

School Communication in Parents' Native Language

Headline

Among children in kindergarten through grade three whose parents spoke a language other than English, those living in households at or below the poverty line were much more likely than their wealthier peers to attend schools that both provided interpreters for parent-teacher conferences and other school meetings and translated memos and newsletters into parents' native language (81 percent versus 49 percent, respectively, in 2003). (See [Figure 1](#)) Overall, 64 percent of such children attended schools that provided both these services.

Importance

Parental involvement in school can lead to increased academic performance and positive social outcomes for children,¹ as well as enable teachers to identify learning problems at an earlier age.² In order to effectively reach all parents, it is important that schools develop culturally sensitive and diverse outreach strategies. As the immigrant population in this country continues to grow, such issues will become increasingly important. Currently, one in five school-aged children is foreign-born or the child of a foreign-born parent. And between 1990 and 2010, children of immigrants are expected to account for more than half of the growth in the school-aged population.³ Teachers' lack of understanding of cultural context can hinder child development.⁴ Parents who do not speak English well may feel less comfortable or less welcome getting involved in their children's schools.⁵ In a study of a Spanish-speaking community, parents reported attending more school meetings when translators were available.⁶ Some schools with high proportions of limited English proficiency students have been using funds from Title I to provide interpreters and to translate materials.⁷ By taking such measures, schools may increase parental involvement and improve parents' understanding of their children's education.

Trends

In 2003, the first year for which such data are available, 64 percent of children in kindergarten through grade 3 whose parents spoke a language other than English attended schools that provided interpreters for parent-teacher conferences and other school meetings, as well as translated memos and newsletters into parents' native language. (See [Table 1](#)) The same year, 8 percent of such children attended schools that only provided interpreters and 6 percent attended schools that only provided translated materials. However, 22 percent of children in kindergarten through grade 3 whose parents spoke a language other than English attended schools that provided neither interpreters nor translated materials in 2003. Estimates are based on reports from parents.

Differences by Race and Ethnicity

Hispanic children were more likely than children of other races and ethnicities to attend schools that both provided interpreters at school meetings and translated memos and newsletters into parents' native language. ([See Table 1](#)) Among children in kindergarten through grade 3 in 2003, 78 percent of Hispanic children whose parents spoke a language other than English attended schools with both services, compared with 17 percent of non-Hispanic white children and 19 percent of Asian or Pacific Islander children whose parents spoke a language other than English. Numbers of non-Hispanic black children whose parents spoke a language other than English were negligible.

Differences by Parental Education

Children whose parents had a bachelor's degree or more were the least likely to attend schools that provided interpreters at school meetings and translated memos into parents' native language. ([See Table 1](#)) For example, in 2003, among children whose parents spoke a language other than English, only 25 percent of children whose parents had at least a bachelor's degree attended schools that provided both services compared with 83 percent of children whose parents had less than a high school education.

Differences by Poverty

Among children in kindergarten through third grade whose parents spoke a language other than English, those living in households at or below the poverty line were much more likely than their wealthier peers to attend schools that provided interpreters for parent-teacher conferences and other school meetings and translated memos and newsletters into parents' native language (81 percent versus 49 percent, respectively, in 2003). ([See Figure 1](#))

Differences by Type of School

Among children in kindergarten through third grade whose parents speak a language other than English, those attending public schools were more likely than children of the same age attending private schools to attend schools which provided interpreters at parent-teacher conferences and school meetings and translated memos and newsletters into parents' native language (67 percent versus 23 percent, respectively, in 2003). ([See Table 1](#))

Differences by Neighborhood Poverty

In 2003, among children in kindergarten through third grade whose parents spoke a language other than English, children living in poor neighborhoods were much more likely than children living in wealthier neighborhoods to attend schools that provided interpreters at parent-teacher conferences and school meetings and translated memos and newsletters into parents' native language. ([See Figure 3](#)) For example, among children in kindergarten through grade three, 86 percent of children living in neighborhoods where at

least 20 percent of all children lived below the poverty line attended schools that provided both interpreters and translated materials, compared with 45 percent of those children living in neighborhoods with less than five percent of all children living below the poverty line.

