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(by)

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## (introduction)

In its most recent Kids Count report, the Annie E. Casey Foundation warned that states in the Southern region generally ranked low on a composite index of child well-being (economic, education, health, and family and community factors), noting that “states in the Southeast, Southwest and Appalachia – where the poorest states are located – populated the bottom of the overall rankings. In fact, with the exception of California, the 15 lowest-ranked states were located in these regions.”<sup>1</sup> Low-income students (those qualifying for free or reduced-price lunch, at or below 185% of the federal poverty level) are now the majority in Southern schools, creating unique challenges. As the Southern Education Foundation reported, “In this brave, new world, the people and policymakers of Southern states must realize that continuing the current, uneven level of educational progress will be disastrous. They must understand more fully that today their future and their grandchildren’s future are inextricably bound to the success or failure of low income students in the South. If this new majority of students fail in school, an entire state and an entire region will fail simply because there will be inadequate human capital in Southern states to build and sustain good jobs, an enjoyable

1. 2015 Data Book: State trends in child well-being. <http://www.aecf.org/m/resourcedoc/aecf-2015kidscountdatabook-2015.pdf>

quality of life, and a well-informed democracy. It is that simple.”<sup>2</sup> At the same time, the South is the region with the faster growing population in the country, with an increasing share of residents who were born outside the region.<sup>3</sup>

Perhaps in acknowledgement of the difficult situations in which many of the region’s children live, early childhood education has a strong history in the South. Several high profile initiatives in the South have made early childhood education a priority well before it took off as a national priority in the 2000s. In 1988, the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) called for “increasing the percentage of ‘at risk’ children served by pre-school and kindergarten programs to 100 percent” as well as screening all children using a readiness assessment before first grade.<sup>4</sup> In 1989, President George H. W. Bush and the nation’s governors, led by then-Governor of Arkansas Bill Clinton, met in Virginia to develop a national education agenda. This resulted in the National Education Goals Panel, which asserted that “by the year 2000, all children in America will start school ready to learn” and called for increasing the availability of preschool.<sup>5</sup> In a 2015 report, SREB called for ongoing, systematic improvements to early childhood, including expanding access and coordination across programs.<sup>6</sup> The need for investing in young children has only increased since, particularly as regional demographics changes. The 2010 Census found that about 18 percent of residents over the age of 5 in the South spoke a language other than English at home,<sup>7</sup> up from 15 percent the decade before, and there is no reason to expect this growth to slow. Additionally, as noted in a 2010 Southern Education Foundation report, “the bulk of Southern public school students are low income and/or people of color, in whose education the region has historically underinvested.”<sup>8</sup>

However, a focus on academic outcomes is a narrow barometer by which to measure the success of the children of the South. Given the unique economic challenges of the region, there is a great need to focus on the health and social-emotional development indicators as well – in short, to focus on the whole child. The federally-funded Head Start program has a long history of doing just that, serving not only as an early learning environment but also as a community resource for families.

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2. Southern Education Foundation. (2015). A New Majority: *Low income students now a majority in the nation’s public schools*. Research Bulletin. Southern Education Foundation: Atlanta, GA. Retrieved from: <http://www.southerneducation.org/getattachment/4ac62e27-5260-47a5-9d02-14896ec3a531/A-New-Majority-2015-Update-Low-Income-Students-Now.aspx>.

3. Cohn, N. (2014). Changing South is at intersection of demographics and politics. *New York Times Upshot blog*. Retrieved from: <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/15/upshot/changing-south-is-at-intersection-of-demographics-and-politics.html>.

4. Southern Regional Education Board Commission for Education Quality. (1988). *Goals for Education: Challenge 2000*. South Regional Education Board: Atlanta, Georgia.

5. Carolan, M.E. & Squires, J.H. (2012). Preschool for Y’All: How Did Early Education Become a Southern Goal? *Preschool Matters blog*. National Institute for Early Education Research: New Brunswick, NJ.

6. Southern Regional Education Board. (2015). *Building a strong foundation: State policy for early childhood education*. SREB: Atlanta, GA.

7. Modern Language Association. *MLA Language Map Data Center*. Accessible at: [https://apps.mla.org/map\\_data](https://apps.mla.org/map_data).

8. Southern Education Foundation. (2010). Pre-Kindergarten in the South: Preserving the Region’s Comparative Advantage. Southern Education Foundation: Atlanta. Retrieved from: <http://www.southerneducation.org/getattachment/d3e4366f-1039-43b4-9be8-1b3676f66c18/Pre-K-in-the-South-Update-Preserving-the-Region-s.aspx>

## (background on head start)

Head Start is the federal government's largest program focused on preschool-age children. It started in 1965 as a War on Poverty program providing part-time, community-based program serving 561,000 low-income children. The program has grown since then, serving 810,314 children in the 2013-2014 year<sup>9</sup> nationwide, including in U.S. Territories. Nationally, just 5 percent of the nation's 2- to 5-year-olds are enrolled in Head Start.<sup>10</sup> Operated through the federal Department of Health and Human Services, Head Start focuses not only on improving academic outcomes for children, but also on providing comprehensive services and opportunities for family engagement.<sup>11</sup> Rather than funding programs through states' Departments of Education, federal funding for Head Start has always gone to local, community-based grantees who implement the program.<sup>12</sup>

Head Start is an important early childhood program for low-income children and their families. Eligibility for the program is largely based on income, with families at or below 100 percent of the federal poverty level (FPL) qualifying. Other factors can contribute to eligibility, including homelessness or having a child who is in foster care. While these eligibility factors have a clear focus on the families most at risk, there is reason to believe Head Start does not reach all of the children it could help. Programs must maintain waiting lists of interested, eligible families and prioritize those families by risk factors when an opening is available. Head Start is rarely the only publicly-funded early learning program operating in a state. All but a handful of states invest in pre-K programs, serving over 1.3 million children nationally in the 2013-2014 school year.<sup>13</sup> Many of these pre-K programs also use income-based risk factors to determine enrollment, and in a few states, pre-K and Head Start operate in collaboration. However, the programs operate with very different operating structures, program standards, and funding.

