CONNECTICUT PRESCHOOL SPECIAL EDUCATION NEEDS ASSESSMENT

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Introduction

The National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) conducted a needs assessment to understand and describe early childhood services for preschool-age children with an Individualized Education Program (IEP) in the state of Connecticut. In collaboration with the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE), NIEER developed survey protocols to collect information about the quality of the environments in which 3-, 4-, and 5-year-old preschoolers in Connecticut receive services as part of their IEP. This report provides a statewide representative picture of the state of preschool programs in which children with IEPs are served in CT. The needs assessment is designed to provide CSDE with information to support professional learning opportunities and other CSDE priorities in relation to preschool-age children with disabilities, as well as to provide guidance to ensure that all preschool-age children with an IEP in the state receive high-quality services in their least restrictive environment (LRE).

This report summarizes the findings of the needs assessment. In particular, we focus on preschool program characteristics, the least restrictive environment (LRE), the development of IEPs, engagement with the CT Early Learning and Development Standards (ELDS), curriculum practices, assessment, and professional development. Overall, the report highlights areas of strong alignment to best practices and areas that would benefit from additional professional development across preschool programs in CT.

Background Context

Starting in 1991, Part B of the Federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) addressed the provision of a "free and appropriate education" for school age children with disabilities from ages three through 21 (20 U.S.C. 1412(a)(5)(B)). In order to receive federal funding under IDEA, Part B, states must comply with all aspects of the law, which specifically requires the delivery of education in each child's LRE, and for school districts to provide inclusive environments for children with disabilities to the greatest extent possible.

State policies governing publicly-funded preschool programs provide insight into how states approach inclusive preschool education across the nation. The 2018 State of Preschool Yearbook[1] explored this topic and found that 79% of state-funded preschool programs reported having state policies in place to support inclusion; CT was not one of these states. A deeper dive into preschool inclusion policies across the country reveals concerning gaps between policies and best practices. Only 42% of state-funded preschool programs require professional development for teachers serving preschoolers with disabilities, and just 10% require coaching for those teachers. Slightly more than half of programs (54%) require inclusion specialists to support preschool teachers, but just 17% report following the Division of Early Childhood's (DEC's) best practices. Further, only 44% of state preschool programs limit the number or percent of preschoolers with disabilities in a given classroom. Even more revealing, only 43% of all state preschool programs reported having policies in place to require that lead teachers in inclusive preschool classrooms hold a certificate or endorsement in preschool special education indicating that, in the majority of state preschool programs, children with disabilities in general education classrooms are not being taught by a teacher who is specifically trained to meet their needs.

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[1] Friedman-Krauss, A. H., Barnett, W. S., Garver, K., A., Hodges, K. S., Weisenfeld, G. G., & DiCreccio, N. (2019), The State of Preschool 2018: State of Preschool Yearbook. New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research.

As of the 2018-2019 school year, federal IDEA data[2] indicate that CT served 67% of preschool children (ages 3, 4, and 5) with disabilities in regular early childhood settings for at least ten hours per week and another 3% in regular education settings for less than ten hours per week. Another 18% of preschoolers with disabilities were served in a separate (self-contained) classroom, while 7% were served in a location other than a traditional early childhood program. Finally, 4% of children were served by a separate service provider, and 1% in a separate school.

Of the 9,785 children ages 3 to 5-years-old receiving services under IDEA in CT, more than 70% are male and just under 30% are female. Approximately 48% of preschoolers with an IEP were White, 32% were Hispanic, 12% Black or African American, 4% Asian, and 4% Multi-racial. More than half of CT's preschoolers with disabilities (52%) are classified as having a developmental delay, another 27% with a speech or language impairment, and 15% with Autism. The remaining 6% fall into the categories of either hearing impairment (1%) or other disabilities (5%).

Study Methods

Survey Development

The needs assessment about preschool special education in Connecticut was developed by NIEER in close consultation with representatives from CSDE and a group of stakeholders. To gather a complete, statewide picture of the structural and process elements of preschool quality related to providing services for preschool-age children with IEPs, NIEER developed three separate surveys tailored to three groups of individuals holding key roles: Directors of Special Education, Early Childhood Education Supervisors, and school principals/center directors (referred to as Site Directors). Triangulating information from Directors of Special Education, Early Childhood Education Supervisors, and school principals/center directors (Site Directors) provides a comprehensive understanding of the experiences of preschoolers with IEPs in Connecticut. Additionally, each group provides a unique perspective that informs the landscape of the experiences of preschoolers with IEPs in Connecticut.

Based on the original RFP, and with on-going guidance from CSDE, NIEER developed survey questions to address the following primary areas of interest:

1. **Early Childhood Program Structural Characteristics**, including class size, teacher-to-child ratio, number of preschoolers with IEPs compared to number of other preschoolers per class, staff qualifications (including highest degree and any certifications earned), size of the school/center, and ages of children served (including whether classrooms are mixed-age). Data on respondent, teacher, and preschooler characteristics were also collected.
2. **Least Restrictive Environments**, including understanding of LRE, the number of children with IEPs in general education and special education classrooms, the disabilities represented in each type of classroom, a description of classroom environments, and a description of

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[2] Preschool Special Education Enrollment information provided by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, Number of Children with Disabilities (IDEA) Receiving Special Education and Related Services by Age: Fall 2018. Table generated from 2018 Part B Child Count and Educational Environments data in the EDFacts reporting system. Retrieved from https://www2.ed.gov/programs/osepidea/618-data/state-level-data-files/index.html

related services provided (i.e., services provided and if they are push-in and/or pull out).

3. **IEP Development**, including the extent to which parents and teachers are involved in IEP development, typical members of the IEP team, the level of collaboration among the IEP team members, and a description of processes for establishing a preschooler's IEP.

4. **Use of the Connecticut Early Learning and Development Standards (ELDS)**, including use of domains; training of preschool staff; alignment with other state standards, curriculum, and assessments; and implementation in classrooms serving preschoolers with IEPs.

5. **Curriculum, Professional Development & Family Engagement**, including types of curriculum used, adaptations made for children with an IEP, supports and training provided to support practice, and strategies used to promote family engagement.[3]

NIEER reviewed existing surveys, observational tools, previous needs assessments completed by NIEER, and nationally recommended practices for preschool-age children receiving special education services to inform survey development. Tools included: The Teacher Survey of Early Education Quality (TSEEQ)[4], Division for Early Childhood (DEC) Checklists[5], the Inclusive Classroom Profile (ICP™)[6], the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale®, 3rd ed. (ECERS-3)[7], and checklists developed by the Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center (ECTA)[8], among others.

NIEER first developed a question bank that covered all topics described above. Next we selected which questions would be included in the survey for each of the three respondent groups. Duplication of questions across respondents was done intentionally to collect data from different perspectives on one topic. Because it was often the case that individuals had more than one role in their districts (e.g. supervising special education and early childhood or being a supervisor of either and a center director), surveys were adapted to combine the necessary protocols. For example, we created a survey that combined questions in the Director of Special Education and ECE Supervisor surveys so that one individual serving in both of those roles had to only complete one survey. In addition to the three primary surveys, NIEER created four additional surveys for individuals whose position crossed more than one of the three key roles.

The surveys were programmed in Qualtrics, a web-based survey platform, by NIEER staff. Using a web-based survey eliminates the potential for data entry errors and saves time by eliminating data entry, making it a time-efficient method to accurately collect the desired data. Links to the web-based survey were emailed to respondents, along with a pdf file containing all questions. Respondents were asked to actively consent to participate in the study.

Sample & Procedures

We focused on three groups of respondents in order to collect information from multiple perspectives about the quality of the preschool environments in which 3-, 4-, and 5-year-old children with IEPs are served in Connecticut. First, we reached out to the Director of Special

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[3] The original proposal also included a focus on understanding alignment with the CT Quality Rating Improvement System (QRIS), however this topic was dropped from this research in consultation with CSDE.

[4] http://nieer.org/research/research-instruments

[5] https://ectacenter.org/decrp/type-checklists.asp

[6] https://products.brookespublishing.com/The-Inclusive-Classroom-Profile-ICP-Set-Research-Edition-P969.aspx

[7] https://www.ersi.info/ecers3.html

[8] Available here: https://ectacenter.org/decrp/type-checklists.asp

Education in each of Connecticut's 179 school districts and region/community programs.[9] Directors of Special Education were surveyed to provide a special education perspective. Second, we reach out to a random sample Early Childhood Education Supervisors (or the equivalent position) across districts to provide an early childhood education perspective. And third, we surveyed a random sample of school principals and center directors serving preschool-age children with IEPs. All respondents received an electronic gift card as a thank you for completing the survey.

In order to ensure data collected were representative of the state, the goal was to collect data from the Director of Special Education in each school district and region/community program, ECE Supervisors from 60 randomly selected districts, and site directors from 400 randomly selected schools and centers (within the same 60 districts as the sampled ECE supervisors). We used stratified random sampling within District Reference Groups (DRGs) in order to ensure the data collected was representative across all types of districts in the state. We also over sampled within each DRG and had a randomly ordered list of alternates. However, responses rates were lower than anticipated and in the end we distributed the ECE supervisor survey to the ECE supervisor in each district. We also distributed the Site Director survey to all schools/centers for which we had or were able to obtain contact information.

We received 114 responses from the 153[10] Directors of Special Education contacted (response rate of 75%), 63 responses from ECE Supervisors (out of 83 contacted, 76% response rate), and 198 responses from 359 school principals or center directors contacts (55% response rate).[11] The 114 Directors of Special Education surveyed represented 123 school districts and region/community programs[10] or 70% of the 162 providing preschool. The 63 Early Childhood Education Supervisors surveyed represented 65 school districts and region/community programs[12], or 108% of the targeted sample of 60. The surveys received from the contacted Directors of Special Education and Early Childhood Supervisors are representative of each of the nine DRGs in Connecticut. Table A below reports the number of surveys received per DRG and the percentage of districts in each DRG for which data were collected from the Directors of Special Education and the ECE Supervisors.[13]

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[9] While the goal was to engage all 179 school districts and region/community programs in CT, only 162 provided preschool.

[10] These 153 Directors of Special Education represent all school districts and region/community programs providing preschool in Connecticut. Five of these 153 Directors supervised special education in more than one school district.

[11] If a Site Director oversaw more than one preschool program site, we randomly selected one site about which for them to complete the survey.

[12] One of the Early Childhood Education Supervisors supervised two districts.

[13] Nine Directors of Special Education and three Early Childhood Education respondents completed their survey for a district or region/community program that was not rated in Connecticut's 2016 DRG list. They are not included in Table 1.

Table A. Preschool special education needs assessment responses by 2016 DRG

District Reference Group (DRG)	Director of Special Education Surveys		ECE Supervisor Surveys		Site Director Surveys
	N	% of DRG	N	% of DRG	N
A	7	70%	3	30%	11
B	25	76%	13	39%	8
C	16	73%	9	41%	8
D	25	74%	11	32%	11
E	16	84%	3	16%	6
F	2	67%	2	67%	18
G	13	81%	10	63%	15
H	7	88%	5	63%	18
I	4	80%	4	80%	96

Survey protocols were initially deployed in December 2019 and data collection continued through March 2020. Prior to data collection, NIEER conducted webinars to inform potential respondents about the goals of the study and the purpose of the survey.

Several steps were taken to encourage respondents to complete the survey. Email reminders were sent frequently and all respondents were called by NIEER staff to inform them about the survey. Through these reminder emails and phone calls they were told that anyone who completed the survey would be entered into lotteries for additional gift cards. Reminder emails were also sent by CSDE.[14] Additionally, to boost response rates, each respondent was mailed a physical copy of their survey with postage for a return mailing and instructions for accessing their survey online, as well as an additional gift card. Finally, we created shortened versions of each survey during the last few weeks of data collection to include only the most essential items for analysis, to encourage responses and reduce the time burden.

All data were cleaned and checked for completeness at NIEER and coded for analyses as needed. Open ended questions were coded using emergent coding. Analyses below are descriptive and focus on identify areas where there was variation in responses, capturing differences across districts (or sites).

Results

1. What are the characteristics of the Preschool Programs in Connecticut that serve preschool-age children with disabilities?

Leadership

Information was collected from three groups of respondents: Directors of Special Education, Early Childhood Education Supervisors (i.e., whoever was in charge of preschool for the districts), and school principals, child care center directors, and Head Start directors (referred to in this report as Site Directors). In some cases, the same individual was in more than one of these

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[14] One lesson learned is that many survey recipients flagged emails from NIEER (who was relatively unknown to them despite advanced warning of the surveys) as spam. The suspicions were heightened due to the high monetary incentive for completing the survey.

roles and therefore responded to the questions for each of their roles. Below we describe the characteristics of each of the three groups of respondents.

The **Directors of Special Education** in the sample had, on average, 5.1 years of experience in their current position, ranging from 3 months to 20 years. All Directors of Special Education had at least a Master's degree (27%) though most had furthered their education beyond a Master's: 48% had a Certificate of Advanced Graduate Studies (CAGS), 16% had a doctoral level degree (Ph.D. or Ed.D.), and 8% had "other" educational background which included working towards a doctoral degree. Their highest degrees tended to be in Special Education, Leadership, Administration, and/or Elementary Education, while Early Childhood Education/Preschool was missing for most. The most common Connecticut certifications/ endorsements were in Special Education (#055) and Administration (#092). Seventy-five percent of Directors of Special Education reported prior experience as a classroom teacher, most commonly in Special Education (not preschool/ECE; 84%) followed by middle or high school (65%), and elementary school (49%). Thirty percent previously taught preschool special education and 23% previously taught preschool; however, there is a large amount of overlap between those who reported teaching preschool special education and special education so these percentages should not be considered cumulative. Overall, 35% reported prior teaching experience in preschool and/or preschool special education.[15]

The individuals who completed the **Early Childhood Education (ECE) Supervisor** survey had a number of different roles in their districts including school principals (and assistant principals), directors of special education, and ECE coordinators. Sometimes the person in the ECE Supervisor role was also in the Director of Special Education role (23 people across 25 districts). The ECE Supervisors had, on average, 5.4 years of experience in their current role, which ranged from less than 1 year to 21 years. All ECE supervisors had at least a bachelor's degree: 2% had a bachelor's degree, 39% had a graduate degree (Masters, Ed.D., Ph.D.), 54% had a CAGS, and 5% reported "Other" which included working towards a graduate degree. Notably, only 17% of ECE Supervisors reported that their highest degree was in ECE. Special Education was the most common area for their highest degree (23%). Nineteen percent reported their highest degree was in Leadership, 19% in Administration, and 17% in Elementary Education.[16] The most common Connecticut certification/ endorsements held by the ECE supervisors were Administration (#092, 47%), Special Education Pre-K-Grade 12 (#065, 38%), and Elementary (#013, 28%). Twenty-seven percent had a prekindergarten (#001, #002, #003) and/or Integrated early childhood/special education (#112 or #113) certification/endorsement. Eighty-nine percent of ECE supervisors had prior teaching experience, most commonly in elementary school (61%). However, 38% had prior teaching experience in preschool/ECE and/or preschool special education. Forty-six percent reported teaching special education (other than preschool special education) previously.

The individuals who completed the **Site Director Survey** were typically either **public school principals, child care center directors, or Head Start directors**. On average, they had been in their position as a principal or director for nine years but had been a principal or center director at any school/center for an average of 13 years. Experience ranged from less than 1 year

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[15] Many survey questions allowed for respondents to "select all that apply". Therefore, since respondents could choose more than one response, percentages often will not add up to 100.

[16] Note, it is possible that a lower degree was in ECE but for example their CAGS was in leadership. We only asked about the field of the highest degree.

to 41 years. Individuals such as center directors[17] who completed the survey about a child care center tended to have the most experience on average (13 years total and 9 years in current center), compared to Head Start directors (8 years total and 3 years in current center), and public school principals (8 years and 4.8 in current school).

Sixty percent of the individuals who completed the Site Director Survey had a graduate degree and 12% had a CAGS; 19% had a bachelor's and 7% had less than a bachelor's degree. Nearly all school principals had a graduate degree. Child care center directors were most likely to have a bachelor's degree. Fifty-five percent of Site Directors reported that their highest degree was in ECE; 8% reported developmental psychology and 20% reported child development as the fields for their highest degree. Child care center directors and Head Start directors were more likely than public school principals to have a background in ECE/Child Development/Psychology. However, 45% reported that their highest degree was in elementary education, 9% in middle school education, and 13% in high school education. Nineteen percent reported their highest degree in special education; 14% in Leadership, and 19% in Administration. Forty-seven percent of these individuals reported not holding a Connecticut certification/endorsement. The most commonly held certification were in administration and Elementary Education. Thirty-three percent had a certification in Special Education that covered ECE and four percent has a special education certification that did not cover ECE. Nineteen percent had a Pre-K – 3 certifications and 23% had a Pre-K -6 or Pre-K-8 certification. Child care center directors and Head Start directors were more likely than public school principals to have a background in ECE/Child Development/ Psychology. School principals were more likely than center directors to have a background in special education.

Ninety-two percent of individuals completing the site director survey had previous teaching experience, including 97% of school principals, 89% of child care center directors, and 87% of Head Start directors. About 50% reported prior teaching experience in Preschool/ECE, 45% in Elementary school, and only about 15% reported prior teaching experience in preschool special education or special education more generally. However, nearly all child care center directors and all Head Start directors reported prior preschool/ECE teaching experience compared to approximately just 25% of school principals. On the other hand, school principals were more likely to have prior special education teaching experience than center directors.

School Districts

Data were collected from districts across all nine DRGs (See Table A). And data from each of the surveys were collected from participants in each DRG. Overall, across the three surveys, data were collected from 131 different school districts.

ECE Supervisors were asked to report any state or federal funding that their district preschool program receives. Forty-four districts reported receiving state funding from the School Readiness Program, 30% reported receiving Title I funding, 16% IDEA funding, and 11% each reported Head Start funding, CT Smart Start funding, or no state or federal funding (See Figure 1a). Twenty-seven percent of districts reported that their preschool programs were currently licensed for preschool and another 18% reported that some preschool sites were licensed. Forty-three percent of districts reported that preschool programs had completed a health and safety

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[17] Individuals who filled out the Site Director survey for a child care center will be referred to as child care center directors; Individuals who filled out the Site Director survey for a Head Start center will be referred to as Head Start directors; and Individuals who completed the survey for a public school will be referred to as school principals.

inspection by the CT Office of Early Childhood (OEC), and another 20% reported that some preschool sites had completed the inspection.

ECE Supervisors were also asked about how children without IEPs were selected for enrollment for their districts' preschool programs. Responses indicated a variety of methods are used. The most common methods reported included: a lottery (44% of districts), first come first serve (36%), parents pay tuition (28%), priority to children from low-income families (25%), priority to children who are at-risk of not being ready for kindergarten (25%), and priority to Dual Language Learners (DLLs; 18%). Sixteen percent of districts also reported that children were selected for enrollment based on the requirements of the funding stream. See Figure 1b for additional detail.

Figure 1a. State and federal funding used to support districts' preschool programs
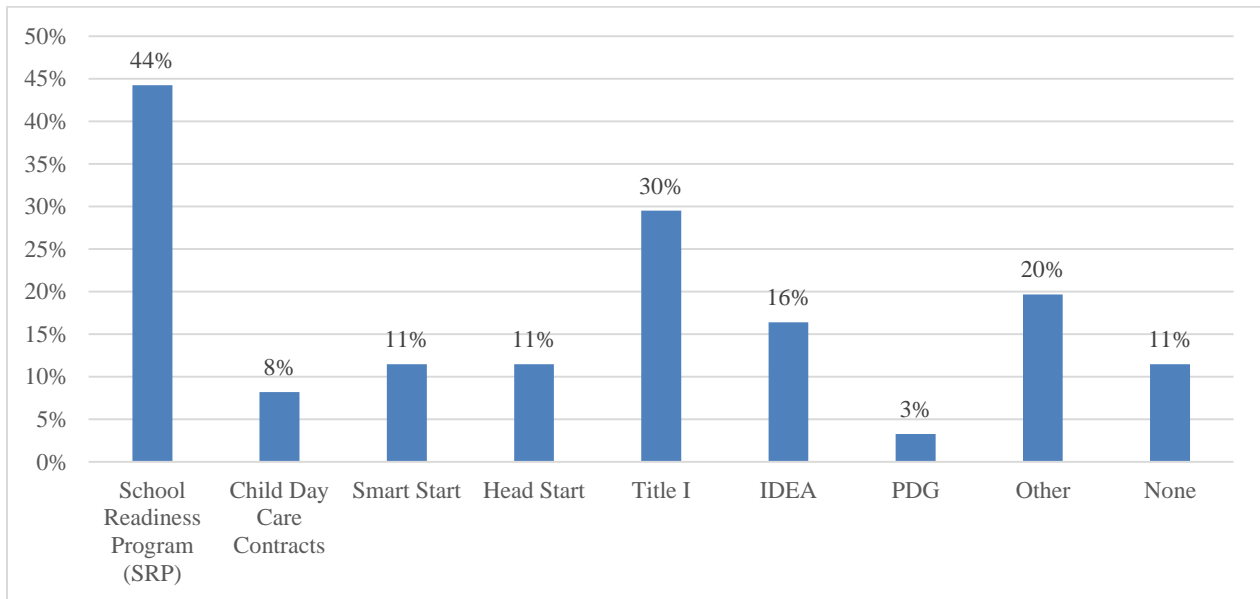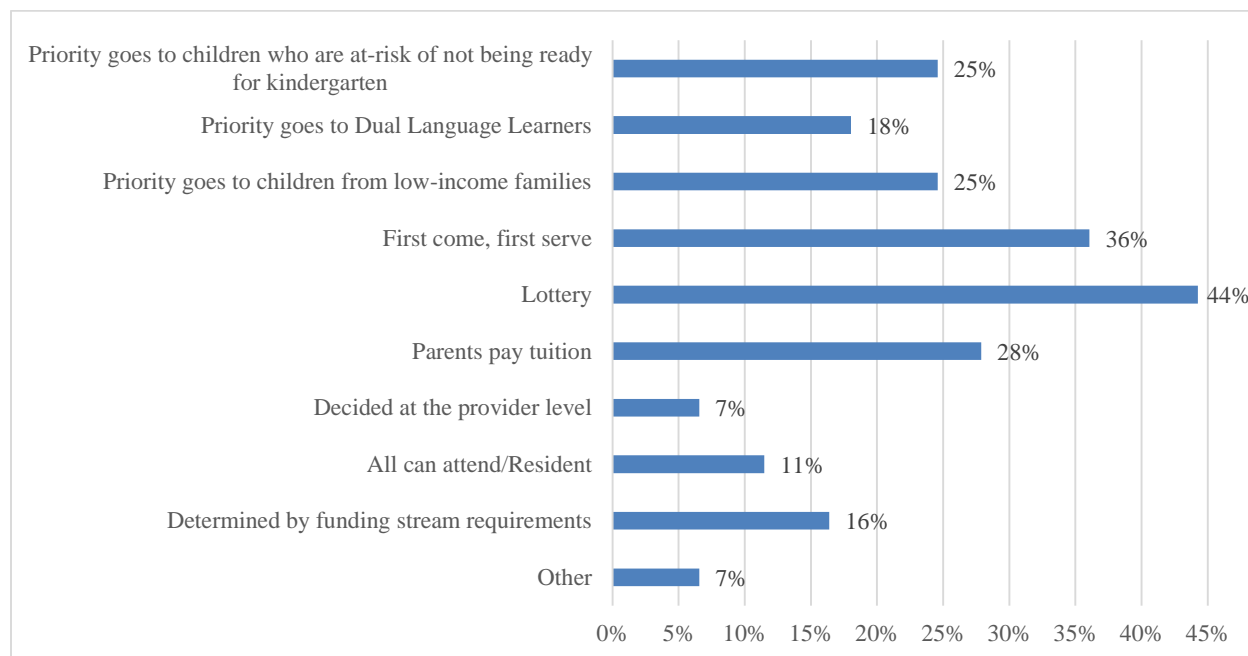
Figure 1b. Methods for selecting children without an IEP for preschool enrollment (reported by ECE supervisors)


School and Child Care Centers Providing Preschool

School principals and center directors were asked to provide information about their schools and centers, respectively. They reported that on average, schools/centers have the capacity to serve 78 preschool-age children, ranging from three to 763. Some principals/directors reported not knowing their program's capacity to serve preschoolers. On average, these programs actually served 73 preschoolers, ranging from one to 763, suggesting that most programs were operating at or close to capacity for serving preschoolers. On average schools/centers had 5.4 preschool classrooms, ranging from one to 45.[18] Schools/centers served a variety of age ranges of children. The most common age ranges of children in the schools/centers were birth/6 weeks through preschool, preschool only, preschool and elementary school, and infant/toddler through elementary schools. A few sites housed programs that went through middle school.

Almost 52% of preschool programs in this sample were in public schools, 37% were private child care providers, 10% were Head Start centers, and 10% were Magnet schools. (Note, some programs reported more than one program type). There was one Charter School in the sample and none reported being an approved private school for special education.[19] See Figure 1c. Focusing on only the private child care centers in the sample, 71% reported being nonprofit, 26% for-profit, 10% independent, and none reported being part of a chain.

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[18] Principals/Directors were asked to report on the number of classes. One classroom with a morning and an afternoon session should be considered two classes.

[19] For analyses that present data by program type, programs are categorized as public schools (including magnet and charter schools), private child care center, and Head Start programs (that did not also fall into one of the other categories).

Figure 1c. Type of preschool programs
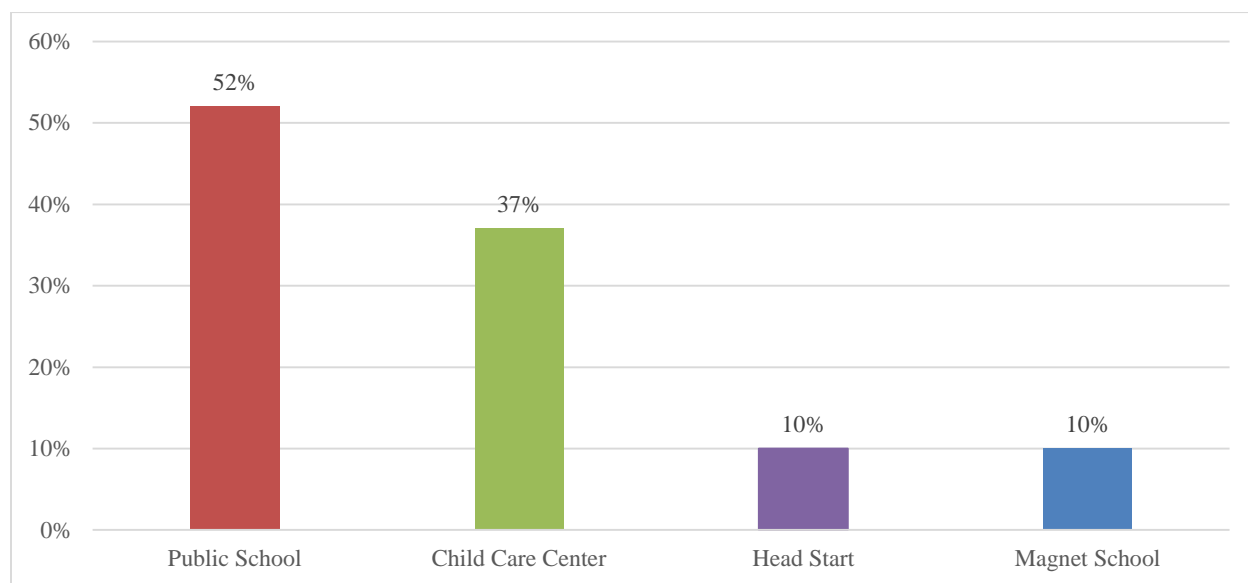
Fifty-nine percent of preschool programs were reported to be licensed for child care and another 21% were licensed-exempt. However, all Head Start centers and 94% of child care centers reported being licensed for preschool and the other six percent reported being licensed exempt. Only 26% of preschool programs in public schools reported being licensed with another 33% reporting being licensed exempt. Overall, 76% of programs reported completing a health and safety inspection by the CT Office of Early Childhood, including 100% of Head Start programs, 99% of private child care centers, and 52% of public school preschool programs.

The most common type of state or federal funding used by preschool programs in this sample was Connecticut School Readiness funding which were utilized by 54% of preschool programs (including 38% of public school programs, 73% of child care centers, and 73% of Head Start programs). Programs also reported using Connecticut Child Day Care Contracts (CDCC; 14%), Connecticut Smart Start (5%), Head Start (13%), Title I (15%), Care for Kids (12%), IDEA (3%), Preschool Development Grants (2%)[20], and other sources (8%). Seventeen percent of programs reporting no state or federal funds. Figure 1d provides additional information on funding sources used, including by program type.

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[20] IDEA, PDG, and Care for Kids were responses written in to the "Other" option for this question and therefore may underestimate programs using these funding sources.

Figure 1d. State and federal funding used by preschool program type
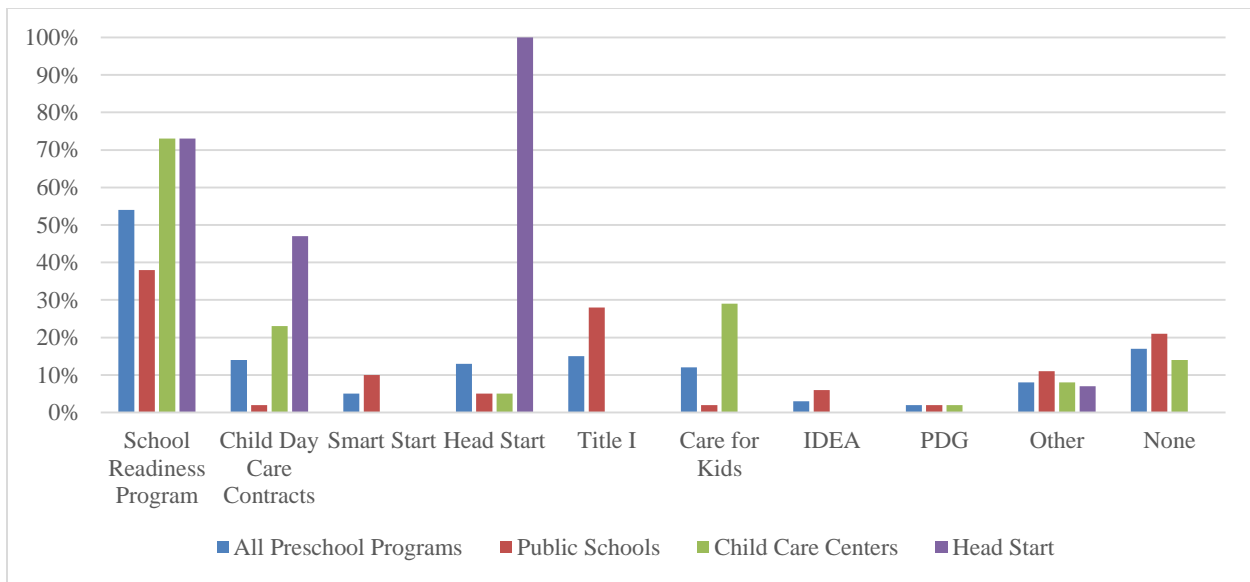
Children without an IEP are selected for enrollment in preschool programs in a variety of different ways. The most common way reported was on a first-come, first serve basis, followed by parents paying tuition, determined by funding stream, and the use of a lottery. Programs also reported prioritizing children from low-income families, children who are at-risk of not being ready for kindergarten, and Dual Language Learners. Figure 1e provides more detail on selection for enrollment, including by program type.