Differences by Region

Among children in kindergarten through third grade whose parents speak a language other than English, those living in the West were the most likely to attend schools that provided interpreters at parent-teacher conferences and school meetings and translated memos and newsletters into parents' native language. (See Table 1) Children living in the Midwest and Northeast were the most likely to attend schools that provided neither interpreters nor translated materials.⁸ (See Figure 2)

State and Local Estimates

None available

International Estimates

None available

National Goals

While it does not specifically mention services for those parents whose native language is not English, the *No Child Left Behind Act*, signed into law January 2002, mandates that parents are informed on how they can be involved in school improvement efforts and are provided with local report cards of schools in their district to help guide their involvement. Schools and education agencies are required to disseminate literature on effective parent involvement and schools receiving Title I funding must have written policies, annual meetings, and training on parental involvement strategies, as well as re-evaluate and revise their strategies when needed.

For more information on the requirements, see "No Child Left Behind: A Parent's Guide" at <http://www.ed.gov/parents/academic/involve/nclbguide/parentsguide.pdf>

Definition

Parents who reported speaking a language other than English the most at home were asked:

Does (CHILD)'s school have:

- a) Interpreters that speak your language for meetings or parent-teacher conferences?
- b) Written materials, such as newsletters or school notices that are translated into your language?

Percentages are presented for only those children whose parents' primary language is not English.

Data Source

Child Trends' original analyses of data from National Household Education Surveys, Parent and Family Involvement in Education Survey (PFI), 2003.

Raw Data Source

National Household Education Surveys

<http://nces.ed.gov/nhes/>

Next Update

Unknown

¹ Henderson, A.T., & N. Berla. *A New Generation of Evidence: The Family is Critical to Student Achievement*. Washington, DC: National Committee for Citizens in Education, 1994.

² Zill, N. & C.W. Nord. (1994). *Running in Place: How American Families are Faring in a Changing Economy and Individualistic Society*. Washington, DC: Child Trends.

³ Christine Winquist Nord & James A. Griffin. (1999). Educational profile of 3- to 8-year old children. In Donald J. Hernandez (Ed.). *Children of Immigrants: Health, Adjustment and Public Assistance*.

Washington, DC: National Academy Press. <http://darwin.nap.edu/books/0309065453/html/>

⁴ A. Y. Fred Ramirez. "Dismay and Disappointment: Parental Involvement of Latino Immigrant Parents." *The Urban Review*, 35(2).

⁵ Christine Winquist Nord & James A. Griffin. (1999). Educational profile of 3- to 8-year old children. In Donald J. Hernandez (Ed.). *Children of Immigrants: Health, Adjustment and Public Assistance*.

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⁶ A. Y. Fred Ramirez. Dismay and Disappointment: Parental Involvement of Latino Immigrant Parents. *The Urban Review*, 35(2).

