

Research BRIEF

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A National Portrait of Head Start Children and Families: FACES 2014

INTRODUCTION

This research brief provides a national portrait of the characteristics, development, and well-being of children and families at the beginning of the Head Start program year, using recent data from the Head Start Family and Child Experiences Survey (FACES 2014). This brief highlights descriptive information from the Fall 2014 Data Tables and Study Design report (Aikens et al. 2017c). We address the following research questions:

1. What are the characteristics of children and families in Head Start?
2. How are families doing at the beginning of the Head Start year?
3. How are children doing at the beginning of the Head Start year? How does this vary by Head Start exposure (that is, newly entering children compared with those returning for a second year), the age of newly enrolled children, and race/ethnicity?

In addressing the first question, we explore the characteristics of children and families participating in Head Start, such as the age of the children, children's racial/ethnic background, home language, and household structure. We examine child and family characteristics to provide a national portrait of the participants the Head Start program serves.

For the second question, we turn to indicators of family well-being during the fall of the Head Start program year. Specifically, we examine parent education and employment, family perceptions of economic and psychological well-being (that is, financial strain, food security, and parental depression), home learning activities, and the frequency of joint book reading. We describe family well-being because Head Start programs aim to address the needs of families in addition to children given families influence child development.

To address the third question, we describe children's cognitive skills (language, literacy, and mathematics), body mass index (BMI), social skills, problem behaviors, and executive function at the beginning of the program year. For children's cognitive skills, we examine children who were assessed in English.¹ For the skills where standard scores are available, we compare Head Start children's average scores to others of the same age in the general population. We also examine differences in children's skills by Head Start exposure (that is, newly entering children versus children returning for a second year), the age of newly enrolled children, and race/ethnicity.² These comparisons are descriptive so they do not account for any other factors that might explain differences. By examining children's skills in the fall, we can gauge a starting place from which to measure children's progress during the year.

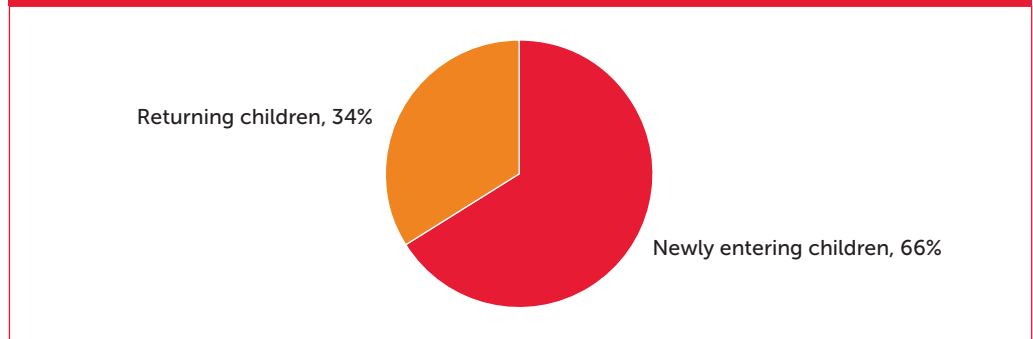
WHAT ARE THE CHARACTERISTICS OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES IN HEAD START?

A national portrait of the population Head Start serves provides information for Head Start to consider when assessing needs and setting national goals for the program. Information on child and family characteristics, including prior exposure to Head Start, child age, race/ethnicity, and home language, can help Head Start better tailor services to the needs of the population being served. In addition, household structure, including whether children live with both of their biological or adoptive parents, gives some indication of family needs and strengths in providing resources, caregiving, and attention to children.

Sixty-six percent of children are entering Head Start for the first time, whereas 34 percent are returning for a second year (Figure 1).³ Fifty-six percent of Head Start children are 4 years old and the rest are 3 years old at the start of the program year (Figure 2). Of children entering for the first time, 63 percent of children are 3 years old and the rest are 4 years old. Of those returning for a second year, 94 percent are 4 years old and the rest are 3 years old. About one third of Head Start children’s parents report that their child had participated in Early Head Start. Almost equal numbers of children in Head Start are female (51 percent) and male (49 percent).

Figure 1:

Two-thirds of children are entering Head Start for the first time

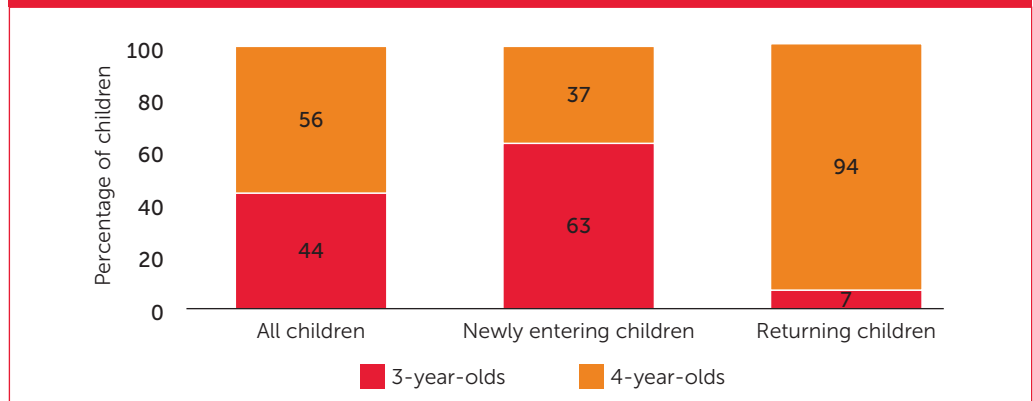


Source: Fall 2014 FACES Parent Survey and Survey Management System.

Note: Statistics are weighted to represent all children enrolled in Head Start in fall 2014

Figure 2:

Almost two-thirds of newly entering children are 3-year-olds



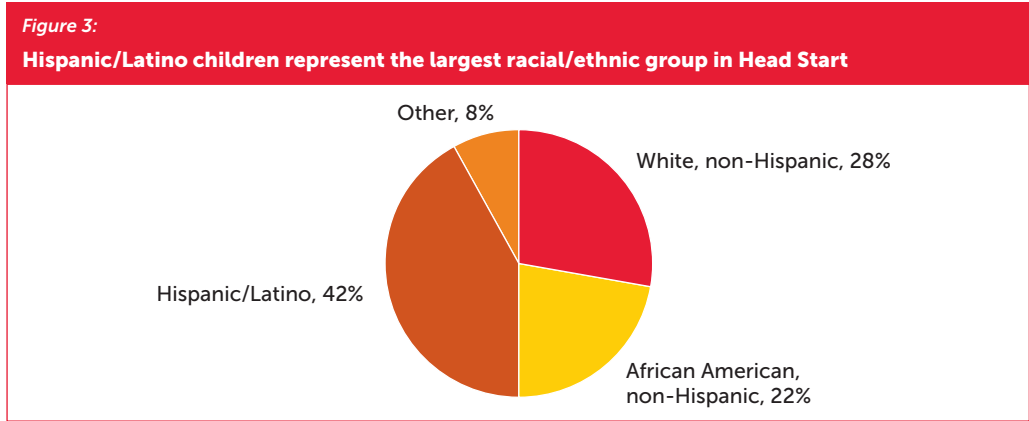
Source: Fall 2014 FACES Parent Survey and Survey Management System.

