



# 02

## Key Themes

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### **Equity of Access to Head Start and Early Head Start**

*The State(s) of Head Start and Early Head Start: Looking at Equity* finds many areas of inequitable access to Head Start but also areas where Head Start is excelling for all children. We offer suggestions for improvements to make Head Start more equitable and to reach more eligible children with high quality services. On the next page we summarize the key findings organized by the report's four themes.



### COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The Covid-19 pandemic had a large negative impact on enrollment in Head Start and Early Head Start.

Across all Head Start programs, 287,000 fewer children attended Head Start in 2020-21 than in 2018-19. Despite the large decrease in actual enrollment, funding for Head Start increased slightly, adjusted for inflation; and additional funding was made available to local programs through Covid-19 relief funding allocated by Congress. The good news is that data from 2021-22 suggest enrollment is rebounding, though it is not yet entirely back to pre-pandemic levels. To ensure a continued return of children to Head Start and Early Head Start, funding should be used to improve facilities (e.g., air purification and ventilation), recruit and retain staff, and for outreach to families on the benefits of Head Start and Early Head Start and how children can safely return. (For more information see pages [12-15](#).)



### POVERTY

Head Start and Early Head Start do not reach even half of children in poverty (defined as 100% of the federal poverty level) even though

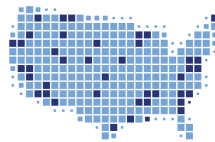
all are eligible. Moreover, despite a decade long decline in the number of children living in poverty, the percent of children in poverty enrolled in Head Start has not changed (moving from an estimated 40% in 2011-12 to an estimated 41% in 2018-19 prior to the pandemic). Early Head Start enrollment did increase from an estimated 5% of children in poverty in 2011-12 to an estimated 9% in 2018-19, but this is still less than 10% of infants and toddlers in poverty. (See Methodology on page [294](#).) Additional funding for Head Start and Early Head Start would enable the programs to enroll more children in poverty, especially important in states and localities where there are no other public early childhood education programs. (For more information see pages [16-17](#).)



### RACE AND ETHNICITY

Head Start and Early Head Start enrollment, funding, and experi-

ences vary by child race and ethnicity in ways that are not easily explained, with inequities nationally and in most states. For example, a higher percentage of Black children in poverty (33%) enrolled in Head Start than White children (25%), Asian children (23%), and children of other races (28%). To some extent these difference could be due to other need factors that Head Start considers for prioritizing enrollment. However, Head Start funding per child was lower in states that enrolled a higher percentage of Black children in Head Start. And, classroom quality, as measured by the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS)<sup>9</sup> was lower in states that enrolled a higher percentage of Black children. On a positive note, Head Start serves as an exemplar for other early childhood education programs on collecting detailed data on children's and staff's race and ethnicity that makes these kinds of analyses possible. While increased funding is one action to decrease the identified inequities in access, funding, and quality, outreach to underrepresented families is also an important step to take. (For more information see pages [18-21](#).)



### STATE VARIATION

There are large state-by-state difference in Head Start and Early Head Start funding, enrollment, program

components, and quality that are not explained by differences in state population eligibility and needs. Although all Head Start and Early Head Start programs are required to follow the same Head Start Program Performance Standards, this report identifies large state-by-state differences that have no policy rationale. For more detail on these state-by-state differences in enrollment, funding, quality, program duration, transportation, serving children with disabilities, staff turnover, and teacher salaries, see pages [22-27](#). Increasing federal funding for Head Start and targeting the distribution of this funding to reduce interstate inequality by leveling up, is a critical next step for Head Start.

## Conclusions and Policy Recommendations

Head Start aims to provide educational and child development services to support whole child development, in both the short- and long-run.

However, insufficient funding has limited the program's ability to deliver these services to all eligible children and families, hampering progress over the last decade. This remains true even though a long-term decline in poverty rates made it easier to reach the goal of serving every child in poverty across Head Start, state pre-K, and other publicly-funded early childhood education (ECE) programs. In some states Head Start has been more successful in contributing to this goal – Mississippi enrolled an estimated 90% of 3- and 4-year-olds in poverty in Head Start before the Covid-19 pandemic. The top five states for Head Start access enrolled an estimated average of 74% of 3- and 4-year-olds in poverty and the top five states for Early Head Start access enrolled an estimated average of 22% of children under 3 in poverty.

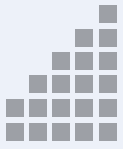
**We recommend increased funding for Head Start and Early Head Start to bring enrollment in all states up to the levels of access in the 5 states with the best coverage.**

This would cost approximately

**\$10 billion, taking into account pre-existing needs for salary increases and could be done by increasing Head Start funding by \$2.5 billion each year for four years**

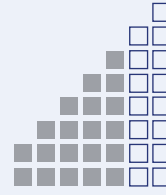
(with additional adjustments for inflation).

We also recommend additional funding to increase salaries supporting increased equity in the quality of education Head Start provides. This is critical to true equity of access and enabling Head Start to achieve its goals for all children and families. The National Head Start Association (NHSA) has estimated this cost at an additional \$2.5 billion annually based on current enrollment. The time to act is now, before even more children miss out on the opportunity to attend Head Start and/or Early Head Start.



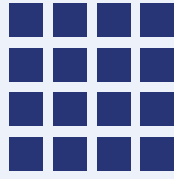
**2020-2021 Head  
Start Funding**

**\$10.3  
billion**

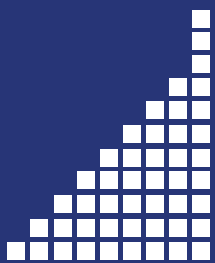


**Gap in  
Funding**

**\$12.5  
billion**



**Total Funding Needed**



**\$22.8  
billion**



# Covid-19 Pandemic

**The Covid-19 pandemic had a large negative impact on enrollment in Head Start and Early Head Start. The 2020-21 program year saw 287,000 fewer children enrolled in Head Start, Early Head Start, AIAN, and MSHS than in 2018-19. Enrollment partially rebounded in 2021-22.**

Head Start enrollment declined in all 50 states, D.C., and the U.S. Territories between the 2018-19 and the 2020-21 program years. Enrollment in Early Head Start declined everywhere except for seven states (Alabama, Arkansas, Colorado, DC, Florida, Iowa, and Utah). Enrollment in the Migrant and Seasonal Head Start (MSHS) and American Indian/Alaska Native (AIAN) Head Start programs also declined. This large decline in enrollment likely reflects the disruption of the Covid-19 pandemic on all facets of life, including attending in-person school. By 2021-22, enrollment increased but it did not reach pre-pandemic levels.

