



ADVANCING EQUITY

through

Head Start's Program Information Report

CHILDREN'S EQUITY
PROJECT

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INTRODUCTION

Systemic inequities in access to resources and opportunity affect children, particularly those who have been historically marginalized, before birth and throughout childhood, including within early care and education systems.

Black, Latine, Indigenous, and Asian American and Pacific Islander children, including those with disabilities, experience inequities in access to high quality early care and learning and have differential and often lower quality experiences within early care and learning systems. These inequities too often result in racial, disability, and language based disparities across a number of education, health and wellness outcomes.¹

Head Start has a long-standing commitment to serving children from under-resourced communities, and since its inception, has served over one million children and their families through early education and related services. Although Head Start prides itself on advancing equity for eligible children and families, and has notable standards that can concretely ensure programs achieve that goal, there are gaps and missed opportunities to advance equity in its data system.

To center equity across programmatic functioning, Head Start must operationalize equity in its data systems, including in and starting with the Program Information Report (PIR). Without an objective and uniform way of examining equity, it is difficult to evaluate how the program is fairing in providing equitable, positive experiences to children, especially those that have been historically marginalized, including Black, Indigenous, Latine, and Asian American and Pacific Islander children, those who are Dual Language Learners (DLLs), those who are speakers of different varieties of English (especially children who are Black and speak African American English), those who are immigrants, and those with disabilities.

The PIR is designed to provide data on Head Start's and Early Head Start's services to staff, children, and families. Its mandatory reporting and annual release make it the primary method for providing an up-to-date overview of Head Start programs at the national, regional, state, and grantee levels. On January 13, 2022, the Administration for Children and Families' Office of Head Start (OHS) requested public comment regarding proposed changes to the existing PIR. These proposed changes included creating questions to collect data on the collaboration activities with Part C

agencies and the average benefits provided to certain education staff as part of their compensation. There also was a proposal to add new questions regarding programs' participation in a local or state Quality Rating Improvement System and the licensing status for each center.

While these changes will be helpful in expanding our current understanding of the status of Head Start programs, questions specifically addressing equity are sorely lacking. Without indicators that specifically capture grantees' efforts to advance equity, the program, and the field more broadly, is missing a valuable opportunity to determine the extent to which Head Start is benefiting the groups of people it was designed to serve. **Head Start can begin addressing this gap by modifying the PIR to include a new equity section**, that specifically captures indicators on programmatic features that disproportionately affect the experiences of Black, Indigenous, Latine, and Asian American and Pacific Islander children, dual language learners and speakers of other varieties of English, and children with disabilities.

We recommend that OHS make PIR data accessible at the program and classroom level in order to more precisely understand whether children are receiving the fair, positive experiences they are entitled to in their classrooms and programs. While higher level data are important (e.g. grantee level), it does not provide a precise enough understanding of children's experiences.

In addition, we recommend that a new PIR equity section include new indicators, disaggregated by race, ethnicity, language, and disability, related to:

- **Language equity for dual language learners and speakers of other varieties of English**
- **Intersectionality and children with disabilities**
- **Equitable workforce wages and positions**
- **Disproportionalities in discipline and transitions**
- **Equitable services and positive experiences for families**

AVAILABILITY OF CLASSROOM, PROGRAM, & COMMUNITY LEVEL DATA

Currently, the PIR includes Head Start data at the national, state, regional, and grantee levels. Site and classroom level data are unavailable to the public. Without these more granular data, it is impossible to make accurate interpretations regarding children's experiences in the program. For example, one might view data at the grantee level to estimate teacher-child language match, but without classroom level data, it is impossible to understand children's actual exposure, and importantly, it is impossible to identify gaps in the delivery of the linguistically responsive services children are entitled to. It is also difficult to understand teacher-child's racial/ethnic match, which some research suggests is important for children's learning experiences

and outcomes.² In addition, as more programs blend and braid funds with federal, state, and local dollars, program and classroom level data can enable a greater understanding of socioeconomic and racial diversity at a level that influences children's experiences. Finally, grantee level information does not enable researchers and communities to understand where Head Start slots are specifically, and whether those slots align with community needs. More granular data could enable an analysis of the match between slot location and community needs, particularly considering the latest Census data available to the field.³ **All of these data should be disaggregated, at a minimum, by race, ethnicity, disability, and language.**

CURRENT DATA AND GAPS

Data is collected and posted at the grantee level. Data at the program and classroom level are not currently reported or public.

RECOMMENDATION

- ✓ All data should be disaggregated and reported at the classroom, program, site, and community levels, in addition to existing levels.

