

BRIEF: OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

Migrant & Seasonal Head Start Study 2017



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BRIEF FROM THE MIGRANT AND SEASONAL HEAD START STUDY OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

Head Start and Early Head Start services provide early learning, health, and family well-being supports to low-income families and their children, birth to school entry. Within the Office of Head Start, the Regional Office for Migrant and Seasonal Head Start (MSHS) is responsible for Head Start programs that specifically serve the children and families of migrant and seasonal farmworkers.

MSHS programs have not participated in other national Head Start studies for a number of reasons including: (1) the availability of culturally appropriate measures (e.g., child assessments, classroom observations) valid with the migrant and seasonal population, which is primarily Spanish-speaking; and (2) unique features of MSHS programs that are difficult to study reliably and validly (e.g., age range, variation in program schedule, unpredictability of program start up) (ACF, 2011). For example, the study needed to be designed carefully to take into account very different schedules across MSHS centers that can range from a few months to an entire year, depending on the needs of migrant and seasonal families as they follow agricultural seasons and crops south to north across the year.

In 2015, the Administration for Children and Families funded a new study—the Migrant and Seasonal Head Start Study (MSHS Study)—to focus on MSHS programs and the families they serve. The MSHS Study is designed to closely match the characteristics of the whole population of MSHS programs, centers, families and children across the United States (a “nationally representative study”). Since the last nationally representative study of MSHS was conducted almost 20 years ago, this study provides a much-needed update on MSHS programs and centers, as well as the migrant and seasonal farmworker families they serve.

From January 2017 to January 2018, the MSHS Study gathered information from:

- Programs and centers—collected from surveys of program and center directors
- Classrooms—collected through classroom observations and from surveys of teachers and assistant teachers
- Families—collected from interviews with parents
- Children—collected from direct assessments, assessor ratings, and parent and teacher ratings of children

The MSHS Study 2017 Data Tables report describes the MSHS Study methodology, sample, and measures, all developed (or selected) in collaboration with MSHS stakeholders and experts in MSHS programs and early childhood research. The study was conducted by Abt Associates and its partners—The Catholic University of America and Westat—under contract to the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the characteristics of MSHS programs, centers, staff, families, and children?
2. What services does MSHS provide, and what are the instructional practices and general classroom quality of MSHS classrooms?
3. What are the associations between MSHS characteristics and child/family well-being?

PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is twofold: (1) to provide information about the MSHS Study, including its background, design, methodology, and measures; and (2) to report detailed descriptive statistics in a series of data tables on MSHS children, families, classrooms, centers, and programs.

KEY FINDINGS AND HIGHLIGHTS

The data tables present information about MSHS programs, centers, classrooms, teachers, assistant teachers, parents, and children. Specifically, the data tables include information about:

- Program and center directors' background and experience
- Program and center use of data and information
- Staffing characteristics, including issues related to training, support, recruitment, and compensation
- Classroom approaches to family engagement and disability services
- Classroom quality and instructional practices—broadly, and in support of children's language development
- Instructional and assessment practices, including language(s) of instruction
- Teacher and assistant teacher characteristics, including background, knowledge, beliefs, linguistic abilities, well-being, training, support, and compensation
- Parent characteristics, including work schedules, health and well-being, parenting practices, and economic resources
- Household characteristics, including type of housing, who lives in the household and home linguistic practices
- Child characteristics, including language skills, socioemotional skills, counting skills, physical health, and care arrangements (MSHS and other)

METHODS

The MSHS Study provides information about MSHS children and their families, classrooms, centers, and programs. There are two samples for the study.

Exhibit 1. Response Rates for Program and Center Component

Instrument	Number Sampled	Response Rate
Program Director Survey	36 programs (all)	88.9%
Center Director Survey	252 centers	79.8%

The first sample includes the programs and centers whose directors were sent a survey. All program directors providing center-based services received a survey, as well as a random selection of 252 center directors operated by those programs across five geographic regions covering the 48 contiguous U.S. states (East, Midwest, Northwest,

Southeast, and California/Southwest).¹ We worked to ensure that centers of different sizes were represented within each region and each program.

The second sample includes those centers that we visited to collect information from classrooms, teachers, assistant teachers, families and children. This sample is a nationally representative sample that was selected in four stages: (1) MSHS programs that provide center-based services were selected across geographic regions; (2) centers were then selected from that pool of programs; (3) classrooms were then selected from that group of centers; and finally, (4) children (and their families) were selected from those classrooms.

Exhibit 2. Response Rates for Classroom, Family, and Child Component

Instrument	Number Sampled	Response Rate
Classroom observation	122 classrooms	100.0%
Teacher survey	122 classrooms	97.5%
Assistant teacher survey	112 classrooms with assistant teachers	89.3%
Parent interview	778 families	83.1%
Direct assessments of children	703 older toddlers and preschoolers	81.5%
Ages & Stages Questionnaire, Third Edition (ASQ)	170 infants/young toddlers	85.7%
Parent report of child	873 children	77.2%
Teacher report of child	873 children	85.3%

NATIONALLY REPRESENTATIVE

The statistics provided in the tables throughout the 2017 MSHS Study Data Tables report are estimates of key characteristics of the MSHS population in 2017. Because we collected information on only a sample of centers, classrooms, teachers, assistant teachers, families, and children, we used a statistical procedure called weighting. This procedure adjusts the data so that we can interpret the information as being representative of the MSHS population in 2017. We attempted to survey all of the eligible program directors within MSHS, and because of the small number of this overall population, we were not able to weight the data collected from program directors.

¹ The study defined regions consistent with the National Agricultural Workers Survey (NAWS): **East:** Connecticut, Delaware, Kentucky, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Vermont, Virginia, West Virginia. **Midwest:** Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, Wisconsin. **Northwest:** Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, Washington, Wyoming. **Southeast:** Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina. **California/Southwest:** Arizona, California, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Texas.

GLOSSARY

Migrant farmworker families are those engaged in agricultural labor and have changed their residence from one geographic location to another in the preceding two-year period.

Seasonal farmworker families are those engaged primarily in seasonal agricultural labor and have not changed their residence to another geographic location in the preceding two-year period.

MSHS Programs are those entities receiving federal funding to oversee and implement Migrant and Seasonal Head Start Centers.

REFERENCES

ACF (2011). O'Brien, R., Barrueco, S., Lopez, M., D'Elio, M.A. Design for the Migrant and Seasonal Head Start Survey: Final Design Report. OPRE Report. Washington, D.C. Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, Department of Health and Human Services.

Content for this brief was drawn directly from the MSHS Study 2017 Data Tables report (ACF, 2019) as part of the MSHS Study 2017. The Administration for Children and Families' Project Officer for the study was Wendy DeCoursey. The content of the report was written by Linda Caswell and Erin Bumgarner of ABT Associates, Sandra Barrueco of Catholic University of America, and Michael Lopez of NORC.

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