Figure 1e. Methods for selecting children without an IEP for preschool enrollment by program type (reported by site directors)
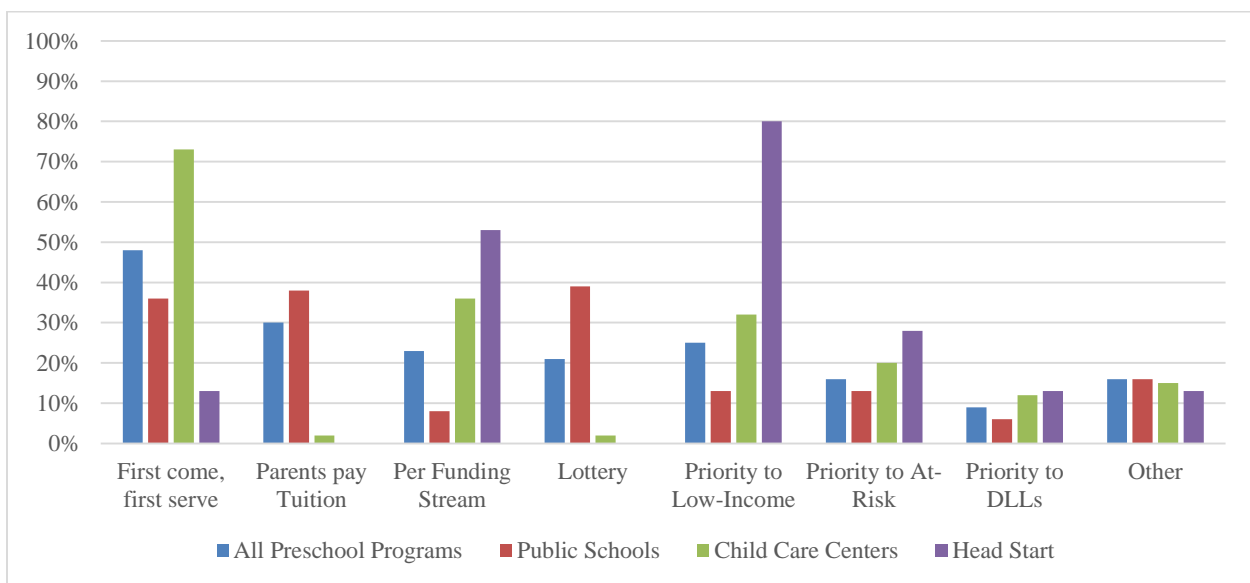
Preschool Classrooms

Directors of Special Education were asked to report on the number of preschool classrooms in their districts. On average, they reported 3.35 full-day preschool classrooms (range: 0 to 66) and 4.69 part-day preschool classrooms (range: 0 to 30). Across the districts in the sample, 42% of preschool classes were full-day and 58% were part-day.

      Directors of Special Education reported an average of 2.76 special education classrooms (range: 0 to 22), 4.83 general education preschool classrooms (range: 0 to 66), and 0.3 general education preschool classrooms that did not serve any children with an IEP (range: 0 to 12).[21] Across all districts in the sample 36% of preschool classrooms were special education, 55% were general education that included children with an IEP, and eight percent were general education classrooms that did not include any children with an IEP.

      School principals/center directors also provided information about preschool classrooms in their school/center. Across respondents, there was a total of 595 preschool classrooms, ranging from one to 25 preschool classrooms per site. A total of 465 of those classrooms (78%) included preschoolers with an IEP (ranging from one to 25 classrooms per site). Approximately 75% of the classrooms in this sample were general education classrooms and 25% were special education classrooms.[21] In public schools, approximately 56% of preschool classrooms were general education and 44% were special education. In both child care center and Head Start programs, all preschool classrooms were general education.

      There was an average of 17 preschoolers enrolled per preschool classroom (17 in public schools, 17 in child care, 18 in Head Start), ranging from 1 to 40.[22] And on average, there were 3.7 preschoolers with an IEP enrolled in a classroom, ranging from 0 to 25. In preschool classrooms that had a least one child with an IEP, there was an average of 4.4 preschoolers with an IEP (6.3 in public schools, 1.7 in child care, and 2.4 in Head Start), ranging from 1 to 25.

      Across all preschool classrooms, there was an average of 1.6 lead teachers, 1.2 paraprofessionals not specifically assigned to a child, and 0.5 paraprofessionals assigned specifically to one or more children with an IEP. These numbers varied across general and special education preschool classrooms. In general education preschool classrooms, there was an average of 1.7 lead teachers, 1 paraprofessional not specifically assigned to a child, and 0.3 paraprofessionals assigned specifically to one or more children with an IEP. And in preschool special education classrooms, there was an average of 1 lead teacher, 1.9 paraprofessionals not specifically assigned to a child, and 1.3 paraprofessionals assigned specifically to one or more children with an IEP. Table 1a provides additional detail on staffing varies by program type.

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[21] A special education class was defined as a class where 50% or more of children in the class had an IEP. A general education class was defined as a class where less than 50% of children in the class had an IEP. These definitions were provided in the survey.

[22] Preschool enrollment data are reported by classroom. Some classrooms may include more than one class or session, leading to enrollment numbers that are higher than might be expected.

Table 1a. Average number of staff per classroom by classroom and program type

	Teachers Only				Paraprofessionals (not specifically assigned to a child)				Paraprofessionals (assigned to a child/children with an IEP)			
	All	Public Schools	Child Care	Head Start	All	Public Schools	Child Care	Head Start	All	Public Schools	Child Care	Head Start
All Classrooms	1.6	1.1	2.0	1.8	1.2	1.5	0.6	0.9	0.5	0.9	0.1	0.0
General Education	1.7	1.2	2.0	1.8	1.0	1.2	0.6	0.9	0.3	0.6	0.1	0.0
Special Education	1.0	1.0	NA	NA	1.9	1.9	NA	NA	1.3	1.3	NA	NA

Based on the number of preschoolers enrolled per classroom and the staff in each classroom, we calculated child to teacher ratios in three different ways: based on only the lead teacher, based on the lead teacher and paraprofessionals not assigned to a specific child, and based on all teaching staff in the classroom. Table 1b summarizes the calculated child to teaching staff ratios in the sample overall and by program type.

Table 1b. Child to teaching staff ratios in preschool classrooms

	Teachers Only				Teachers and Paraprofessionals (not specifically assigned to a child)				Teachers and All Paraprofessional			
	All	Public Schools	Child Care	Head Start	All	Public Schools	Child Care	Head Start	All	Public Schools	Child Care	Head Start
All Classrooms	12.7	16.0	8.9	10.9	7.5	7.4	7.1	8.9	7.0	6.4	6.9	8.9
General Education	12.3	16.7	8.9	10.9	7.8	8.3	7.1	8.9	7.3	7.2	6.9	8.9
Special Education	15.0	15.0	NA	NA	6.0	6.0	NA	NA	5.3	5.3	NA	NA

Preschool Teaching Staff

The Director of Special Education in each district was asked to report on the number of staff that work with preschoolers. This information is summarized in Table 1c. Across the districts for which data were provided, there were a total of 580 lead preschool teachers, 786 preschool paraprofessionals who were not assigned to specific children, and 427 preschool paraprofessionals who were assigned to one or more specific children per their IEPs.

Directors of Special Education were also asked to report on the degrees and/or certifications required for preschool teaching staff upon hiring. Most reported that lead teachers in general education preschool classrooms were required to have at least a bachelor's degree and certification in either ECE or ECE Special Education. Nearly all reported that lead teachers in special education preschool classrooms were required to have at least a bachelor's degree and certification in ECE special education. Paraprofessionals tended to be required to have either a High School Diploma (or equivalent), or an Associate's Degree (or equivalent), or pass the ParaPro exam. A few reported a Bachelor's degree was required or that there were no degree requirements for paraprofessionals.

Table 1c. Summary of the number of staff working with preschoolers

	Total Number of Staff	Number of Full-Time Staff	Number of Part-Time Staff
Lead Preschool Teachers	580		
Preschool Paraprofessionals (not 1:1)	786		
Preschool Paraprofessionals (1:1)	427		
Special Education Specialists	462	448	14
Directors/Principals	228	189	39
Social Workers	116	80	36
Nurses	172	124	48
Child Study Team Members	140	124	16
OT/PT Staff	217	113	104
Speech Therapists	213	169	44
BCBAs	80	45	35
Counselors	19	14	5
Other	141	130	11

Note: Not all district in the sample provided answers for each staff type.

School principals and center directors also provided information on staff that work with preschoolers. On average, sites had 6 full-time lead preschool teachers, 2.6 part-time lead preschool teachers, 5.7 full-time preschool paraprofessionals, and 2 part-time preschool paraprofessionals. Table 1d summarizes additional detail on preschool staff at the site level.

Table 1d. Summary of preschool staff per site

	Total Number of Staff	Number of Full-Time Staff
Lead Preschool Teachers	6.0	2.6
Preschool Paraprofessionals	5.7	2.0
Special Education Specialists	1.3	0.5
Directors/Principals	1.3	0.2
Social Workers	0.9	0.3
Nurses	1.1	0.4
Child Study Team Members	1.2	0.2
OT/PT Staff	1.0	0.8
Speech Therapists	1.1	0.5
BCBAs	0.4	0.4
Counselors	0.2	0.1
Other	1.8	0.7

Demographic information (including race, ethnicity, and languages spoken) about preschool lead teachers, paraprofessionals, and related services providers was also provided by site directors. The majority of the staff that work with preschoolers were White, Non-Hispanic, and spoke only English. However, child care center staff and Head Start staff tended to be more diverse than preschool staff in public schools.[23] Figures 1f through 1n provide additional detail on preschool staff demographics overall and by program type.

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[23] Samples sizes were smaller for child care center teachers and particularly for Head Start staff, especially for paraprofessionals and related service providers.

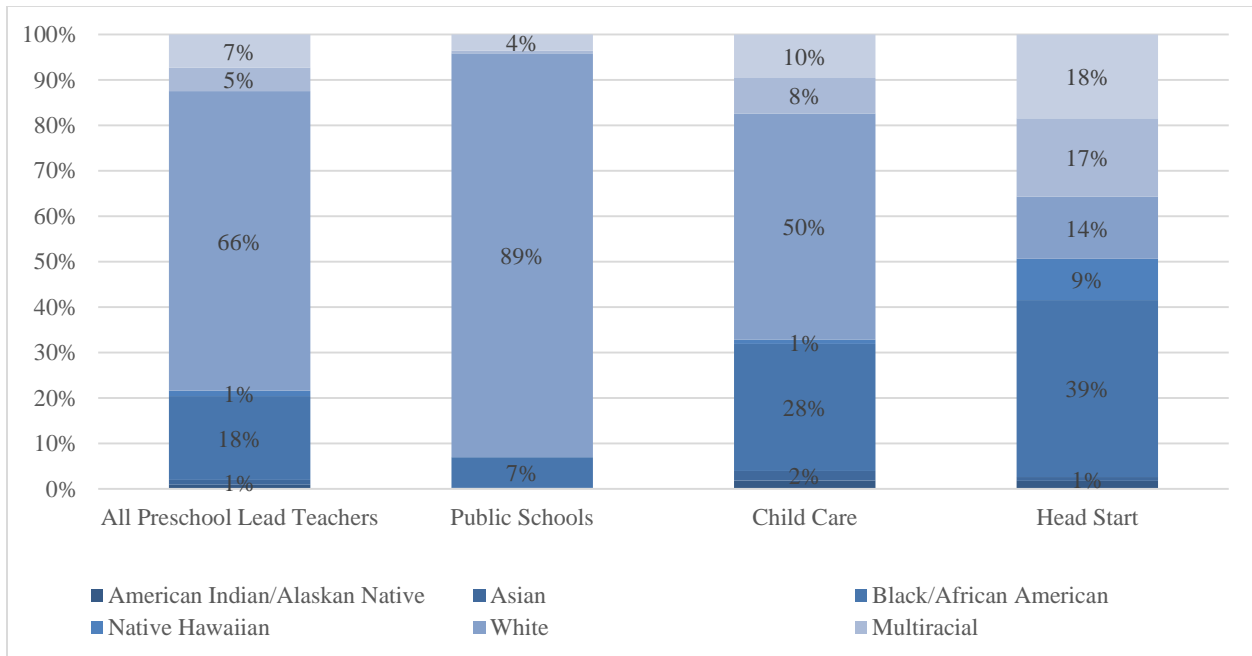**Figure 1f. Lead preschool teacher race by program type**

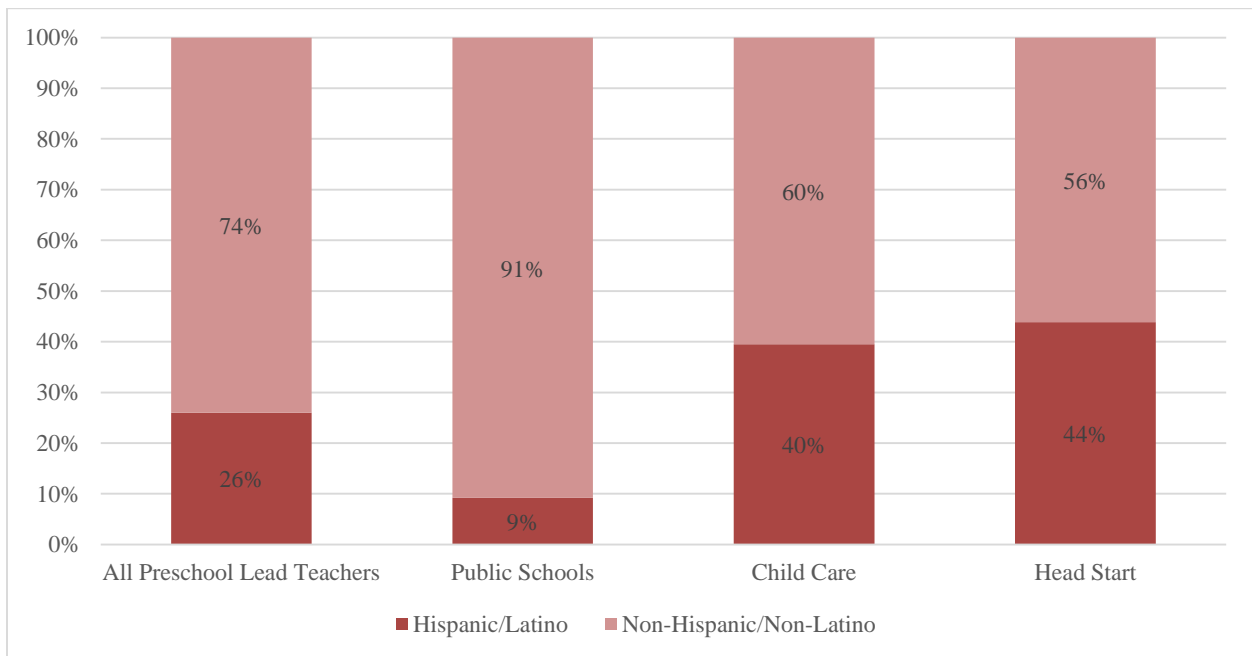**Figure 1g. Lead preschool teacher ethnicity by program type**

Figure 1h. Lead preschool teacher languages spoken by program type
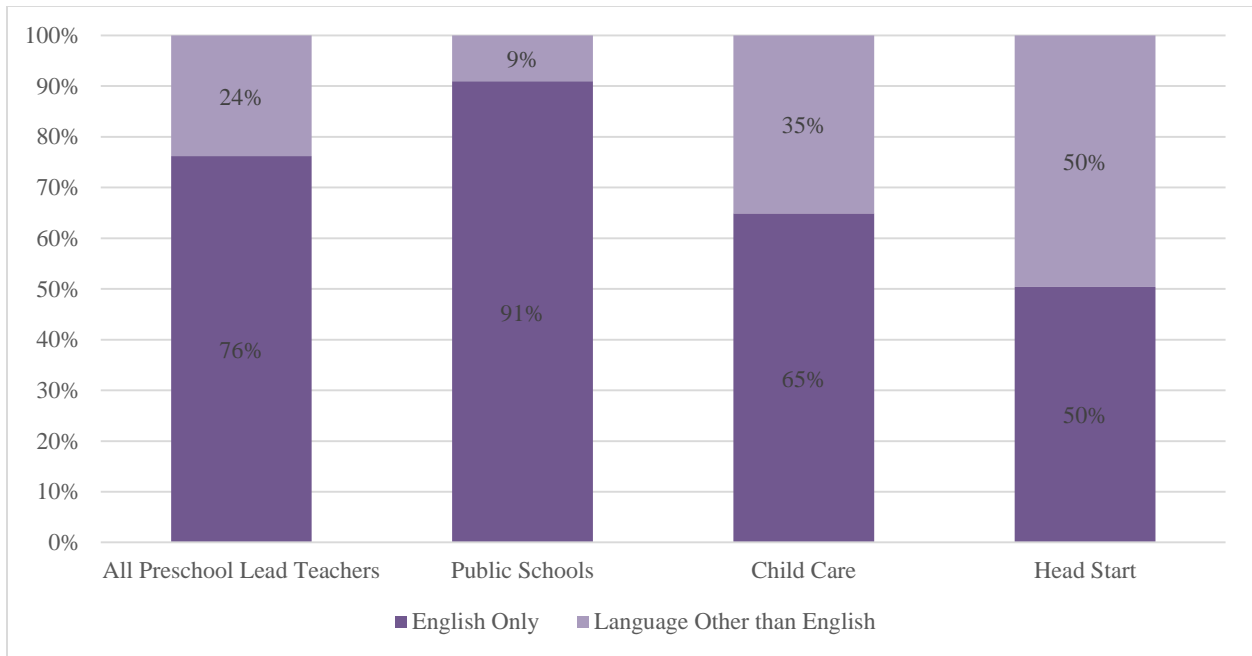

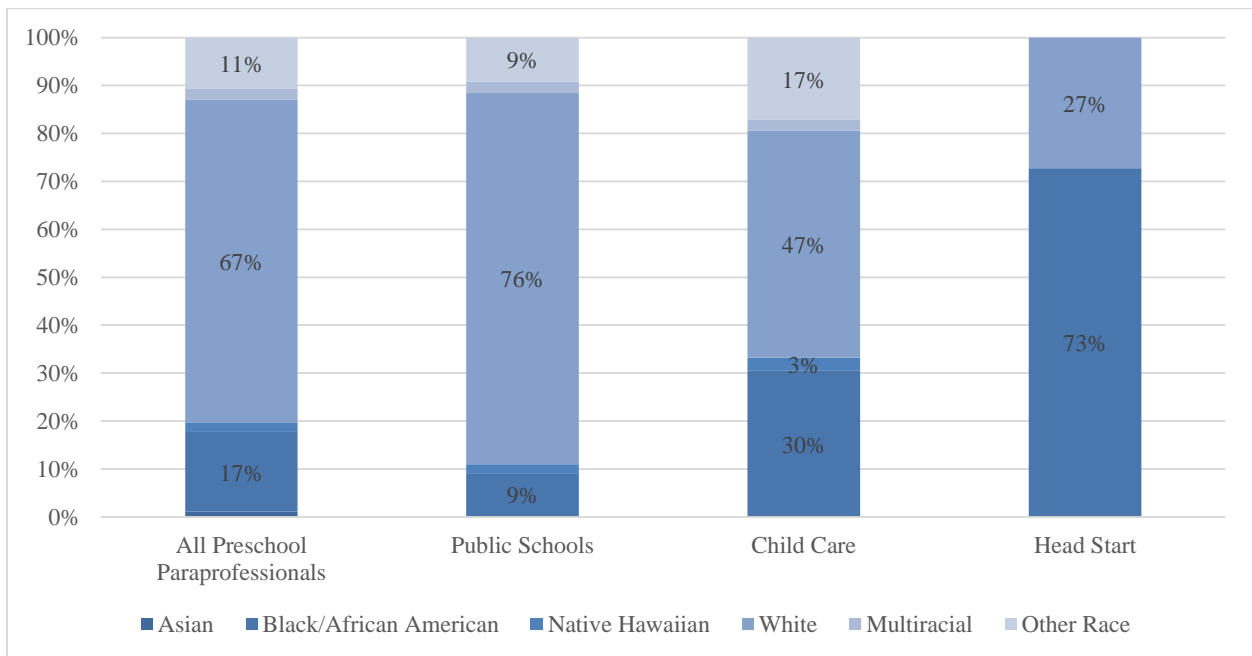**Figure 1i. Preschool paraprofessional race by program type**

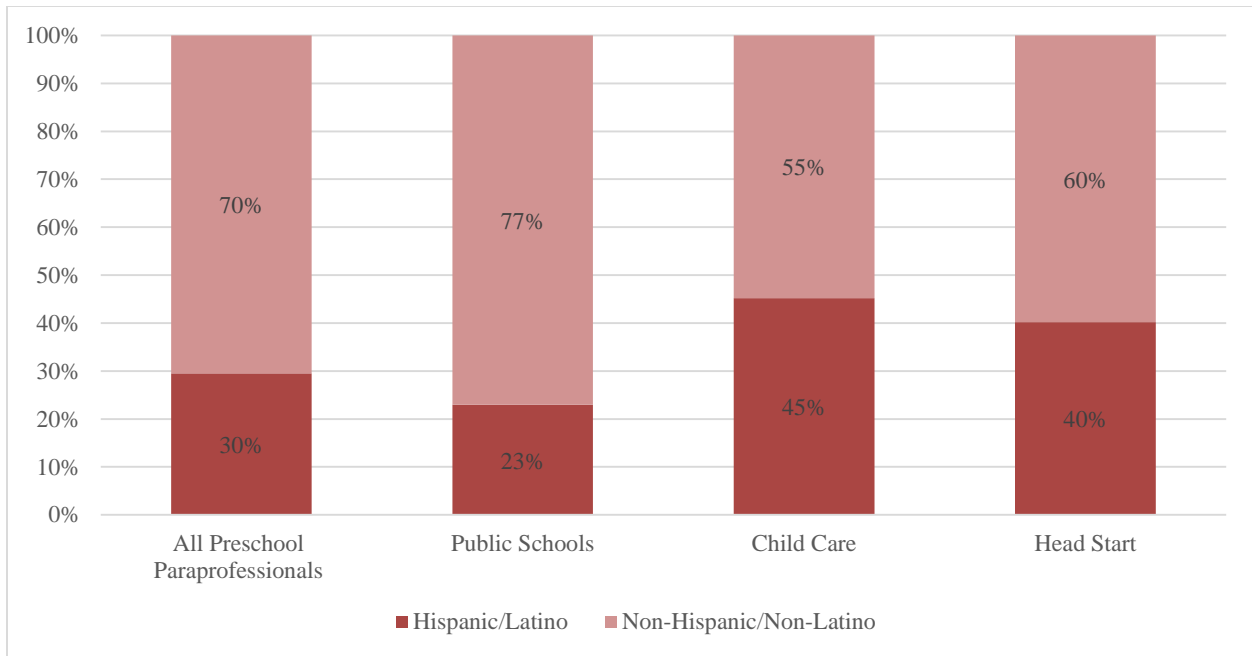**Figure 1j. Preschool paraprofessional ethnicity by program type**

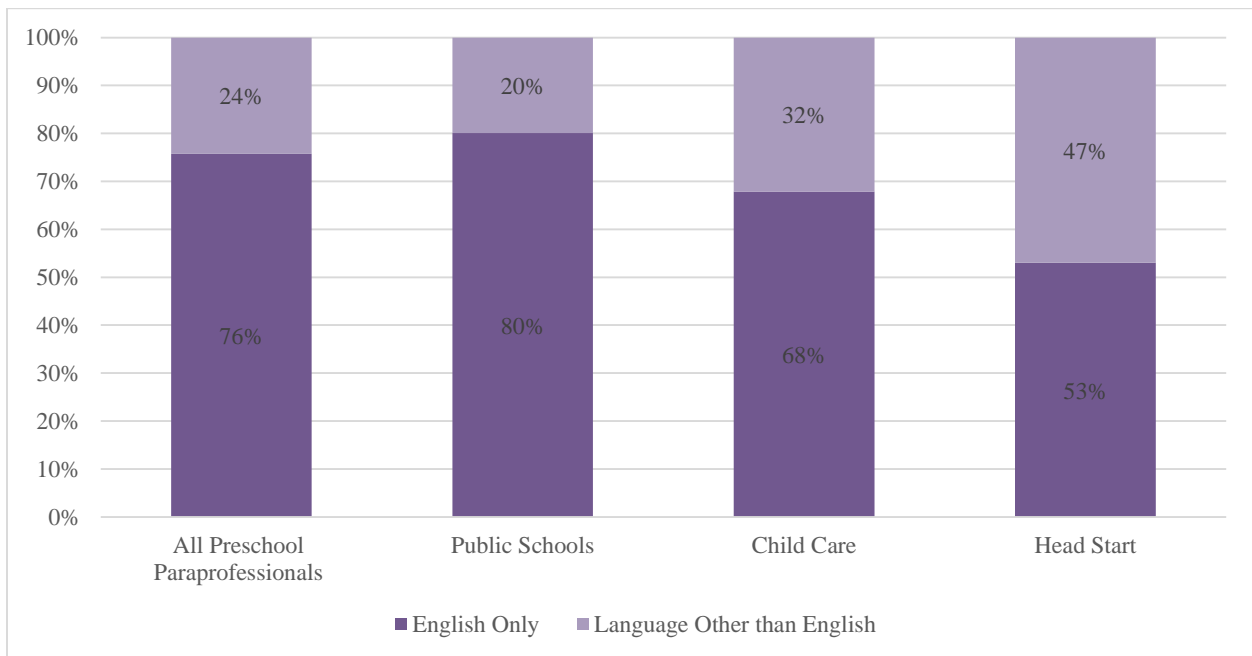**Figure 1k. Preschool paraprofessional languages spoken by program type**
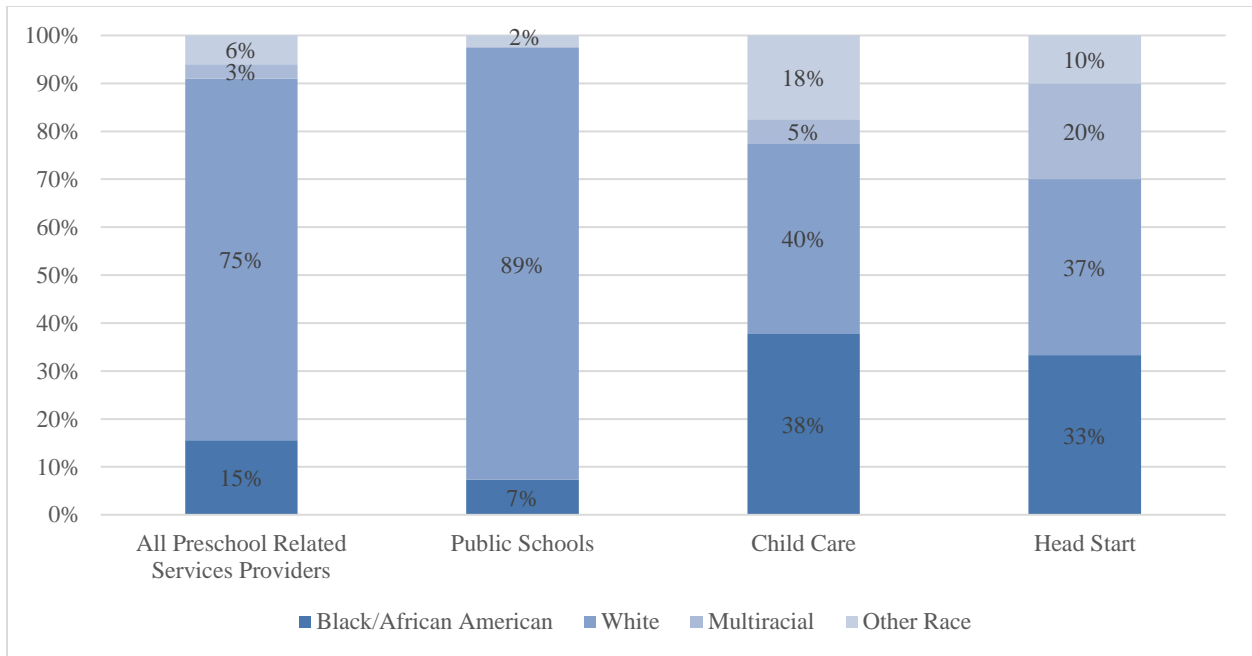
Figure 1l. Preschool related services provider race by program type

Figure 1m. Preschool related services provider ethnicity by program type
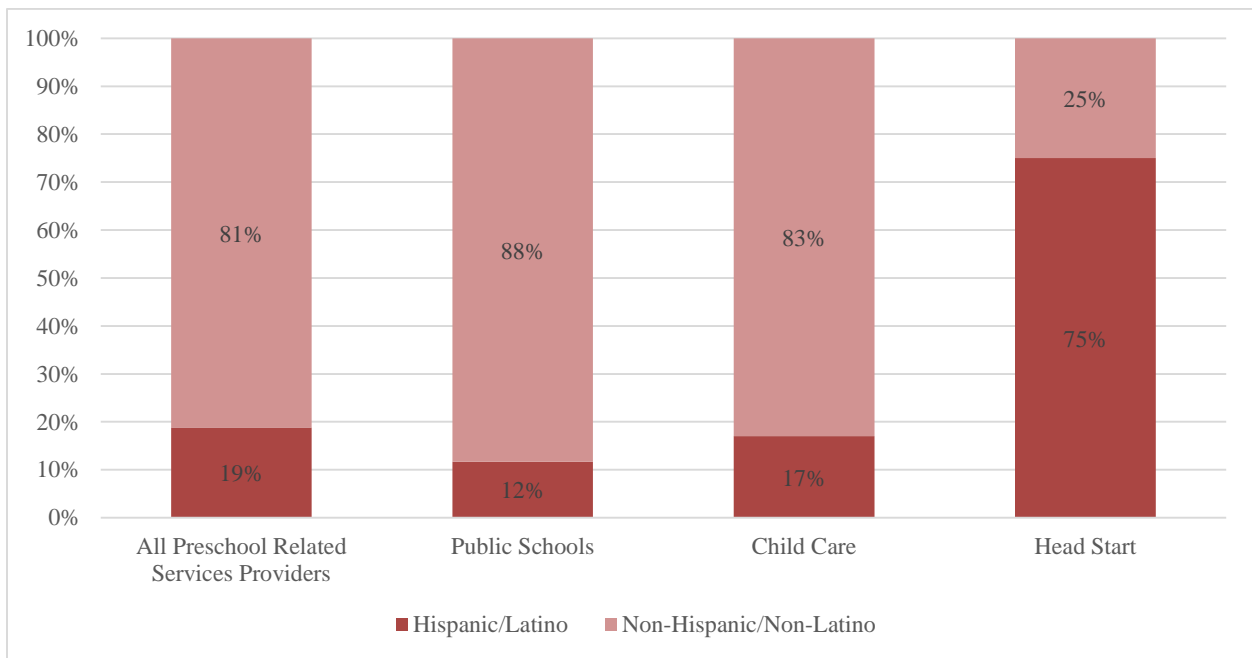
Figure 1n. Preschool related services provider languages spoken by program type
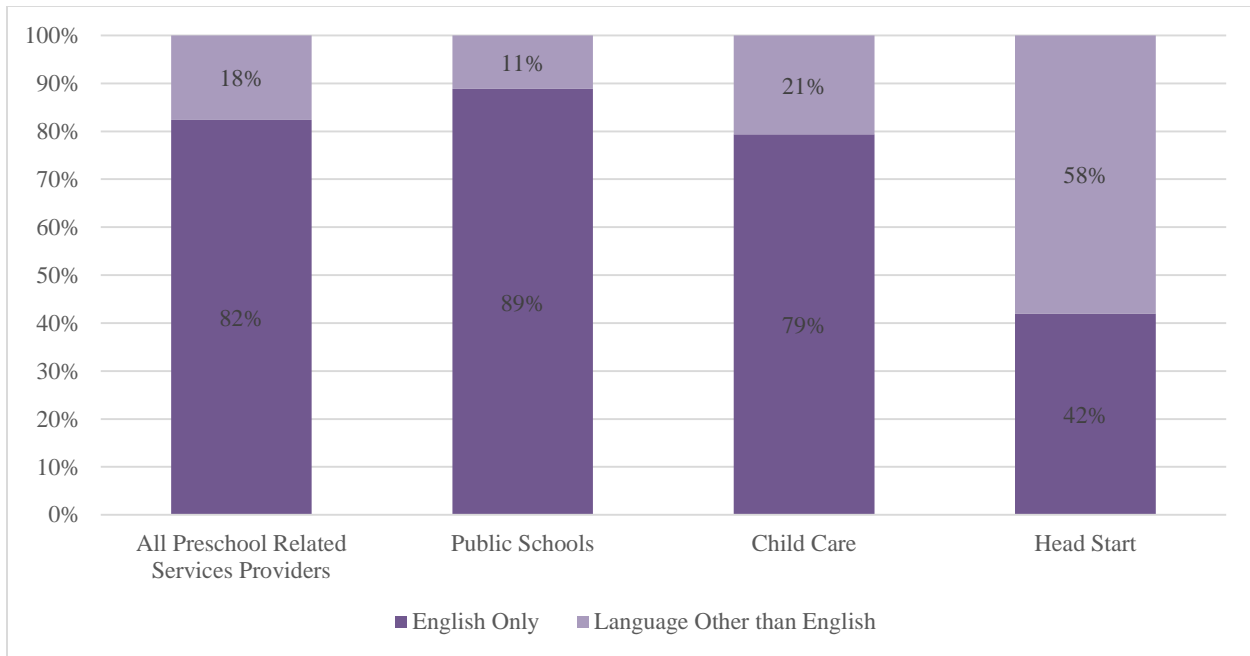
Nearly all (89%) lead preschool teachers had a bachelor's degree or higher, including 99% of lead preschool teachers in public schools, 73% in child care, and 77% in Head Start. Seventy-one percent of lead preschool teachers had at least a bachelor's degree in ECE, including 85% of lead preschool teachers in public schools, 61% in child care, and 47% in Head Start. Another two percent had an alternative route certification in ECE and almost 4% were reported to not have any degree in ECE. Seventy-nine percent of lead preschool teachers were reported to have at least a bachelor's degree in special education (including a CAGS), including 89% of lead preschool teachers in public schools, eight percent in child care and no Head Start teachers. Almost 3% had an alternative route certification in special education, and 16% had no degree in special education. Figures 1o through 1q provide additional detail on preschool lead teacher highest degree by program type.