LANGUAGE EQUITY FOR DUAL LANGUAGE LEARNERS & SPEAKERS OF DIFFERENT VARIETIES OF ENGLISH

Latine, Black, Indigeneous and other children of color's language practices are usually considered less sophisticated than speakers of standardized English, despite no evidence of this harmful assumption.⁴ In terms of dual language learners (DLLs), research supports that access to instruction and social learning opportunities in their home language, alongside

English.^{5,6} DLLs who receive dual language instruction in early childhood outperform those who only receive instruction in English. Despite strong research supporting dual language instruction, most DLLs in early childhood receive English-only instruction and assessments. This creates an inequitable experience for these children, as they are denied from receiving

the bilingual services best aligned with promoting their social and academic success.⁷ Moreover, children who are speakers of other varieties of English, including Black children who are speakers of African American English (AAE), are often assessed and instructed using tools and approaches that do not validate their linguistic backgrounds.⁸ Consequently, they are more likely to face disadvantages in their learning experiences and be reported as underperforming, despite their linguistic strengths.⁹

The Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPSS) provide guidance on the best approaches to providing high quality early childhood education to children who are DLLs and guidance on supporting children from diverse linguistic backgrounds. These standards include ensuring that teachers and home visitors are implementing research-based teaching practices that support DLLs' development, and that if a majority of children in a class or home-based program speak the same language, at least one class staff member or home visitor must speak their language.

CURRENT DATA AND GAPS

The PIR currently collects data regarding the language(s) spoken by teachers and assistant teachers and the primary language of families at home, and the total number of children who are DLLs. With this data provided, one can analyze whether the language(s) and/or variety of English spoken by teachers and assistant teachers match children's primary language and/or variety of English spoken at home at the levels in which the data are provided. However, it is impossible to understand DLLs' exposure to bilingual teachers at the classroom level, a much more relevant data point. There also is no data indicating the types of home language supports DLLs are receiving in Head Start programs. Further, there is presently no way to identify the providers, children, and families who speak different varieties of English, such as AAE.

THE PIR SHOULD INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING NEW INDICATORS:

- ☑ Child and staff language background at the classroom and program levels
- ☑ The Classroom Language Model used at the classroom level
 - English with home language support (i.e., home language used for behavioral guidance and social interaction)
 - Home language as the foundation for English development
 - English-only instruction
 - Dual language instruction
 - 50% English, 50% home language
 - 90% home language, 10% English
 - 90% English, 10% home language
 - Other
- ☑ Position of staff responsible for providing home language support/instruction to DLLs
- ☑ Any specialized support for DLLs and speakers of other varieties of English, including African American English

INTERSECTIONALITY & CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

Head Start has been a national leader in the inclusion of children with disabilities, even predating IDEA. Still, three to five year old children receiving services under Part B 619 in the early care and education and K-12 education system more broadly, experience a multitude of inequities. For example, Black, Indigenous, and Latine children are less likely to receive early intervention or preschool special education services, which can be critical to supporting long term outcomes. What's more, over half of preschoolers with disabilities receive their services in settings separate from their peers without disabilities.¹⁰ Even when these children receive inclusive

services in early childhood, the quality and dosage of these services vary widely.¹¹ Black, Latine, and Asian American children are more likely to spend less time in general education settings than their peers in the K-12 system, and children with disabilities who are also DLL, are less likely to receive coordinated services to support both their bilingual and developmental needs.¹² For children who are DLLs with suspected disabilities, initial eligibility evaluations also might be delayed because there are limited providers who speak their home language.

CURRENT DATA AND GAPS

Presently, the PIR contains data regarding the total number of children referred for an evaluation to determine IDEA eligibility, the number preschoolers enrolled in the program who had an Individualized Education/Family Service Plan (IEP/IFSP), the number of children receiving infant and toddler Part C early intervention services, and the preschool primary disability (e.g., health impairment, speech language impairment, etc.). The largest gap in current PIR data collection is the lack of data that can be examined through an intersectional lens, enabling an analysis of race, language, and disability. That is, it is impossible to understand the experiences of dual language learners who have disabilities, or children of specific racial or ethnic groups with disabilities.

THE PIR SHOULD INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING NEW INDICATORS:

- ✓ Total number of children referred for an evaluation to determine eligibility under IDEA, number of children enrolled in the program who had an Individualized Education/Family Service Plan (IEP/IFSP), and children's primary disability, each disaggregated by race/ethnicity and the language(s) spoken at home.

