

Since 1965, the Head Start program has served low-income 3- and 4-year-old children and their families with comprehensive early education and support services. Programs provide services focused on the “whole child,” including early education addressing cognitive, developmental, and socio-emotional 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. In 1994, the federal Early Head Start program was created to address the comprehensive needs of low-income children under age 3 and pregnant women.

All Head Start programs (including Head Start preschool programs, Early Head Start, and Migrant and Seasonal Head Start) are required to complete the Program Information Report (PIR) on an annual basis.¹ Based on information reported through the PIR, this fact sheet describes the characteristics of Head Start children and families enrolled in the preschool program and the services provided to them during the 2008-2009 program year.²

In 2009, the Head Start preschool program served 929,257 young children through 1,787 grantees throughout the country—about 11,000 fewer

children than in 2008.³ Key findings from the 2009 PIR include:

Participants

- Most children (91 percent) received a medical screening as required by the Head Start Program Performance Standards. Fourteen percent required follow-up treatment, and of those children, nearly all (95 percent) received that treatment.
- The majority of children in Head Start preschool programs are receiving health insurance through public programs, even though 68 percent of families had one or both parents working in 2009. Eleven percent of children had private insurance in 2009, while 82 percent had health insurance through Children’s Health Insurance Programs (CHIP), Medicaid, a combined CHIP/Medicaid program, or other state funded insurance.
- By the end of the program year, 96 percent of children had a medical home for ongoing care, and 90 percent had a source for ongoing dental care.
- Twelve percent of enrolled children had a disability, about half of whom were diagnosed prior to the Head Start year and half during the program year. Among those preschool children diagnosed with a disability, 99 percent received special education and related services.
- Among children enrolled in Head Start preschool programs, 39 percent were white, and 31 percent were African-American. Thirty-four percent were of Hispanic origin, regardless of race.



Programs

- In 2009, the total number of funded Head Start preschool slots was 795,776, a drop of about 8,000 from 2008. Both federally funded slots and slots funded from other sources decreased.
- Ninety-five percent of Head Start preschool slots were center-based. An additional 3 percent were in home-based programs, which included weekly home visits and group socialization activities. Slots in family child care homes, locally designed programs, and combination programs each comprised 1 percent or less of all Head Start preschool slots in 2009.

- Most Head Start preschool families (68 percent) included at least one working parent, and 13 percent of families included a parent in school or job training.
- Fifteen percent of Head Start preschool families received cash assistance under the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program in 2009. The percentage of families receiving the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) was 52 percent in 2009.
- Forty-two percent of families included two parents, and 58 percent had a single parent.

Families

- Seventy-two percent of children in Head Start preschool programs were from homes where English was the primary language, and 24 percent were from homes speaking primarily Spanish. Other languages each accounted for 1 percent or less of the total Head Start preschool population.
- Seventy-three percent of Head Start preschool families accessed at least one support service in 2009, with parenting education (46 percent) and health education (45 percent) accessed most frequently. Other services include substance abuse treatment and prevention; child abuse and neglect services; and mental health services.

Staff

- Eighty-three percent of Head Start preschool teachers had at least an Associate's Degree (A.A.) in early childhood education or a related field. In addition, 49 percent of teachers had a Bachelor's Degree (B.A.) or higher in early childhood education or a related field.
- Head Start preschool teachers earned an average of \$27,752 in 2009. This average salary was similar to the national average for public and private preschool teachers, which was \$27,450 in 2009, but fell well below the national average for kindergarten teachers—\$50,380.⁴



¹ For more information on Head Start Program Information Reports (PIR), visit <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/Program%20Design%20and%20Management/Head%20Start%20Requirements/Program%20Information%20Report>.

² For more information on Early Head Start, see CLASP's fact sheet, *Early Head Start Participants, Programs, Families, and Staff in 2009*.

³ The PIR collects data on all children and pregnant women who participate in Head Start at any point during the program year, including those who do not complete the year.

⁴ U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *May 2009 National Occupational Employment and Wage Estimates*, www.bls.gov/oes/oes_data.htm.