

Native Language and Culture Experiences Among Children in Region XI Head Start Classrooms and Programs: Findings From the American Indian and Alaska Native Head Start Family and Child Experiences Survey 2015



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Introduction

Region XI Head Start programs are operated by grants to federally recognized American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) tribes in the lower 48 United States and Alaska (see Box 1, “What is Region XI Head Start”). Head Start promotes school readiness among preschool-aged children by providing educational, health, nutritional, social, and other program services (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services). In its Head Start Program Performance Standards (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2015), the Office of Head Start provides for “the integration of tribal language and culture into Head Start classrooms, in the curricula, with ongoing observation-based assessment, and across program systems and services.” This is critical given the central role of Native language and culture in children’s development. Starting early in life, Native language and culture are foundational to a child’s emerging sense of self, being, relating, and belonging in the world (McCarty, Romero, & Zepeda, 2006; Sarche, Tafoya, Croy, & Hill, 2016; Tsethlikai, 2015). Engagement in Native language and culture also helps children get ready for school by promoting the kinds of cognitive, social, and emotional skills that relate to success in school and beyond (Grunewald, 2016; Tsethlikai, 2011; Tsethlikai, Murray, Meyer, & Sparrow, 2018). Given the importance of Native language and culture for children’s development, Region XI programs prioritize their incorporation into children’s

Head Start classroom and program experiences (National Center for Cultural and Linguistic Responsiveness, 2012; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2015). In many communities, the language and culture opportunities that Head Start provides often are central to the community’s broader efforts to ensure that Native language and culture are sustained across the generations (Sarche, Dobrec, Barnes-Najor, Cameron, & Verdugo, In press).

This research brief uses data from the American Indian and Alaska Native Head Start Family and Child Experiences Survey (AI/AN FACES) 2015 (see Box 2) to provide nationally representative descriptive information about children’s Native language and culture experiences in their Region XI classrooms and programs. AI/AN FACES 2015 was the first national study of Region XI Head Start. The members of the AI/AN FACES Workgroup, which includes Region XI Head Start directors, researchers, and federal program staff, provided input on the study’s design, implementation, and dissemination (Malone et al., 2018). Among the Workgroup members’ priorities was that the study provide a portrait of Region XI children’s Native language and culture experiences. In this brief, data from teachers, center directors, and program directors in the spring of 2016 (see Box 2) are used to describe

Box 1. What is Region XI Head Start?

There are 12 regions for federal management of Head Start, 10 of which are geographically based. The other two are defined by the populations served: **Region XI serves children and families in programs operated by federally recognized AI/AN tribes** and Region XII serves migrant and seasonal workers and their families. AI/AN FACES 2015 is a descriptive study of the children, families, and programs in Region XI. In 2015, Region XI comprised 146 Head Start programs across the United States. These programs served approximately 20,000 children, of whom the majority, but not all, were AI/AN.

Region XI Head Start programs may enroll families that have incomes above the poverty line if: (1) all eligible children in the service area who wish to be enrolled are served by Head Start; (2) the tribe has resources in its grant to enroll children whose family incomes exceed the low-income guidelines in the Head Start Program Performance Standards; and (3) at least 51% of the program's participants meet the eligibility criteria in the Head Start Program Performance Standards (45 CFR Chapter XIII, <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/hspps-fnal.pdf>). States with Region XI Head Start programs are highlighted in red.



children's experiences in their Head Start classrooms and programs. All data in this brief are included in the report "Descriptive Data on Region XI Head Start Children and Families: AI/AN FACES Fall 2015–Spring 2016 Data Tables and Study Design," which is available on www.acf.hhs.gov/opre, under the AI/AN FACES project (Bernstein et al., 2018). A companion brief on Region XI children's Native language and culture experiences in their homes and communities is also available on www.acf.hhs.gov/opre, under the AI/AN FACES project, along with other briefs, reports, and presentations of AI/AN FACES 2015 findings. The Workgroup members hope that these AI/AN FACES resources are helpful for informing Head Start policies, practices, and priorities, at the local and federal level.

