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Executive Summary

This State(s) of Head Start and Early Head Start report focuses on equity of access to Head Start in the 2020-21 program year. It answers questions such as, are some children more (or less) likely to enroll in Head Start or Early Head Start? Does enrollment vary by children’s race or ethnicity, or by geographic location within and across states? For children enrolled in Head Start or Early Head Start, are there differences in funding per child or the quality of their experiences? And finally, how has the Covid-19 pandemic affected enrollment in Head Start and Early Head Start?
Given the disruptions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, we compare 2020-21 data to 2018-19 and (where available) 2019-20 to assess the impacts of the pandemic. Most data for this report come from the Head Start Program Information Report (PIR)\(^1\) which was not collected in 2019-2020 due to the pandemic. To provide an even greater historical perspective we also present some data going back to the 2011-12 program year. (For additional information see the Guide to the Profile Pages and Methodology.)

The *State(s) of Head Start and Early Head Start: Looking at Equity* is the second report from the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) to examine Head Start and Early Head Start enrollment, funding, and quality state-by-state. This report differs from the first *State(s) of Head Start* report in its greater focus on equity of access and its organization around four main themes relating to equity: (1) Impacts of The Covid-19 Pandemic, (2) Poverty, (3) Race and Ethnicity, and (4) State Variation.

### Head Start and Early Head Start

Head Start, which began in 1965 as part of the War on Poverty, is one of the nation’s oldest federal programs serving low-income children and their families.\(^2\) The American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN) Head Start program began in the summer of 1965 providing grants to federally-recognized American Indian and Alaska Native tribes.\(^3\) The Migrant and Seasonal Head Start program began by providing services to migrant farm workers and their children in 1969. In 1999, the program expanded to include seasonal workers and their children.\(^4\) Early Head Start began in 1995 providing services to pregnant women and infants and toddlers.\(^5\)

Together, these programs strive to enhance children’s development, improve school readiness, and provide a strong foundation for success later in life. Head Start is a comprehensive child development program that aims to support children’s cognitive and social-emotional development, and health.
Head Start has been overdue for reauthorization since 2012 with no indication of when Congress may act.”
Head Start is a federal program, administered nationally by the Office of Head Start within the Administration for Children and Families within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Head Start programs are available in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, six U.S. territories, and in tribal areas. As this report highlights, although all Head Start programs are required to follow the same set of Head Start Program Performance Standards, there is substantial variation in how the programs operate that leads to inequalities in enrollment, funding, and quality that state-by-state comparisons illuminate.

Head Start was last reauthorized in 2007 through the Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act which revised performance standards to be more developmentally appropriate, raised teacher qualifications (requiring at least 50% of Head Start teachers to have a BA or higher and all Early Head Start teachers to have at least a CDA), expanded eligibility from 100 to 130 percent of the federal poverty level for up to 35% of enrollment, and called for school-day programs. In 2016, new Head Start Program Performance Standards called for teachers to have training and skills needed to provide high quality learning experiences, prohibited expulsions and limited suspensions of children, and required all Head Start programs to provide 1,020 hours annually by 2021. However, in 2020, this hours requirement was decreased to 45% of programs by then Health and Human Services Secretary Azar.

Head Start has been overdue for reauthorization since 2012 with no indication of when Congress may act. The findings in this report establish clear areas where improvements to Head Start can be made to improve equity of access to the program.
Key Themes

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 XX.)

**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 pages XX.) 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 XX.)

**RACE AND ETHNICITY**

Head Start and Early Head Start enrollment, funding, and experiences 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) 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 XX.)

**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 XX. 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


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.
During the 2020-21 program year, almost 257,000 fewer children attended Head Start nationwide than in 2018-19, a decrease of 33%.

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.

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.

Supporting Text: 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.

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. 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.
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 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.

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.

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. 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.

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**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.

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) 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.

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) 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.

“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.”
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.
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 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

50 percentage points

Difference between the highest and lowest states for

$6,995/child for Head Start

$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 (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. 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.
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.
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)\(^7\), 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.

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.\(^8\)

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 Norther 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.
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.