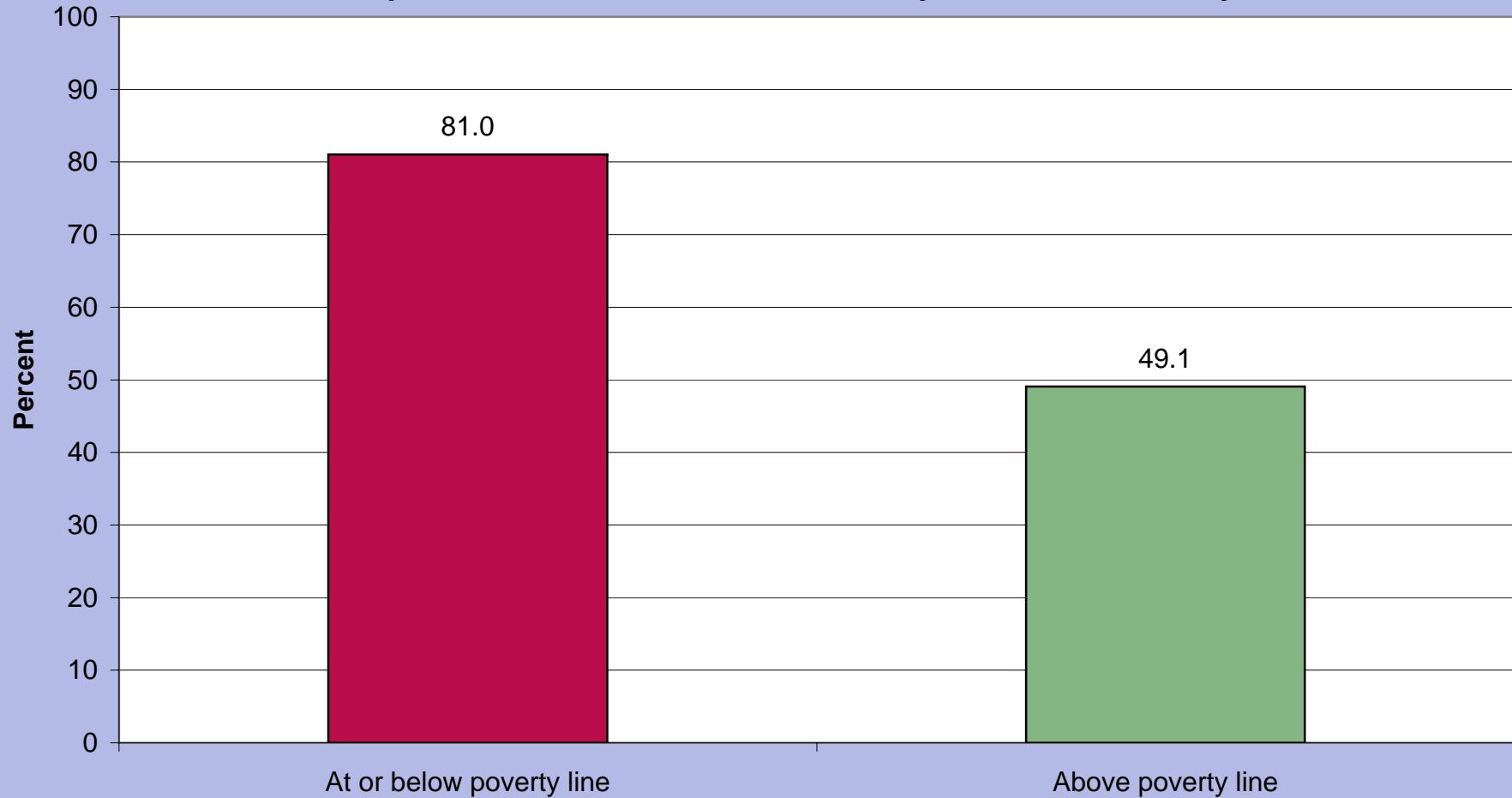
⁷ Clemencia Cosentino de Cohen, Nicole Deterding, & Beatriz Chu Clewell. (2005). *Who's Left Behind? Immigrant Children in High and Low LEP Schools*. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute.

http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/411231_whos_left_behind.pdf

⁸ Differences between children in the Midwest and the South are only significant at the p=.1 level. All other differences are significant at the p=.05 level.

Figure 1

Among Kindergartners through Third Graders Whose Parents Speak a Language Other than English, Percent of Children Attending Schools That Provide Interpreters and Translated Materials, by Household Poverty, 2003



