



Head Start Access and Participation

Variation by Geography, Race and Ethnicity

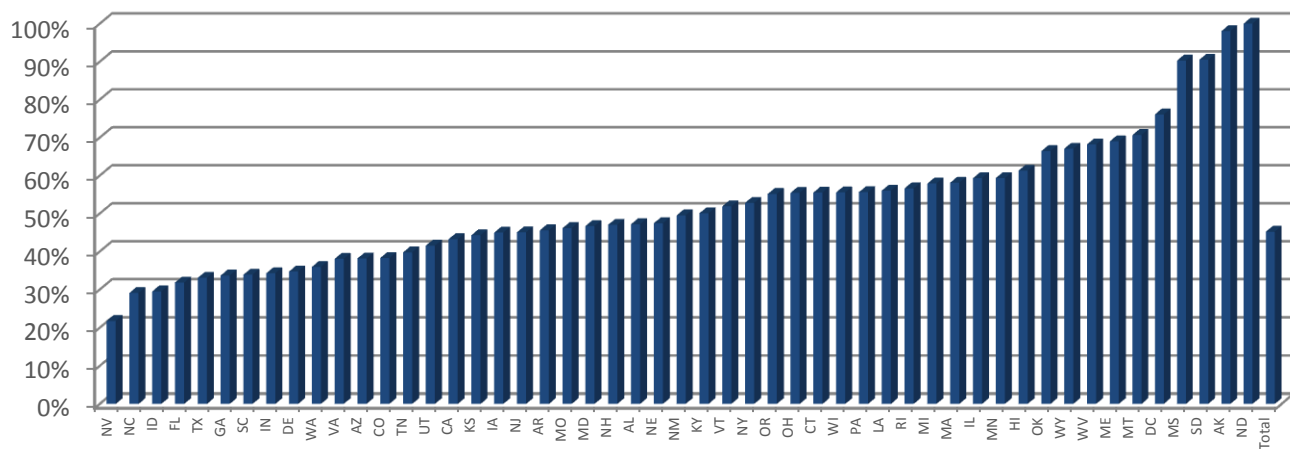
Overview

Access to Head Start services varies widely across states and race groups. In some states a small proportion of income-eligible¹ children participate in Head Start, while in other states a much larger proportion participates. Moreover, the level of participation varies greatly by child race or ethnicity in some states, but in others it is fairly uniform across racial/ethnic groups. A child’s geographic location and race/ethnicity can therefore greatly impact their degree of access to Head Start services.

Throughout this brief, ‘Head Start participation among income-eligible children’ has been calculated as the ratio of Head Start cumulative enrollment (all children enrolled for any amount of time in Head Start during the program year) to the population of Head Start income-eligible children. Because Head Start also serves some children from families with incomes above the poverty line, and these children are counted in cumulative enrollment, this measure likely overstates the true levels of participation among income-eligible three- and four-year olds.²

The chart below illustrates wide state variation in the level of Head Start enrollment among the income-eligible child population. Participation levels range from 22% in Nevada to over 90% in North Dakota. In 24 states and Washington, D.C, more than half of income-eligible children participate in Head Start.

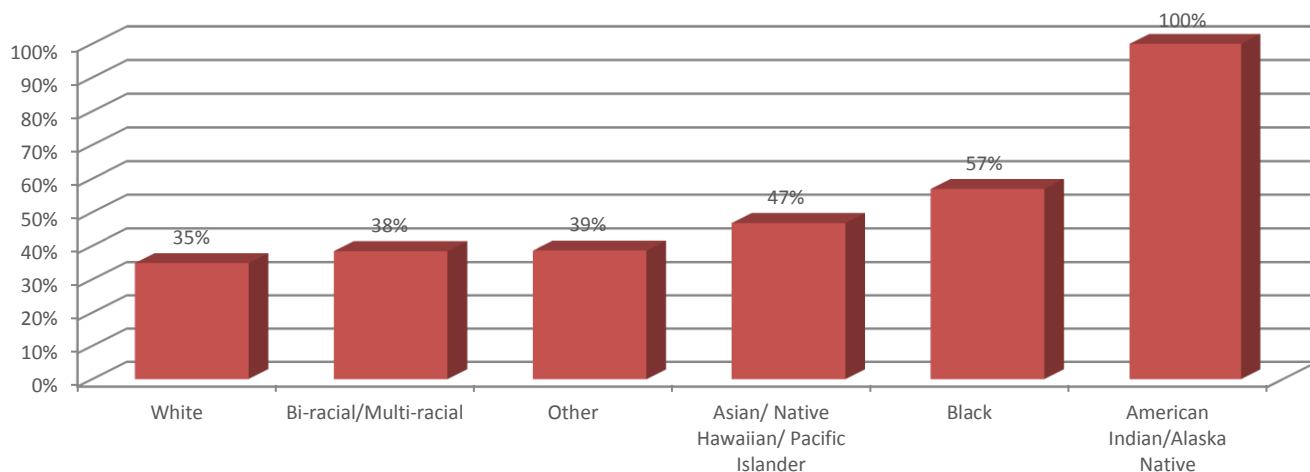
Head Start participants as share of total Head Start income-eligible 3- and 4-year olds , by state³





