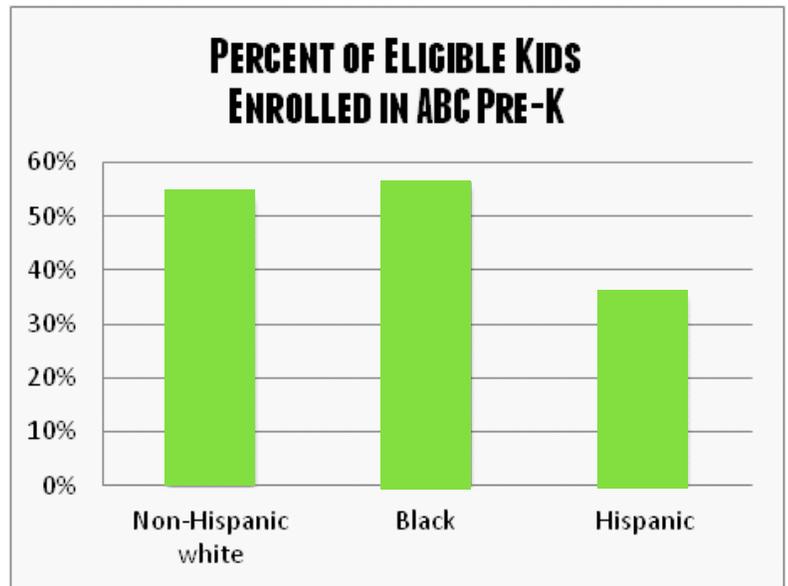
In Arkansas, most children of foreign-born parents are Hispanic. Nationally, poverty rates that accelerated with the recent recession hit Hispanic children especially hard. For the first time, more Hispanic children are living in poverty in the United States – 6.1 million in 2010 – than any other racial or ethnic group.⁶ In contrast, children of Hispanic origin in Arkansas are less likely than their African American peers to live in poverty. However, they are twice as likely as their white, non-Hispanic counterparts to live in poverty.

Most Arkansas families who live in poverty remain there despite their own hard work. The same goes for immigrant families. Non-citizen families are as likely as citizen families to have at least one worker in the home, but they’re more likely to be low-income. At the same time, Arkansas immigrants are paying their share. A 2007 study funded by the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation showed that Arkansas’s immigrants, including those who are undocumented, produce a net “gain” for our state on many levels. The study showed

“It’s not just success in kindergarten, but all through elementary school, because of their pre-K English skills.”