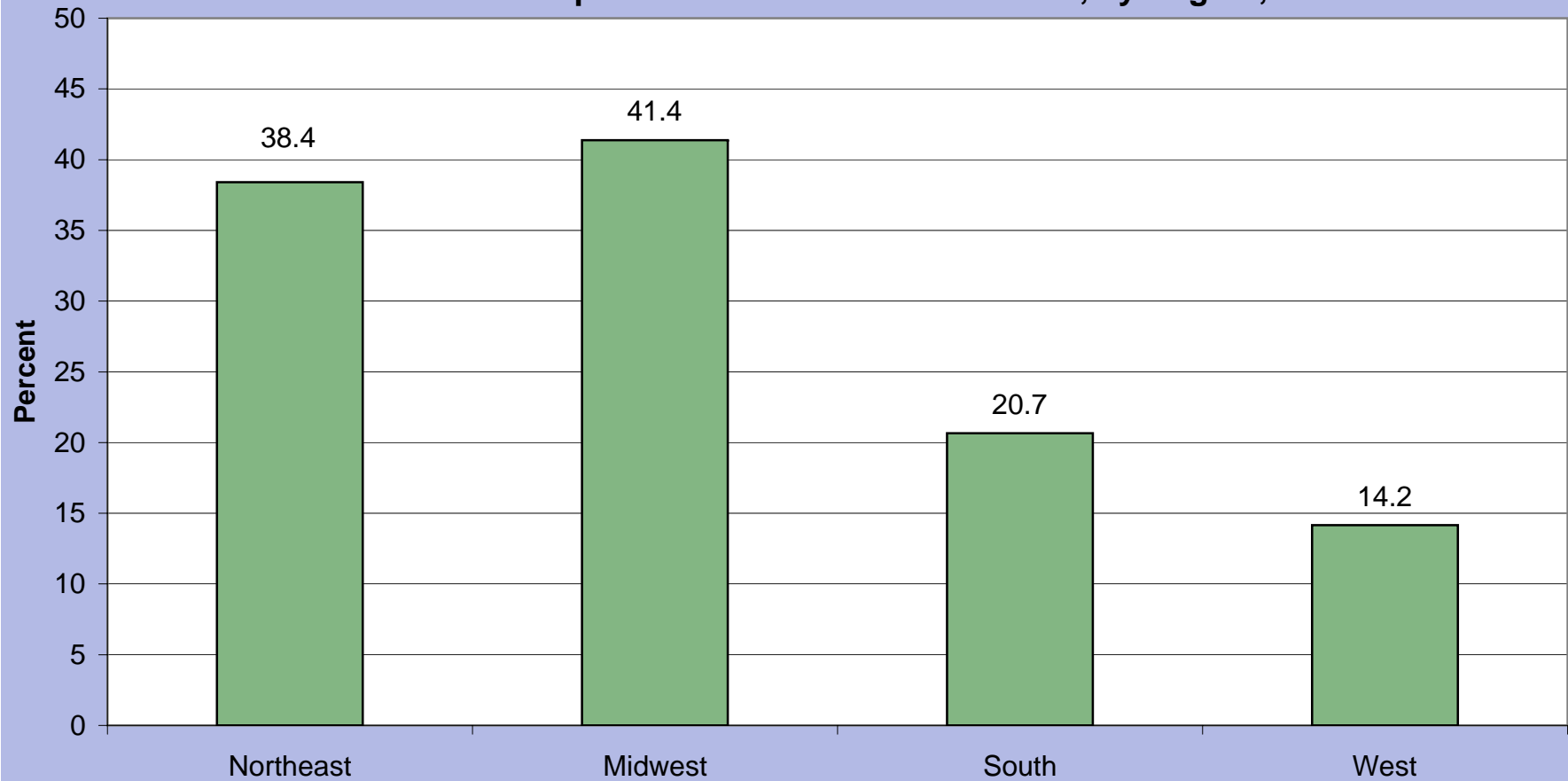
*Percentages are based on parent reports.

Source: Child Trends' original analysis of data from the National Household Education Survey



Figure 2

Among Kindergartners through Third Graders Whose Parents Speak a Language Other than English, Percent of Children Attending Schools That Provide Neither Interpreters nor Translated Materials, by Region, 2003