In addition to geographic variation, Head Start participation rates also vary by child race and ethnicity. As shown in the chart below, a higher proportion of income-eligible American Indian/Alaska Native and black children are enrolled in Head Start nationwide than Asian or white children. In fact, Head Start programs have the capacity to enroll all American Indian/Alaska Native income-eligible children nationwide. Note that all race groups include children of both Hispanic and non-Hispanic ethnicities.⁴

Head Start participants as a share of Head Start income-eligible 3- and 4-year olds nationwide, by race*

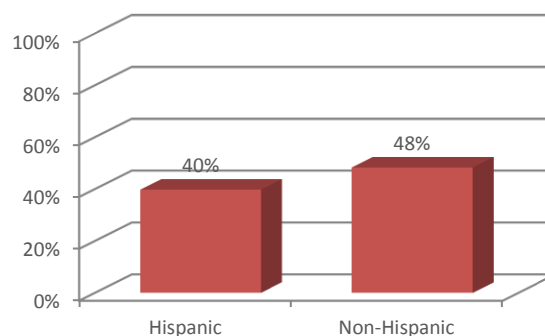


* All reported racial groups include both Hispanic and non-Hispanic members.

Different patterns in participation rates also emerge by child ethnicity. A greater proportion of income-eligible non-Hispanic children are enrolled in Head Start than Hispanic children (of any race group).

Below is a closer look at selected states to examine disparate trends in Head Start participation by race/ethnicity and by geography. The best scenarios are states with high overall participation among the income-eligible population, without stark disparities in participation by race/ethnicity. In contrast, the worst scenarios include states with low overall participation and stark disparities by race or ethnicity. It is important to note that non-enrolled eligible children may participate in other early childhood education (ECE) programs, meaning that racial/ethnic disparities in Head Start enrollment levels do not always indicate inequitable access to ECE services. To measure true access and equity in the ECE system, states need to improve and synchronize the data collection systems that track the number of low-income children participating in other ECE programs.

Head Start participants as a share of Head Start income-eligible children nationwide, by ethnicity

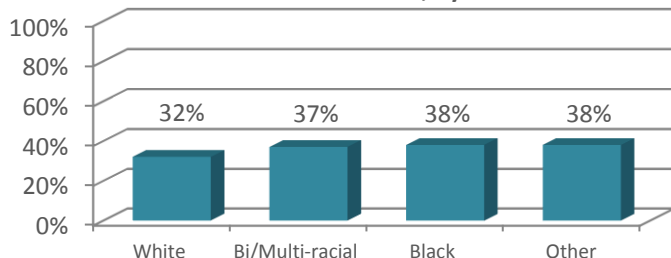




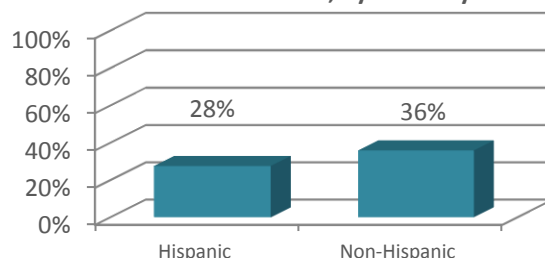
INDIANA

In **Indiana**, an average of 34% of income-eligible three- and four-year olds participated in Head Start during the 2009-2010 and 2010-2011 program years. This is below the 45% national average of participation among income-eligible children. In this context of low overall access, participation levels are relatively similar across racial groups (ranging from 32% to 38% of income-eligible children), as well as across ethnicity groups (ranging from 28% to 36%).