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.
Guide to the State Profiles

For each state and territory, we present a four-page profile organized by four themes: Covid-19 Impacts, Poverty, Race and Ethnicity, and State Variation. Data on the profile pages are for the 2020-2021 program year except as otherwise noted. AIAN data are included for each state with the Head Start and Early Head Start data on each state’s page that has an AIAN program. To facilitate comparisons national averages are reported with each state profile. National averages are based on the 50 States, D.C., and the U.S. territories and include AIAN programs. MSHS is not included in state-specific numbers but is included in national statistics where applicable.
All funding and salary information has been adjusted for state-by-state differences in cost of living to represent purchasing power differences for programs across the states. All funding is reported in constant 2021 dollars, adjusting dollars from other years for inflation.

In the following, each data point included in the state profile is explained:

**Funding Overview:** “Federal Funding” is total federal funding across all Head Start, Early Head Start, AIAN Head Start, and AIAN Early Head Start in a state. “State Supplemental Funding” is any additional funding a state provides to Head Start and/or Early Head Start to improve quality, increase the length of the program day, or increase the number of seats available.

**Enrollment Overview:** Enrollment of children in poverty in Head Start and in Early Head Start (separately) as a percentage of children in poverty in the relevant age range (ages 3 to 4 years and birth to 3 years, respectively).

**Total Head Start and Early Head Start Federal Funding (in millions):** Total funding each year (2011-2012, 2017-2018, 2018-2019, 2019-2020, 2020-2021) is shown, as is the Head Start and Early Head Start amounts. Numbers are shown in millions of dollars. The first year for which funding information can be separated into Head Start and Early Head Start is 2011-2012.

**Funding Per Child:** Funding per child for Head Start and Early Head Start is calculated by dividing the total funding in each state by the total funded enrollment.

**Total Number of Children and Pregnant Women Enrolled:** This figure shows the number of children enrolled in Head Start, the number of children enrolled in Early Head Start, and the number of pregnant women in 2011-2012, 2016-2017, 2017-2018, 2018-2019, and 2020-2021. These figures are for cumulative enrollment – the total number of children and pregnant women who received services at any time during the program year. It is not available for 2019-2020.

**Impact of Covid-19 on Number Enrolled:** This shows the change in the total number of children enrolled in Head Start and in Early Head Start between 2018-2019 and 2020-2021. Negative numbers indicate a decline in enrollment.

**Impact of Covid-19 on Percent of Children in Poverty Enrolled:** This is the change in the percentage of children in poverty enrolled in Head Start and in Early Head Start. The
percentage point change is calculated by subtracting the percentage enrolled in 2018-2019 from the percentage enrolled in 2020-2021. Negative numbers indicate a decrease.

**Percent and Number of Children in Poverty Enrolled in Head Start and Early Head Start Compared to Number of Children in Poverty in the State:** This figure shows, in 2011-2012, 2018-2019, and 2020-2021 the percentage of children in poverty and the number of children in poverty in the state who enrolled and did not enroll in Head Start and Early Head Start. These years were selected to show change over a decade and the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

**Head Start and Early Head Start Federal Funding Per Child:** Funding per child in Head Start and Early Head Start is calculated by dividing the total funding of programs in each state by the total funded enrollment. It is shown here for 2011-2012, 2017-2018, 2018-2019, 2019-2020, and 2020-2021. Horizontal dark blue bars show the national average funding per child for each year.


**Average CLASS Pre-K Scores 2016-2019:** This figure presents average scores for each domain of the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS). CLASS data are from the Head Start monitoring process between 2016 and 2019 and may not reflect all grantees in a state. The dark blue bars show the average scores across observed classrooms in the state on each of the three CLASS domains: Emotional Support, Classroom Organization, and Instructional Support. The national average is shown in yellow. The research-based threshold for each domain is shown by a dark blue horizontal line. A green check mark indicates that the state’s CLASS score is statistically significantly above the research-based threshold. A red X indicates that the state’s CLASS score is statistically significantly below the research-based threshold. No mark indicates the score is not statistically different from the research-based threshold. CLASS scores can range from 1 to 7.

**Percent of Children Enrolled in Head Start and Early Head Start with an IEP/IFSP:** This figure shows the percentage of children enrolled in Head Start and Early Head Start with an IEP or IFSP in the state. That total is also broken down into the percentage who had their IEP/IFSP when they enrolled in Head Start and Early Head Start and the percentage who had their IEP/IFSP determined while they were enrolled. The national averages are presented for comparison.

