

Early Childhood Program Enrollment

Indicators of Child
and Youth Well-Being



The proportion of three- to six-year-old children (not yet in kindergarten) who attended center-based early childhood care and education programs increased from 55 to 61 percent between 2007 and 2012. Gains were particularly high for Hispanic children.

Importance

Participation in high-quality early childhood care and education programs can have positive effects on children's cognitive, language, and social development, particularly among children at risk for poor outcomes.¹ Sometimes these effects fade in the early school years, but the impacts of some programs have continued into later school years and adulthood.^{2,3} In an international study involving 15-year-olds from 14 developed countries, students who had attended a year or more of pre-primary education scored an average of 33 points higher on a comprehensive reading assessment, even after accounting for the fact that those attending such programs tend to come from relatively more advantaged backgrounds.⁴

Quality is an important element of programs that have had strong impacts. High-quality programs do not just meet the basic needs of children, but also provide opportunities for meaningful learning activities and language development, and work to foster close, caring relationships between children and their teachers/caregivers.⁵

While this indicator does not provide information on aspects of program quality, it describes the percentage of three- to six-year-old children (not yet enrolled in kindergarten) in early childhood care and education programs. Such programs include early learning centers, Head Start programs, and preschools.

Trends

The share of three- to six-year-olds (not yet in kindergarten) in early childhood care and education programs remained relatively constant between 1995 and 2007, ranging from 55 percent in 1995 to 57 percent in 2005; in 2007 it was 55 percent. However, in 2012 the proportion had increased to 61 percent of children. Increases are apparent for all race/Hispanic origins and across the socio-economic spectrum. (Appendix 1)