WORKFORCE WAGES & POSITIONS THAT ARE EQUITABLE

The early childhood workforce is the backbone of a high quality early childhood education; yet, there are major inequities in teachers' access to higher education, lead positions, and salaries.¹³ Children enrolled in Head Start programs are more racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse than the workforce that serves them, nationally.^{14, 15} Moreover, pay disparities are evident even within the same position. Research from the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment indicates that Black Head Start teachers are compensated 78 cents less per hour than white peers for doing the same job, even after controlling for educational attainment.¹⁶ In the ECE

system broadly, teachers of color and teachers who are bilingual are more likely to be assistant teachers rather than lead teachers.¹⁷ Compounding these challenges related to the workforce in early childhood is the high rate of teacher turnover; a challenge that has been exacerbated due to the COVID-19 pandemic.¹⁸ Therefore, measuring the various dimensions of workforce equity, including disparities in pay and positions, as well as the racial, ethnic, and language diversity of the workforce, and their match to the children they serve, is vital in ensuring that the workforce in Head Start programs is well-equipped to serve a diverse group of children and families.

CURRENT DATA AND GAPS

The PIR currently presents data related to program staff and qualifications, the education and child development staff, and staff turnover. Grantee-level questions address professional development, education management and staff qualifications, family service staff qualifications, and the average salaries for the management, education, and child development staff. This data is not disaggregated by race, ethnicity, language, or disability. Without this information, equity in the workforce cannot be evaluated or addressed.

THE PIR SHOULD INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING NEW INDICATORS:

- ✓ All staff (e.g. education, child development, family service, or management staff) position and qualifications, disaggregated by race, ethnicity, disability, and language(s) spoken.
- ✓ All staff and management salaries disaggregated by race, ethnicity, and language(s) spoken.
- ✓ Turnover of education and child development staff disaggregated by race, ethnicity, and language(s) spoken, and reason for leaving.

DISPROPORTIONALITIES IN DISCIPLINE & TRANSITIONS

Exclusionary discipline, including suspension and expulsion, are associated with higher risks of school disengagement and high school dropout.¹⁹ Black children are more likely to experience harsh discipline, despite showing similar behaviors as white children.²⁰ The Civil Rights Data Collection indicates that Black boys represent 41% of public preschool suspensions, and Black girls represent more than half of public preschool suspensions among all girls suspended,²¹ but only represent 18% and 19% of male and female preschool enrollment, respectively.²² Children with disabilities and children who are American Indian/Alaska natives are also disproportionately affected,²³ as well as boys. Research indicates a host of factors

contribute to these racial disparities, including bias at the interpersonal and policy levels.²⁴ Although Head Start Program Performance Standards prohibit expulsions, short term suspensions and planned transitions are allowed. The PIR should require data collection on these short term suspensions and on planned transitions due to behavior, disaggregated by child gender, race, ethnicity, disability, and language background, in order to identify and address any racial disparities.

CURRENT DATA AND GAPS

No data are currently collected on this issue.

THE PIR SHOULD INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING NEW INDICATORS:

- ✓ Number of children who were temporarily suspended, disaggregated by race and ethnicity, gender, home language, and disability status at the classroom, program, grantee, and regional levels.
- ✓ Number of children who were transitioned to another program, disaggregated by race and ethnicity, gender, home language, and disability status at the classroom, program, grantee, and regional levels.

EQUITABLE SERVICES & POSITIVE EXPERIENCES FOR FAMILIES

Families are children's first, longest lasting, and most important teachers. Prenatally and throughout children's lives, parents from communities that have been historically marginalized experience greater systemic barriers across various facets of life, including health, wealth, employment, and education. Research indicates that families of color, including those who do not speak English at home and/or those of children

with disabilities, are less likely to have access to the high quality early learning experiences and wrap-around services necessary for future success.²⁵ Black women are three to four times more likely to die during or after childbirth due to the impact of systemic racism. Black, Latine, Asian, and Indigenous women are also more likely to experience postpartum depression, but have less access to mental health supports that are

culturally valid, meaningful, and effective.²⁶ Moreover, children who are particularly vulnerable, those in foster care and those who are homeless, benefit greatly from having their families and foster parents receive additional supports to aid their safety and well-being.²⁷

²⁸ These supports are particularly pressing for Black and Indigenous children and their families, as they are twice as likely to be in foster care and experience homelessness.²⁹ Caring for children requires caring for the adults who are raising them.

Family engagement and leadership have been centerpieces of the Head Start program since its inception. The HSPPS have requirements (and the program is funded) to support family advocacy and

support services for families, such as connections to housing, job training, and healthcare, and parenting supports. However, the data reported on the number of families, including pregnant mothers and families who are homeless, who received these wraparound services is not disaggregated by race, ethnicity, and language status. Collecting data that allows for an analysis of the potential racial disparities in access to and experiences with family services will ensure that Head Start programs can create strategic initiatives to reach out to families who are less likely to receive the support they need to promote their economic, health, and educational well-being, or who are more likely to have negative experiences with these services.