**Average Head Start and Early Head Start Education & Child Development Staff Salaries Compared to Public School Teacher Salaries:** Average annual salaries for the Head Start
and Early Head Start workforce are presented here and compared to the average salary for a public school teacher in the state (in yellow). Horizontal bars indicate the national average as an additional comparison. Average annual salaries are shown for the following types of employees: Head Start teachers, Head Start assistant teachers, Early Head Start teachers, Head Start Home-Based Visitors, Head Start Family Child Care, Early Head Start Home-Based Visitors, and Early Head Start Family Child Care.

**Head Start and Early Head Start Staff Turnover:** These figures show the percentage of Head Start and Early Head Start staff in each state who left their jobs during the program year. This data is shown for 2018-2019 and for 2020-2021, show the extent to which the Covid-19 pandemic impacted staff turnover. Blue horizontal lines show the national average.

**Percent of Children in Poverty Enrolled, by Race:** These figures show, for each state, the percentage of children in poverty served for each race (Asian, Black, White, and other) in Head Start or Early Head Start. The vertical blue bars display the national averages. In some states, data for a specific race are not available, typically because there are too few young children in poverty for that race to reliably estimate that population. These data are not available for the territories.

**Percent of Children in Poverty Enrolled, by Ethnicity:** These figures show, for each state, the percentage of Hispanic/Latino and Non-Hispanic/Non-Latino children in poverty who attended Head Start or Early Head Start. The vertical blue bars display the national averages. In some states, data for Hispanic/Latino children are not available. These data are not available for the territories other than Puerto Rico.

**Percent of Education & Child Development Staff, by Ethnicity:** The percentage of Head Start and Early Head Start Education and Child Development staff in the state who are Hispanic/Latino and Non-Hispanic/Non-Latino is shown here. The vertical blue bars show the national average for comparison.

**Percent of Education & Child Development Staff, by Race:** These figures show the percentage of Head Start and Early Head Start Education and Child Development Staff in each state by race: American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Black or African American, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, White, Biracial or Multi-race, and Other/Unspecified race. The vertical blue bars show the national average for comparison.

**Child Home Languages:** For Head Start and Early Head Start, the four most common languages spoken among enrolled children in the state are shown, and the bottom bar represents the total of all other languages spoken. The languages shown vary by state and may also differ within a state for Head Start and Early Head Start.

**Education & Child Development Staff Language Proficiency:** This shows the
percentage of Head Start and Early Head Start Education and Child Development staff in each state who are proficient in a language other than English.

**Location of Head Start Centers Compared to the Percent of Families with Children under age 5 in Poverty, by County:** The map shows the geographic location of all Head Start centers in the state, color coded by type of center. The map also shows the concentration of families with children under 5 living in poverty by county. Poverty data was divided into quartiles so that 25% of counties nationally are in each quartile. The 25th percentile was 10.3% poverty, 50th percentile/media was 17.1% poverty, and 75th percentile was 26.2%. Counties in darker blue have a higher percentage of families with children under 5 living in poverty, and lighter colored counties have a lower percentage of families with children under 5 in poverty.

**Total Centers:** This lists the total number of Head Start and Early Head Start centers in the state. It also shows, of this total, the number of centers that are Head Start, Early Head Start, both Head Start & Early Head Start, American Indian and Alaska Native Head Start and Early Head Start, and Migrant and Seasonal Head Start.

**Percent of Children Who Received Transportation to and from Head Start:** This figure shows the percentage of children enrolled in Head Start and Early Head Start who received transportation to and from Head Start.

**Percent of Head Start Funded Enrollment Receiving at Least 1,020 Hours Annually:** This figure shows the percentage of Head Start funded enrollment in the state that received at least 1,020 hours during the program year. The national average is shown in yellow for comparison.