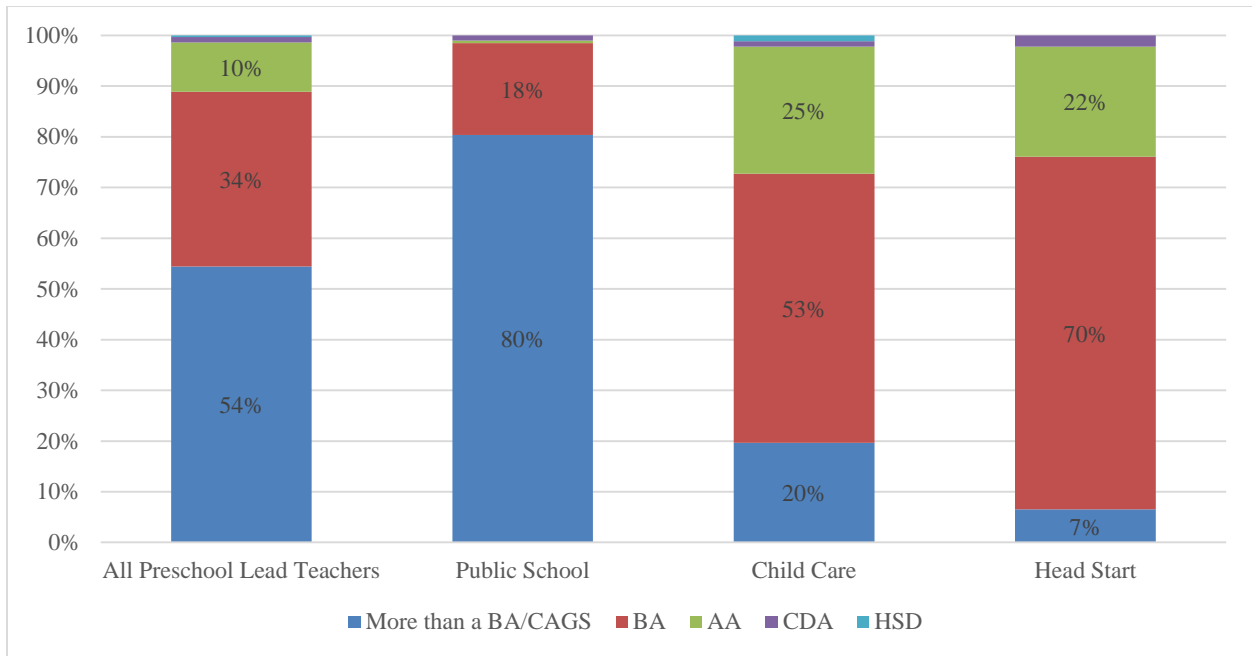**Figure 1o. Lead preschool teacher highest degree by program type**

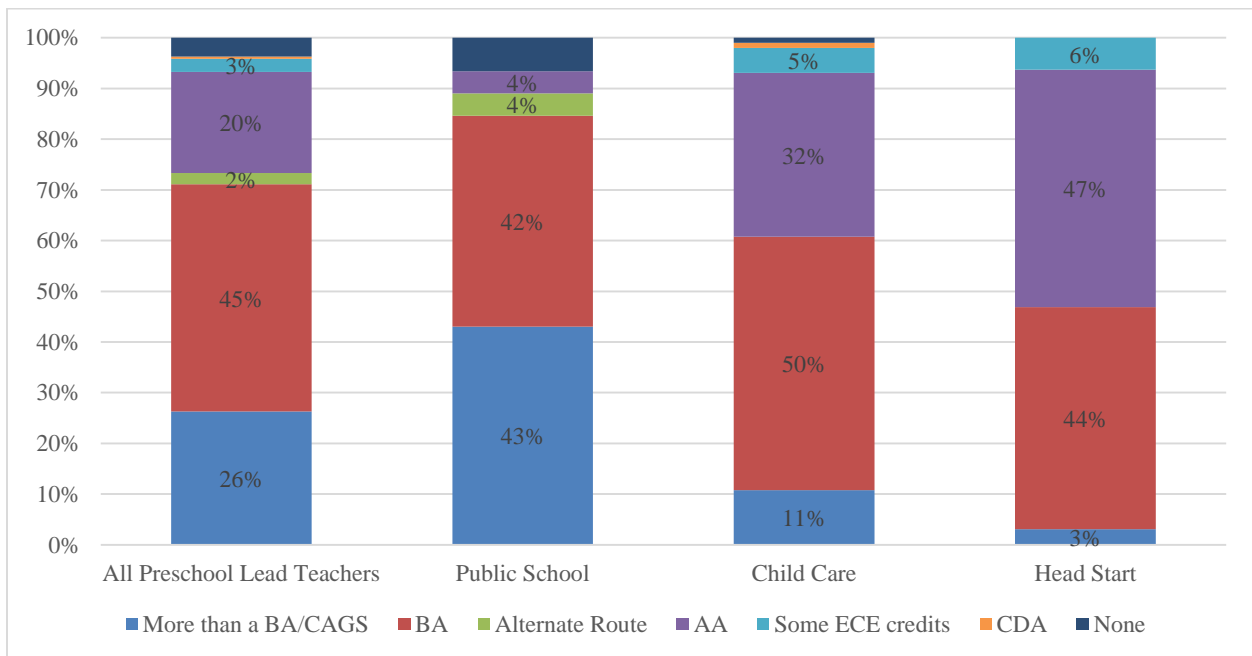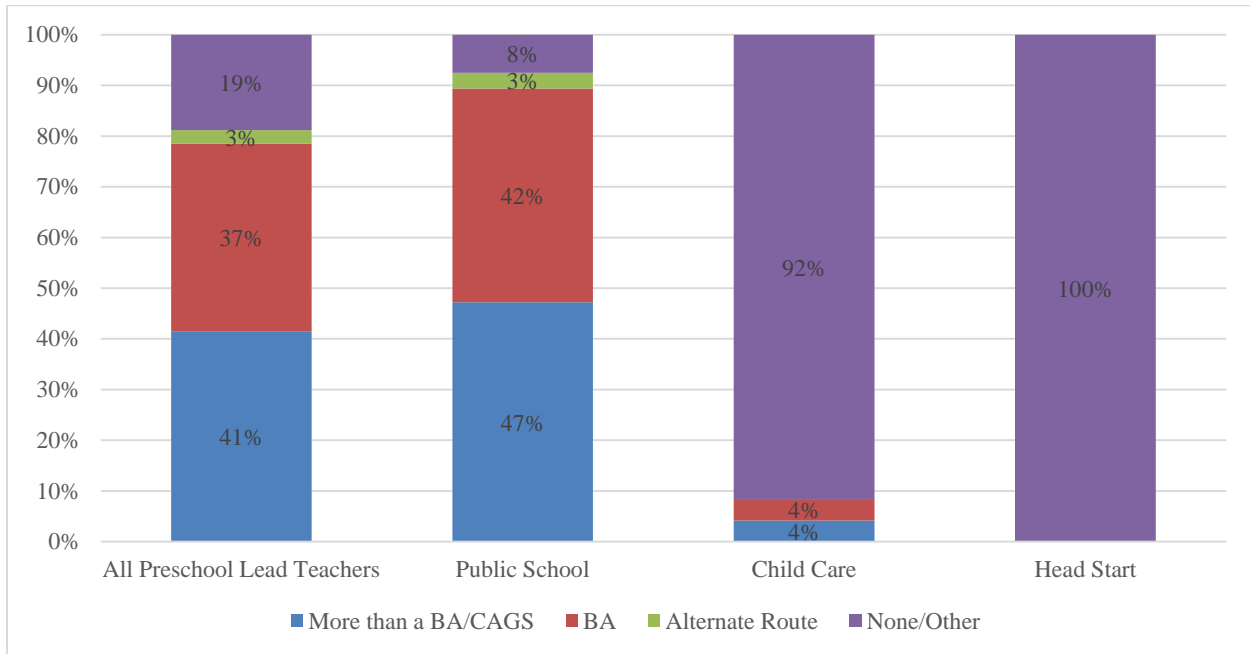**Figure 1p. Lead preschool teacher highest degree in ECE by program type**

Figure 1q. Lead preschool teacher highest degree in special education by program type

Sixty-nine percent of lead preschool teachers had a CT preschool teaching certification, 57% had a CT special education teaching certification, and 25% had another CT teaching certification. Preschool teachers in public schools were more likely than those in child care or Head Start to have preschool or special education certification. See Figure 1r.

Figure 1r. Lead preschool teacher CT teaching certifications by program type
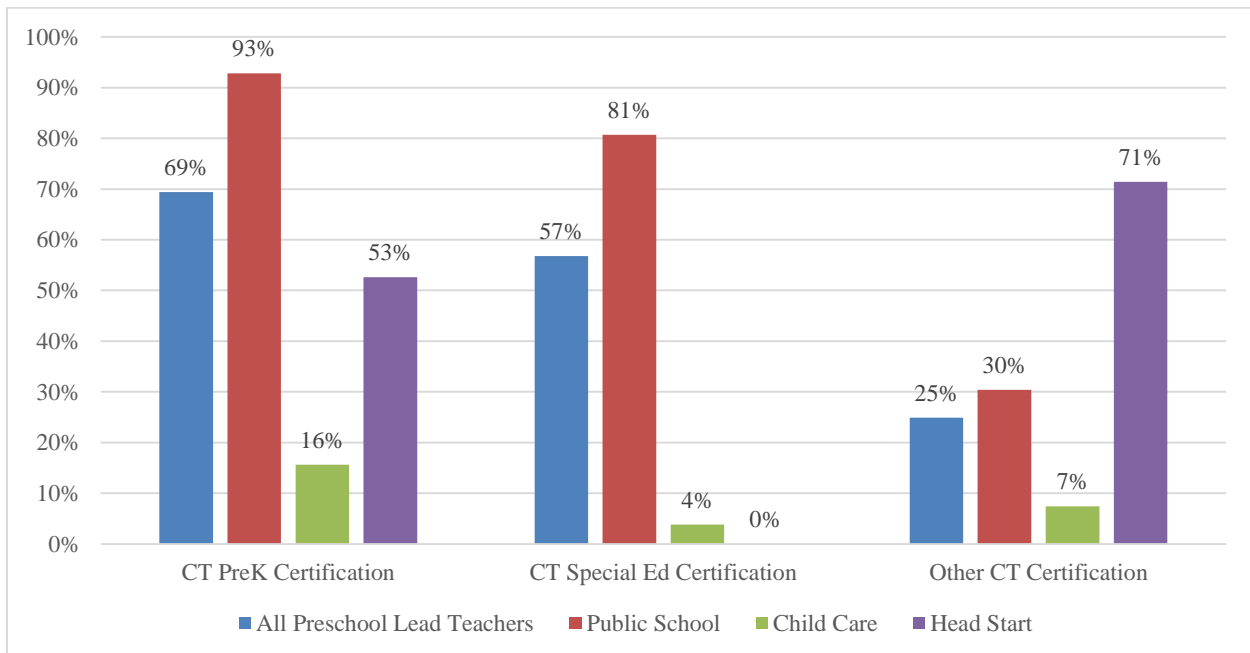
Sixty-four percent of preschool paraprofessionals were reported to have a bachelor's degree or higher, including 72% in public schools, 43% in child care, and 60% in Head Start. Only 36% were reported to have a bachelor's or higher in ECE including 41% in public schools, 26% in child care, and 50% in Head Start. Thirty percent of preschool paraprofessionals had no degree or credits in ECE, though all Head Start paraprofessionals had some background in ECE. Twenty-nine percent of preschool paraprofessionals had a BA or higher in special education while 68% had no degree or credits in special education, including all Head Start paraprofessionals. Twenty-five percent of preschool paraprofessionals were reported to have a Child Development Associate (CDA), including 19% in public schools, 25% in child care, and 100% in Head Start. Figures 1s through 1v provide additional detail on preschool lead teacher highest degree by program type.

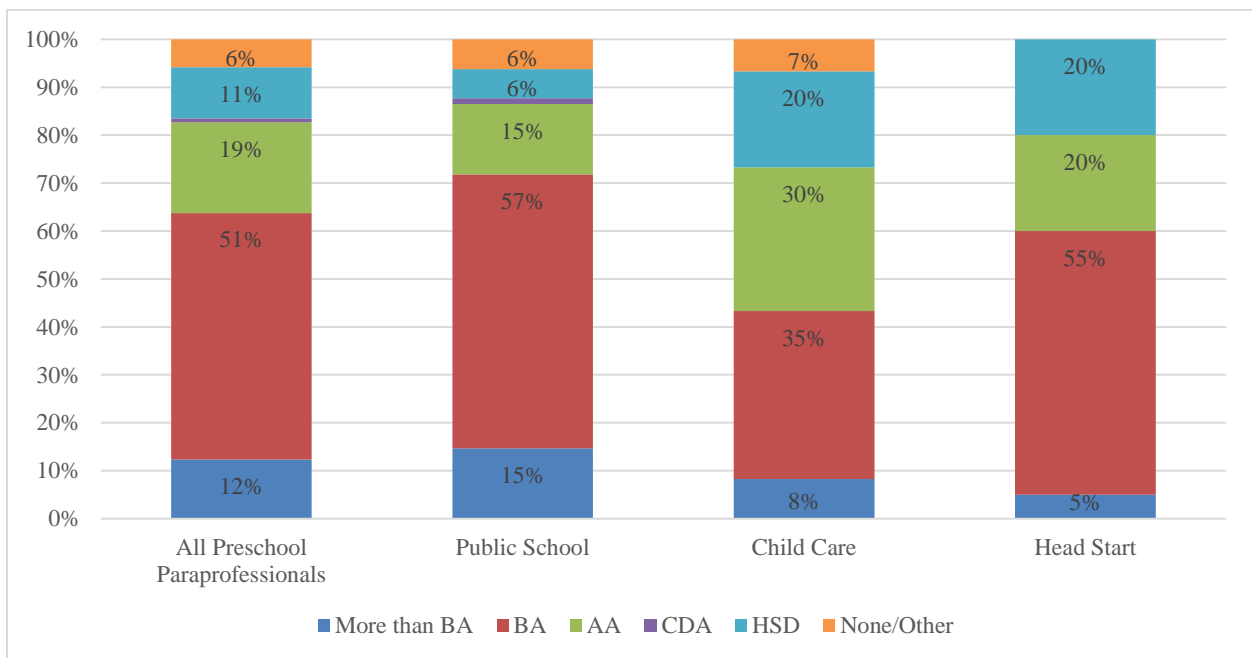**Figure 1s. Preschool paraprofessional highest degree by program type**

Figure 1t. Preschool paraprofessional highest degree in ECE by program type
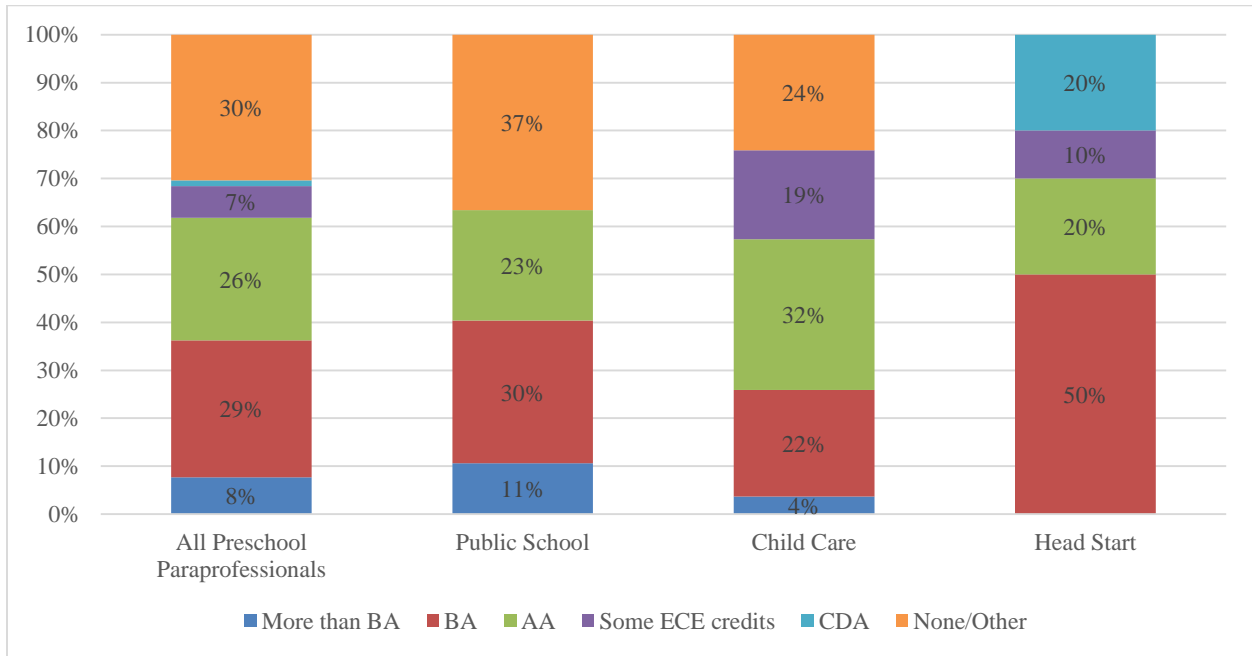

Figure 1u. Preschool paraprofessional highest degree in special education by program type
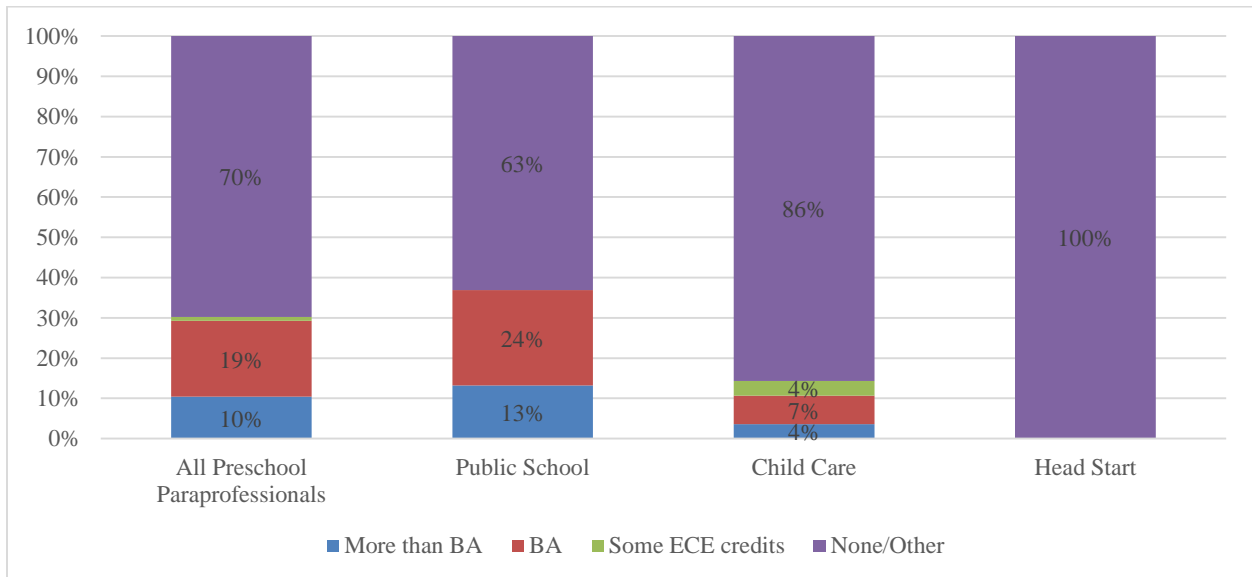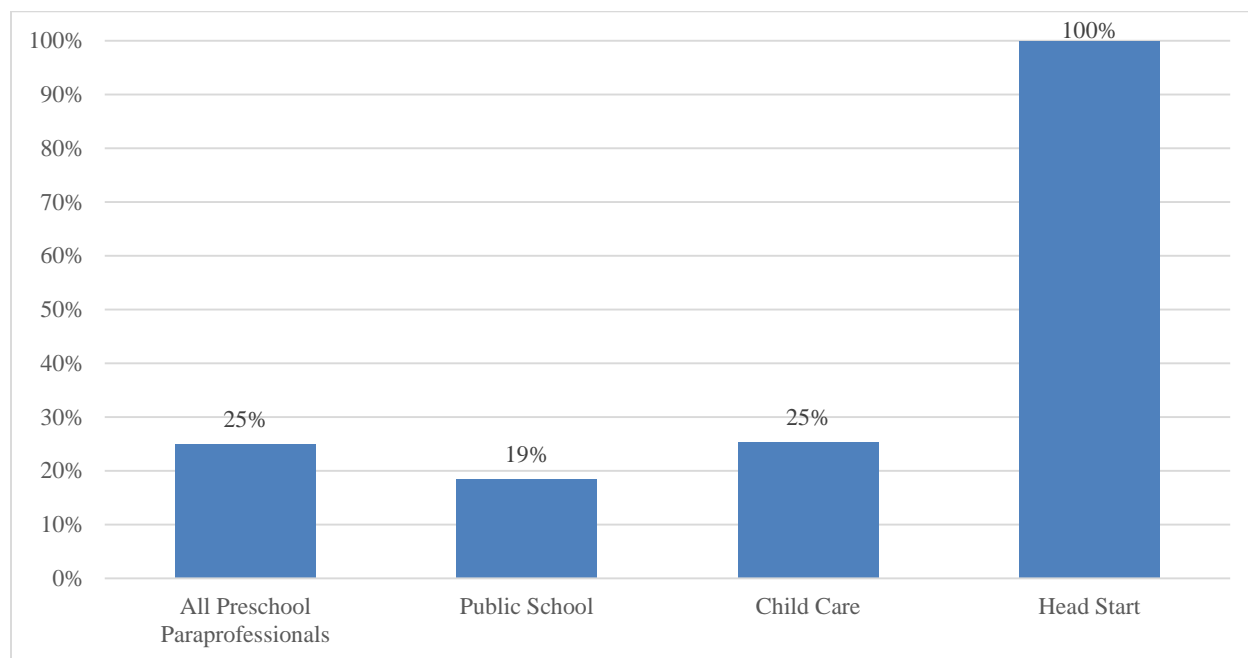
Figure 1v. Preschool paraprofessional CDA by program type

Preschool Children

Both the Directors of Special Education and the Site Director (school principals/center directors) were asked to provide information about preschoolers enrolled in their districts and programs, respectively. We found that some of the information reported at the district and the site level did not always match up. Two possible explanations for these discrepancies are: (1) the districts included in the district-level and site-level samples are different, though there is some overlap; and (2) it is possible that the districts did not always report on the children in their districts served in child care and/or Head Start centers.[24]

Figure 1w displays the percent of preschoolers by race, both for all preschoolers and for only preschoolers with IEPs as reported by the Directors of Special Education. On average, the race breakdown of preschoolers with IEPs is very similar to the race breakdown of all preschoolers. Figure 1x displays the percent of preschoolers by race for all preschoolers and for only preschoolers with IEPs as reported by the site directors and also displays this information for public schools, child care centers, and Head Start centers. On average, the race breakdown for all preschoolers and for preschoolers with IEPs was very similar. The differences tended to be across program type: a higher percentage of preschoolers in public schools were White compared to in child care or in Head Start. Similarly, there were more Black/African American preschoolers in child care and Head Start than in public schools. And there were more preschoolers identified as "other race" in Head Start than in child care or public schools. Additionally, there were some differences in the race breakdown of preschoolers from the

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[24] Additionally, the child care centers are over-represented in the larger, poorer DRGs which may partially explain the differences in child demographics from the district-level and program-level data.

district-level reports from the directors of special education and the program-level reports from the site directors. The district level data indicated a higher percentage of preschoolers were White and a lower percentage were White than the program/site level data. As mentioned previously, this difference is likely because different districts were included in the two samples.

Figure 1w. Preschool children by race (reported by directors of special education)
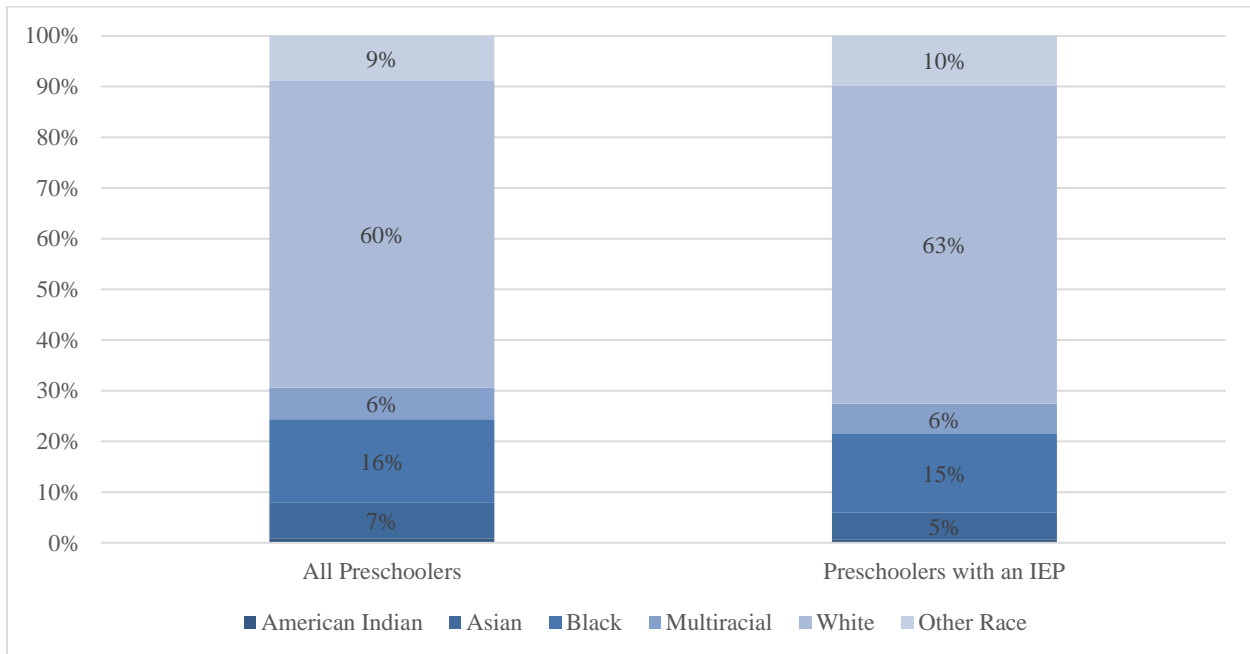

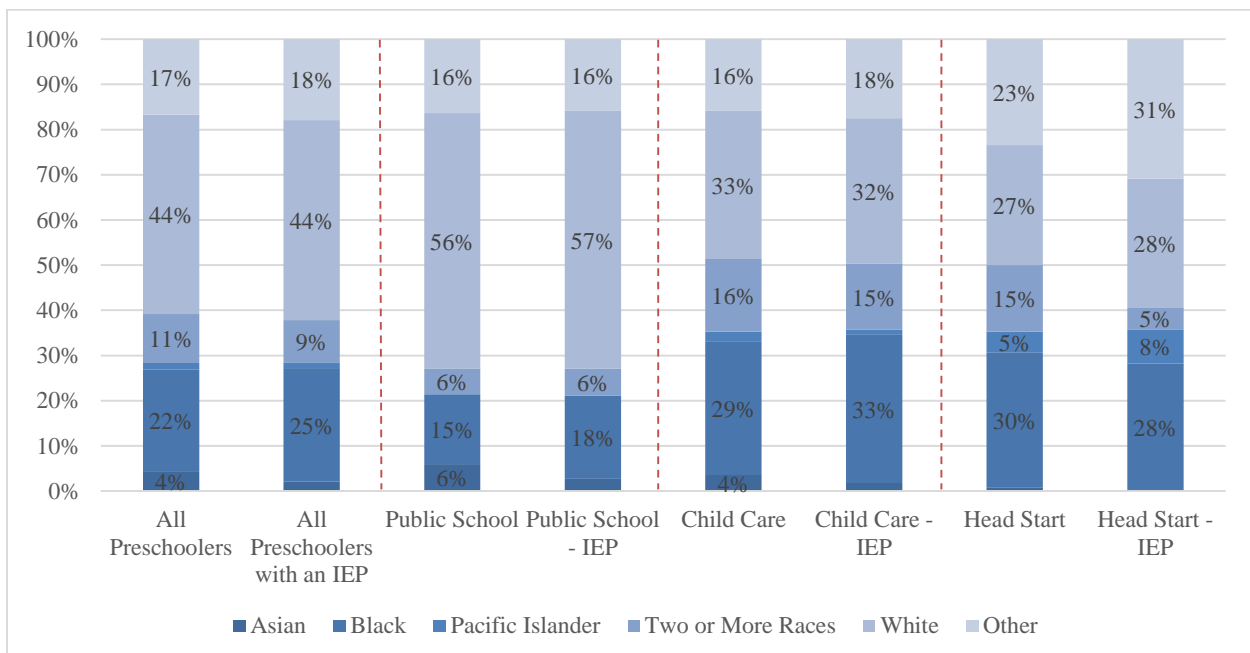**Figure 1x. Preschool children by race and program type (reported by site directors)**

Figure 1y displays the Ethnic background of all preschoolers and those with IEPs and Figure 1aa displays information on preschoolers' home language, as reported by directors of special education. For both preschoolers' ethnicity and home language, the composition of all preschoolers looks very similar to the composition of preschoolers with an IEP. Figures 1z and 1ab display similar information broken out by program type, as reported by site directors. There is greater variation in both child Ethnicity and Home Language across program type than between all preschoolers and preschoolers with IEPs. For example, Head Start programs had a higher percentage of Hispanic/Latino preschoolers and preschoolers with a home language other than English, followed by child care, and then public schools.