The Covid-19 pandemic impacts on Head Start enrollment were not equal for all children: Black children in poverty had an estimated 15 percentage point decline compared to only 6 percentage points for White children in poverty; no difference was seen for Early Head Start. Hispanic/Latino and Non-

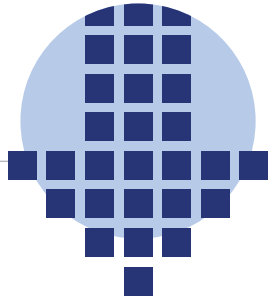
Hispanic/Non-Latino children had similar decreases in Head Start and Early Head Start enrollment.

Among the children who did attend Head Start and Early Head Start, many received virtual programming for at least part of the year, which likely reduced the effectiveness of the program in achieving its child development goals. Data on who attended virtual programs, for how long, and the impacts of this, are not available.

Despite the large decrease in Head Start and Early Head Start enrollment, federal funding for the programs and funded enrollment remained relatively stable. Additional pandemic relief funding was also made available to programs. Data from the 2020-21 program year indicate a continuation of the trend of funding and funded enrollment shifting from Head Start to Early Head Start.

## 📌 ACTIONS TO TAKE

Congress has provided funding to facilitate the safe return of children to Head Start and Early Head Start by, for example, investing in facilities (e.g., air purifiers and ventilation) to mitigate Covid-19 risks, outreach to parents about the benefits and safety of Head Start, and increased teacher salaries to reduce turnover. Programs may need assistance to effectively spend the funds. Funding for research on how the pandemic, including virtual learning, impacted children will be important as the pandemic continues to evolve.



## HEAD START

During the 2020-21 program year, almost

**257,000**

fewer children attended Head Start nationwide than in 2018-19, a decrease of

**33%**

## EARLY HEAD START

Almost

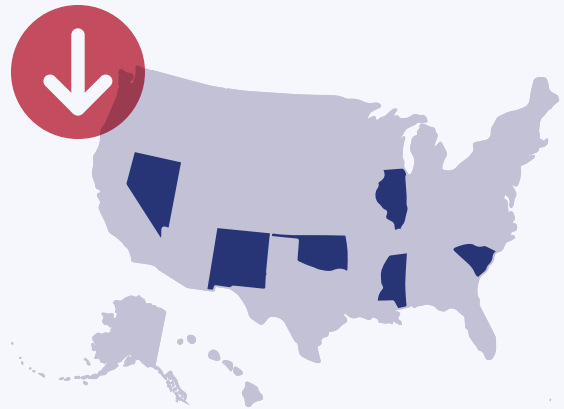
**22,000**

fewer children attended Early Head Start nationwide, a decrease of almost

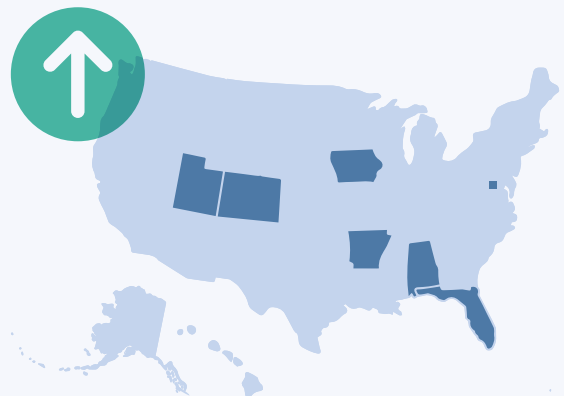
**10%**

between 2018-19 and 2020-21.

Enrollment in Head Start declined in all 50 states, D.C., and the U.S. Territories, but some states saw a more significant decline than others. Enrollment in Early Head Start declined in all but 7 states.



Enrollment declined by **more than 40%** in Illinois, Mississippi, Nevada, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and South Carolina.



Enrollment in Early Head Start **declined everywhere except** for seven states: Alabama, Arkansas, Colorado, D.C., Florida, Iowa, and Utah.





## FUNDING

**Total annual federal funding authorized by Congress for Head Start, Early Head Start, AIAN, and MSHS combined did not change substantially as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. But Congress did authorize supplemental Covid-19 relief funding to support local programs.**

Total federal funding was stable, adjusting for inflation between the 2019-20 and 2020-21 program years. Total funding for Head Start and Early Head Start (including MSHS and AIAN Head Start and Early Head Start) in the 50 states, DC, and six U.S. territories totaled \$10.3 billion in 2020-21, a 0.20% increase, adjusted for inflation from the previous year. Stable funding signifies a commitment to maintaining the programs and keeping classrooms open and staff employed despite lower than expected program enrollment especially for Head Start. Congress provided an additional \$2 billion total in 2020 and 2021 in supplemental Covid-19 relief funding to support local programs in responding to the pandemic, including for recruiting and retaining staff and improving facilities.

Total funded enrollment was also stable (a decrease of less than 2%) between the 2019-20 and 2020-21 program years. However, continuing a trend since the 2014-2015 program year, Head Start funded enrollment decreased by 20,700 children (3%) and Early Head Start funded enrollment increased by almost 8,700 children (5%). Similarly, Head Start funding decreased by 3% and Early Head Start funding increased by 7%, adjusted for inflation.