**Percent of Early Head Start Funded Enrollment Receiving at Least 1,380 Hours Annually:** This figure shows the percentage of Early Head Start funded enrollment in the state that received at least 1,380 hours during the program year. The national average is shown in yellow for comparison.
Glossary

AIAN American Indian and Alaska Native
CDA Child Development Associate credential
CLASS Classroom Assessment Scoring System
ECE Early Childhood Education
IEP Individualized Education Program
IFSP Individualized Family Service Plan
MSHS Migrant and Seasonal Head Start
OHS Office of Head Start
PIR Program Information Report
05
Endnotes
1 Head Start Program Information Reports (PIR) for 2011-2012 through 2021-2022.
13 Funding for the territories has not been adjusted for "state-by-state" cost of living because adjustors are not available.
14 DC has universal preschool for 3- and 4-year-olds, consistently leading the nation in preschool access. High rates of preschool enrollment explain, at least in part, DC's low Head Start enrollment. Most of DC's federal Head Start funding goes towards Early Head Start and the District is a leader in Early Head Start enrollment.
15 Pianta et al. (2008).
16 The funded duration of program hours reported in the PIR should reflect normal operations as instructed by OHS. However, due to COVID-19 causing general confusion on how to report certain items in the PIR, it is still possible that at least a few programs reported shorter operational hours due to COVID-19 in their PIR.
17 Throughout this report, the District of Columbia is included like a state.
06
National Profile
**National Profile: 2020–2021**

**Funding Overview**

- **Total Federal Funding:** $10,344,077,007
- **Total State Supplemental Funding:** $328,613,470

**Enrollment Overview**

- **30%** of 3- and 4-year-olds in poverty in the U.S. enrolled in Head Start
- **9.4%** of children under 3 in poverty in the U.S. enrolled in Early Head Start

**Total Head Start and Early Head Start Federal Funding (in millions)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Head Start</th>
<th>Early Head Start</th>
<th>Migrant &amp; Seasonal Head Start</th>
<th>In 2021 Dollars</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2011-2012</td>
<td>$8,975 M</td>
<td>$7,087 M</td>
<td>$1,493 M</td>
<td>$395 M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012-2013</td>
<td>$9,720 M</td>
<td>$6,787 M</td>
<td>$2,514 M</td>
<td>$1,493 M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013-2014</td>
<td>$9,993 M</td>
<td>$6,725 M</td>
<td>$3,206 M</td>
<td>$1,493 M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014-2015</td>
<td>$10,323 M</td>
<td>$6,683 M</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015-2016</td>
<td>$10,344 M</td>
<td>$6,682 M</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Impact of Covid-19 on:**

- **Number Enrolled:**
  - **Head Start:** -256,659 fewer children enrolled in Head Start than in 2018-2019.
  - **Early Head Start:** -21,716 fewer children enrolled in Early Head Start than in 2018-2019.

- **Percent of Children in Poverty Enrolled:**
  - **Head Start:** 30% lower in 2020-21 than 2018-19.
  - **Early Head Start:** 9.4% change in 2020-21 than 2018-19.

**Funding Per Child**

- **Head Start:** $11,065 per child
- **Early Head Start:** $16,583 per child
- **Migrant & Seasonal Head Start:** $16,945 per child

**Total Number of Children and Pregnant Women Enrolled**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Head Start</th>
<th>Early Head Start</th>
<th>Pregnant Women</th>
<th>Migrant &amp; Seasonal Head Start</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2011-2012</td>
<td>1,245,819</td>
<td>896,625</td>
<td>612,690</td>
<td>407,610</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012-2013</td>
<td>819,255</td>
<td>942,819</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013-2014</td>
<td>2,836,935</td>
<td>2,000,917</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014-2015</td>
<td>151,459</td>
<td>207,458</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015-2016</td>
<td>1,750,267</td>
<td>182,312</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**POVERTY**

Both Head Start and Early Head Start are falling short of reaching children in poverty, despite a decrease in the number of children in poverty.

Nationally, Head Start funding per child is less in states with higher child poverty whereas Early Head Start funding per child is higher in states with higher child poverty.

Learn more on page 16 of this report.

**Percent and Number of Children in Poverty Enrolled in Head Start and Early Head Start Compared to Number of Children in Poverty in the State**

- **Head Start:** 40% in 2011-2012, 41% in 2018-2019, 30% in 2020-2021
- **Early Head Start:** 5% in 2011-2012, 9.4% in 2018-2019, 9.4% in 2020-2021

Learn more about the impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on page 12.
Nationally, Head Start funding per child is less in states with a higher percent of Black children in enrolled. Additionally, observed classroom quality—specifically Emotional Support and Classroom Organization scores—was significantly lower in states in which Black children were a larger percentage of Head Start enrollment.

Learn more on page 18 of this report.

Nationally, the Covid-19 pandemic did not have a negative impact on staff turnover, though it is still concerning that nearly 14% of Head Start and Early Head Start staff left during the program year.

