



Early Care and Education Centers That Participate in Head Start and Public Prekindergarten

This brief summarizes data gathered by the National Survey of Early Care and Education (NSECE)¹ examining early care and education (ECE) centers that participate in Head Start² and publicly funded prekindergarten (public pre-k). The focus of this brief is to describe how the two most prominent publicly funded ECE investments fit within the larger spectrum of center-based ECE programs. This brief also outlines questions for States to consider regarding program funding streams, infant/toddler care access, and ECE program access in high-poverty communities.

How Many Centers Participate in Head Start or Public Prekindergarten?

For this analysis, centers were considered to be participating in Head Start or pre-k if they reported receiving that type of funding for at least one child. Over a third of center-based programs (39 percent) reported receiving some funding from Head Start or public pre-k, as shown in table 1 (NSECE Project Team, 2015, p. 3).

This brief is one of a [six-part series](#) providing information excerpted from the 2012 NSECE, a nationally representative study that includes the following surveys:

- Household Survey with approximately 12,000 parents or guardians who have children younger than 13 years
- Home-Based Provider Survey with approximately 6,000 interviews
- Center-Based Provider Survey with approximately 8,200 directors of programs on state or national administrative lists.
- A Workforce Provider Survey with 5,600 classroom-assigned center staff members.

The information in this brief is based on the report *Which Early Care and Education Centers Participate in Head Start or Public Pre-Kindergarten?* (NSECE Project Team, 2015).

Table 1. Center-Based Enrollment by Head Start and Public Pre-K Participation

Enrollment Funding Source	Number	Percentage of All Center-Based Programs
Head Start and public pre-k	7,800	6%
Head Start (no public pre-k)	14,500	11%
Public pre-k (no Head Start)	28,000	22%
Neither Head Start nor public pre-k	79,000	61%

Source: NSECE Project Team, 2015.

¹ Data for this brief were collected using NSECE center-based provider data, which included data about the 129,000 centers that provided ECE services to children ages five and under in 2012.

² Some Head Start programs also participate in Early Head Start, Migrant and Seasonal Head Start, or local partnerships to provide center-based care.



What Types of Centers Participate in Head Start and Public Pre-K?

Table 2 shows that across all funding sources except Head Start, about half of center-based programs are nonprofit. In the Head Start–funded category, almost three-quarters of centers are nonprofit (NSECE Project Team, 2015, p. 5). Head Start places strict limitations on for-profit centers that are awarded funding, which might explain why no more than 10 percent of the centers receiving Head Start funding reported being for-profit. Nearly half of centers that did not receive funding from either initiative identified as for-profit. Finally, about one in five centers receiving public pre-k funds were sponsored by a school district, whereas less than 6 percent of the remaining centers reported school sponsorship. In sum, a mix of for-profit and nonprofit programs participate in public pre-k and, to a lesser degree, Head Start.

Table 2. Program Organization Type, by Head Start and Public Pre-K Participation

	Head Start and Public Pre-K	Head Start (no public pre-k)	Public Pre-K (no Head Start)	Neither Head Start nor Public Pre-K
Non-profit	54%	73%	46%	49%
For-profit	10%*	3%*	28%	42%
Sponsored by a school district	21%	6%	16%	5%

Source: NSECE Project Team, 2015. Exhibit 4.

Note: Organization types are mutually exclusive.

* Interpret with caution because of sample size or standard error.

As shown in table 3, centers funded by both Head Start and public pre-k and Head Start alone were more likely to report being predominantly publicly funded than centers funded by public pre-k alone and centers that did not receive funding from either initiative (NSECE Project Team, 2015, p. 5). However, more than half of all centers that did not receive funding from either initiative were exclusively privately funded and did not receive any public funding (NSECE Project Team, 2015, p. 6).

Table 3. Extent of Public Funding by Head Start and Public Pre-K Participation

	Head Start and Public Pre-K	Head Start (no public pre-k)	Public Pre-K (no Head Start)	Neither Head Start nor Public Pre-K
Predominantly public funding	84%	74%	49%	10%
Mixed public and private funding	15%	26%	45%	36%

Source: NSECE Project Team, 2015. Exhibit 4.

Notes: “Predominately public funding” refers to centers that reported that public funding was one of their top two sources of funding. Private funds include tuition, money obtained through fundraising, and grants from nongovernmental organizations.