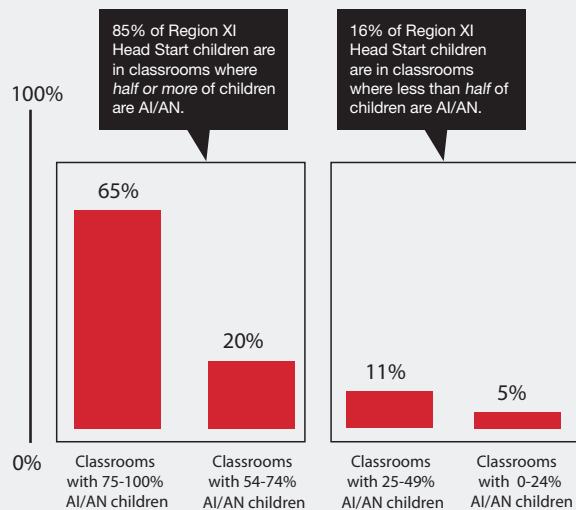
Region XI Head Start Children's Classroom Peer and Staff Racial Composition

The **majority (85%) of Region XI children are in classrooms where half or more of the children are AI/AN**, including 65% who are in classrooms where over three-quarters of children are AI/AN, and 20% who are in classrooms where 50–74% of children are AI/AN. A small percentage of Region XI Head Start children (15%) are in classrooms where fewer than half of children are AI/AN, including 10% who are in classrooms where 25–49% of children are AI/AN and 5% who are in classrooms where less than a quarter of the children are AI/AN.



Source: National Center on Early Childhood Development, Teaching, and Learning

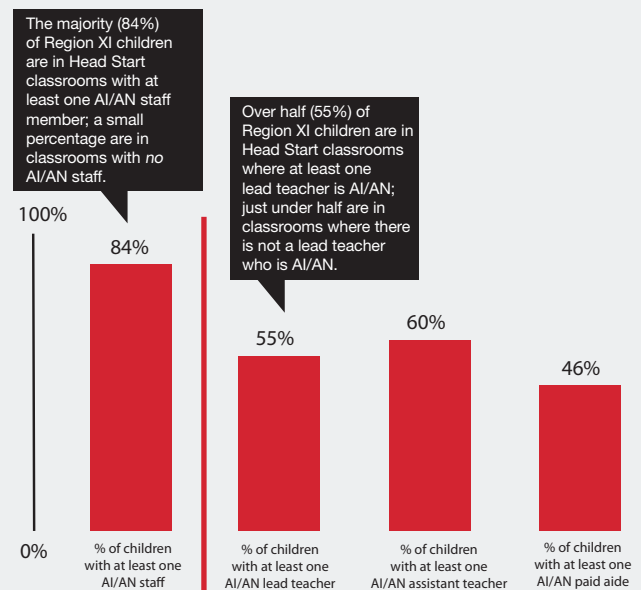
Most Region XI Head Start children are in classrooms where half or more of children are AI/AN.



Source: Spring 2016 AI/AN FACES Teacher Survey; Table E.1, "Descriptive Data on Region XI Head Start Children and Families: AI/AN FACES Fall 2015–Spring 2016 Data Tables and Study Design."

Note: Statistics are weighted to represent all children enrolled in Region XI Head Start in fall 2015 and who were still enrolled in spring 2016. There were 71 teachers who completed a teacher survey, reporting on 74 classrooms. Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

The majority of Region XI Head Start children are in classrooms with at least one AI/AN staff member.



Source: Spring 2016 AI/AN FACES Teacher Survey; Table E.2, "Descriptive Data on Region XI Head Start Children and Families: AI/AN FACES Fall 2015–Spring 2016 Data Tables and Study Design."