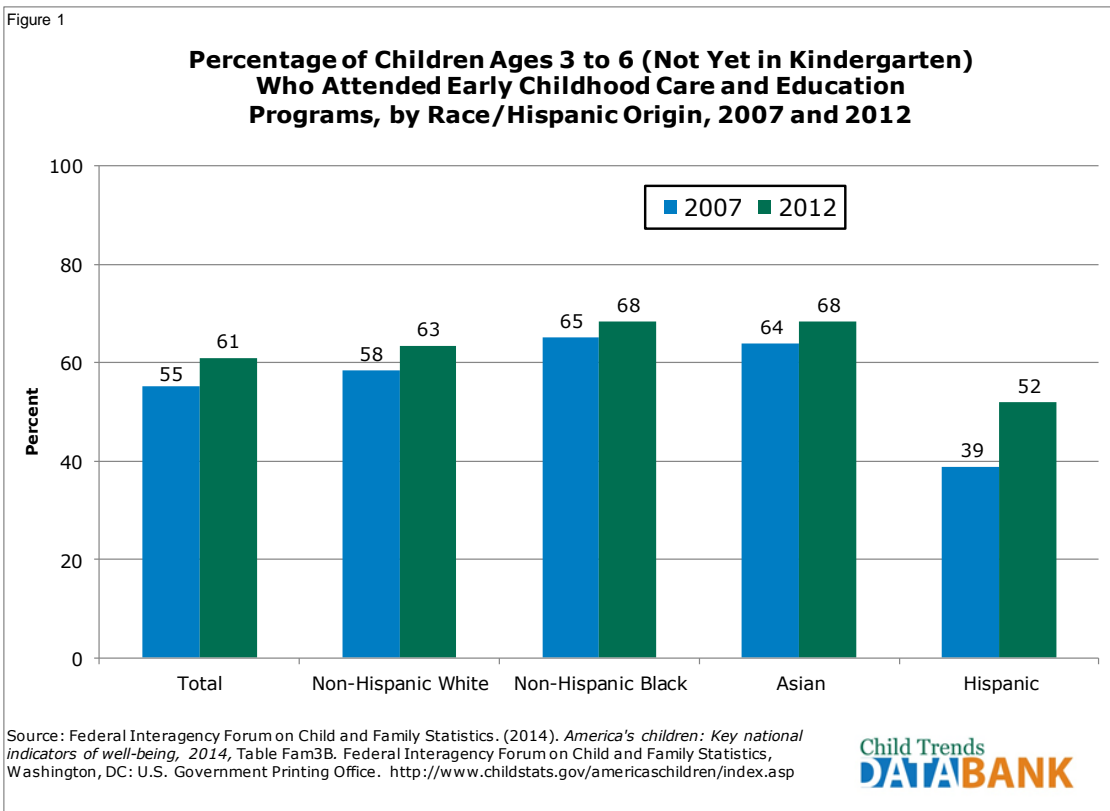


Differences by Poverty Status

Children in poor families (with incomes below the federal poverty line) and those in low-income families (with incomes between the poverty line and twice the poverty line) are less likely than children in more affluent families to be in center-based programs. In 2012, 46 percent of three- to six-year-olds in poor families, and 52 percent in low-income families, were in such programs, compared with 72 percent of children in families with higher incomes. (Appendix 1)

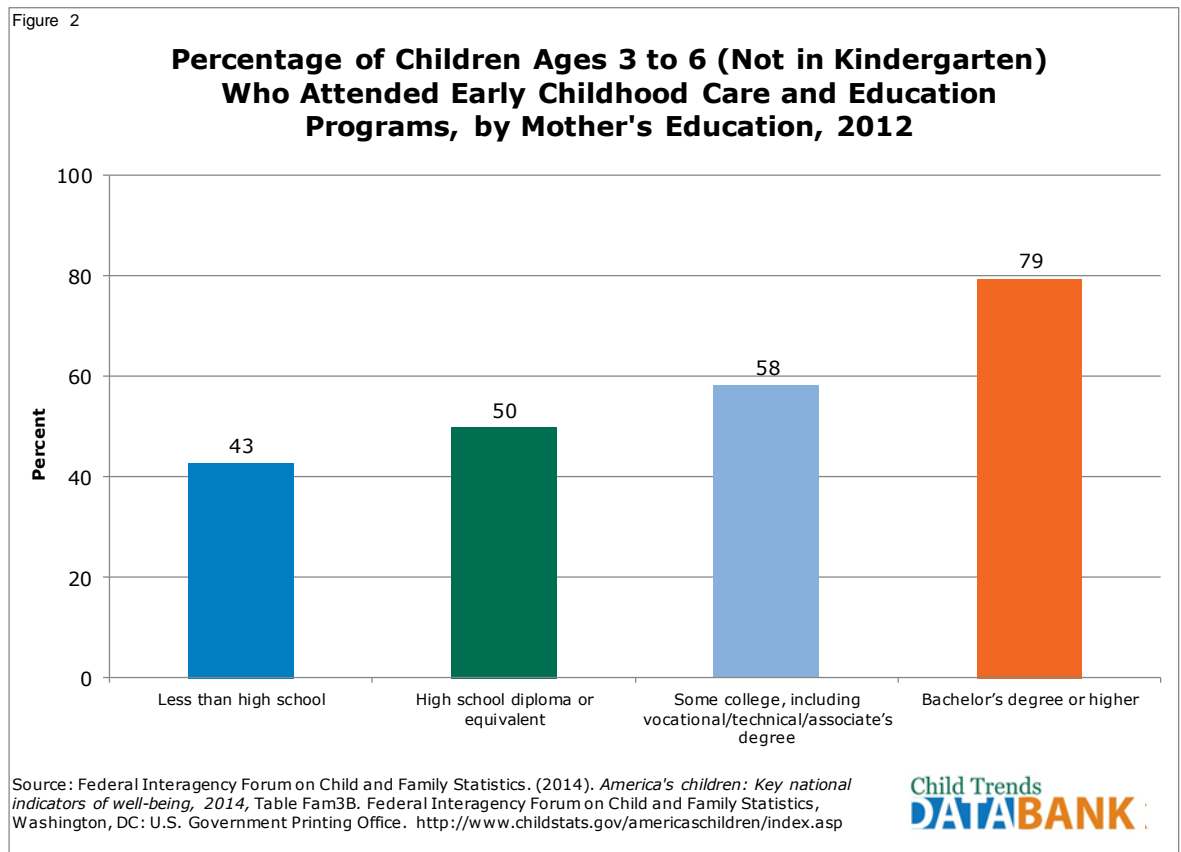
Differences by Race and Hispanic Origin⁶

