



# Hispanic Children's Participation in Early Care and Education: Type of Care by Household Nativity Status, Race/Ethnicity, and Child Age

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November 2016

## Why research on low-income Hispanic children and families matters

Hispanic or Latino children currently make up roughly 1 in 4 of all children in the United States,<sup>a</sup> and by 2050 are projected to make up 1 in 3, similar to the number of white children.<sup>b</sup> Given this increase, how Hispanic children fare will have a profound impact on the social and economic well-being of the country as a whole.

Notably, though, 5.7 million Hispanic children, or one third of all Hispanic children in the United States, are in poverty, more than in any other racial/ethnic group.<sup>c</sup> Nearly two thirds of Hispanic children live in low-income families, defined as having incomes of less than two times the federal poverty level.<sup>d</sup> Despite their high levels of economic need, Hispanics, particularly those in immigrant families, have lower rates of participation in many government support programs when compared with other racial/ethnic minority groups.<sup>e-g</sup> High-quality, research-based information on the characteristics, experiences, and diversity of Hispanic children and families is needed to inform programs and policies supporting the sizable population of low-income Hispanic families and children.

<sup>a</sup> Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics. (2015). *America's children: Key national indicators of well-being, 2015, Table POP3*. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office. Retrieved from <http://www.childstats.gov/americaschildren/tables.asp>

<sup>b</sup> Ibid.

<sup>c</sup> DeNavas-Walt, C., & Proctor, B.D. (2015). *Income and Poverty in the United States: 2014, Table B-2, Current Population Reports, P60-252*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Commerce, U.S. Census Bureau. Retrieved from <http://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2015/demo/p60-252.pdf#TableB-2>

<sup>d</sup> Lopez, M. H., & Velasco, G. (2011). *Childhood poverty among Hispanics sets record, leads nation*. Washington, D.C.: Pew Research Hispanic Center. Retrieved from <http://www.pewhispanic.org/2011/09/28/childhood-poverty-among-hispanics-sets-record-leads-nation/>

<sup>e</sup> Williams, S. (2013). *Public assistance participation among U.S. children in poverty, 2010*. Bowling Green, Ohio: National Center for Family & Marriage Research. Retrieved from <http://www.bgsu.edu/content/dam/BGSU/college-of-arts-and-sciences/NCFMR/documents/FP/FP-13-02.pdf>

<sup>f</sup> Lichter, D., Sanders, S., & Johnson, K. (2015). *Behind at the starting line: Poverty among Hispanic infants*. Durham, NH: University of New Hampshire, Carsey School of Public Policy. Retrieved from <http://scholars.unh.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1250&context=carsey>

<sup>g</sup> Child Trends Databank. (2014). *Health care coverage*. Bethesda, MD: Child Trends. Retrieved from <http://www.childtrends.org/?indicators=health-care-coverage>

## Overview

More than one quarter of all children age 5 and younger in the United States are Hispanic or Latino,<sup>a</sup> and more than two thirds of these children live in poverty or near poverty.<sup>1</sup> Given that early care and education (ECE) settings serve as a key developmental context for children and a critical work support for parents, it is important to examine and understand the ECE experiences of low-income Hispanic families.

ECE programs, especially those that are high quality and center-based, have been shown to promote school readiness and early achievement for children in low-income families.<sup>2,3</sup> These positive effects appear to hold for Hispanic children, and may in fact be larger than those observed for non-Hispanic children.<sup>4-6</sup> Yet several studies have shown that low-income Hispanic parents, especially those who are foreign-born, are less likely than other parents to access some types of ECE services, particularly center-based arrangements.<sup>7-10</sup>

In this brief, we provide a national snapshot of ECE participation among low-income Hispanic households. We use publicly available data from the 2012 National Survey of Early Care and Education (NSECE) to describe the percentage of young children in low-income Hispanic households who are in non-parental care on a regular basis (more than 5 hours per week), and the different types of settings they experience. ECE is broadly defined in this analysis to include the full range of home- and center-based arrangements children experience when not in the care of their parents.

