



SURVEYING CHINESE IMMERSION PRESCHOOL PROGRAMS AND TEACHERS IN THE UNITED STATES: 2020-2021

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The number of Chinese language programs in the formal K-16 education system in the United States has grown significantly over the past 60 plus years. The trend started in higher education in 1958, and moved to high school in the decades since the late 1980s. A proliferation of Chinese immersion programs have been established in K-8 schools since 2000. In recent years, a trend of incorporating Chinese in early childhood programs can be observed, which is documented in this Brief.

In 2020, representatives from early childhood programs, government offices, higher education, and professional and non-profit organizations met in New York City to discuss the state of the Chinese immersion preschool field and developed a few key next steps. A trilogy of paper was developed as the result of the meeting and follow-up research. The first paper is a CELIN Brief entitled, *An Emerging Field: Chinese Immersion Preschool Education*. This Brief is the second paper of the series, and the last one is a white paper entitled, *A Blueprint for Building and Sustaining Chinese Immersion Preschool Education in the United States*. Together, these documents form the baseline data for the emerging field in 2021.

This Brief reports two national surveys of Chinese immersion preschools and of teachers who work in these schools conducted by the CELIN at Asia Society research team. It describes the methodology regarding their design, implementation, data collection and

analysis; reports their findings; and discusses the implications of the findings, with directions for future research. The survey questions and findings from each survey can be found in the Appendices.

Program Survey: The first survey, completed by 19 program leaders, principals, and administrators, sought to examine the key features of Chinese immersion preschools, with a focus on the school context, program features, curriculum and instruction, and parent and community involvement.

Teacher Survey: The second survey, completed by 54 teachers, teacher aides, and administrators, investigated the personal backgrounds, educational backgrounds, teaching experience, and professional views and needs of these educators.

Findings from the two surveys confirm that the field of Chinese immersion preschool education is emerging and growing, particularly in the last decade. This trend is evident in both public and private schools, indicating an increased number of programs for diverse linguistic communities in suburban and urban settings. Missing from the sample are programs in rural or midwestern states and those that serve children from low SES backgrounds. The teacher workforce in Chinese preschool programs is mostly foreign-born, but highly educated, with the majority possessing graduate degrees in a variety of specializations. The implications of these findings for the education field are clear.

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- “All children have the right to equitable learning opportunities that enable them to achieve their full potential as engaged learners and valued members of society” (National Association for the Education of Young Children, NAEYC, 2019).
- Immersion preschool programs should be available to children of all backgrounds, including lower socio-economic and underrepresented groups.
- All children need to have the opportunity to become globally competent, and education policy and funding need to focus on language learning and school achievement as a right of and resource for all students, regardless their backgrounds.
- There is a need to develop a framework about Language Immersion Preschools for All, so that programs have a common frame of reference and standards to guide their work.
- Building on the framework, there is a need to develop a guide on establishing, implementing, and sustaining high-quality language immersion preschools.
- Programs need to consider ways to promote and facilitate parent and community involvement, including how to recruit and support families from underserved populations.
- In order to sustain the development and excellence of preschool programs, a comprehensive teacher supply and support system must be built.
- Provide support and professional development for teachers on their knowledge, skills, and understanding of the interplay between early childhood education and language acquisition.

More quality research to support the growth and excellence of Chinese preschool education will contribute to the field building significantly. Areas such as initial and early Chinese-English bilingual and biliteracy development and whole child development hold the key for us to grow a nation of multilingual speakers. Efforts to uncover and document best practices in program development, curriculum design, instructional strategies, classroom interactions, language assessment, social emotional learning, and relationship building will benefit not only Chinese but all language immersion programs. Teacher development is another area that demands our attention and deliberate actions.

This Brief describes the current landscape of Chinese immersion preschool programs and teachers and staff working in these programs in the United States in 2020-2021. All stakeholders – parents, teachers, program leaders, university educators and researchers, local, state, and federal governments, and organizations are called to engage in rigorous dialogues, leveraging resources, and building partnerships. As the United States, and the world, emerges from the aftermath of Covid-19, all of us are invited to examine the reality of the “New Normal” around us and to imagine the possibilities and power of this and future generations of change agents who can, and must, make the local and global communities a better place for all.