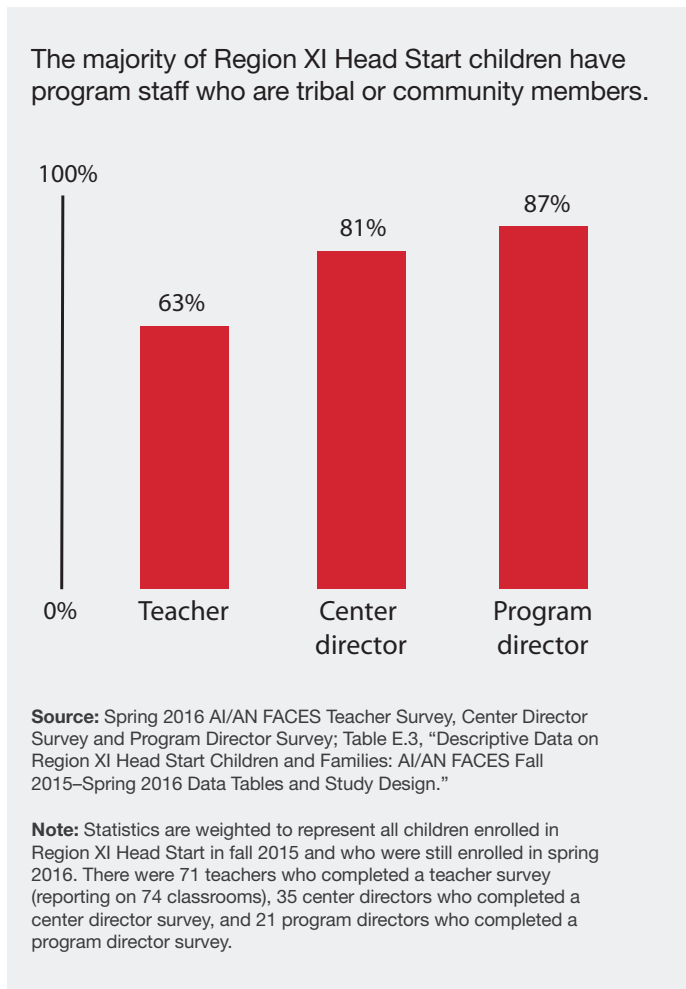
Note: Statistics are weighted to represent all children enrolled in Region XI Head Start in fall 2015 and who were still enrolled in spring 2016. There were 71 teachers who completed a teacher survey, reporting on 74 classrooms.

The majority (84%) of Region XI Head Start children are in classrooms where at least one of the classroom's staff (lead teacher, assistant teacher, or paid aide) is AI/AN. More than half (55%) of children are in classrooms where at least one lead teacher is AI/AN, 60% are in classrooms where at least one assistant teacher is AI/AN, and 46% are in a classroom where at least one paid aide is AI/AN.

Region XI Head Start Children's Programs' Staff Tribal and Community Memberships

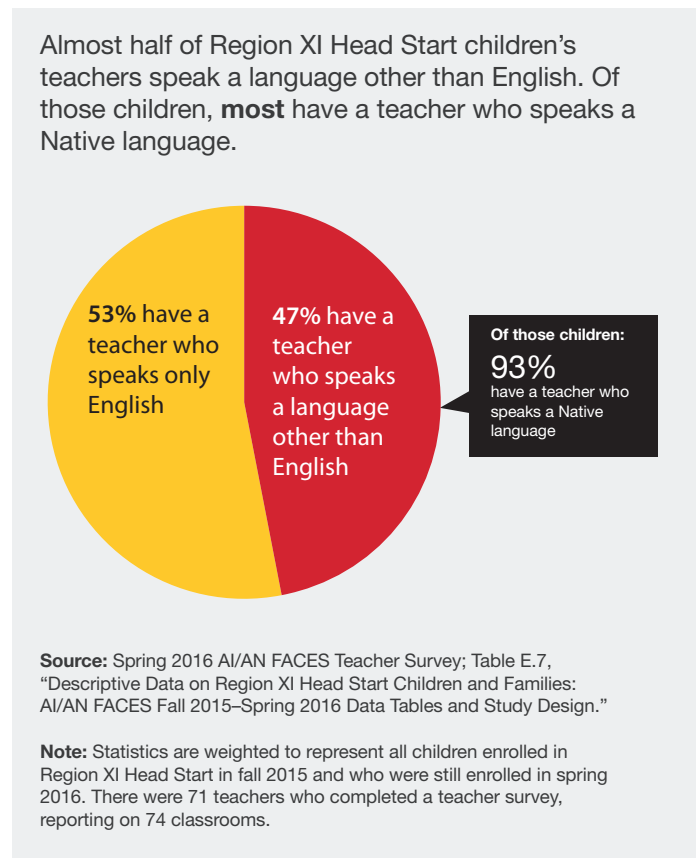
Teachers, center directors, and program directors reported on their connections to the tribe or community where their Region XI Head Start program is located to indicate whether they were a member of the same tribe as the children and families they worked with, a member of a different tribe, or a community member with tribal relatives.

The majority of Region XI children have teachers, center directors, or program directors who are tribal or community members. Children are most likely to have program directors (87% of children) or center directors (81% of children) who are tribal or community members and slightly less likely to have teachers who are tribal or community members (63% of children).



Region XI Head Start Children’s Teachers’ Native Language Use

Almost half (47%) of Region XI Head Start children are in classrooms in which their teacher speaks a language other than English, either at home or in the classroom. Of those children whose teachers speak a language other than English, the majority (93%) have teachers who speak a Native language either at home or in the classroom.