We focus on low-income households because the challenges of coordinating parental employment and the care of young children are most acute for families with limited economic resources. Low-income families are therefore the primary target of policy efforts and public investments to improve ECE access, utilization, and quality.

Households' ECE needs, preferences, and available options may vary by family members' demographic characteristics and/or child age. Thus, we report separate estimates for Hispanic children in immigrant households (i.e., including at least one foreign-born adult) and those living with U.S.-born adults only, and provide comparison data for young non-Hispanic white and

<sup>a</sup> In this brief series, we use the terms *Hispanic* and *Latino* interchangeably.

black children from low-income households.<sup>b</sup> We also examine ECE participation patterns separately for infants and toddlers (younger than age 3), and preschoolers (3 to 5 years).

## Key findings

When it comes to participation in early care and education, long-observed gaps between low-income Hispanic children and their low-income white and black peers may be closing, especially during the preschool years.

- We found few differences in ECE participation among low-income children ages 3 to 5 of different racial/ethnic groups. Most are in non-parental ECE arrangements.
  - Nearly two thirds of Hispanic preschoolers from low-income immigrant and non-immigrant households participate in ECE, which is similar to the participation rate of low-income white preschoolers, but lower than the three quarters of low-income black preschoolers who are in ECE arrangements.
- In contrast, ECE participation among low-income children younger than age 3 varies significantly by household nativity and race/ethnicity.
  - Just over one third of Hispanic infants and toddlers from low-income immigrant households are in ECE arrangements, compared to roughly half of their non-immigrant Hispanic and white peers from low-income households, and nearly two thirds of black infants and toddlers from low-income households.
- Similar to low-income black children, approximately one third of low-income Hispanic children (regardless of age or household nativity) in ECE spend time in multiple arrangements; this is a smaller share than the nearly half of low-income white children who do.

Among families *using non-parental care*, we found that low-income Hispanic children (birth to age 5) are as likely as their low-income white and black peers to experience center- and home- based arrangements.

- The majority (approximately 2 in 3) of Hispanic infants and toddlers from low-income immigrant and non-immigrant households who are in ECE are in home-based arrangements, with a much smaller percentage (fewer than 1 in 5) experiencing any center-based care. These utilization rates are similar to those of infants and toddlers from low-income white and black households.
- The majority (approximately 3 in 5) of Hispanic preschoolers from low-income immigrant and non-immigrant households who are in ECE are in center-based arrangements, similar to their white and black peers.

<sup>b</sup> In this analysis, child race/ethnicity is based on information provided by the household survey respondent. Children are classified as Hispanic/Latino if this was provided as a response to the question about ethnicity or the question about race. The white and black child race categories do not include children who were identified as multi-racial.

- One of the only group differences we found regarding type of care among children in ECE exists for specific types of home-based arrangements.
  - Compared to their low-income Hispanic, white, and black peers from non-immigrant households, low-income Hispanic children (birth to 5) from immigrant households are less likely to be in unpaid home-based care (typically provided by family, friends and neighbors) and more likely to be in paid home-based care with an unfamiliar provider.

## About this series

This brief is part of an ongoing series aimed at better understanding the early care and education experiences of Latino children. This brief uses data from the National Survey of Early Care and Education (NSECE)—a set of four integrated, nationally representative surveys that describe the ECE landscape in the United States.

Other briefs in this series include:

Crosby, D.A. & Mendez, J.L. (2016). *Hispanic Children's Participation in Early Care and Education: Amount and Timing of Hours by Household Nativity Status, Race/Ethnicity, and Child Age*. Bethesda, MD: The National Center for Research on Hispanic Families & Children.

Guzman, L., Hickman, S., Turner, K., & Gennetian L. (2016). *Hispanic Children's Participation in Early Care and Education: Perceptions of Care Arrangements, and Relatives' Availability to Provide Care*. Bethesda, MD: The National Center for Research on Hispanic Families & Children.

These publications and forthcoming briefs in the series can be accessed on the Center's website at: <http://www.hispanicresearchcenter.org/nrc/resources/publications/>.



