

Enrollment Rates of Young Children

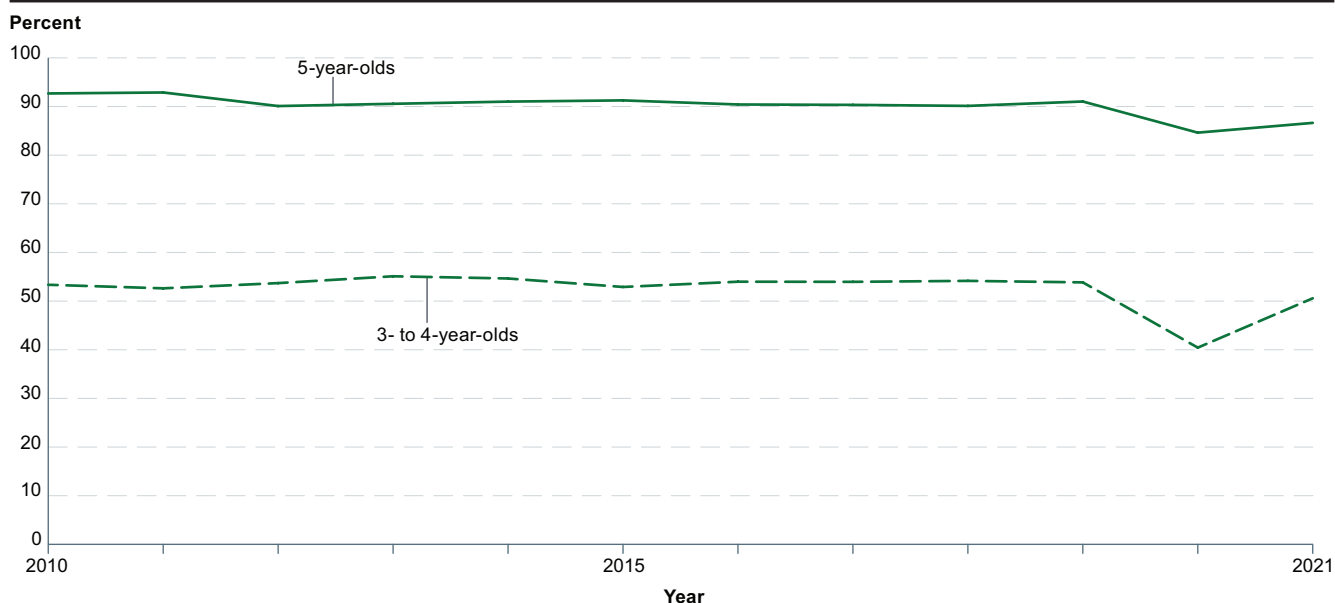
In October 2021, about 50 percent of 3- to 4-year-olds and 86 percent of 5-year-olds were enrolled in school. For both age groups, enrollment rates were lower than they had been in October 2019, prior to the coronavirus pandemic.

Formal schooling, such as kindergarten and preschool programs, is an important component of early childhood education. This indicator looks at the school enrollment rates of 3- to 5-year-olds using data from the Current

Population Survey (CPS), October Supplement. This indicator also compares enrollment rates by various child and family characteristics within the 3- to 4-year-old and 5-year-old age groups.

Overall Enrollment Rates

Figure 1. Percentage of 3- to 4-year-olds and 5-year-olds enrolled in school: October 2010 through October 2021



NOTE: Data exclude children living in institutions (e.g., prisons or nursing facilities).

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, Current Population Survey (CPS), October, 2010 through 2021. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2022*, table 202.20.

In October 2021, about 63 percent of 3- to 5-year-olds were enrolled in school overall. The enrollment rate was higher for 5-year-olds than for 3- to 4-year-olds (86 vs. 50 percent).¹ For both age groups, enrollment rates were lower than they had been in October 2019, prior to the coronavirus pandemic. A closer examination of the changes in enrollment rates over time shows the following:

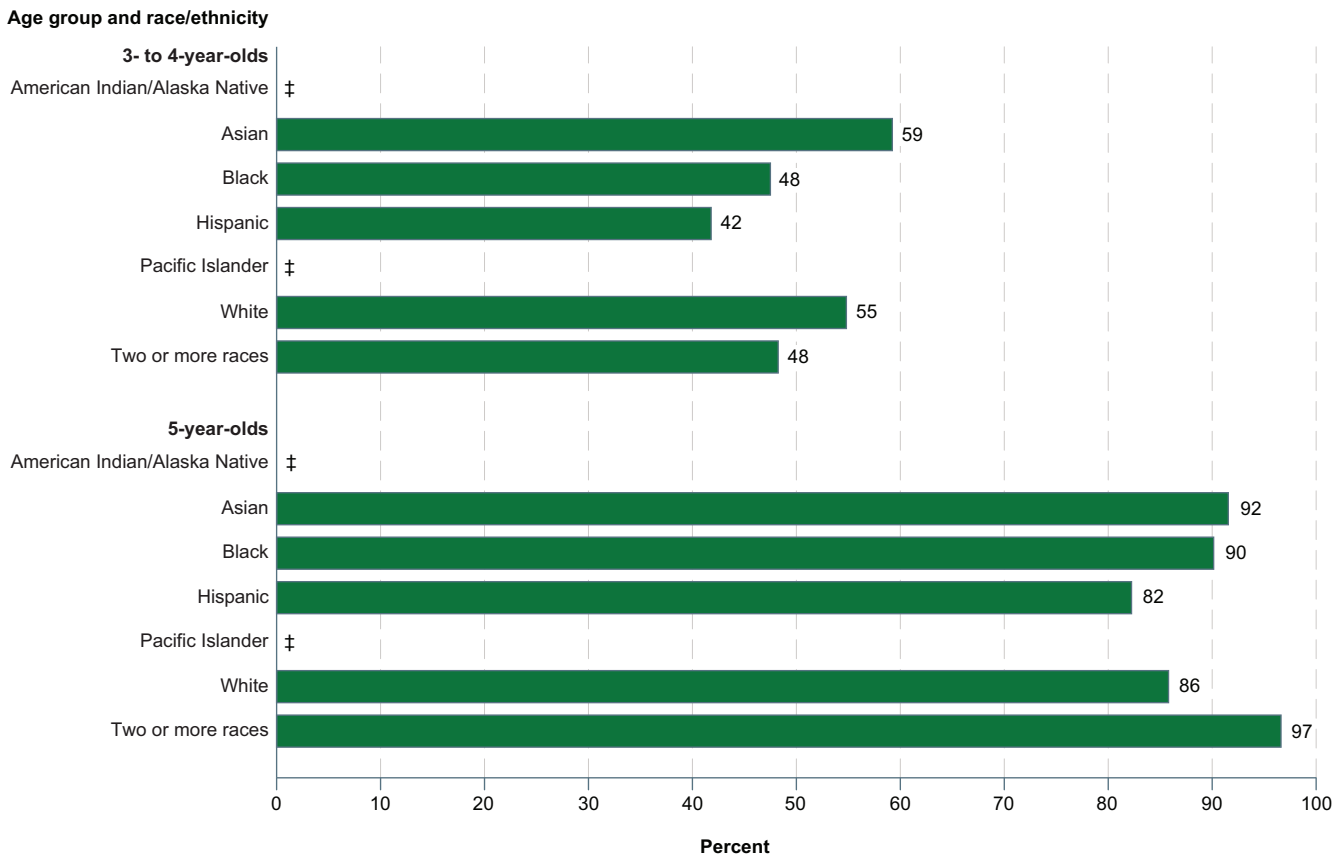
- For both age groups, enrollment rates in October 2019 were not measurably different from those in October 2010.²
- Between October 2019 and October 2020, enrollment rates decreased for both age groups: the rate for 5-year-

olds fell 6 percentage points (from 91 to 84 percent), while the rate for 3- to 4-year-olds fell 13 percentage points (from 54 to 40 percent).³

- Between October 2020 and October 2021, the enrollment rate increased for 3- to 4-year-olds only, by 10 percentage points (from 40 to 50 percent).
- For both age groups, enrollment rates in October 2021 remained lower than in October 2019, despite the 10-percentage-point recovery from October 2020 to October 2021 for 3- to 4-year-olds.

Enrollment Rates by Child and Family Characteristics

Figure 2. Percentage of 3- to 4-year-olds and 5-year-olds enrolled in school, by race/ethnicity: October 2021



‡ Reporting standards not met. Either there are too few cases for a reliable estimate or the coefficient of variation (CV) is 50 percent or greater.
 NOTE: Data exclude children living in institutions (e.g., prisons or nursing facilities). Race categories exclude persons of Hispanic ethnicity. Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded data.
 SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, Current Population Survey (CPS), October, 2021. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2022*, table 202.20.