Source: National Center on Early Childhood Development, Teaching, and Learning

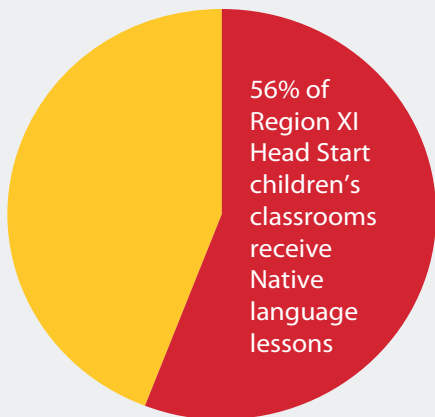


Source: National Center on Early Childhood Development, Teaching, and Learning

Region XI Head Start Children's Native Language Experiences in Their Classrooms

Based on teachers' reports, **over half (56%) of Region XI Head Start children are in classrooms that receive formal Native language lessons.**

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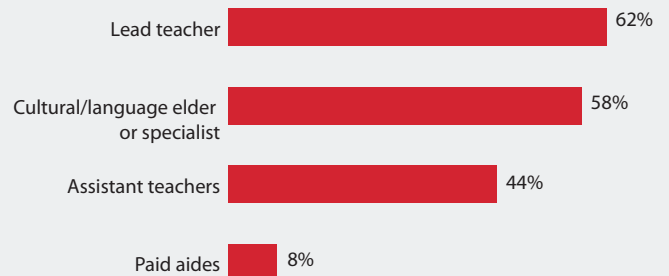


Source: Spring 2016 AI/AN FACES Teacher Survey; Table E.7, "Descriptive Data on Region XI Head Start Children and Families: AI/AN FACES Fall 2015–Spring 2016 Data Tables and Study Design."

Note: Statistics are weighted to represent all children enrolled in Region XI Head Start in fall 2015 and who were still enrolled in spring 2016. There were 71 teachers who completed a teacher survey, reporting on 74 classrooms.

Among the Region XI children in classrooms receiving Native language lessons, lessons are most likely to be delivered by a lead teacher (62%) and/or a cultural or language elder or specialist (58%). Assistant teachers and paid aides also deliver language lessons but do so less frequently. Forty-four percent of Region XI children in classrooms with formal language instruction receive that instruction from an assistant teacher, and 8% receive it from a paid aide.

Of Region XI Head Start children who are in classrooms with Native language lessons, a majority receive lessons from the lead teacher, and more than half receive lessons from a cultural/language elder or specialist.



Source: Spring 2016 AI/AN FACES Teacher Survey; Table E.7, "Descriptive Data on Region XI Head Start Children and Families: AI/AN FACES Fall 2015–Spring 2016 Data Tables and Study Design."

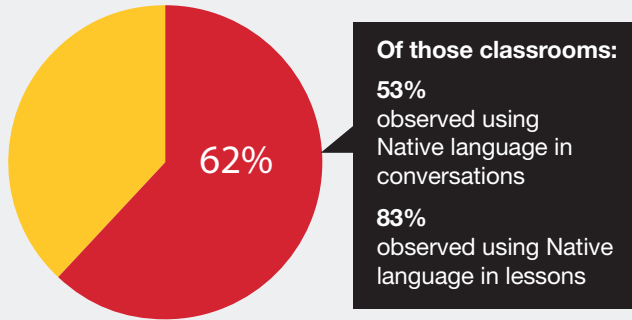
Note: Statistics are weighted to represent all children enrolled in Region XI Head Start in fall 2015 and who were still enrolled in spring 2016. There were 71 teachers who completed a teacher survey, reporting on 74 classrooms.

Based on classroom observations by trained observers, **nearly two-thirds (62%) of Region XI children are in classrooms where a Native language was used during the time of observation.** Among children in classrooms where Native language use was observed, 83% are in classrooms where its use is formal, for example, as part of a planned lesson, while 51% are in classrooms where its use is informal, for example, as part of a conversation.



Source: National Center on Early Childhood Development, Teaching, and Learning

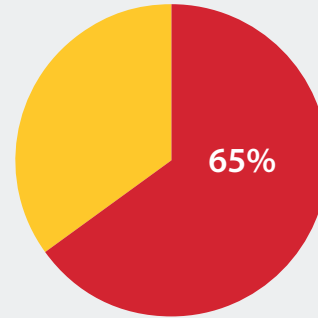
A majority (62%) of Region XI Head Start children were in classrooms where Native language use was observed.