## (methodology)

All Head Start grantees are required to annually submit the Program Information Report (PIR), which requests data on a range of demographic and operational questions. ICS reviewed nationally data on a range of issues, as well as pulled PIR data by state to complete state and regional comparisons. The focus of this report is on the South as a region, as well as individual Southern states, and so information is compared to the national average rather than other specific regions.<sup>14</sup> Data reflect FY 2014, which closely aligns with the 2013-2014 program year.

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9. At the time this analysis was started, 2013-2014 was the most recent year for which full information was available.

10. Office of Head Start (OHS). (2014). Head Start Program Facts Fiscal Year 2013. Retrieved from: <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/data/factsheets/docs/hs/program-fact-sheet-2013.pdf>

11. Carolan, M., Clarke Brown, K., & Barnett, S. (in press). Publicly Supported Early Care and Education Programs. In E. Dearing & E. Votruba-Drzal (Eds.). *The Handbook of Early Childhood Development Program, Practices, and Policies*. Wiley.

12. This paper will discuss the reach and characteristics of Head Start programs by state. It is important to remember, however, that this represents data reports from local grantees which have been aggregated by state of operation. While states have Head Start collaboration offices for the purpose of partnership and aligning services, Head Start remains a community-based program.

13. Barnett, W.S., Carolan, M.E., Squires, J.H., Clarke Brown, K., & Horowitz, M. (2015). *The state of preschool 2014: State preschool yearbook*. New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research.

14. All data used in this paper is available from the Office of Head Start, with registration. For more information on the PIR as well as available data, please see: <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/data/pir>

In addition to the traditional Head Start program, three variations are federally funded with different eligibility criteria to meet needs of other target populations. These are:

- American-Indian and Alaskan Native (AIAN) program, for children from birth to age 5.
- Migrant and Seasonal Head Start: Developed in 1969 to keep children of migrant workers out of fields; expanded to other seasonal workers in 1999; serves children and pregnant women.
- Early Head Start: Since 1994, a specific funding stream to serve infants, toddlers under age 3, and expectant mothers; it offers a full-day, full-year program.

The statistics presented in this report include children served through the AIAN and Migrant/Seasonal Head Start programs based on the state in which programs are reported. It is important to note that children served in the Migrant program may move more often, and so child trends may change throughout the program. Additionally, AIAN programs occasionally cross state borders. Because this brief is focused primarily on preschool-aged children, it focuses on children served in the traditional Head Start program, and does not include mothers and children in the Early Head Start program.

This paper does not address the effectiveness of Head Start or summarize findings of previous evaluations. The PIR contains a rich dataset regarding program demographics and standards; however, it does not collect information on child or classroom outcomes in cognitive or non-cognitive domains. This paper is focused on the current service provision of Head Start in the South, and recommendations to strengthen services based on notable trends.

## **(enrollment and access)**

### **Number of children**

The 13 states defined here as the South<sup>15</sup> are home to 35 percent of the nation's 2-to5-year-olds. Their Head Start offerings are proportionate to this, enrolling 273,689 of these students, or 34% of overall national enrollment. More populous states in the region have larger shares of regional enrollment, with Texas enrolling 25 percent of the Head Start students in the South, and Florida enrolling 13 percent (proportions for all states can be found in Table A-1 in the Appendix).<sup>16</sup>

Head Start programs enroll about 5 percent of the South's 2-to 5-year-olds, on track with the national average, as seen in Table 1. However, the reach that Head Start has varies in each state in the South. In Mississippi, a state that only implemented state-funded pre-K<sup>17</sup> midway through the 2013-2014 school year, Head Start reaches 14 percent of the states' 2- to 5-year-olds, representing a significant role in early childhood. On the other end of the spectrum, only 3 percent of Virginia's children in this age range are enrolled in Head Start. It is worth noting that some states and localities may run Head Start in collaboration with other early childhood offerings, such as pre-K or child care.

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15. The following states are defined here as "the South:" Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia.

16. Additional tables are included in the Appendix for ease of reading. All tables which are included in the body of this paper are also include in the Appendix.

17. Barnett, Carolan, Squires, Clarke Brown, Horowitz, 2015

**Table 1: Program reach in the South**

Program State	Total Funded Enrollment	Percent of 2 to 5s Served
Mississippi	22,884	14%
West Virginia	6,882	8%
Louisiana	18,945	8%
Kentucky	14,626	7%
Alabama	15,248	6%
Arkansas	9,036	6%
South Carolina	11,994	5%
Tennessee	15,263	5%
Texas	67,790	4%
Florida	36,421	4%
North Carolina	20,781	4%
Georgia	21,058	4%
Virginia	12,761	3%
Southern region	273,689	5%

**Ages of children in program<sup>18</sup>**

Head Start is generally discussed as a program for preschool-age children – that is, 3- and 4-year-olds. However, federal eligibility guidelines do clarify that, 2-year-olds may be enrolled in Head Start if they “turn three years old by the date used to determine eligibility for public school in the community in which the Head Start program is located.” Similarly, children older than 4 may be enrolled as long as they “not be older than compulsory school age,”<sup>19</sup> which differs by state, though for most states is age 6.<sup>20</sup>

Nationally as well as in the South, 55 percent of Head Start children are 4-year-olds, though a large number of 3-year-olds also receive the program (43% in the South; 41% in the United States). Several states in the South have higher than average rates of 4-year-old enrollment; 73% of West Virginia’s Head Start enrollees were reported to be 4-year-olds; see Table 2.

