



National Survey of Early Care & Education Fact Sheet

November 2014

Characteristics of Center-based Early Care and Education Programs

INTRODUCTION

This fact sheet provides the first nationally representative portrait of center-based early care and education (ECE) in more than 20 years, using data from the newly available National Survey of Early Care and Education (NSECE). We describe ECE programs that serve children age birth to five years, not yet in kindergarten. Key characteristics include enrollment size, ages of children served, revenue sources, auspice and hours of operation.

CHARACTERISTICS OF CENTER-BASED ECE PROGRAMS

There are approximately 129,000 center-based programs serving 6.98 million children birth through age five years not yet in kindergarten, and another 3.03 million school-age children (including kindergartners)¹. In the NSECE, a center-based program is defined as the set of all ECE services to children birth through five years, not yet in kindergarten, provided by an organization at a single location. Center-based programs include Head Start facilities and preschools and pre-kindergarten classrooms in public schools, as well as private nursery schools, day care centers, and many other types of ECE.

The National Survey of Early Care and Education (NSECE) is a set of four integrated, nationally representative surveys conducted in 2012. These were surveys of 1) households with children under 13, 2) home-based providers of ECE, 3) center-based providers of ECE, and 4) the center-based provider workforce. Together they characterize the supply of and demand for early care and education in America and permit better understanding of how well families' needs and preferences coordinate with providers' offerings and constraints. The study is funded by the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE) in the Administration for Children and Families (ACF), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The data for this fact sheet come from 7,770 center-based provider questionnaires completed in 2012 by directors or other instructional leaders of center-based ECE programs serving children birth through age 5 years, not yet in kindergarten.

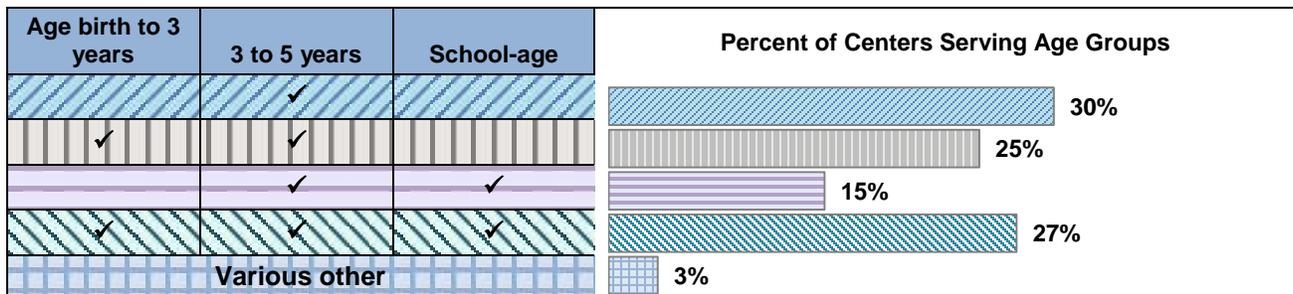
¹ Only centers serving at least one child birth through age five years, not yet in kindergarten, are included in these data, so the estimate of enrolled children only partially covers center-based ECE enrollment of school-age children.



AGES SERVED

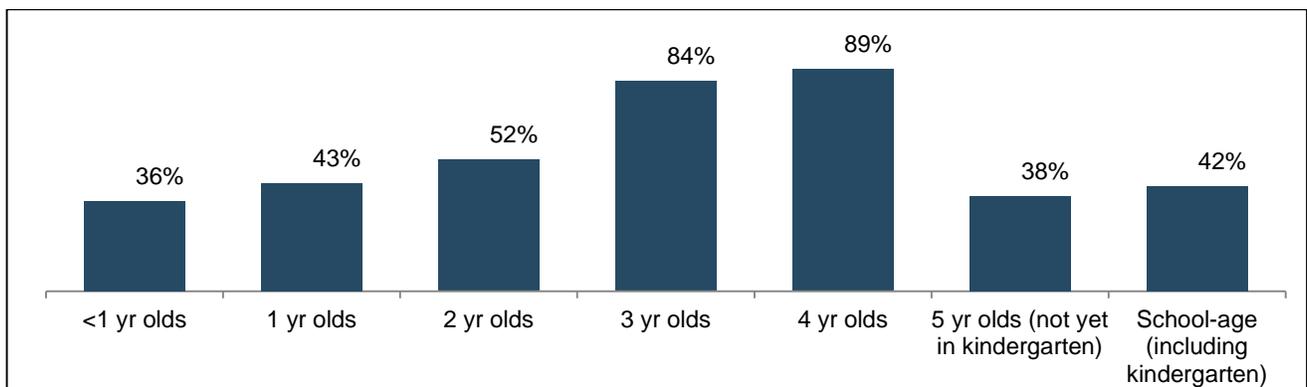
We classify these centers as to whether or not they serve each of three child age groups: birth to age three years, age three through five years, or school-age. Figure 1 shows that 30 percent of centers serve only children ages three through five years old, while another 27 percent serve children in all three age groups. Overall, fifty-six percent of centers serve children under age 3 years, including some of those 3 percent from the group serving “Various other age group combinations” that only serve children under 3 years of age.