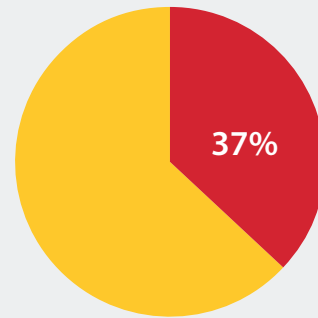
Source: Spring 2016 AI/AN FACES Classroom Observation; Table E.5, "Descriptive Data on Region XI Head Start Children and Families: AI/AN FACES Fall 2015–Spring 2016 Data Tables and Study Design."

Note: Statistics are weighted to represent all children enrolled in Region XI Head Start in fall 2015 and who were still enrolled in spring 2016. Observations were completed in 76 classrooms.

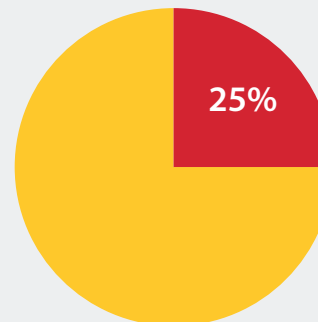
Region XI Head Start children are exposed to Native language in their classrooms in a variety of ways.



Most (65%) of Region XI Head Start children receive at least some classroom instruction in a Native language.



More than one-third (37%) of Region XI Head Start children are in classrooms that have at least some printed materials in a Native language.



One quarter (25%) of Region XI Head Start children are in classrooms where they are read to in a Native language at least some of the time.

Source: Spring 2016 AI/AN FACES Teacher Survey; Table E.7, "Descriptive Data on Region XI Head Start Children and Families: AI/AN FACES Fall 2015–Spring 2016 Data Tables and Study Design."

Note: Statistics are weighted to represent all children enrolled in Region XI Head Start in fall 2015 and who were still enrolled in spring 2016. There were 71 teachers who completed a teacher survey (reporting on 74 classrooms).

Based on teachers' reports, **Native language is used in a variety of ways in the classroom, including for instruction (65% of children), reading to children (37% of children), and in written materials (25% of children).** Native language is most commonly used for instruction, and least commonly for reading to children. That Native language is used least commonly for reading may reflect few books being available in a Native language or greater reliance on oral storytelling traditions.

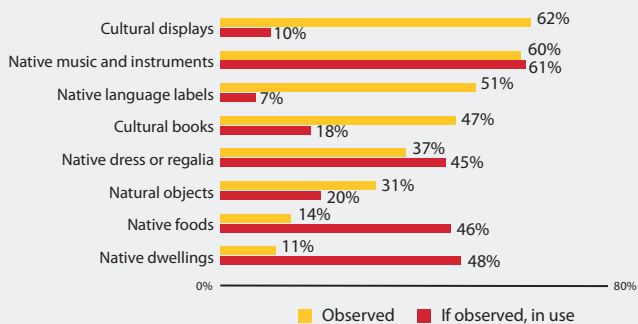


Source: National Center on Early Childhood Development, Teaching, and Learning

Region XI Head Start Children’s Native Culture Experiences in Their Classrooms

Region XI Head Start programs provide opportunities for children to experience and participate in their Native culture. Trained classroom observers reported on the presence and use of 10 categories of AI/AN cultural materials in Region XI Head Start classrooms. The list of materials was developed by Region XI Head Start directors and researchers for use in AI/AN FACES. **The majority of Region XI Head Start children (86%) are in classrooms with at least one of these AI/AN cultural materials present. Of those children, over half (58%) are in classrooms where the material was also in use by the children or staff.** While some materials are more likely than others to be present, they may be less likely to be in use. For example, 47% of children are in classrooms where cultural books are present, but only 18% of those children are in classrooms where they are also in use. Conversely, while some items are less likely to be present, if present they are more likely to be in use. For example, 11% of children are in classrooms where Native dwellings are present, but of those children, 48% are in classrooms where they are also in use.

A variety of cultural items were observed and used in Region XI Head Start children’s classrooms during the observation period.



Source: Spring 2016 AI/AN FACES Classroom Observation; Table E.4, “Descriptive Data on Region XI Head Start Children and Families: AI/AN FACES Fall 2015–Spring 2016 Data Tables and Study Design.”

Note: Statistics are weighted to represent all children enrolled in Region XI Head Start in fall 2015 and who were still enrolled in spring 2016. Observations were completed in 76 classrooms.

