SELECTED HIGHLIGHTS RE: EARLY EDUCATION

NOTE: All of the highlights quoted below are direct quotes from the report. HEPC has not included all categories or all text. For complementary charts for most of the textual data, please refer to the complete report. HEPC has identified selected terms or sections in bold print to facilitate easier identification of items of potential interest to policy makers.

The indicators in this section of The Condition of Education measure aspects of elementary and secondary education in the United States. The indicators examine school characteristics and climate; principals, teachers and staff; elementary and secondary financial resources; student assessments; and other measures of the progress students make as they move through the education system, such as graduation rates.


Early Education and Child Care Arrangements of Young Children

From 1980 to 2011, the percentage of 3- to 5-year-olds enrolled in preprimary programs increased from 53 percent to 64 percent. The percentage of these children who attended full-day programs increased from 32 percent to 59 percent during this time period.

Preprimary programs are groups or classes that are organized to provide educational experiences for children and include kindergarten, preschool, and nursery school programs. From 1980 to 2011, the percentage of 3- to 5-year-olds enrolled in preprimary programs increased from 53 percent to 64 percent, with most of the growth occurring between 1980 and 2000. From 1980 to 2000, the percentage of children enrolled in preprimary programs increased from 27 to 39 percent for 3-year-olds and from 46 to 65 percent for 4-year-olds. The enrollment rate for 5-year-olds was higher in 2000 than in 1980 (88 percent vs. 85 percent). However, the percentages enrolled in preprimary programs were not measurably different in 2000 compared to 2011 for any of the age groups.

The percentage of 3- to 5-year-olds in preprimary programs who attended full-day programs increased from 32 percent in 1980 to 59 percent in 2011. In addition to the overall increase, the full-day attendance percentage increased for each age group during this period. The enrollment rate for 3-year-olds was higher in 2000 than in 1980 (49 percent vs. 37 percent). From 1980 to 2000, the percentage of 4-year-olds enrolled in full-day preprimary programs increased from 33 to 46 percent, and the percentage of 5-year-olds increased from 29 to 59 percent. The full-day enrollment rates were also
higher in 2011 than in 2000 for 3-year-olds (56 percent vs. 49 percent) and 5-year-olds (70 percent vs. 59 percent), but not measurably different for 4-year-olds.

Differences by age in enrollment in full-day preprimary programs have shifted over the past few decades. For example, in 1980, the percentage of 5-year-olds enrolled in full-day preprimary programs was 8 points lower than the percentage of 3-year-olds (29 percent vs. 37 percent), and not measurably different from the percentage of 4-year-olds (33 percent); but in 2011, the percentage of 5-year-olds was 14 points higher than the percentage of 3-year-olds (70 percent vs. 56 percent), and 23 points higher than the percentage of 4-year-olds (47 percent).

Enrollment in preprimary programs varied by parents’ highest level of education, defined as the diploma attained by the most educated parent. In 2011, higher percentages of 3- to 5-year-olds whose parents had either a graduate or professional degree (75 percent) or a bachelor’s degree (71 percent) were enrolled in preprimary programs than children of parents with any other level of educational attainment. For instance, 53 percent of children whose parents had less than a high school degree and 58 percent of children whose parents had a high school credential were enrolled in preprimary programs. Enrollment in full-day and part-day preprimary programs also differed by the highest educational attainment of parents or guardians. Forty-four percent of 3- to 5-year-olds whose parents had a graduate or professional degree were enrolled in full-day preprimary programs, an enrollment rate that was generally higher than for children whose parents had any other level of educational attainment, except for those whose parents had attended a vocational/technical program or some college. Children whose parents had a graduate or professional degree (31 percent) or a bachelor’s degree (33 percent) were also enrolled in part-day preprimary programs at higher percentages than those of children whose parents had less than a high school degree (16 percent) or a high school credential (24 percent).

Kindergarten Entry Status: On-Time, Delayed-Entry, and Repeating Kindergartners

In the fall of 2010, reading scores were higher, on average, for delayed-entry kindergartners (36 points) and repeating kindergartners (37 points) than for on-time kindergartners (35 points). In the spring of 2011, however, reading scores were higher for delayed-entry kindergartners and on-time kindergartners (51 and 50 points, respectively) than for repeating kindergartners (48 points).

