

Enrollment of Children From Historically Underserved Backgrounds in Center-Based Child Care Programs



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Purpose

The purpose of this descriptive study was to examine access to early care and education (ECE) for historically underserved populations, including children experiencing homelessness, children with disabilities, children requiring non-standard hours, infants, and toddlers. Specifically, we examined linkages between features of ECE centers, such as use of subsidies, which are types of financial supports that reduce child care costs for families, and their enrollment of children from historically underserved populations.

Key Findings

- Centers that accepted child care subsidies were more likely to enroll children from any historically underserved population.
- Current ECE policies could have unintended consequences for populations that lack opportunities for equitable access to ECE.

Data Sources

We used the 2019 National Survey of Early Care and Education (NSECE), which is a nationwide survey funded by the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation. We used data from the center-based provider survey, which included a sample of center directors (n = 6,917 providers) from a comprehensive list of ECE programs across all 50 states and Washington, D.C.

Measures

Child Demographic Characteristics

Percentage of children enrolled in the program who were Hispanic, Asian, Black, Other, White, and children with an IEP.

Whether the program served *any* children with an IEP, children experiencing homelessness, infants, and toddlers.

Measure of Access by Underserved Groups

Percentage of children enrolled in the program who were experiencing homelessness, had an IEP, needed non-standard hour care, infants, and toddlers.

Features of ECE Programs

Whether the center accepted subsidies, Head Start, or pre-K funding.

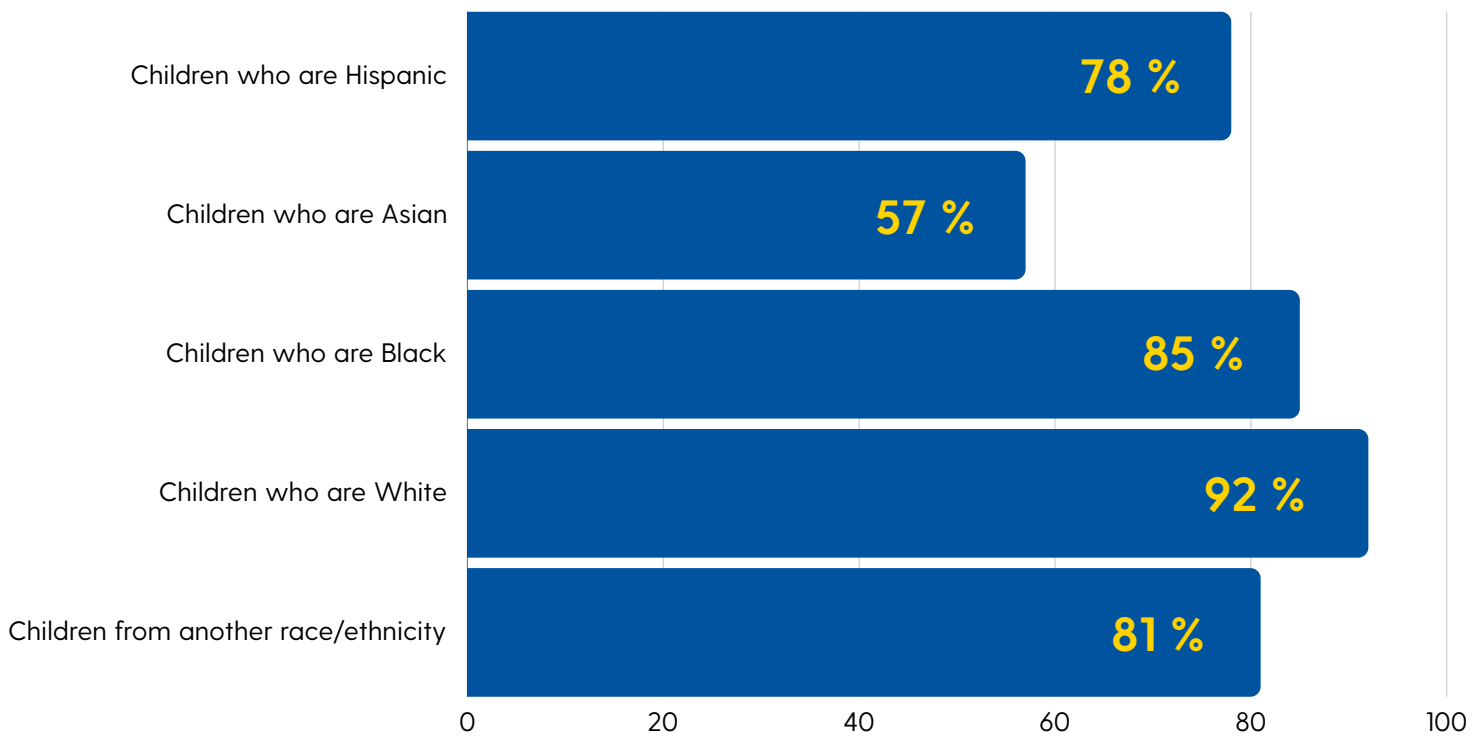
Whether the center was school-sponsored, part of a chain, or for-profit.