Note: Statistics are weighted to represent all children enrolled in Head Start in fall 2014.

Age as of September 1, 2014.

Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

Forty-two percent of all Head Start children are Hispanic/Latino; 28 percent are White, non-Hispanic; 22 percent are African American, non-Hispanic; the remaining children are of other races/ethnicities, including American Indian and Alaska Native, non-Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander, non-Hispanic, and multiracial and biracial designations (Figure 3).

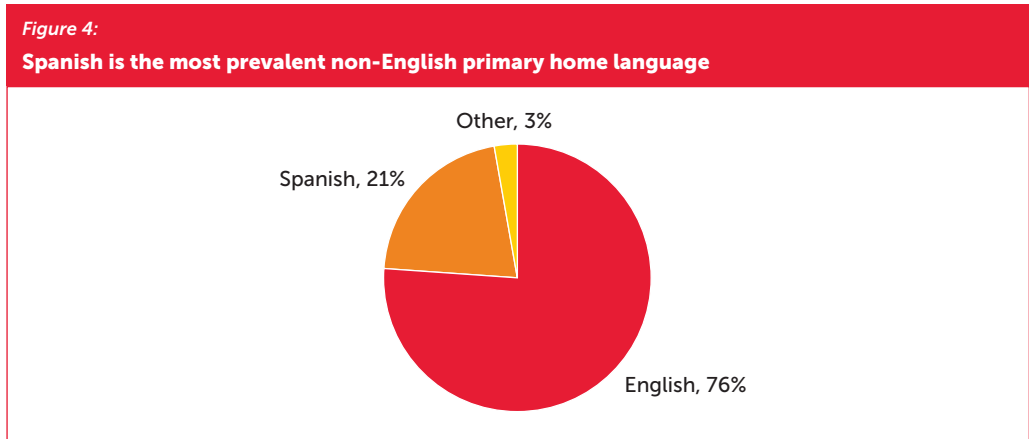


Source: Fall 2014 FACES Parent Survey.

Note: Statistics are weighted to represent all children enrolled in Head Start in fall 2014.

Other category includes American Indian and Alaska Native, non-Hispanic; Asian/Pacific Islander, non-Hispanic; and multiracial and biracial designations, among others.

Thirty-nine percent of Head Start children live in households where a language other than English is spoken, and 24 percent are primarily spoken to in a language other than English at home (primary home language).⁴ Spanish is the most prevalent non-English language and is the primary language spoken to 21 percent of children at home (Figure 4).



Source: Fall 2014 FACES Parent Survey.

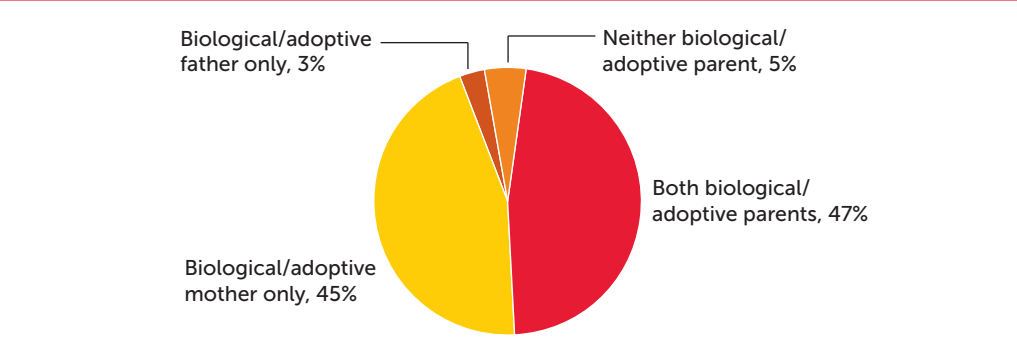
Notes: Statistics are weighted to represent all children enrolled in Head Start in fall 2014.

Other category includes African languages, Arabic, and Native American or Alaskan languages, among other languages.

Fewer than half of Head Start children live with both of their biological or adoptive parents (47 percent). Forty-five percent of Head Start children live with their biological mother and not their biological father (although other adults may be in the household; Figure 5).

Figure 5:

Nearly half of children live with both of their biological or adoptive parents



Source: Fall 2014 FACES Parent Survey.

Note: Statistics are weighted to represent all children enrolled in Head Start in fall 2014.

HOW ARE FAMILIES DOING AT THE BEGINNING OF THE HEAD START YEAR?

In fall 2014, FACES collected information on parent education and employment, family perspectives on economic and psychological well-being (that is, financial strain, food security, and parental depression), home learning activities, and reading frequency.

We examine parents' education and employment because they reflect the availability of resources to support their children. For instance, parents' education levels are associated with stimulating home learning environments and support for children's cognitive development (Harding 2015; Magnuson et al. 2009). We examine family economic well-being because prior research links higher family income with young children's higher achievement, fewer problem behaviors, and better executive function skills (Duncan et al. 2011; Yeung et al. 2002). On the other hand, family financial strain (parent perceptions of whether there is enough money to afford the kind of home, clothing, food, and medical care they need) has been associated with lower executive function over and above the association between poverty and executive function (Raver et al. 2013). Research findings also indicate that food insecurity puts children age three and younger at developmental risk and can be negatively linked with older children's academic outcomes, social skills, and weight status (Jyoti et al. 2005; Rose-Jacobs et al. 2008).

Additionally, we examine parents' depressive symptoms because these can influence how a parent interacts with their child.⁵ On average, depressed mothers are more likely to display withdrawn or intrusive parenting styles, compared to their non-depressed counterparts. These parenting styles are associated with children's social and emotional problems, such as internalizing and externalizing behavior problems and difficulties in reading social cues (Downey and Coyne 1990; National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement 2013; National Research Council and Institute of Medicine 2009; Shonkoff and Phillips 2000).

