

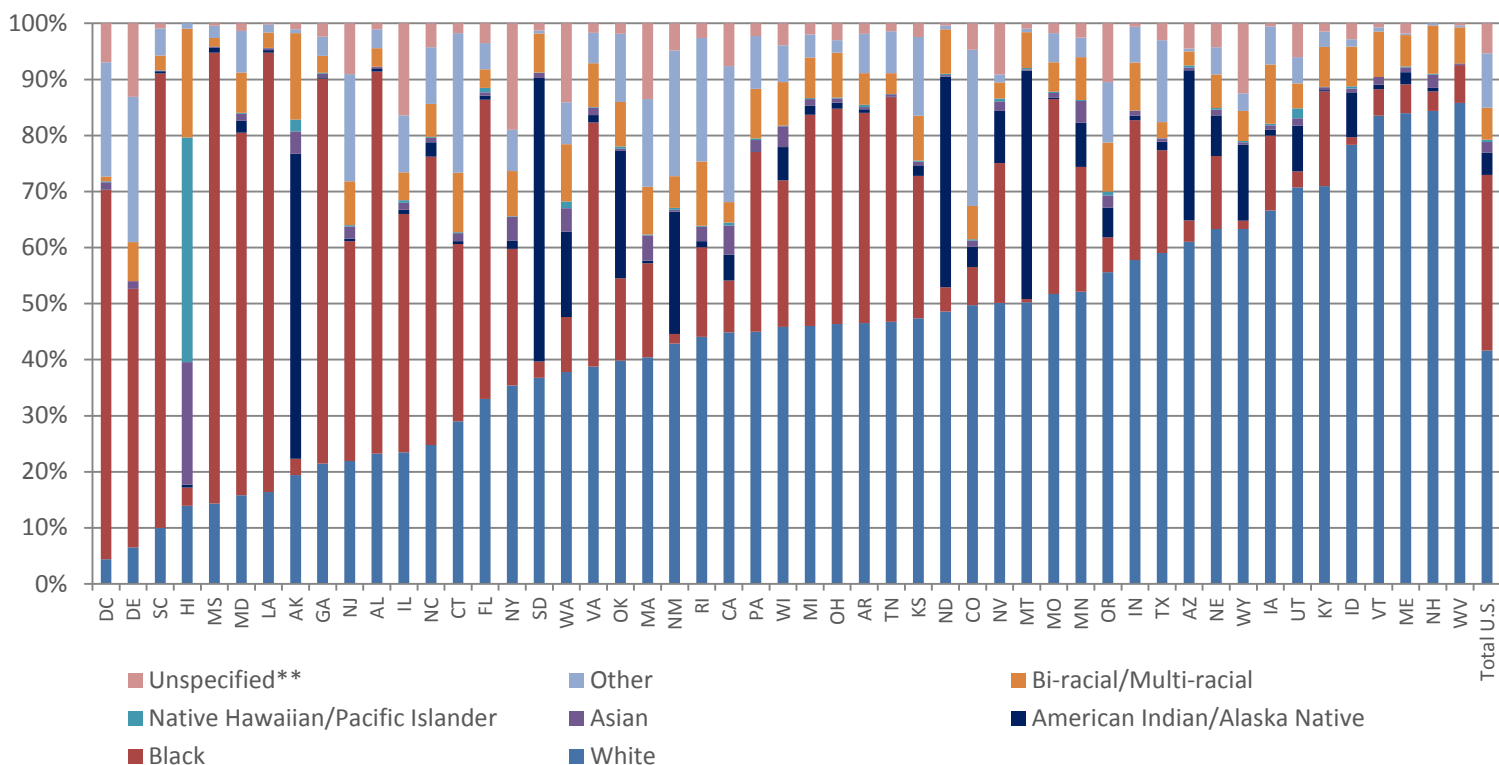


Diversity in Head Start

Racial Composition of Head Start Participants

The racial composition of Head Start participants varies by state and by program type. In traditional¹ and American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) Head Start programs, the majority of three- and four-year olds are black in D.C., South Carolina and Mississippi, but white in Vermont, New Hampshire, and West Virginia. Programs in Alaska, Montana and South Dakota have substantial American Indian/Alaska Native populations, while programs in Hawaii have large proportions of both Asians and Native Hawaiians/Pacific Islanders. The chart below depicts the variation in student racial composition of traditional and AI/AN Head Start programs across the United States.