18. These figures do not include children who are enrolled in the Early Head Start program, which is generally targeted to children under age 3.

19. Administration for Children and Families, (2015). § 1305.4 Age of children and family income eligibility. Department of Health and Human Services; Washington, DC. Retrieved from: <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/standards/hspss/1305/1305.4%20Age%20of%20children%20and%20family%20income.htm>

20. Education Commission of the States. (2014). Compulsory School Age <http://ecs.force.com/mbdata/mbquestRT?rep=Kq1401>

**Table 2: Enrollment breakdown by age**

	2 Years Old	3 Years Old	4 Years Old	5 Years & Older
Alabama	1%	36%	61%	1%
Arkansas	6%	46%	48%	1%
Florida	1%	40%	59%	0%
Georgia	1%	54%	45%	0%
Kentucky	2%	38%	60%	0%
Louisiana	1%	57%	42%	0%
Mississippi	1%	42%	58%	0%
North Carolina	0%	37%	57%	6%
South Carolina	1%	51%	47%	2%
Tennessee	1%	40%	59%	0%
Texas	2%	43%	54%	1%
Virginia	1%	38%	60%	1%
West Virginia	1%	26%	73%	0%
Southern region	1%	43%	55%	1%
U.S. including territories	2%	41%	55%	2%

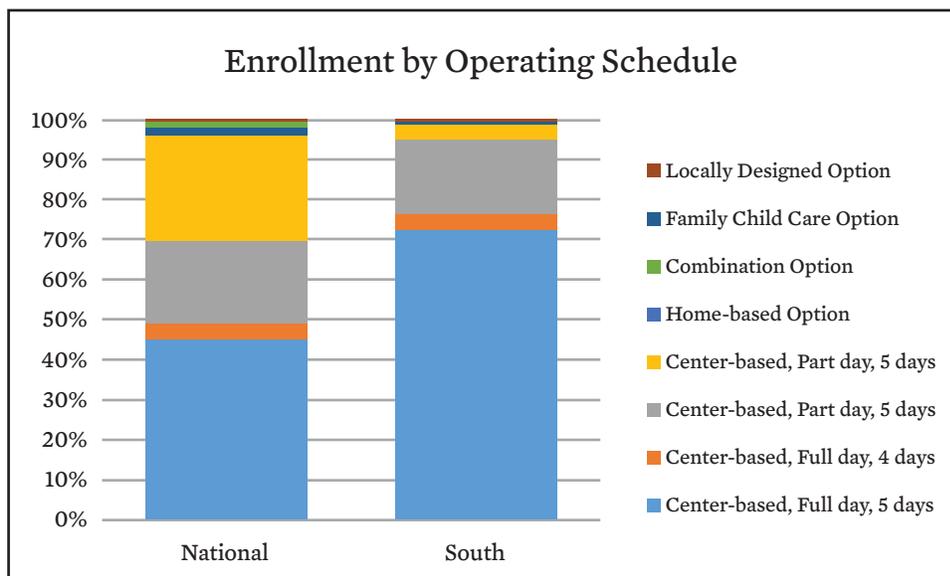
Federal policy does not require that local Head Start programs serve all 4-year-olds who apply before enrolling other ages, but rather requires that “the Head Start program must consider the income of eligible families, the age of the child, the availability of kindergarten or first grade to the child, and the extent to which a child or family meets the criteria that each program is required to establish.”<sup>21</sup> While programs are required to maintain waiting lists throughout the year, with children prioritized by eligibility factors, no information was available on these lists in the PIR.

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21. Administration for Children and Families, (2015). § 1305.6 Selection process. Department of Health and Human Services; Washington, DC. Retrieved from: <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/standards/hspps/1305/1305.6%20Selection%20process..htm>

## (operating schedule)

Head Start nationwide offers a variety of operating schedules based on local capacity, need, and the desire to meet parent preferences. No one operating schedule dominates Head Start nationally, though in the South, there is a clear majority of center-based, full day programs offered 5 days per week. Figure 1 below shows the enrollment distribution by operating schedule.



**Figure 1: Enrollment by Operating Schedule. For source data, see Table A-4 in the Appendix.**

In September 2016, new Head Start Program Performance Standards were announced after nearly a year of public comment and revision. Chief among the revisions is the requirement that all programs nationally operate for 1,020 hours per year, or the equivalent of 170 6-hour-days. The requirement will be phased in over time, with center-based programs providing 50 percent of their slots on this schedule by August 2019, and 100 percent of their slots by August 2021<sup>22</sup> in line with high-quality pre-K programs. As 72 percent of students in the South are already enrolled in 5 day, full-day programs, this transition would be easier than elsewhere in the country. (See Table A-4 in the appendix for specific state details).

22. Administration for Children and Families. (2016). Head Start Program Performance Standards Final Rule: General Fact Sheet. Washington, D.C.: Administration for Children and Families. Retrieved from: <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/hs/docs/hs-prog-pstandards-final-rule-factsheet.pdf>

## (average class size)

Average class size nationally as well as in the Southern region is 17 children per class. While average class size does not indicate the maximum allowable number of children, it is encouraging to see the class size below 20 children, in line with recommendations of the both the National Association for the Education of Young Children<sup>23</sup> and the National Institute for Early Education Research.<sup>24</sup> There is some variability in average class size in Southern states, as shown in Table 3. Head Start's class size requirements vary based on a range of factors, including age of children enrolled.

