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Early Head Start Participants, Programs, Families, and Staff in 2005

August 2006

Since 1965, the federal Head Start program has served low-income 3- and 4-year-old children and their families with comprehensive early education and support services. Head Start programs provide services focused on the “whole child,” including early education addressing cognitive, developmental, and socioemotional needs; medical and dental screenings and referrals; nutritional services; parental involvement activities and referrals to social service providers for the entire family; and mental health services.¹ In 1994, policymakers authorized the Early Head Start program to address the needs of children under age 3 and pregnant women.

All Head Start programs are required to complete the Program Information Report (PIR) on an annual basis.² Based on information reported through the PIR, this policy brief describes the characteristics of Head Start children and families and the services provided to them during the 2004-2005 program year.

In 2005, the Early Head Start (EHS) program served 81,914 children under age 3 and 10,485 pregnant women in 741 programs throughout the country. Seven percent of all Head Start slots were in Early Head Start. About 45 percent of children are served through a home-based program model,³ while about half receive services through a center-based program. Although nationally just 2.5 percent of eligible children are served by EHS,⁴ enrollment remained stagnant in 2005. Key findings from the 2005 PIR include:

Participants

- The age breakdown for children participating in Early Head Start remained relatively even: 29 percent of children were under age 1; 31 percent were age 1; and 33 percent were age 2.
- Most (82 percent) children received a medical screening as required by the Head Start Program Performance Standards. About 22 percent required follow-up treatment and of these, nearly all (93 percent) received this treatment.
- By the end of the program year, 95 percent of children had a medical home for ongoing care, and 64 percent had a source for ongoing dental care.
- Thirteen percent of enrolled children had a disability, 54 percent of whom were diagnosed prior to the Head Start year and 46 percent of whom were diagnosed during this program year. Among those children diagnosed with a disability, 91 percent received special education and related services.

- Among children enrolled in EHS, 40 percent were white and 25 percent were black or African-American. About 29 percent were of Hispanic origin, regardless of race.

Programs

- Programs had a mental health professional onsite an average of 36 hours per month. In comparison, Head Start preschool programs had an on-site mental health professional for an average of 52 hours per month. Mental health professionals provided consultation to teachers for 16 percent of all children and to parents for 6 percent of children.

Families

- Forty-two percent of families included a single parent and 58 percent included two parents.
- A greater proportion of EHS families access services as compared to families in the Head Start preschool program; in 2005, 80 percent of EHS families accessed at least one service, compared to 66 percent of families with children enrolled in the preschool program.
- Most families (66 percent) included at least one working parent, and 26 percent of families included at least one parent in school or job training. Nearly one-quarter (24 percent) of families received cash assistance under the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program.
- EHS served a linguistically diverse group of families and children. One-quarter (25 percent) of participants were from homes where English was not the primary language. Among these, 81 percent were from Spanish-speaking homes. Other languages accounted for less than 1 percent of participants.

Staff

- About 50 percent of EHS teachers and 62 percent of EHS home visitors had at least an A.A. in early childhood education or a related field. In addition, 23 percent of teachers and 43 percent of home visitors had a B.A. or higher in early childhood education or a related field.
- Salaries for EHS teachers were comparable to those for Head Start preschool teachers. Overall, EHS teachers earned an average of \$23,783, and teachers with a B.A. earned \$26,604 on average. Home visitors earned an average of \$25,654.

¹ For a more in-depth analysis of 2005 PIR data for all Head Start programs, including preschool Head Start, Migrant and Seasonal Head Start, and Early Head Start, see: <http://www.clasp.org/publications.php?id=3>

² For more information on Head Start Program Information Reports (PIR) visit <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/hsb/programs/pir/>.

³ The home-based program includes weekly home visits from a trained visitor, monthly group socialization activities, and access to Early Head Start comprehensive services.

⁴ National Women's Law Center calculations based on data from the U.S. Head Start Bureau on number of enrolled preschoolers and Census Bureau data on children in poverty by single year of age in 2004.