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 US 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. 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. 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 attending special programs in both the special education counts and the counts of preschool-aged children who are in regular prekindergarten programs, the preschool special education in state prekindergarten count is subtracted from the prekindergarten special education enrollment counts. Similarly, when states reported that they have included Head Start children in counts of children in state prekindergarten and Head Start, the Head Start in state prekindergarten count is subtracted from the Head Start enrollment. Children with disabilities enrolled in Head Start are also subtracted from the prekindergarten 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 user-friendly, 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 prior to data collection beginning and to review a 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. The checks flag inconsistent answers for respondents while respondents are entering data into the CAI. Prior to publication, respondents are sent current year answers for one last verification for accuracy before the data are released.

The survey form was developed by staff and faculty at NIEER with technical input and guidance from staff at NCES. NIEER is responsible for collecting the data and developing initial NCES reports, again with guidance from NCES. The annual State Preschool Yearbook, subsequently produced by NIEER, is not an NCES product and is solely the responsibility of NIEER.

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 39. This report covers the same initiatives as our 2014 report, with the addition of programs in Hawaii and Mississippi and additional programs in Connecticut and Massachusetts.

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, operating schedule, child eligibility and reassessment, program standards, statewide early learning standards, personnel, resources, program monitoring and evaluations, and important changes to the program since the last survey. New for the 2015 report, the survey also included two supplemental surveys focused on policies for supports to Dual Language Learners and the Workforce.

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 2014-2015 school year were calculated by NIEER based on data from the National Education Association's report, Rankings and Estimates: Rankings of the States 2014 and Estimates of School Statistics 2015. 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 2014 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 Head Start Bureau of the US 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 from the Education Commission of the States, State Pre-K Funding: 2014-2015 Fiscal Year Report and through the Head Start Program Information Reports (PIR) for the 2014-2015 program year. Where necessary, states were asked for clarification and/or additional information regarding state supplements to Head Start. Head Start data are provided in Appendix B. Additional calculations were done for the PIR data to ensure that children served on interim grants were included in the appropriate states.

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 2014 for the 2014-2015 program year) to calculate percentages of 3- and 4-year-olds enrolled in state preschool programs, federal Head Start, and special education.

The US 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 2014-2015 program year. These data are provided in Appendix D.

In the 2015 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 pre-K or Head Start programs, it is important to ensure that those children are not counted twice. Thirty-seven states and the District of Columbia reported including children in special education in their state preschool enrollment figures, while five do not include these children in their enrollment count. Twenty of the 37 states and the District of Columbia were able to provide the number of 3- and 4-year-olds in special education who were also counted in their enrollment; another five 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 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 pre-K and enrollment numbers for each program. Information from the PIR regarding special education students were used for three Head Start program (See Table 4).

Three- and four-year-olds enrolled in Head Start with an IEP or IFSP, as reported in the 2014-2015 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. Three-year-olds enrolled in Early Head Start programs were not included in this estimate.

New for the 2014-2015 Yearbook, 3- and 4-year-olds who were enrolled in both Head Start and state prekindergarten were removed from the Head Start enrollment total used in the enrollment pie charts. Only 20 programs were able to report information on the number of children enrolled in state prekindergarten who were also enrolled in Head Start. In two states, only a total number of children was reported. For these states, the number of 3- and 4-year-olds in Head Start was estimated using the percent of 3- and 4-year-olds in state prekindergarten. Another four programs reported that they do not serve any children who are also enrolled in Head Start.

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 initiatives 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. New this year, we also provide an indicator of if the state was able to report local and/or federal resources. All states 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 initiative that spent the most per child. States that did not serve children at age 3 receive notations of "None Served" on the rankings of access for 3-year-olds. Throughout this report, the District of Columbia is referred to by the term "state," creating a list of 43 states for rankings. The 8 states that did not fund a prekindergarten initiative during the 2014-2015 school year are omitted from all rankings and instead receive notations of "No Program" on their state profile pages.

New for the 2014-2015 Yearbook, states are also rated on the extent to which they have policies in place to support Dual Language Learners (DLLs) in state pre-k and the state pre-k workforce. States received a "+" if they reported that teachers are required to possess qualifications related to working with DLLs and their families and had at least two of the following other supports for DLLs: children are assessed in their home language, materials are provided in the family's home language, additional resources are allocated to serve DLLs, the state has ELDS with content to support DLLs, and the state sponsors or supports professional development focused on best practices for DLLs. States received a "✔" if they required at least three of the previously mentioned supports but did not require teachers to have DLL-related qualifications. Finally, states received a "–" if they reported having policies regarding fewer than 3 supports for DLLs. A similar rating system was used for state policies regarding the pre-K workforce. States were given a "+" if the state required pre-K teachers to be paid the same as K-3 teachers and if they had at least two other workforce supports, such as scholarships or loan forgiveness, mentoring, job-embedded professional development, paid planning or professional development time, or bonuses. States were given a "✔" if they offered salary parity or at least one other support and were given a "-" if they had two or fewer policies in place to support teachers.

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