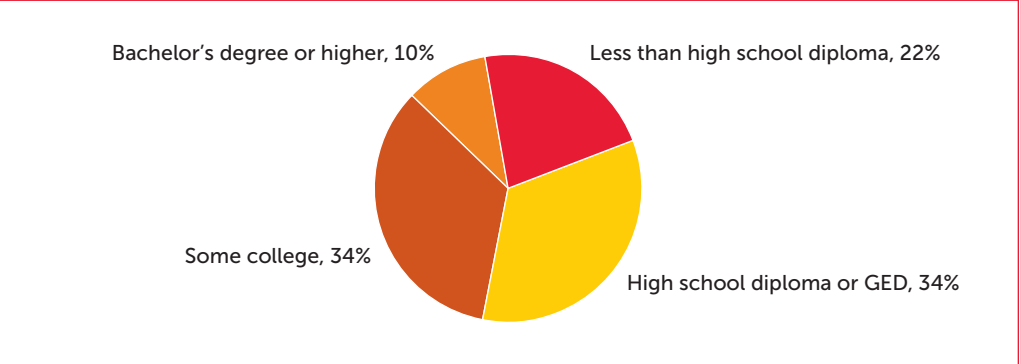
Lastly, we examine indicators of home learning activities and joint book reading frequency since these parenting behaviors are associated with children's cognitive skills, social-emotional development (more positive social skills and fewer problem behaviors), and positive approaches to learning (Bradley et al. 2001; Fantuzzo et al. 2004; Foster et al. 2005; McWayne et al. 2004; Weiss et al. 2006). Research also supports associations between early literacy development and family social interactions, especially among low-income samples (Dunst et al. 2006; Teale 1984). Family characteristics and well-being provide important information about children's developmental contexts and how Head Start programs might best serve children and their families.

Parent education and employment

Over three-quarters of Head Start children (78 percent) live with one or more parents with at least a high school diploma or GED (based on the parent with the highest education in the household). One-third (34 percent) of Head Start children live with at least one parent who has earned a high school diploma or GED; another third live with at least one parent who has some college, vocational, or technical training (34 percent); and 10 percent live with at least one parent who has a bachelor's degree or higher (Figure 6).

Figure 6:

More than three-quarters of children live with at least one parent with a high school diploma/ GED or higher



Source: Fall 2014 FACES Parent Survey.

Note: Statistics are weighted to represent all children enrolled in Head Start in fall 2014.

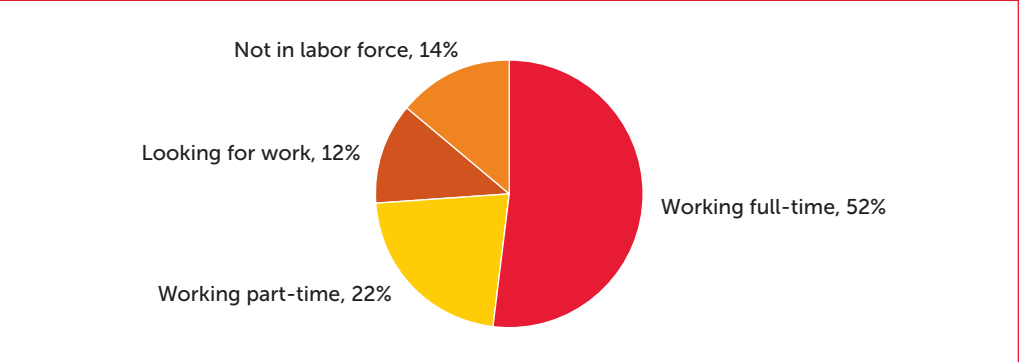
Some college includes college, vocational, or technical training.

Parents include both biological and adoptive parents. Households that include neither a mother nor a father are not included in this figure. Data refer to the biological or adoptive parent with the highest education in the household.

Fifty-two percent of children live with at least one parent who is working full-time, and 22 percent live with at least one parent who is working part-time (based on the parent with the highest level of employment in the household). Twelve percent of children live with one or more parents who are looking for work, and 14 percent live with one or more parents who are not in the labor force (Figure 7).

Figure 7:

Three-quarters of children live with at least one parent who is employed full- or part-time



Source: Fall 2014 FACES Parent Survey.

Note: Statistics are weighted to represent all children enrolled in Head Start in fall 2014.

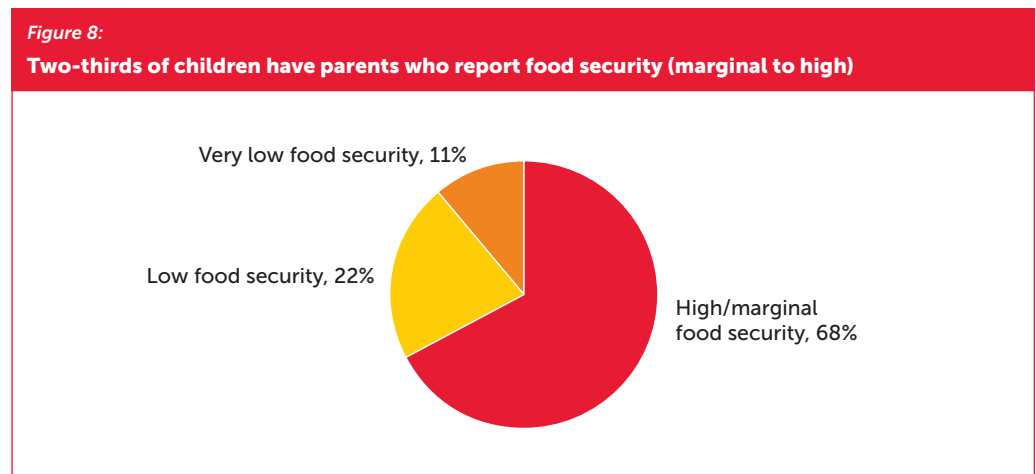
Parents include both biological and adoptive parents. Households that include neither a mother nor a father are not included in this figure. Data refer to the biological or adoptive parent with the highest level of employment in the household.

Family economic well-being

Two-thirds of Head Start children live at or below the federal poverty threshold. Thirty-six percent of children live between 50 percent and 100 percent of the poverty threshold, and 31 percent live below 50 percent of the poverty threshold.⁶

Nearly half of Head Start children (47 percent) have parents who report at least one financial strain in the past month, defined as being unable to afford the kind of home, clothing, food, and medical care they need.⁷ The most common financial strains include being unable to afford the medical care or home that they need (32 percent and 29 percent, respectively).

