THE STATE OF PRESCHOOL SURVEY METHODOLOGY

Respondent Universe

The respondent universe for this study is the state preschool administrators in the 50 states and the District of Columbia, plus the U.S. territories. Data are collected directly from these entities through a web-based survey form. More than one agency supports early childhood education programs in some states. As a result, some states have more than one respondent. Note that in some states, there are no state programs to support publicly provided early childhood education. As such, these states do not have state preschool administrators and they do not report data on the topic. Other administrators in these states, however, are contacted to update and confirm a state narrative on the status of other early childhood programs in the state each year.

Statistical Methodology

This is a universe data collection, employing a survey form. All states with publicly supported early childhood education have responded to the collection effort. In addition, information was sought from territories; Guam is the first and only territory to operate its own preschool program comparable to state-funded programs. Because the data collection is based on a universe of sample members, weighting adjustments and adjustments to variances for statistical test purposes are not necessary. Some statistical adjustments are made to the resulting data, however, to help unduplicate enrollment counts that can arise when the same child is enrolled in more than one publicly funded program. More specifically, when states report that they have included children with disabilities in both the special education counts and the counts of preschool-aged children who are in regular preschool programs, the preschool special education in state preschool count is subtracted from the preschool special education enrollment counts. Similarly, when states reported that they have included Head Start children in counts of children in state preschool and Head Start, the Head Start in state preschool count is subtracted from the Head Start enrollment. Children with disabilities enrolled in Head Start are also subtracted from the preschool special education enrollment count to avoid duplication.

Methods to Maximize Response Rate and Ensure Data Accuracy

Several steps have been taken to maximize the response to this data collection. First, the data are collected through a web-based, computer-assisted interview (CAI) program. This flexibility allows respondents to enter information as time and data availability permit. Further, respondents are offered opportunities to check previous years' entries at the beginning of data collection and to review the current year's entries before the data are published. The first data check acts both as a data quality control step, in terms of reminding respondents what kinds of data will be needed for the current year's collection, and as a reminder that the current year's data collection is about to begin. Allowing respondents to review current year's data entry before results are published acts as another data quality control check and also provides respondents with confidence that accurate data will be reported from their respective states, further garnering cooperation.

Once surveys are completed, data are checked by NIEER staff for entry errors, consistency with prior year's data, and consistency with information available from public documents (for example, with published state education agency regulations and guidance). Any apparent inconsistencies or errors are discussed with the respondents for resolution. When data have been compiled and summarized for publication in a public use data set and reports, the results are then sent back to the state administrators who provided the information for final verification.

Tests of Procedures and Methods

Each year, staff at NIEER review changes to policies that support early childhood education at the state and federal levels. Modifications are then made to the questionnaire and the related web-based CAI instruments to reflect these policy changes. In addition to the policy review, respondents are sent data from the previous year's data collection, allowing them to correct errors or to update information for the formal release of the data. NIEER staff actively solicit opinions regarding the clarity, usefulness, and availability of data requested by the survey from the primary respondents. This facilitates NIEER staff learning about new or changing policies from the provider perspective.

The CAI instruments undergo extensive testing prior to the initiation of data collection. Tests are run to verify that logical skips through the instrument are functioning as expected so that respondents are not asked questions that are not meaningful based on responses to prior questions. Prior to publication, respondents are sent current year answers for one last verification for accuracy before the data are released.

All initiatives included in the current report meet the criteria outlined by NIEER, which defines state preschool education programs as initiatives that are funded and directed by the state to support group learning experiences for preschool-age children, usually ages 3 and 4. For more information about these criteria, please see, "What Qualifies as a State Preschool Program?" on page 44. This report covers the same initiatives as the 2019 report with two exceptions. Utah began providing state funding for its Expanded Student Access to High Quality School Readiness Programs (ESA) during the 2019-2020 school year, which is included in the report for the first time. Montana's STARs Preschool Pilot Program ended after the 2018-2019 school year and is no longer included in the report.

The survey included yes or no questions, questions that asked state administrators to select which of several choices best described their program, and open-ended questions. The survey included questions on access, program administration, operating schedule, child eligibility and reassessment, program standards, statewide early learning standards, curriculum, personnel, resources, structured observations of classroom quality, child assessments, and important changes to the program since the last survey. New this year the survey also included questions about the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on state-funded preschool in the Spring of 2020 and during the 2020-2021 school year.