Head Start participation among income-eligible children in IN, by race*



Head Start participation among income-eligible children in IN, by ethnicity

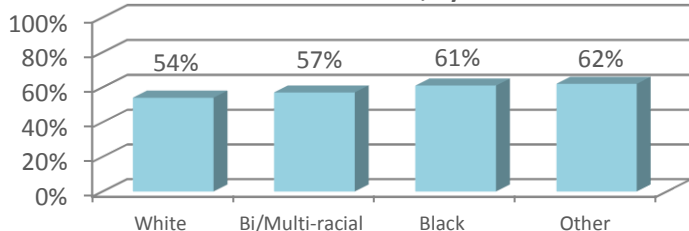


*All race groups include children of both Hispanic and non-Hispanic ethnicities.

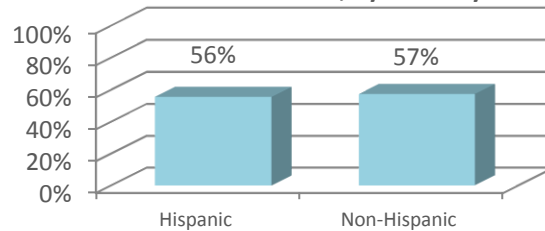
RHODE ISLAND

Rhode Island has high participation rates: an average of about 57% of income-eligible three- and four-year olds participated in Head Start during the 2009-2010 and 2010-2011 program years, compared to 45% nationally. In this context of relatively high overall access, this state also has fairly equitable enrollment levels across race groups and almost identical levels across ethnicity groups. Therefore, Rhode Island models both higher overall participation levels and fairly equitable access by race/ethnicity.

Head Start participation among income-eligible children in RI, by race*



Head Start participation among income-eligible children in RI, by ethnicity



*All race groups include children of both Hispanic and non-Hispanic ethnicities.

diversitydatakids.org

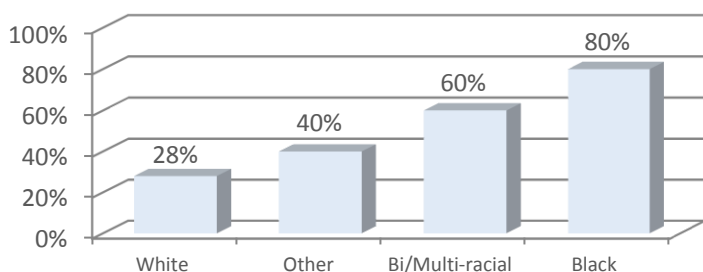
data for a diverse and equitable future



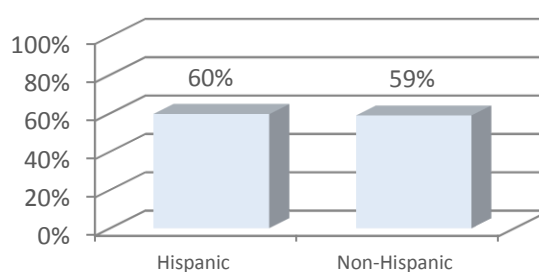
ILLINOIS

Similar to Rhode Island, **Illinois** has a relatively high overall participation rate, with an average of around 59% of income-eligible three- and four-year olds enrolled in Head Start during the 2009-2010 and 2010-2011 program years. Although participation levels are similar by ethnicity, Illinois has much greater variation in participation levels by race: while just 28% of white income-eligible children participated in Head Start, 60% of bi- or multi-racial children and 80% of black children participated.

Head Start participation among income-eligible children in IL, by race*



Head Start participation among income-eligible children in IL, by ethnicity

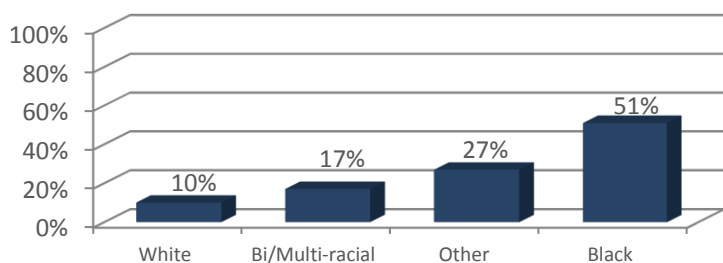


*All race groups include children of both Hispanic and non-Hispanic ethnicities.