Figure 1. Percent of Centers with Enrolled Children Age Birth through Five Years by Combination of Age Groups Served



We often classify enrollment in these three groups because many centers considered “preschools” only serve children age three to five. If we look in at the share of centers serving children by single-year age categories, however, we see some important differences that were masked in the figure above. Figure 2 shows, for example, that more centers serve two year olds than children under twelve months old.

Figure 2. Percent of Centers Serving Children in each Single-year Age Category

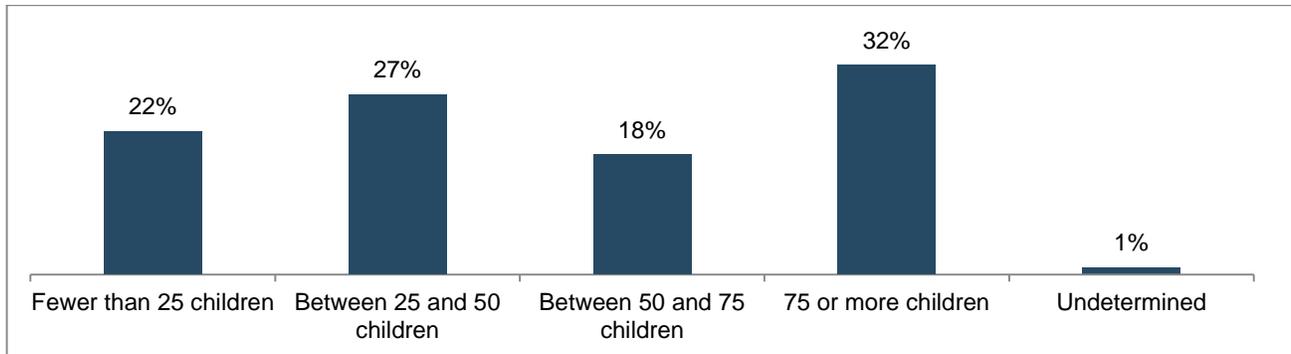


Thirty-six percent of centers serve children under one year old. The largest number of enrolled children in a single year of age is the 2.3 million four-year-olds who are served by 89 percent of these centers. Figure 2 shows that the number of centers serving each age group increases at age 3, but drops again for 5 year-olds, some of whom are attending kindergarten.

ENROLLMENT SIZE

We find considerable diversity in the enrollment sizes of centers as shown in Figure 3, with one half serving 50 or fewer children and almost a third serving more than 75 children. Approximately 28,000 of those centers have fewer than 25 children enrolled. We estimate that 35,300 centers have between 25 and 50 children enrolled in their programs, 23,600 centers have between 50 and 75 children and 41,100 centers have 75 or more children enrolled. For about 1 percent of centers, it was not possible to estimate size of enrollment. Enrollment counts include all children birth to age 13 years served in these centers.

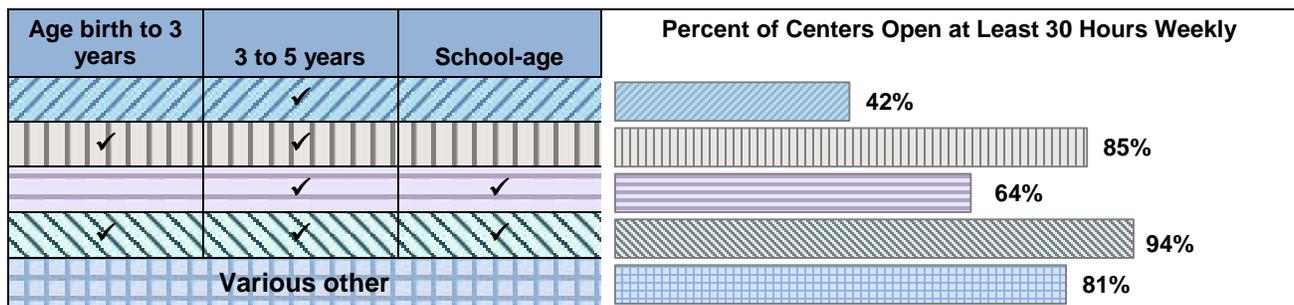
Figure 3. Percent of Centers by Enrollment Size



HOURS OF OPERATION

About three in ten centers serving children birth through age five years, not yet in kindergarten, offer fewer than 30 hours per week of care, thus limiting their usefulness for parental employment support. (Many centers, like half-day Head Start or pre-k programs, may not have parental employment support as an objective). Centers serving only children age three through five years are least likely to be open 30 hours or more hours weekly; 42 percent as compared to 94 percent of centers serving all three age groups. This is shown in Figure 4.