Two-thirds of Head Start children have parents who report food security (marginal to high), which indicates no or minimal food-access problems. Twenty-two percent of the parents report low food security, which includes reduced quality, variety, or desirability of diet but little or no indication of reduced food intake. An additional 11 percent report very low food security, which includes disrupted eating patterns and reduced food intake (Figure 8).



Source: Fall 2014 FACES Parent Survey.

Note: Statistics are weighted to represent all children enrolled in Head Start in fall 2014. Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

Parents' depressive symptoms

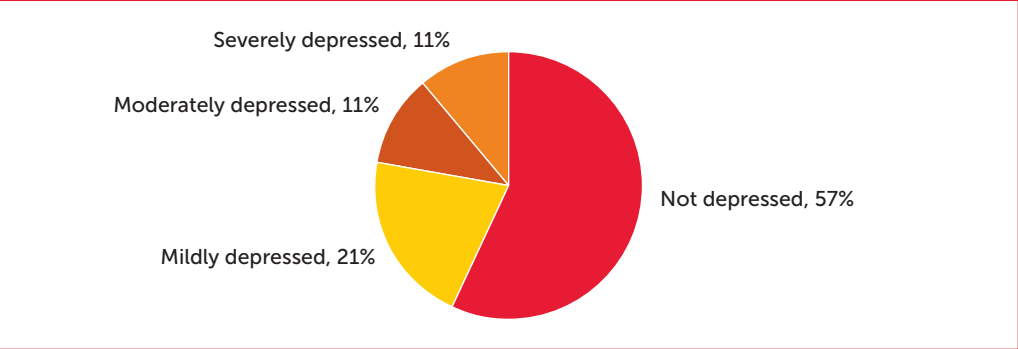
More than 40 percent of Head Start children have a parent who reports symptoms of depression. Parents of 11 percent of Head Start children report symptoms of severe depression, another 11 percent report symptoms of moderate depression, and 21 percent report symptoms of mild depression.⁸ The remaining 57 percent do not report symptoms of depression (Figure 9).

Home learning activities and reading frequency

More than 90 percent of Head Start children have family members who engaged them in home learning activities in the past week. For example, they: (1) told them a story; (2) taught them letters, words, or numbers; (3) played with toys or games indoors; (4) took them along on errands; (5) involved them in household chores; (6) talked about what happened in Head Start; or (7) counted different things with them.

Figure 9:

More than 40 percent of children have a parent who reports symptoms of depression



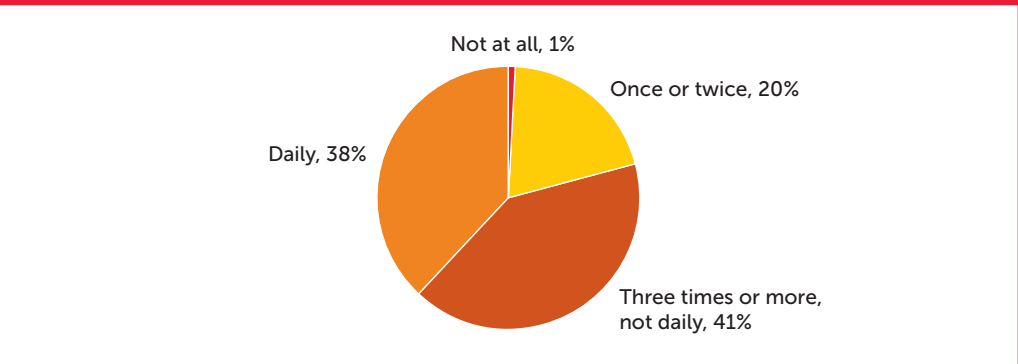
Source: Fall 2014 FACES Parent Survey.

Note: Statistics are weighted to represent all children enrolled in Head Start in fall 2014.

More than three-quarters (79 percent) of Head Start children were read to at least three times in the past week by a family member. Forty-one percent of children were read to three or more times, but not daily, and 38 percent were read to daily. About 20 percent were read to once or twice a week, and only about 1 percent were not read to at all (Figure 10).

Figure 10:

Most children were read to at least three times in the past week



Source: Fall 2014 FACES Parent Survey.

Note: Statistics are weighted to represent all children enrolled in Head Start in fall 2014.

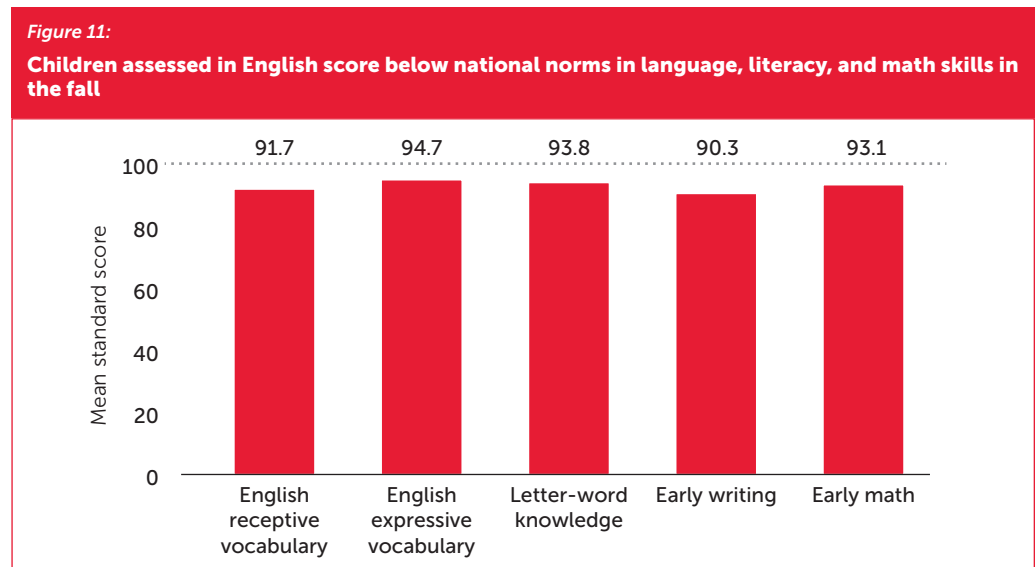
HOW ARE CHILDREN DOING AT THE BEGINNING OF THE HEAD START YEAR?