--Darlene Odom
Director, Springdale Early Childhood Center

GRAPH 4

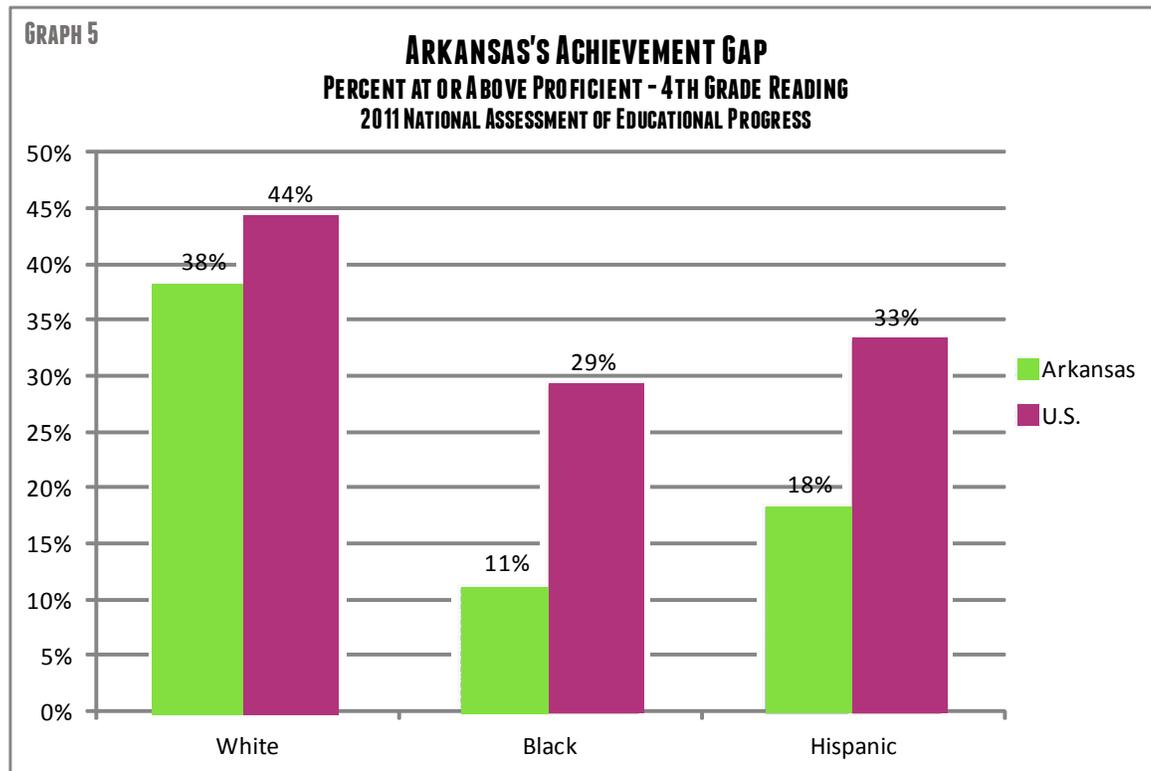


that immigrants paid \$20 million more in taxes than they used in state services. It also showed that immigrants directly and indirectly generate almost \$3 billion a year in business revenue. Immigrants are paying sales taxes, property taxes - either through rent or home ownership - and income taxes.

ACCESS TO PRE-K IN ARKANSAS

Those higher poverty rates make Hispanic children more likely to be eligible for low-income programs such as Arkansas Better Chance for School Success pre-kindergarten, which is available to three- and four-year-olds whose families have incomes lower than twice the poverty level. Despite this increased likelihood of eligibility, Hispanic children as a whole are less likely to be enrolled in the state's ABC Pre-K programs, according to an AACF analysis of data from the U.S. Census and the Arkansas Department of Human Services.

Research continues to confirm the importance of early learning to provide a better chance at future academic and economic success for children. Arkansas has created a system of high-quality pre-K programs that have placed the state among the top-tier in the nation in terms of standards, the number of children served, and the amount of state funding available. The return on investment is already evident with more





youngsters entering school with improved readiness and better performance on benchmark exams. However, too many families still struggle to gain access to these programs.

English language learners, most of whom are Hispanic in Arkansas, have much to gain from pre-K education. They're kids like those in Springdale School District's Early Childhood Program. With a mostly Hispanic student population in pre-K, the majority of children in the program speak a language other than English at home. An AACF analysis of language assessments showed significant improvement in English language mastery from the beginning to end of the program. While most students participate only one year, the best language improvement – more than one level on a five-level assessment – is achieved when language learners participate in the program for two years.

With about 600 kids in the district's Pre-K program now – mostly four-year-olds – Springdale could serve at least another 400 children who are on a list waiting for funding and space to become available.

As Springdale has shown, the positive impacts of pre-K programs carry into elementary school. Since Arkansas greatly expanded its state-funded pre-K programs in 2003, elementary test scores have reflected gains. The scores of Hispanic children and English language learners on third-grade benchmark scores have improved markedly since full implementation of expanded state-funded pre-K – faster improvement than the child population as a whole.

The potential to raise these scores even higher is a good argument for more investment in pre-K programs, especially among children who are learning English. A significant achievement gap remains in fourth grade reading levels. Children who don't read proficiently by that time are more likely to drop out of high school, which lowers their individual earning potential as well as our state's competitiveness and productivity.