Learn more on page 22 of this report.

There are large state-by-state differences in Head Start and Early Head Start funding, enrollment, teacher salaries, program components, and quality that are not explained by differences in state population eligibility and needs.

Learn more on page 22 of this report.
### Percent of Children in Poverty Enrolled, by Race:

#### HEAD START
- Asian: 23%
- Black or African American: 33%
- White: 25%
- Other: 28%

#### EARLY HEAD START
- Asian: 6%
- Black or African American: 10%
- White: 8%
- Other: 9%

National Average: N/A Not available

### Percent of Children in Poverty Enrolled, by Ethnicity:

#### HEAD START
- Hispanic or Latino: 27%
- Non-Hispanic or Non-Latino: 32%

#### EARLY HEAD START
- Hispanic or Latino: 9%
- Non-Hispanic or Non-Latino: 9%

### Percent of Education & Child Development Staff, by Ethnicity:

#### HEAD START
- Hispanic or Latino: 27%
- Non-Hispanic or Non-Latino: 73%

#### EARLY HEAD START
- Hispanic or Latino: 32%
- Non-Hispanic or Non-Latino: 68%

### Child Home Languages

#### HEAD START
- English: 74%
- Spanish: 20%
- Other: 7%

#### EARLY HEAD START
- English: 73%
- Spanish: 20%
- Other: 7%

### Education & Child Development Staff Language Proficiency

- 27% of Head Start Education & Child Development Staff are proficient in a language other than English.
- 32% of Early Head Start Education & Child Development Staff are proficient in a language other than English.
The location of Head Start programs in relation to where children in poverty live varies greatly by state. In some states centers tend to be concentrated in higher poverty counties; but in other states, the location of Head Start centers is related to population density.

States should ensure programs are accessible to eligible families. This could include ensuring programs are located in neighborhoods near children living in poverty and/or providing transportation to a greater number of children.

Learn more on page 22 of this report.
10 Methodology

**States and Territories:** This report includes information about Head Start and Early Head Start programs in the 50 states, the District of Columbia\(^9\), and six U.S. territories (American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Mariana Islands, Guam, Palau, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands), as well as American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN) Head Start and Early Head Start and Migrant and Seasonal Head Start (MSHS) programs. Head Start programs are in all 50 states, D.C., and all six territories. However, American Samoa, Guam, and Palau do not have an Early Head Start Program. AIAN Head Start programs operated in 26 states (AK, AZ, CA, CO, ID, KS, ME, MI, MN, MS, MT, NE, NV, NM, NY, NC, ND, OK, OR, SC, SD, TX, UT, WA, WI, WY) and AIAN Early Head Start programs operated in 20 states (AK, AZ, CA, ID, KS, MI, MN, MS, MT, NE, NM, NC, ND, OK, OR, SC, SD, WA, WI, WY) in the most recent 2020-2021 program year. Although AIAN programs may operate across multiple states, in the current report, AIAN data is included with the data for the state in which the grantee is based. Many MSHS programs also operate across multiple states, making it difficult to ascertain the precise number of children enrolled in MSHS in each state. Therefore, this report only presents data on MSHS at the national level. However, state maps do include the location of where MSHS centers are headquartered.
Head Start Programs: This report includes information on five types of Head Start programs:

1. Head Start: Enrolls children 3 to 5 years old during the two years before kindergarten

2. Early Head Start: Enrolls children birth through age three, and pregnant women

3. American Indian and Alaska Native Head Start: Enrolls 3- to 5-year-old children through grants to federally recognized American Indian and Alaska Native tribes

4. American Indian and Alaska Native Early Head Start: Enrolls children birth to age three and pregnant women through grants to federally recognized American Indian and Alaska Native tribes

5. Migrant and Seasonal Head Start: Enrolls children of migrant and seasonal workers, birth through age five, and pregnant women

Throughout this report Head Start and Head Start AIAN data are combined and reported together on the state profiles pages and in other figures, tables, and maps. The same holds true for Early Head Start and Early Head Start AIAN. National AIAN data are also reported separately on the AIAN profile pages. MSHS data are presented on the MSHS profile pages and are not included in the state-by-state information, with the exception of the state maps. U.S. totals include 50 states, all territories, AIAN programs, and MSHS programs where possible. Since MSHS data encompasses the full age range it is not reported in Head Start or Early Head Start specific totals or averages.