Whether the program was in a high poverty, urban, or rural area.

Analytic Plan

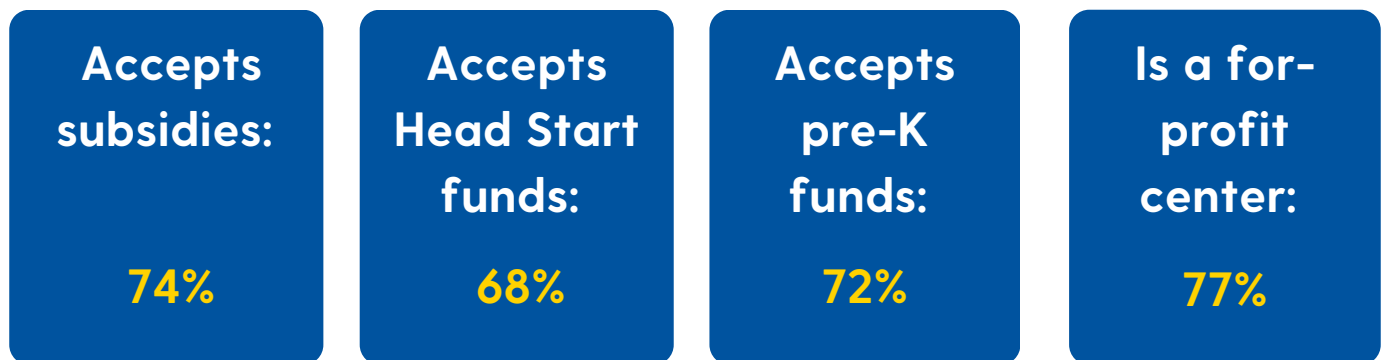
We calculated the frequency of centers that served children based on demographic characteristics and program location. Additionally, we ran logistic regression analyses predicting whether center features were associated with centers' enrollment of historically underserved populations.

Percentage of Centers (N = 121,345) That Serve at Least One Child From Varying Racial and Ethnic Backgrounds

