

Research Notes

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Head Start Programs and Teaching Staff in 2005

Since its inception in 1965, Head Start has served low-income children and their families with comprehensive early education and support services.¹ As part of their administrative requirements, all Head Start programs complete an annual Program Information Report (PIR). PIR data cover 3- and 4-year-old children served in the Head Start preschool program, children under age 3 served in Early Head Start, children birth to age 5 served in the Migrant and Seasonal Head Start program, and children served by the American Indian and Alaskan Native Head Start programs.

A summary of the 2004-05 Program Information Report data was the subject of a recent policy brief published by the Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP).² Within the information presented in the CLASP brief was descriptive data about Head Start programs and updated statistics about Head Start teachers' education and salaries.

Head Start Programs

In 2005, Head Start included 1,890 preschool programs, 741 Early Head Start programs, and 64 Migrant and Seasonal Head Start programs. The number of Head Start slots dropped slightly in 2005 to 904,106, down from 917,423 in 2004. The federal government funded approximately 10,000 fewer Head Start slots in 2005 than in 2004. The number of slots funded through states and other sources also dropped in 2005.

Determinations about the most effective means for delivering Head Start services—whether to administer services through a center-based or home-based model, or a combination of both—are made at the local level. Center-based programs may exist in a classroom operated by Head Start or through a partnership with a child care center that complies with Head Start Program Performance Standards. In keeping with the historical precedent, most Head Start program slots (91%) in 2005 were in centers. Additionally, 5% were in home-based programs, which include weekly home visits and group socialization programs. Less than 1% of program slots were in family child care homes.

Head Start Teaching Staff

As a group, Head Start teachers, assistant teachers, family child care providers, and home visitors, are racially and ethnically diverse: Forty-five percent are white, 29% are black or African-American, 4% are American Indian or Alaskan Native, 2% are Asian, and 1% are Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander. In the 2005 PIR data, there was a sharp increase in the percentage of teaching staff who identified themselves as bi- or multi-racial, other, or who did not specify their race. In 2004, 3% of staff did not specify their race, compared to 13% in 2005. Likewise, the percentage of staff identifying themselves as more than one race increased from 1% to 5% from 2004 to 2005. Similar to program participants, in 2005, the "Hispanic" category was removed from race and included as a separate question on ethnicity. Twenty-seven percent of teaching staff were Hispanic, and 29% were proficient in a language other than English, a rate that has remained relatively constant since 2002.

Level of Education

By legislative mandate in 1998, Congress required that at least 50% of all center-based Head Start teachers across the nation obtain at least an associate degree by September 2003. Collectively, Head Start programs met that mandate, and the number of teachers with degrees and credentials has continued to grow: The 2005 PIR reported that seven out of ten (69%) of Head Start teachers held an associate degree or higher. As shown in Figure 1, 33% had an associate degree, 31% held a baccalaureate degree, and 5% had a graduate degree. In 2005, 20% of teachers with associate degrees were enrolled in a baccalaureate degree program.

While the level of education among Head Start teaching staff continues to improve, salaries remained virtually unchanged in 2005.

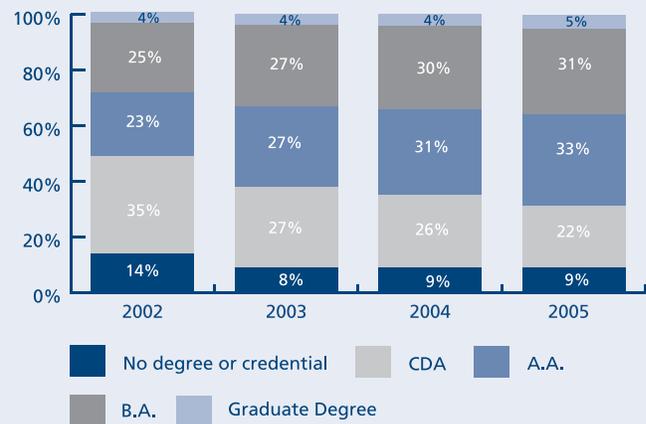
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In 2005, less than one-third of teachers (31%) had neither an associate nor a baccalaureate degree, a sharp decrease from the 2002 data that showed almost one-half of all teachers (49%) did not have such a degree. The 2005 figures show that among Head Start teachers without degrees, 71% had a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential or the state equivalent. One-half of teachers with a CDA were enrolled in either an associate or baccalaureate degree program, and among teachers without a degree or CDA, more than a quarter were enrolled in a degree program.

Salaries

While the level of education among Head Start teaching staff continues to improve, salaries remained virtually unchanged in 2005. On the whole, Head Start teachers earned an average of \$24,608 in 2005, compared to \$24,211 the previous year. Likewise, pay for teachers with a baccalaureate degree averaged \$26,522, comparable to the 2004 average. Head Start teacher salaries in 2005 mirrored the national average of \$24,560 for public and private preschool teachers. Despite the increasing number of Head Start teachers with baccalaureate degrees, their compensation remained well below the \$44,940 national average salary for kindergarten teachers working in public schools.

Figure 1. Head Start Teachers with Degrees and Credentials, 2002-2005



Note. The percentages do not add up to 100% due to rounding.

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Implications for Professional Development

Although educational and professional development needs vary according to local circumstances, some needs are cross-cutting: the need to improve the educational levels of current and prospective teachers, the need to provide training to Early Head Start teachers, and the need to provide training and resources for Head Start teachers working in family child care settings. These needs can be addressed through increased access to educational offerings specifically designed for Head Start staff, such as college coursework delivered at or near a local Head Start site, or through innovations in online educational technology.³

As in past years, Head Start programs continued to serve a diverse group of children and families. Despite Head Start's role in serving low-income children and their families, resource constraints have prevented many programs from reaching more children and providing higher quality through increased teacher qualifications and compensation. In 2005, as in previous years, teacher educational levels improved while salaries remained stagnant. As Congress takes up the issue of reauthorizing Head Start, an increased investment in enhancing teacher qualifications and pay should figure as an essential element of delivering high-quality comprehensive early childhood services.

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1. Office of Head Start (2006). *About Head Start*. Retrieved from <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/hsb/about/index.htm>.
2. Hamm, K. (2006). *More than meets the eye: Head Start programs, participants, families, and staff in 2005*. Washington, DC: The Center for Law and Social Policy.
3. Clark, D. (2004). *A long-awaited conversation: Dialogue to bridge the high-tech/high-touch gap in early childhood workforce preparation and professional development*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families.

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