## Data source and methodology

The [2012 National Survey of Early Care and Education \(NSECE\)](#) is a set of four nationally representative surveys that describe the early care and education (ECE) landscape in the United States.<sup>a</sup> The data presented in this brief are drawn from the household survey of the NSECE, a nationally representative sample of households with children under the age of 13. Respondents reported on all regular non-parental care arrangements used in the week prior to the survey for each child in the household younger than age 13.

The estimates presented here were calculated using merged data from the NSECE Household Child-level Quick Tabulation file and the Household Public Use file. Our analysis focuses on young children (birth to age 5, not yet in kindergarten<sup>b</sup>) who were living in low-income households, defined as having an annual income below 200 percent of the federal poverty threshold. The NSECE oversampled in low-income areas, resulting in large numbers of such households. Our analytic sample is made up of 5,153 children, including 2,393 Hispanic children (1,562 in immigrant households and 831 in households with U.S.-born adults only), 1,717 non-Hispanic white children, and 1,043 non-Hispanic black children (white and black children were from non-immigrant households; see “Definitions” below). Children of other racial-ethnic backgrounds were excluded due to small sample sizes.

We conducted descriptive analyses across several measures related to children’s participation in early care and education arrangements, testing the statistical significance of mean differences between racial/ethnic groups. Significant differences are noted in the text, figures, and summary tables. We use consistent notation (a-f) for each pairwise difference for clarity; if one of the letters does not appear in a specific figure or table, it means that the difference was non-significant for that outcome. All analyses were conducted in STATA and were weighted to be representative of children living in U.S. households in 2012.

## Definitions

**Household nativity status.** *Nativity status* refers to whether any adult in the household was foreign-born. A household with at least one adult who was foreign-born was identified as being an *immigrant household*. A household in which all of the adults had been born in the United States was identified as being a *U.S.-born household*. Because we focus on Hispanic families, and because low-income Hispanic children are more likely to live in an immigrant household than low-income white or black children are, we excluded from our analysis the small numbers of white and black children living in low-income immigrant households. This means that our four household nativity groups are: 1) Hispanic immigrant household, 2) Hispanic U.S.-born household, 3) white (non-Hispanic) U.S.-born household, and 4) black (non-Hispanic)

<sup>a</sup> NSECE Project Team. (2012). *National Survey of Early Care and Education (NSECE)*, 2012. Ann Arbor, MI: Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research. <http://doi.org/10.3886/JCPSR35519.v2>

<sup>b</sup> A small number of 6-year olds were identified as not being in kindergarten, which may reflect birthdates after the eligibility cut-off or parental decisions to delay kindergarten entry. However, we restrict the analytic sample for this brief to children younger than age 6 to make this work comparable to the broader early childhood literature, which tends to focus on children from birth to age 5.

U.S.-born household. For simplicity, we use the terms *white* and *black households*. Also, we use the terms *U.S.-born household* and *non-immigrant household* interchangeably.

**Non-parental care.** In the child calendar portion of the household survey, parents reported on all of the times in the week prior to the interview when their child was in the care of someone other than a parent. Several follow-up questions were then asked about each arrangement listed in the calendar so that non-parental care could be further classified into more detailed types of care. The NSECE public use files include constructed variables for eight types of non-parental arrangements. One of these types is K-8 schooling, which is not included in this brief. We report on the other types of non-parental care (also referred to here as *early care and education*, or ECE) using the variables described below.

**Center-based care.** This category of care captures all center- or organization- based ECE arrangements that children participate in for at least 5 hours per week. Examples of this type of care include Head Start, public pre-K, community-based child care, drop-in care, single-activity care or lessons, and church child care during services.<sup>c</sup>

**Home-based care.** This category captures any regular care arrangement provided by an individual in a home-based setting for at least 5 hours per week. It includes care that occurs in the child’s home or the provider’s home, including family child care homes.<sup>d</sup>

**Irregular care.** This category of care captures arrangements (center- or home- based) that children participate in for less than 5 hours per week. Examples of this type of care include emergency or intermittent arrangements. Children may have multiple irregular arrangements that together total more than 5 hours of care per week.