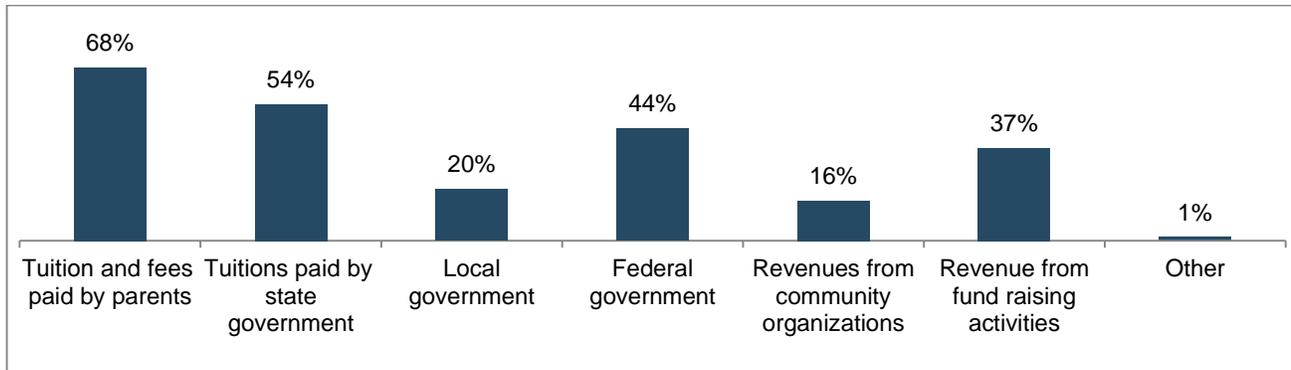
Figure 4. Percent of Centers Open 30 Hours or More Weekly by Combination of Age Groups Served



AUSPICE

Center auspice data indicate that a bare majority (52 percent) of ECE centers are not-for-profit operations, with almost one third (32 percent) for-profit, and almost all the remaining (16 percent) run by government entities such as public school districts, human service agencies, tribal councils, or parks and recreation departments.

Figure 5. Percent of Centers Reporting Any Receipt of Each Type of Revenue



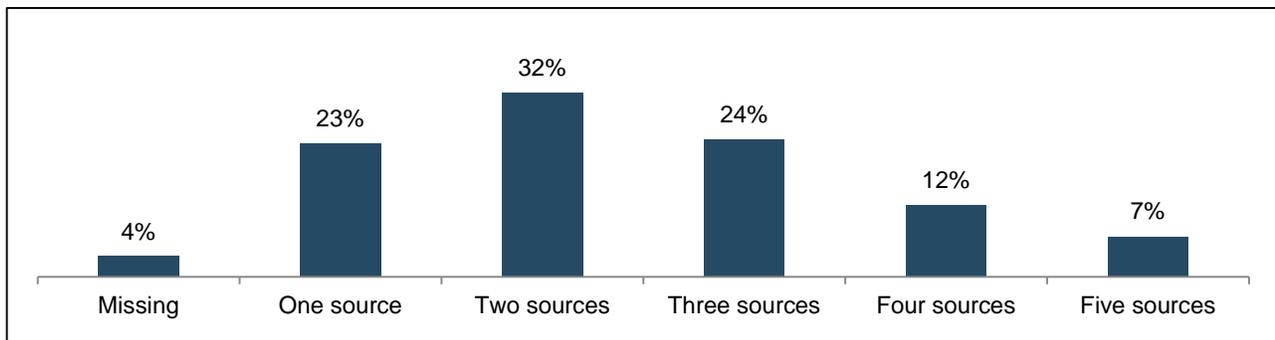
REVENUE

Figure 5 shows that two in three centers receive tuitions and fees from parents (68 percent of all centers). Slightly more, 72.8 percent, report at least some government revenue (not shown). As shown in Figure 6, 22.8 percent of programs (29,500 centers) had one source of revenue, 31.5 percent of programs (40,700) had two sources of revenue, and 23.2 percent have three sources of revenue (30,000). The remaining 42 percent reported more than 3 sources of revenue.

INTERESTING FACTS

- Just 8.4 percent of children receive ECE in a center that is public-school sponsored.
- More than one third of centers (35.5 percent) report that their top two sources of revenue include one government and one non-government source.

Figure 6. Percent of Centers by Number of Revenue Sources



SUGGESTED CITATION

National Survey of Early Care and Education Project Team (2014). Fact Sheet: Characteristics of Center-based Early Care and Education Programs. OPRE Report No. 2014-73b, Washington DC: Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Available at <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/research/project/national-survey-of-early-care-and-education-nsece-2010-2014>.