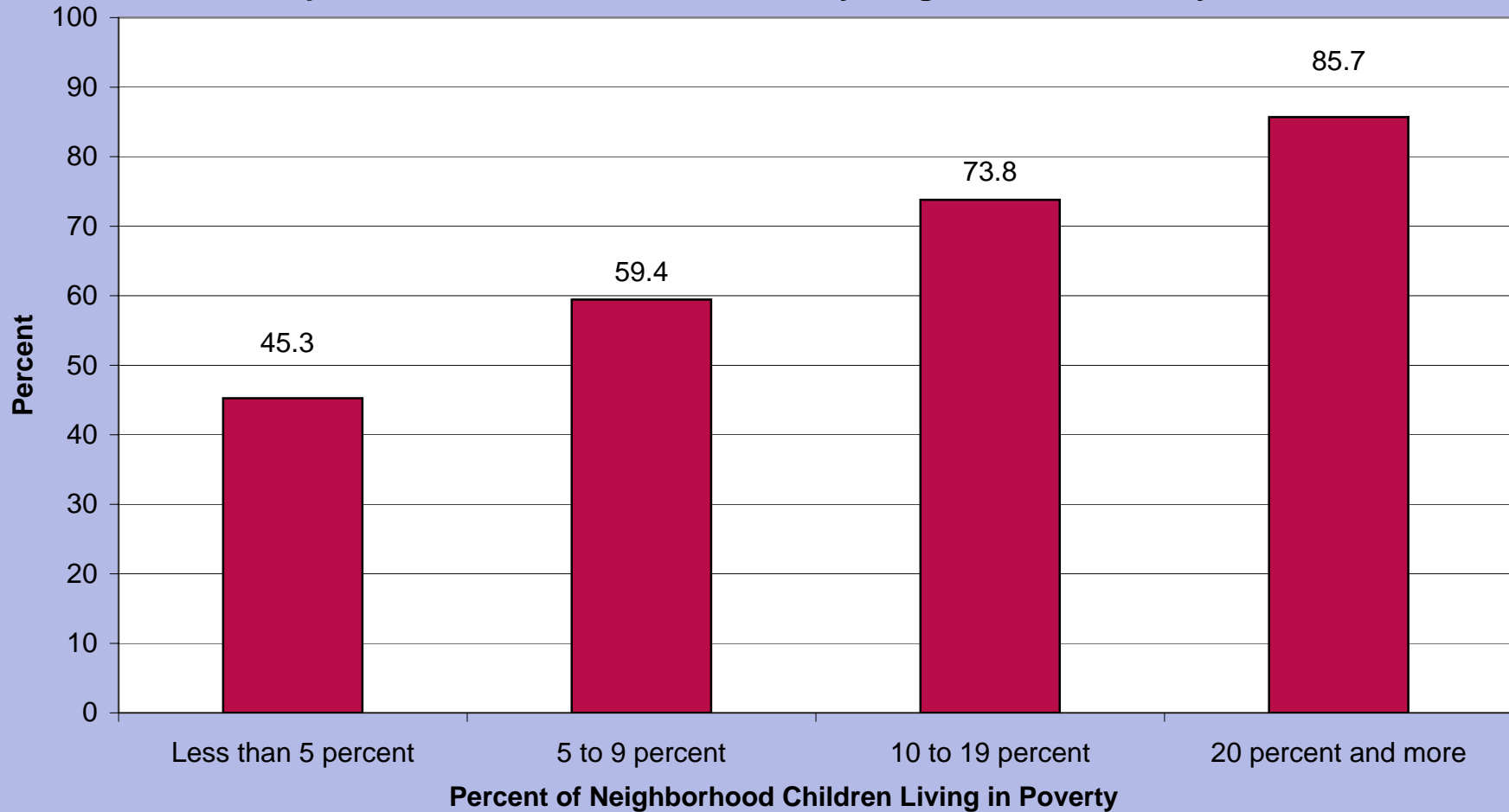


*Percentages are based on parent reports.

Source: Child Trends' original analysis of data from the National Household Education Survey

Figure 3

Among Kindergartners through Third Graders Whose Parents Speak a Language Other than English, Percent Attending Schools That Provide Interpreters and Translated Materials, by Neighborhood Poverty, 2003



*Percentages are based on parent reports.