Hispanic children are less likely than white or black children to be in center-based programs. In 2012, 52 percent of Hispanic three- to six-year-olds attended such programs, compared with 63 percent of white children, 65 percent of black children, and 64 percent of Asian children. The rate among Hispanic children increased by one-third between 2007 and 2012, from 39 to 52 percent. (Figure 1)



Differences by Mother's Highest Level of Education

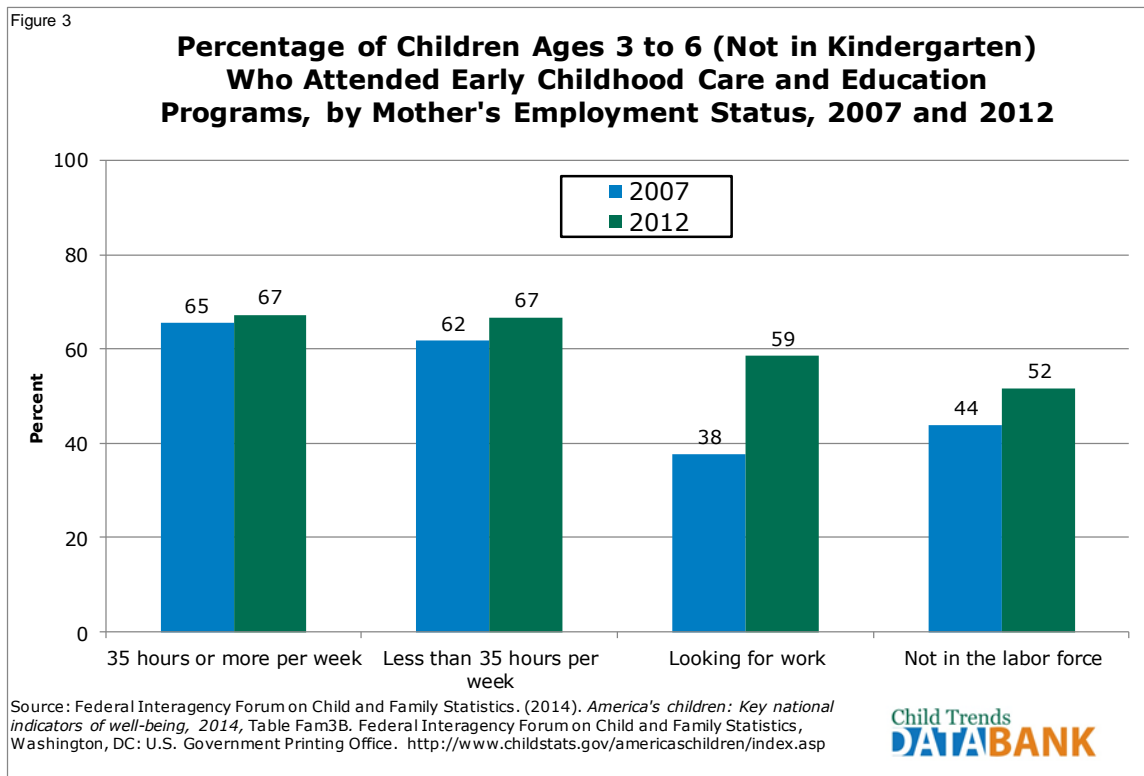
Mothers with higher levels of education are more likely to enroll their children in early care and education programs than are mothers with less education. In 2012, 43 percent of three- to six-year-olds whose mothers had not completed high school participated in such programs, compared with 50 percent whose mothers were high school graduates, 58 percent whose mothers had at least some vocational/technical training or college, and 79 percent whose mothers were college graduates. (Figure 2)