**Table 3: Class size and number of classes operated**

Program State	Average Class Size	Total Classes Operated
Mississippi	19	1,208
Arkansas	19	488
Alabama	18	834
Louisiana	18	1,037
South Carolina	18	675
Virginia	17	731
Georgia	17	1,209
Tennessee	17	884
Florida	16	2,209
Texas	16	4,130
North Carolina	16	1,319
Kentucky	14	1,046
West Virginia	11	646
Southern region	17	16,416
U.S. including territories	17	47,307

## (eligibility)

Head Start is a program geared towards the children most at-risk for not being ready for school entry. This is largely determined based on income eligibility (below 100% federal poverty level), but other factors can also contribute; this flexibility was strengthened in the 2007 Head Start Reauthorization.

A child is eligible if:<sup>25</sup>

- Family income is equal to or below the federal poverty level (FPL).
- The family is eligible for public assistance, or would be in the absence of child care.

23. NAEYC. (2013). NAEYC Accreditation: Teacher-Child Ratios within Group Size (assessed in Criterion 10.B.12). Retrieved from: [http://www.naeyc.org/academy/files/academy/file/Teacher\\_Child\\_Ratio\\_Chart.pdf](http://www.naeyc.org/academy/files/academy/file/Teacher_Child_Ratio_Chart.pdf)

24. Barnett, Carolan, Squires, Clarke Brown, & Horowitz, 2015.

25. Administration for Children and Families, (2015). § 1305.4 Age of children and family income eligibility. Department of Health and Human Services; Washington, DC. Retrieved from: <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/standards/hspss/1305/1305.4%20Age%20of%20children%20and%20family%20income.htm>

- Up to 10 percent of enrollees may have a family income above the poverty level if it is deemed the child would benefit from the services.
- Families are categorically eligible if they are homeless or if the child is in foster care.
- An additional 35 percent of enrollees who are neither income nor categorically eligible, but have family incomes below 130 percent FPL if the program demonstrates it implemented an outreach plan to inform income or categorically eligible families before serving ineligible families and ensured eligible families were enrolled first.

Across all Southern states, as well as nationally, the majority of Head Start students are eligible based on income, as shown in Table 4. While all of the above risk factors have been demonstrated to put children at risk for school success,<sup>26</sup> children who are in the foster care system or are defined as homeless may have additional needs that must be addressed. Head Start offers a range of support services for both parents and children, including referrals to mental health consultation and community resources. While homeless and foster children represent a small number of overall Head Start enrollment, their participation in this program provides an early opportunity to provide additional supports in their development.

**Table 4: Frequency of eligibility type**

State	Income Eligibility	Receipt of Public Assistance	Foster Children	Homeless Children	Over Income	Income between 100% & 130% of Property*
Southern Region	81%	11%	1%	2%	4%	2%
U.S. including territories	72%	16%	2%	3%	6%	3%

\*Percentages may add to greater than 100 in a state, as “income between 100 and 130 percent FPL” is also counted in “Over income.”

See Table A-6 in Appendix for full details by state

### **(student demographics)**

Changing racial and ethnic demographics in the United States are most clearly seen in child populations. A report from the Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics notes that “In 2020, less than half of all children are projected to be White, non-Hispanic. By 2050, 32 percent of U.S. children are projected to be Hispanic (up from 24 percent in 2014), and 39 percent are projected to be White, non-Hispanic (down from 52 percent in 2014).”

26. Carolan, M. & Connors-Tadros, L. (2015). Eligibility policy for state pre-K programs: Research on risk factors and approaches to developing state policy (CEELO Policy Report). New Brunswick, NJ: Center on Enhancing Early Learning Outcomes.

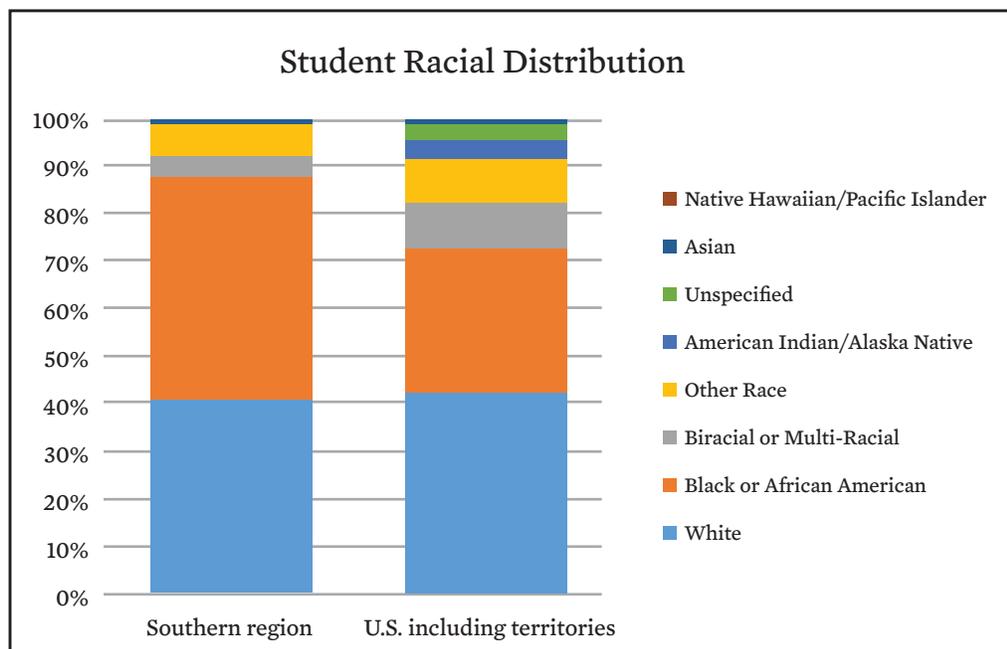
The majority of Head Start students report ethnicity of “Non-Hispanic/Non-Latino origin” (63% nationally, 71% in the South), though many Southern states report more than three-quarters of their students are in this category (see Table 5). These figures likely indicate differing Hispanic/Latino populations across these states (Texas, which has a high Latino/Hispanic population, reports 74 percent of students fit this demographic). However, the 2010 Census found that Hispanic children represent the largest share of any ethnic/racial group in poverty, with 37 percent of children in poverty having a Hispanic/Latino background.<sup>27</sup> This raises concerns that many more Hispanic/Latino children may be eligible for Head Start but are not accessing the program.

