



# Society for Research in Child Development

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## PRESS RELEASE

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### **Children of Immigrants Pursue Math and Science as Pathways to Upward Mobility**

A study published in the September/October issue of the journal *Child Development* finds that children of immigrants are more likely to pursue math and science in college than students from the same ethnic groups whose families have been in the US for generations. Additionally, the study finds that the pursuit of math and science is not isolated to one immigrant group, but exists for children of Latino, Afro-Caribbean and European immigrants.

The issue is important, says Vivian Tseng, PhD, a program officer at the William T. Grant Foundation in New York City, because the country is experiencing a surge in immigration not seen since the early 1900s. Today one in five children has an immigrant parent. "For child development researchers, this growth in immigration raises important questions about how children of immigrants are faring in school and work, and how the challenges and opportunities of immigration influence how they fare," she said.

Dr. Tseng surveyed almost 800 college students between the ages of 18 and 25 about their aspirations for the future. She also collected data on their majors from the large, urban university they attended. She defined students from immigrant families and children of immigrants as those with at least one immigrant parent. She compared those children to students born in the U.S. who also had two parents born in the US.

One reason these children of immigrants are more likely to pursue math and science than their peers whose families have been in the US for generations is that the students she surveyed had higher economic aspirations and were aiming for better paying occupations than their later-generation peers.

"These findings complement previous studies by other researchers," she said. "In interviews, immigrant parents, especially those working in low-wage, low-status jobs, channel their greatest hopes for upward mobility in this new country to their children. They tell their children that they must do well in school so they can have better lives and more satisfying, better paying, and higher status jobs than their parents."

As immigration policy debates rage this political season, her study, along with a growing body of research, suggests that children of immigrants fare quite well in ways that are important for the US economy. "At a time when the US economy is facing demands for highly educated workers in technology and science," said Dr. Tseng, "children of immigrants may well contribute to our nation's changing workforce needs."

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Summarized from Child Development, Vol. 77 Issue 5, *Unpacking Immigration in Youths' Academic and Occupational Pathways* by Vivian Tseng (William T. Grant Foundation).  
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