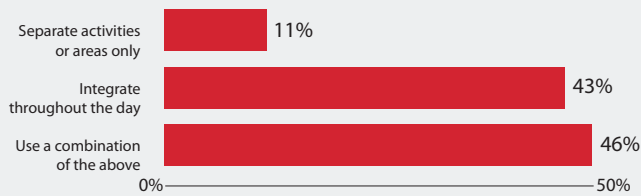
Approaches to Incorporating Native Language and Culture in Region XI Head Start Children’s Classrooms

Teachers incorporate Native language and cultural activities in one or a combination of two ways — by integrating language and cultural activities throughout the day, and/or by offering separate activities or areas for language and cultural activities within the classroom. **The integration of Native language and culture throughout the day — whether alone or in combination with offering separate activities or areas for language and culture activities — is more common than only offering separate activities or areas.** Most (89%) Region XI children are in classrooms with Native language and culture integrated throughout the day alone (46%) or in combination with separate activities or areas (43%). Only 11% of children are in classrooms that only provide separate activities or areas for Native language and culture. **No Region XI children are in classrooms where teachers conduct a pull-out program for Native language and cultural activities.**



Source: National Center on Early Childhood Development, Teaching, and Learning

Almost half of Region XI Head Start children’s teachers use a combination of approaches to cultural and language activities in the classroom.

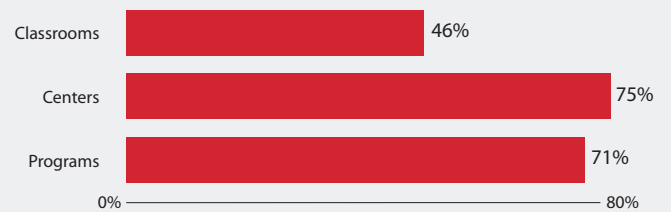


Source: Spring 2016 AI/AN FACES Teacher Survey; Table E.8, “Descriptive Data on Region XI Head Start Children and Families: AI/AN FACES Fall 2015–Spring 2016 Data Tables and Study Design.”

Note: A combination of the approaches above could also include: “Offer separate cultural activities/areas within the classroom.”

Statistics are weighted to represent all children enrolled in Region XI Head Start in fall 2015 and who were still enrolled in spring 2016. There were 71 teachers who completed a teacher survey (reporting on 74 classrooms).

Cultural or language elder or specialists are present in Region XI Head Start children’s classrooms, centers, and programs.



Source: Spring 2016 AI/AN FACES Teacher Survey, Center Director Survey and Program Director Survey; Table E.6, “Descriptive Data on Region XI Head Start Children and Families: AI/AN FACES Fall 2015–Spring 2016 Data Tables and Study Design.”

Note: Statistics are weighted to represent all children enrolled in Region XI Head Start in fall 2015 and who were still enrolled in spring 2016. There were 71 teachers who completed a teacher survey (reporting on 74 classrooms), 35 center directors who completed a center director survey, and 21 program directors who completed a program director survey.

Native Language and Culture Resources and Needs in Region XI Head Start Children’s Classrooms and Programs

Region XI Head Start classrooms and programs have a variety of resources and needs for supporting their Native language and culture efforts. **Nearly three-quarters of Region XI children are in Head Start centers or programs that have a cultural or language elder or specialist available to support their Native language and culture efforts. Almost half are in classrooms that have a cultural or language elder or specialist.**



Source: National Center on Early Childhood Development, Teaching, and Learning

Cultural curricula and assessment tools are additional resources for supporting Native language and culture in Region XI Head Start. **Nearly one-quarter (23%) of Region XI Head Start children are in classrooms where a Native cultural curriculum is used and 20% are in classrooms that use a locally-designed or Native-specific tool to assess Native language development or cultural practices.**



Source: National Center on Early Childhood Development, Teaching, and Learning

Just under one-quarter (23%) of Region XI Head Start children are in classrooms using a cultural curriculum or locally-designed or Native-specific assessment tool.



Source: Spring 2016 AI/AN FACES Teacher Survey.