About 70 percent of all centers reported operating for at least 30 hours a week (NSECE Project Team, 2015, p. 6). Conversely, only 50 percent of Head Start programs reported operating for 30 or more hours per week (table 4).³

³ The revised Head Start standards require Head Start programs to operate for longer hours, so hours of operation will likely be longer in coming years.

**Table 4. Program Hours of Operation by Head Start and Public Pre-K Participation**

	Head Start and Public Pre-K	Head Start (no public pre-k)	Public Pre-K (no Head Start)	Neither Head Start nor Public Pre-K
Open 30 hours or more	74%	50%	69%	73%

Source: NSECE Project Team, 2015. Exhibit 4.

Centers that don't receive funding from either initiative are more likely to serve children 3 years of age and younger (NSECE Project Team, 2015, p. 6). Centers receiving public pre-k funding, as well as centers that do not participate in either initiative, are more likely to serve school-age children (table 5).

Table 5. Ages Served, by Head Start and Public Pre-K Participation

	Head Start and Public Pre-K	Head Start (no public pre-k)	Public Pre-K (no Head Start)	Neither Head Start nor Public Pre-K
Serving children 0 to 3	35%	30%	46%	66%
Serving school-age children	27%	16%	45%	47%

Source: NSECE Project Team, 2015. Exhibit 4.

What Communities Have Centers That Participate in Head Start and Public Pre-K?

Approximately a third (33 percent) of centers in low-poverty communities receive Head Start or public pre-k funds (table 6). This compares to nearly half of those in moderate-poverty and high-poverty communities (47 percent and 50 percent, respectively) (NSECE Project Team, 2015, p. 7).

Table 6. Percentage of Centers in Low-, Moderate- and High-Poverty Communities by Head Start and Public Pre-K Participation

	Head Start and Public Pre-K	Head Start (no public pre-k)	Public Pre-K (no Head Start)	Neither Head Start nor Public Pre-K
Low poverty	4%	9%	20%	68%
Moderate poverty	10%	13%	24%	53%
High poverty	9%	18%	23%	50%

Source: NSECE Project Team, 2015. Exhibit 5.

Questions for States to Consider

- ◆ **Multiple funding sources at centers.** NSECE data suggest that ECE centers, particularly those receiving public funds, are likely receiving funding from multiple sources. These programs may be burdened by having to meet different requirements (for example, standards, monitoring, and reporting) for each funding source. Does your State have data about the funding sources that ECE programs receive? How is your State using this data?



- ◆ **Managing multiple funding sources.** Has your State implemented strategies to help streamline management and administration for centers that are managing multiple public funding streams and regulations? Such strategies may include coordinated monitoring systems or blended funding streams.
- ◆ **Infants and toddlers.** About two-thirds of centers that were not receiving Head Start or pre-k funding reported caring for infants and toddlers, compared to about a third of programs receiving Head Start funds or both Head Start and pre-k funds. These data indicate that, nationally, fewer programs serving infants and toddlers are supported through Head Start and pre-k funds. Are there data from your State about the ages of children served in centers receiving Head Start and pre-k funding? Programs receiving multiple sources of funding may have more resources to support quality improvement. Those receiving government funding from sources such as Head Start or pre-k may also have access to supports to help them provide high-quality care and education to young children. If programs serving infants and toddlers are less likely to receive Head Start or pre-k funds, it may be harder for them to cover the cost of high-quality care or support quality improvement. What are the strategies in your State to improve access to high-quality ECE for infants and toddlers? Are there quality-improvement supports earmarked for programs serving infants and toddlers? Are there any Early Head Start–Child Care Partnerships in your State that might help increase the availability of high-quality programs for young children in high-poverty communities?
- ◆ **Reaching children in high-poverty communities.** According to the national data, about 50 percent of ECE programs in high-poverty communities participated in Head Start, pre-k, or both. Does your State have data about the availability of high-quality programs in high-poverty communities? Are there efforts to increase the number of programs in high-poverty communities that participate in Head Start or pre-k? What incentives or supports are available to attract centers to these programs?

Reference

NSECE [National Survey of Early Care and Education] Project Team. (2015). *Which early care and education centers participate in head start or public pre-kindergarten?* OPRE Report #2015-92a. Washington DC: Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Retrieved from <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/resource/which-early-care-and-education-centers-participate-in-head-start-or-public-pre-kindergarten>

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