**Other, uncategorized care.** This category captures regular care arrangements that occur for at least 5 hours per week that could not be categorized into one of the center- or home-based types listed above because of inadequate information about the program/provider.

**Multiple care arrangements.** Using information in the public use files about the number of providers currently providing care for each child, we were able to capture when children had multiple arrangements (i.e., two or more providers). These could be providers within the same category or type of child care, or across different types of care.

**Primary care arrangement.** Using variables available in the public use files regarding how many hours children spent in each of the eight types of care over the week prior to the interview, we identified the type of arrangement in which the child spent the most time. For the purposes of this brief, we examine the percentage of children whose *primary arrangement is center-based* or whose *primary arrangement is home-based*.

<sup>c</sup> The NSECE public data files include separate variables for “center-based early care and education,” which includes traditional ECE settings for young children, such as Head Start, public pre-K, and community-based child care centers, and “other organizational early care and education,” which includes any regular organizational care not included in the center ECE category (e.g., church-based). We combine these two categories for this analysis, as both capture formal settings where children are cared for in relatively large groups.

<sup>d</sup> It is not possible in the NSECE public use child-level quick tab or household-level files to further categorize home-based care according to whether it is licensed or regulated.

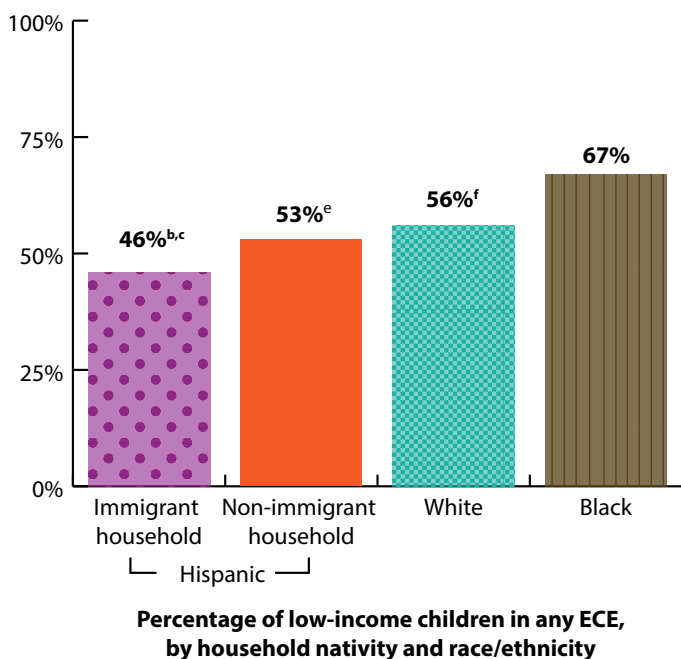
## Findings

### Proportion of low-income Latino children in ECE

These estimates represent the share of all young children from low-income households in a given racial/ethnic group who experience each type of setting; thus, the sample includes children who were not in any ECE arrangements (i.e., who were in parental care only) at the time of the survey.

**Approximately half of all young children from low-income Hispanic households (49 percent) are in non-parental ECE arrangements** (see Figure 1). Low-income Hispanic children in non-immigrant households are about as likely to be in care as low-income white children (53 and 56 percent, respectively), but less likely to be than low-income black children (67 percent). Low-income Hispanic children in immigrant households, however, are less likely to be in care (46 percent) than either their low-income white or black peers. The difference in ECE participation rates between low-income Hispanic children in immigrant and non-immigrant households is not statistically significant.