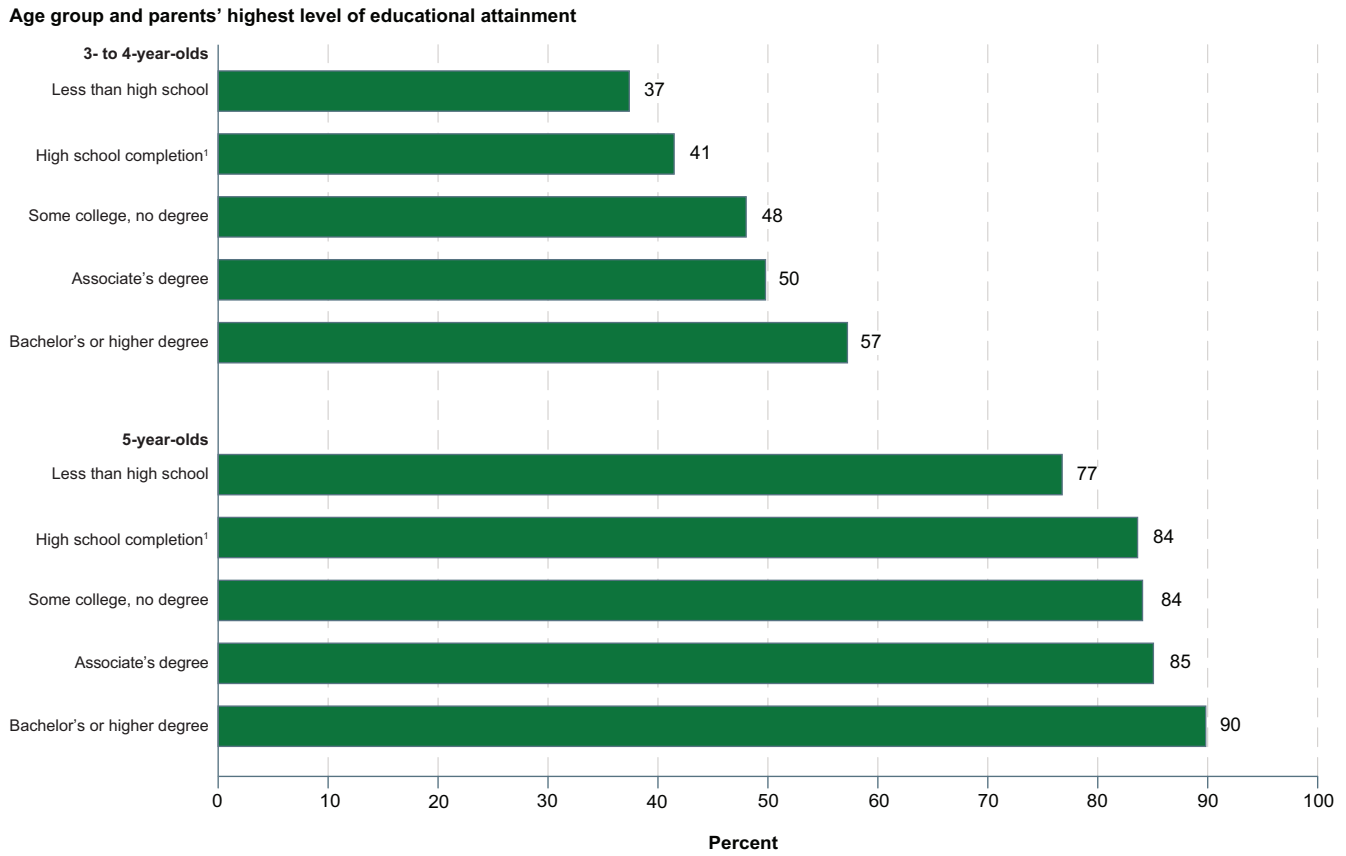
In October 2021, for both 3- to 4-year-olds and 5-year-olds, enrollment rates were lower for Hispanic children than for their peers of some other racial/ethnic groups.⁴ Specifically, enrollment rates in October 2021 were

- lower for Hispanic 3- to 4-year-olds (42 percent) than for those who were White (55 percent) or Asian (59 percent); and
- lower for Hispanic 5-year-olds (82 percent) than for those who were Black (90 percent), Asian (92 percent), or of Two or more races (97 percent).