As of May 2011, 42 states and the District of Columbia required their school districts to offer kindergarten programs, and 15 states and the District of Columbia required children to attend kindergarten (see Digest of Education Statistics 2012, table 197). In the 2010–11 school year, about 4 million students were enrolled in kindergarten in the United States (see Digest of Education Statistics 2012, table 136). About 89 percent of the kindergartners attended public schools and 11 percent attended private schools. School year, about 4 million students were enrolled in kindergarten in the United States (see Digest of Education Statistics 2012, table 136). About 89 percent of the kindergartners attended public schools and 11 percent attended private schools.

HAWAII EDUCATIONAL POLICY CENTER
1776 University Avenue, Castle Memorial Hall 133 • Honolulu, Hawai‘i 96822
Dr. Jim Shon, Director Phone (808) 282-1509 • jshon@hawaii.edu
http://manoa.hawaii.edu/hepc/
Over the years, policies and practices have emerged that are intended to improve children’s early school experiences by giving them more time to develop and mature (e.g., changes to age of entry requirements and use of transitional grades and readiness testing). One such enrollment strategy is to purposefully delay a child’s entrance into kindergarten, a practice known as “academic redshirting.”1 Parents or school staff may decide to wait a year to enroll a child in kindergarten if the child’s birthday is close to the school system’s cutoff date for kindergarten age requirements. Redshirting may occur if parents do not wish their child to be among the youngest in their kindergarten class, or if there is social, or physical skills than their peers of the same age. A second strategy is to retain kindergartners who did not achieve the same level of academic or social skills as their peers in their first year of school and to have them repeat kindergarten.

In the fall of 2010, about 94 percent of kindergartners were attending their first year of kindergarten: 87 percent were on-time kindergartners who started kindergarten within the age requirements set by their school system, while 6 percent were delayed-entry kindergartners and 1 percent were early-entry kindergartners, based on school system age requirements. In addition, about 6 percent of fall 2010 kindergartners were repeating kindergarten.

In fall 2010, about 6 percent of all kindergartners were delayed entrants. Higher percentages of American Indians/Alaska Natives (8 percent), Whites (7 percent), and students of two or more races (7 percent) than of Hispanics (4 percent) or Blacks (3 percent) were delayed-entry kindergartners. Also, a higher percentage of Asian students than of Black students (6 vs. 3 percent) were delayed-entry kindergartners. No measurable differences were observed in the percentages of repeating kindergartners across different racial/ethnic groups. Comparisons could not be made for early-entry kindergartners due to the small number of children in the sample.

For the most part, delayed-entry kindergartners tended to outscore on-time and repeating kindergartners in reading, mathematics, and science in the 2010–11 school year. In reading, for instance, the fall scores were higher, on average, for delayed-entry kindergartners (36 points) and repeating kindergartners (37 points) than for on-time kindergartners (35 points) (see Digest of Education Statistics 2012, table 137). In the spring, however, reading scores were higher for delayed-entry kindergartners and on-time kindergartners (51 and 50 points, respectively) than for repeating kindergartners (48 points).

In mathematics, the fall 2010 scores were higher for delayed-entry kindergartners (33 points) than for on-time kindergartners (29 points) and repeating kindergartners (30 points). This pattern was also observed in the spring of 2011: delayed-entry kindergartners had an average mathematics score of 45 points, compared with an average score of 42 points for on-time kindergartners and an average score of 41 points for repeating kindergartners. Kindergartners were also assessed in science in the spring of 2011. The science assessment reflects student performance on questions about physical sciences, life sciences, environmental sciences, and scientific inquiry. For that assessment, scores were higher, on average, for delayed-entry kindergartners (12.1 points) than for on-time kindergartners (11.4 points) and repeating kindergartners (11.0 points).

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Dr. Jim Shon, Director Phone (808) 282-1509 • jshon@hawaii.edu
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In the fall of 2010 and the spring of 2011, kindergarten teachers were asked to rate their students on a set of seven approaches to learning behaviors: attentiveness, task persistence, eagerness to learn, learning independence, flexibility, organization, and ability to follow classroom rules. Scores ranged from 1 to 4, with higher scores indicating that a child exhibited positive learning behaviors more often.

In both the fall and spring of the kindergarten year, delayed-entry and on-time kindergartners had higher scores on the approaches to learning scale than repeating kindergartners. In the spring, for example, delayed-entry and on-time kindergartners both had average scores of 3.1 points on the 4-point scale, while repeating kindergartners had an average score of 2.9 points.