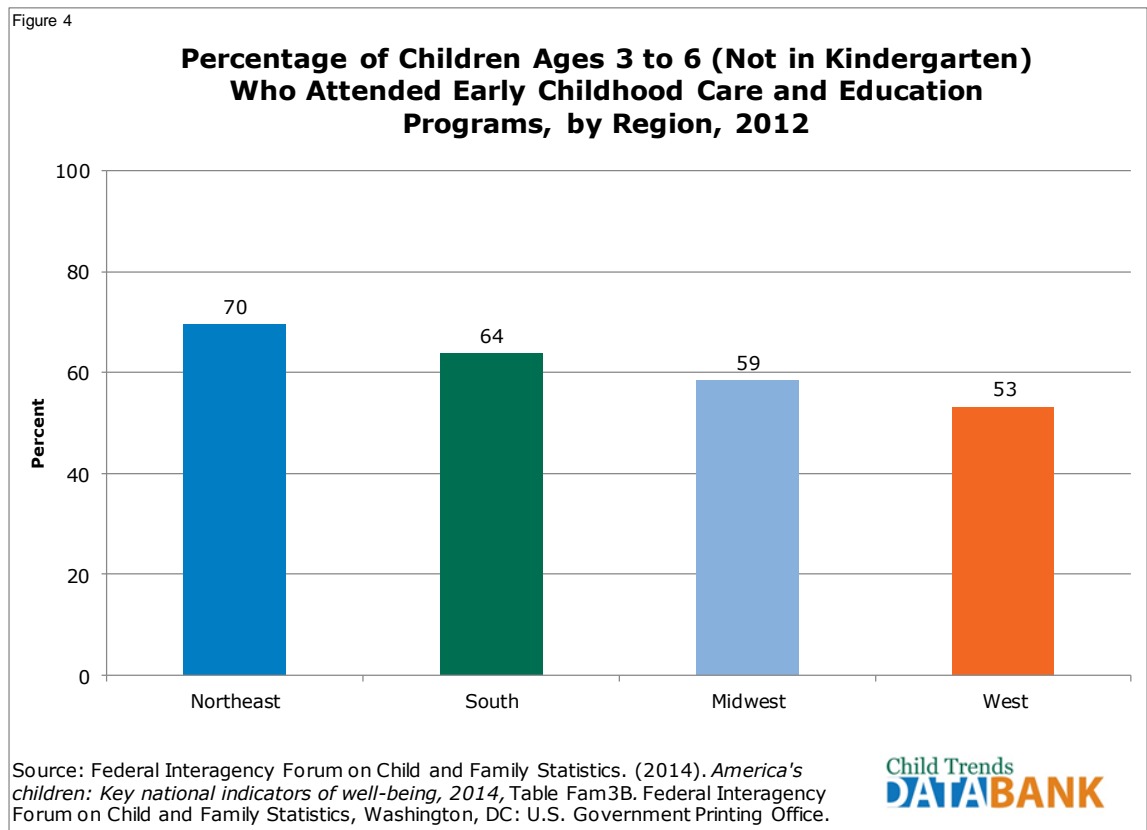
Differences by Mother's Employment Status

In 2012, children three to six years old with working mothers were more likely than their peers whose mothers did not work to attend early childhood care and education programs, although the gap decreased between 2007 and 2012. Sixty-seven percent of children whose mother worked full-time or part-time were in center-based care, compared with 59 percent who had mothers looking for work, and 52 percent whose mothers were not in the labor force. However, the proportion of children with mothers who were looking for work who were in center-based care increased 21 percentage points between 2007 and 2012, while the rate among employed mothers remained relatively constant. (Figure 3)