The enrollment rate was also lower for White 5-year-olds (86 percent) than for those of Two or more races. There were no other measurable differences by race/ethnicity in the school enrollment rates of 3- to 4-year-olds and 5-year-olds.

In October 2021, enrollment rates did not measurably differ by sex for either 3- to 4-year-olds or 5-year-olds.

Figure 3. Percentage of 3- to 4-year-olds and 5-year-olds enrolled in school, by parents' highest level of educational attainment: October 2021

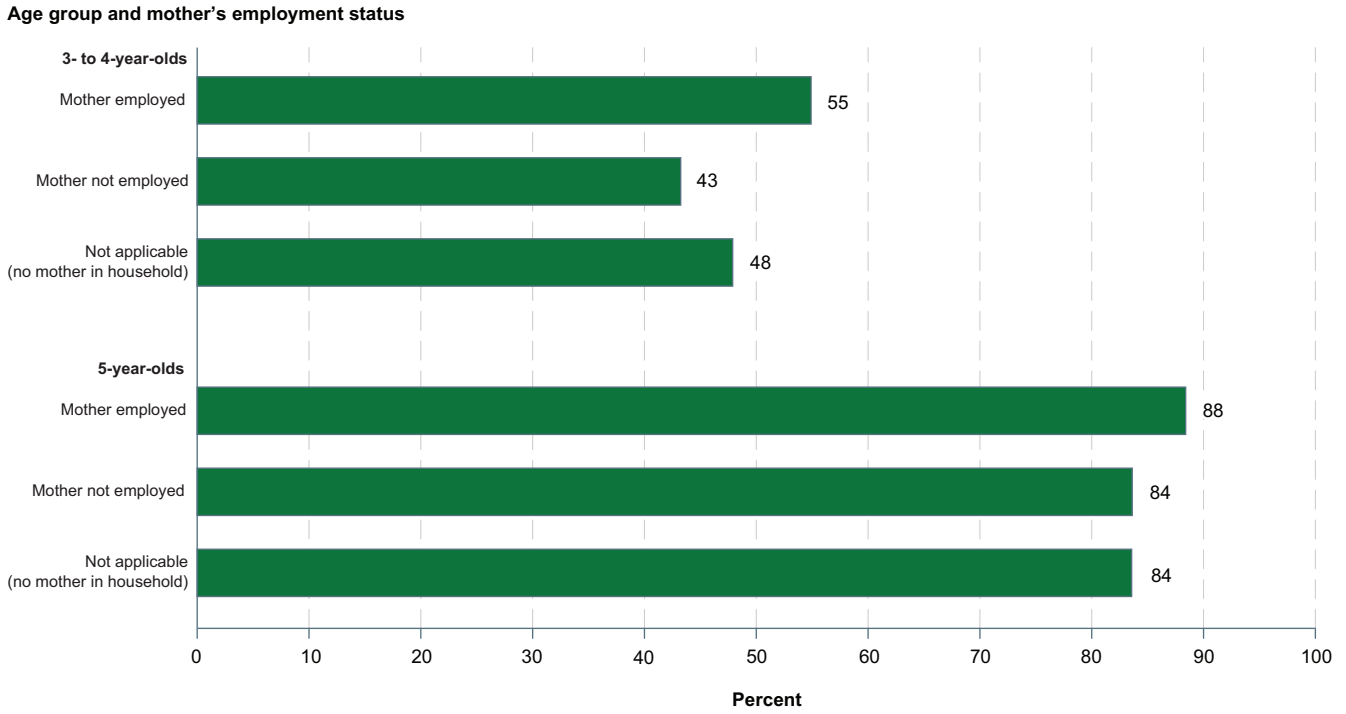


¹ Includes parents who completed high school through equivalency programs, such as a GED program.
 NOTE: Data exclude children living in institutions (e.g., prisons or nursing facilities). This figure includes only children who resided with at least one of their parents (including an adoptive or stepparent; excluding a foster parent). Parents' educational attainment refers to the highest education level of any parent residing with the child. Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded data.
 SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, Current Population Survey (CPS), October, 2021. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2022*, table 202.20.

