

## Choosing to Not Enroll? Understanding Parents' Decision Making in Choosing to Enroll and to Not Enroll in Head Start

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### Project Description

Only 38 to 50 percent of preschool aged-children in poverty enroll in any form of center-based or school-based early education.<sup>1</sup> This mixed-methods study uses surveys (n=369) and in-depth interviews (n=34) to examine the factors that influence Head Start-eligible families' decisions of whether or not to enroll. Situated in Durham, North Carolina, an area experiencing a burgeoning Hispanic population, this study provides information about enrollment in an important and growing demographic context.

### Research Questions

1. To what extent do racial and ethnic group relations (i.e., cohesion, competition, and conflict) influence parents' Head Start enrollment and non-enrollment decisions?
2. To what extent do racial and ethnic group relations predictors of enrollment vary across and between racial and ethnic groups?

### Sample

Durham, North Carolina is a mid-sized city in the southeast that has experienced growth in its Hispanic population. The survey sample size is 369 black and Hispanic Durham Head Start enrollee parents and eligible non-enrollee parents. The interview sample size is 34 black and Hispanic enrolled and non-enrolled parents.

### Methods

This study uses quantitative (survey) and qualitative (interview) approaches.

- *Survey:* 100-item multiple choice and open response survey measuring parents' sense of self-efficacy, social connectedness, socioeconomic status, group consciousness, group conflict, and preferences when selecting early child care.
- *Interview:* In-depth interviews with open-ended questions about parents' experiences and perceptions engaging with early education services, social services, and individuals of different racial and ethnic backgrounds.
- *Analysis:* Logistic regressions measure the predictive value of the various constructs and measure the extent to which these factors vary across racial and ethnic groups. In-depth interviews of parents provide rich and detailed information parents' cross-race and ethnic experiences and perceptions.

### Progress Update

Data collection and analyses are complete. Writing.

### Findings

My study confirms the predictive power of previously identified social contexts and finds that group relations are also predictors of preschool enrollment.

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<sup>1</sup>Child Trends, 2013; NIEER State of PreK, 2013; U.S. Census, 2011.

Specifically, I find that non-enrolled Hispanic parents are more likely than enrolled Hispanic parents to report a strong sense of intragroup cohesion. In addition, enrolled black and Hispanic parents are more likely than non-enrolled parents to report a sense of intergroup competition and experiences of intergroup conflict.

**Implications for Policy/Practice**

My findings highlight the need for programs serving diverse population, especially in areas

experiencing demographic transition, to attend to the intra- and inter-group dynamics that influence enrollment.

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