Data Sources

Program Information Report: A main source of data for this report is the Office of Head Start Program Information Report (PIR). Each year, all federally-funded Head Start grantees and delegates are required to complete the PIR questionnaire. The annual survey collects data on Head Start children and families, program staff, and services provided and received. The report focuses on the PIR covering the 2020-2021 program year. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic the PIR was not required to be completed during the 2019-2020 program year. To estimate impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic, the 2018-2019 PIR data were used. PIR data dating back to 2011-2012 are also included in the report to illustrate changes over the last decade. The number of children enrolled during the 2021-2022 program year comes from the 2021-2022 PIR that was released as this report was being finalized. All PIR data were downloaded from the Head Start Enterprise System.

Office of Head Start: The Office of Head Start (OHS) in the Administration for Children and Families provided NIEER with additional data for this report. For each year, they provided the number of funded Head Start and Early Head Start slots and funding for each state and territory, as well as U.S. totals. They also
provided AIAN enrollment slots and funding by state beginning in 2013-2014, as well as total AIAN funded enrollment and funding. They provided total MSHS funded slots and funding.

OHS also provided average scores in each state, Puerto Rico, other territories together, nationally, for AIAN, and for MSHS on the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) Pre-K. CLASS Pre-K scores are from Head Start’s on-site review of grantees as part of the grant renewal process. Within each state, CLASS Pre-K scores were averaged across all grantees who received a CLASS observation between 2016 and 2019. Not all grantees are represented in these scores. Means, standard deviations, and the number of observations in each state were provided for the three CLASS domains: Emotional Support, Classroom Organization, and Instructional Support.

**Head Start Centers:** The Head Start Center Locator provided by the Early Childhood Learning & Knowledge Center (ECLKS) was used to get a list of all Head Start centers in each state and territory, including the geographic location/address of each center. All centers are identified as either Head Start, Early Head Start, Migrant and Seasonal Head Start, American Indian and Alaska Native, or combined Head Start and Early Head Start.

**State of Preschool:** Data on state supplemental funding to Head Start and Early Head Start came from NIEER’s 2021 State of Preschool survey. The survey was completed by state preschool administrators in each state. **Census:** U.S. Census data were used to determine the number of children by single year of age in each state and nationally, for each year included in this report. All estimates used are based on the 2010 Census. The same Census data were used to determine the number of children by race and by ethnicity who were under 1, 1-, 2-, 3-, or 4-years-old.

The Current Population Survey (CPS), Annual Social and Economic Supplement (March) was used to estimate the number of children living in poverty (below 100% of the federal poverty level) in each state. The CPS data was extracted using the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS) and was used to estimate the percentage of all children under 5 years living in poverty, as well as the percentage of children under 5 living in poverty by race and by ethnicity, in each state and nationally. To estimate the number of children in poverty, those percentages were multiplied by the number of children in each state (and repeated for each racial and ethnic group). In some states, the number of children in poverty in a specific racial or ethnic group is too small to reliably estimate the number of children in poverty; in these cases, those numbers are not reported or included in the report.

The international consensus was used to determine the number of children by single year of age in each U.S. territory included in this report. Information on children’s race and ethnicity and family income was not readily
available for the territories. Information on children’s ethnicity in Puerto Rico was estimated from the Puerto Rico Quick Facts based on the April 2020 Census data. Data on ethnicity are for individuals of all ages. Data on child poverty in Puerto Rico was obtained from the American Community Survey, 5-year estimates from 2020 through 2015 (the earliest year for which a 5-year estimate was available). Child poverty data was for children under five years old. No other poverty data or race and ethnicity data were readily available for the territories that was comparable to the 50-state data.

The 2019 American Community Survey 5-year estimates were used to identify the percentage of families with a child under 5 years old living below the federal poverty level in each county. We divided counties into four quartiles based on this percentage. The lowest poverty quartile includes counties with less than 10.3% of families with children under 5 in poverty; the second quartile has between 10.3% and 17.1% (median), the third quartile has between 17.1% and 26.2%, and the highest poverty quartile includes counties with more than 26.2% of families with children under 5 living in poverty.

Public School Teacher Salary: The National Education Association Rankings of the States 2020 and Estimates of School Statistics 2021 was used to determine the average salary of elementary school teachers in public schools in 2020-2021. This data was not available for the territories.