**Figure 1.** Roughly half of Hispanic children in low-income households are in ECE arrangements.



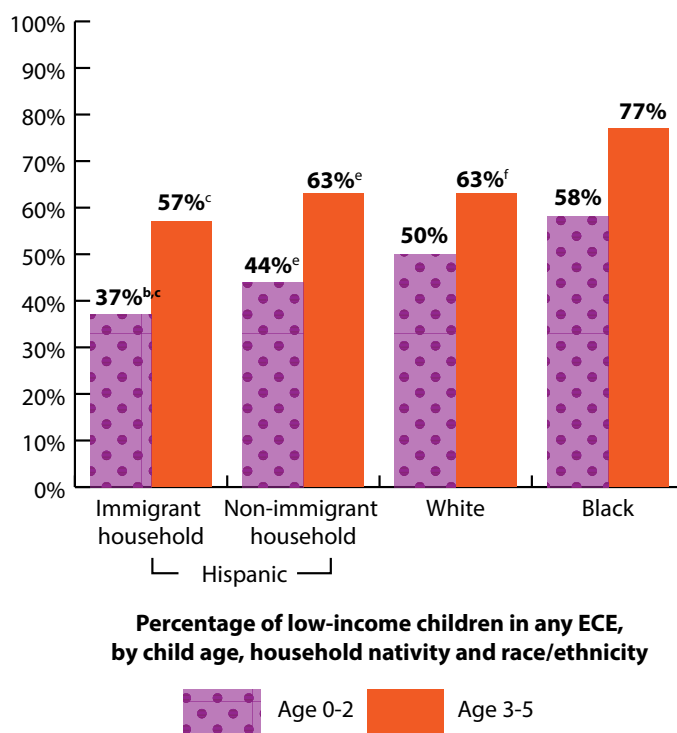
Source: Authors' analysis of 2012 National Survey of Early Care and Education. The following notation is used consistently throughout the brief. If a letter does not appear in the figure above, it means the particular pairwise difference was non-significant.  
<sup>a</sup> Significant difference ( $p < .05$ ) between Hispanic children of immigrants and non-immigrants  
<sup>b</sup> Significant difference ( $p < .05$ ) between Hispanic children of immigrants and white children.  
<sup>c</sup> Significant difference ( $p < .05$ ) between Hispanic children of immigrants and black children.  
<sup>d</sup> Significant difference ( $p < .05$ ) between Hispanic children of non-immigrants and white children.  
<sup>e</sup> Significant difference ( $p < .05$ ) between Hispanic children of non-immigrants and black children.  
<sup>f</sup> Significant difference ( $p < .05$ ) between white children and black children.

When we examined how ECE utilization patterns for low-income households vary by child age (see Figure 2), we found that **children younger than age 3, from all racial/ethnic groups, are less likely to be in ECE than children ages 3**

**to 5.** Just over one third (37 percent) of Hispanic infants and toddlers from low-income immigrant households are in ECE arrangements, which is statistically similar to their same-age Hispanic peers in non-immigrant households (44 percent), but significantly less than their same-age white and black peers (50 and 58 percent, respectively). The share of Hispanic infants and toddlers from low-income non-immigrant households participating in ECE is similar to that of their white peers, but smaller than the share of black infants and toddlers who participate in ECE.

**Fewer racial/ethnic group differences in ECE utilization exist during the preschool years than during infancy and toddlerhood.** More than half of Hispanic preschoolers in low-income immigrant households (57 percent) participate in ECE, which is similar to rates for Hispanic and white preschoolers in low-income non-immigrant households (both 63 percent), but somewhat lower than the 77 percent for black preschoolers from low-income households.

**Figure 2.** ECE utilization by low-income children varies by child age; differences across nativity and racial/ethnic groups are smaller for preschoolers than for younger children.



Source: Authors' analysis of 2012 National Survey of Early Care and Education. The following notation is used consistently throughout the brief. If a letter does not appear in the figure above, it means the particular pairwise difference was non-significant.  
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<sup>d</sup> Significant difference ( $p < .05$ ) between Hispanic children of non-immigrants and white children.  
<sup>e</sup> Significant difference ( $p < .05$ ) between Hispanic children of non-immigrants and black children.  
<sup>f</sup> Significant difference ( $p < .05$ ) between white children and black children.