There were some measurable differences by parental educational attainment⁵ in the enrollment rates of young children in October 2021. For 3- to 4-year-olds, the enrollment rate was higher for those whose parents had a bachelor's or higher degree (57 percent) than for those whose parents had any level of attainment below an associate's degree (ranging from 37 to 48 percent). Although enrollment rates had been higher for 3- to 4-year-olds whose parents had a bachelor's or higher

degree than for those whose parents had an associate's degree in every year from October 2010 to October 2019, there was no measurable difference between these groups in October 2020 or October 2021. For 5-year-olds, in October 2021 the enrollment rate was higher for those whose parents had a bachelor's or higher degree than for those whose parents had less than a high school credential (90 vs. 77 percent).

Figure 4. Percentage of 3- to 4-year-olds and 5-year-olds enrolled in school, by mother’s employment status: October 2021

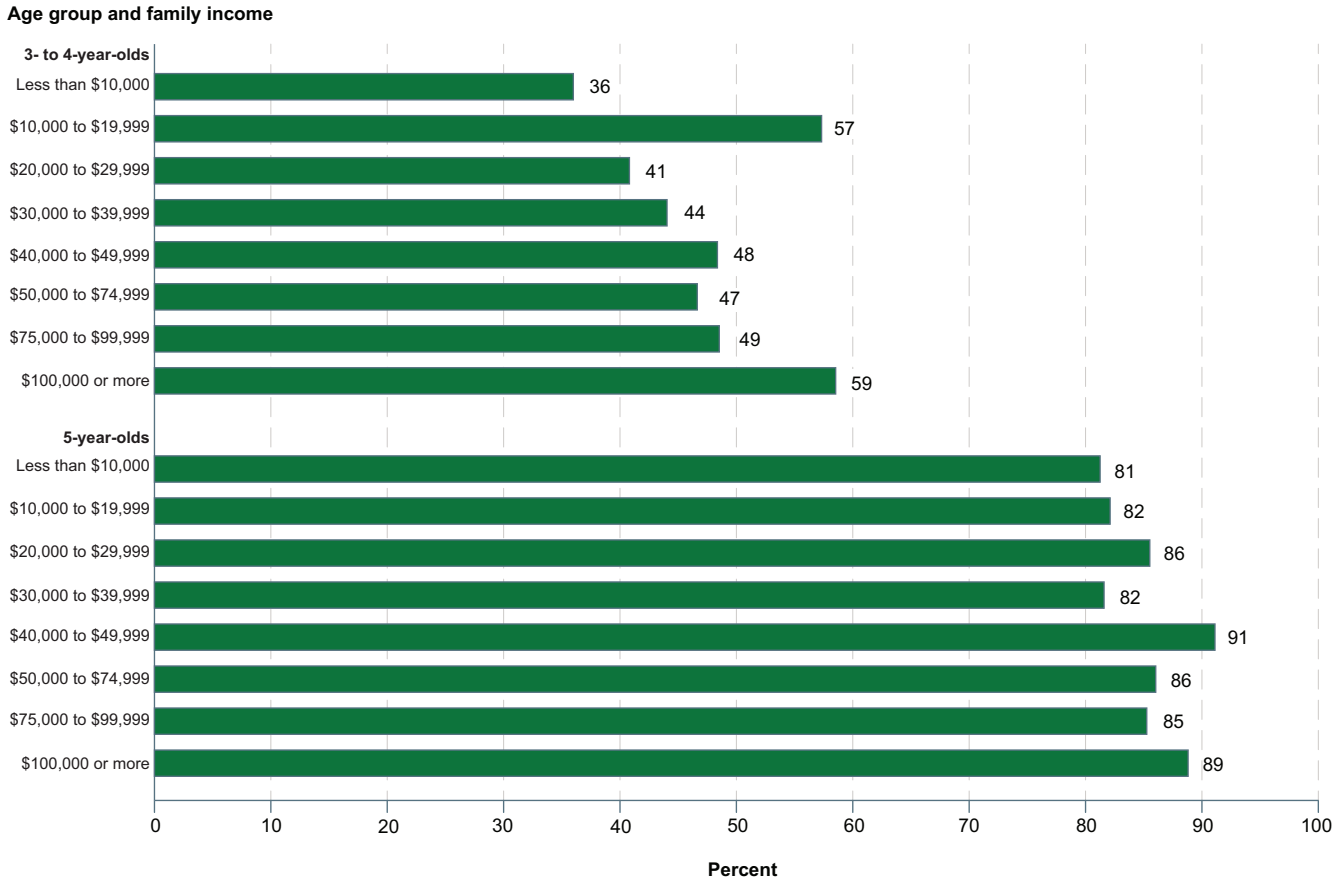


NOTE: Data exclude children living in institutions (e.g., prisons or nursing facilities). Mother includes a biological, adoptive, or stepmother and excludes a foster mother. Children living with foster mothers are included in the “Not applicable (no mother in household)” category. Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded data.
 SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, Current Population Survey (CPS), October, 2021. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2022*, table 202.20.

In October 2021, the enrollment rate was higher for 3- to 4-year-olds whose mothers were employed than for their peers whose mothers were not employed (55 vs. 43 percent). There was no measurable difference by

mother’s employment status in the school enrollment rates of 5-year-olds. For either age group, there were no measurable differences in enrollment rates by number of parents living with the child.

Figure 5. Percentage of 3- to 4-year-olds and 5-year-olds enrolled in school, by family income: October 2021



NOTE: Data exclude children living in institutions (e.g., prisons or nursing facilities). Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded data. SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, Current Population Survey (CPS), October, 2021. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2022*, table 202.20.

In October 2021, among 3- to 4-year-olds, the enrollment rate was higher for children in households with an annual family income exceeding \$100,000 (59 percent) than for those in households of most other income groups, including households that earned

- less than \$10,000 (36 percent);