Next, we describe children’s school readiness skills at the beginning of the Head Start year. We also highlight differences in children’s skills by Head Start exposure (comparing children who are newly entering in the fall, having no prior Head Start exposure, to those returning to Head Start in the fall, having prior Head Start exposure), the age of newly enrolled children, and race/ethnicity. These comparisons present a descriptive picture and do not include any control variables for other factors that may account for differences between groups. In the fall of 2014, FACES included assessments of children’s cognitive skills (language, literacy, and mathematics), physical development (height and weight), social-emotional skills, and executive function. Information about measures of children’s development is included at the end of this brief in the box describing the Head Start FACES study. For some skills, we are able to draw comparisons between Head Start children and others of the same age in the general population. Fall child assessments also provide a starting place from which to measure children’s progress during the Head Start year. We examine fall to spring changes in

children's skills in the FACES Fall 2014-Spring 2015 Data Tables and Study Design report (Aikens et al. 2017a).

Children's cognitive skills

On average, Head Start children assessed in English lag behind other children of the same age in language, literacy, and math skills at the beginning of the program year.⁹ Standard scores allow for comparisons of an individual child's performance to national norms for other children of the same age. These scores have a mean of 100 and a standard deviation of 15. Specifically, Head Start children score close to two-thirds of a standard deviation below national norms in English receptive vocabulary (91.7) and one-third of a standard deviation below norms in English expressive vocabulary (94.7; Figure 11). Children score between one-third and two-thirds of a standard deviation below national norms on letter-word knowledge (93.8), early writing (90.3), and early math (93.1).



Source: Fall 2014 Direct Child Assessment.

Note: Statistics are weighted to represent all children enrolled in Head Start in fall 2014.

----- The dotted line indicates national norms.

Children's scores on direct assessments of cognitive skills vary at the beginning of the Head Start year by Head Start exposure, age of newly entering children, and race/ethnicity.

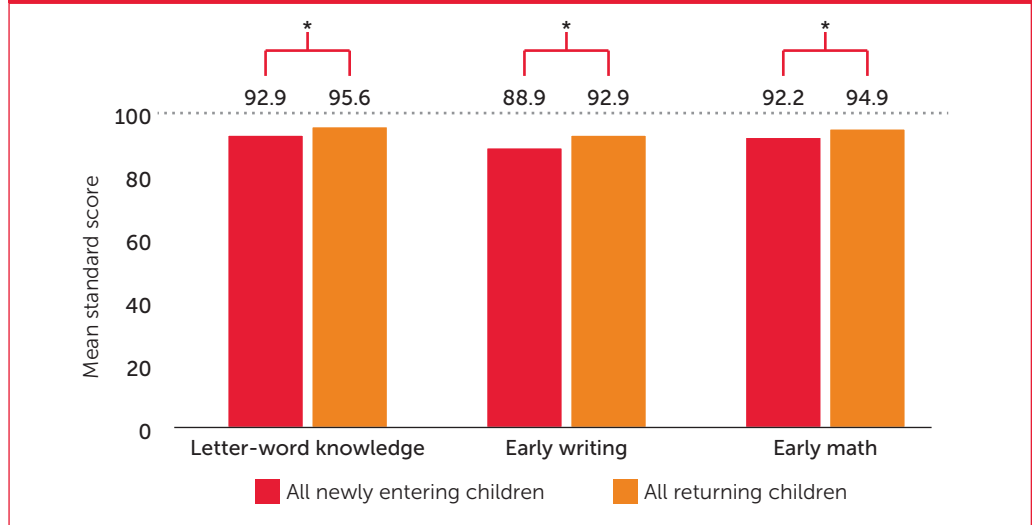
Among children assessed in English, there are differences in children's cognitive skills by Head Start exposure (that is, between newly entering children and those returning for a second year) and by age. Children returning for a second year (mostly 4-year-olds, with a small percentage of 3-year-olds; see Figure 2) score higher than those who are new to the program in letter-word knowledge (95.6 versus 92.9), early writing (92.9 versus 88.9), and early math (94.9 versus 92.2; Figure 12), with these scores being relative to other children of the same age in the general population. Returning children do not differ from newly entering children on English receptive and expressive vocabulary. Among newly entering children, 4-year-olds score closer to national norms for children of the same age than 3-year-olds in English expressive vocabulary (96.6 versus 92.9) and early math (95.6 versus 89.9), but there are no other significant differences in the cognitive skills of newly entering 3- and 4-year-olds.

There are also differences in children's cognitive skills by race/ethnicity among children assessed in English at the beginning of the Head Start year. White children score closer to others of the same age on English receptive vocabulary than African American and Hispanic/Latino children (97.0 versus 87.8 and 89.5; Figure 13). White children score closer to norms than Hispanic/Latino

children who, in turn, score closer to norms than African American children on English expressive vocabulary (99.1, 94.5, and 89.8, respectively). This same pattern is evident for early math (96.7, 92.7, and 89.4, respectively; not shown). African American children score closer to norms than White and Hispanic/Latino children on letter-word knowledge (96.7 versus 92.7 and 92.5). There are no significant differences in early writing by race/ethnicity.

Figure 12:

Returning children score closer to national norms compared to newly entering children in the fall



Source: Fall 2014 Direct Child Assessment, Parent Survey, and Survey Management System.

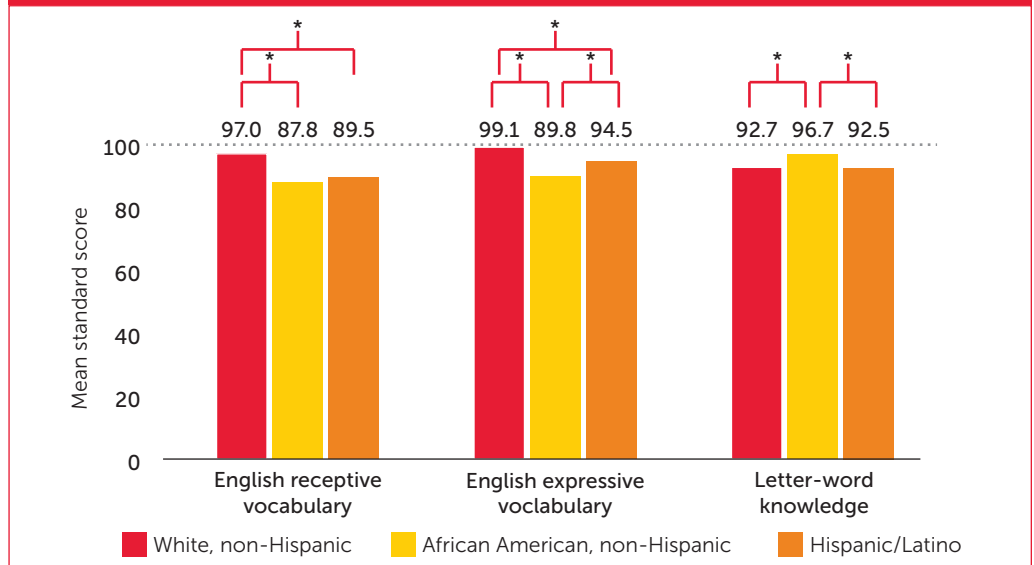
Note: Statistics are weighted to represent all children enrolled in Head Start in fall 2014.