📌 Increase annual federal funding to at a minimum include the amount of stabilization funding programs received so programs can continue to operate safely. Additional funding can grow Early Head Start without decreases in Head Start while also enrolling more children in programs that meet the 1,020 hour requirement for Head Start and the 1,380 hour requirement of Early Head Start.



## ENROLLMENT

**When compared to pre-pandemic enrollment, Head Start enrollment declined in all U.S. states and territories, and Early Head Start enrollment declined in all but 7 states during the 2020-2021 program year.**

The 2020-21 program year saw 33% fewer children enroll in Head Start and almost 10% fewer children enroll in Early Head Start compared to 2018-19. Head Start enrollment declined across all U.S. states, D.C., and territories, by 256,659 from 775,902 to 519,243 children nationally. Early Head Start enrollment declined in almost all U.S. states and Territories, with the exception of 7 states, by 21,716 from 230,067 children to 208,351 children nationally. Migrant and Seasonal Head Start enrollment decreased by 8,578 children. The good news is that by 2021-22, enrollment had begun to rebound, though it did not yet reach pre-pandemic levels.

Some groups of children experienced larger declines in enrollment: Enrollment of Black children in Head Start decreased by 37%, compared to 29% for White children. For Early Head Start, 10% fewer Black children enrolled compared to 8% fewer White children. Enrollment decreases were similar for Hispanic/Latino and Non-Hispanic/Non-Latino children.

📌 Invest in more outreach to parents regarding the benefits of Head Start and Early Head Start program participation, vaccine availability and safety, and ways programs are reducing health risks. Additional funding for facilities to reduce risk of Covid-19 risks (e.g., air purification and improved ventilation) can also help with this.



## OUTCOMES

**The Covid-19 pandemic reduced the number of children living in poverty reached by Head Start and Early Head Start, but did not impact staff turnover on a national scale.**

During the 2020-21 program year, Head Start reached an estimated 30% of 3- & 4-year-olds living in poverty, compared to an estimated 41% prior to the pandemic. Early Head Start reached an estimated 9% of children under 3 living in poverty in both 2018-19 and in 2020-21, despite an estimated 12% decrease in the number of children living in poverty who enrolled in the program (see *Poverty on Page 16*).

Nationally, approximately 14% of Head Start and Early Head Start staff left Head Start in 2018-19 and in 2020-21. Unlike other ECE programs, Head Start did not experience an increased exodus of staff as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. Covid-19 relief funding allocated by Congress likely helped to stabilize the system and retain staff. As in the economy generally, staffing turnover is now at an all time high (20% in Head Start and 18% in Early Head Start in 2021-22). In some states more than 30% of staff left during the 2021-22 program year.

📌 Increase funding to attract and retain a high quality workforce and support pay parity with K-12.



## DATA AVAILABILITY

**There is no data available to assess the extent to which children received virtual Head Start or Early Head Start, or how that affected children’s learning and development.**

The Head Start Program Information Report (PIR) did not collect data on how many children attended virtual Head Start programs, and for how long or how well. Currently, we cannot draw conclusions about any impact virtual Head Start programming had on children.

📌 Additional learning and development supports may be needed for children who only received virtual Head Start or Early Head Start during the Covid-19 pandemic. Better data is needed to identify who may need additional supports.

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**Stable funding signifies a commitment to maintaining the programs and keeping classrooms open and staff employed despite lower than expected program enrollment especially for Head Start.”**







# Poverty

**Both Head Start and Early Head Start are falling short of reaching children in poverty, despite a decline in the percent of children living in poverty over the last decade.**

Head Start was launched in 1965 as part of the national War on Poverty as a child development program for preschool-age children in poverty. Early Head Start, a program to support pregnant women and children under age 3 began in 1995. In the last decade, child poverty rates fell dramatically from 25% in 2012 to 18% in 2019.<sup>9</sup> This reduced the percentage and number of income-eligible children and families.

Because of the decrease in children living in poverty over the last decade, Head Start might have been expected to greatly increase coverage of the income-eligible population. However, the percentage of children in poverty served by Head Start only increased from an estimated 40 to 41%. Early Head Start had a larger improvement in the percent of children in poverty enrolled, increasing from an estimated 5 to 9%, but the program still enrolls less than 10% of children in poverty.

Despite the incremental improvement, it is disappointing that Head Start and Early Head Start remain so far from reaching most young children in poverty after so many decades and despite the reduction in child poverty.

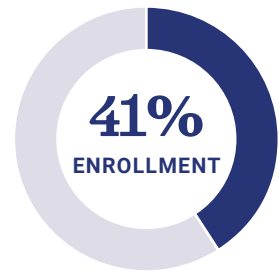
## 📌 ACTIONS TO TAKE

Funding for Head Start and Early Head Start must be increased to serve more children living in poverty, especially in places where other quality early childhood education (ECE) programs are not available. States must also ensure programs are accessible to eligible families. This could include locating programs in neighborhoods convenient for children and families living in poverty and/or providing transportation (see [State Variation](#)). Additionally, increased outreach to eligible families might uncover other barriers to participation.

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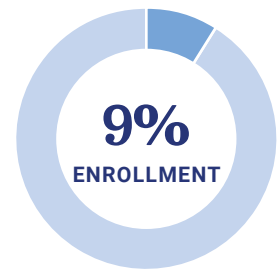
Research demonstrates that high-quality preschool, including Head Start, can improve academic, social, and lifetime outcomes, especially for children disadvantaged by poverty.<sup>10</sup>

Every child deserves equal access to education. ”



### HEAD START

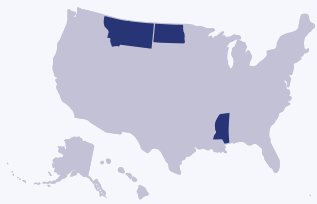
Head Start enrolled 41% of 3- & 4-year-olds in poverty in 2018-19. The Covid-19 pandemic **reduced this to 30%** in 2020-21.