**Table 5: Student ethnicity**

State	Hispanic or Latino Origin	Non-Hispanic/ Non-Latino Origin
Alabama	10%	91%
Arkansas	16%	86%
Florida	41%	65%
Georgia	13%	87%
Kentucky	8%	92%
Louisiana	4%	96%
Mississippi	8%	92%
North Carolina	33%	73%
South Carolina	10%	92%
Tennessee	12%	88%
Texas	74%	30%
Virginia	16%	84%
West Virginia	4%	96%
Southern region	31%	71%
U.S. including territories	39%	63%

27. Hugo Lopez, M. & Velasco, G. (2011). *Childhood poverty among Hispanics sets record, leads nation*. Pew Research Center Hispanic Trends. Retrieved from: <http://www.pewhispanic.org/2011/09/28/childhood-poverty-among-hispanics-sets-record-leads-nation/>

Head Start is a racially diverse program whose composition can differ greatly by geography. No racial majority is seen at either the national level or in the South, though White and Black make up the largest groups, as shown in Figure 2.



**Figure 2: Student racial distribution, regional and national**

There is also no clear trend in racial demographics in individual Southern states. For example, 84% of Head Start children in West Virginia are White, with only 7% who are Black; another 8 percent are multi-racial. On the other hand, 78% of South Carolina’s participants are Black, with just 11% reported as White, 6% “other,” 4% multi-racial, and 1% unspecified. Three other large racial groups are less represented in the South than they are at the national level: American Indian/Alaska Native; Asian; and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander. (For state-level details, see Table A-8 in the Appendix)

Nationwide, throughout the South, and in each Southern state, English is the primary home language for a majority of students, though this differs by state; 65% of Head Start children in Texas has English as their primary language, as opposed to 92% in Alabama (in the South and nationally, the figures are 81% and 71% respectively). Spanish is the second most common home language, with 26% of students nationally reporting it; this figure is 19% in the South. Florida, North Carolina, and Texas each exceed the national average for Spanish speakers. A variety of other languages are reported in different states. While these languages tend to be reported by small numbers of families overall, this raises concerns as to whether programs are adequately equipped to meet the engagement needs of a family who speaks one of these languages. There is a very real possibility of under-enrollment among eligible families if outreach is not conducted in their native languages. (See Table A-9 in the Appendix for state-level details.)

## (teacher characteristics)

### Teacher credentials

Teacher credentials were a heavy focus on the 2007 Head Start reauthorization. It required that by September 30, 2013 at least 50% of Head Start teachers nationwide hold a baccalaureate or advanced degree in Early Childhood Education or equivalent. While this increased degree requirement is intended to raise the quality of the classroom experience, this 50% requirement applies to the national level, rather than for each grantee. This allows 50% of all teachers to have an AA, with some exceptions,<sup>28</sup> which raises concerns about whether Head Start students have access to equitable experiences.

Nationwide, Head Start programs have exceeded the Bachelor's degree requirement, with 58% of teachers meeting it in 2014; this is 59% in the South. Combining Bachelors' degrees as well as higher degrees, every state in the South exceeds the requirement, as shown in Table 6. West Virginia has the highest rate of advanced degrees in the region (38%). Nationally, a total of 6% of Head Start teachers do not meet the minimum standard of an Associate's degree (7% in the South). In Florida, 22% of teachers either have a Child Development Associate Credential (CDA)<sup>29</sup> or no ECE credential – more than 1 in 5 teachers is not meeting the federal requirement.

**Table 6: Lead teacher degree distribution**

	Advanced Degree in ECE or related	Baccalaureate degree	Associate degree	CDA	No ECE Credential - Preschool Classroom Teachers
Alabama	4%	50%	41%	6%	0%
Arkansas	7%	53%	37%	6%	0%
Florida	12%	53%	21%	20%	2%
Georgia	10%	66%	23%	1%	1%
Kentucky	25%	43%	26%	10%	0%
Louisiana	6%	55%	35%	5%	1%
Mississippi	6%	62%	29%	1%	3%
North Carolina	8%	68%	22%	2%	1%
South Carolina	9%	54%	36%	0%	0%
Tennessee	8%	64%	26%	2%	0%
Texas	6%	67%	22%	6%	1%
Virginia	21%	56%	21%	4%	0%
West Virginia	38%	46%	14%	2%	0%
Southern region	10%	59%	26%	6%	1%
U.S. including territories	13%	58%	25%	5%	1%

28. Administration for Children and Families (2008). Statutory Degree and Credentialing Requirements for Head Start Teaching Staff ACF-IM-HS-08-12. Retrieved from: [http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/standards/im/2008/resour\\_ime\\_012\\_0081908.html](http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/standards/im/2008/resour_ime_012_0081908.html)

29. The Child Development Associate credential, or CDA, is a degree specifically focused on early childhood development. It requires fewer credits than an Associate's Degree.

The same 2007 reauthorization required that by 2013, all assistant teachers in a Head Start program must have a CDA or be on track to receive one in two years. While the majority of assistant teachers had a CDA by the 2013-2014 school year, roughly 1 in 5 assistants in the south and 1 in 4 in the U.S. as a whole had not yet secured a CDA. Some states had made very strong progress, as shown in Table 7 – only 4 percent of Georgia’s assistants have not yet received their CDA – while others like Virginia and West Virginia still had more than 30 percent of their teachers not yet meeting this.