Additional estimates presented in Table 1 (included at the end of this brief) indicate overall use of center-based and home-based arrangements.



### Use of different types of ECE arrangements by Latino children in care

In this next section, we take a closer look at Latino families' use of center- and home-based providers, *among those who were using ECE arrangements at the time of the survey*—in other words, children who are in parental care only have been excluded from the analysis. (Also see Table 2 at the end of the brief.)

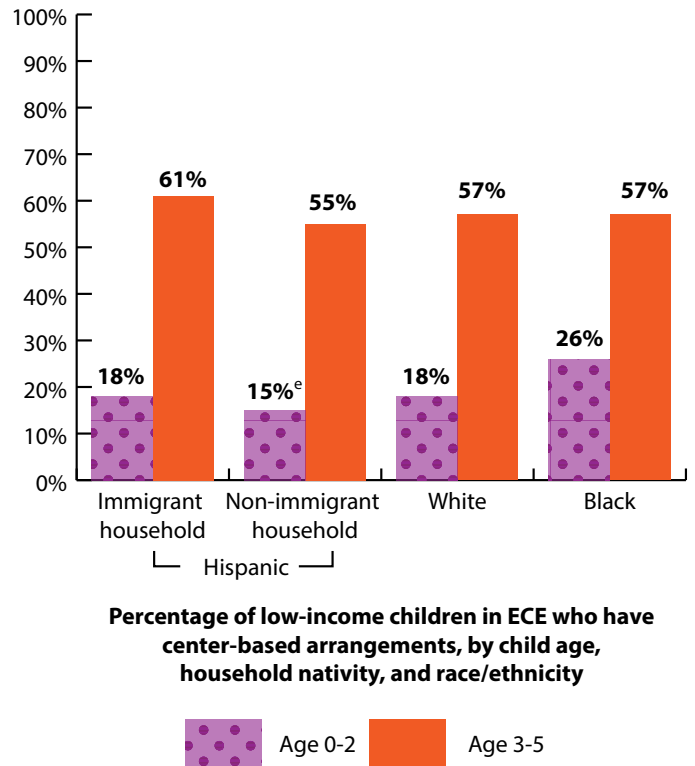
We focus separately on the percentage of children who experience center-based and home-based arrangements,<sup>c</sup> as these two broad categories of ECE settings tend to differ on such characteristics as group size, provider education and training, and level of structure (e.g., planned activities, curriculum use). As before, we compare the experiences of Hispanic children in low-income immigrant and non-immigrant households with those of white and black children in low-income, non-immigrant households.

**Among preschool-aged children in ECE arrangements, we found no significant differences in the use of center-based care between low-income Hispanic children and their low-income white and black peers** (see Figure 3). A majority of low-income Hispanic preschoolers who participate in ECE are enrolled in centers (61 and 55 percent respectively), which is similar to the rate for low-income white and black preschoolers (both 57 percent).

**Across racial/ethnic groups, infants and toddlers in ECE are much less likely to be in center-based arrangements than preschool-aged children.** Approximately 18 percent of low-income Hispanic infants and toddlers in immigrant households and 15 percent of those in non-immigrant households who are in ECE are in center-based arrangements, compared with 18 percent of low-income white and 26 percent of low-income black children. The only significant group difference is the lower rate of center care for infants and toddlers in U.S.-born Hispanic versus black households.

<sup>c</sup> These types of care are not mutually exclusive; respondents in the NSECE were asked to identify all non-parental care providers and settings used in the week prior to the interview.