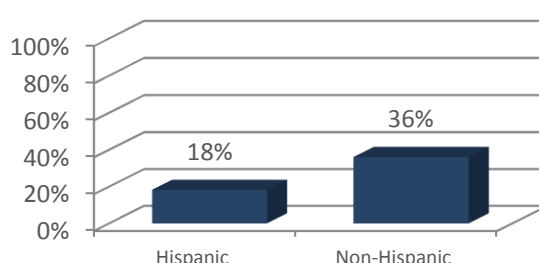
SOUTH CAROLINA

South Carolina's total Head Start enrollment is low, at only 34% of income-eligible three- and four-year olds. Moreover, there is significant variation in participation levels by race *and* by ethnicity. An average of only 10% of white income-eligible children participated in Head Start in the 2009-2010 and 2010-2011 program years, compared to 51% of black children. Likewise, only 18% of Hispanic income-eligible children participated in Head Start, compared to 36% of non-Hispanic children. However, the low overall participation levels and the variation by race and ethnicity in South Carolina may be compensated by other early education programs. In 2010-2011 South Carolina served 24% of *all* children in the state through pre-k special education and two public-prekindergarten programs that target low-income children. This is more than three times the percentage of children served by these programs in Rhode Island (7.9%) and Indiana (6.2%). Therefore, while Indiana and Rhode Island have higher enrollment levels in Head Start, in SC participation in other early education programs may correct limited participation and inequities in Head Start.

Head Start participation among income-eligible children in SC, by race*



Head Start participation among income-eligible children in SC, by ethnicity



*All race groups include children of both Hispanic and non-Hispanic ethnicities.

diversitydatakids.org

data for a diverse and equitable future



The above charts highlight the importance of geographic location, race, ethnicity, and their interaction in determining the level of access to Head Start services:

Within states, children of different racial or ethnic backgrounds may have equitable or differential access to Head Start services. White and black income-eligible children have roughly the same Head Start participation rates in Rhode Island and Indiana, but not in South Carolina or Illinois.

Across states, children of the same race/ethnic group may have differential access: white income-eligible children living in Illinois do not participate in Head Start at the same level as white children in Rhode Island, even though total child participation is very similar. Lastly, regardless of race or ethnicity, participation levels in some states are much lower than in others, limiting access to Head Start services for all children. In all states and for all racial and ethnic groups, enrollment in other early education programs may help address low participation and inequities in access to Head Start. However, it is difficult to present a picture of access/equity in all early education programs due to program and data fragmentation.

Sources & notes:

Author's calculations using 2009-2011 three-year ACS data and 2009-2010 & 2010-2011 Head Start PIR data. The data only include traditional and American Indian/Alaska Native Head Start participants. There are four types of programs within Head Start: Head Start programs, Early Head Start programs, Migrant & Seasonal Head Start programs or American Indian/Alaska Native Head Start programs. Head Start programs constitute the largest of the four types of programs, and serve children aged three to mandatory school age (usually five). Throughout diversitydatakids.org, Head Start programs are referred to as 'traditional' Head Start programs when juxtaposed with any of the other types of programs, for clarity.

¹ Income-eligible children refers to children in families with income below 100% of the federal poverty line. Head Start has various eligibility criteria, but the majority of children in the program are from income-eligible families.

² PIR enrollment data is available by type of eligibility, including income eligible. However, due to the aggregate nature of PIR data, it is not possible to calculate enrollment by both type of eligibility and by race. Because a key interest of this brief is racial and ethnic variation in Head Start participation, the authors have chosen to accept a less precise measure of income-eligible child participation. These data limitations are discussed more fully in the Head Start Research Evidence section of diversitydatakids.org.

³ Because the time frame of Head Start participation (calculated as a 2-year average of cumulative enrollment for program years spanning March 2009 through Sept 2011) does not align perfectly with the time frame of the estimate of total income-eligible children (ACS 3-year estimates: Jan 2009 through Dec 2011), users should interpret these percentages with caution. For more information on the calculations of this chart, see [Appendix 4](#).

⁴ Head Start PIR enrollment data does not report combined child race/ethnicity, instead these are reported separately. Due to the aggregate nature of PIR data, it is not possible to determine which children of each race are Hispanic or non-Hispanic. For example, white children may be of either Hispanic or non-Hispanic ethnicity, while Hispanic children may be of any race group. For more information on Head Start race/ethnicity reporting categories, [click here](#).

For full dataset with data on all states, please see [Appendix 4a](#) (participation rates by race) and [Appendix 4b](#) (participation rates by ethnicity).