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IMMIGRANT CHILDREN LAG BEHIND, POSING RISK

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The education, health and socioeconomic lot of the children of immigrants, the fastest-growing population group in the U.S., has raised concerns about how those children will perform when they enter the workforce.

Many of the parents are Hispanic and speak little or no English. And though the story of the U.S. is one of immigrants whose children assimilate, some researchers worry about the prospects for this generation. Their performance, they say, could undermine the U.S. economy as the children grow up, affecting everything from medical services for baby boomers to home prices.

"The baby-boom generation ... will increasingly depend on children of immigrants to ensure the economy is productive," said Donald Hernandez, a sociology professor at Hunter College who wrote a report on the children of immigrants.

The report, released Wednesday, was funded by the Foundation for Child Development, a New York-based philanthropy that sponsors research on children's well-being. The report analyzed official demographic, education and health data collected between 1994 and 2010.

"We need educated workers because the modern economy is increasingly knowledge-based," said Randy Johnson, a senior vice president at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. "It's clear that people who don't finish high school face huge headwinds in this economy, and it's not good for the country because they don't have the skills to be gainfully employed."

Mr. Johnson said the unemployment rate is substantially higher for those who are less educated, noting that it is 13% for those without a high school degree and 4% for those with at least a bachelor's degree.

Many of the most disadvantaged immigrants are Hispanic, according to the study, which found that children of South Asian and East Asian parents performed better in terms of education.

Marguerite Roza, a professor at University of Washington who focuses on educational productivity, says that improving the outcomes of Latino and other disadvantaged students in a time of budgetary constraints requires "innovative approaches, such as pairing the use of computer technology with traditional teaching." Ms. Roza said some programs, like the Rocketship group of charter schools in San Jose, Calif., had successfully combined tutor-led computer instruction with face-to-face teaching.

Starting in the 1980s, immigration from Latin America and Asia surged. Now, a quarter of all children in the U.S. have at least one foreign-born parent. Ninety percent of those 18 million children are U.S. citizens who will begin to reach adulthood next year.

Many children of immigrants start life with advantages that children of native-born Americans don't have, according to the study. Roughly three-quarters of the country's

children of immigrants lived with both parents in 2010, according to Mr. Hernandez's study, compared with 70% for the children of native-born Americans. At least one parent had a fulltime job for roughly two-thirds of each group. Children of immigrants are less likely to experience low birth weight or infant mortality, an advantage known as the "immigrant paradox" because it runs counter to the expected outcome.

However, as they grow up, children of immigrants begin to fall behind other children as the liabilities of being born into poverty become more acute.

Earlier generations of immigrants to the U.S. arrived during the manufacturing era when it was possible to experience upward mobility by acquiring more skills on the job. Now, in the service economy, "gone are the career ladders that have connected low-wage jobs to high-wage jobs," said Daniel Cornfield, a professor of sociology at Vanderbilt University who studies immigration and labor. "One would have had to accumulate a lot of education before entering the workforce to advance."

Children of immigrants are almost twice as likely as children with U.S.-born parents not to be covered by health insurance, at 15% compared with 8% in 2010, according to the report. Nearly a third live in poverty, compared with 19% for those with U.S.-born parents, and a quarter drop out of high school, as opposed to 18% for the children of native-born parents, the report said.

Educational attainment among Hispanics is a particular concern. Children with origins in Mexico and Central America are least likely of any group to finish school, followed by those whose parents are from the Dominican Republic, Haiti and Africa.

More than a third of Hispanic fourth graders were identified by their schools as English language learners, according to a 2011 report by the U.S. Department of Education. By the time they are in middle school, English language learners tend to show the poorest performance in math and reading of all groups.

"This is the canary in the coal mine for dropping out," says Richard Fry, an education researcher at the nonpartisan Pew Hispanic Center, of the poor math and reading performance. The children, he says, often aren't prepared for high school.

The Aspiring Centennial College Preparatory Academy, a charter school that caters to Hispanic immigrants in Los Angeles, is dealing with many of these challenges. Parents with little formal education past high school often can't help their children get through school and into college. "Their parents want to help," Jennifer Garcia, the middle school's principal, speaking of the 540-child student body. "But it's hard for them to guide their own children through school."

Eighth-grader Karen Arroyo, 14, said both her parents had to quit school in Mexico after elementary school to support their siblings and extended families. In the U.S, they have "done everything they can to encourage me and my sisters to get a good education," she said. "But right now, my parents don't know much about what I am doing because they didn't go to high school."

Erik Valdez got perfect scores on the state's standardized math test, the school principal said. The 15-year-old said, "I want to go to MIT one day and become an astronomer for NASA." His immigrant parents from El Salvador speak little English but they try to "push me forward," he said, also adding, "My teachers expect a lot from me. They believe I have what it takes to achieve a lot."

Researchers say not all children of immigrants are at a disadvantage, particularly those from South and East Asia.

About 82% of children of South Asians and 55% of children of East Asians had earned college degrees, compared with about a third of children with U.S.-born parents, according to 2010 government data.

In 2010, children with parents from South Asia, mainly India, were in families with a median income of \$98,000, while East Asian families, including South Korea and China, earned a median \$86,000. In contrast, children of Mexican and Central American immigrant parents were in households with a median income of \$31,400; while those with Dominican parents were in families who earned \$33,800.