HEALTH CARE ACCESS

As students advance in school, they're more likely to succeed if they have access to a doctor's care. Insurance coverage helps to keep children healthy and engaged in school. Arkansas has had continued success supporting children's health through the successful ARKids First program, which cut the rate of uninsured children in Arkansas dramatically: from 21 percent uninsured children in 1997 to about seven percent in 2010. The number of uninsured kids actually has dropped during the recession, as ARKids First and Medicaid have kept children covered even as employers dropped coverage or laid off workers.⁷

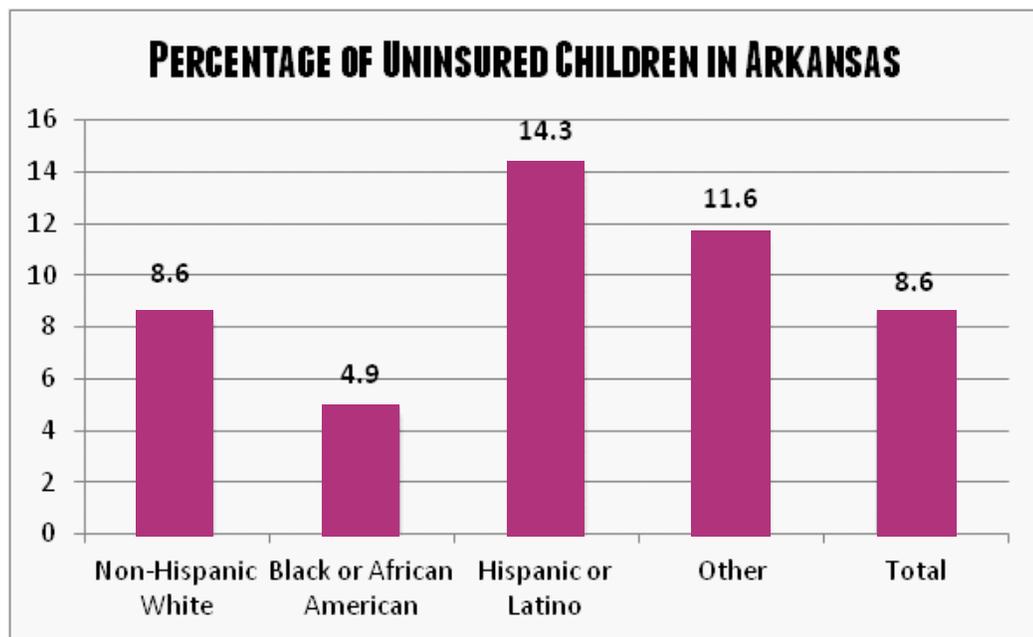
Children of immigrants are far less likely to be insured, however.⁸ Because Arkansas's immigrant population is mostly Hispanic, those uninsured numbers are reflected in higher uninsured rates among Hispanic children. The "other" category also reflects children of Marshallese migrants, who for the most part have been left out of ARKids First and Medicaid coverage if they weren't born in the United States.

Thanks to a change in federal law in 2009 that allows federal reimbursement for coverage, Arkansas now has the option to extend coverage to at least some migrant children, as long as they are lawfully residing in Arkansas. (Federal law does not allow reimbursement for coverage of undocumented children.) The new law, the Children's Health Insurance Program Reauthorization Act of 2009 (CHIPRA), would allow the federal government to cover most of the cost of covering those kids as long as they're otherwise eligible. They still must meet income and other state residency requirements to be eligible.

Before the law passed, states could cover legally residing immigrant children who had lived in the United States for more than five years. The change in federal law would allow Arkansas to lift that five-year ban and use federal money to cover "lawfully residing nonimmigrant" children for the first time.

That category includes children born in the Marshall Islands, whose families technically aren't immigrants but are allowed to come and go freely under a compact with the United States government. For that

GRAPH 6



"I know of many cases where a [Marshallese] parent will frequent local emergency rooms for care, rather than use a medical clinic, since they know they will be seen regardless of the status of insurance. I'm not sure how the costs of those visits are resolved, and follow-up care is usually not provided."