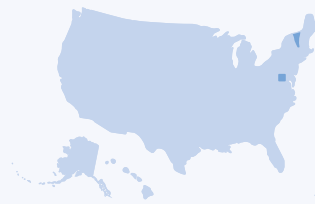
### EARLY HEAD START

Early Head Start enrolled 9% of children under 3 in poverty in 2018-19. This remained level in 2020-21 despite a 12% decrease in Early Head Start enrollment.

## Head Start and Early Head Start both fell short of reaching all children in poverty. However, Head Start and Early Head Start do better in some states than others.



At its highest, Head Start reached 50% of children in poverty in **only three** states in 2020-21: Mississippi, Montana, and North Dakota.



At its highest, in 2020-21 Early Head Start reached 38% of children in poverty in **only** Washington DC, with the next closest state, Vermont, falling much shorter at 22%.



### Program reach has increased at a disproportionately lower rate relative to the decrease in poverty.

Although poverty decreased by 7 percentage points (a drop from 25% to 18%), Head Start's reach increased by only 1 percentage point and Early Head Start's by 4 percentage points. Reasons might include insufficient funding, a continued shift of funding between Head Start and Early Head Start, more full-day enrollment, or more children enrolled in other ECE programs.

➤ Increase overall program funding instead of shifting funding between Head Start and Early Head Start.



### Head Start provides the same level of quality regardless of child poverty in the state.

Emotional Support, Classroom Organization, and Instructional Support average scores from the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) show little variation from state to state when compared to the percent of children in poverty enrolled in Head Start or in the state. Instructional Support is low across the board.

➤ A renewed focus on supporting teachers to engage with children in rich, meaningful interactions is needed to raise the bar everywhere.



### Head Start funding per child is *less* in states with *higher* poverty. The opposite is true for Early Head Start.

In the five states with the highest percent of children in poverty (more than 23% in Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, New Mexico, West Virginia), Head Start's average federal funding per child was **\$1,590 less** compared to the five states with the lowest poverty (less than 11% in Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Hampshire, New Jersey, Utah).

However, Early Head Start federal funding averaged **\$1,924 more** per child in the five states with the highest percent of children in poverty than in the five states with the lowest percent.

➤ Additional funding is needed to raise the funding levels up in all states to a level that supports high quality environments and higher teacher compensation.



### There is no national data system to track enrollment across all early childhood education programs at the state level.

According to national census data, less than 50% of 3- & 4-year-olds in poverty are in any type of preschool program, public or private.<sup>11</sup> And Head Start and Early Head Start are both falling short of reaching all children in poverty. Without a national data system tracking enrollment across all publicly-funded programs, the extent of the problem for each state and for specific groups of children is unknown.

➤ State and federal governments need to work together to create a comprehensive data system of all ECE programs that includes information on child characteristics.



# Race & Ethnicity

**Head Start and Early Head Start enrollment, funding, and classroom experiences vary by child race and ethnicity in ways that are not easily explained, highlighting inequities nationally and in most states.**

Nationally, an average of an estimated 30% of 3- & 4-year-olds in poverty attended Head Start during 2020-21. But, for reasons unknown, children's race and ethnicity are associated with their likelihood of enrolling in Head Start. Black children in poverty were more likely to be enrolled in Head Start (33%) than White children (25%), Asian children (23%), and children of other races (28%) in poverty. Hispanic/Latino children in poverty were less likely (27%) to enroll in Head Start than their Non-Hispanic/Non-Latino peers (32%).

A similar pattern is found for Early Head Start which enrolled, on average, an estimated 9% of children under age 3 living in poverty in 2020-21, though differences are very small, much less than for Head Start: an estimated 10% of Black children, 9% of children of other races, 8% of White children, and 6% of Asian children in poverty. Enrollment for Hispanic/Latino children in poverty was an estimated 9% compared to 9.4% of Non-Hispanic/Non-Latino children in poverty under age 3.

## 📌 ACTIONS TO TAKE

Head Start grantees and agencies should be supported to identify ways to increase enrollment of underrepresented groups in Head Start and Early Head Start while decreasing inequities in funding and quality by race and ethnicity. This might include outreach to underrepresented families in each state to understand their choices about ECE programs for their children. Additional funding for Head Start and Early Head Start should be made available to expand services in communities with low and unequal access and to reduce inequities in per child funding.

# \$3,204

is the gap in Head Start federal funding per child in the 5 states with the lowest and highest percentages of Black children



Gaps between Black and White and Hispanic/Latino and Non-Hispanic/Non-Latino children in poverty in Head Start and Early Head Start.

## HEAD START

Black-White gap:

# 9

**percentage points**

Hispanic/Latino-Non-Hispanic/Non-Latino gap:

# -4

**percentage points**

## EARLY HEAD START

Black-White gap:

# 2

**percentage points**

Hispanic/Latino-Non-Hispanic/Non-Latino gap:

