Preschool and Kindergarten Enrollment

In 2015, the percentage of 3- to 5-year-olds enrolled in preschool programs was higher for children whose parents had a graduate or professional degree (48 percent) than for those whose parents had a bachelor’s degree (42 percent), an associate’s degree (37 percent), some college (37 percent), a high school credential (29 percent), and less than a high school credential (29 percent).

Preprimary programs are groups or classes that are organized to provide educational experiences for children and include kindergarten and preschool programs. Preschool and Kindergarten Enrollment

Figure 1. Percentage of 3-, 4-, and 5-year-old children enrolled in preprimary programs: 2000 through 2015

The percentages of 3-year-olds, 4-year-olds, and 5-year-olds enrolled in preprimary programs fluctuated between 2000 and 2015. In 2015, some 38 percent of 3-year-olds, 67 percent of 4-year-olds, and 87 percent of 5-year-olds were enrolled in preprimary programs, which were not measurably different from the percentages enrolled in 2000 (39 percent, 65 percent, and 88 percent, respectively). In 2015, the percentage of children enrolled in preprimary programs remained higher for 5-year-olds than for 4-year-olds, and higher for 4-year-olds than for 3-year-olds.
Among 3- to 5-year-olds who were enrolled in preschool programs in 2015, some 51 percent attended full-day programs. The percentage of 3- to 5-year-old preschool students attending full-day programs in 2015 was not measurably different from the percentage attending full-day programs in 2000. Among 3- to 5-year-olds attending kindergarten, the percentage attending full-day programs increased from 60 percent in 2000 to 81 percent in 2015. In every year from 2000 to 2015, the percentage of 3- to 5-year-old kindergarten students enrolled in full-day programs was greater than the percentage of 3- to 5-year-old preschool students enrolled in full-day programs.
In 2015, most 3- and 4-year-old children who were enrolled in preprimary programs attended preschool programs, while most 5-year-old children who were enrolled in preprimary programs attended kindergarten. A higher percentage of 4-year-olds (60 percent) than of 3-year-olds (36 percent) attended preschool.
Figure 4. Percentage of 3- to 5-year-old children enrolled in preschool programs, by race/ethnicity and attendance status: October 2015

In 2015, a lower percentage of Hispanic 3- to 5-year-olds (30 percent) were enrolled in preschool programs than of 3- to 5-year olds who were White (40 percent), Black (39 percent), Asian (40 percent), American Indian/Alaska Native (48 percent), and of Two or more races (42 percent). There were no measurable differences in enrollment among children who were White, Black, Asian, Pacific Islander, American Indian/Alaska Native, and of Two or more races.

In terms of attendance status, a higher percentage of Black children attended full-day than part-day preschool programs (27 vs. 11 percent). In contrast, a lower percentage of Hispanic children attended full-day than part-day preschool programs (13 vs. 17 percent). For children in the other racial/ethnic groups, there were no measurable differences in the percentages enrolled in full-day compared to part-day programs. Enrollment in full-day preschool programs was higher for Black children (27 percent) than for White (19 percent), Hispanic (13 percent), and Asian (20 percent) children. The percentage of 3- to 5-year-olds enrolled in full-day preschool programs was also higher for children who were White, Asian, and of Two or more races (22 percent) than for Hispanic children. The corresponding percentage for Pacific Islander 3- to 5-year-olds was not measurably different from that of any other racial/ethnic group.
Figure 5. Percentage of 3- to 5-year-old children enrolled in preschool programs, by parents’ highest level of education and attendance status: October 2015

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parents’ highest level of education</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than high school</td>
<td>14 (Part-day)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school/ GED</td>
<td>16 (Part-day)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some college, no degree</td>
<td>18 (Part-day)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate’s degree</td>
<td>18 (Part-day)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s degree</td>
<td>21 (Part-day)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate or professional degree</td>
<td>22 (Part-day)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE: Enrollment data include only those children in preschool programs and do not include those enrolled in kindergarten or primary programs. “Parents’ highest level of education” is defined as the highest level of education attained by the most educated parent. Data are based on sample surveys of the civilian noninstitutional population. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding. SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, Current Population Survey (CPS), October 2015. See Digest of Education Statistics 2016, table 202.20.

Enrollment in preschool programs varied by parents’ highest level of education, defined as the highest level of education attained by the most educated parent in the child’s household. In 2015, the overall percentage of 3- to 5-year-olds enrolled in preschool programs was higher for those children whose parents had a graduate or professional degree (48 percent) than for those whose parents had a bachelor’s degree (42 percent), an associate’s degree (37 percent), some college (37 percent), a high school credential (29 percent), and less than a high school credential (29 percent). The overall preschool enrollment percentage was also higher for those children whose parents had a bachelor’s degree, an associate’s degree, and some college than for those whose parents had a high school credential and less than a high school credential.

The percentage of 3- to 5-year-olds enrolled in part-day and full-day preschool programs also varied by parents’ highest level of education. In 2015, for full-day preschool enrollment, the percentages were higher for those children whose parents had a graduate or professional degree (22 percent) and a bachelor’s degree (21 percent) than for those children whose parents had a high school credential (16 percent) and less than a high school credential (14 percent). Among children whose parents’ highest level of education was a high school credential, a greater percentage were enrolled in full-day than in part-day preschool programs (16 vs. 12 percent). There was no measurable difference between the percentages of children enrolled in full-day and part-day programs for children whose parents had other levels of educational attainment (graduate’s degree or professional degree, bachelor’s degree, associate’s degree, some college, and less than a high school credential).
Figure 6. Percentage of 3- and 4-year-old children enrolled in school, by OECD country: 2014

In 2014, some 55 percent of 3- and 4-year-olds in the United States were enrolled in school, compared to the average enrollment of 79 percent for the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries. The OECD is an organization of 35 countries whose purpose is to promote trade and economic growth.

The OECD also serves as a statistical agency, collecting and publishing an array of data on its member countries. Among the 31 OECD countries reporting data that year, the percentage of 3- and 4-year-olds enrolled in school ranged from 20 percent in Turkey to 100 percent in France.
Preschool and Kindergarten Enrollment

Chapter: 2/Participation in Education
Section: Preprimary

Endnotes:
1 Preschool programs are also known as nursery school programs.


Glossary: Associate’s degree, Bachelor’s degree, College, Educational attainment (Current Population Survey), Enrollment, High school completer, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Preschool, Racial/ethnic group