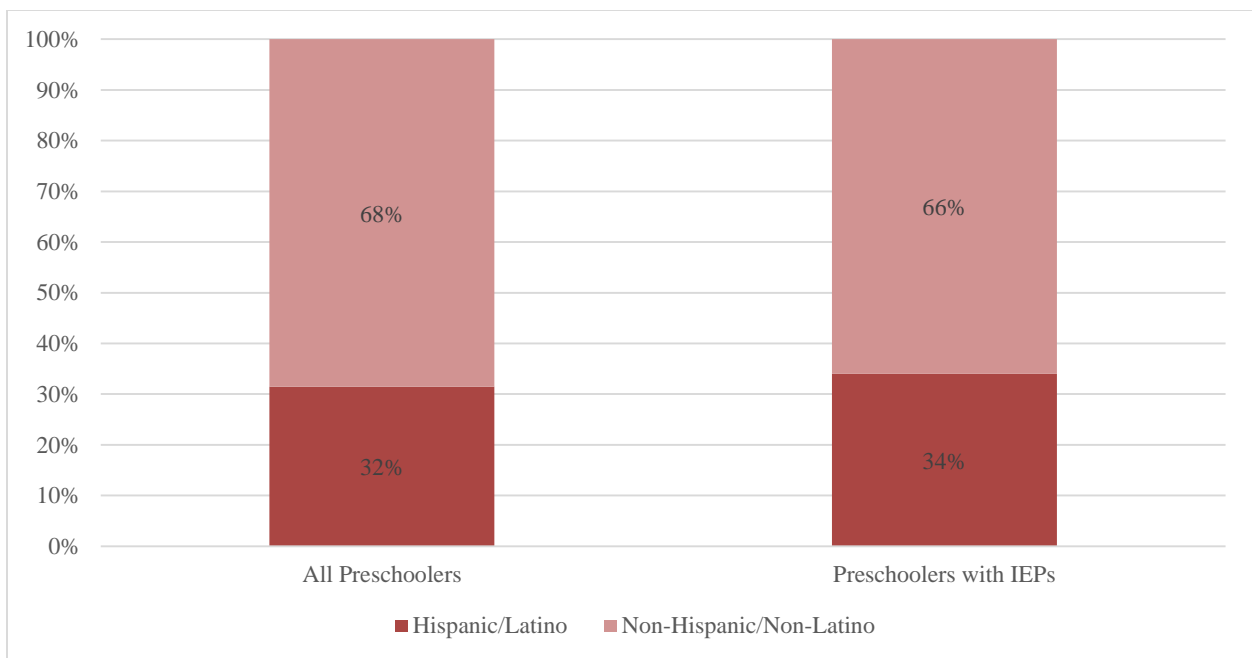**Figure 1y. Preschool children by ethnicity (reported by directors of special education)**

Figure 1z. Preschool children by ethnicity and program type (reported by site directors)
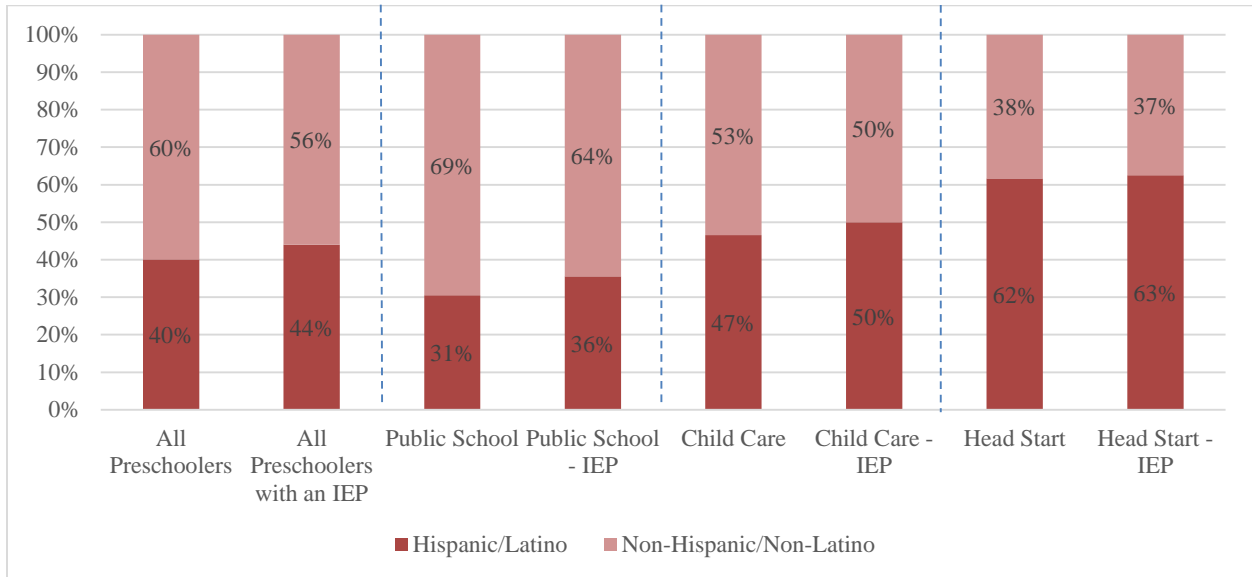

Figure 1aa. Preschool children by home language (reported by directors of special education)
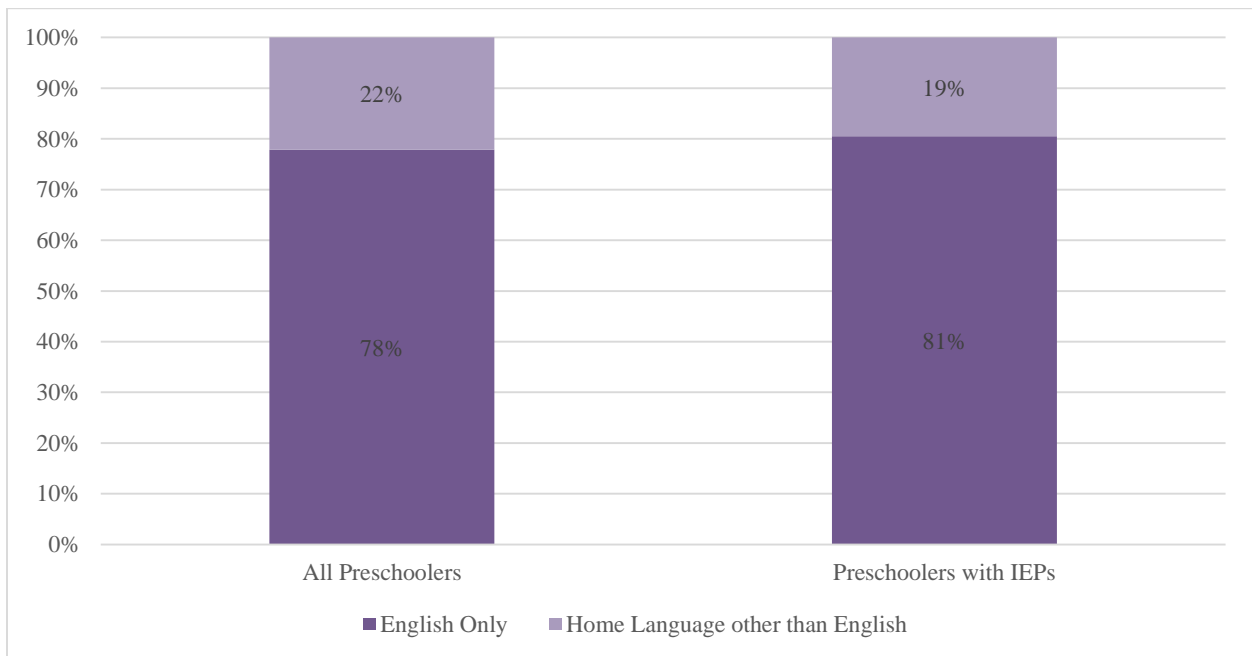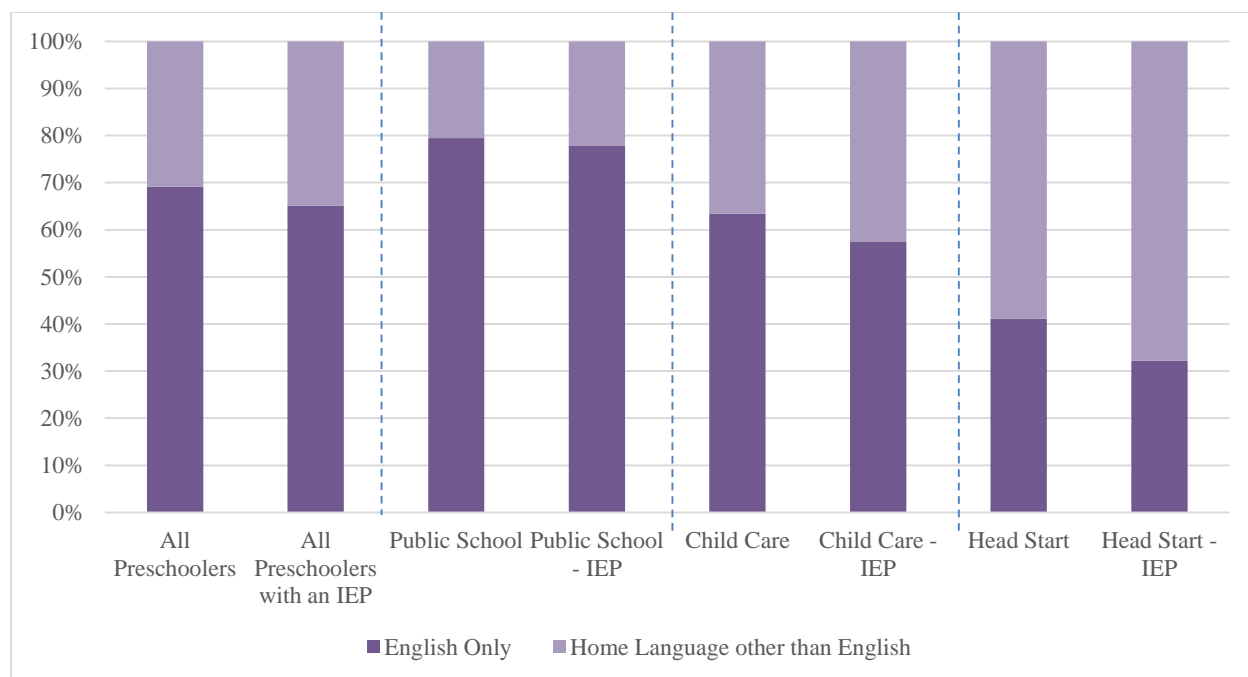
Figure 1ab. Preschool children by home language and program type (reported by site directors)

We asked Directors of Special Education and Site Directors to provide information about preschoolers' eligibility for free and/or reduced-price lunch (FRPL). They were asked to report the number of preschoolers eligible for free lunch, reduced-price lunch, and free or reduced price lunch if they did not know which. Figure 1ac shows the percent of children at the district level eligible for FRPL and Figure 1ad displays this information at the site level. Eligibility for FRPL was similar across public school and child care centers.[25] About half of all children were eligible for Free Lunch based on both sources of data with a slightly smaller percentage of preschoolers with IEPs eligible for Free Lunch, compared to all preschoolers. The Site Level data suggest that another 20% of children were eligible for Reduced Lunch or Free or Reduced Price Lunch. Some child care centers reported that they did not collect data on FRPL eligibility because they did not serve meals. Other schools reported that all children in the school receive free lunch and therefore they did not have data on individual children.

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[25] FRPL data were only reported for 3 Head Start centers.

Figure 1ac: Preschool children by eligibility for FRPL (reported by directors of special education)
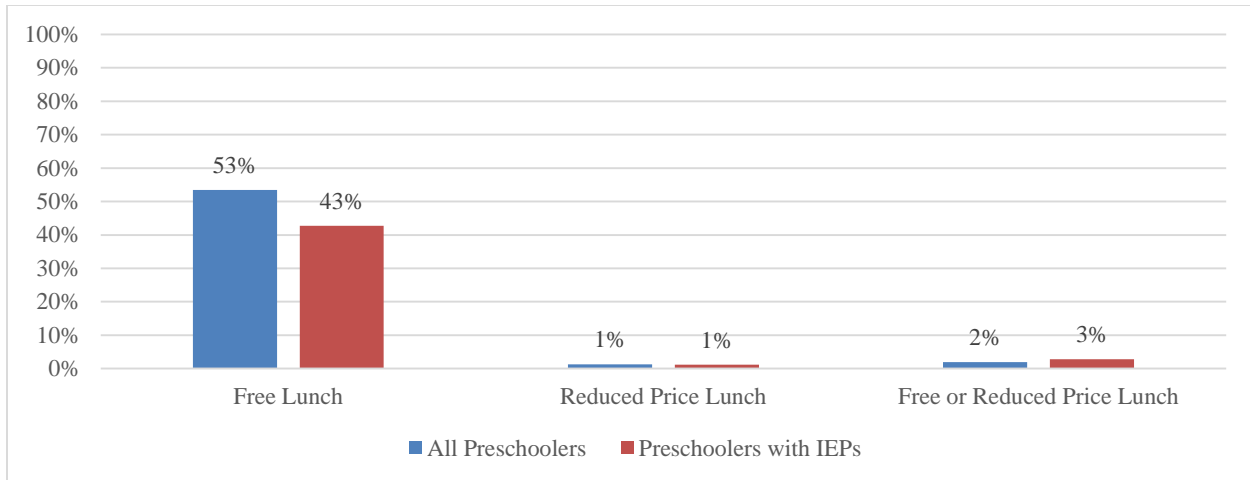

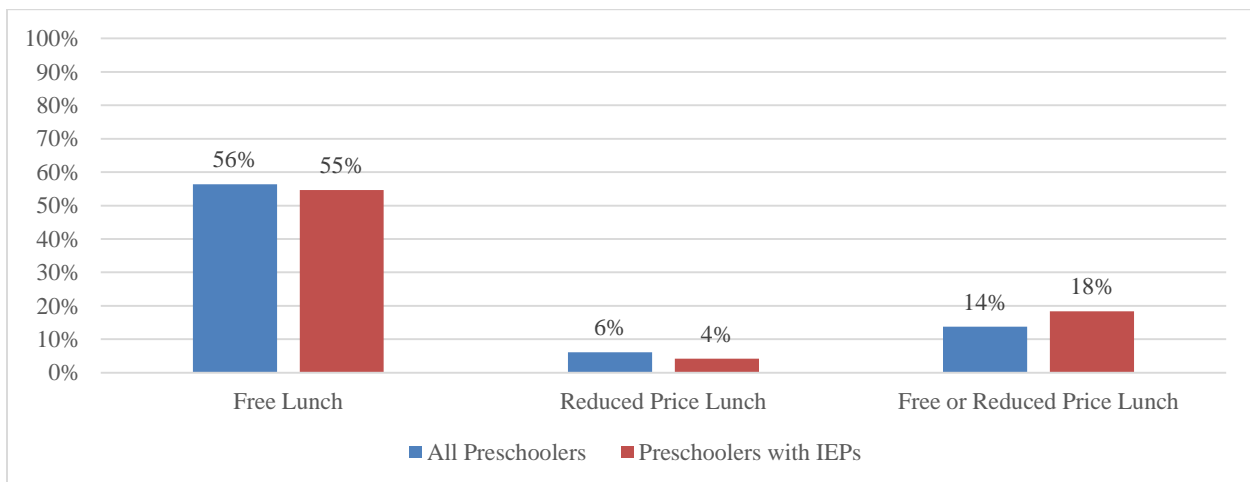**Figure 1ad: Preschool children by eligibility for FRPL (reported by site directors)**

Figure 1ae provides information on the age of all preschool students and those with an IEP as reported by the directors of special education. Whereas 32% of all preschoolers were 3-years-old (including children 2.9 years) and 64% were 4-years-old, a higher percent of preschoolers with IEPs were 3-years-old (45% were 3-years-old and 48% were 4-years-old). This difference is not surprising given that most state- and locally-funded preschool programs serve more 4-year-olds than 3-year-olds when thinking about the general education population.

Information on preschoolers' age reported at the program level from the site directors provides a slightly different picture (See Figure 1af). On average, 53% of all preschoolers were 4-year-olds and 42% were 3-year-olds. This compares to 57% of preschoolers with IEPs were 4-year-olds and 39% were 3-year-olds. Somewhat surprisingly, with this program-level data we do not see the increase in 3-year-olds among preschoolers with IEPs. The percent of preschoolers with IEPs that were 3-year-olds was the smallest in Head Start (compared to public schools and

child care). This is also somewhat surprising given that unlike public preschool, Head Start tends to serve similar numbers of 3- and 4-year-olds.

Figure 1ae. Preschool children by age (reported by directors of special education)
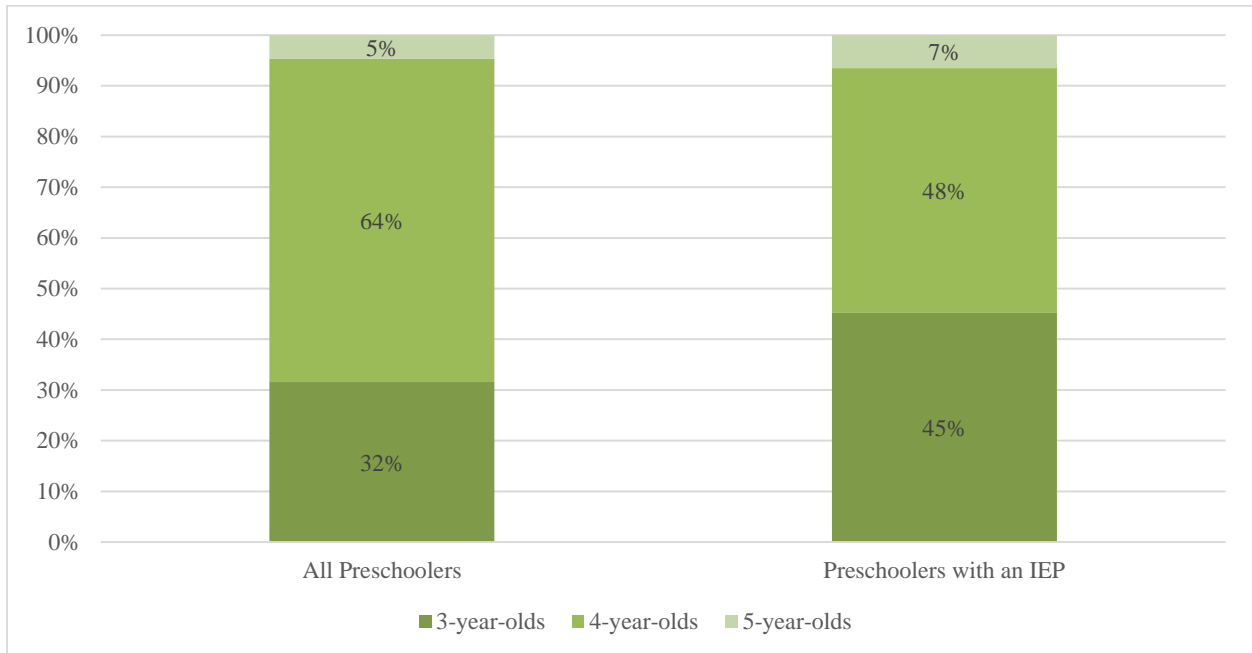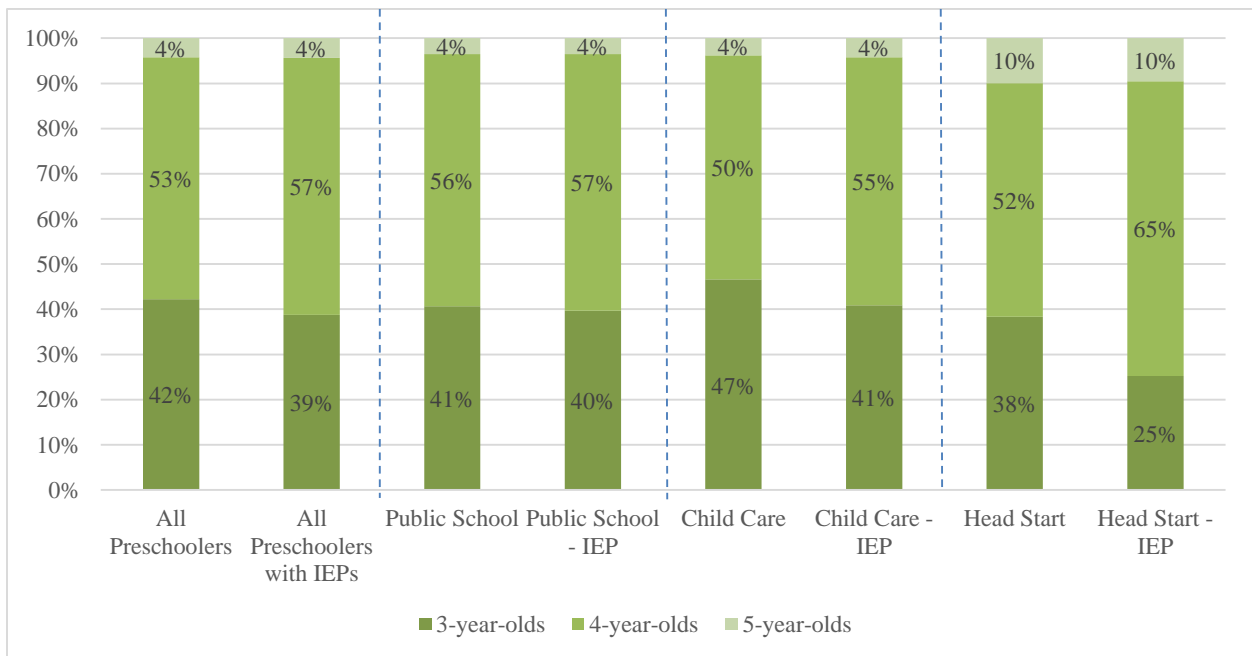

Figure 1af. Preschool children by age and program type (reported by site directors)

Both the Directors of Special Education and the Site Directors were asked to provide information about preschoolers' disabilities (per their IEPs). Table 1e summarizes this

information, including by program type for the site director-reported information. Similar to federal IDEA data for CT (described in the Introduction), Developmental Delay was the most common disability among preschoolers, followed by speech or language impairment, and Autism. There were some differences in preschoolers' disabilities across program type: there was a higher percentage of preschoolers with a developmental delay in public schools, then Head Start, and child care, and there was a higher percentage of preschoolers with a Speech or Language Impairment in child care than in Head Start or public schools.

Table 1e. Preschool enrollment by disability type

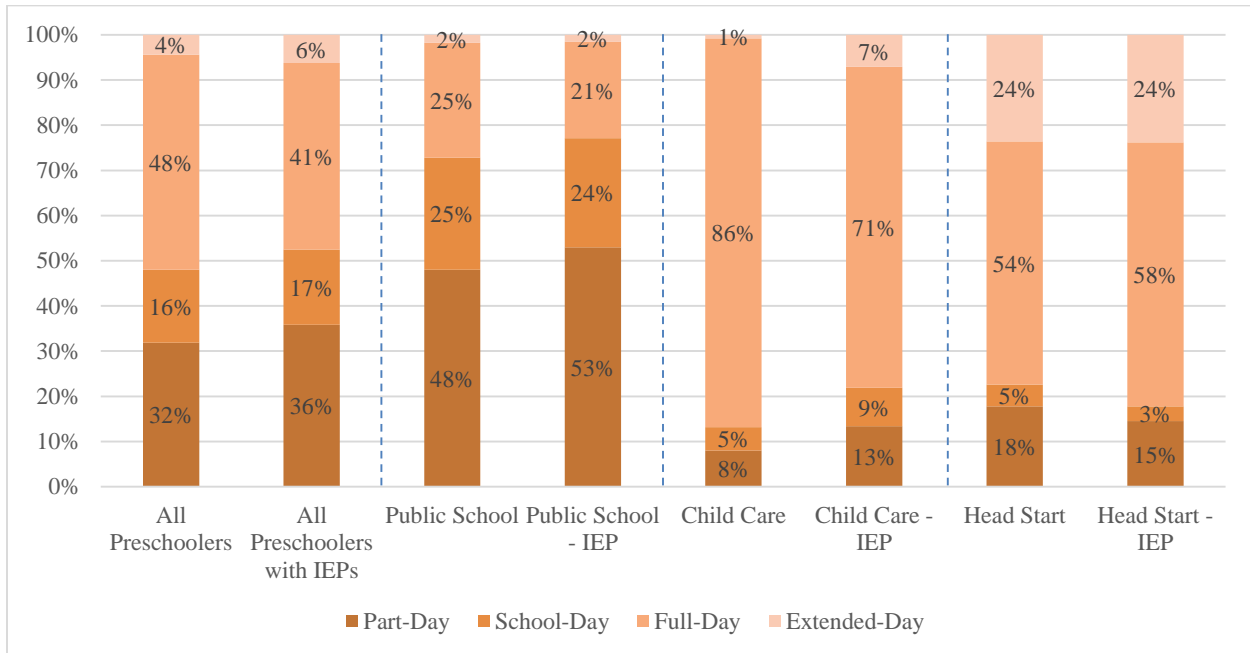|	Reported by Director of Special Education	Reported by Site Director			
		All Preschoolers with an IEP	Public School	Child Care	Head Start
Autism	17.3%	20.6%	20.6%	20.1%	22.7%
Developmental Delay	59.2%	40.0%	52.6%	21.7%	39.0%
Deafness	0.3%	0.4%	0.5%	0.4%	0.0%
Emotional Disturbance	0.0%	2.4%	0.5%	5.8%	0.0%
Hearing Impairment	0.5%	1.1%	1.0%	1.5%	0.0%
Intellectual Disability	0.1%	0.4%	0.2%	0.7%	0.0%
Multiple Disabilities	1.0%	2.9%	1.7%	3.1%	7.3%
Orthopedic Impairment	0.0%	0.3%	0.0%	0.7%	0.8%
Other Health Impairment	1.3%	0.8%	1.0%	0.7%	0.0%
Specific Learning Disability	0.2%	2.4%	2.7%	2.4%	0.8%
Speech or Language Impairment	20.0%	26.8%	19.2%	36.2%	29.4%
Traumatic Brain Injury	0.1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Visual Impairment	0.1%	0.6%	0.0%	1.5%	0.0%
IEP information not shared	Not asked	1.9%	0.0%	5.1%	0.0%

Figure 1ag provides information on preschool program operating schedules as reported by site directors. Respondents were provided with the following operating schedule definitions:

- **Part-Day/Part-Year**: 2.5 hours per day, 5 days per week, minimum 180 days per year
- **School-Day/School-Year**: 6 hours per day, 5 days per week, minimum 180 days per year
- **Full-Day/Full-Year**: 10 hours per day, 5 days per week, 50 weeks per year
- **Extended-Day**: extended part-day to provide 10 hours per day, 5 days per week, 50 weeks per year

On average, all preschoolers and preschoolers with an IEP attended programs with similar operating schedules: 32% of all preschoolers and 36% of preschoolers with IEPs attended part-day preschool programs; 16% of all preschoolers and 17% of preschoolers with IEPs attended school-day preschool programs; 48% of all preschoolers and 41% of preschoolers with IEPs attended full-day preschool programs; 4% of all preschoolers and 6% of preschoolers with IEPs attended extended-day preschool programs. Although preschoolers with IEPs were slightly more likely to attend part-day programs than preschoolers generally, there was more variation across program type than between preschoolers with and without an IEP. Part-day programs were most common in public schools (compared to child care and Head Start): About half of preschoolers in public schools were in part-day programs. Full-day was the most common operating schedule in both child care and Head Start, though in child care, preschoolers with an IEP were slightly

less likely to be in full-day program (and slightly more likely to be in part-day programs) than all preschoolers.

Figure 1ag: Preschool enrollment by operating schedule (reported by site director)

Information was also collected about the settings in which preschoolers with IEPs received special education services (reported by Director of Special Education, see Figure 1ah). District-operated general education classes (37%) and Special Education classes (37%) were the most common settings reported. Twelve percent of preschoolers with an IEP received their special education services in a combination of general and special education classes. A total of 8% received services in community-based general education classrooms and 6% received only services (e.g., speech, OT, PT) from the school district.

Figure 1ah: Settings in which preschoolers with IEPs received special education services
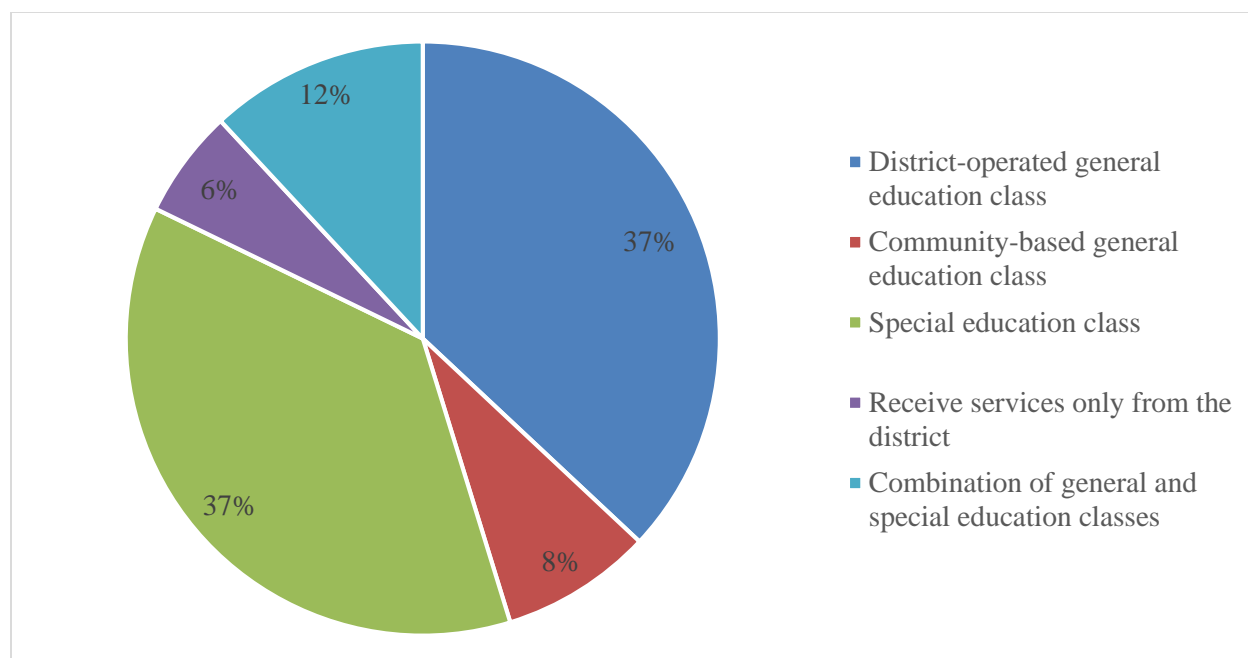
School principals and center directors were also asked about the types of classrooms in which preschoolers with IEPs in their schools/centers received services. On average, the most common setting was general education preschool classrooms, followed by a combination of general education and special education preschool classrooms. As shown in Table 1f, this pattern was generally consistent across program type.