Collection of Non-Survey Data

Although most of the data in this report were collected through the surveys, there are a few exceptions. Total federal, state, and local expenditures on K–12 education in the 2019-2020 school year were calculated by NIEER based on data from the National Education Association's report, Rankings of the States 2019 and Estimates of School Statistics 2020. Total K–12 spending for each state includes current operating expenditures plus annual capital outlays and interest on school debt. This provides a more complete picture of the full cost of K–12 education than including only current operating expenditures, which underestimate the full cost. Our estimate of K–12 expenditures is also more comparable to total preschool spending per child because this funding generally must cover all costs, including facilities. Expenditure per child was calculated for each state by dividing total expenditures by the Fall 2019 enrollment. We estimated the breakdown of expenditure per child by source, based on the percentages of revenue receipts from federal, state, and local sources in each state.

The Administration for Children and Families (ACF) and the Office of Head Start in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services were the sources of data on federal Head Start spending and enrollment and Head Start enrollment supported by state match. In addition, some data were obtained through the Head Start Program Information Reports (PIR) for the 2018-2019 program year. Due to the pandemic, the 2019-2020 PIR was not collected. Where necessary, states were asked for clarification and/or additional information regarding state supplements to Head Start. ACF reports the total number of Head Start slots nationally and per state. The number of funded Head Start slots for 3- and 4-year-olds is estimated using the age-breakdown of the cumulative enrollment information from the PIR, applied to the number of slots reported by ACF. Enrollment in American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) Head Start programs is calculated in a similar way and included in each state's total. Enrollment in Migrant Seasonal Head Start (MSHS) is based on information provided in the PIR and is also included in each state's total. Total funding for each state includes Head Start as well as AI/AN and MSHS. Spending per child is calculated for each state by dividing the total Head Start spending by the funded enrollment, both provided by ACF. For MSHS, only total national spending and enrollment were provided by ACF and includes children birth to 5. To get state-specific estimates, we estimated the percent of children and funding in each state using information from the PIR. All data in Appendix B include AI/AN and MSHS when applicable. Information included in the report is specific to Head Start and does not include Early Head Start. Head Start data are provided in Appendix B.

Populations of 3- and 4-year-olds in each state were obtained from the Census Bureau's datasets and are shown in Appendix C. As in the past, NIEER used estimates for the July immediately preceding the program year (e.g., July 2019 for the 2019-2020 program year) to calculate percentages of 3- and 4-year-olds enrolled in state preschool programs, federal Head Start, and special education.

The U.S. Office of Special Education Programs provided data on special education enrollment in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Preschool Grants program (IDEA Section 619 of Part B) in the 2019-2020 program year. These data are provided in Appendix D.

In the 2020 *Yearbook*, NIEER again attempts to provide a more accurate estimate of unduplicated enrollments, whether in state preschool, Head Start, special education, or other settings, through a series of calculations. Because many children who are counted in special education enrollments are also enrolled in state preschool or Head Start programs, it is important to ensure that those children are not counted twice. Forty-three states and the District of Columbia reported including children in special education in their state preschool enrollment figures, while one state and Guam do not include these children in their enrollment count. Thirty-four of the 43 states and the District of Columbia were able to provide the number of children in special education who were also counted in their enrollment; another four multi-program states provided breakdown for some, but not all, programs. Those children were subtracted from the special education enrollment figure for the state, but remain in the state preschool enrollment figure in the enrollment pie charts and when calculating total enrollment across both programs. The remaining six states were unable to report special education enrollment numbers, and, therefore, estimates were used based on the average percent of special education students in state preschool and enrollment numbers for each program. Information from the PIR regarding special education students was used for three Head Start programs (See Table 4).

Three- and 4-year-olds enrolled in Head Start with an IEP or IFSP, as reported in the 2018-2019 PIR, were also removed from the special enrollment total used in the enrollment pie charts. As the PIR does not report a breakdown of special education students by age, estimates were based on total special education enrollment and the percentage of all Head Start enrollees who were 3 or 4 years old. 3-year-olds enrolled in Early Head Start programs were not included in this estimate. The 2018-2019 PIR was used again because the PIR was not collected in 2019-2020.

Beginning with the 2014-2015 *Yearbook*, 3- and 4-year-olds who were enrolled in both Head Start and state preschool were removed from the Head Start enrollment total used in the enrollment pie charts. In 2019-2020, 26 programs were able to report information on the number of children enrolled in state preschool who were also enrolled in Head Start. These children were subtracted from the total Head Start number but remain in the state preschool enrollment number for the enrollment pie charts and when calculating total enrollment across both programs. Thirteen programs reported that children were dually enrolled in Head Start and state preschool but could not report the number of children. And ten programs reported that it was unknown if children were dually enrolled. In these states, the number of children in state preschool and Head Start may be an overestimate.