----- The dotted line indicates national norms.

* Asterisk indicates that the difference between pairs is statistically significant at the $p \leq .05$ level.

Figure 13:

There are racial/ethnic differences in language and literacy skills in the fall



Source: Fall 2014 Direct Child Assessment and Parent Survey.

Note: Statistics are weighted to represent all children enrolled in Head Start in fall 2014.

-----The dotted line indicates national norms.

* Asterisk indicates that the difference between pairs is statistically significant at the $p \leq .05$ level.

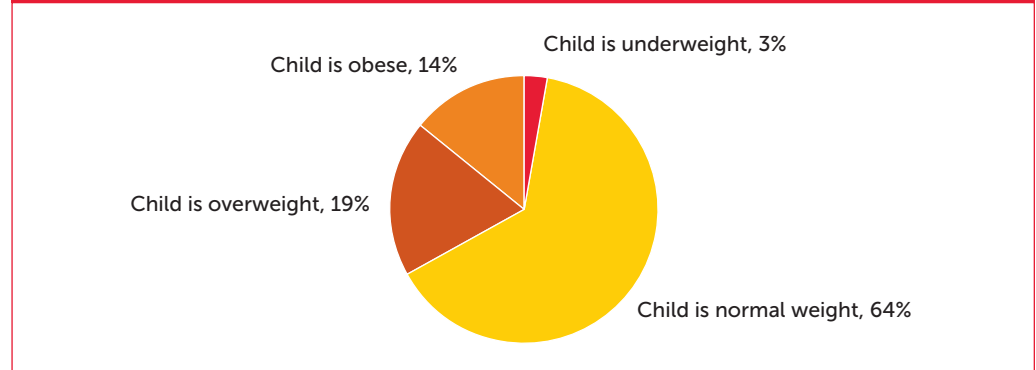
Children's BMI

At the beginning of the Head Start year, one-third of children are overweight or obese

(Figure 14).¹⁰ There are no differences in children's BMI scores by Head Start exposure, age of newly entering children, or race/ethnicity.

Figure 14:

One-third of children are overweight or obese in the fall



Source: Fall 2014 FACES Direct Child Assessment.

Note: Statistics are weighted to represent all children enrolled in Head Start in fall 2014.

Children's social-emotional skills

On average, Head Start children score 15.7 on teacher-reported social skills (with a range of 0 to 24), 1.7 on positive approaches to learning (with a range of 0 to 3), and 4.3 on total problem behaviors (with a range of 0 to 36). Children respond correctly on the pencil tapping executive function task 46 percent of the time, on average. Correct responses require the child to inhibit the impulse to copy the assessor and instead do the opposite of the assessor's pencil tapping. Children's social-emotional outcomes are measured with raw scores, which are counts or averages of the individual items reported by teachers or that a child completed. These are indicators of absolute performance rather than performance compared to children of the same age.

Children's scores on measures of teacher-reported social-emotional skills and direct assessment executive function scores vary at the beginning of the Head Start year by Head Start exposure, age of newly entering children, and race/ethnicity.

There are differences in teacher-reported social-emotional skills by Head Start exposure and age.

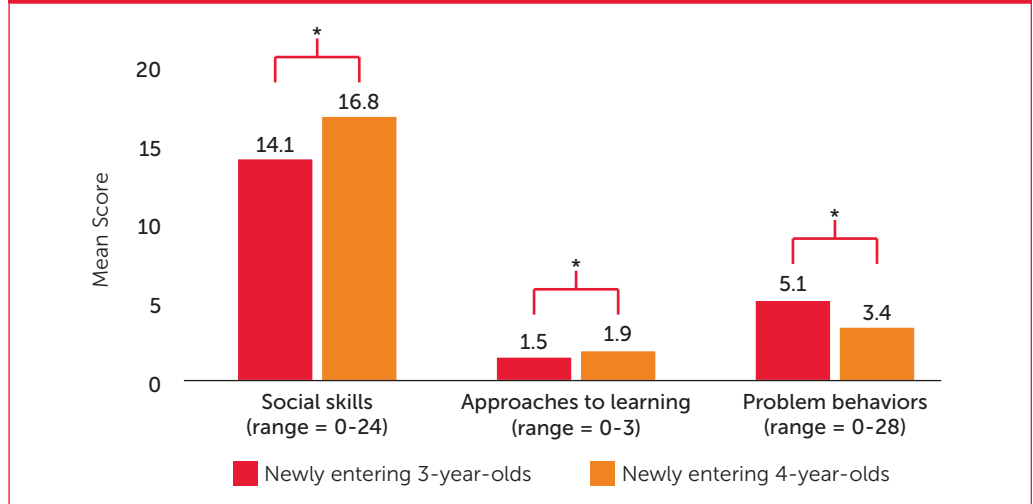
Children returning to Head Start have better teacher-reported social skills than those who are newly entering (16.7 versus 15.1) and more positive approaches to learning (1.9 versus 1.6), but they have similar scores on total problem behaviors. Among only newly entering children, teachers report that 4-year-olds have better social skills than 3-year-olds (16.8 versus 14.1); more positive approaches to learning (1.9 versus 1.5); and fewer total problem behaviors (3.4 versus 5.1; Figure 15). These differences in ratings of children's social-emotional development by Head Start exposure and age are likely due to developmental changes as children age; the scores are not normed.

Children's scores on measures of teacher-reported social-emotional skills vary by race/ethnicity at the beginning of the Head Start year.

Teachers report more positive approaches to learning for White (1.8) and Hispanic/Latino (1.8) children than for African American children (1.5). Teachers also report White children have better social skills (16.3) than Hispanic/Latino (15.6) and African American children (15.3), who do not differ from each other. In contrast, teachers report White children have more problem behaviors (4.9) than Hispanic/Latino children (4.4), but neither group is significantly different from African American children (4.6).