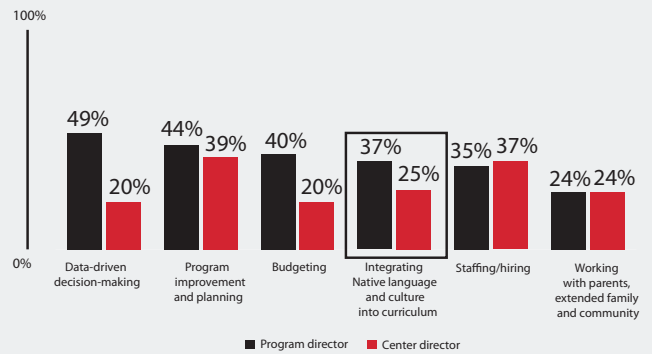
Note: Statistics are weighted to represent all children enrolled in Region XI Head Start in fall 2015 and who were still enrolled in spring 2016. The n column in this table includes unweighted sample sizes to identify the number of children with valid teacher survey data on each of the constructs. There were 71 teachers who completed a teacher survey, reporting on 74 classrooms.

According to Region XI Head Start children’s center and program directors, the integration of Native culture and language into the Head Start curriculum is a priority for additional support. Of 15 areas, Region XI center and program directors could identify up to 3 areas where they need additional support to lead more effectively. One-quarter (25%) of Region XI children have center directors and over one-third (37%) have program directors who identify integrating Native culture and language into the curriculum as areas where they need support to lead more effectively. This makes integrating Native language and culture into the curriculum among the top 5 areas identified by both children’s program directors (for whom it was the fourth most-endorsed priority for additional support) and center directors (for whom it was the third most-endorsed priority).



Source: National Center on Early Childhood Development, Teaching, and Learning

Region XI Head Start children’s program and center directors report needing additional support in a variety of areas, including integrating Native language and culture into the curriculum.



Source: Spring 2016 AI/AN FACES Center Director and Program Director surveys; Table G.7, “Descriptive Data on Region XI Head Start Children and Families: AI/AN FACES Fall 2015–Spring 2016 Data Tables and Study Design.”

Note: Statistics are weighted to represent all children enrolled in Region XI Head Start in fall 2015 and who were still enrolled in spring 2016. There were 35 center directors who completed a center director survey and 21 program directors who completed a program director survey.

Conclusions

These nationally representative findings from AI/AN FACES 2015 document the types of Native culture and language experiences that children have in their Region XI Head Start classrooms and programs. The findings show that the majority of Region XI children experience Native language in some form and at least some of the time in their classrooms — including through formal Native language instruction and a variety of other ways, such as in conversation, in printed materials, or when being read to by their teachers. In addition, the data show that the majority of children are in classrooms, centers, or programs where there are Native culture and language resources available — for example, by the presence and use of cultural materials in the classroom and by the availability of cultural or language elders or specialists in classrooms, centers, and programs.

These data also highlight the racial and language diversity of Region XI children’s classrooms. Nearly one-third of

Region XI children are in classrooms where 25% or more of their classmates are a race other than AI/AN, and over half are in classrooms where the lead teacher is a race other than AI/AN. Nearly all Region XI children are in classrooms where English is used in some way, and over 10% are in classrooms where Spanish or another (non-Native) language is used at least some of the time for instruction.

While these data highlight the availability of Native culture and language experiences in Region XI Head Start, the data also highlight the importance of ongoing support for Region XI programs as they seek to expand and deepen the kinds of Native culture and language experiences they can provide to children. For example, less than one-quarter of Region XI children are in classrooms that use a Native cultural curriculum and less than 20% are

in classrooms that use a locally-designed or Native-specific assessment tool. Not surprisingly, children's center and program directors alike ranked additional support for integrating Native language and culture into the curriculum among the top areas in which they need support to lead more effectively.

Given the importance of Native language and culture in early development and beyond, and the alignment of Native language and culture programming with the Head Start Program Performance Standards, support for Region XI programs as they seek to broaden and deepen their Native language and culture efforts should remain a priority for the Office of Head Start and its national centers and training and technical assistance providers in their work on behalf of Region XI programs, children, families, and communities.



Source: National Center on Early Childhood Development, Teaching, and Learning

AI/AN FACES 2015

This research brief draws upon data from AI/AN FACES 2015, which is the first national study of Region XI Head Start children and their families, classrooms, and programs. Other AI/AN FACES 2015 products describe the study's design and methodology (Malone et al., 2018), the characteristics of Region XI Head Start children in fall 2015 and spring 2016 (Bernstein, Malone, Kopack Klein, et al., 2018), the key characteristics of children when they enter Head Start in the fall (Barofsky, Hoard, & AI/AN FACES 2015 Workgroup, 2018), children's progress over the program year (Bernstein, Malone, & the AI/AN FACES 2015 Workgroup, 2018), and children's Native language and cultural experiences at home and in their communities (Barnes-Najor et al., 2019).