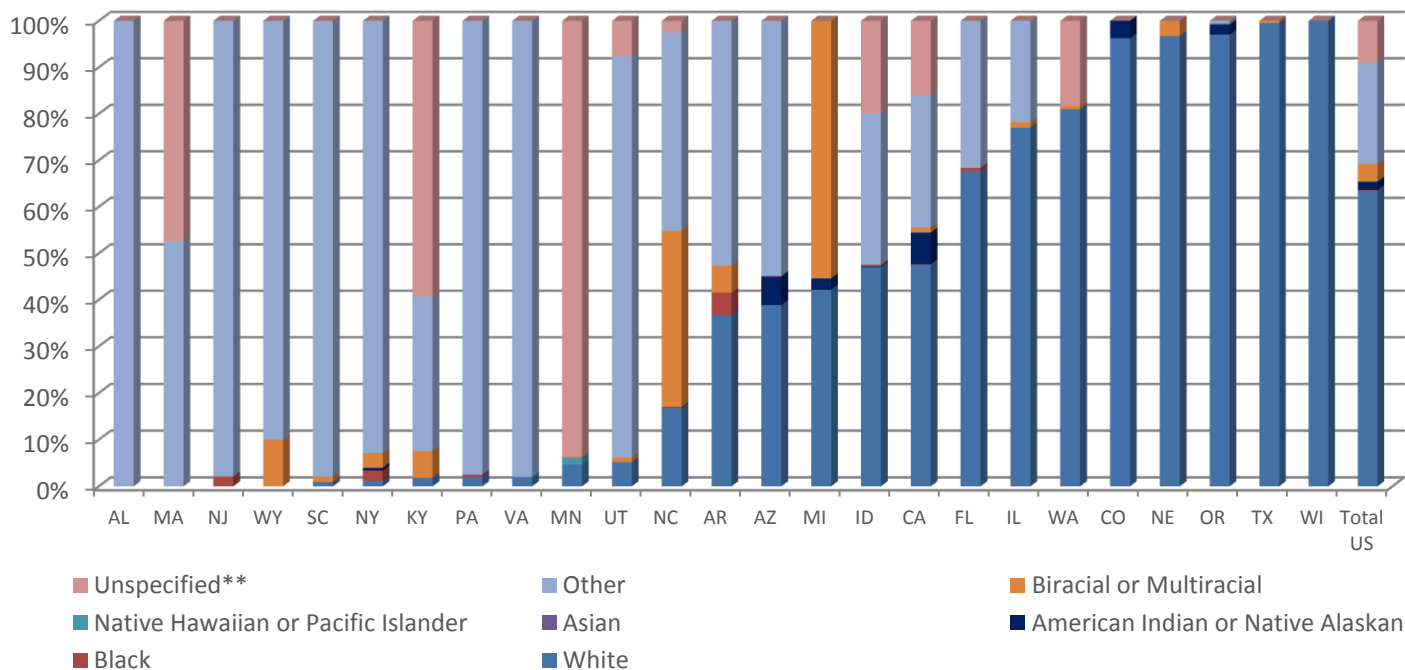
Racial composition of traditional Head Start and American Indian/Alaska Native Head Start participants by state, 2010-2011²



Compared to the demographics of traditional and AI/AN Head Start program participants above, Migrant and Seasonal Head Start (MSHS) participants have different geographic and racial distributions. MSHS centers are located in 36 states³ with significant agricultural production and the overwhelming majority (99%) of the 34,043 MSHS participants nationwide are of Hispanic or Latino ethnicity. However, the racial breakdown of MSHS children is much less clear. As shown in the chart below, in almost half of states with MSHS programs, nearly all of MSHS children report either “other” or “unspecified” race. In another five states, 40% to 60% of MSHS children report either “other” or “unspecified” race. These ambiguous categories make it difficult to assess the true racial composition of this population.



Racial composition of Migrant and Seasonal Head Start participants by state, 2010-2011⁴



The ambiguity in MSHS racial reporting most likely stems from the racial/ethnic categories used in Head Start data collection. Since 2005, the Head Start Program Information Report (PIR) collects and reports enrollment data by Hispanic/Latino ethnicity separately from race. Therefore, many Hispanics, when required to choose a race without “Hispanic” as an option, may choose “other” or “unspecified.” For example, in Alabama, 100% of MSHS participants report their race as “other,” and 100% also report Hispanic ethnicity. Likewise, in Utah, 98% of MSHS participants report their race as “other” and 99.8% also report Hispanic ethnicity. Therefore, one reason for the high predominance of “other” or “unspecified” race among MSHS participants could be the lack of a Latino or Hispanic racial category. The separate collection of race and ethnicity would not be problematic if these data were reported combined (e.g. Hispanic other, Hispanic unspecified). Unfortunately, the PIR does not report Head Start enrollment by combined race and ethnicity groups. The problems inherent in Head Start racial/ethnic reporting also affect traditional and AI/AN Head Start programs, where it precludes an examination of mutually exclusive racial/ethnic groups such as Hispanic white, Non-Hispanic white, and Non-Hispanic black. In sum, the lack of clarity in the reporting of race and ethnicity categories constitutes a data issue that can impede the analysis of race-based effects. For more information on the collection of race/ethnicity in Head Start, [click here](#). To view details on Head Start ethnic composition, [click here](#).

Sources & notes

**Unspecified race is defined as “a person whose race is unknown or whose parents declined to identify their race” (2010-2011 PIR Survey Form).

¹ 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 often referred to as ‘traditional’ Head Start programs when juxtaposed with any of the other types of programs, for clarity.

² Author’s calculations using 2010-2011 Program Information Report (PIR) survey data. PIR is an annual survey of all Head Start programs, which includes the collection of basic demographic information such as participant race and ethnicity. Percentages are calculated by dividing the number of students in each racial group enrolled in Head Start during the 2010-2011 period by the total cumulative enrollment for each state during the same period. Hispanic ethnicity is not included as a race category.

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³ Personal communications (email) with ACF HSES Helpdesk. March 01, 2013. Refers to 2011-2012 PIR data.

⁴ Authors' calculations using Program Information Report (PIR) survey data from the 2010-2011 Head Start enrollment years. Percentages are calculated by dividing the number of students in each racial group by the total cumulative enrollment for each state. MSHS centers currently operate in 36 states; however, only 25 states are displayed in this graph. This discrepancy is due to the fact that PIR data is reported at the program level, and each program is assigned the business address of the MSHS grantee that oversees it, even though each program may be operating centers in multiple states. For example, a large MSHS grantee with a business address in Texas oversees programs with MSHS centers located in Indiana, Ohio, Nevada, New Mexico, Iowa, and Oklahoma. Even though MSHS centers are operating in all these states, only Texas appears in the chart because the others are not home to any MSHS grantees.