CURRENT DATA AND GAPS

Presently, the PIR collects rich information regarding families, including the total number of families, the best description of parental figures (e.g., biological parents, grandparents, relatives, foster parents, etc.), the types of wrap-around services families received, the number of fathers engaged. Specific sections are dedicated to reporting the number of pregnant women who received access to prenatal healthcare and the total number of families experiencing homelessness. However, none of these data are disaggregated, and there is no specific information on the types of services that foster parents or families experiencing homelessness receive.

THE PIR SHOULD INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING NEW INDICATORS:

- ✓ Types of family services received, disaggregated by race, ethnicity and language(s) spoken.
- ✓ Services offered to pregnant women disaggregated by race/ ethnicity and language(s) spoken.
- ✓ Services offered to foster parents disaggregated by race/ ethnicity and language(s) spoken.
- ✓ Number of women who received mental health referrals/ counseling postpartum and postnatally disaggregated by race, ethnicity and language(s) spoken.
- ✓ Services offered to families experiencing homelessness disaggregated by race, ethnicity and language(s) spoken.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We recommend a new equity section in the PIR include the following new indicators.

Availability of Classroom, Program, and Community Level Data

- All data should be disaggregated and reported at the classroom, program, site, and community levels, in addition to existing levels.

Language Equity for for DLLs and Speakers of Different Varieties of English

- Child and staff language background at the classroom and program levels
- The Classroom Language Model used at the classroom level
 - English with home language support (i.e., home language used for behavioral guidance and social interaction)
 - Home language as the foundation for English development
 - English-only instruction
 - Dual language instruction
 - 50% English, 50% home language
 - 90% home language, 10% English
 - 90% English, 10% home language
 - Other
- Position of staff responsible for providing home language support/instruction to DLLs
- Any specialized support for DLLs and speakers of other varieties of English, including African American English

Intersectionality & Children With Disabilities

- Total number of children referred for an evaluation to determine eligibility under IDEA, number of children enrolled in the program who had an Individualized Education/Family Service Plan (IEP/IFSP), and children's primary disability, each disaggregated by race/ethnicity and the language(s) spoken at home.

Workforce Wages & Positions That are Equitable

- All staff (e.g. education, child development, family service, or management staff) position and qualifications, disaggregated by race, ethnicity, disability, and language(s) spoken.
- All staff and management salaries disaggregated by race, ethnicity, and language(s) spoken.
- Turnover of education and child development staff disaggregated by race, ethnicity, and language(s) spoken, and reason for leaving.

Disproportionalities in Discipline & Transitions

- Number of children who were temporarily suspended, disaggregated by race and ethnicity, gender, home language, and disability status at the classroom, program, grantee, and regional levels.
- Number of children who were transitioned to another program, disaggregated by race and ethnicity, gender, home language, and disability status at the classroom, program, grantee, and regional levels.

Equitable Services & Positive Experiences for Families

- Types of family services received, disaggregated by race, ethnicity and language(s) spoken.
- Services offered to pregnant women disaggregated by race/ethnicity and language(s) spoken.
- Services offered to foster parents disaggregated by race/ethnicity and language(s) spoken.
- Number of women who received mental health referrals/counseling postpartum and postnatally disaggregated by race, ethnicity and language(s) spoken.
- Services offered to families experiencing homelessness disaggregated by race, ethnicity and language(s) spoken.

CONCLUSION

Since its inception, Head Start has provided young children from under resourced communities with high quality, comprehensive early childhood education. To continue building on Head Start’s legacy, it is important to have concrete ways of measuring the equitable access and positive experiences of all children, especially those who have been historically marginalized, such as Black, Latine, Indigenous, and Asian American and Pacific Islander children and children with disabilities.

Embedding indicators of equity and creating a new equity section in the Program Information Report will contribute to that goal, provide a more holistic understanding of how programs are faring in advancing equity, and identify shortfalls in programmatic operations to address potential racial disparities. In this brief we propose expanding the existing reporting by collecting and publishing program- and classroom-level data, reporting disaggregated data across different demographic variables across all indicators, and including a new equity section that captures linguistic equity for dual language learners and speakers of different varieties of English, intersectionality and children with disabilities, disproportionality in discipline and transitions, workforce equity, and equitable services and positive experiences for families. Revising the data currently gathered through the PIR will be key toward Head Start’s continued growth toward equity, and to ensure programs are well equipped to meet the diverse needs of all the children and families they serve.

ENDNOTES

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