Determination of State Rankings

States are given rankings in four areas: the percentage of 4-year-olds enrolled in state preschool (Access Ranking–4-Year-Olds), the percentage of 3-year-olds enrolled in state preschool (Access Ranking–3-Year-Olds), state spending per child enrolled (Resources Ranking–State Spending), and all reported spending per child enrolled (Resources Ranking–All Reported Spending). The measures of access for 3- and 4-year-olds were calculated, as described above, using state data on enrollment in the preschool programs and Census population data. When a state did not report separate enrollment numbers of 3-year-olds and 4-year-olds, the age breakdown was estimated by other means, such as using the average proportion of children enrolled in state preschool at each age in states that served both 3- and 4-year-olds, and provided data by age. State per-child spending was calculated by dividing state preschool spending (including TANF spending directed toward the state preschool initiative) by enrollment. All reported spending per child was calculated by dividing the sum of reported local, state (including TANF), and federal spending by enrollment. Beginning with the 2014-2015 report, we also provide an indicator of whether the state was able to report local and/or federal resources (see Table 6).

All states (and D.C.) that provided data were ranked, starting with "1" for the state with the highest percentage of its children enrolled in the state preschool education program or the state program that spent the most per child. Illinois, Texas, Vermont, and Wisconsin 4K did not report preschool spending for 2019-2020 (or 2018-2019 in the case of Vermont) so their spending rankings are based on estimates calculated using 2018-2019 spending data (and 2017-2018 in the case of Vermont). Guam is not included in the state rankings. States that did not serve children at age 3 receive notations of "None Served" on the ranking of access for 3-year-olds. Throughout this report, the District of Columbia is referred to by the term "state," creating a list of 45 states for rankings. The six states that did not fund a preschool initiative during the 2019-2020 school year are omitted from all rankings and instead receive notations of "No Program" on their state profile pages.

ESTIMATING FUNDING NEEDED FOR HIGH-QUALITY, FULL-DAY PRESCHOOL

Funding Estimates

Our estimates of the cost of providing high-quality, full-day preschool were based on the CPQ-Mini. The CPQ-Mini is a tool designed to help policymakers calculate accurate costs related to implementing high-quality preschool programs. It is specifically designed to illustrate the cost of meeting NIEER's ten quality standards benchmarks, in addition to other important drivers of program quality such as providing salary parity for all preschool teaching staff, basic state- and site-level administrative costs, as well as estimates for facilities, staff benefits, transportation, meals, and child assessments.

The CPQ-Mini was used in this report to assess the adequacy of current funding for public preschool in every state. The resulting estimates are intended to shed light on the funding needed not just to expand access to public preschool, but also to ensure that at least minimum quality standards are attained in both new and existing preschool seats. The per child estimates represent the cost for each state to meet all ten quality standards benchmarks in a full-day program, as well as to provide salary parity for all preschool teaching staff. These estimates were compared to the all reported spending in each state to calculate the "gap" between what a state currently spends and what it should spend.

Seat Gap Estimates

To estimate the number of preschool-age children currently served and unserved by public preschool, we used preschool and Head Start enrollment data and Census data (all previously described in this Methodology section). Census data provided estimates of the total universe of preschool-age children (3- and 4-year-olds) by state, as well as the percentage of children in each state living at or below 200% of the federal poverty level (i.e., low-income). Yearbook data told us how many children are currently served in state-funded preschool programs, and Head Start data (described previously in the methodology section) gave us the number of three- and four-year-olds being served in Head Start programs. Any children known to be served in both programs were counted only once.

To estimate seats needed for a public preschool program targeted to low-income children, we relied on Census estimates that approximately 68% of low-income children are currently unserved in public preschool programs and applied this percentage to the number of children living at or below 200% of poverty in each state. We deliberately did not compare the number of unserved low-income children in each state directly to the number of seats currently available in each state. This is because eligibility policies in many states extend beyond just low-income children, and although we recommend that states prioritize low-income children, we are not suggesting that states change existing eligibility policies that also prioritize other children in need.

To estimate seats needed to achieve a universal public preschool program, we assumed a 90% uptake rate of all preschool-age children in each state (i.e., that 10% of age-eligible preschoolers remain at home or attend private fee-paid programs). This is consistent with what we see in states with universal preschool programs, like Florida, Oklahoma and Vermont.

There are also limitations associated with the CPQ-Mini tool. Although the data and methodologies used to develop the CPQ-Mini were researched extensively, the tool has some shortcomings that are important to keep in mind. In general, these limitations have to do with costs that are not represented in CPQ-Mini estimates. The CPQ-Mini provides basic estimates for classroom square footage costs, but these estimates likely to do not capture the full cost of school district facilities housing preschoolers, which may actually be reflected in K–12 spending levels. Similarly, CPQ-Mini cost estimates include some basic administrative costs, but do not reflect in-kind support often provided by local education agencies in the form of building principals and other administrators who oversee preschool as well as other classrooms. Lastly, the above estimates include costs for child meals and transportation, however we recognize that these expenses may be funded by sources outside of state preschool funding (e.g. for child meals, National School Lunch Program/Child and Adult Care Food Program).