The AI/AN FACES 2015 sample was selected to represent all children enrolled in Region XI Head Start in fall 2015. A nationally representative sample of Region XI Head Start programs was selected from the 2012–2013 Head Start Program Information Report, with one to two centers per program and two to four classrooms per center. Within each classroom, all children were selected for the study. In total, 21 programs, 36 centers, 73 classrooms, and 1,049 children participated. The sample used for this brief includes all 979 AI/AN and non-AI/AN children who participated in the study in the spring of 2016. All findings are weighted to represent this population.

Measures for This Brief

Data for the current brief were contained in the AI/AN FACES 2015 teacher, center director, and program director surveys and in the AI/AN FACES 2015 classroom observation. All data were collected in the spring of 2016. A total of 71 teachers, 35 center directors, and 21 program directors completed surveys, and 76 classrooms were observed. Sample sizes are not large enough to provide sufficient precision for analysis at the classroom, center, and

program level. Therefore, all analysis was conducted at the child level.

Teacher, center director and program director surveys

Teachers, center directors, and program directors completed surveys on paper or via the web. Information on teachers and classrooms provides context for children's classroom experiences. In the spring, children's lead classroom teachers completed surveys about their demographic characteristics, education, experience, credentials, and professional development. Teachers were also asked about a number of classroom-level characteristics, such as classroom activities. Information on programs and centers provides additional context for children's Region XI Head Start experiences. In the spring, center and program directors completed surveys that provide information on structural characteristics and program policies and processes. Program directors responded to questions on training and technical assistance activities; curricula and assessment tools; electronic data systems and support staff; and sources and uses of program revenue. Center directors responded to questions on training and technical assistance activities and professional development supports; child assessment practices; and whether a parent education or support curriculum is in use. Program and center directors were also asked about their education and credentials.

Classroom Observations

Classroom observations were an important part of AI/AN FACES 2015, allowing for direct measurement of the quality of classroom interactions and classroom environments. Specially trained observers used observational measures that have been widely applied in child development research and other large-scale studies. Measures included a short version of the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Revised (ECERS-R) (Harms, 1998) and the Pre-K Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) (Pianta &

La Paro, 2008). Measures also included the Native Culture and Language in the Classroom Observation (NCLCO) which was newly developed with guidance from the members of the AI/AN FACES 2015 Workgroup. The NCLCO is designed to capture the presence and use of cultural items in the classroom and to note Native language use and storytelling. More information about the NCLCO, including a copy of the measure itself, can be found in two briefs on the AI/AN FACES website (AI/AN FACES 2015 Workgroup, 2019a, 2019b).

To prepare for the spring observations, classroom observers participated in a 9-day training developed specifically for AI/AN FACES. During the training, observers were trained on the use of all measures and participated in activities designed to ensure that observers understood the unique cultural setting of Region XI programs. The training prepared observers to work sensitively and respectfully with Native communities and programs and increased awareness of how culture could influence the expression of concepts measured by the classroom observation measures. The training took place in proximity to a Region XI Head Start program that

was not participating in AI/AN FACES 2015. The training included three initial days on-site with the Region XI program where observers met with the program director, heard a presentation by a tribal leader, conversed informally with teachers, and spent unstructured time in the classroom. Videos from other Region XI programs were used in the training to broaden observers' understanding of the diversity across Region XI programs. The videos were used in the cross-cultural understanding training, as tribally diverse exemplars of ECERS-R and CLASS concepts, and as practice for completing the NCLCO. The last day of observation training included a return to the Region XI program where trainees and a gold-standard observer conducted four hours of observation utilizing all observation measures. Trainee scores needed to match the gold-standard observer's score plus or minus one point for 80% of the items on the CLASS and ECERS-R Short Form to pass the field certification. In addition to the field certification, the CLASS also involved video certification that trainees also had to pass. Because the NCLCO was newly developed for AI/AN FACES, its use was more exploratory and did not include a reliability standard.

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To learn more about AI/AN FACES, visit <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/research/project/american-indian-and-alaska-native-head-start-family-and-child-experiences-survey-faces>.

A restricted-use data set is available for additional analyses by qualified researchers in order to further provide critically needed information about Region XI Head Start programs and the children and families they serve. Information about the data set and how to apply for access is available at <https://www.researchconnections.org/childcare/studies/36804>.



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