State Median Income: Data on the state median income for a one earner household came from the Census Bureau Median Income data.

Cost Adjustments: The Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA) Implicit Regional Price Deflators were used to adjust funding in each state each year to account for cost of education differences across states (cost of living) and to adjust funding amounts between 2012 to 2020 for inflation to 2021 dollars. The BEA’s Implicit Price Deflators for Gross Domestic Product were used to adjust national funding for inflation, as well as for U.S. territories, AIAN, and MSHS.

Calculations of State and National Data
Both funded enrollment and cumulative enrollment are presented in this report. Funded enrollment refers to the number of slots that each program is funded to provide. In other words, this is the number of children who could enroll at any one time. Cumulative enrollment refers to the total number of children and pregnant women who enrolled in Head Start or Early Head Start at some time during the program year. Cumulative enrollment typically exceeds funded enrollment as children enroll, leave, and are replaced by new enrollees during the year. In 2020-2021, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, Head Start funded enrollment was higher than Head Start cumulative enrollment nationally, and in most states because many programs enrolled less than the full number they were funded to serve.
The percentage of children living in poverty enrolled in Head Start and Early Head Start is calculated based on cumulative enrollment. First, we estimated the number of children enrolled who were living in poverty based on their primary eligibility for the programs. Children in families below 100% of the federal poverty level, children in families receiving public assistance, and homeless children were considered in this report to be living in poverty. The cumulative enrollment of children in poverty was divided by the number of children living in poverty in the state.

The PIR data includes the number of children, families, and teachers in each program who have various characteristics and qualifications and/or who received specific Head Start services. For the purposes of this report, the number of children or teachers were summed across all programs in a state to calculate the total for each state. Next, the percentage of children or teachers in each state meeting each criterion was calculated by dividing by the total number of children or teachers. AIAN Head Start and Early Head Start programs were included in each state’s calculations. MSHS are not included in each state because MSHS programs often cross state lines. MSHS numbers are included in national totals that include both Head Start and Early Head Start since MSHS data encompass all ages of children.

Funding per child in each state was calculated by dividing the federal funding for that state by the federally-funded enrollment. Funding per child from 2011-2012 through 2019-2020 was adjusted for inflation. All funding numbers presented are in 2021 dollars and are adjusted for differences in cost of living in each state. (See the Appendix Tables 1b and 4b for funding data that has not been adjusted for cost of living.)

Research-based thresholds for each of the three CLASS Pre-K domains were determined by NIEER in consultation with the authors of the instrument and based on research findings regarding the level of quality in each domain needed to support learning and positive developmental outcomes. Average CLASS scores from evaluations of publicly-funded preschool programs and Head Start FACES was also considered in determining thresholds. For this report, the research-based thresholds are: Emotional Support: 5.5, Classroom Organization: 5.5, and Instructional Support: 3.

One sample t-tests were conducted in Stata version 17 to determine, in each state and nationally, if average scores on each CLASS score domain were (1) statistically significantly lower than the research-based threshold, (2) statistically significantly lower than the research-based threshold, or (3) statistically significantly indistinguishable from the research-based threshold. States were determined to have CLASS scores significantly higher or lower than the research-based threshold if $p<.05$.

Tests of proportions using Stata version 17 were also used to test in each state for
statistically significant differences in the percentage of children in poverty served by Head Start and Early Head Start by child race and by child ethnicity. Groups of children were determined to be differentially enrolled in Head Start if $p < .05$.

**Maps**

Maps showing the location of all Head Start centers in the state and county-level poverty were produced using Tableau, a visual analytics platform. Using Tableau, we overlaid maps of the location of Head Start centers with the county-level poverty data. The resulting state maps show where in the state Head Start programs (of different types) are located in relation to county-level poverty rates.

**Determination of Additional Head Start Funding Needed to Improve Equity**

We calculated the average percentage of children in poverty enrolled in Head Start and Early Head Start in 2018-2019 in the five states with the highest percentage of children served. We then calculated how many children and how many additional children each state would have to enroll 74% of all 3- and 4-year-olds in poverty in Head Start and 22% of all children under 3 in poverty in Early Head Start. We multiplied these numbers by the current Head Start and Early Head Start funding per child amounts to estimate the total and additional funding needed. Additional funding to increase teacher salaries was also included in this calculation.