

# Demographic Diversity & Enrollment of Priority Populations in Early Childhood Centers



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## Purpose

The Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) aims to assist families from low-income and underserved backgrounds with access to affordable early care and education (ECE), and CCDF includes guidelines about which families should be prioritized. Specifically, CCDF provides child care subsidies to qualifying families using federally specified eligibility criteria. However, less is known about whether ECE programs that accept subsidies serve diverse groups of children. We analyzed national data to understand:

- How ECE centers that accept child care subsidies align into groups based on demographic diversity of children served.
- Whether state CCDF policies predict membership in the identified groups.

**Priority populations are populations that merit particular attention, because they have historically struggled to access high-quality child care. These are some of the prioritized groups:**

- Children with special needs
- Children experiencing homelessness
- Children from high poverty areas
- Children from rural areas
- Infants and toddlers

## Key Findings

- There were three groups of centers:
  1. Centers offering a wider breadth of services for priority populations.
  2. Centers responsive to specific child or family needs.
  3. Centers with less emphasis on priority populations.
- State CCDF policies predicted differences between groups of centers.

## Data Sources

The 2019 National Survey of Early Care and Education

- The [NSECE](#) is a nationwide survey funded by the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation and was administered in 2019. We used data from the center-based provider survey, which included 3,474 centers.

The 2018 CCDF Policies Database

- The [database](#) includes child care subsidy policies across all 50 states. Policies are collected from state caseworker policy manuals and later verified by state administrators to ensure accuracy.

## Measures

### Priority Populations

Including children who were experiencing homelessness, infants, or toddlers as well as programs operating in higher poverty areas, rural areas, and offering non-standard hours of care.

### CCDF Policies

Including base subsidy reimbursement rate, whether the state has a tiered reimbursement policy, whether the center received subsidy funds through a state contract, and whether the state prioritized children experiencing homelessness and children with special needs.

### Child Demographic Characteristics

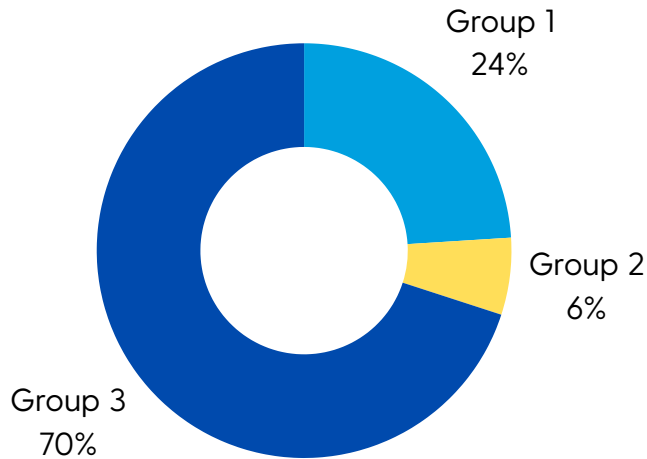
Including percentages of children enrolled who were Hispanic/Latino, non-Hispanic Black, and non-Hispanic White as well as children enrolled who had an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) .

## Analytic Plan

We used Latent Profile Analysis (LPA), which is a statistical technique that helps identify naturally occurring groups of programs. Additionally, we ran multinomial logistic regressions to predict group membership based on CCDF policy variables.

# Groups of Child Care Centers Based on Demographic Diversity and Enrollment of Priority Populations

Our findings show centers align into three groups:



## Characteristics of Centers

### Group 1: Wider breadth of services aimed at priority populations

- These centers have the highest likelihood of serving infants and toddlers and of offering care during non-standard hours.
- The majority of the centers in this group serve children experiencing homelessness and operate in areas of high poverty.
- These centers have the largest mean population of children who are Black.

### Group 2: Responsive to identified child/family needs

- These centers have the highest likelihood of serving children commonly targeted by public ECE programs (i.e., CCDF, Head Start, public pre-K), including children experiencing homelessness and from areas of high poverty.
- These centers have the highest mean proportion of children with IEPs and who are Hispanic.
- These centers are least likely to serve infants and toddlers.

### Group 3: Less emphasis on priority populations

- These centers have the smallest mean proportion of children with IEPs, the lowest likelihood of serving children experiencing homelessness, and are least likely to operate in an area of high poverty.
- These centers are not more likely to serve any child from a priority population but are more likely to serve White children than other groups.

## How CCDF Policies Predict Group Membership

State policies prioritizing enrollment of specific groups of children appear to be highly related to the likelihood of being in either Group 1 (Wider breadth of services aimed at priority populations), Group 2 (Responsive to identified child/family needs), or Group 3 (Less emphasis on priority populations).

	Whether Centers Serve Priority Populations		Whether Centers are in States that Provide Higher Reimbursement Rates for Priority Populations	
	Children with IEPs	Children Experiencing Homelessness	Children with IEPs	Children Experiencing Homelessness
Group 1	+	+	+	+
Group 2	-	+	-	-
Group 3		-		

**Note:** In the table above, + and - indicate that the group was significantly more or significantly less likely to enroll children from the italicized priority populations.

## Summary

Child care centers nationwide are serving diverse populations and meet a variety of identified family needs. However, some groups of centers appear to be more responsive to enrolling families from CCDF priority populations than others.

## Recommendations

### For states:

- Access to subsidies differs for some priority populations, with some racial/ethnic disparities in access. States may need to carefully consider how families are prioritized for subsidies, in order to promote more equitable access.
- Given that children with IEPs were served in the smallest group of centers, states may need to encourage centers to enroll children with special needs.

### For researchers and policymakers:

- Researchers and policymakers may need to identify packages or combinations of CCDF policies that can be leveraged to improve access based on demonstrated needs in individual states.

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