Table 1f: Average number of preschoolers with an IEP by type of preschool classrooms per school/center

	All Settings	Public Schools	Child Care	Head Start
General Education Classrooms	19.2	18.2	15.5	45.5
Special Education Classrooms	3.9	7.4	0.1	0.3
Individual Services Only (e.g., speech, PT, OT)	2.5	3.3	1.0	4.2
Combination of General & Special Education Classrooms	7.3	8.2	4.6	13.9

Table 1g provides information about the number of preschoolers per school/center for whom transportation is a related service on their IEP (as reported by site directors). On average, more children enrolled in preschool classrooms than children only receiving individual related services also had transportation services on their IEPs. More children in public schools, followed by Head Start, and then child care had transportation services on their IEPs. Directors of special education also provided information on transportation as a related service on preschoolers' IEPs. According to them, 52% of preschoolers with an IEP who were enrolled in a preschool classroom had transportation as related services on their IEP. However, only 5% of preschools with an IEP who were receiving only services from the districts had transportation as a related service on their IEP.

Table 1g: Average number of preschoolers with an IEP for whom transportation is a related service on their IEP

	All Settings	Public Schools	Child Care	Head Start
Preschoolers with IEPs receiving individual services only (e.g., speech, PT, OT)	2.7	3.3	1.8	3.0
Preschooler with IEPs enrolled in preschool classrooms	10.2	15.6	3.1	8.7

2. To what extent do preschool classrooms in CT serving children with IEPs provide them with an education in their least restrictive environment?

NIEER explore the extent to which preschool classrooms in CT were providing preschoolers with an IEP an education in their Least Restrictive Environment. We explored the distribution of children with and without IEP in classrooms and inclusion policies and practices. Survey respondents were asked to provide their interpretation/understanding of LRE and the concept of natural proportions.

The focus of the analysis presented in this section is the way districts and programs define and operationalize LRE. IDEA[26] defines LRE as meaning that children with an IEP should spend as much time as possible with peers who do not receive special education services. Therefore, it encompasses two notions: (a) inclusion in activities and environments with children without an IEP, and (b) to the maximum extent possible/appropriate. Another important notion that arises from IDEA is that of a continuum[27] to meet the needs of children that ranges from inclusive settings with various possible supports through separate environments for children only in severe cases when supporting the child's needs in inclusive settings cannot be successfully achieved.
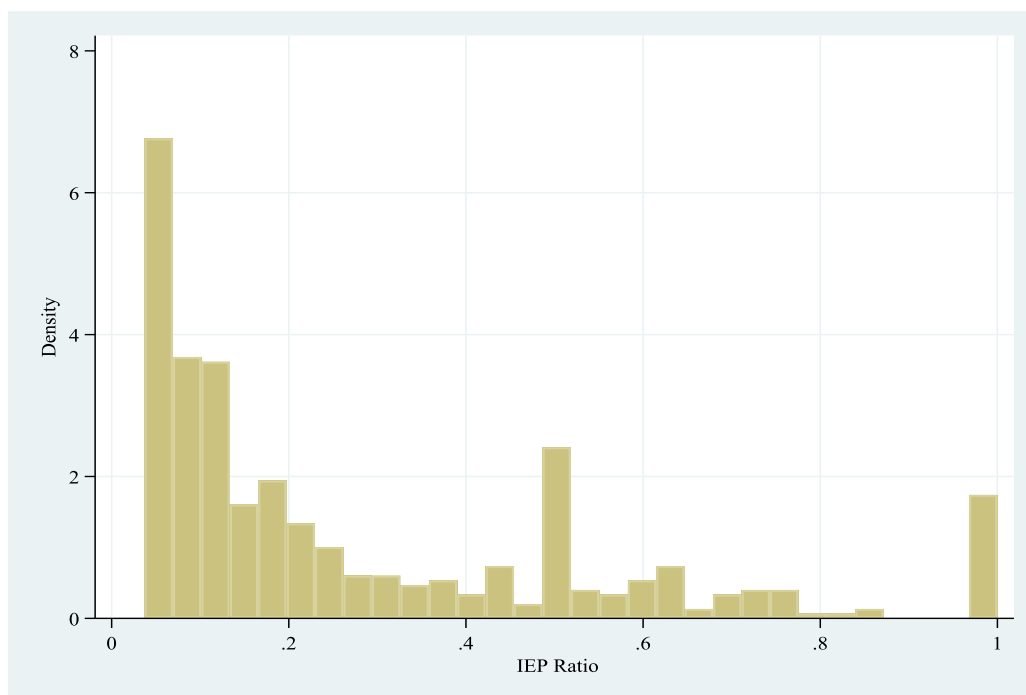
Proportion of preschoolers in a classroom with an IEP

On average, about 28% to 30% of preschoolers in a classroom had an IEP (based on data reported by site directors).[28] The average is about 35% when considering only 4-year olds. These averages hide a significant amount of variation, with the percentage ranging between 3% and 100%. The majority of the classrooms with at least one child with an IEP (75%) have inclusion rates under the 50% cutoff for a General Education classroom. Only 25% of the classrooms would therefore be considered Special Education classrooms. Having said this, the distribution of the percent of preschoolers with an IEP per classroom (Figure 2a) shows that there is some concentration observed around the 50% cutoff between General and Special Education classrooms.

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[26] https://sites.ed.gov/idea/regs/b/b/300.114
[27] https://sites.ed.gov/idea/regs/b/b/300.115
[28] The difference emerges from responses on enrollment by age group versus responses by type of program.

Figure 2a. Distribution of percent of preschoolers with an IEP per classroom

Note: Only includes preschool classrooms with at least one child with an IEP.

The portion of preschoolers with an IEP per classroom based on children enrollment reported at the site level is slightly different from the sites' categorization of classes as General Education (<50% children with an IEP) or Special Education (equal or greater than 50%). Site directors reported on average 86% of their classrooms as General Education (10 percentage points higher than our calculations based on enrollment reports by classroom). Said another way, there were some classrooms categorized as General or Special Education by the site director that did not meet those definitions when exploring the child enrollment per classroom data.

Inclusion policies

We asked informants whether the district has written inclusion policies, and the extent to which these are shared with families. About 70% of Directors of Special Education responded that their district had no written inclusion policies, another 4% indicated these existed in some sites only, and about 27% indicated these their district did have written policies. Among the districts that had written inclusion policies, about two-thirds reported these were shared with families. The percentage of ECE Supervisors reporting such policies were in place in the district is lower, about 55%, though a similar percentage reported these policies (when in place) where always or sometimes shared with families.

Ensuring children with IEPs are served in their LRE

Directors of Special Education and ECE Supervisors were both asked to describe how their district ensures that preschool children with special needs receive their education in the LRE.

Open responses were coded with deductive[29] and emergent[30] coding. When coding the data, we kept in mind that the definition of LRE in IDEA includes the concept of integration with children without special needs, as well as the concept of time spent with peers without IEPs to the greatest extent possible. In addition, we also incorporated the concept of a continuum defined earlier.

One concept that emerged from responses is the definition of LRE based on a setting, classroom, space or environment. This emerged in 48% of responses from the Directors of Special Education and 32% of responses from the ECE Supervisors. In addition, some responses included the idea that LRE was dependent on the mandated inclusion ratios (under 50%) in the state. In contrast, and more in line with IDEA, some responses related LRE to being in an environment with peers without an IEP. This was the case for 57% of responses from the Directors of Special Education and 32% of ECE Supervisors' responses. In addition, 55% of the Directors of Special Education and 43% of the ECE Supervisors' responses included the concept of time (maximum amount of time in LRE or with peers without an IEP). Both of the latter two concepts were present in the responses from 50% of the Directors of Special Education and 42% of ECE Supervisors. Lastly, only a few respondents included some notion of continuums of LRE: 6% of Directors of Special Education and 9% of ECE Supervisors.

Below are some examples of responses that included notions of LRE aligned with IDEA:

> *Least restrictive environment is a continuum of environments in which children can receive the most educational benefit. The continuum begins with education in the general education classroom with typical peers with supplementary supports and services in the school where the child would attend if they did not have an IEP. [ECE Supervisor 6]*

> *LRE is an education environment where children with needs are fully integrated with typical peers and receive their services within their classroom. All of our preschool classes are integrated but with our overwhelming special needs our percentage is near to 50%. [SpED Director 37]*

In contrast, examples of responses that did not demonstrate understanding of the concepts and meaning of IDEA include:

> *A ratio no larger than 50% of disable[d] students. [SpED Director 10]*

> *50% Peer / 50% SPEP students that make up the student population [ECE Supervisor 1]*

Some concerning responses described LRE as including the least amount of supports needed:

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[29] Deductive codes included were based on IDEA.
[30] Emergent codes are codes that emerged from the data.

A learning environment in which students have only as much support as they need. Typically, that means they spend a much time as possible with typically developing peers. [SpED Director 6]

Learning in a classroom in a large group setting with the opportunity to engage with typically developing peers with the least amount of supports. [SpED Director 32]

One theme that emerged out of these responses is that there is some variation in the language used to talk about children with an IEP and children without an IEP (Figure 2b, as reported by Directors of special education). Language used includes children with special needs, children disabled or with a disability, children with an IEP, and children with special education. For children without an IEP language in responses included the concepts of typically developing, non-disabled, general education, without special education or without special needs.

Figure 2b. Language used for children with and without IEPs
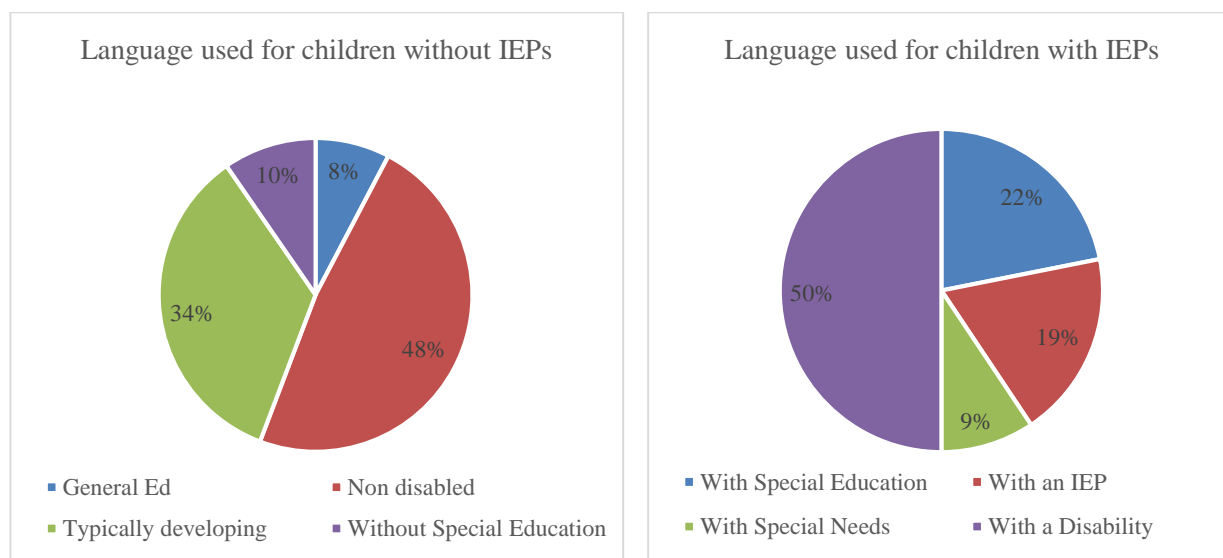
In addition, we performed frequency cloud analyses on the language used in reference to LRE (Appendix Figure A.1). There were strong similarities between responses from the Directors of Special Education and ECE Supervisors, with strong emphasis from both on "education", "peers", and "disabilities".

We also asked Directors of Special Education and ECE supervisors to describe how their districts ensure that preschool children with special needs receive their education in the LRE. A central theme that emerged is that all classrooms are inclusion settings. In addition, there were many responses that described this occurred in relation to children's needs and/or as defined by the PPT (Planning and Placement Team) meeting in the general sense, without description of specific strategies. A few other themes that emerged were the use of push-in vs. pull-outs, maintaining less than 50% of children in a classroom with an IEP, and using part-day accommodations in general education settings, sometimes in a separate school with transitions

between schools. Figure 2c below shows how these themes emerge (as reported by Directors of Special Education (SpED) and ECE Supervisors (ECE)).

Figure 2c. How districts ensure children with IEPs receive education in LREs
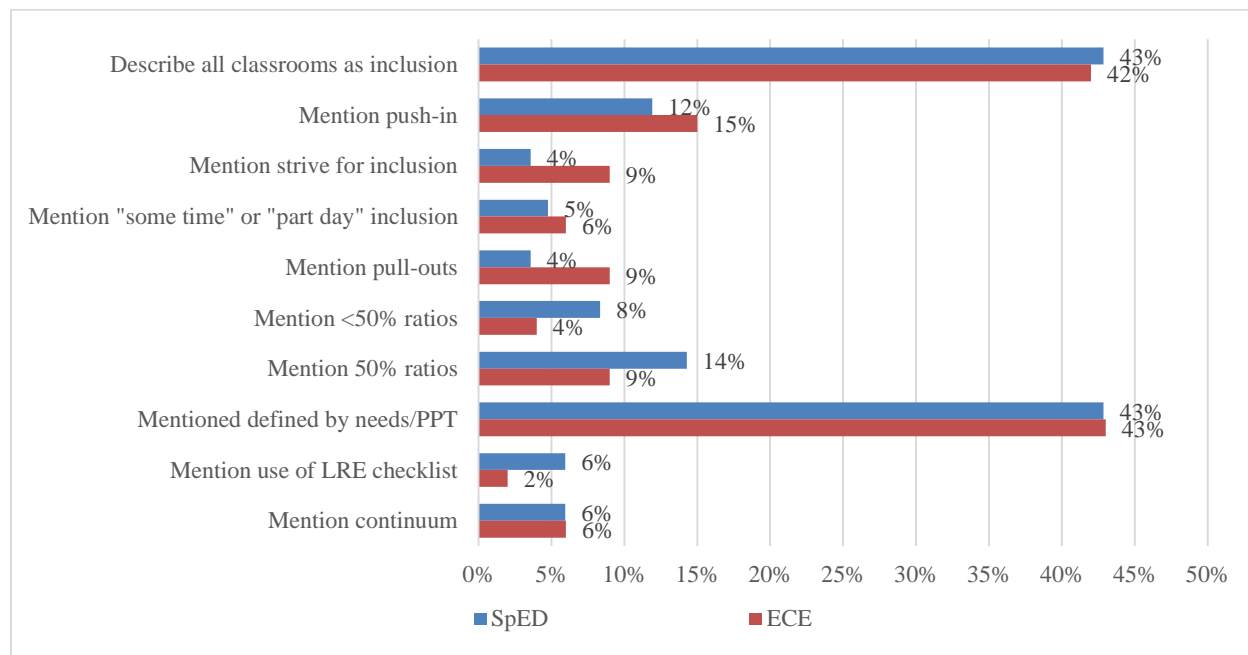
Policies to support children with IEPs

In the survey we asked all three groups of respondents to identify which of a series of policies are in place in their district/site to support children with an IEP (See Figure 2d). Among the policies listed in the survey, the ones more consistently present across districts and sites were the presence of established procedures for identifying children at risk of developmental delay or a learning disability, the requirement that teachers are part of the PPT meeting, the requirement that teachers have access to the IEP plans for all their children with an IEP, policies or procedures on how often are IEP plans reviewed, and a requirement that preschool teachers in inclusion classroom have special education qualifications. In contrast, policies that are less likely to be in place are written and shared inclusion policies, coaching of preschool teachers about special needs, inclusion specialists available to support schools and/or teachers, written policies affirming natural proportions, and requirements to follow DEC recommended practices. These patterns are quite comparable across respondents, with small variations. Interestingly, there is variation across respondents with regards to policies limiting the maximum proportion of preschoolers with an IEP in a preschool classroom; however, across the three respondent groups, the percent selecting this response was low, surpassing 50% for only the ECE Supervisors.

Figure 2d. Policies in place to support the provision of services to children with an IEP
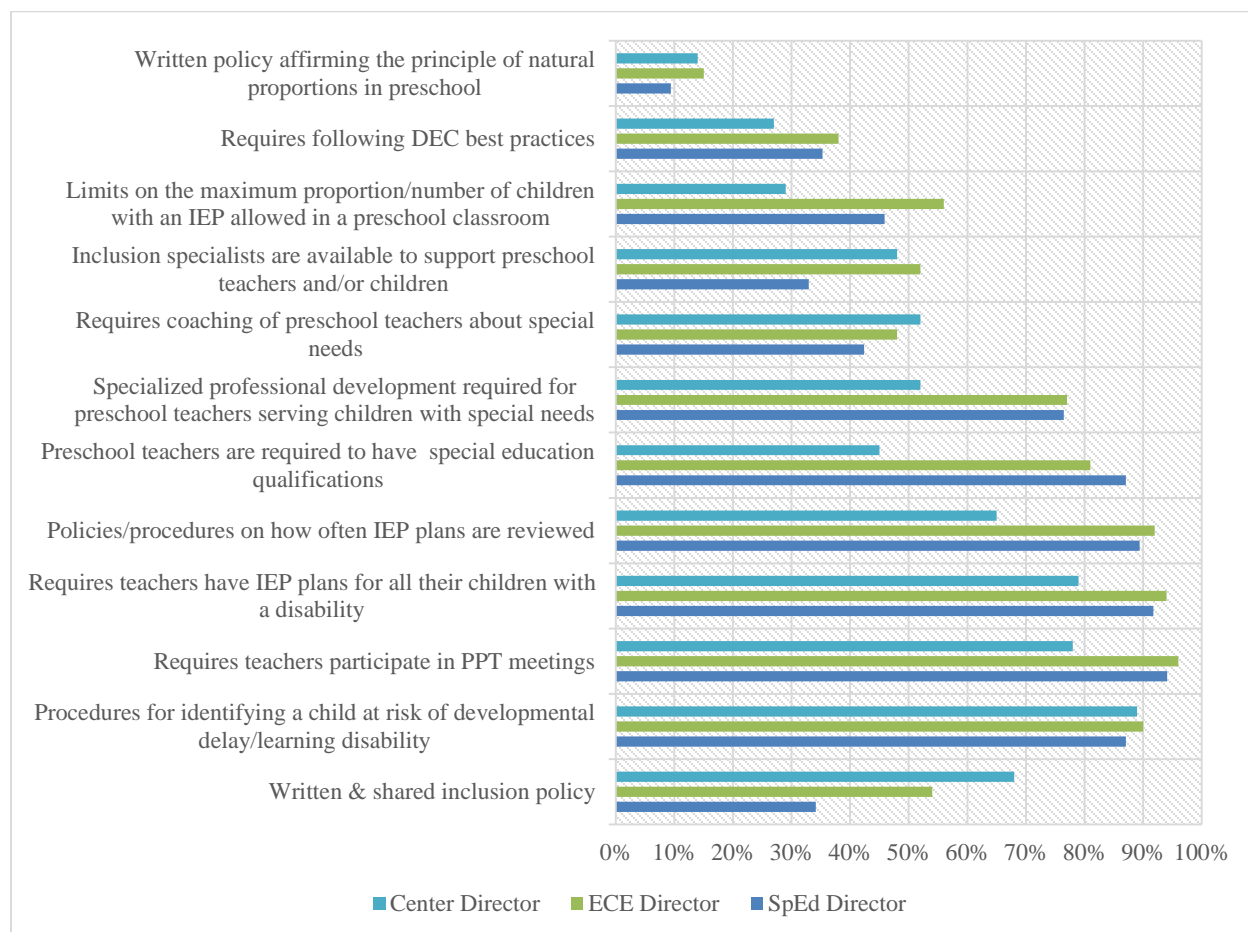
In addition, we asked the Directors of Special Education about the frequency with which preschool teachers used the concepts of Universal Design for Learning (UDL)[31] in their classrooms. Twenty-four percent reported that their preschool teachers always use UDL, 33% reported teaches using it often, 15% reported sometimes, and 28% reported not knowing, not using it, or using rarely. Site Directors were also asked how often preschool teachers consider the principles of UDL to create accessible learning environments. Almost one-third were unsure whether teachers use UDL principles, but 45% said teachers use them always or often. This question was complemented by asking Site Directors the extent to which there were accommodations or modifications made in materials and the environments, and about variations made to the daily schedule, so that preschoolers with IEPs can fully participate in their classroom (Figure 2e). The majority (about 75-85%) of site directors reported these were often or always made.

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[31] "Universal Design for Learning (UDL) reflects practices that provide multiple and varied formats for instruction and learning. UDL principles and practices help to ensure that every young child has access to learning environments, to typical home or educational routines and activities, and to the general education curriculum." See https://www.naeyc.org/sites/default/files/globally-shared/downloads/PDFs/resources/position-statements/DEC_NAEYC_EC_updatedKS.pdf

Figure 2e. Supports for preschoolers with IEPs in their classrooms
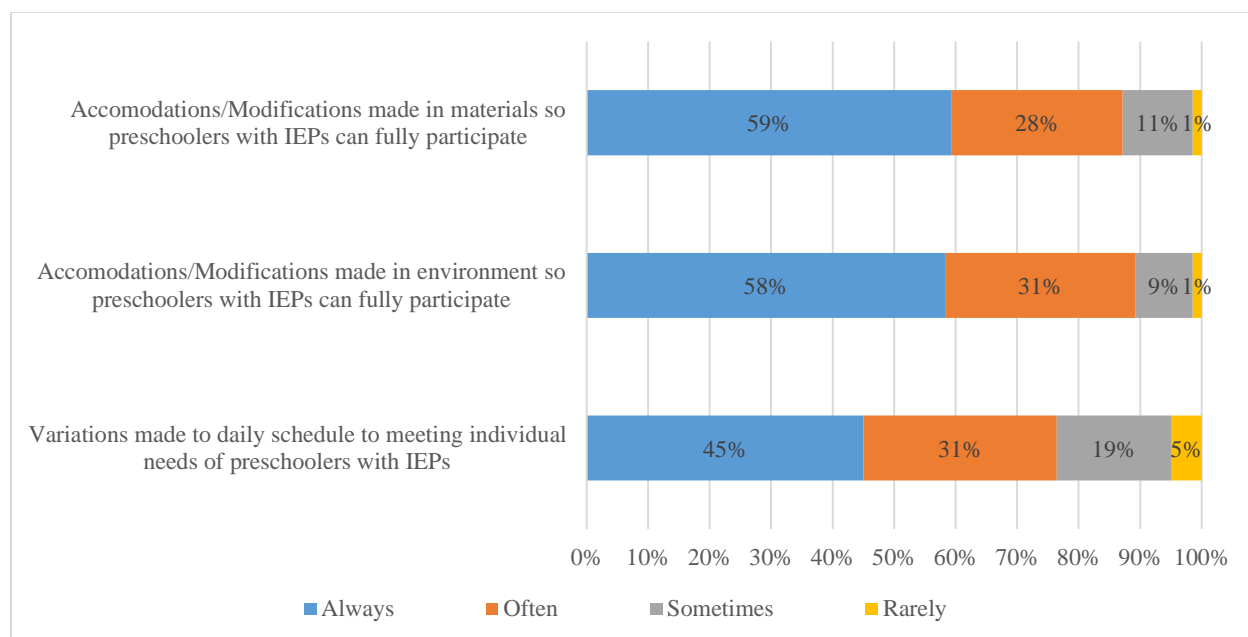
Do schools maintain natural proportions of preschoolers with IEPs in classrooms?

The principle of natural proportions means that children with disabilities are included in preschool classrooms in proportion to their presence in the general population. We asked Directors of Special Education if their district maintains a natural proportion of preschoolers with special needs most of the time in their preschool classrooms; 64% responded they did so, 25% responded that they did not, and 11% responded that they did not know if natural proportions were maintained in preschool. ECE Supervisors were asked the same question and responses indicated a higher percentage of districts did maintain natural proportions of preschoolers with IEPs in classrooms (73%). Finally, 63% of the site directors reported natural proportions were maintained in classrooms at their schools and centers.

We also asked Directors of Special Education and ECE Supervisors to provide additional information about the district's policy regarding natural proportions of children with special needs in preschool classrooms. From these responses emerged a focus on maintaining a ratio of preschoolers with IEP to general education preschoolers that was 50% or lower. There were very few responses that aligned to the definition of natural proportions related to the incidence of preschoolers with IEPs in the general population. See Figure 2f.

Figure 2f. Ways of defining Natural Proportions
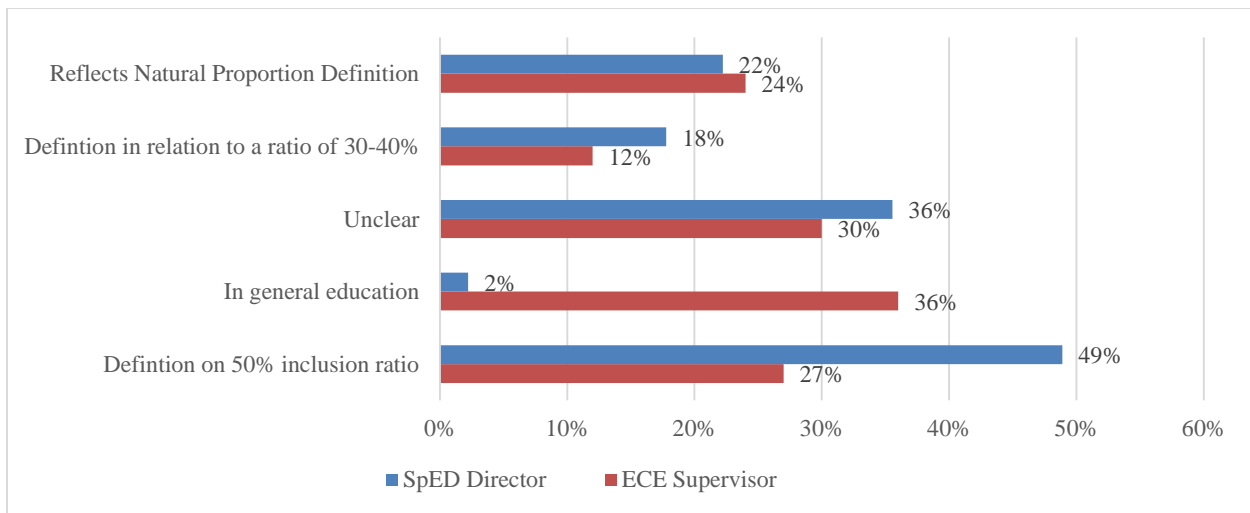
Additionally, frequency cloud analysis on the language of their responses (see Appendix Figure A.3) shows distinct differences between the responses from Directors of Special Education and those of ECE Supervisors. There are identifiable differences in how these two groups conceptualize and seem to understand LREs. The concept of population is much more present in responses from ECE Supervisors.

Related services

Both Directors of Special Education and Site Directors were asked about the settings/formats in which preschoolers with IEPs received related services such as speech, physical therapy, and occupational therapy. Figure 2g shows the responses from the Directors of Special Education and shows that speech and language therapy, physical therapy and occupational therapy are most commonly provided through a combination of push in and pull out services. Applied behavioral therapy, psychology, and social work services are provided through either push in or push out. Results were similar as reported by the Site Directors (See Appendix Figure A2).
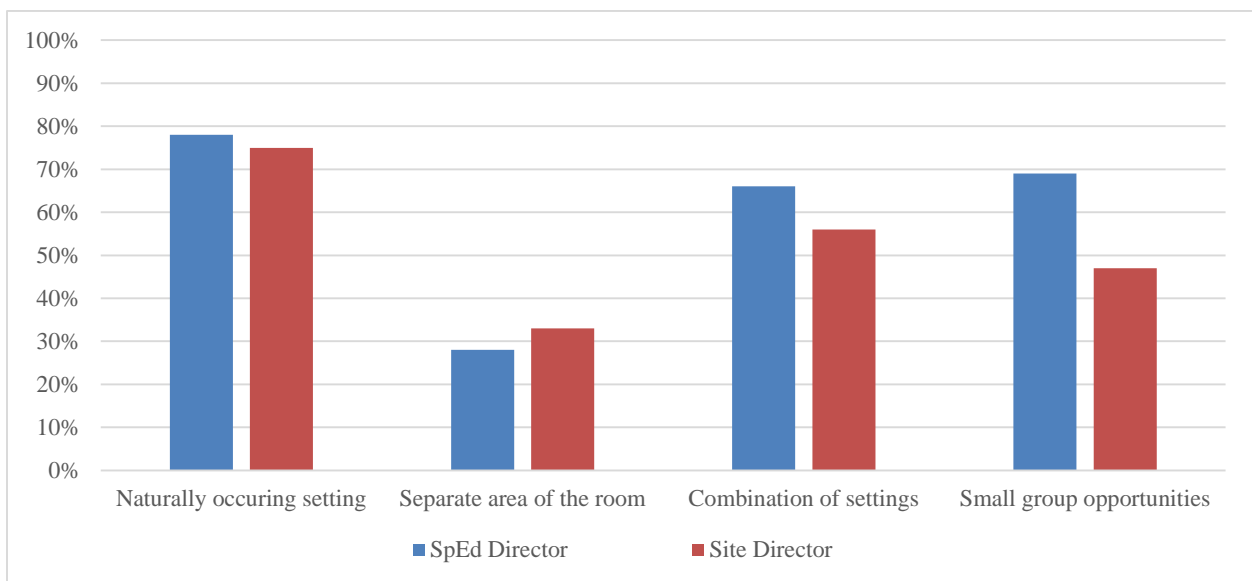
Directors of Special Education and Site Directors were asked to identify the most common formats for push in services. Responses indicate that the most common format for push in services are for these to be provided in naturally occurring settings. Small group observations and a combination of settings were also frequently reported (Figure 2h). Site Directors were less likely than Directors of Special Education to report that a combination of strategies or small group opportunities were used for push in services.