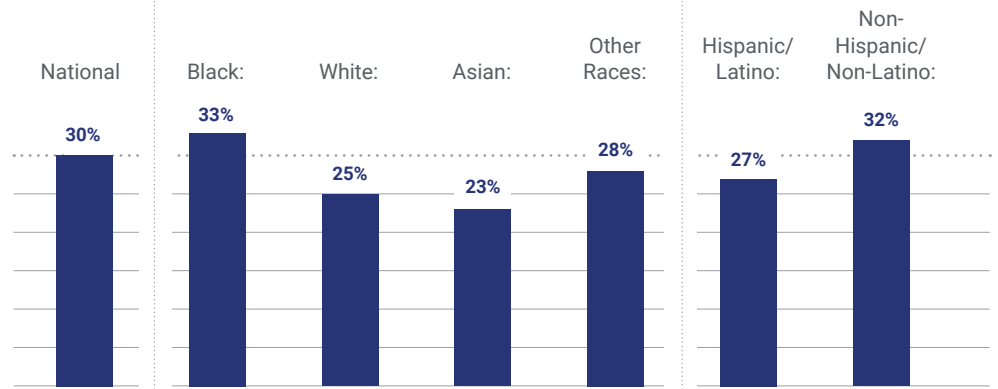
# -0.5

**percentage points**

## Head Start and Early Head Start enrollment vary by race and ethnicity but are too low for all children in poverty.

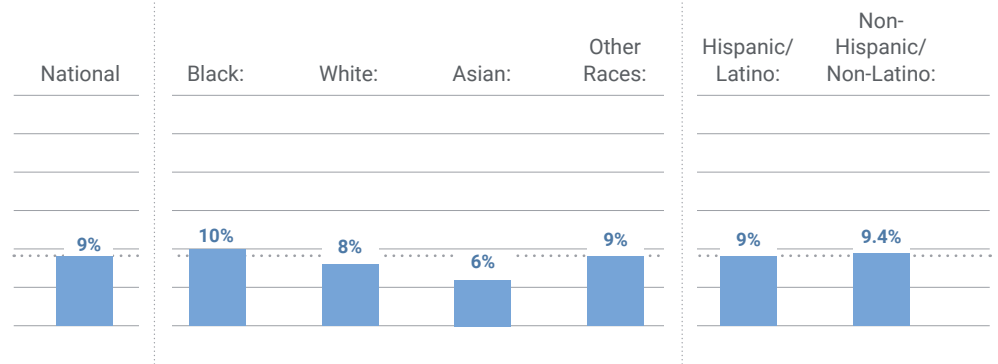
### Head Start

Black children in poverty are more likely than other children in poverty to enroll in Head Start; Hispanic/Latino children in poverty are less likely than Non-Hispanic/Non-Latino children to enroll.



### Early Head Start

Black children in poverty are more likely than other children in poverty to enroll in Early Head Start; Hispanic/Latino children in poverty are less likely than Non-Hispanic/Non-Latino children to enroll; the differences are smaller than for Head Start.



## FUNDING

### Federal Head Start funding is not equitably distributed to states.

Head Start funding per child is lower in states that enroll higher percentages of Black children in Head Start, that have a higher percentage of Black children in the state, and that have a higher percentage of teachers who are Black. In the five states with the highest percent of Black children (DC, Georgia, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi), average funding per child was \$9,450, compared to \$12,654 in the five states with the lowest percentage of Black children in the state (Idaho, Montana, Utah, Vermont, and Wyoming), a difference of \$3,204 per child

after adjusting for differences in cost of living by state. The reason for this discrepancy is not readily apparent but the data suggest Black children may be less likely to receive a quality program.

This same pattern was not seen for Early Head Start.

➤ Additional funding for Head Start to increase funding per child in states with the largest populations of Black children to the levels in other states.



#### ENROLLMENT

### Head Start reaches a smaller percent of eligible children in more racially and ethnically diverse states.

Nationally, Head Start enrolled a lower percent of 3- and 4-year-olds in poverty in states that have a greater percent of Black children and states that have a greater percent of Hispanic/Latino children.

This same pattern was not seen for Early Head Start.

➤ Additional Head Start funding for programs in states with the most diverse populations so that all states can enroll an equally high percentage of children in poverty to reduce or eliminate these inequities.



#### OUTCOMES

### Black children enrolled in Head Start are more likely to enroll in programs with lower observed quality.

Observed classroom quality—specifically Emotional Support and Classroom Organization scores on the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS)<sup>12</sup>—was significantly lower in states where Black children in poverty were a larger percentage of Head Start enrollment, and in states that have a higher percent of Black children in the state. Alleviating this concern somewhat is that Emotional Support and Classroom Organizations scores were high in nearly all states. The same patterns were not seen for Instructional Support, which is low in most states.

➤ Dedicated funding for programs to use for quality enhancements, which could include coaching for teachers, with more support for programs more in need. This quality problem also should be addressed by adding funding for programs with low per child funding levels.



#### DATA AVAILABILITY

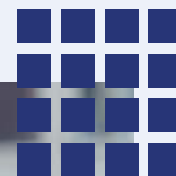
### Head Start does a good job reporting data about children's race and ethnicity, standing in stark contrast to many other ECE programs.

Through the Head Start Program Information Report (PIR)<sup>13</sup> each Head Start and Early Head Start program (including AIAN and MSHS) is required to report annually information on the race and ethnicity of all children enrolled during the program year. As a result, there is detailed information at the program level, which can easily be aggregated to the state or national level, on the characteristics of children attending Head Start programs, including race, ethnicity, home language, age, parent education, parent employment, and receipt of social services. Annual data are comparable year to year and easily accessible. Most state-funded preschool programs do not have this type of data on children enrolled.

➤ Head Start can be a model for other ECE programs' data systems and should be integrated with states' early childhood data systems.

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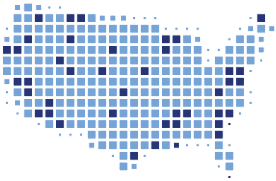
Head Start funding per child is lower in states that enroll higher percentages of Black children in Head Start, that have a higher percentage of Black children in the state, and that have a higher percentage of teachers who are Black. ”



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The first *State(s) of Head Start* report found substantial variation in Head Start and Early Head Start across the states. Six years (and one pandemic) later, state-by-state variation remains ubiquitous and is found in enrollment, funding, observed quality, teacher salaries, and program duration (e.g., number of hours provided), to name just a few key program features. These differences have no clear policy rationale and must be addressed to make Head Start and Early Head Start more equitable.

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# State Variation

Head Start and Early Head Start funding, enrollment, program components, and quality vary greatly state-by-state in ways that are not related to differences in state population eligibility and needs.

Head Start and Early Head Start are federally-funded programs required to follow a uniform set of federal Head Start Program Performance Standards. Nevertheless, we find large state-by-state differences in Head Start and Early Head Start funding, enrollment, and quality, not explained by differences in population eligibility and needs.