-Marcia Bishop, R.N.
School Nurse at Parson Hills
Elementary School in Springdale

THE HIGH COST OF FAILING TO PROVIDE PREVENTATIVE CARE

Sandy Hainline, a registered nurse with the Arkansas Department of Health, is one of many health care workers in Northwest Arkansas who sees children suffer unnecessarily because they lack preventative health care. Children born in the Marshall Islands, all of whom reside in Arkansas lawfully, don't have access to ARKids First health insurance even if their families meet the eligibility criteria. Without preventative care, a childhood illness as common as a high fever can have long-lasting and devastating consequences. For example, Hainline has treated two children who experienced hearing loss as a result of untreated, high fevers.

“Here is the sadness,” Hainline said. “Because the children have been without communication skills past their 3rd birthday, they will never be able to have a full understanding of language and vocabulary.”

reason, Marshallese kids potentially have the most to gain from this, as well as the Arkansas communities they call home – mostly in Northwest Arkansas.

Combined, ARKids First and Medicaid cover a majority of our state's kids – more than 400,000. It is estimated that fewer than 1,000 children would be newly eligible for ARKids under this provision. With some 1,600 children of Marshallese families in the Springdale schools, some of whom are citizens and already eligible, it's well worth it to take this step that would make a relatively small group of kids eligible for the first time.

Arkansas should cover these children, many of whom have few options for health care access. But our state has made no move toward that change yet. As of January 2012, 24 states had elected to cover lawfully residing immigrant children as allowed under federal law.

Arkansas doesn't have to make any policy change to reach most of the children who are uninsured today. The majority of uninsured children should be eligible for ARKids already, including citizen children of immigrant parents. The state should ensure that it's doing adequate outreach efforts to make certain that citizen children in immigrant families are covered, if they're eligible.

Under the CHIPRA law, Arkansas could get an increased matching rate from the federal government for language access services, such as written translation of health care materials as well as spoken translation services in a health care setting. Providing such services would help ensure that quality care is available to people for whom English is not their primary language. Research shows that language barriers affect quality of care, increase errors, and lead to reduced patient compliance with the health care workers' advice.⁹

No child should be denied access to health care in the United States. Helping more children get health insurance will be better for all of us in many ways. Insured children are more likely to get preventive care such as vaccinations that can keep them healthy and give them the opportunity to grow into productive adults.

DREAMING OF A BETTER LIFE

Even when an undocumented child excels in Arkansas, overcoming the barriers of language and poverty, our state places an unnecessary barrier to their success beyond high school. Many children whose parents lack the proper residency documents have been in the U.S. most of their lives. They feel as American as any other teenager they sit next to in their high school classrooms, but they must pay a far greater price for their higher education. Arkansas requires those students to pay out-of-state tuition prices – sometimes triple or quadruple the rates their high school classmates will pay for the same education – because they’re undocumented. And this despite ample research to show that the great majority of undocumented children’s parents pay taxes and contribute to our state’s economy.¹⁰

A state-level DREAM Act (which stands for Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors) would allow undocumented kids in Arkansas to attend state-funded colleges and universities at the same tuition and fee levels as citizens.

The best solution is a federal law that allows not only higher education access but a path to citizenship that allows undocumented college graduates to work legally after college and contribute to our state’s economy. Arkansas doesn’t have the authority to change the federal laws regarding citizenship. But short of that, the law seems clear that our state can at least allow equal access to higher education.

In 2005, when the Arkansas Legislature came close to passing a state version of the DREAM Act, lawmakers and others were concerned that the proposal would violate federal law. Since that time, court cases and other states’ experiences have shown that we can and should open the doors of higher educa-



“Some might argue that allowing undocumented students to become residents will only encourage further illegal immigration and reward their parents’ crimes. I certainly do not condone illegal immigration, but... punishing their children years later is not going to fix the problem, and will more than likely create worse problems down the road. This is why I am a proponent of the DREAM Act.”