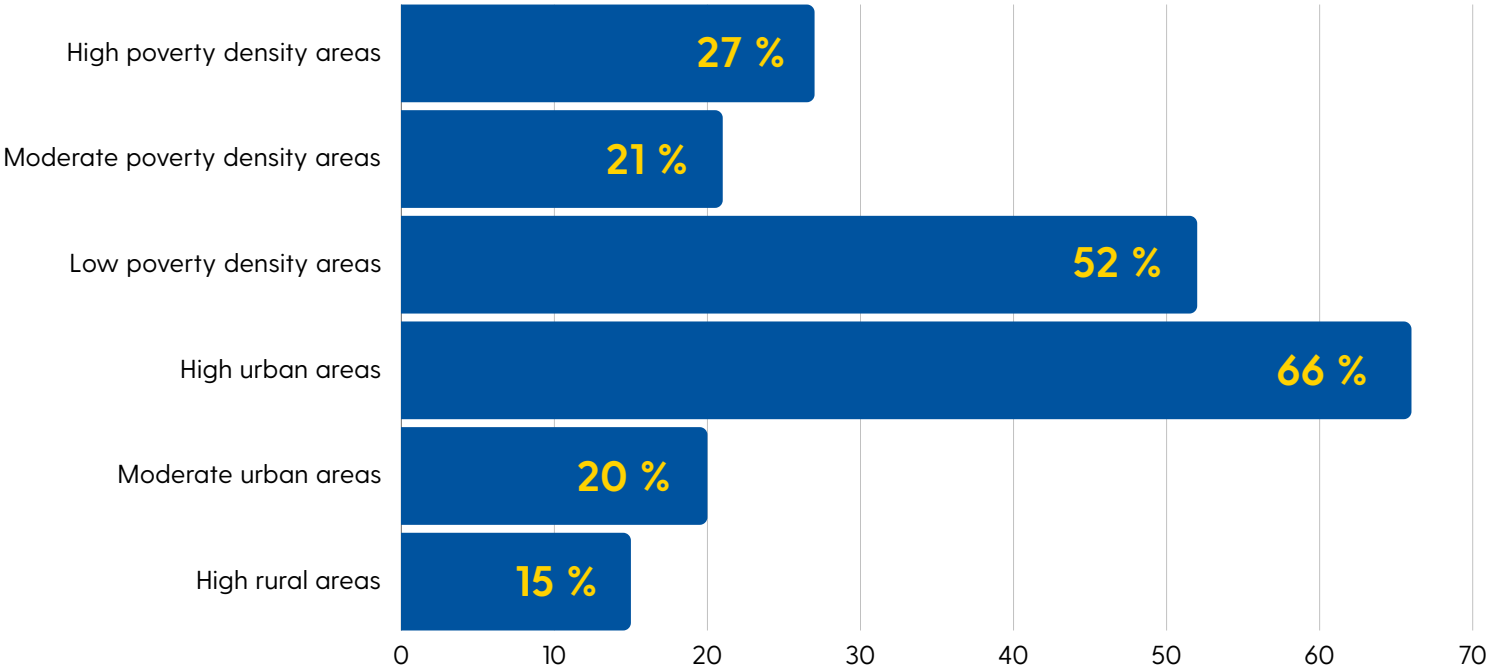


Our results also suggest that the historically underserved population that is served most often is **children with IEPs (64%)**. The next highest served population is **toddlers (61%)** followed by **infants (41%)** and **children who are experiencing homelessness (31%)**.

Percentage of Centers Serving a Child From Any Prioritized Population:



Percentage of Centers That Operate in Areas of Poverty & Rural and Urban Areas



The figure above highlights the majority of centers operate in **low poverty density areas** and are in **high urban areas**.

Center Characteristics That Are Associated With Enrollment of Historically Underserved Populations

Centers that:	Enrollment of Priority Populations				
	Children experiencing homelessness	Children with IEPs	Infants	Toddlers	Non-standard hour care
Accept subsidies	+		+	+	+
Accept Head Start funds	+	+		-	
Accept pre-K funds	+	+	-	-	
Are part of a chain	+	+	+		
Are sponsored by a school		+	-	-	
Are for-profit	-	-	+	+	+
Operate in a high poverty area	+		+		
Operate in a highly urban area		-		+	

Note: In the table above, + and - indicate that the center characteristic was significantly associated with being more or less likely to enroll children from the identified priority population.

Summary

Our descriptive study highlights linkages between eligibility priorities and access to ECE for historically underserved children. Our results suggest that programs receiving public funding appear to be more likely to serve children from historically underserved populations. However, certain types of funding may also reduce the likelihood of serving specific groups of children (e.g., infants, toddlers).

Implications

- Policies related to ECE eligibility can be leveraged to increase access for children who have been historically underserved.
- Decisions to prioritize certain populations for access may be linked with reduced access for other populations as a potentially unintended consequence.

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