Head Start and Early Head Start are federally funded programs with a single uniform set of federal Head Start Program Performance Standards. The first *State(s) of Head Start*<sup>14</sup> report found substantial variation in Head Start and Early Head Start across the states. Six years (and one pandemic) later, state-by-state variation remains ubiquitous and is found in enrollment, funding, observed quality, teacher salaries, and program duration (e.g., number of hours provided), to name just a few key program features. These differences have no clear policy rationale and must be addressed to make Head Start and Early Head Start more equitable.

## Difference between

the highest and lowest states for enrollment of children in poverty in Head Start

**50**  
percentage points

## Difference between

the highest and lowest states for enrollment of children in poverty in Early Head Start

**33**  
percentage points



Difference between the highest and lowest states for

**\$6,995/**  
**child**  
for Head Start

Difference between the highest and lowest states for

**\$7,685/**  
**child**  
for Early Head Start

## ▶ ACTIONS TO TAKE

Increase federal funding and distribute this funding in ways that raise enrollment, teacher salaries, and funding per child everywhere to the highest levels achieved among the states. Increased federal funding also could be dedicated to reducing inequities within states by ensuring all groups of children have equal and equitable access. States also could consider providing supplemental funding for Head Start and Early Head Start to increase equity by serving more children—as federal Head Start funding is far below that needed to serve all eligible children— and by increasing funding per child, extending program hours, raising teacher pay, and supporting quality improvement.



## FUNDING

**From the highest to lowest state, federal funding differs by nearly \$7,000 per child in Head Start and \$7,700 in Early Head Start.**

Head Start federal funding per child averaged \$11,065 nationally in 2020-21 but this varied by nearly \$7,000 after adjusting for differences in the cost of living (e.g., the cost of providing Head Start) in each state. At the low end, programs in six states (Arkansas, Florida, Hawaii, Oklahoma, Texas, and Virginia) and four territories<sup>15</sup> (American Samoa, Guam, Northern Mariana Islands, and Palau) received less than \$9,000 per child. At the high end, programs in two states (Oregon and Vermont) received more than \$14,000 per child.

Early Head Start federal funding per child was \$16,583 nationally, but this varied by nearly \$7,700, adjusting for differences in state cost of living. At the low end, programs in two states (Hawaii and Kansas) received less than \$11,500 per child while at the high-end programs in seven states (Alabama, Alaska, Montana, Nevada, North Dakota, Tennessee, and Vermont) received more than \$17,000 per child.

🗨️ Provide an increase in federal funding for Head Start and Early Head Start that is dedicated to raising per child funding levels across states with lower funding levels to reduce inequalities.



## ENROLLMENT OF CHILDREN IN POVERTY

**Enrollment of children in poverty in Head Start ranges by more than 50 percentage points across states; For Early Head Start, the range is 33 percentage points.**

Nationally, an estimated 30% of 3- and 4-year-olds living in poverty enrolled in Head Start during the 2020-21 program year but the percentage of young children in poverty enrolled in Head Start differed across states by 50 percentage points—from an estimated 56% in North Dakota to an estimated 9% in Nevada and an estimated 6% in DC.<sup>16</sup> While DC's low Head Start enrollment may be explained by the District's truly universal preschool program for 3- and 4-year-olds obviating the need for separate Head Start provision, the same cannot be said for other states with very low Head Start enrollment like Connecticut and Nevada where state-funded preschool programs reach only a tiny fraction of the eligible children.

Turning to Early Head Start, nationally the program enrolled nine percent of children under 3 in poverty but the percentage of children in poverty enrolled ranged by 33 percentage points—from an estimated 5% in Indiana and Nevada to an estimated 22% in Vermont and an estimated 38% in DC. Both Vermont and DC have universal preschool programs for 3- and 4-year-olds, enabling them to allocate a larger percentage of federal Head Start funding to Early Head Start than Head Start, as compared to other states. In some states Early Head Start reaches less than half the percentage of eligible children it does in most other states.

🗨️ Increase federal Head Start allocations to programs in the states serving the lowest percentage of their eligible populations—when they are not already served by state or local ECE programs—so that all states can enroll the same high level of children in poverty as the top states.





ENROLLMENT BY RACE AND ETHNICITY

In nearly all states, the percentage of children living in poverty enrolled in Head Start and Early Head Start varies by child race and ethnicity but there is considerable variation across states in which groups of children are underrepresented.

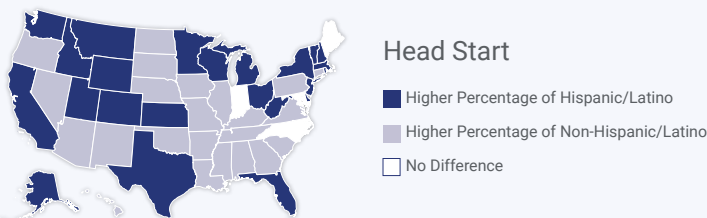
There were differences in nearly all states in the percent of children in poverty attending Head Start by child race and by child ethnicity; however, there was not necessarily a consistent pattern where one group was always more likely than other to attended Head Start. For example, in 23 states, a significantly larger percent of Non-Hispanic/Non-Latino than Hispanic/Latino children in poverty enrolled in Head Start. But in 23 states it was the reverse (and in the remainder of states, there was no meaningful difference). For Early Head Start, there were also 23 states where a significantly larger percent of Non-Hispanic/Not Latino than Hispanic/Latino children in poverty were enrolled, and 19 states with the opposite pattern reverse (and in the remainder of states, there was no meaningful difference). For example, in California a higher percentage of Hispanic/Latino children in poverty (29%) than non-Hispanic/non-Latino children in poverty (22%) enrolled in Head Start. The reverse pattern was seen in New Mexico where 22% of Hispanic/Latino children in poverty attended Head Start, compared to 37%

of Non-Hispanic/Non-Latino children in poverty.

