

# Identifying Head Start and Public Pre-K Participation in NSECE Data on Center-based ECE Programs

*Supplement to Technical Report: “Which Early Care and Education Centers Participate in Head Start or Public Pre-Kindergarten”*



**NSECE TECHNICAL REPORT SUPPLEMENT**  
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National Survey of **Early Care & Education**

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## NSECE TECHNICAL NOTE

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## INTRODUCTION

The analyses we present in the Technical Report, “Which Centers Participate in Head Start or Public Pre-Kindergarten” characterize centers that have at least one child whose enrollment is funded through Head Start or Public Pre-K funds. This supplement to the technical report provides interested readers with technical details of the analyses (including additional information about tabulations and definitions used, as well as discussion of features of the data that affect how additional analyses might be undertaken).

## METHODOLOGY FOR IDENTIFYING HEAD START AND PUBLIC PRE-K PARTICIPATION

### *Overview*

Based on our review of the available data, we adopted a three-part classification for Head Start participation:

- Center-based program reports at least one child whose enrollment is funded by Head Start
- Center-based program reports no children whose enrollment is funded by Head Start, but program appears in administrative lists as a Head Start participant
- Center-based program does not participate in Head Start

We classified center-based programs primarily based on their reports in the Center-based Provider Questionnaire to questions about enrollment that was funded by Head Start. If that information is missing but information in source files received from agencies such as the Office of Head Start or state education departments and from the Center-based Screener indicate that the program was a Head Start program, then the program was classified in the middle category as appearing in lists but not reporting funded enrollment.

Public Pre-K classification had some additional data available but also some unexpected scenarios. For Public Pre-K, centers could report funded enrollment or direct receipt of funds (there was no direct funding question for Head Start). A center with either an enrollment or funding report was classified as participating in Public Pre-K. Also, programs are classified as ‘Listed, but did not report Public Pre-K enrollment or funding’ if they are listed as Public Pre-K in administrative lists, reported Public Pre-K programs in the screener, reported no Public Pre-K enrollment or funding in the main questionnaire, and reported enrollment of children age birth through five years, not yet in kindergarten. There was a substantial incidence of these centers.

### *Details on Data Sources*

There are three NSECE data sources that indicate programs’ Head Start or Public Pre-K participation.

- Head Start or Public Pre-K designations in state and national lists of center-based ECE providers, including lists from the Office of Head Start, from state education departments, from child-care licensing agencies, from NAEYC (since their accreditation is adequate for pre-K qualification in some states), and from other agencies such as the U.S. Department of Defense and the General Services Administration. Any Head Start or Public Pre-K designations in the lists were retained to classify addresses as having a Head Start or Public Pre-K for initial sampling purposes. Lists were collected May

through August of 2011, followed by NSECE data collection November 2011 through June 2012.

Source lists varied in their units of observation. For example, an infant care program might appear separately on a licensing list from a school-age program in the same facility. In addition, there was often duplication across lists, with a single facility appearing in a Head Start list and a licensing list or public pre-K list. For sampling purposes, all available lists were combined into a single list of physical addresses. Each such address was associated with one or more programs appearing on the various source lists. We designated an address as participating in Head Start if at least one program at that address had been designated on any source list as a Head Start program. Public Pre-K was similarly defined at the address level.

- Head Start or Public Pre-K indication in the Center-based Screener. The Screener was a brief questionnaire administered to all sampled center-based addresses in order to confirm eligibility and sample an eligible program according to the NSECE definition of a sampling unit. The NSECE sampling unit was, “All ECE services to children under age 13 provided by a single organization in a single location.” Eligibility for the Center-Based Provider Questionnaire was defined as “serving at least one child age five years or younger, not yet in kindergarten.” The screener could be completed by any knowledgeable person at the center, not necessarily the director or instructional leader sought for the Center-based Provider main interview. An organization was designated in the screener as having Head Start or public pre-K services if the screener respondent confirmed the existence of a program that had been reported on a source list as Head Start or Public Pre-K, or reported any new Head Start or public pre-K services that had not been found on any of the source lists.

The results of the screener effort indicated that the quality of information from source lists regarding Head Start participation was excellent, but that the quality of information about public pre-K was more variable. We see this in Technical Report Exhibit 1, where there are relatively few programs in the ‘Listed Only, No (Funded) Enrollment’ category for Head Start, but a substantial number for Public Pre-K. We saw the converse as well for Public Pre-K: centers that did not appear on public pre-K lists but did report enrollment supported by public pre-K dollars.