Figure 2g. Format of IEP related services as reported by directors of special education
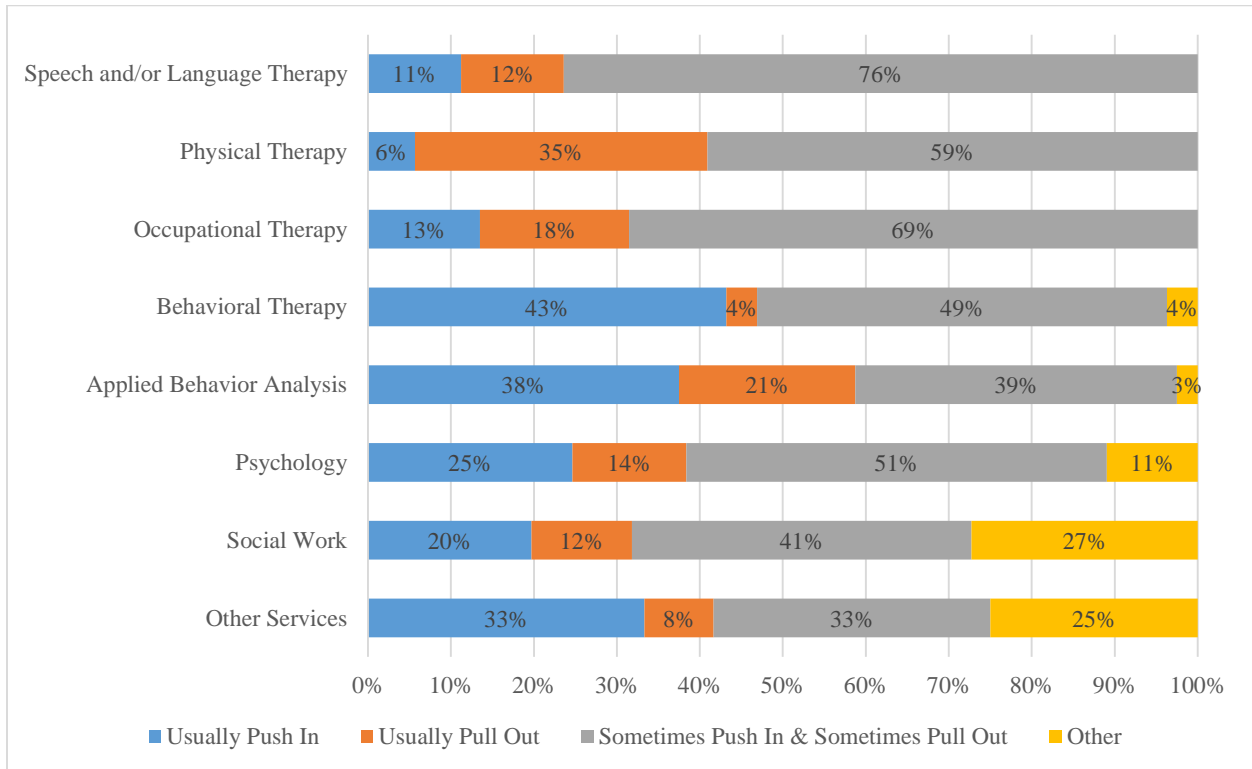
Note: This question was also asked to site directors, and similar patterns emerged.

Figure 2h. Format for push-in services, by informant

3. How are IEPs developed?

Policies and procedures for referrals

Almost all Directors of Special Education (98%) and ECE Supervisors (98%) reported having specific policies and/or procedures in place to refer preschoolers for special education services, and only slightly fewer Site Directors reported the same (93%). Similarly, 90% of Directors of Special Education, 89% of ECE Supervisors, and 85% of Site Directors responded that all teachers are aware of the process for referring a preschooler for special education services, and none responded that teachers are unaware of procedures.

Policies for inclusion

Over two-thirds of Site Directors reported having a written inclusion policy in place for their school or center. Of those that did, 88% reported that it was shared with families.

Family involvement in the development of IEPs

Families are involved in the development of preschoolers' IEPs in a variety of different ways and at various frequencies in programs and districts across the state (see Figure 3a and Table 3b). Directors of Special Education reported that the PPT meets with families to discuss IEP plans either annually (50%) or multiple times per year (50%), and more than 75% of Site Directors reported these meetings taking place multiple times per year. According to Directors of Special Education, progress reports are shared with families multiple times per year (97%), and over 75% reported translating reports into some or all home languages spoken by families. Progress reports are shared primarily a few times per year or monthly, according to Site Directors, and over 80% reported translating reports into some or all home languages spoken by families.

There were differences in the frequency of meetings between teachers and families to discuss child progress as reported by Directors of Special Education and Site Directors. About 80% of Directors of Special Education reported that parent-teacher meetings take place several times per year and about 15% reported meetings occurring monthly. However, 43% of Site Directors reported meetings taking place multiple times per year, and 39% reported weekly meetings.

Directors of Special Education reported that families have the opportunity to provide feedback mostly weekly (39%) or a few times per year (about 43%). A similar percentage of Site Directors said that families can provide feedback multiple times per year (38%), but 43% said this happens only annually.

Finally, special education directors were asked about the frequency with which families are engaged in the development of IEP goals, and the majority (over 60%) responded that this happens annually, with just under 40% reporting that families are engaged more frequently (e.g., multiple times per year).

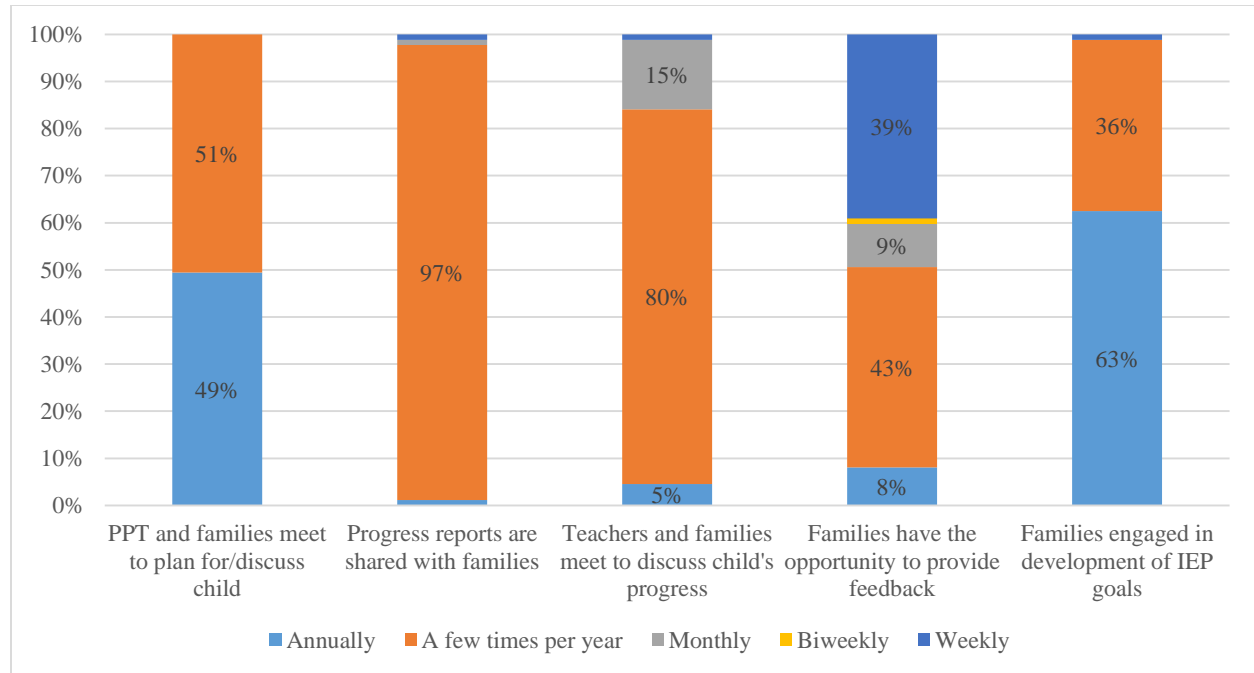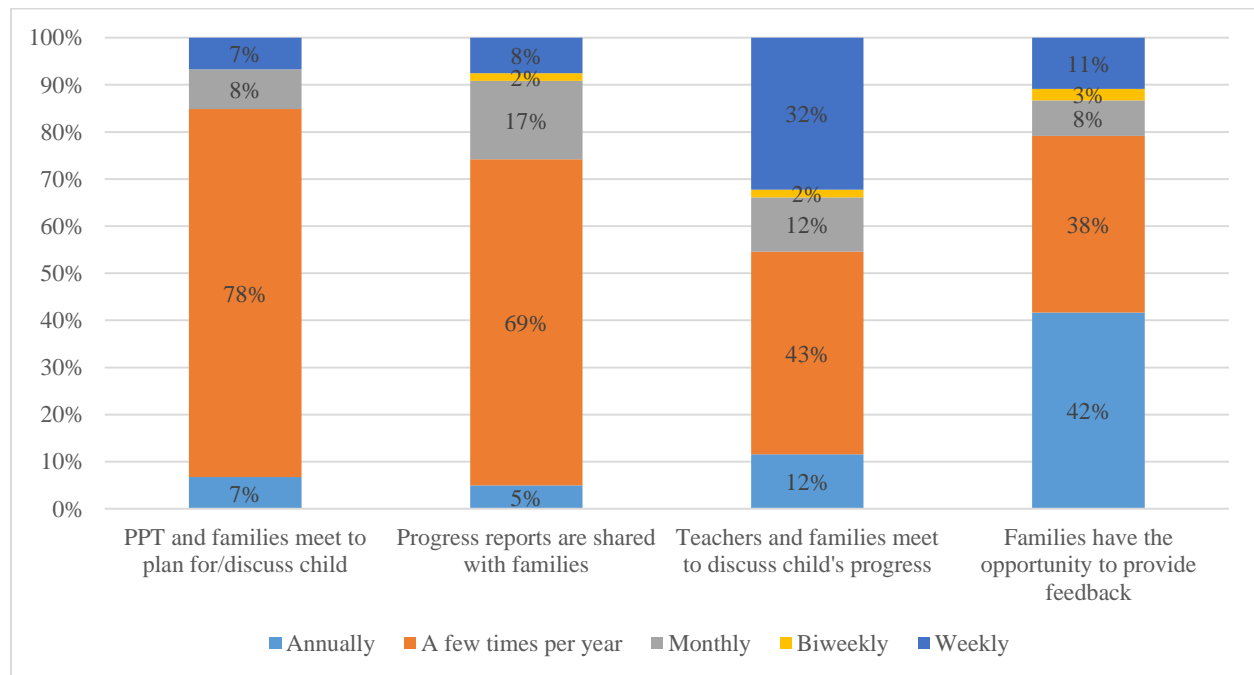**Figure 3a: Family involvement in IEP development, reported by directors of special education**

**Figure 3b: Family involvement in IEP development, reported by site directors**

Description of the referral process and IEP development

ECE Supervisors and the Directors of Special Education were asked to describe the steps their districts take when referring a preschool child for special education services. Responses to these question differed in language used around the role of parents and families (with different roles mentioned: for consent, as referring agents, as participants). There were also differences between the two respondent groups in the percent of responses that included families, assessment, and PPTs in their description of the process. Responses were coded for emergent patterns and are described in Figure 3c. Most responses described the process up to the PPT1 meeting, and a few responses also included the process post PPT1 meeting. Additionally, some responses, particularly from the ECE Supervisor just referred to state regulation as the description of the referral process.

A small percentage of respondents mentioned the use of data in the initial process. About a fourth of respondents mentioned CST or SRBI as steps that precede the referral to special education. A similar percentage of Directors of Special Education and ECE Supervisors mentioned Child Find and its role in the referral process. Some responses (17-27%) included parents in some role, assessment, and the PPT meetings in their description of the IEP establishment. Very few (6-12%) mentioned IEP development and/or the establishment of IEP goals as part of this process. To a higher degree, responses from Directors of Special Education and ECE Supervisors referred to the use of assessments or evaluations, mentioned the role of teachers in referrals and meetings, and mentioned parents in some role (referral, consent, etc.). A few of the responses brought up the role of CST and in-classroom interventions as part of a continuum towards IEP development when necessary.

Figure 3c. Descriptions of the special education referral process
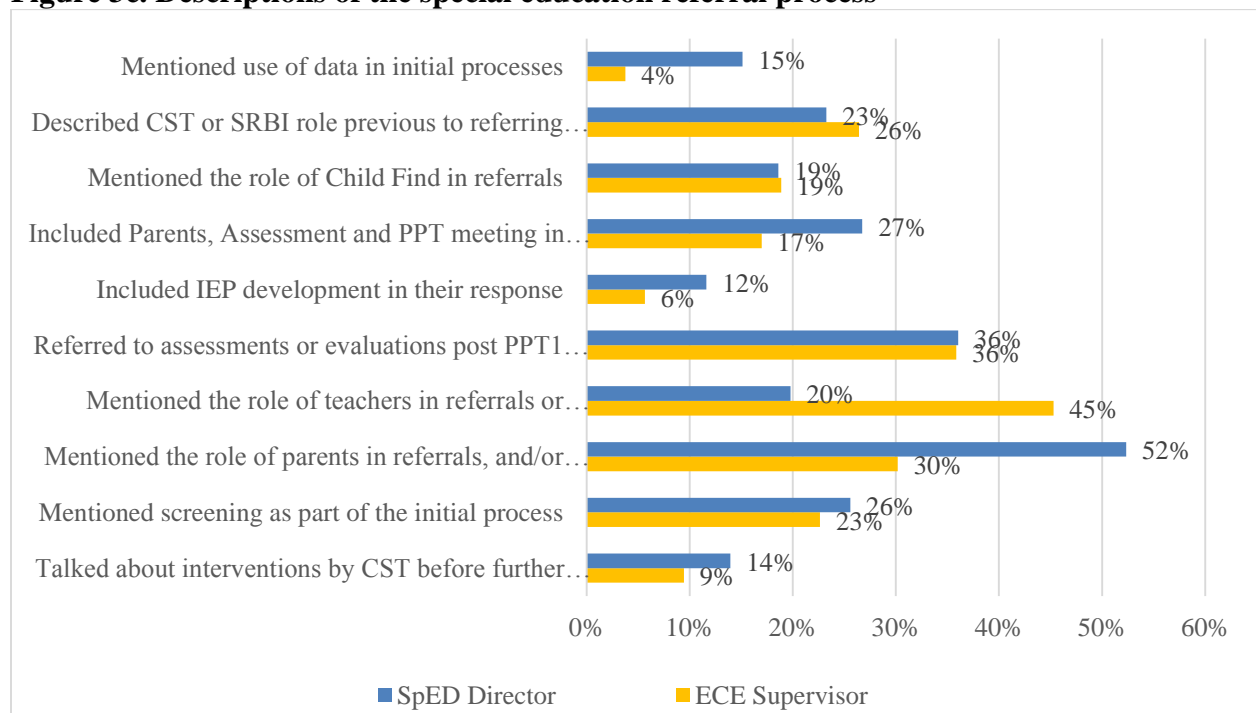
Responses to the question about steps the district takes when referring a child for special education services varied from limited descriptions without detail on the referral process, such as:

[F]orm needs to be filled out and PPT meeting is set. [SpED 29]

[E]vidence of research based intervention based on area of concern. [ECE 16]

To responses that acknowledge the different roles and actions that are undertaken in the process of establishing the IEP, and the actions that may precede this process in terms of referrals and in relation to working with the teaching teams within the classroom, such as:

Referrals can be initiated by Parental (due to pediatrician, daycare, or other source) concerns. Child find is listed on our website. Mailings to area families with children 2+ years old. Flyers are located throughout the community (Library, pediatrician offices, daycares). We offer playdates (early intervention screenings 4x/yr.) [ECE 27]

The team discussed student concerns on an on-going basis, implements interventions for a period of time. All teachers have integrated degrees so they are able to provide developmentally appropriate interventions prior to referral. Once a referral is made through the team or parent, a comprehensive evaluation including observation is completed. [SpED 66]

Children are screened upon registering for PreK with the Ages and Stages diagnostic tool. If a child presents with cognitive or social/emotional delays, they are referred to the Pupil Services Department for further evaluation. If a child presents after they are enrolled, the staff can make a referral through the SRBI process. The child is evaluated by the SRBI team and strategies can be offered to support the child. If the child does not begin to make progress, the Pupil Services department is notified to ascertain if additional supports/testing and placement is needed. [ECE 12]

Similarly, Directors of Special Education were also asked to describe the process used to establish an IEP. About two-thirds mentioned assessment and/or evaluation (61%), about one third included parents or families in their description of the process (38%). Another two-thirds defined the process around convening the PPT (63%). Some of the Directors of Special Education discussed progress measurement in their description (9%), yet the responses more often mentioned the establishment of goals (35%) and/or the recommendation of services (21%). A small percentage described the IEP process in relation to following the CT ELDS or state or federal guidelines (9%).

The examples below show contrasting descriptions of this process:

A multidisciplinary team inclusive of parents and general education teacher at a PPT determine a disability which requires specialized instruction to close the gap between the student's skills and age level skills. Assessment data from a variety of

sources is used to inform the IEP. There is a through-line beginning with Present Levels of Performance including general education classroom data gathered through planned experiences, natural experiences, and parent input. There are formal assessment results from the evaluation. SMART IEP goals and objectives are developed to be mastered within a year's time. Assessment procedures are identified to measure progress. Student's IEP progress is evaluated at report card reporting periods. Accommodations and modifications are included considering AT and transportation, Frequency or services, description of participation in general education, and justification for removal for services is included. Parents always receive Procedural Safeguards and Prior Written Notice as partners in the development of the IEP. IEP aligns with state standards. [SpED 7]

[D]epends on student's needs [SpED 24]

Evaluation results, clinical observations, IEP's, medical findings are used to write specific goals and objectives for a preschool IEP. [SpED 33]

In addition, Directors of Special Education and ECE Supervisors' responses about the IEP referral process were analyzed using word frequency clouds. Responses from both groups of respondents closely resembled each other (Figure A.4 in the Appendix). Most prevalent in these responses were the concepts of "evaluation", "parent" and "PPT" meetings. Frequency cloud analyses about the process of IEPs development as reported by the Directors of Special Education also show a prevalence "evaluation", "parent" and "PPT", as well as the inclusion of "goals" and "objectives" and "team". The concept of the "review" also comes up in these responses (Figure A.5 in the Appendix).

Role of preschool teachers in IEP development and their access to IEP information

Preschool teachers are frequently members of the IEP PPT (see following section), and are often provided with support to attend PPT meetings. Three-quarters of Directors of Special Education reported that preschool teachers are always provided with support or coverage to attend PPT meetings, and two-thirds of Site Directors reported the same. One slight difference between responses from Directors of Special Education and Site Directors is that 5% of the latter reported that coverage is provided rarely or never. No Directors of Special Education reported that teachers are never or rarely provided with coverage to attend PPT meetings. When coverage is provided, floating teachers or paraprofessionals are used most frequently (77%), with an administrative staff member the next most frequently used (34%).

Site Directors provided interesting information about teachers' access to IEP information and opportunities to collaborate and plan with relevant staff regarding IEPs goals and progress. The majority of Site Directors said that their teachers have access to child assessment data (69%), children's behavior intervention plans (72%), and children's progress reports (72%) for all children with IEPs in their classroom (see Figure 3c). Another 16-18% said that this information was available to teachers for at least some of the preschoolers with IEPs in their classroom.

**Figure 3d: Preschool teachers access to information about preschoolers with IEPs?**
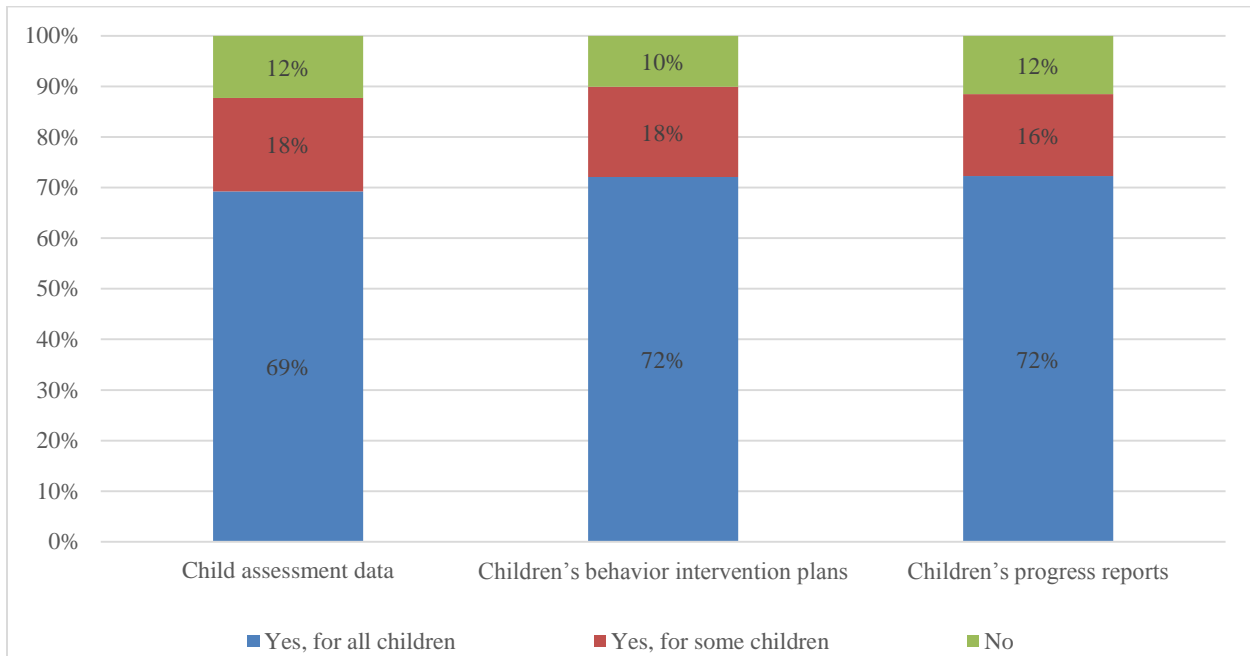
Just over a quarter of Site Directors reported that preschool teachers always consult with therapists/specialists to plan lessons addressing specific IEP goals and objectives, 39% said this often takes places, and 23% said it sometimes takes place (see Figure 3e). Only 11% reported that this takes place rarely or never. When asked whether IEP goals are embedded into regular classroom routines and activities, 40% reported they always are, 43% that they often are, and 14% that they sometimes are. Only 4% said that they rarely or never are.

Figure 3e: Do preschool teachers have access to the following information about preschoolers with IEPs?
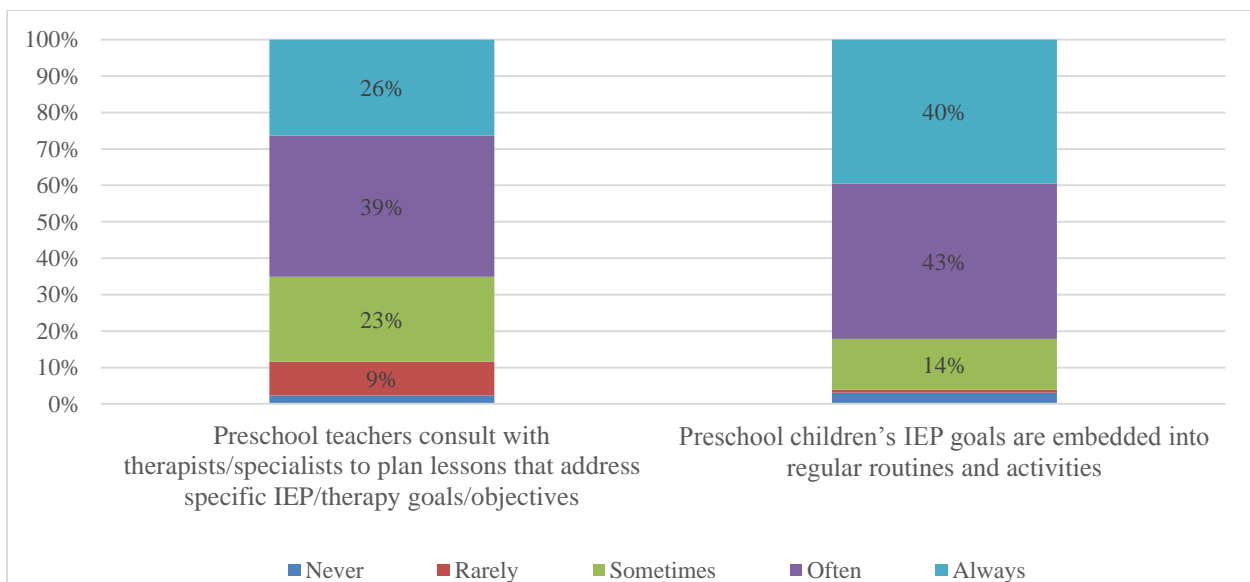
Addressing the question of opportunities for staff to collaborate in support of preschoolers with IEPs, almost three-quarters of Site Directors responded that preschool staff have joint planning time either weekly or daily. A similar percentage reported child related information was communicated among staff weekly or daily (see Figure 3f). Collaboration between teachers and therapists is equally likely to happen monthly (30%) or weekly (31%). Interestingly, 21% of Site Directors reported never interacting with Directors of Special Education regarding questions about children with IEPs. Another 27% reported this happens a few times per year, 19% said it happens monthly, 22% weekly, and 11% daily.

Figure 3f: Staff collaboration to support preschoolers with IEPs
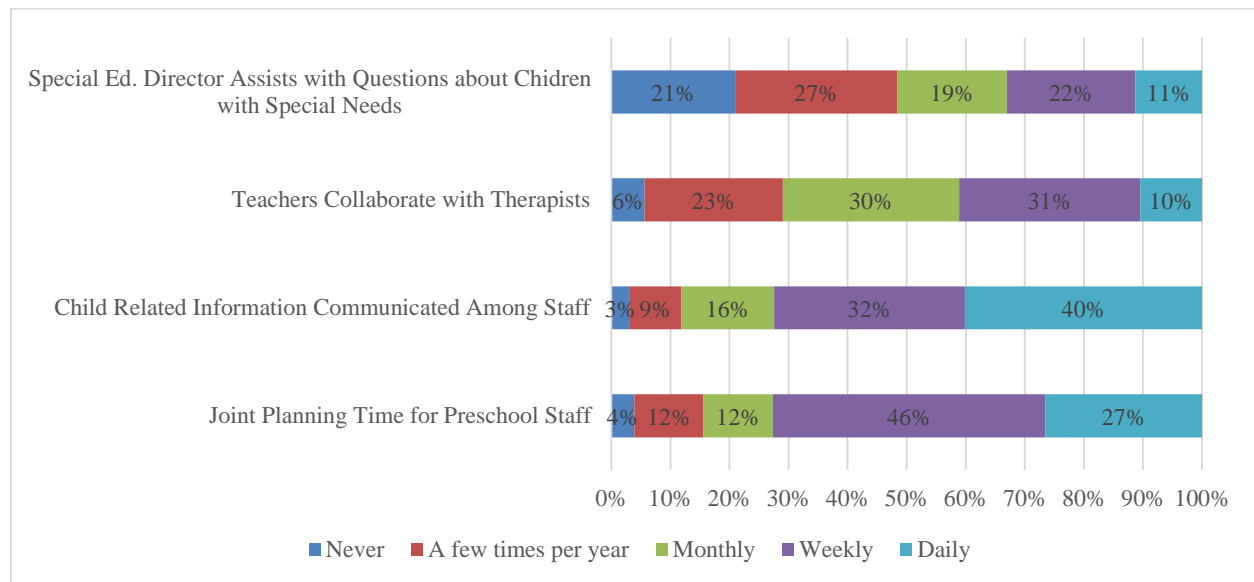
Who is included on the PPTs?

Directors of Special Education were asked to report the typical members of PPTs (see Figure 3g). Almost all districts include parents (99%), therapists (95%), special education teachers (88%), and preschool teachers (87%). A large percentage (74%) also typically include a psychologist. The least likely PPT members are center directors (9%) and district-level ECE supervisors (11%); however, it should be noted that one or both of these positions may have been accounted for in others answer choices selected.

Figure 3g: Typical preschool IEP PPT members
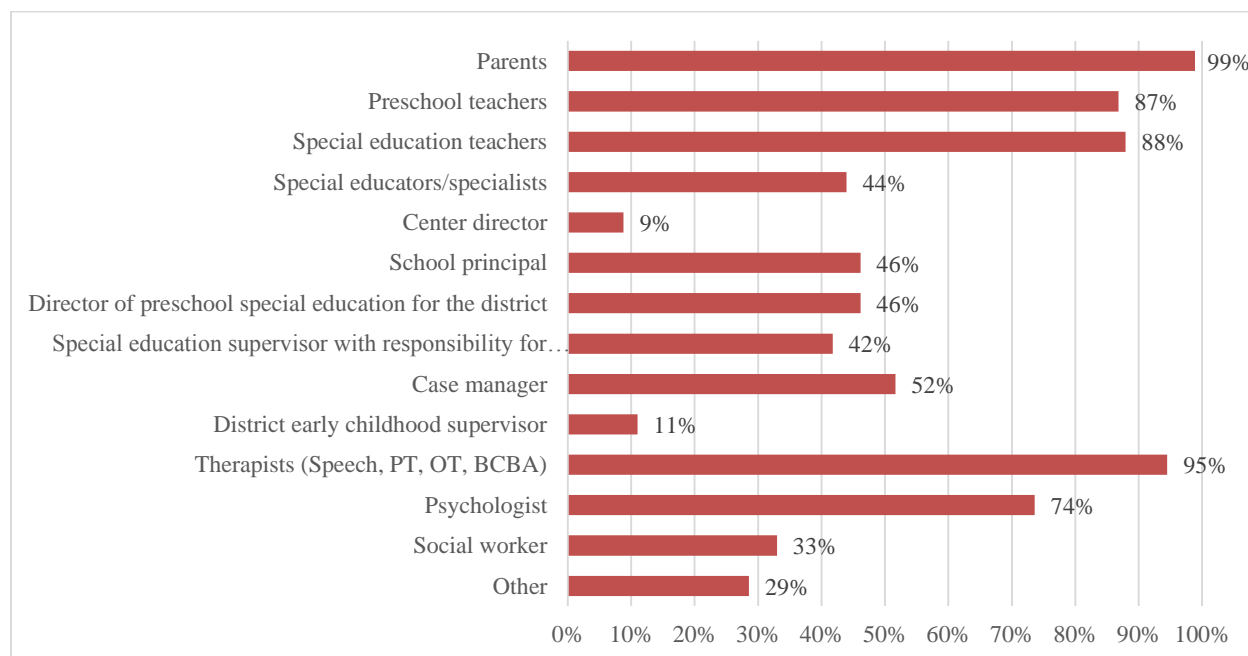
How often are IEPs reviewed?

Almost two-thirds of districts review and/or adjust preschoolers' IEPs annually, according to Directors of Special Education, and the remaining districts review them multiple times per year.

Transition of IEPs from Preschool to Kindergarten

Only slightly more than half of ECE Supervisors described having written guidelines or procedures in place to transition IEPs from preschool to kindergarten, while about two-thirds of Directors of Special Education reported that these procedures are in place.