Figure 15:

Teachers report better social skills, more positive approaches to learning, and lower total problem behaviors for newly entering 4-year-olds compared to newly entering 3-year-olds in the fall



Source: Fall 2014 FACES Teacher Child Report, Parent Survey, and Survey Management System.

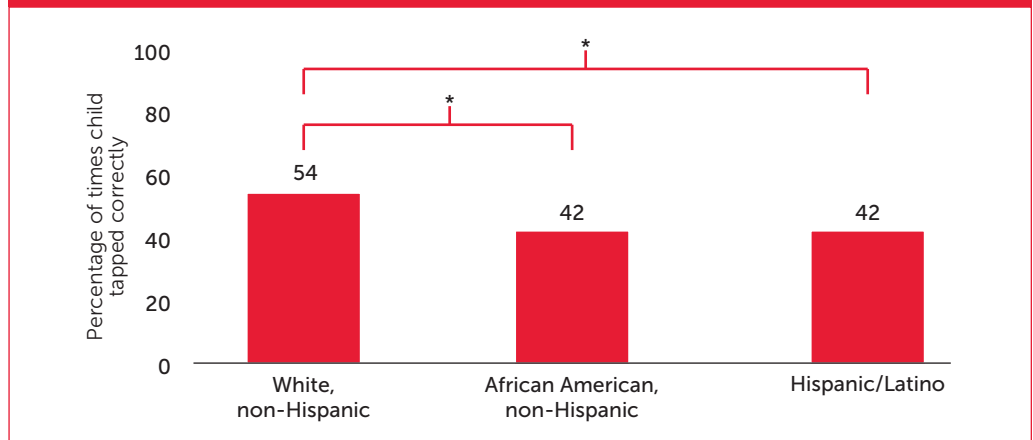
Note: Statistics are weighted to represent all children enrolled in Head Start in fall 2014.

* Asterisk indicates that the difference between pairs is statistically significant at the $p \leq .05$ level.

White children score higher on an executive function task than African American and Hispanic/Latino children. White children respond correctly 54 percent of the time, whereas African American and Hispanic/Latino children each do so 42 percent of the time (Figure 16).

Figure 16:

White children score higher on executive function than African American and Hispanic/Latino children in the fall



Source: Fall 2014 FACES Teacher Child Report, Parent Survey, and Survey Management System.

Note: Statistics are weighted to represent all children enrolled in Head Start in fall 2014.

* Asterisk indicates that the difference between pairs is statistically significant at the $p \leq .05$ level.

SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this brief is to provide a national portrait of the characteristics and well-being of children and families and children's school readiness skills at the beginning of the Head Start program year.

In fall 2014, Head Start served a diverse group of children and families who entered the program with a wide variety of strengths and needs. Specifically, we see that Hispanic/Latino children represent the largest ethnic/racial group of children in Head Start. Additionally, many children live in households where they are primarily spoken to in Spanish. We also find that nearly half of Head Start children live with both of their biological or adoptive parents, reflecting diverse family structures.

We also see variation in the economic strengths and needs of Head Start families. More than three-quarters of the children live with one or more parents with at least a high school diploma or GED. Around half of the children live with at least one parent who is working full-time. However, two-thirds of the children live at or below the federal poverty threshold, with more than 30 percent living below 50 percent of the poverty threshold. Similarly, almost half of children's parents report experiencing financial strain—such as being unable to afford the medical care or home they need. Furthermore, one-third of parents report some level of food insecurity.

We find that many Head Start parents face additional challenges, with more than 40 percent reporting some level of depressive symptoms, which may adversely affect their interactions with their children. Nevertheless, the majority of parents report engaging in a variety of home learning activities at the start of the program year. More than three-quarters report reading to their Head Start child at least three times in the past week. Head Start programs are encouraged to direct and tailor resources and services appropriately to meet the strengths and needs of specific families and children.

Children begin the Head Start program year with a range of prior experiences, skills, and needs. Examining children's skills in the fall provides a starting place from which to measure children's progress during the year. As measured through direct assessments at the beginning of the program year, we see that the language, literacy, and early math skills of Head Start children lag behind others of the same age in the general population, on average.

By examining differences in skills among subgroups of Head Start children, we can gain insight into possible ways to tailor services to support specific child needs. Based on differences in cognitive skills, African American and Hispanic/Latino children may need more support in English receptive vocabulary than White children. African American and Hispanic/Latino children may also need more support in English expressive vocabulary and early math than White children. Conversely, White and Hispanic/Latino children may need more support in letter-word knowledge than African American children. Teacher-reported social skills and direct assessment of executive function also vary by race/ethnicity, with White children and Hispanic/Latino children scoring higher than African American children on approaches to learning, and White children scoring higher than both other groups on executive function. Yet, on average, White children are only responding correctly on the executive function task slightly more than 50 percent of the time.

By comparing the skills of newly entering and returning Head Start children relative to others of the same age nationally, we can examine the skills of those children who have experienced a prior program year. Scores on several measures are higher for children returning for a second year than for those entering the program for the first time. Compared to newly entering children, children who previously attended Head Start have higher scores on letter-word knowledge, early writing, and early math, but show no differences in English receptive or expressive vocabulary scores relative to those in their age group. Teachers also rate children returning to Head Start as having better social skills and more positive approaches to learning compared to newly entering children. Among newly entering children, teachers report that 4-year-olds have better social-emotional skills than 3-year-olds.

Overall, this national portrait of the children and families served by Head Start at the beginning of the 2014–2015 program year underscores that the program is serving a diverse population of families and children with a range of strengths and needs for whom Head Start can tailor services. Responsive services often require racial, cultural, and linguistic diversity among Head Start staff and partnerships with community resources to provide services aimed at meeting families' educational, employment, health, and financial needs. Head Start children perform lower on cognitive skills

assessments, on average, than others of the same age nationally, and services should also be responsive in considering children's skills and development, such as the fact that returning children are closer to national norms than newly entering children. This national picture provides information that Head Start can consider when setting national goals for the program and provides a starting place for tracking children's progress.

HEAD START FACES

This research brief draws upon data from FACES 2014. FACES provides information at the national level about Head Start programs, centers, and classrooms, and about the children and families that Head Start serves. This brief is part of a series of reporting products describing data from the 2014–2015 round of FACES 2014. Other FACES 2014 products describe the study's design and methodology (Aikens et al. 2017c), the characteristics of dual language learner Head Start children and their families at the beginning of the program year (Aikens et al. 2017b), and changes in Head Start children's family environments and developmental outcomes across the program year (Aikens et al. 2017a).