**Table 7: Assistant teacher credential distribution**

	Advanced Degree	Baccalaureate degree	Associate degree	CDA	No ECE Credential
Alabama	1%	7%	22%	43%	27%
Arkansas	0%	4%	16%	51%	29%
Florida	1%	9%	17%	56%	16%
Georgia	3%	9%	21%	64%	4%
Kentucky	1%	5%	10%	57%	27%
Louisiana	0%	6%	14%	53%	27%
Mississippi	1%	20%	50%	16%	13%
North Carolina	1%	10%	48%	22%	19%
South Carolina	1%	11%	32%	30%	26%
Tennessee	0%	8%	25%	47%	19%
Texas	0%	8%	13%	51%	27%
Virginia	1%	12%	19%	37%	31%
West Virginia	0%	4%	12%	49%	35%
Southern region	1%	9%	22%	46%	22%
U.S. including territories	1%	11%	22%	42%	24%

Head Start has always focused on fostering community, with efforts to employ members of the local community and funding skipping state governments to go directly to local grantees. An analysis of teacher and student demographics in Table 8 indicates that teacher ethnicity closely reflects child ethnicity, an encouraging step to ensuring community roots, building cultural competency, and giving students role models who look like themselves.

**Table 9: Average teacher salary**

State	Assistant teachers	Teachers, all degree levels	Teachers with CDA credentials	Teachers with Associates degrees	Teachers with Bachelors degrees	Teachers with graduate degrees
Alabama	\$15,753	\$23,160	\$17,016	\$20,064	\$24,222	\$25,897
Arkansas	\$16,709	\$26,473	\$21,691	\$23,837	\$28,604	\$32,873
Florida	\$19,960	\$33,628	\$21,163	\$24,824	\$35,601	\$42,601
Georgia	\$17,680	\$27,270	\$18,149	\$22,297	\$28,261	\$32,855
Kentucky	\$15,124	\$29,225	\$22,467	\$21,976	\$27,220	\$41,744
Louisiana	\$16,500	\$27,307	\$21,604	\$24,740	\$28,700	\$32,457
Mississippi	\$13,201	\$19,403	\$15,283	\$15,942	\$20,518	\$20,901
North Carolina	\$11,789	\$11,848	N/A	\$11,621	\$12,486	\$17,615
South Carolina	\$15,934	\$22,214	\$9,500	\$20,493	\$23,461	\$26,740
Tennessee	\$17,072	\$29,222	\$16,801	\$21,885	\$31,557	\$35,567
Texas	\$17,948	\$33,776	\$22,350	\$24,001	\$36,539	\$43,524
Virginia	\$18,737	\$31,922	\$27,745	\$26,475	\$33,235	\$41,678
West Virginia	\$19,121	\$32,518	\$17,057	\$21,068	\$31,691	\$44,204
<b>Southern Region</b>	<b>\$16,579</b>	<b>\$26,767</b>	<b>\$19,236</b>	<b>\$21,479</b>	<b>\$27,853</b>	<b>\$33,743</b>
<b>50 States + DC *</b>	<b>\$18,404</b>	<b>\$29,968</b>	<b>\$22,804</b>	<b>\$24,639</b>	<b>\$30,852</b>	<b>\$37,459</b>

\* These figures taken from NIEER's 2014 Yearbook, which also calculates salaries using PIR data.

About 2,500 lead teachers left Head Start classrooms in the South in the 2013-2014 year, about 35 percent of the turnover seen nationally. When asked why they left, trends in the U.S. and the South were similar, as shown in Table 10.

**Table 10: Reasons given for turnover**

State	Higher Compensation within the field	Change in job field	Other reasons
Southern region	30%	16%	54%
U.S. including territories	30%	15%	56%

Nearly one-third of teachers who left Head Start reported that compensation was the reason, with another 15-16 percent changing fields entirely. While some teachers may enter the classroom only to find out it is not the right fit for them, there is a larger concern that the logistics of Head Start and its compensation may be driving out talented professionals. This is a problem to varying degrees in the Southern states (full details can be seen in Table A-14 in the Appendix). For example, in both Alabama and Louisiana, more than 40 percent of teachers who left pursued higher compensation for other teaching positions; less than 20 percent of teachers who left in Mississippi and West Virginia did so for this reason. This is potentially a problem in states with established state-funded pre-K programs, where teachers may leave Head Start classrooms for higher compensation in other classrooms. Competition for qualified staff may be a side effect of failing to view early childhood as a cohesive system.

### **(health indicators)**

Head Start was created with a focus not only on education but on comprehensive services for families and children, which includes health screenings and referrals for students. These referrals are particularly important in helping families control children’s chronic health conditions, like asthma.

Nationally, Head Start programs report that the equivalent of 13% of students received treatment for a chronic condition in the last year (this figure is 11% in the South). Nationally as well as in the South, the majority of these treatments are for asthma, though in several Southern states, anemia is also a large issue; for example, 30% of children receiving treatment in Mississippi did so for anemia, compared to 37% for asthma. The anemia treatment rates are particularly high in states which

have a high African-American population in Head Start programs, suggesting these rates may be impacted by the high rates of a particular type of anemia – sickle cell – in the African-American population.<sup>30</sup> Table 10 provides details of health conditions nationally and in the Southern region; state-level breakdowns are available in Appendix A, Table A-15.