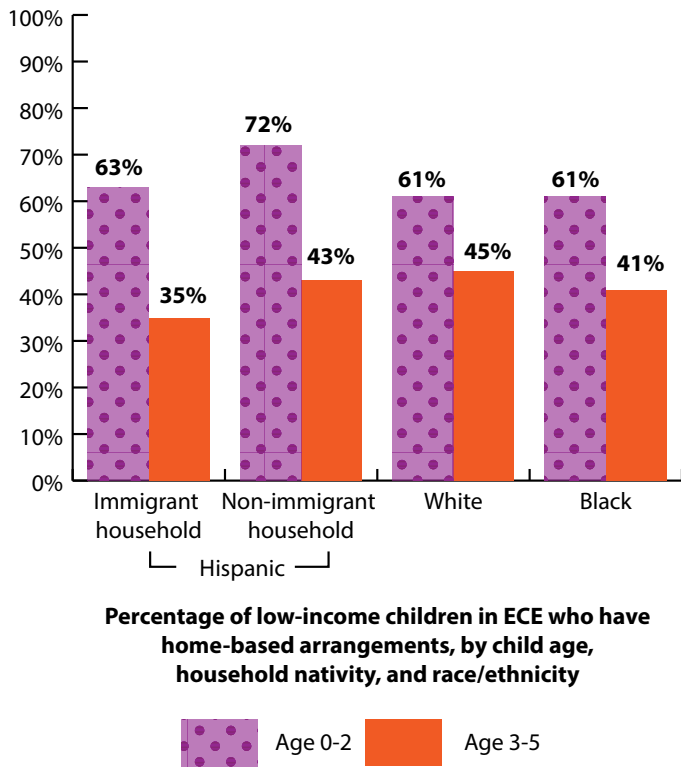
**Figure 3.** Among those participating in ECE, low-income Hispanic children are generally as likely as their white and black peers to be in center-based care.



Source: Authors' analysis of 2012 National Survey of Early Care and Education  
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<sup>e</sup> Significant difference ( $p < .05$ ) between Hispanic children of non-immigrants and black children.  
<sup>f</sup> Significant difference ( $p < .05$ ) between white children and black children.

**We also found no significant differences in the use of home-based care by low-income Latino children in ECE arrangements, relative to their white and black peers** (see Figure 4). In contrast to the pattern for center-based care, infants and toddlers across the race-ethnic groups are *more* likely than preschool-aged children to be in home-based care. Approximately two thirds of Hispanic children younger than age 3 have at least one home-based arrangement; this is true for fewer than half of Hispanic children ages 3 to 5. None of the group differences by household nativity or race/ethnicity are statistically significant. In the “Definitions” text box, we provide additional information about the types of home-based arrangements used by Hispanic families.

**Figure 4.** Among children from low-income households participating in ECE, Hispanic children are as likely as their white and black peers to be in home-based care.



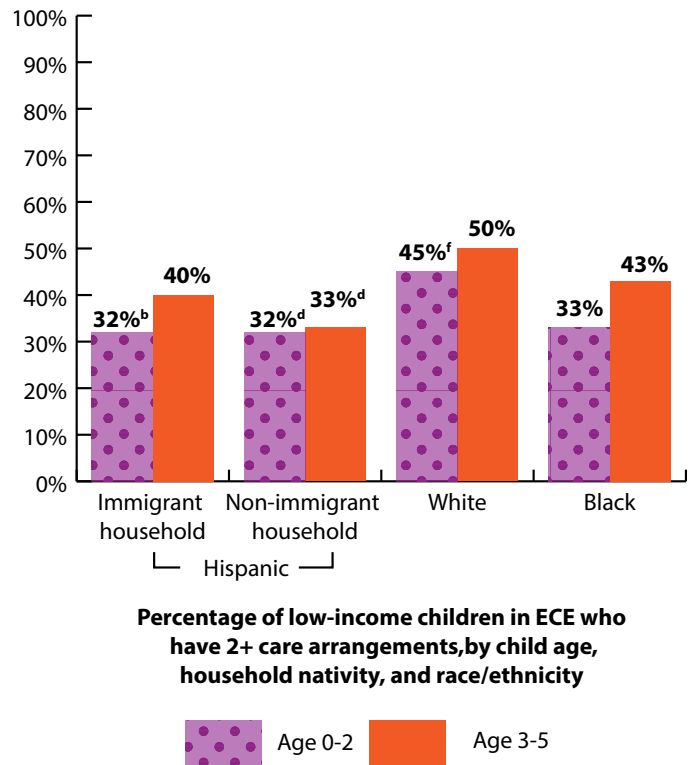
Source: Authors' analysis of 2012 National Survey of Early Care and Education  
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<sup>e</sup> Significant difference ( $p < .05$ ) between Hispanic children of non-immigrants and black children.  
<sup>f</sup> Significant difference ( $p < .05$ ) between white children and black children.