   Both Directors of Special Education and ECE supervisors were asked to describe the process of transitioning preschoolers' IEPs to kindergarten. Some described a partnership with the K-12 systems where they are invited to participate by even observing the child in the classroom, and articulation mechanisms exist for the transition, even though these are sometimes not specified in writing:

> *Kindergarten aged students are observed by the receiving elementary school at least by the special education teacher, sometimes by more providers and general ed teachers. The receiving staff reviews the IEPs and goals and objectives. The preschool team and the receiving school team meet to discuss the students profile and need. An "Articulation" PPT is held with the receiving schools' special education team, the parent and the PK special education teacher to review the needs of the student and create an IEP for Kindergarten setting. The parents participate in the process. [ECE 12]*

Although the information is not formally written in our guidelines, Spring transition PPTs are scheduled including members of the receiving kindergarten team. During this meeting information is shared regarding key components to support a positive transition to kindergarten. Depending on the level of need, additional informal meetings are scheduled including but not limited to informal observations of the student. [SpED 14]

In contrast, the process as describe by other districts seems to be more limited, with conversations happening between teachers but not necessarily the PPT teams.

Pre K teachers meet with Kindergarten teachers to review IEPs and provide additional helpful information. [ECE 22]

[P]rocess is currently being developed [SpED 45]

However, most responses showed collaborations between PPTs, between teachers, and many responses included the use of observations by the receiving team. Frequency cloud analyses for the language in these responses (Figure A.6 in the Appendix) show the prevalence of terminology used such as "meeting", "PPT", "receiving", "teacher" and "team", which seem to point to collaboration between teams. Parents are less prevalent in these responses, relative to those in referrals and IEP development.

4. Early Learning and Development Standards

How familiar are staff with the ELDS?

More than half of Directors of Special Education (53%) and ECE Supervisors (58%) reported being very familiarly with the CT Early Learning and Development Standards (CT ELDS) and using them to guide their work, and almost 40% of each group said that they are familiar with them. At the site level, principals and center directors reported that almost 80% of preschool teachers reference the CT ELDS when planning instruction and another 15% said that teachers references them at least some of them time when planning instruction.

*How is the CT ELDS Used by Programs?*

At the site level, the CT ELDS are often or almost always used in the following ways: to inform professional development for teachers (78% of sites), to guide placement and instruction of children with IEPs (78% of sites), to inform curriculum decisions (86% of sites), and to guide preschool instruction (89% of sites) (see Figure 4a).

Figure 4a: Extent to which CT ELDS guide practices reported by site directors
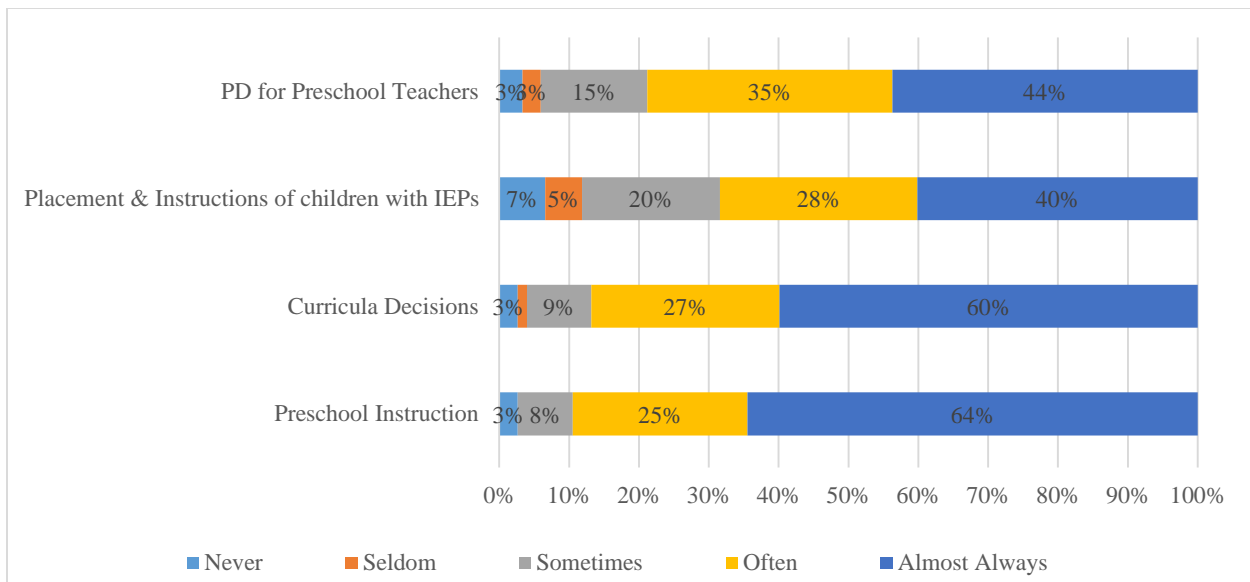
ECE Supervisors answered three comparable questions about their districts and reported that the CT ELDS are often or almost always used in the following ways: to inform professional development for teachers (76% of districts), to inform curriculum decisions (85% of districts), and to guide preschool instruction (91% of districts) (see Figure 4b). Responses across the two respondents were very similar.

Figure 4b: Extent to which CT ELDS guide practice reported by ECE supervisors
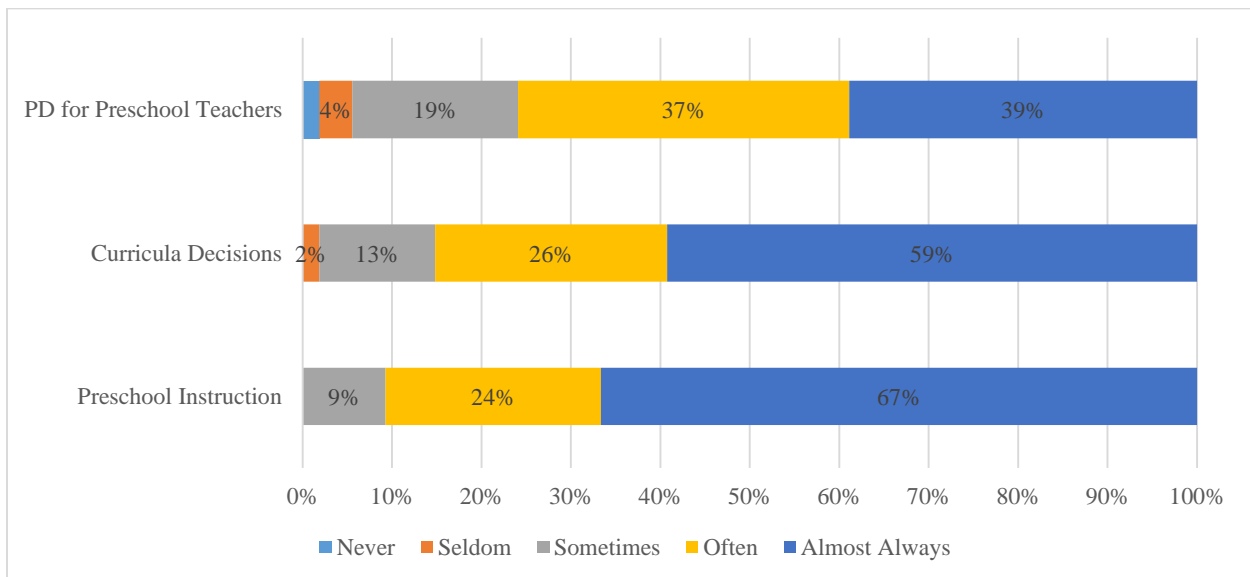
Site Directors were asked to expand on the ways in which the CT ELDS are integrated into classroom practice (see Figure 4c). Over 90% of Site Directors indicated that the CT ELDS are used to develop learning centers and plan large group activities, and almost 90% use them to

plan small group activities or to plan activities or supports for individual children. Fewer (though still close to 60%) reported using the CT ELDS to inform portfolio assessments, book choices, classroom displays, and direction provided to aides or classroom volunteers. Less than 20% of Site Directors reported that the CT ELDS are not integrated into classroom practice.

Figure 4c: Integration of ELDS into preschool classrooms
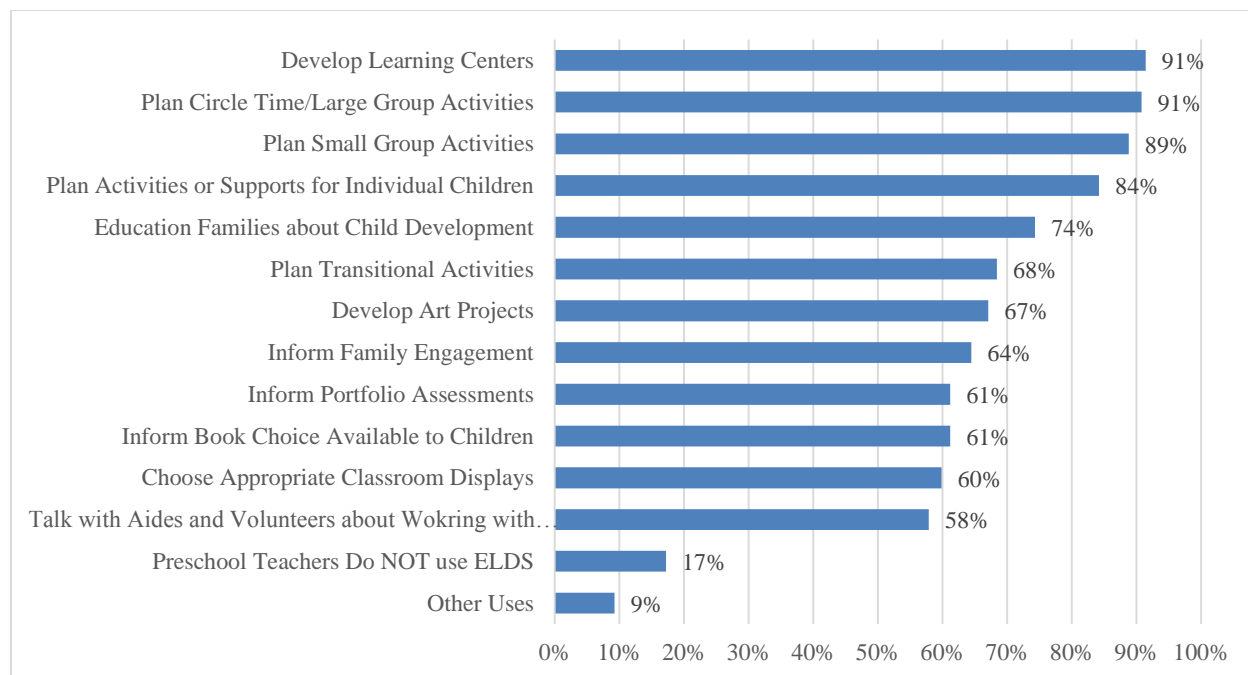
ECE Supervisors were also asked to describe how the CT ELDS were used in their districts. Responses showed a focus using them for planning purposes (53%), some mention of their use in instruction (33%) and for creating or aligning curriculum (43%). Some ECE Supervisors described their use in child assessment (24%), and there was some minimal discussion of the ELDS use in relation to SRBI or IEP planning, and in relation to planning trainings. Very few ECE Supervisors brought up its use in relation to observations. Some examples of responses that illustrate various uses of the CT ELDS are:

> *We use them to guide our practice and are currently using them to develop PK-4 ELA and Math Curricula. Our preschool progress reports are aligned with them as well. [ECE 48]*

> *Our board of education approved curriculum is based on the CT ELDS. The teachers refer to the document frequently for guidance. [ECE 16]*

> *For some programs, ELDs guides curriculum. Other programs use ELDs as resource. There are some programs that do not use ELDs or a formal curriculum. [ECE 12]*

> *[T]eachers are given a copy. [T]hey take it upon themselves to implement them into their classrooms and teaching. [ECE 19]*

Training on CT ELDS

ECE Supervisors and Site Directors were how often preschool teachers receive training related to the CT ELDS. About 42% of ECE Supervisors and 36% of Site Directors responded that preschool teachers receive training multiple times per year, while 37% and 34% (respectively) said it happens annually. A small percentage reported that training related to the CT ELDS happens on a monthly basis (ECE Supervisors, 4%; Site Directors, 12%). Only 17% of ECE Supervisors and 18% of Site Directors responded that CT ELDS training occurs only once upon hiring or not at all.

Alignment of assessments with CT ELDS

Directors of Special Education answered questions about the extent to which preschool assessments are aligned with the CT ELDS (see Figure 4d). Assessments informing curriculum and instruction are more likely to be aligned with the CT ELDS (80% of districts) than assessments informing progress monitoring (61% of districts). However, approximately 13% of Directors of Special Education responded that they are unsure of whether either types of assessment are aligned with the CT ELDS.

Figure 4d: Are preschool assessments aligned to the CT ELDS?
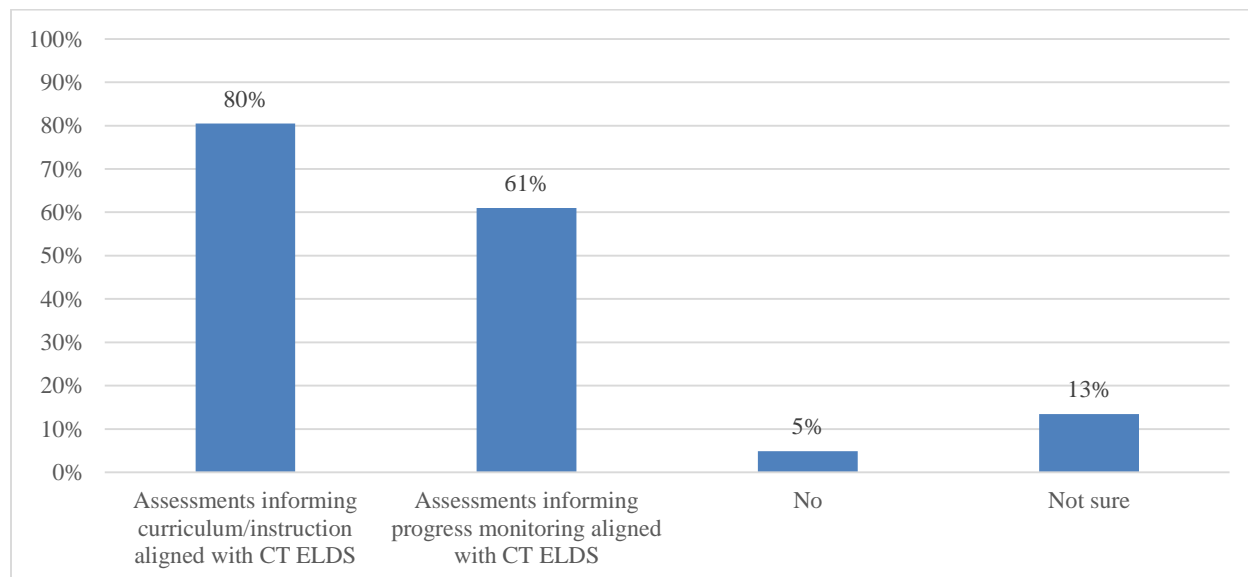
Use of CT DOTS

All three groups of respondents were asked about the use of CT DOTS to assess preschoolers' learning, and responses were fairly consistent across respondent groups. Between 42% and 46% of respondents said that the CT DOTS are currently being used to assess preschoolers' learning;

between 30% and 35% said that it is not currently being used; and 20% to 28% said that they are in the process of transitioning to the CT DOTS.

5. What types of Professional Development supports do teachers receive?

Amount of professional development provided to preschool teachers

On average, ECE Supervisors reported that preschool teachers and therapists receive 32 hours of professional development each year, with between 11 and 12 hours related to serving children with special needs. Preschool paraprofessionals receive less than half this amount of professional development (14 total hours with just five dedicated to special education issues). It is important to note, however, that the range of reported professional development hours related to special education across districts ranged from no hours to 100% of hours. Also, more than a quarter of responding districts (27%) indicated that requirements for professional development hours are different for preschool teachers serving children with IEPs and preschool teachers who do not. Also, fewer than 5% of districts, according to both ECE Supervisors and Directors of Special Education, have policies to reward staff for obtaining professional development in inclusive practices.

All three types of respondents were asked about training on inclusive practices for preschool staff during in-service days. Responses from ECE Supervisors and Directors of Special Education were nearly identical. Roughly 60% responded that all preschool staff receive training on inclusive practices during in-service days, 9% said that only preschool staff working with children with IEPs receive training on inclusive practices, and 11-14% said that training is provided to "other" preschool staff. In both surveys, 17% responded that no preschool staff receive professional development on inclusion. Seventy-two percent of Site Directors said that all preschool staff receive training on inclusive practices, 9% said that only preschool staff working with children with IEPs receive training on inclusive practices, and 6% said that training is provided to "other" preschool staff. Only 13% of Site Directors reported that no preschool staff receive training related to inclusion.

Preschool professional development providers

When asked who provides professional developed related to inclusive practices, answers varied somewhat between the Directors of Special Education and ECE Supervisors. Almost 90% of Directors of Special Education and 95% of ECE Supervisors said that some inclusion professional development sessions are conducted by in-district staff. Both groups of respondents said that some professional development is also provided by Regional Education Service Center staff, private contractors, and the State Education Resource Center (SERC), but the percentage of responses varied slightly for each. For Regional Education Service Center staff, 46% of ECE Supervisors and 54% of Directors of Special Education reported them providing professional development related to inclusion. For private contractors, the percentages were 54% versus 48%, and for the SERC they were 39% versus 49%, respectively. Site Directors reported much lower percentages of professional development being delivered by these entities: in-district staff (67%), Regional Education Service Center staff (30%), private contractors (46%), and SERC (22%).

Professional development topics covered for preschool teachers

Early Childhood Supervisors reported a wide range of professional development topics covered for preschool teachers (see Figure 5a). The most widely, and sufficiently, covered topics include positive behavioral interventions and support, referral processes, classroom quality, curriculum, and the CT ELDS. Topics least likely to be covered are DEC recommended practices, supporting dual language learners, parent involvement in the IEP process, and birth-3 programming and transition. ECE Supervisors indicated that more emphasis is needed in all of the professional development topics listed.

Figure 5a: Professional development topics covered for preschool teachers
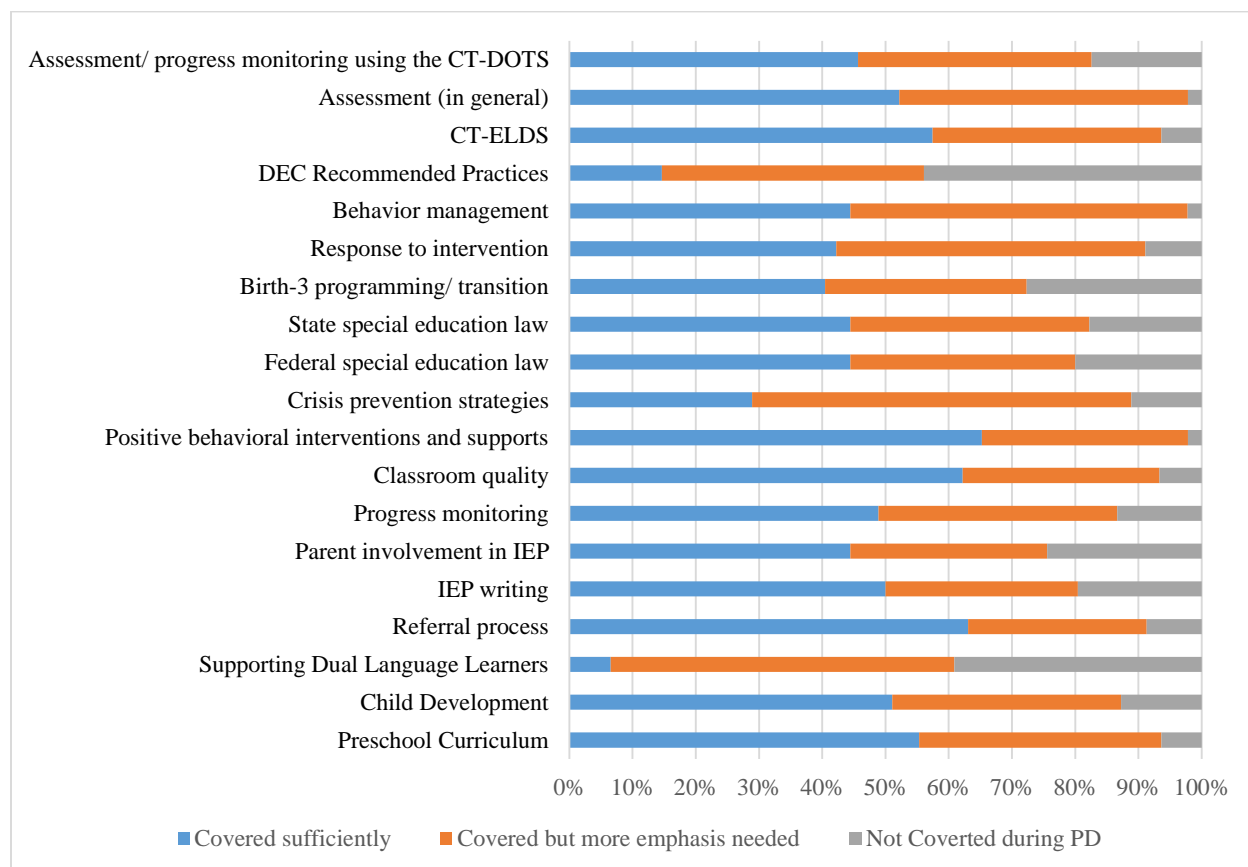
Coaching/Mentoring for preschool teachers

ECE Supervisors were asked several questions about coaching and mentoring provided to preschool teachers. Just over two-thirds responded that mentors/coaches are available for all preschool teachers, and 68% said that mentors/coaches are from the school district. Fewer districts (57%) require individualized professional development plans for all teachers, 14% for some teachers, and 29% do not require them at all. In those districts that provide coaching, 6% say that teachers meet with their coaches only annually, 44% say that teachers meet with their coaches a few times per year, 25% say it occurs monthly, 8% bi-weekly, and 8% weekly. The remaining 8% responded that teachers do not meet with coaches. During coaching sessions, the

most commonly covered topics are classroom management (66%), content-specific topics (60%), and best practice for children with IEPs (54%). The least covered topics tend to be classroom interactions (49%), review of observation results (40%), and best practices for dual language learners (40%).

Supports to attend professional development

ECE Supervisors were asked to describe supports available for preschool teaching staff to attend courses, conferences, and/or workshops to enhance professional development (e.g., paid transportation to conferences, coverage available, paid conference fees). Respondents mostly pointed towards an intention to support teachers but a large fraction mentioned minimal supports or limited funding. Only one third of ECE Supervisors specified covering conference fees and about another third mentioned coverage for teaching substitutes. Very few responses mentioned covering conference/PD fees, or transportation or mileage. The following examples highlight some of the variation in responses:

> *[M]inimal, we have time built into yearly schedule [ECE 16]*

> *Paid transportation and lunch on the conference day, coverage to attend, sometimes paid conference fees but currently in a budget freeze. University course reimbursement. [ECE 19]*

> *Staff are encouraged to attend course, conferences, etc. Costs are most often covered by program funds. [ECE 25]*

> *Teacher can complete a PD request form if they have an interest in attending something. If it is approved, they will get sub coverage, paid for mileage and pay for the PD. [ECE 29]*

6. What supports are available for curriculum implementation?

Preschool curriculum approaches and models

ECE Supervisors and Site Directors were asked what approaches they use for curriculum planning and implementation. Ninety percent of ECE Supervisors and 88% of Site Directors responded that lessons plans are developed either daily or weekly. Next most commonly, 61% of ECE Supervisors and 56% of Site Directors reported the use of a locally-developed curriculum (41% and 30% reported use of a commercially-developed curriculum, respectively). Across both surveys, fewer than 6% indicated using Reggio Emilia or Montessori Method as approaches for curriculum planning and implementation. Site Directors also responded to a question asking what goals/outcomes form the basis for curriculum and planning in preschool classrooms. Ninety-one percent said that the CT ELDS serve as a guide for curriculum and planning goals and 78% said that IEP or IFSP goals serve as their guide. Fewer Site Directors answered using

outcomes specified in their assessment tool(s) as a guide (43%), or goals outlined in their curriculum (37%), and just 7% indicated using the Head Start Framework.

Although seven of the most commonly used preschool curricula were provided as answer choices in the survey, the most frequently selected answer choice by both ECE Supervisors and Site Directors was "other" (89% and 54%, respectively). For both, the next most common choice was Creative Curriculum[32] (30% and 44%, respectively). Beyond this, only 11% of ECE Supervisors selected High/Scope[33] and just 4% selected either Frog Street[34] or Tools of the Mind[35]. None selected Bank Street[36], Curiosity Corner[37], or Opening the World of Learning (OWL)[38]. Five percent or fewer of site-level directors selected High/Scope, OWL or Tools of the Mind, and none selected Bank Street, Curiosity Corner, or Frog Street.

Curriculum adaptations for preschoolers with IEPs

All three respondents were asked about the extent to which preschoolers with IEPs are supported through curriculum and instruction. Across the three surveys, the largest variation was in response to whether adaptations are made to the curriculum. While 96% of ECE Supervisors and 89% of Directors of Special Education reported that curriculum adaptations are made to support preschoolers with IEPS, just 69% of Site Directors indicated that this practice takes place. Similarly, although 98% of ECE Supervisors and 94% of Directors of Special Education said that modifications are made to curricula, the percentage drops to 83% of Site Directors. A comparable pattern of differences is also seen in response to whether adjustments are made to activities. However, across all three surveys 92% - 94% responded that preschoolers with IEPs are supported through planning individualized strategies.

Curriculum training for preschool teachers

According to 60% of ECE Supervisors, preschool teachers receive curriculum training a few times per year. Just under a quarter (23%) said that training occurs just once per year and 8% replied that training takes places monthly. Approximately 10% indicated that curriculum training occurs either never, or just once upon hiring. Responses from Site Directors varied from those of the ECE Supervisors: at the program level, 53% reported that training happens a few times per year, 25% monthly, 17% annually, a 5% never or once upon hiring.

Asked whether curriculum training includes strategies for teachers to work with children with IEPs in the classroom, answers were somewhat more similar across the two surveys. Seventy-one percent of ECE Supervisors and 81% of Site Directors said that all preschool teachers receive training that includes strategies for working with preschoolers with IEPs. Another 8% of ECE Supervisors and 6% of Site Directors responded that this kind of training takes place, but only for preschool teachers of children with IEPs. The remaining respondents

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[32] https://teachingstrategies.com/solutions/teach/preschool/
[33] https://highscope.org/our-practice/curriculum/
[34] http://www.frogstreet.com/curriculum/
[35] https://toolsofthemind.org/
[36] https://www.bankstreet.edu/about-bank-street/our-approach/
[37] http://www.successforall.org/our-approach/schoolwide-programs/curiosity-corner/
[38] http://www.texasowl.com/previewonline.html

(22% of ECE Supervisors and 13% of Site Directors) indicated that this training is not provided to any preschool teachers.

7. Assessment and Screening

Preschool curriculum and related assessments

Responses to questions about the use of a child assessment associated with the preschool curriculum varied between ECE Supervisors and Site Directors. Forty-five percent of ECE Supervisors report that a curriculum assessment is used (most commonly CT DOTS[39] and TS GOLD[40]) and 33% said that a separate tool is used (most commonly CT DOTS, Battelle[41], and Brigance[42]). By contrast, over two-thirds of Site Directors reported using a curriculum assessment tool and only 19% reported using a separate tool. The most common assessments cited by Site Directors were the ASQ[43], Brigance, CT DOTS, DIAL[44], and TS GOLD.

Preschool assessments by purpose

Respondents were also asked which assessments were used in (1) Child Find and for screening, (2) to determine eligibility/for evaluation, (3) for informing curriculum and instruction, (4) to monitor children's progress towards their IEP goals, and (5) for monitoring progress towards program and curriculum goals. A variety of instruments were mentioned across districts for these different purposes. For example, ECE Supervisors highlighted:

- For Child Find and screening: most common DIAL, Battelle and to a lesser extent, Brigance. Almost half of the respondents included others beyond ASQ, PLS[45] (16%), ESI[46] (6%), TS GOLD, HAPP-3[47], DECA[48].

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[39] https://ctspecialednews.org/2019/03/05/ct-documentation-and-observation-for-teaching-system-ct-dots/
[40] https://teachingstrategies.com/solutions/assess/gold/
[41] https://www.riversideinsights.com/solutions/battelle-developmental-inventory-3?tab=0
[42] https://www.curriculumassociates.com/products/brigance/early-childhood
[43] https://agesandstages.com/
[44] https://www.pearsonassessments.com/store/usassessments/en/Store/Professional-Assessments/Academic-Learning/Brief/Developmental-Indicators-for-the-Assessment-of-Learning-%7C-Fourth-Edition/p/100000304.html
[45] https://www.pearsonassessments.com/store/usassessments/en/Store/Professional-Assessments/Speech-%26-Language/Preschool-Language-Scales-%7C-Fifth-Edition/p/100000233.html
[46] https://www.pearsonassessments.com/store/usassessments/en/Store/Professional-Assessments/Academic-Learning/Brief/The-Early-Screening-Inventory-%7C-Third-Edition/p/100001986.html
[47] https://www.proedinc.com/Products/11550/happ3-hodson-assessment-of-phonological-patternsthird-edition.aspx
[48] https://centerforresilientchildren.org/preschool/assessments-resources/the-devereux-early-childhood-assessment-clinical-form-deca-c-kit/

- For Eligibility/evaluation: Most predominant in responses is Battelle, after which there is mention of PLS, Brigance, ADOS[49], CELF[50] and others, including responses on individually designed evaluations.
- For informing instruction: Combinations of sources, observations, assessments, information. Some mention of Brigance, TS GOLD, ELDS, CT DOTS. 10% mentioned locally developed assessments.
- To monitoring progress towards IEP goals: Use of IEP goals, or combinations of data, portfolios and observations. Some mention of CT DOTS.
- To monitor progress towards curriculum goals: Most of the responses included CT DOTS, TS GOLD and observations.

Responses by Directors of Special Education mostly aligned with responses from ECE Supervisors. Some additional assessments mentioned were observations for screening, BDI and for eligibility, Brigance for informing instructions, Brigance and TS GOLD for monitoring progress towards IEP goals and Brigance also for monitoring progress towards curriculum.

ECE Supervisors were asked how the information from the assessments of each preschool child's skill or progress is used in the classroom. Two-thirds mentioned this data were used to guide instructions (66%), 56% referred to planning, and 24% referred to IEP development. A few respondents mentioned that this data are used to work with specialists or with parents, for benchmarking, or for curricular development.

In addition, 83% of districts reported that assessments used to inform curriculum and/or instruction aligned with the CT ELDS, 51% of districts report that assessments used to inform progress monitoring are aligned with the CT ELDS, 11% reported they were not sure about alignment and 4% said assessments were not aligned with the CT ELDS.

Frequency cloud analyses of these responses (Figure A.7 in the Appendix) aligns with these findings. The "Battelle", "Brigance" and "DIAL" were most commonly mentioned with regards to screening; "ADOS" and "PLS" were commonly mentioned as used for eligibility purposes; "CT DOTS" for instruction and progress towards curriculum; and "goals" were mentioned in responses about the use of assessment for monitoring progress towards IEP goals.

Adaptations for assessments of preschoolers with IEPs

Responses from Directors of Special Education and ECE Supervisors were fairly consist regarding the extent to which adaptations are made for assessments of preschoolers with IEPs. Both report that adaptations are made as needed most frequently for informing curriculum/ instruction, then for progress monitoring for program/curriculum goals, and then for progress monitoring for IEP goals. Both groups also consistently reported that adaptations are least likely for eligibility determinations.