Head Start is a national program that promotes school readiness by enhancing the social-emotional, physical, and cognitive development of children through the provision of educational, health, nutritional, social, and other services to enrolled children and their families. The program places special emphasis on helping preschoolers develop the reading, language, social-emotional, mathematics, and science skills they need to be successful in school. It also seeks to engage parents in their children's learning and to promote progress toward the parents' own educational, literacy, and employment goals (Administration for Children and Families 2015). The Head Start program aims to achieve these goals by providing comprehensive child development services to economically disadvantaged children and their families through grants to local public agencies and to private nonprofit and for profit organizations.

METHODS

For FACES 2014, we selected a sample of Head Start programs from the 2012–2013 Head Start Program Information Report, with two centers per program and two classrooms per center. Within each classroom, we randomly selected 12 children for the study. In total, 60 programs, 119 centers, 247 classrooms, and 2,462 children participated in the study in fall 2014. More information on the study methodology and measurement in FACES 2014 and tables for findings presented here are available in the Fall 2014 Data Tables and Study Design report (Aikens et al. 2017c). The sample used for this brief includes 1,908 children enrolled in Head Start in fall 2014.¹¹ All findings are weighted to represent this population.

MEASURES OF CHILDREN'S DEVELOPMENT

To assess children's cognitive skills, FACES directly administers norm- and criterion-referenced measures of language, literacy, and mathematics to the children. The assessment battery measures English receptive and expressive vocabulary using the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test, Fourth Edition (PPVT-4; Dunn and Dunn 2006) and the Expressive One-Word Picture Vocabulary Test—4th Edition (EOWPVT-4; Martin and Brownell 2010). The assessment battery measures children's letter-word knowledge, early writing, and early math skills in English by using the Letter-Word Identification, Spelling, and Applied Problems subtests from the Woodcock-Johnson Tests of Achievement, Third Edition (WJ III; Woodcock et al. 2001). Standard scores have a mean of 100 and standard deviation of 15. Children's height and weight are also directly measured for computation of body mass index.

Teachers report on children's cooperative classroom behavior or social skills, and their problem behaviors in the classroom using items from the Behavior Problems Index (Peterson and Zill 1986), the Personal Maturity Scale (Entwisle et al. 1997), and the Social Skills Rating Scale (Gresham and Elliott 1990). Teachers also rate children's approaches to learning with the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study—Kindergarten Approaches to Learning Scale (U.S. Department of Education 2002). A pencil tapping task (Blair 2002; Diamond and Taylor 1996; Smith-Donald et al. 2007) captures children's executive functioning in the direct child assessment. In the pencil tapping task, children are asked to inhibit the natural response to imitate the adult assessor exactly (or to tap repeatedly) and instead to keep in mind that the rule is to do the opposite of what the assessor does. Reported scores reflect the percentage of times the child tapped correctly. They can take on any value from zero to 100, with higher scores indicating better skills on the task. The task is only administered to children age 4 and older at the time of the direct assessment.

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ENDNOTES

¹ In this brief, children who are assessed in English comprise (1) children who most often use English at home, (2) children who most often use a language other than English or Spanish at home and who make 12 or fewer errors on the direct assessment language screener and therefore are assessed in English, and (3) children who most often use Spanish at home and make 12 or fewer errors on the direct assessment language screener and are primarily assessed in English (with some Spanish measures also administered). For more information on children's language paths in the direct child assessment, or about children primarily assessed in Spanish and children who receive an abbreviated assessment battery see the Fall 2014 Data Tables and Study Design report (Aikens et al. 2017c).

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- ²To assess whether there are statistically significant differences by Head Start exposure, age of newly entering children, and race/ethnicity, we conducted t-tests. Unless otherwise noted, all cited differences are statistically significant at the .05 level and lower.
- ³Prior Head Start exposure refers to children's participation in preschool Head Start and does not include Early Head Start.
- ⁴This characteristic is based on the parent's report of whether a language other than English is spoken in the child's home and whether the child's parent/guardian primarily uses this language when speaking with the child. Other FACES reports refer to children with a primary home language other than English as dual language learners or DLLs. This may differ from definitions used in other studies.
- ⁵FACES collects information on parent depressive symptoms from the respondent who completes the parent survey. In fall 2014, 84 percent of respondents were biological or adoptive mothers, 8 percent were biological or adoptive fathers, and the remainder were other household members.
- ⁶Household income is not used to estimate eligibility for Head Start. Head Start qualifying criteria are based on family (not household) income, and there are other (non-income) ways to qualify for the program. The federal poverty threshold for a family of four in 2013 was \$23,834.
- ⁷The financial strain scale is derived from four items that measure the extent to which a family feels they have enough money to afford the kind of home, clothing, food, and medical care they need. A family "reported a financial strain" if they disagreed or strongly disagreed that the family had enough money to afford a home, clothing, food, or medical care. A family "did not report a financial strain" if they agreed or strongly agreed that the family had enough to afford a home, clothing, food, or medical care.
- ⁸The FACES 2014 parent survey included the short form of the Center for Epidemiologic Studies–Depression Scale (CES-D), a psychosocial measure. The short form includes 12 items on a 4-point scale for frequency in the past week. Total scores range from 0 to 36. Scores ranging from 0 to 4 are coded as not depressed, from 5 to 9 as mildly depressed, from 10 to 14 as moderately depressed, and 15 and above as severely depressed. The CES-D is a screening tool and not a diagnostic tool, but scores have been correlated with clinical diagnosis.
- ⁹Most children, regardless of the language the child uses most often at home, have sufficient English ability to be assessed in English or primarily assessed in English at the beginning of the Head Start year (88 percent). Twelve percent were primarily assessed in Spanish in fall 2014. Fewer than 1 percent, who most often use a language other than English or Spanish at home, receive a shortened assessment battery (are administered the PPVT-4 and EOWPVT-4, and have height and weight measurements taken) in fall 2014.
- ¹⁰According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), a child is considered to be overweight when his/her BMI score is at or above the 85th percentile and below the 95th percentile for his/her age and gender, and obese if his/her BMI is at or above the 95th percentile for his/her age and gender.
- ¹¹In fall 2014, there were 2,462 children who participated in the FACES study. The sample included in this research brief is smaller because it excludes children that did not have a completed parent survey, child assessment, or teacher child report in the fall.

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