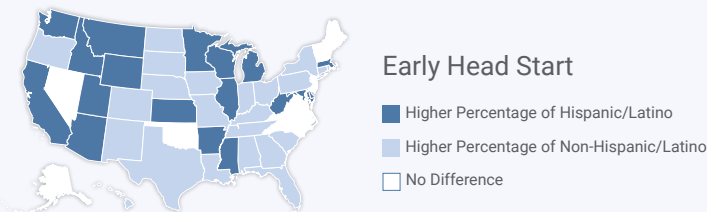
In 14 states, a significantly larger percentage of White children in poverty than Black children in poverty enrolled in Head Start. But in 29 states, it was the reverse. For Early Head Start, 11 states enrolled a significantly larger percent of White children in poverty than Black children in poverty; in 28 states, the opposite pattern was seen. (In the other states there were no meaningful differences.) For example, in Alabama, a higher percentage of Black children in poverty (56%) was enrolled in Head Start compared to White children in poverty (14%). In Michigan, however, 34% of Black children in poverty enrolled in Head Start compared to 44% of White children in poverty.

Research to understand why these discrepancies exist can help Head Start grantees target outreach to under enrolled populations in their communities, but additional funding likely is needed to expand outreach and to raise enrollment for all groups of children to the levels attained for those currently best served.

Differences in Enrollment of Children in Poverty by Ethnicity

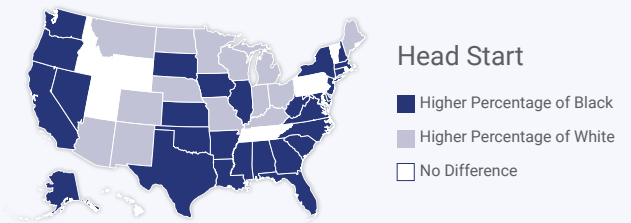


Head Start  
■ Higher Percentage of Hispanic/Latino  
■ Higher Percentage of Non-Hispanic/Latino  
□ No Difference

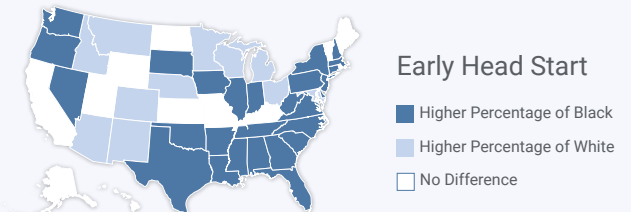


Early Head Start  
■ Higher Percentage of Hispanic/Latino  
■ Higher Percentage of Non-Hispanic/Latino  
□ No Difference

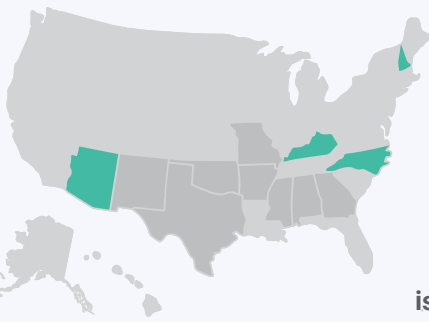
Differences in Enrollment of Children in Poverty by Race



Head Start  
■ Higher Percentage of Black  
■ Higher Percentage of White  
□ No Difference



Early Head Start  
■ Higher Percentage of Black  
■ Higher Percentage of White  
□ No Difference



Average CLASS Instructional Support scores are higher than 3 in 20 states, but confidently higher than 3 in only 4 states (in green) It is confidently lower than 3 in 8 states (in dark gray).



#### OBSERVED QUALITY

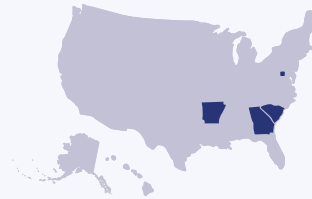
**In only four states do statistical analyses provide confidence that Instructional Support is higher than a research-based threshold.**

Classroom quality was measured by observations using the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS)<sup>17</sup>, averaged between 2016 and 2019.

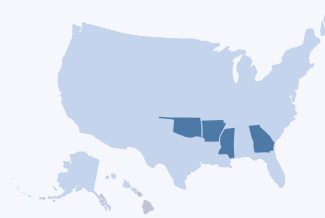
There are only four states where we can be confident that Instructional Support exceeds the research-based threshold of a 3 (on a scale of 1 to 7): Arizona, Kentucky, New Hampshire, and North Carolina. Another 16 states had average CLASS scores above a 3, though we cannot be confident this is not due to chance. On the flip side, average Instructional Support scores were confidently lower than a 3 in eight states (Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Mississippi, Missouri, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas).

There was minimum variation across states in average scores on the two other CLASS domains. Emotional Support scores were confidently above the research-based threshold of 5.5 in all states. Classroom Organization scores were above a 5.5 in all states, and confidently above 5.5 in all except eight states.

📌 Average Instructional Support Scores increased from 2012-2015 to 2016-2019. Nevertheless, Head Start in most states does not reach the Instructional Support research-based threshold. Therefore, additional funding is needed to raise quality, for example for increased teacher compensation and qualification, coaching and professional development.



Nearly all Head Start enrollment was funded to operate for at least 1,020 hours annually in Arkansas, DC, Georgia, and South Carolina.



At least 90% Early Head Start enrollment was funded to operate for at least 1,380 hours annually in Arkansas, Georgia, Mississippi, and Oklahoma.



#### DURATION

**The 2016 revisions to the Head Start Program Performance Standards require programs to provide 1,020 hours of Head Start and 1,380 hours of Early Head Start annually. States varied in the extent to which they met this goal in 2020-2021.<sup>18</sup>**

Three-quarters of Head Start center-based enrollment during 2020-21 was funded to provide at least 1,020 hours (but only 16% was funded to provide a full working day and calendar year program). In four states (Arkansas, DC, Georgia, and South Carolina) and two territories (Palau and Virgin Islands), nearly all Head Start enrollment was funded to operate for at least 1,020 hours during the program year. At the other end, in eight states and three territories, less than half of Head Start children were provided 1,020 hours.