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[49] https://www.wpspublish.com/ados-2-autism-diagnostic-observation-schedule-second-edition?utm_term=ados%20test&utm_campaign=Search+%7C+Champion+Keyword+RSA%27s+-+Broad+Match&utm_source=adwords&utm_medium=ppc&hsa_net=adwords&hsa_tgt=kwd-1820849069&hsa_ad=350562097364&hsa_acc=6243382947&hsa_grp=71360921235&hsa_mt=b&hsa_cam=1933626877&hsa_kw=ados%20test&hsa_ver=3&hsa_src=g&gclid=CjwKCAjw2a32BRBXEiwAUcugiMX8kjiWsSfRlA57EWgwvaT2qVlORaBj5IvwDe1A-zCEtgcSXekHGhoChEUQAvD_BwE
[50] https://www.pearsonassessments.com/store/usassessments/en/Store/Professional-Assessments/Developmental-Early-Childhood/Clinical-Evaluation-of-Language-Fundamentals-Preschool-2/p/100000316.html

Frequency of screenings

The Directors of Special Education and ECE Supervisors were extremely uniform in their responses to questions about the frequency of screenings for preschool children. Screenings to inform curriculum and instruction occur multiple time per year in 82%–83% of district, child progress monitoring happens multiple times per year in 93%–94% of districts, and child progress monitoring for program and curriculum goals happens multiple times per year in 87%–91% of districts. One of the few small discrepancies was that Directors of Special Education (8%) were more likely than ECE Supervisors (2%) to report that child progress monitoring for program and curriculum goals happens only at the beginning of the year. Conversely, ECE Supervisors (7%) were more likely than Directors of Special Education (3%) to report that screenings to inform curriculum and instruction happened only at the beginning of the year (7%).

8. Preschool Classroom Experiences, Activities, and Accessibility

Preschool classroom experiences

The majority of Site Directors (75%) reported that preschoolers with and without IEPs are always encouraged to work collaboratively and 22% said that children are often encouraged (see Figure 8a). A smaller percentage (36%) indicated that children always see representations of themselves in classroom materials and activities, but another 56% said that they do often. Even fewer Site Directors (32%) reported that classroom activities are always embedded with experiences to promote understanding of individual differences, however another 58% said they often are.

Figure 8a: Frequency of Classroom Experiences
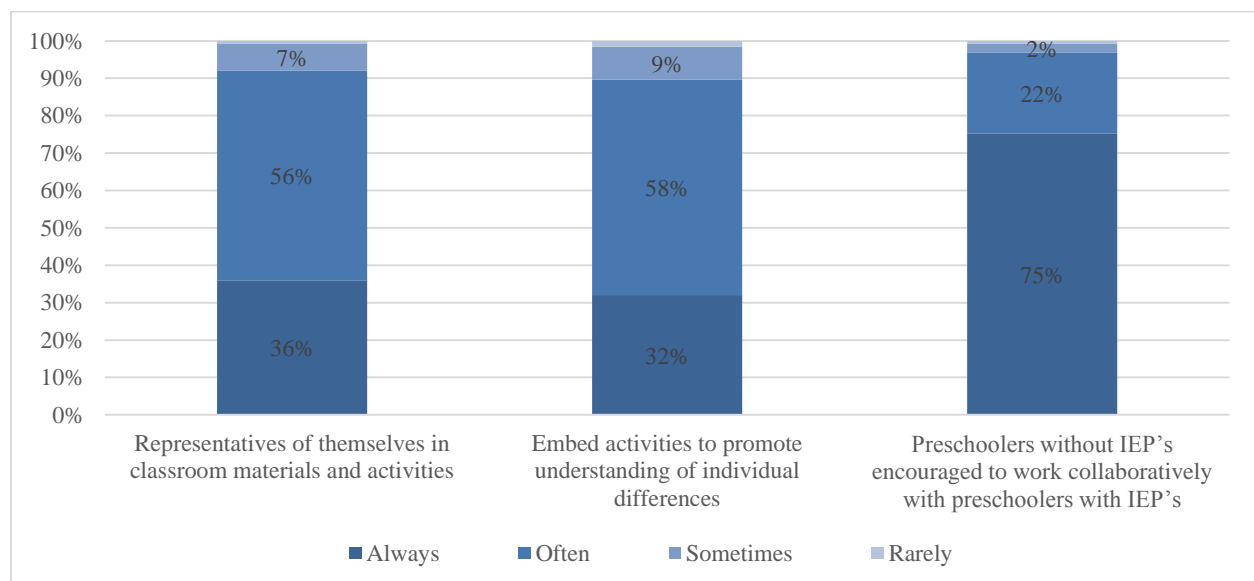
Classroom activities for preschoolers with IEPs

Site Directors provided information on the amount of time preschoolers with IEPs spend engaged in various activities (see Figure 8b). On average, child directed activities comprise the largest portion of the day for preschool children with IEPs, with 59% of Site Directors indicating that children have choice for at least an hour a day. Appropriately, adult-directed activities (whole group, small group, and individual) most frequently happen for just five to 30 minutes per day. Children work in self-chosen groups for at least an hour each day in 42% of programs, and work together in other groups for at least an hour each day in 37% of programs.

Figure 8b: Time preschoolers with IEPs spend by type of activity
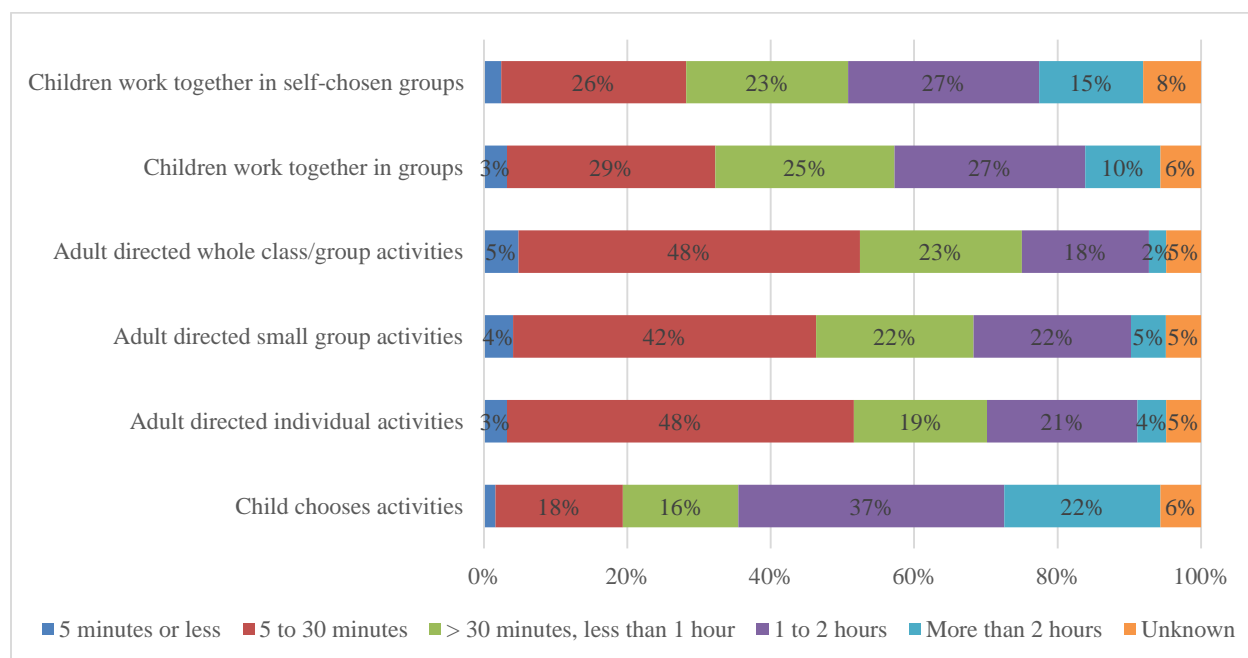
Time preschoolers spend in content areas

According to ECE Supervisors, the largest cumulative blocks of time (at least one hour or more per day) are reserved for literacy and math, followed by fine motor, gross motor and dramatic play (see Figure 8c). Site Directors reported a slightly different list, including literacy, fine motor, dramatic play, and blocks, closely followed by art (see Figure 8d). Less time (an hour or less per day) is most commonly set aside for technology, science, and teachers reading to children, based on responses from both ECE Supervisors and Site Directors. Interestingly, Site Directors reported anywhere between 15 and several hundred books available for children to use on their own, and most said that books are frequently rotated.

Figure 8c: Time preschoolers spend per content area, reported by ECE supervisors
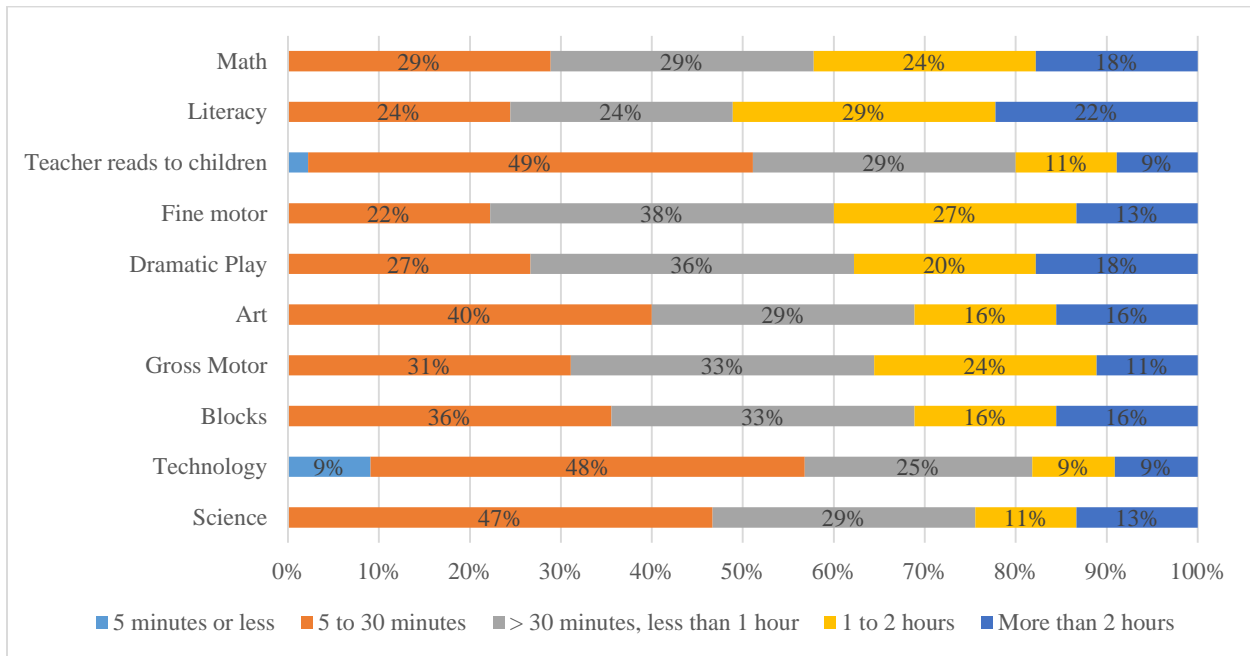
Figure 8d: Time preschoolers spend per content area, reported by site directors
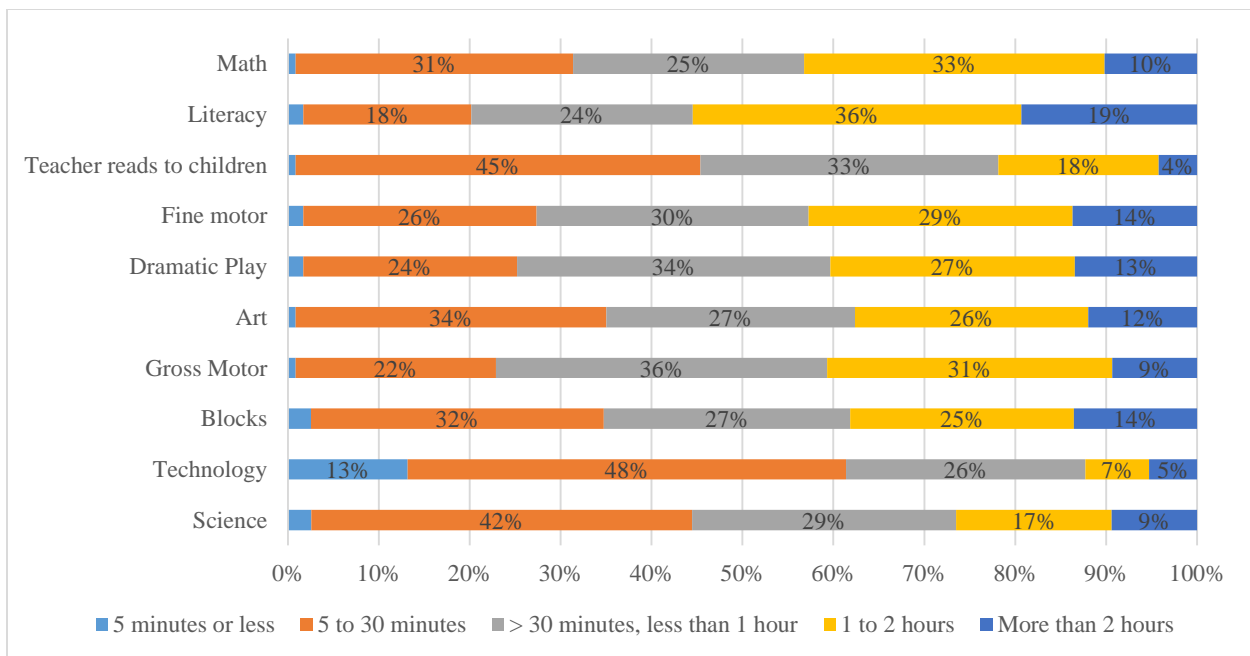
Classroom accessibility

The overwhelming majority of Site Directors (88%) reported that all preschoolers with special needs have physical access to all areas in the classroom as well as to the school entrance (92%), the entrance to the outdoor gross motor area (91%), the gross motor area itself (88%), and to bathrooms (89%). However, although the majority of programs said that all children with special needs can access the outdoor gross motor area, only 70% said that all children with IEPs can access gross motor equipment. Forty-six percent of Site Directors reported that alternative means of communication are always or often incorporated into the preschool classroom to help children with IEPs communicate and participate in activities with their peers.

9. Family Engagement

Strategies used to promote family engagement

Almost 100% of respondents across all three surveys use family-teacher conferences to engage the families of preschoolers. Family engagement activities (e.g. game nights) and classroom volunteering opportunities were the next most commonly used strategies, though they were reported more commonly by Site Directors than by Directors of Special Education or ECE Supervisors. One of the largest discrepancies across the respondents was in the use of home visits as a family engagement strategy. While more than two-thirds of Directors of Special Education reported that home visits were conducted home visits, only 50% of ECE Supervisors and just 31% of Site Directors reported engaging preschool families through home visits.

When asked for additional information about the strategies that their district uses to ensure the engagement of families with preschool children, 25 Directors of Special Education provided some additional information. There was variation in these responses from engagement in the child's learning process in a variety of ways (e.g., regular communication or daily informational sheets, opportunities for child observations, parent groups or workshops, IEP meetings) to information events (e.g., back to school night, some sort of family day, family events in the classroom).

In addition, Directors of Special Education where also asked to provide additional detail about the engagement of families and parents in the IEP development. Almost all respondents defined family engagement around the PPT meeting. About half of the respondents define frequent or very frequent communications. For example:

> *As a program, the preschool provides daily logs to parents about what the children are working on for all children. Children with IEPs have either bi weekly or monthly written updates by the SET, SLP and monthly by the OT/PT. [SpED 10]*

> *Families are invited to conference with their preschool/special education teacher 3 times a year. In addition, families receive a weekly report on their child and have the opportunity to communicate with their child's team through a daily communication log that goes back and forth from school to home. Further, families receive quarterly progress reports on their IEP goals in addition to*

report cards aligned to the CTELDS. In addition, students typically have 2-3 review PPT meetings throughout the course of the school year. [SpED 16]

Families are offered opportunities to observe their child in the classroom a minimum of once per year. Formal parent-teacher conferences occur twice per year, and additional meetings are planned as often as needed. Special education teachers also send home daily communication about the activities their child engaged in on that day. Special education teachers and related service providers frequently contact parents additionally by phone or email. [SpED 18]

Parents are invited to provided input prior to the PPT meeting about their concerns. [SpED 42]

PPT meetings [SpED 44]

Discussion

This report summarizes the results of a needs assessment conducted in order to understand and describe early childhood services for preschool-age children with an Individualized Education Program (IEP) in the state of Connecticut. In collaboration with the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE), NIEER developed survey protocols to collect information about the quality of the environments in which 3-, 4-, and 5-year-old preschoolers in Connecticut receive services as part of their IEP. This report summarizes the findings on preschool program characteristics, the least restrictive environment (LRE), the development of IEPs, engagement with the Early Learning and Development Standards (ELDS), curriculum practices, assessment, professional development, classroom practices, and family engagement. Overall, the report highlights areas of strong alignment to best practices and areas that would benefit from additional professional development across preschool programs in CT. All data is self-reported from surveys to Directors of Special Education, ECE Supervisors and Site Directors across the state.

　　　The results of the needs assessment demonstrate that there are some areas where across districts and across the three respondent groups, policies and practices are similar. For example, family engagement practices were uniformly high across districts and as reported by Directors of Special Education, ECE Supervisors, and Site Directors, particularly around family-teacher conferences. Similarly, Directors of Special Education and ECE Supervisory had similar responses regarding supporting preschoolers with IEPs as part of curriculum and instruction, how assessment adaptations were made for preschoolers with disabilities, and the frequency of screenings. Directors of Special Education and ECE Supervisors reported similar levels of familiarity with the CT ELDS but Site Directors reported that their teachers had a higher level of familiarity and engagement with the CT ELDS. Generally, responses indicated high levels of engagement and familiarity with the ELDS. However, differences emerged as well; for example, Directors of Special Education were more likely than ECE Supervisors to report that their district had a written inclusion policy.

　　　One concerning finding is that a large percentage of the district leadership did not have a

background in ECE. Although all Directors of Special Education had at least a Master's Degree and many of them had a background in Special Education, very few had a highest degree or certification in ECE. All ECE Supervisors had at least a Bachelor's degree but only 17% reported that their highest degree was in ECE (and 23% reported it was in special education). A higher percentage of ECE Supervisors did report a certification either in preschool special education or ECE/preschool. Site Directors, particularly child care center directors and Head Start directors, were more likely than the other two respondent groups to have a background in ECE. Most preschool teachers also had at least a Bachelor's degree, including nearly all in public schools. The majority had a CT Pre-K and CT Special Education teacher certifications, though there was variation across programs.

Overall, the majority of preschool teaching staff were White, non-Hispanic/non-Latino, and spoke only English. Preschoolers, including preschoolers with IEPs also tended to be White, non-Hispanic/non-Latino, and speak only English. However, on average, the teaching staff for whom information was provided tended to be less diverse than the preschoolers for whom information was provided. Both preschool teaching staff and preschoolers tended to be more diverse in child care centers and Head Start centers than in public schools.

Nearly 60% of preschoolers with an IEP in the sample had a developmental delay; 20% speech or language impairment, and 17% Autism (as reported by Directors of Special Education). The prevalence of disabilities in the sample closely mirrors the entire state's IDEA data. However, there were some differences between the Director of Special Education reports and Site director reports, as well as across program type. For example, children with a developmental delay were more likely to be in public schools than child care or Head Start. Children with a speech or language impairment were more likely to be in child care. Understanding the prevalence of disability types across program type may be useful for targeting professional development or other supports.

Preschoolers with an IEP were more likely to be in part-day programs than preschoolers without an IEP. However, the study results do not shed light on why – is this driven by the IEP? Or other factors such as program availability? Additionally, preschoolers (both with and without an IEP) who attended child care or Head Start compared to public school preschool were more likely to be in full-day program. Again, we do not know if the IEPs dictate a longer school day for children in these programs, or in the case of child care, for example, if parents pay for part of the day not required by the IEP. Both from the perspective of supporting children's development and supporting working parents, increasing access to high quality full day preschool may be important. Some responses indicate use of part-time services and transitions between schools in order to serve the IEPs goals. Understanding alignment between these and the needs of children with IEPs may further support programming.

A central goal of this needs assessment was to understand the quality of preschool environments, including the extend to which districts and programs provide preschoolers with disabilities an education in their LRE and maintain natural proportions in the classrooms. We approached this question from a variety of perspectives. First, we found that most preschool classrooms were considered General Education classrooms (rather than Special Education classrooms) and most of those classrooms included at least one preschooler with an IEP. This leaves about a quarter of the classroom as Special Education, with children with an IEP comprising 50% or more of the classroom enrollment. Second, on average, just less than one-third of preschoolers in a classroom had an IEP, though there was significant variation here, ranging from 3% to 100%. And in many preschool classrooms 50% of children had an IEP (the

threshold for a Special Education classroom per CT's definitions). Third, most Site Directors correctly classified preschool classrooms as General or Special Education but not all did.

Responses from open-ended questions provide additional insight into how LRE and natural proportions are implemented in preschool in CT. In particular, responses indicate somewhat of a disconnect between the concept of continuum of services required by federal IDEA and perceptions of respondents as to what that means and how to implement it and provide services to preschoolers with an IEP in their LRE. Although many respondents defined LRE based on a setting or inclusion, very few mentioned the idea of continuums, though more did mention the idea of an education alongside peers without an IEP. A few mentioned the idea of minimal services.

We also found variation in responses defining natural proportions across all three respondent groups. Many emphasized the established inclusion ratio of 50% of children with an IEP but fewer mentioned its definition in relation to the incidence of children with special needs in the larger preschool population. This may be the result of the structure of preschool programs – that is some programs may start with children with IEPs and then recruit general education preschoolers in order to create an inclusion program, rather than the programs serving the preschool population at large. Further articulation of natural proportion in state guidelines could provide additional guidance to align preschool services with K-12 services in relation to natural proportions.

We also found variation in descriptions of the IEP development process. Whereas some respondents provided simple answers about filling out forms, having a PPT meeting, or following standards/policies, other provided more in depth answers that demonstrated a deeper understanding of the process. These responses mentioned who should be involved, the different steps in the process, as well as Child Find. Families and teachers seemed to be highly involved in the IEP process, according to most respondents.

Across respondents and questions, DEC recommended practices seem to be quite absent in respondent's answers. Though this was not a focus of the survey questions, it was rarely mentioned in responses to open ended questions. Additionally, the requirement to follow DEC best practices was not a commonly selected answer across all three respondent groups when asked about policies to support preschoolers with IEPs.

Conclusions

Results from this needs assessment indicate the most preschool teaching staff are receiving professional development, and on average, an adequate number of PD hours each year. However, not all preschool staff receive PD related to inclusion or related to serving preschoolers with special needs. In-district staff were the most common provider of PD though districts and programs also utilized regional education service centers, private contractors, and State Education Resource Center. The majority of preschool teachers also receive coaching or mentoring, but about one-third do not.

These results suggest that most districts and programs have in place systems to deliver professional development and/or coaching/mentoring to preschool teachers. However, the data collected in this needs assessment can be useful to inform new topics for emphasis in preschool teacher PD and coaching. For example, some programs may need more professional development/TA devoted to supporting preschoolers with IEPs and what it means to implement

inclusive education in children's LRE. Responses to open-ended questions indicate that, across the three respondent groups, not everyone fully understands the meaning of LRE or natural proportions, or the steps involved in referring children for an IEP and developing IEPs. There was also a large amount of variation in the tools used for screening and assessments (for different purposes), many of which were district or program developed and therefore may not be valid and reliable. Additional guidance on selecting and using assessment and screening tools could be helpful. It was also concerning that there was no mention of differentiated assessments and screening for dual language learners (though this was not explicitly asked).

All data in this report are self-reported by special education and preschool administrators. Director surveys preschool teachers may provide additional useful information. Additionally, direct observations of classroom practices using a standardized observation tool would provide another perspective of the quality of preschool programs serving children with an IEP that could also help inform a continuous quality improvement system.

Appendix. Tables and Figures

Figure A.1. Frequency cloud of language on LRE concepts

    a.   Directors of Special Education   b.   ECE Supervisors

Figure A.2. Format of IEP related services as reported by site director
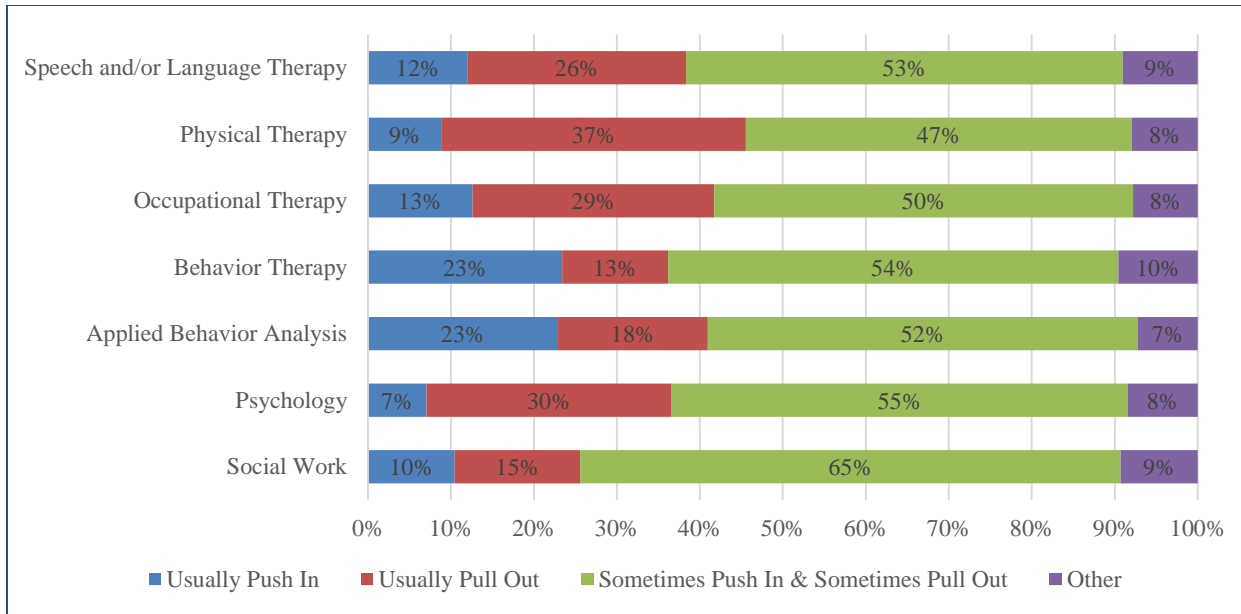
Figure A.3. Frequency cloud of language around natural proportions

a. Directors of Special Education   b. ECE Supervisors

Figure A.4. Frequency cloud of language on referrals to special education

a. Directors of Special Education

b. ECE Supervisors

Figure A.5. Frequency cloud of language on IEP development
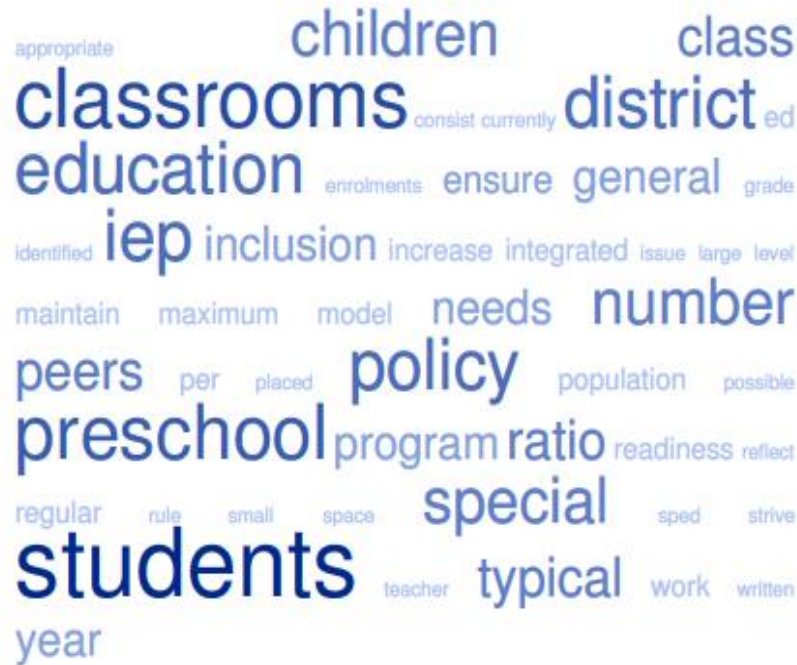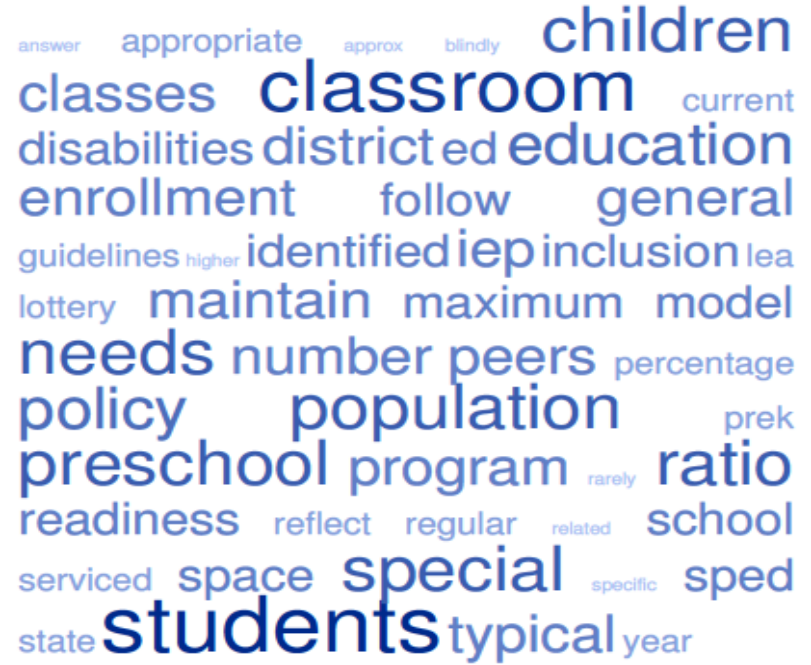
Figure A.6. Frequency cloud of language on IEP transition to Kindergarten

Figure A.7. Frequency cloud of language on Assessments as reported by ECE Supervisors

a. Child Find / Screening

b. Eligibility determination / evaluation

c. Informing curriculum / instruction
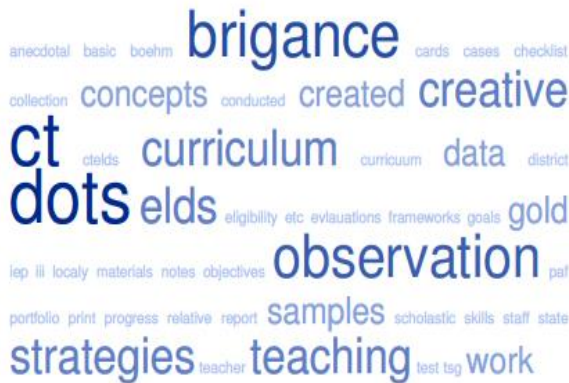
d. Progress monitoring towards IEP goals

e. Progress monitoring towards program / curricula goals

List of Figures and Tables

Appendix Figures