**Table 10: Reasons given for turnover**

State	Anemia	Asthma	Hearing Difficulties	Vision Problems	High Lead Levels	Diabetes
Southern region	14%	53%	8%	23%	1%	1%
U.S. including territories	14%	50%	8%	24%	3%	1%

While the majority of Head Start students begin the school year at a healthy BMI (66% nationally, 67% in the South), this still leaves large numbers of students at unhealthy BMIs, as shown in Table 11. Sixteen percent of Head Start students are obese at program entry in the South and nationally, while another 12 percent in the South (13% nationally) are overweight. On the other side of the spectrum, but still concerning, is the 4% of student nationally who are underweight. This percentage is 5% in the South, though Alabama and West Virginia each had 7%.

30. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2015). *Sickle Cell Disease: Data & Statistics*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Atlanta, GA. Retrieved from: <http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/sicklecell/data.html>.

**Table 11: Child weight indicators**

	<b>Underweight</b>	<b>Healthy Weight</b>	<b>Overweight</b>	<b>Obese</b>
Alabama	7%	68%	11%	15%
Arkansas	4%	65%	14%	17%
Florida	5%	65%	12%	18%
Georgia	5%	67%	12%	16%
Kentucky	6%	61%	15%	19%
Louisiana	5%	73%	10%	12%
Mississippi	5%	65%	13%	17%
North Carolina	4%	68%	12%	15%
South Carolina	5%	67%	12%	16%
Tennessee	4%	66%	13%	17%
Texas	4%	70%	12%	14%
Virginia	5%	65%	12%	18%
West Virginia	7%	70%	11%	12%
Southern region	5%	67%	12%	16%
U.S. including territories	4%	66%	13%	16%

Almost all children start the Head Start year with health insurance of some kind, with 95 percent of students in the U.S. and 96 percent of children in the South entering with coverage. This figure is slightly higher at the end of the year, when 98 percent of students both in the U.S. and regionally have insurance. Every state in the South indicated an increase in the proportion of children having insurance by the end of the year. This may be due to Head Start’s commitment to the whole child as well as its focus on connecting families with community resources. As can be seen in Table 12 below, the majority of Head Start children come into the classroom on the first day having met several health milestones, such as having insurance, access to health care, being up to date on the Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic, and Treatment (EPSDT) screening schedule, and having access to dental care. Impressively, these figures are even better by the end of the year, with several states reporting 100 percent rates on several of these metrics. This is no small feat in some areas. For example, less than half of Georgia’s Head Start students are up-to-date on their EPSDT schedules, but 91% are on schedule by the end of the year.

**Table 12: Child health milestones**

State	Children with health insurance		Children continuous Accessible Health Care		Up-to-date per state's EPSDT schedule		Children Continuous Accessible Dental Care	
	At enrollment	At end of enrollment year	At enrollment	At end of enrollment year	At enrollment	At end of enrollment year	At enrollment	At end of enrollment year
Alabama	97%	98%	85%	95%	67%	89%	89%	95%
Arkansas	96%	99%	94%	98%	50%	81%	86%	95%
Florida	99%	100%	100%	100%	59%	91%	83%	97%
Georgia	96%	98%	93%	99%	46%	91%	86%	97%
Kentucky	94%	97%	91%	96%	50%	88%	83%	95%
Louisiana	98%	99%	97%	98%	79%	94%	91%	95%
Mississippi	91%	95%	90%	94%	50%	93%	87%	93%
North Carolina	97%	100%	97%	100%	69%	96%	87%	100%
South Carolina	95%	96%	94%	95%	65%	89%	84%	89%
Tennessee	98%	98%	98%	98%	58%	90%	88%	96%
Texas	95%	98%	96%	99%	65%	89%	93%	98%
Virginia	95%	97%	95%	98%	73%	88%	89%	95%
West Virginia	92%	94%	94%	97%	79%	90%	85%	95%
Southern region	96%	98%	95%	98%	62%	90%	88%	96%
U.S. including territories	95%	98%	95%	98%	64%	90%	85%	95%

## (conclusions)

This paper provides a broad look at the characteristics of children served by Head Start programs in the South, as well as the families and teachers in these programs. While this paper does not provide in-depth recommendations on each of the characteristics explored, several trends in both Head Start and early childhood more broadly merit further discussion: length of program day; cultural inclusiveness; and socioeconomic diversity.

As noted above, Head Start nationwide offers a variety of operating schedules based on local capacity, need, and the desire to meet parent preferences. No one operating schedule dominates Head Start nationally, though in the South, there is a clear majority of center-based, full day programs offered 5 days per week. Not all Southern states offer the majority of their services on this schedule, though, as Kentucky and West Virginia enroll a significant number of children in full-day programs 4 days per week; several other states utilize part-day schedules 5 days per week. There is an increased focus in the early childhood education world on operating schedules, influenced heavily by parents' work schedules and the likelihood of greater academic gains.<sup>31</sup> The final Head Start revisions, announced in 2016, require that all programs phase in longer operating schedules, with 50 percent of slots provided for 1,020 per year by 2019 and 100 percent of slots on this schedule by 2021. The original proposed standards called for programs to operate full-day, 5 days per week, but the final standard allows for slightly more flexibility at the program level while also stressing the need to increase classroom time. While the federal government has provided some funds through the FY16 budget to maintain slots while expanding operating schedules, programs are likely to face a challenge in balancing their enrollment numbers with the cost of longer programming. The South provides a model in this area, as the rate of children enrolled in this schedule is significantly higher than the national figure. However, no Southern states currently enroll 100% of children on this schedule; moving programs consistently towards this goal while seeking to maintain the number of children served will require innovative thinking.