Source: Child Trends' original analysis of data from the National Household Education Survey

Table 1

Among Children in Grades K through 3 whose Parents Speak a Language Other Than English, Percentage of Children in Schools that Communicate with Parents in the Language of the Parents, 2003

| | Both interpreters and translated materials available | Only interpreters | Only translated materials | Neither interpreters nor translated materials |
|---|---|----------------------|---------------------------------|--|
| Total | 64.2 | 7.7 | 6.2 | 21.9 |
| Gender | | | | |
| Male | 66.0 | 7.1 | 7.2 | 19.7 |
| Female | 62.5 | 8.2 | 5.1 | 24.2 |
| Race/Ethnicity | | | | |
| Non-Hispanic white | 16.8 | 0.0 | 9.0 | 74.2 |
| Non-Hispanic black | * | * | * | * |
| Hispanic | 78.1 | 8.0 | 6.0 | 8.0 |
| Asian or Pacific Islander | 18.5 | 11.9 | 1.6 | 68.1 |
| Parental Education | | | | |
| Less than a high school degree | 83.2 | 4.2 | 3.9 | 8.7 |
| High school degree/equivalent | 75.5 | 6.2 | 12.3 | 6.1 |
| Some college/technical vocational degree | 70.7 | 13.3 | 1.0 | 15.0 |
| Bachelor's degree or more | 25.3 | 8.5 | 4.4 | 61.8 |
| Primary Language Spoken in the Home | | | | |
| Both parents' main language is English | * | * | * | * |
| One parent's main language is not English | 62.2 | 10.9 | 0.0 | 26.9 |
| Neither parent's main language is English | 65.1 | 7.3 | 6.4 | 21.2 |
| Poverty level | | | | |
| Household income at or below poverty line | 81.0 | 8.1 | 4.8 | 6.0 |
| Household income above poverty line | 49.1 | 7.3 | 7.4 | 36.3 |
| WIC benefits | | | | |
| Received WIC benefits in the past 12 months | 81.8 | 4.9 | 7.6 | 5.7 |
| Did not receive WIC benefits in the past 12 months | 56.7 | 8.9 | 5.5 | 28.9 |
| TANF/AFDC benefits | | | | |
| Received TANF/AFDC benefits in the past 12 months | 88.2 | 0.0 | 5.8 | 6.0 |
| Did not receive TANF/AFDC benefits in the past 12 months | 62.1 | 8.3 | 6.2 | 23.4 |
| Medicaid Receipt | | | | |
| Received Medicaid in the past 12 months | 78.3 | 6.1 | 9.5 | 6.2 |
| Did not receive Medicaid in the past 12 months | 57.4 | 8.4 | 4.6 | 29.6 |
| Food Stamp Receipt | | | | |
| Received food stamps in the past 12 months | 83.6 | 4.7 | 9.1 | 2.6 |
| Did not receive food stamps in the past 12 months | 59.5 | 8.4 | 5.4 | 26.7 |
| Urbanicity | | | | |
| Urban, inside urbanized area | 62.1 | 7.9 | 6.8 | 23.2 |
| Urban, outside urbanized area | 76.5 | 5.1 | 2.5 | 15.9 |
| Rural | * | * | * | * |
| Region | | | | |
| Northeast | 37.3 | 13.0 | 11.3 | 38.4 |
| Midwest | 52.1 | 1.1 | 5.5 | 41.4 |
| South | 64.0 | 11.0 | 4.4 | 20.7 |
| West | 75.0 | 5.2 | 5.7 | 14.2 |
| Neighborhood Poverty (of those under 18) | | | | |
| Less than 5 percent | 45.3 | 12.1 | 4.2 | 38.5 |
| 5 to 9 percent | 59.4 | 8.6 | 4.1 | 27.8 |
| 10 to 19 percent | 73.8 | 5.4 | 11.5 | 9.3 |
| 20 percent and more | 85.7 | 2.9 | 2.6 | 8.9 |
| Type of School | | | | |
| Public | 67.1 | 7.2 | 5.6 | 20.1 |
| Private | 23.3 | 14.1 | 13.6 | 49.0 |
| Grade level | | | | |
| K through 1 | 60.8 | 7.8 | 5.5 | 26.0 |
| 2 through 3 | 67.6 | 7.6 | 6.8 | 18.0 |

* Sample size for these estimates are below 20 and thus do not provide reliable estimates.

Parents who reported speaking a language other than English the most at home were asked: Does (CHILD)'s school have:

- Interpreters that speak your language for meetings or parent-teacher conferences?
 - Written materials, such as newsletters or school notices that are translated into your language?
- Percentages are only out of those children whose parents' primary language is not English.

Source: Child Trends' original analyses of National Household Education Survey data.