**Name**: Nursery and Preschool Enrollment

**Short Description**: Percent of children enrolled in nursery school or pre-school.

**Data Source**:

* Name: United States Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS)
* Link to Source: <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/data.html>

**Year(s):** 5-year estimates(2015-2019)

**Source Geographic Level**: Zip Code Tabulation Area (ZCTA)

**Stratification**: Black population

**Selection Rationale:** Early childhood education (ECE), which includes nursery and preschool, improves both child and parental mental health. It provides a context in which a child’s developmental milestones are monitored,[[1]](#footnote-2) and parents have greater flexibility to participate in the labor force when their children are enrolled in ECE.[[2]](#footnote-3)

**Strengths and Limitations**:

* **Strengths**:
  + [*Importance*] ECE provides a context for early detection of mental and developmental issues in children[[3]](#footnote-4) and supports the development of positive mental health, self-regulation, and executive functioning.[[4]](#footnote-5), [[5]](#footnote-6) ECE has also been shown to improve high school completion rates and lower rates of involvement with the criminal justice system, both of which are associated with better mental health outcomes.[[6]](#footnote-7) There is also a strong connection between child mental health and parent mental health[[7]](#footnote-8); when a parent has access to childcare (e.g. ECE) they have more time to take care of themselves and their household, which cultivates an environment in which children can thrive.
  + [*Equity*] Children in lower income families are less likely to have access to ECE[[8]](#footnote-9) and Black Americans are over-represented among the population living in poverty relative to their proportion of the population as a whole.[[9]](#footnote-10) This creates an increased risk of mental distress for both Black children and parents, emphasizing the importance of understanding the proportion of Black children engaged in ECE. *[Feasibility]* This measure is readily available through the ACS, an ongoing survey that provides data in the year immediately following the year in which they are collected.
  + *[Scientific Soundness]* ACS data provides valid and reliable estimates. This measure calculation is advantageous in that is both simple to calculate and simple to communicate.
* **Limitations**:
  + [*Scientific Soundness*] Data for the numerator and denominator of this measure come from different ACS tables that have differing age cutoffs. The table for the numerator (the number of children enrolled in nursery and preschool) is only for children aged 3 and older (because this question is only asked for children aged 3 and older), while the table for the denominator includes all children under age 5. As a result, the values may be an undercount of the percent enrolled in nursery and preschool given the more inclusive age range for the denominator.
  + *[Equity*] The ACS dataset does not provide information on the availability, quality, or affordability of nursery and pre-k programs. Data from the National Center for Education Statistics shows that on average, Black children are more likely to attend free and government-sponsored schools of lower quality.7,[[10]](#footnote-11) Additional information on the quality of ECE programs would allow for more equitable and accurate measurement of potential impacts on mental health and wellbeing.

**Default Weight**:4.3% (*see Weighting Documentation for details on how default weights were assigned*)

**Calculation**:

*Overall Population Calculation*:

ACS tables and variables used:

* Table B14007: School enrollment by Detailed Level of School for the Population 3 Years and Over
  + B14007\_003: Estimate Total Enrolled in nursery school, preschool
* Table B01001: Sex by Age
  + B01001\_003: Estimate Total Male Under 5 years
  + B01001\_027: Estimate Total Female Under 5 years

*Black Population Calculation*:

ACS tables and variables used:

* Table B14007B: School enrollment by Detailed Level of School for the Population 3 Years and Over (Black or African American Alone)
  + - B14007B\_003: Estimate Total Enrolled in nursery school, preschool
* Table B01001B: Sex by Age (Black or African American Alone)
  + - B01001B\_003: Estimate Total Male Under 5 years
    - B01001B\_018: Estimate Total Female Under 5 Years

1. CDC. (2019a, March 20). *What Are Childhood Mental Disorders?* Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/childrensmentalhealth/basics.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Morrissey, T. (2019). The Effects Of Early Care And Education On Children’s Health. *Health Affairs | Health Policy Brief*. <https://doi.org/10.1377/hpb20190325.519221> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. CDC. (2019b, July 19). *Improving Access to Children’s Mental Health Care*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/childrensmentalhealth/access.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. (2021, June 23). *Early Childhood Development and Education | Healthy People 2020*. Www.healthypeople.gov. <https://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/topics-objectives/topic/social-determinants-health/interventions-resources/early-childhood-development-and-education> ‌ [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Yoshikawa, H., Weiland, C., Brooks-Gunn, J., Burchinal, M., Espinosa, L., Gormley, W., Ludwig, J., Magnuson, K., Phillips, D., & Zaslow, M. (2013). *Investing in Our Future: The Evidence Base on Preschool Education*. <https://www.srcd.org/sites/default/files/file-attachments/mb_2013_10_16_investing_in_children.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
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7. CDC. (2021, April 23). *Mental health of children and parents —a strong connection*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/childrensmentalhealth/features/mental-health-children-and-parents.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. National Center for Education Statistics. (2021, May). *COE - Enrollment Rates of Young Children*. Nces.ed.gov. <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/cfa> [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. Creamer, J. (2020, September 15). *Poverty Rates for Blacks and Hispanics Reached Historic Lows in 2019*. The United States Census Bureau; The United States Census Bureau. <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2020/09/poverty-rates-for-blacks-and-hispanics-reached-historic-lows-in-2019.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. Friedman-Krauss, A., & Barnett, S. (2020). *Access to High-Quality Early Education and Racial Equity*. <https://nieer.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Special-Report-Access-to-High-Quality-Early-Education-and-Racial-Equity.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-11)