As a community-based program, Head Start has long been a champion of diversity and meeting local needs. However, U.S. demographics change rapidly as a result of birth rates, migration, and economic trends. It is perhaps never been more important for Head Start programs, both in the South and throughout the nation, to evaluate their current effort on cultural inclusiveness. There is no clear trend in racial demographics of Head Start students in individual Southern states, with some states overwhelmingly Black and others overwhelmingly White. Three other large racial groups are less represented in the South than they are at the national level: American Indian/Alaska Native; Asian; and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander. Hispanic/Latino students are the majority in only one southern state (Texas). Head Start programs must ensure that the cultural context of all children are met in their programs. This is particularly important in terms of language minorities. Nationwide, throughout the South, and in each Southern state, English is the primary home language for a majority of students. Spanish is the second most common home language. A variety of

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31. Holt, A. (2014). Making the hours count: *Exposing disparities in early education by retiring half-day vs. full-day labels*. New America Foundation: Washington, DC. Retrieved from: [https://static.newamerica.org/attachments/769-making-the-hours-count/Making\\_the\\_Hours\\_Count.pdf](https://static.newamerica.org/attachments/769-making-the-hours-count/Making_the_Hours_Count.pdf); Robin, K.B., Frede, E.C., Barnett, W.S. (2006). Is More Better? The Effects of Full-Day vs. Half-Day Preschool on Early School Achievement. NIEER Working Paper. National Institute for Early Education Research: New Brunswick, NJ.

other languages are reported in different states. While these languages tend to be reported by small numbers of families overall, this raises concerns as to whether programs are adequately equipped to meet the engagement needs of a family who speaks one of these languages.

While Head Start is intended primarily as a program to reach low-income children and those otherwise at risk of not being ready for school, the recent proposed revisions highlight the ability to use Head Start funds for mixed income settings. Mixing children of diverse background (including racial, language, and income) has been found to have significant benefits for children; in particular, studies of peer effects indicate that low-income children have improved learning from sharing a classroom with high income peers, while high-income students suffer no negative consequences of this arrangement.<sup>32</sup> Current Head Start regulations focus enrollment eligibility on children who come from families at or below 100 percent of the federal poverty level, but allow up to 35 percent of participants to come from families at a slightly higher income level (135 percent FPL) as long as it can demonstrate it is already meeting the needs of eligible families.

The proposed revisions would go further towards enabling programs to enroll mixed income groups in the same classroom; programs would “determine whether the characteristics of their communities would allow them to operate classrooms that include children from diverse economic backgrounds.”<sup>33</sup> Programs would also be given clear permission to enroll children who do not meet Head Start eligibility requirements through separate funding sources; this would include private parent fees, but could also potentially include other funds from public or philanthropic sources.<sup>34</sup> The Century Foundation has noted that a mixed-income Head Start model is closer to the original program envisioned by the “Father of Head Start,” developmental psychologist Edward Zigler. Zigler envisioned Head Start enrolling a 50-50 mix of low-income and middle-class students, in order to provide a more diverse learning environment.<sup>35</sup>

Many Head Start grantees already use Head Start funds to serve low-income children while creating integrated classrooms using other funding sources; however, data is not collected specifically on this structure, so it is difficult to estimate how widespread it is. The Rosemount Center in Washington, D.C. was heralded in a *New York Times* piece for its success in integrating children from diverse income backgrounds: “two-thirds of its children live in those [nearby] projects, and they’re eligible for Head Start and Early Head Start. The others come from well-off families. Their parents pay between \$9,600 and \$20,400 — reasonable by D.C. standards — with tuition highest for infants and toddlers. The waiting list hovers at 250, with half the hopefuls coming from the projects and half from the townhouses.”<sup>36</sup> While this center no longer operates a Head Start contract, it provides a

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32. Reid, J.L., Kagan, S.L., Hilton, M. & Potter, H. (2015). *A better start: Why classroom diversity matters in early education*. The Century Foundation: New York, NY.

33. Administration for Children and Families. (2015). “45 CFR Chapter XIII, Subchapter B. Head Start Performance Standards.” Department of Health and Human Services: Washington, D.C, p. 71.

34. Administration for Children and Families, 2015

35. Potter, H. (2015). 50 years on, *Head Start's best hope for its future may lie in an idea from its past*. Blog of the Century Foundation. Century Foundation: New York.

36. Kirp, D. (2014). The benefits of mixing rich and poor. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from: [http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/05/10/the-benefits-of-mixing-rich-and-poor/?\\_r=2](http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/05/10/the-benefits-of-mixing-rich-and-poor/?_r=2)

clear model for like-minded grantees. In the South, Greenville First Steps submitted an application to Head Start’s designation renewal system (“recompetition”) specifically focused on a mixed socio-economic model; they proposed to embed Head Start (and Early Head Start) classrooms in 16 sites at existing schools and private child care centers.<sup>37</sup> Mixed-income Head Start centers provide a compelling opportunity to maximize benefits for children; ICS strongly supports efforts to implement this model, particularly in areas of historic racial and socioeconomic segregation.

As Head Start celebrates its 50th anniversary, this paper seeks to paint a picture of what Head Start looks like in the Southern region. As states and localities focus on new and innovative ways to reach families in need and fund programs, Head Start continues the work it has done over the last five decades: providing comprehensive health and education services to some of the neediest families in America. Head Start continues to be shaped by the times – it grew significantly under the federal stimulus funds during the recession, it was threatened with enrollment cuts during sequestration, and it has renewed a focus on incentivizing quality through recompetition since 2012. The release of the revised Head Start Performance Standards usher in a new era for Head Start’s growth, and provide an opportunity for all those who work for families and children to recommit themselves to the needs of those served.

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37. Greenville First Steps Head Start and Early Head Start Application Funding Opportunity Number: HHS-2014-ACF-OHS-CH-R04-0693 CFDA Number 93.600.

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## **(appendix)**

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