Differences by Region

In 2012, children living in the Northeast were significantly more likely than those living in the West to be in center-based care, at 70 and 53 percent, respectively. Those in the South and Midwest fell in the middle, at 64 and 59 percent, respectively. (Figure 4)



Differences by Family Type

Children living with two unmarried parents are less likely than their peers in other family types to be enrolled in center-based care. In 2012, 48 percent of three- to six-year-olds not yet in kindergarten who lived with two unmarried parents were in center-based care, compared with 58 percent of those living with one parent, 62 percent of children living with two married parents, and 65 percent living with no parents. (Appendix 1)



State and Local Estimates

For 2005-2012 state estimates of the number of children *not* enrolled in nursery school, preschool or kindergarten, total and by poverty status see the KIDS COUNT Data Center at:

<http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data#USA/2/8/10>

For 2009 state estimates of the number of children enrolled in pre-k in public schools only, see *Digest of Education Statistics 2012*, Chapter 2, Table 37. http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d11/tables/dt11_037.asp

International Estimates

For the percentage of children ages three to four enrolled in pre-primary and primary education in selected countries for 2008, see <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2012007> (Indicator 2)

For the 2008 enrollment of children age 4 and under in OECD countries, see

http://www.oecd.org/document/55/0,3746,en_2649_37455_46349815_1_1_1_37455,00.html (Table C1.1)

National Goals

The U.S. Department of Education's *Race to the Top: Early Learning Challenge* aims to increase the percentage of disadvantaged children who are not yet in school who are enrolled in high-quality early learning programs.

More information is available at:

<http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop-earlylearningchallenge/index.html>



Related Indicators

- Early School Readiness: www.childtrends.org/?indicators=early-school-readiness
- Child Care: www.childtrends.org/?indicators=child-care
- Preschool and Prekindergarten: www.childtrends.org/?indicators=preschool-and-prekindergarten
- Head Start: www.childtrends.org/?indicators=head-start
- Full-Day Kindergarten: www.childtrends.org/?indicators=full-day-kindergarten
- Public Schools with Pre-K and Special Education Pre-K Programs (archived): www.childtrends.org/?indicators=public-schools-with-pre-k-and-special-education-pre-k-programs
- Kindergartener's Social Interaction Skills (archived): www.childtrends.org/?indicators=kindergartners-social-interaction-skills

Definition

Center-based early childhood care and education programs include day care centers, Head Start programs, nursery schools, preschools, pre-kindergarten programs, and other early childhood programs.

Data Source

Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics. (2014). *America's children: Key national indicators of well-being, 2014, Table Fam3B*. Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office. Available at: <http://www.childstats.gov/americaschildren/index.asp>

Raw Data Source

U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Household Education Survey (NHES)

<http://www.nces.ed.gov/nhes/>



Appendix 1- Percentage of Children, Ages 3 to 6, in Center-Based Care: Selected Years, 1995-2012

	1995	2001	2005	2007	2012
Total	55.0	56.3	57.1	55.3	61.0
Race and Hispanic origin¹					
White, non-Hispanic	56.9	58.9	59.0	58.4	63.5
Black, non-Hispanic	59.5	63.0	66.5	65.2	68.4
Asian	58.6	61.9	70.4	65.1	68.4
Hispanic	37.2	39.8	43.5	38.9	51.9
Poverty status					
Below federal poverty level (FPL)	45.6	46.6	47.2	40.6	45.6
100–199% of FPL	43.2	48.7	46.5	45.1	51.8
200% of FPL and above	65.8	64.0	66.2	65.3	72.1
Family type					
Two parents²	54.8	56.5	56.9	55.4	61.8
Two parents, married	—	57.3	58.3	56.8	64.1
Two parents, unmarried	—	46.4	42.8	39.8	47.9
One parent	56.0	55.8	57.7	54.3	58.0
No parents	50.5	55.9	59.6	57.2	65.2
Mother's highest level of education³					
Less than high school	34.8	38.0	34.9	28.7	42.7
High school diploma or equivalent	47.6	47.3	48.6	43.1	49.8
Some college, including vocational/technical/associate's degree	56.8	61.4	56.2	54.4	58.2
Bachelor's degree or higher	74.5	70.0	72.9	71.3	79.4
Mother's employment status³					
35 hours or more per week	60.2	62.9	63.7	65.4	67.3
Less than 35 hours per week	62.1	61.4	60.8	61.7	66.7
Looking for work	51.8	46.2	42.0	37.8	58.6
Not in the labor force	46.5	46.9	50.2	43.9	51.7