Fifty-nine percent of Early Head Start center-based enrollment during the 2020-21 program year was funded for at least 1,380 hours (while only 28% was funded to provide a full working day and calendar year program). In four states (Arkansas, Georgia, Mississippi, and Oklahoma) and Northern Mariana Islands, at least 90% of all Early Head Start enrollment was funded to operate for at least 1,380 but in 20 states, less than 50% of Early Head Start enrollment was.

📌 Return to the goal of 100% of Head Start enrollment receiving 1,020 hours. Additional funding will be needed to help grantees expand the hours programs offer without decreasing the number of children they can enroll. Coordination with the child care subsidy system can also help provide working families with longer hours to meet their needs.



## TRANSPORTATION

**Most children do not receive transportation to/from Head Start or Early Head Start, but there is large state-by-state variation.**

Providing transportation to and from Head Start programs is expensive but can help improve accessibility of the program for families. Over the last decade, the percent of children receiving transportation to/from Head Start and Early Head Start has declined drastically. Only 15% of children enrolled in Head Start in 2020-21 received transportation, compared to 29% in 2011-12 and 22% in 2018-19. In some states and territories, no Head Start children received transportation (Delaware, DC, Hawaii, and Virgin Islands). At the high end, 40% of Head Start children in Minnesota, 60% in West Virginia, 58% in American Samoa, and 59% in Palau received transportation.

During the 2020-21 program year, only 2% of Early Head Start children received transportation, compared to 7% in 2011-12 and 4% in 2018-19. Eight states (Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Connecticut, Delaware, New Mexico, South Carolina, and Vermont) and two territories (Northern Mariana Islands and Puerto Rico) did not provide transportation for any children in Early Head Start. Only two states (Idaho and Minnesota) and the Virgin Islands provided transportation to more than 10% of children in Early Head Start.

📌 Prioritize transportation services in areas where it is a known barrier to program participation.



## CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

**Nationally and in most states, at least 10% of children enrolled in Head Start and Early Head Start have an individualized education program (IEP) or an individualized family service plan (IFSP).**

Head Start Program Performance Standards require that at least 10% of funded enrollment is filled by children who qualify for special education services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Nationally, 13% of children in Head Start and 12% of children in Early Head Start had either an IEP or IFSP, though this varied across the states. Thirty percent of children in Head Start in Wyoming had an IEP compared to less than 10% in nine states and three territories. Twenty-five percent of children in Early Head Start in Massachusetts had an IFSP, but less than 10% of children did so in 21 states.

Some of these children entered Head Start and Early Head Start already receiving services through IDEA while Head Start played a role in assisting other children to qualify for services. Nationally, 37% of children with an IEP or an IFSP in Head Start and in Early Head Start had their IEP/IFSP determined during the program year. For Head Start, this ranged from less than 25% of children in four states (Hawaii, Maryland, New Hampshire, and New Mexico) and three territories (Guam, Northern Mariana Islands, and Virgin Islands) to more than half in three states (Arkansas, Oklahoma, and South Carolina) and two territories (American Samoa and Palau). For Early Head Start, this ranged from less than 25% in two states (Nevada and North Dakota) and Northern Mariana Islands to more than half in two states (Arkansas and South Dakota) and two territories (Puerto Rico and Virgin Islands).

📌 Head Start and Early Head Start should continue to prioritize enrollment of children with disabilities in inclusive education settings to maintain its excellent record of success enrolling children with disabilities.



## TEACHER SALARIES

**Head Start and Early Head Start teacher salaries are low, well below what public school teachers earn and the state median income in each state.**

In every state, Head Start and Early Head Start teachers earned less than public school teachers and less than the state median income. Head Start lead teachers earned an average of \$37,685 which is substantially lower than the average public teacher salary (\$67,818) by more than \$30,000. While all Head Start teachers received low salaries, there was substantial variation across the states. After adjusting for state-by-state cost of living differences, in seven states (Arkansas, Delaware, Idaho, Mississippi, Montana, New Hampshire, and South Carolina) the average Head Start teacher salary was below \$30,000; at the other end, average salaries were above \$45,000 in DC and West Virginia (two states with universal pre-K).

Early Head Start teacher salaries averaged \$30,352, less than half of what public school teachers earned. After adjusting for state-by-state cost of living differences, in nine states (Alaska, Arizona, DC, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Texas, Virginia, and Wisconsin) average Early Head Start teacher salaries were below \$25,000; in only three states (Alabama, Arkansas, and Minnesota) were average salaries higher than \$35,000 which is still less than the average Head Start teacher salary.

📌 Head Start must invest in achieving compensation parity for Head Start teachers, including benefits as well as salaries. Initial new investments could be focused on states with the lowest salaries and greatest gaps between Head Start and Early Head Start teachers and their peers in public schools to ensure greater equity in children's access to well-qualified, well-supported teachers.



## TEACHER TURNOVER

**Twenty percent or more of Head Start staff left before the end of the 2020-2021 program year in nine states. This happened in 12 states for Early Head Start.**

Nationally, nearly 14% of Head Start and Early Head Start staff left at some point during the 2020-21 program year. While there was not a substantial uptick in staff turnover during the Covid-19 pandemic, too many children experience an interruption in their program staffing which is concerning given the benefits of stable relationships for young children.

Head Start staff turnover reached as high as 25% in Nebraska and was at least 20% in eight other states (Arkansas, DC, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Maine, Montana, and Nevada). California and Virginia were the only states where less than 10% of Head Start staff left during the program year; however, staff turnover was less than 10% in all territories except Palau.

Early Head Start staff turnover reached as high as 33% (one-third) in Nevada and was at least 20% in 11 other states (Arkansas, Delaware, Georgia, Kansas, Louisiana, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, Utah, and West Virginia). California, DC, New York, North Carolina, Northern Mariana Islands, and Puerto Rico were the only states and territories where less than 10% of Early Head Start staff left during the program year.

📌 Improved supports to reduce teacher burnout will help retain teachers. Head Start agencies should be provided with the best available information on how to improve teacher retention. Efforts to improve teacher compensation should help to address this problem, as well.