- \$20,000 to \$29,999 (41 percent);
- \$30,000 to \$39,999 (44 percent);
- \$50,000 to \$74,999 (47 percent); and
- \$75,000 to \$99,999 (49 percent).

In addition, 3- to 4-year-olds in households with an annual family income of \$10,000 to \$19,999 had a higher school enrollment rate (57 percent) than children in households with other family incomes below \$40,000. Among 5-year-olds, there were no measurable differences in enrollment rates by family income.

Endnotes:

¹ As of 2020, there were 47 states—plus the District of Columbia—that required that free education be offered by age 5; however, schooling was only compulsory for 5-year-olds in 11 states and the District of Columbia (see [50-State Comparison: Free and Compulsory School Age Requirements](#)).

² For historical data on enrollment rates for 3- to 4-year-olds and 5-year-olds (i.e., data prior to 2010), see *Digest of Education Statistics 2019*, [table 202.10](#).

³ Enrollment drops during the coronavirus pandemic were also observed in data collected by NCES (see indicators [Public School Enrollment](#) and [Racial/Ethnic Enrollment in Public Schools](#)).

⁴ For both 3- to 4-year-olds and 5-year-olds, the October 2021 enrollment rates for American Indian/Alaska Native and Pacific Islander children did not meet reporting standards and were thus excluded from the analyses.

⁵ Refers to the highest level of education attained by any parent residing with the child.

Reference tables: *Digest of Education Statistics 2022*, [table 202.20](#)

Related indicators and resources: [Early Childcare and Education Arrangements](#) [*Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Groups*]; [Early Childhood Care Arrangements: Choices and Costs](#) [*The Condition of Education 2018 Spotlight*]; [Kindergarten Entry Status: On-Time, Delayed-Entry, and Repeating Kindergartners](#) [*The Condition of Education 2013 Spotlight*]; [Kindergartners' Approaches to Learning Behaviors and Academic Outcomes](#) [*The Condition of Education 2015 Spotlight*]; [Kindergartners' Approaches to Learning, Family Socioeconomic Status, and Early Academic Gains](#) [*The Condition of Education 2016 Spotlight*]; [Percentage of 3- to 5-year-old children enrolled in school, by race/ethnicity and state: 2021](#) [*Digest of Education Statistics 2022*, [table 202.25](#)]; [Private School Enrollment](#); [Public School Enrollment](#); [Risk Factors and Academic Outcomes in Kindergarten Through Third Grade](#) [*The Condition of Education 2017 Spotlight*]

Glossary: Associate's degree; Bachelor's degree; College; Educational attainment (Current Population Survey); Enrollment; High school completer; Household; Preschool; Racial/ethnic group