	1995	2001	2005	2007	2012
Region⁴					
Northeast	56.3	63.8	67.0	66.3	69.7
South	58.4	59.1	56.4	55.0	63.9
Midwest	53.8	55.5	54.4	55.8	58.5
West	49.9	47.4	54.2	47.6	53.3

"—" Not available.

¹In 1995 and 2001, the 1977 Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Standards for Data on Race and Ethnicity were used to classify persons into one of the following four racial groups: White, Black, American Indian or Alaskan Native, or Asian or Pacific Islander. For data from 2005 and 2007, the revised 1997 OMB standards were used. Persons could select one or more of five racial groups: White, Black or African American, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, or Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander. Included in the total but not shown separately are American Indian or Alaska Native and respondents with "Two or more races." For continuity purposes, in 2005 and 2007, respondents who reported the child being Asian or Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander were combined. Data on race and Hispanic origin are collected separately. Persons of Hispanic origin may be of any race.

²Refers to adults' relationship to child and does not indicate marital status. Data for 2007 and 2012 include same-sex parents.

³Children without a mother in the home are excluded from estimates by mother's highest level of education and mother's employment status.

⁴Regions: Northeast includes CT, MA, ME, NH, NJ, NY, PA, RI, and VT. South includes AL, AR, DC, DE, FL, GA, KY, LA, MD, MS, NC, OK, SC, TN, TX, VA, and WV. Midwest includes IA, IL, IN, KS, MI, MN, MO, ND, NE, OH, SD, and WI. West includes AK, AZ, CA, CO, HI, ID, MT, NM, NV, OR, UT, WA, and WY.

Source: Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics. (2014). *America's children: Key national indicators of well-being, 2014*, Table Fam3B. Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

<http://www.childstats.gov/americaschildren/index.asp>



Endnotes

¹ National Research Council and Institute of Medicine. (2000). *From neurons to neighborhoods: The science of early child development*. Committee on Integrating the Science of Early Childhood Development. J. P. Shonkoff & D. A. Phillips, Eds. Board on Children, Youth, and Families, Commission on Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education. Washington, DC: National Academy Press. http://books.nap.edu/catalog/9824.html?onpi_newsdoc100300

² See, for example, Campbell, F. A., Pungello, E. P., Miller-Johnson, S., Burchinal, M. & Ramey, C. T. (2001). The development of cognitive and academic abilities: Growth curves from an early childhood educational experiment. *Developmental Psychology*, 37(2), 231-242.

³ Schweinhart, L., Barnes, H., Weikart, D., & Epstein, A. (1993). Significant benefits: The High/Scope Perry Preschool Study through age 27. *Monographs of the High/Scope Educational Research Foundation*, (10). Ypsilanti, MI: The High/Scope Press.

⁴ Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, Program for International Student Assessment (PISA). (2011). Does participation in pre-primary education translate into better learning outcomes at school? *PISA In Focus*, No. 1. Retrieved from <http://www.oecd.org/pisa/pisaproducts/pisa2009/47034256.pdf>

⁵ Peisner-Feinberg, E. S., & Burchinal, M. R. (1997). Relations between preschool children's child care experiences and concurrent development: The cost, quality, and outcomes study. *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly*, 43(3), 451-477.

⁶ Hispanics may be any race. Estimates for whites and blacks in this report do not include Hispanics.