-University of Arkansas Chancellor
G. David Gearhart

tion to all children of immigrants. Thirteen states have now passed legislation allowing for in-state tuition rates based on attendance at a state high school, including neighboring Texas. While lawsuits were filed in two states, the suits were unsuccessful. Courts have found in favor of the states that have passed these laws, allowing them to continue to offer in-state tuition rates for undocumented students.

Currently, it’s almost impossible for many undocumented children who have lived in Arkansas for years to become educated beyond high school, in spite of their great desire to do so. This makes little economic sense for our state, which is perennially ranked at the bottom when it comes to the percentage of the population with bachelor’s degrees. In addition, because the federal Government requires states to provide K-12 education to children regardless of their immigration status, we have already invested in the education of undocumented kids. It doesn’t make sense to squander this investment. Especially when research shows that earning a college degree greatly increases the chance of higher earnings over a lifetime. Arkansas can ill afford to pass up the opportunity to increase the percentage of residents with college degrees. If Texas can pass a state-level DREAM Act, why can’t Arkansas do the same?



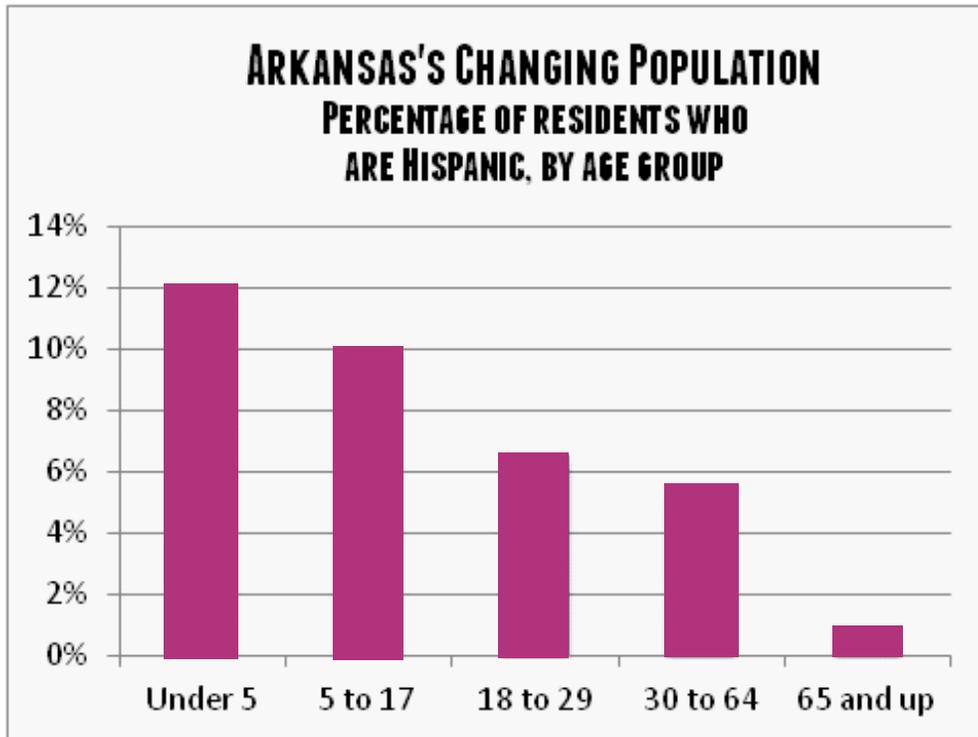
RAUL’S STORY

Raul graduated from Springdale’s Har-Ber High School this year. He arrived in the United States at age 16, landing in high school as a sophomore with no English skills. Less than a year after he started school here, he opted to move out of English-as-a-second language classes and into advanced-placement courses, studying alongside native-born English speaking students. He excelled and graduated with highest honors after only three years in the U.S. For this bright student who dreams of studying science, Arkansas offers little access to a university-level education. If he were to study at the University of Arkansas, his “dream school,” he would have to pay with cash, up front, at more than double the cost. The money is simply not available.

