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Head Start Participants, Programs, Families, and Staff in 2006

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Since 1965, the Head Start program has served low-income 3- and 4-year-old children and their families with comprehensive early education and support services. Programs provide services focused on the “whole child,” including early education addressing cognitive, developmental, and socio-emotional needs; medical and dental screenings and referrals; nutritional services; parental involvement activities and referrals to social service providers for the entire family; and mental health services. In 1994, the federal Early Head Start program was created to address the comprehensive needs of low-income children under age 3 and pregnant women.

All Head Start programs are required to complete the Program Information Report (PIR) on an annual basis.¹ Based on information reported through the PIR, this fact sheet describes the characteristics of Head Start children and families (including children in Early Head Start, the Head Start preschool program, and Migrant and Seasonal Head Start) and the services provided to them during the 2005-2006 program year.²

In 2006, the Head Start program served 1,080,627 young children and 10,825 pregnant women through 2,696 grantees throughout the country—about 26,000 more children and 340 more pregnant women than in 2005.³ Key findings from the 2006 PIR include:

Participants

- Most children (88 percent) received a medical screening as required by the Head Start Program Performance Standards. Twenty-one percent required follow-up treatment, and of those children, nearly all (91 percent) received that treatment.
- Increasingly, children in Head Start are receiving health insurance through public programs, even though 70 percent of families had one or both parents working in 2006. The percentage of children with private insurance declined to 10 percent in 2006, compared to 15 percent in 2002. Most children (78 percent) had health insurance through State Children’s Health Insurance Programs (SCHIP), Medicaid, or a combined SCHIP/Medicaid program.
- By the end of the program year, 93 percent of children had a medical home for ongoing care, and 84 percent had a source for ongoing dental care.
- Thirteen percent of enrolled children had a disability, 49 percent of whom were diagnosed prior to the Head Start year and 51 percent of whom were diagnosed during the program year. Among those children diagnosed with a disability, 96 percent received special education and related services.
- Among participants enrolled in Head Start, 40 percent were white, and 31 percent were African-American. Thirty-four percent were of Hispanic origin, regardless of race.

Programs

- The number of total funded Head Start slots dropped from about 924,000 in 2004 to about 910,000 in 2005, but saw a slight increase to 911,885 in 2006. The federal government funded about 8,500 more slots in 2006 than in 2005, but the number of slots funded through states and other sources dropped by about 6,500.
- Ninety-two percent of Head Start slots were center-based. An additional 5 percent were in home-based programs, which included weekly home visits and group socialization programs. Slots in family child care homes, locally designed programs, and combination programs each comprised 1 percent of all Head Start slots in 2006.

Families

- Seventy-one percent of children and pregnant women were from homes where English was the primary language, and 25 percent were from homes speaking primarily Spanish. Other languages each accounted for 1 percent or less of the total Head Start population.
- Seventy-one percent of families accessed at least one support service in 2006, up from 66 percent in 2005, with parenting education (42 percent) and health education (40 percent) accessed most frequently. Other services include substance abuse treatment and prevention; child abuse and neglect services; and mental health services.
- Forty-four percent of families included two parents, and 56 percent had a single parent.
- Most Head Start families (70 percent) included at least one working parent, and 14 percent of families included a parent in school or job training.
- Among families who needed full-day, full-year child care outside the Head Start program for their children, most children (61 percent) received care at home or at another home with a relative or unrelated adult. Eleven percent received care at a family child care home, 24 percent went to a child care center, and 4 percent of children received care through a public school pre-kindergarten program.
- Eighteen percent of Head Start families received cash assistance under the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program in 2006. The percentage of families receiving the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) increased to 50 percent in 2006, compared to 40 percent in 2002.

Staff

- Seventy-two percent of teachers had at least an Associate's Degree (A.A.) in early childhood education or a related field. In addition, 36 percent of teachers had a Bachelor's Degree (B.A.) or higher in early childhood education or a related field.
- Head Start teachers earned an average of \$24,737 in 2006, a 2 percent decrease from the previous year after inflation adjustment. Head Start teacher salaries were similar to the national average for public and private preschool teachers, which was \$25,900 in 2006, but fell well below the national average for kindergarten teachers—\$47,040.⁴

¹ For more information on Head Start Program Information Reports (PIR), visit www.pirweb.net.

² For more information on Early Head Start, see the fact sheet, "Early Head Start Participants, Programs, Families, and Staff in 2006," at www.clasp.org/publications/ehs_pir_2006.pdf. See also the policy brief *Supporting Families, Nurturing Young Children: Early Head Start Programs in 2006*, at www.clasp.org/publications/ehs_brief9.pdf.

³ The PIR collects data on all children and pregnant women who participate in Head Start at any point during the program year, including those who do not complete the year.

⁴ U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *May 2006 National Occupational Employment and Wage Estimates*, www.bls.gov/oes/oes_data.htm.