

How Are Immigrant Youth Faring in California?

A sizable portion of the state budget reflects California's commitment to its youth and their welfare. Policymakers agree that successful transitions to adulthood—finishing high school, beginning college, entering the workforce, and starting families—bode well for California's future. The state's immigrant youth present a special concern, however, because they often make these transitions in different orders, at different paces, and with different levels of success than their native-born counterparts. Given the large size of the immigrant youth population, these differences have far-reaching consequences for households, communities, and public policy.

In *The Socioeconomic Well-Being of California's Immigrant Youth*, PPIC research fellow Laura Hill profiles the educational attainment, workforce participation, household arrangements, and parenting rates of this population. Her analysis points to four key themes.

- Youth who arrive in the United States by age 10 tend to have outcomes similar to those for native-born youth of the same race and ethnicity.
- Later-arriving youth have outcomes very different from both their early-arriving counterparts and the native born, and these outcomes vary significantly by race and ethnicity.
- Racial and ethnic differences still persist among third and subsequent generations of youth.
- Immigrant youth in the Central Coast region fare poorly on many measures—often worse than their counterparts in Los Angeles and the San Joaquin Valley.

Early- and Late-Arriving Immigrant Youth

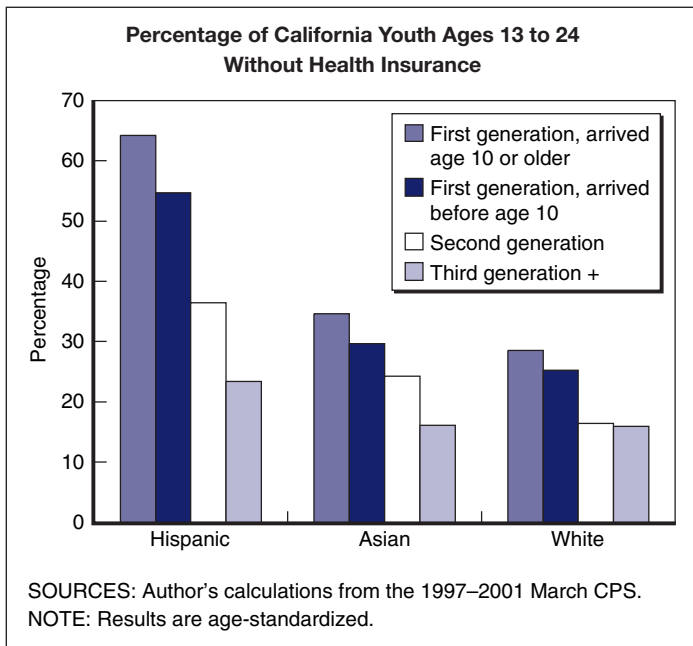
About half of California's immigrant youth arrived in the United States before age 10 and received at least part of their education here. Perhaps as a consequence, their patterns of school enrollment and work effort resemble those of second-generation youth within each racial and ethnic group. For example, 33 percent of today's early-arriving

Hispanic immigrants between ages 19 and 24 have finished at least some college; the corresponding figure for second-generation Hispanic youth is 41 percent. Approximately one-third of both early-arriving Hispanic women ages 19 to 24 and their second-generation counterparts are living with their own children. Among Asian immigrant youth of that age, 78 percent of early arrivers have attended some college, as have 80 percent of their second-generation counterparts. The parenting rate for early-arriving Asian youth of that age is negligible.

About one-quarter of Asian and one-third of Hispanic immigrant youth between ages 19 and 24 arrived in the United States after age 10. On average, Asian immigrant youth fare well. They attend school in great numbers, and 84 percent have attended some college. Outcomes for Hispanic youth are less positive. Slightly more than 10 percent have attended some college, and many more have less than a ninth grade education. Language skills among Hispanic youth arriving after age 10 are poor; nearly two-thirds do not speak English fluently, compared to 11 percent of early-arriving Hispanic youth. Despite a high commitment to the world of work, 64 percent of late-arriving Hispanic youth lack health insurance; the comparable figure for Asians is 35 percent (see the figure). Hispanic immigrant youth who arrive at older ages are very likely to have started families; indeed, nearly half of Hispanic women between ages 19 and 24 are living with their own children. Again, parenting rates among these Asian immigrants are negligible.

Persistent Disparities Among Third-Generation Youth

Although early-arriving immigrants bear strong resemblances to their second-generation counterparts, major differences across racial and ethnic groups persist even among third-generation youth. Third-generation Hispanic youth, for example, are considerably less likely than white or Asian youth to have attended some college. Twenty-three percent of Hispanic third-generation youth lack health insurance,



Health insurance coverage among California youth varies significantly by immigrant generation, age of arrival, and race or ethnicity.

compared to 16 percent of their Asian and white counterparts. Rates of parenting are also dramatically higher among third-generation Hispanics than among whites: 40 percent versus 20 percent.

The Central Coast

Los Angeles and the San Joaquin Valley have large concentrations of immigrant youth and generally poor outcomes relative to state averages. However, these regions do not account for the entire immigrant youth population or all the greatest disparities in outcomes. Although the median age of the Central Coast population (33) is equal to that of the state as a whole, it has the highest proportion of immigrant youth in the state—even higher than the San Joaquin Valley, where the median age is 30. Most Central Coast immigrant youth are between ages 19 and 24, few are college students, and many arrived in the United States as young adults. Indeed, the percentage of youth arriving after age 18 is higher in the Central Coast region than in Los Angeles, San Diego, or the San Joaquin Valley.

On average, Central Coast youth are as well educated as other youth in California. However, this average obscures the fact that state's most- and least-educated youth live

in this region. Nearly 70 percent of Central Coast youth between ages 19 and 24 have at least some college education (more than in the Bay Area), but about 10 percent have less than a high school education (more than in the San Joaquin Valley). The high proportion of Central Coast youth without any high school education likely reflects the large population of late-arriving immigrants (see the table).

Percentage of First-Generation California Youth Ages 16 to 24 Not Enrolled in School

	Percentage
Central Coast	78
Far North	69
Orange County	59
San Joaquin Valley	58
San Diego	57
Los Angeles County	56
Inland Empire	52
Bay Area	42
Sacramento Metro	36

English fluency rates among high school students are somewhat higher in the Central Coast than in other regions that typically receive large numbers of new immigrants. Hill warns, however, that the Central Coast's immigrant youth as a whole are not faring well along this dimension. The Central Coast has the lowest school enrollment rates among immigrant youth between ages 13 and 18, and English language ability among the entire population of Central Coast youth—as opposed to the school population—is the lowest in the state. More than 20 percent are not fluent in English.

The overall poverty level in the Central Coast (17%) is similar to that in Los Angeles but far below that in the San Joaquin Valley. However, the Central Coast's youth poverty rate (27%) is equal to San Joaquin Valley's and exceeds that of Los Angeles. Moreover, San Joaquin Valley youth are much more likely than Central Coast youth to receive public assistance.

Hill concludes that many policies addressing the needs of second- and third-generation youth are likely to help immigrant youth who attend school. For many programs, however, first-generation youth who are not in school must be reached through their employers or through their children's schools.

This research brief summarizes a report by Laura E. Hill, The Socioeconomic Well-Being of California's Immigrant Youth (2004, 120 pp., \$12.00, ISBN 1-58213-082-5). The report may be ordered by phone at (800) 232-5343 [U.S. mainland] or (415) 291-4400 [Canada, Hawaii, overseas]. A copy of the full text is also available on the Internet (www.ppic.org). The Public Policy Institute of California is a private, nonprofit organization dedicated to independent, objective, nonpartisan research on economic, social, and political issues affecting California.