“I love the U.S. I consider myself American. I just can’t prove that I’m American,” he said. “I love this country and I want to be here the rest of my life. I want to contribute like other generations of immigrants did before me.”

This spring, Raul began talking openly about his situation to people who would listen. He knows that he risks deportation by speaking out.

GRAPH 7



MOVING ARKANSAS FORWARD

Arkansas's Hispanic population is relatively young and growing. Indeed, our state's child population would have decreased if it weren't for the growth in Hispanic children from 2000 to 2010. Many of these children represent the second generation of an immigrant family.

By measure of their mobility, our state's immigrant population is here to stay. Arkansas's foreign-born population is almost as likely to stay put in the same residence from one year to the next as native-born citizens.¹¹ With a population that comparatively stable, our state must ensure that these residents' children have access to health care and education, and therefore, more economic opportunity. A system that denies newcomers the rights and responsibilities the rest of us enjoy is not workable or fair – and it's not helping to improve our state's economy. Through a number of attainable policy changes, Arkansas will provide the children of immigrants a better shot at success when we:

- Extend ARKkids health insurance to all lawfully residing children who weren't born here, including children of Marshallese migrants.
- Pass a state-level DREAM Act, which would allow undocumented Arkansas high school graduates the opportunity to pay in-state tuition rates at state colleges and universities.
- Allocate more funding for high quality pre-school programs, which are key in helping children of immigrants learn English before they start kindergarten.

Immigrant families come here for opportunity, to work and to become part of our communities. Their children's achievement will brighten Arkansas's future. Our state's economic success depends on it.

ENDNOTES

¹Population Reference Bureau, “Reports on America: Children of Immigrants Chart New Path.” 2009

²Immigration Policy Center, “Immigrants in Arkansas.” 2012 <http://www.immigrationpolicy.org/just-facts/new-americans-arkansas>

³As proposed, a federal-level DREAM Act would also provide a path to citizenship for certain undocumented U.S. high school graduates who attend college or join the military.

⁴Immigration Policy Center, “Immigrants in Arkansas.” 2012 <http://www.immigrationpolicy.org/just-facts/new-americans-arkansas>

⁵Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families, “Child Poverty in Arkansas 2010: A Deepening Problem.” April 2010. <http://www.aradvocates.org/assets/PDFs/Child-Poverty-2010.pdf>

⁶Pew Hispanic Center, “The Toll of the Great Recession: Childhood Poverty Among Hispanics Sets Record, Leads Nation.” September 2011.

⁷Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families, “Crossing the Finish Line: Cutting the Red Tape in 2011.” Jan. 2012.

⁸Kaiser Commission on Medicaid and the Uninsured: “Key Facts.” Feb. 2012. At the national level, non-citizens are disproportionately uninsured compared with U.S. born-citizens (47 percent vs. 16 percent).

⁹Families USA, “Improving Language Access: CHIPRA Provides Increased Funding for Language Services.” 2010.

¹⁰Urban Institute, “A Profile of Immigrants in Arkansas.” 2007. http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/411441_Arkansas_complete.pdf

¹¹American Community Survey, 2010.





“If you can’t buy the concept because of humanitarian or moral reasons, surely you can understand the economic reasons of it. Anyone who wants our economy to grow should be in favor of it. Companies look at moving in to provide jobs, but they overlook us because we have a low percentage of bachelor’s degrees. They don’t move here, and we don’t have growth.”

-Philip Taldo
Springdale businessman
(on the DREAM Act)

GRAPHS

- 1 U.S. Census Bureau’s 2010 American Community Survey
- 2 U.S. Census Bureau’s 2010 American Community Survey
- 3 KIDS COUNT Data Center, Annie E. Casey Foundation
- 4 AACF analysis of U.S. Census and Arkansas Department of Human Services enrollment data
- 5 “The Nation’s Reading Report Card,” 2011 Snapshot Report, National Center for Education Statistics
- 6 Population Reference Bureau analysis of U.S. Census Bureau’s 2010 American Community Survey
- 7 U.S. Census Bureau’s 2010 American Community Survey



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