- The Center-based Provider Questionnaire included three types of questions relevant to Head Start or Public Pre-K participation. The item we rely on most heavily asks center-based programs that report receiving any public dollars the number (if any) of their children whose enrollment in the center is funded by each public initiative (Head Start or Public Pre-K). Any number of funded children greater than zero is taken as an indication that the center-based program participates in the initiative. Another item asks about sponsorship of the center-based program; many centers reported a state pre-K facility or a Head Start grantee as a sponsor. In all cases, these centers also reported funded enrollment from the corresponding initiative. A third item asks about types of government revenues received by the center-based program. The types asked about include federal, state, and local. Because these categories do not map cleanly to Head Start or Public Pre-K, we use this item only to verify or investigate uncertain cases rather than as an independent indicator of Head Start or Public Pre-K participation. (For example, Head Start dollars come from a federal agency, but could be reported more locally depending on the grantee from whom the center receives funds. Federal funds

could also include dollars from Title I, the Child Care Development Fund (CCDF), or the Child and Adult Care Food Program, and so their receipt cannot be taken as evidence of Head Start participation specifically.)

## DISCUSSION OF SELECTED FEATURES OF THE DATA

Various features of the NSECE data relevant to Head Start and Public Pre-K are worth keeping in mind when planning further research. These include: limited sample size, consequences of the address and organization-based definition of 'center-based program,' and missing data on funded enrollment questions. In addition, we note that the NSECE data are quite limited in what they can say about how programs make use of the funds from these initiatives, and even less so when the programs receive funds from more than one initiative.

As the Technical Report indicates, the proportion of programs with any Head Start or Public Pre-K funding is quite low. Although programs expected to have Head Start or Public Pre-K funding were oversampled in the NSECE design, the number of cases involved is still too low to support some analyses. For example, while we have identified programs that have even one child supported by Head Start or Public Pre-K funds, it is possible to use a more restrictive threshold to define Head Start participation: for example, programs in which at least 60 percent of children age five and under are funded by Head Start dollars. Applying such a restriction may be meaningful in some contexts, but will also reduce the sample size of programs to potentially uncomfortable levels for some analyses.

NSECE center-based provider data are for all services provided by a single organization at a single location to children under age 13 years. This definition was essential because our study design developmental work indicated that enrollment and staffing data could not be collected reliably at finer levels such as by service type (say, school-age children vs. Public Pre-K services vs. private-pay preschool). Very often, respondents would say that they were unable to deduplicate or accurately pro-rate children or staff who might belong to more than one service type. To preserve the accuracy of overall enrollment and staffing numbers, we asked about all services to children under age 13. A consequence of this definition is that we can only qualify a center as receiving some funding from Head Start or Public Pre-K, but we cannot definitively associate that funding with other aspects of the center's operation, such as characteristics of their enrolled children or qualifications of staff.

A specific example is that in centers designated as receiving Head Start or Public Pre-K funds, the randomly selected classroom in the Center-based Provider Questionnaire, and therefore the Workforce respondent who is selected from that classroom may or may not pertain to the public funds received. There is a question that asks if the classroom has any Head Start or Public Pre-K children, but it is not asked for all classrooms that are designated as participating in one of these two programs.

Inferences about centers participating in these two initiatives are therefore delicate to make, since they generally pertain only to centers that participate but not necessarily to specific participating children or staff.

A substantial fraction of providers have missing data on the number of children whose funding is supported by Head Start and/or Public Pre-K. We have taken the conservative approach of reporting which centers have affirmatively reported enrollment in Head Start or Public Pre-K.

We note that it is possible (but we think, unlikely) that there are additional centers participating in the two public programs among those who did not report Head Start or Public Pre-K supported enrollment.

A key question in this research area is the extent to which centers are ‘braiding’ or ‘blending’ funding across programs. Braided funding generally keeps funding streams separate operationally, but those streams co-exist within a center. For example, a center that has 10 children with public pre-K vouchers in one classroom, but a separate Head Start classroom serving another 17 children would be braiding funding. A center that participates in Head Start, and then provides its Head Start children an extended day through use of CCDF funds, and possibly affords teacher professional development activities by combining Head Start and CCDF funds, is blending funding. In actuality, combinations of funding are more on a continuum than in distinct categories.

Toward these questions of blending and braiding funding, we have identified centers that receive both Head Start and Public Pre-K funds. We can also describe the percentage of the center’s enrolled children that are covered by each program’s funds. These tabulations permit descriptions of differences between centers by their participation in these two different public programs. The NSECE data are, however, limited in how much they can say about how funds are spent within centers.

Although we can tell the number of children supported by each type of funding, we can generally not tell whether the same children are supported by different programs or different children within the center are supported by each.

Center data are reported for all ECE services to children under age 13 at a given location. Head Start children are likely to be age five and under, and public Pre-K children may even more narrowly be mostly three-, four-, and five-year-olds. We have calculated densities of funding by dividing the number of children with program funding by the number of the center’s enrolled children age five years and under. More precise estimation may be difficult for such questions as: which ages of children are served through which funds or does a center with Head Start funding have Early Head Start services?

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