Two additional types of ECE arrangements included in our analysis and presented in Table 2 (included at the end of this brief) are *irregular* and *other* (see the “Definitions” text box). These categories of care are not as conceptually distinct as center- and home-based arrangements; there is little information in the public release files about type of setting and regularity of these arrangements. A detailed examination of these types of care is beyond the scope of this brief; however, we note that roughly one third of Hispanic children in immigrant and non-immigrant households experienced at least one of these types of arrangements in the week prior to the survey.

Also presented in Table 2 are estimates of the percentage of Latino children in non-parental care who are in multiple (two or more) arrangements. We found that **among low-income children in non-parental care, approximately one third of Hispanic children (across child age and household nativity groups) are in two or more ECE arrangements** (see Figure 5). This is similar to the share of low-income black children in ECE who have multiple arrangements, but some sub-group

differences exist in comparison to low-income white children. Among low-income infants and toddlers in ECE, Hispanic and black children are less likely than white peers to be in multiple arrangements; among low-income preschoolers, immigrant Hispanic children are less likely than white peers to be in multiple arrangements.

**Figure 5.** Among low-income children participating in ECE, roughly one third of Hispanic children have two or more care arrangements, which is similar to the proportion of black children, but less than the proportion of white children.



Source: Authors' analysis of 2012 National Survey of Early Care and Education  
 The following notation is used consistently throughout the brief. If a letter does not appear in the figure above, it means the particular pairwise difference was non-significant.  
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Children may have multiple providers within the same broader type of care or across different types of settings (e.g., center, home, irregular). Although it is beyond the scope of this brief to detail the various combinations of provider types that children with multiple arrangements experience, we provide estimates of the percentage of children who are in centers as their primary arrangement and in home-based settings as their primary arrangement (based on where they spend the most hours per week; see Table 2). The pattern of findings by type of primary arrangement, for children with multiple arrangements, closely mirrors those for any use of each type of care, so we do not discuss them separately.

## A closer look at the home-based care arrangements used by Hispanic families

Two ways home-based ECE settings can vary from one another are in the level of familiarity the provider had with the family prior to caring for the child (i.e., whether they are a relative, friend, or neighbor) and in the level of compensation the provider receives in exchange for caring for the child (i.e., pay or no pay).

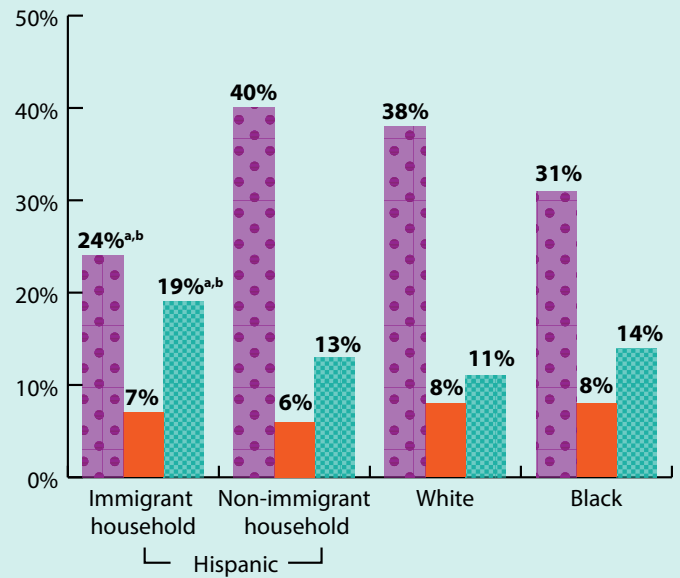
Some parents may prefer family/friend/neighbor care arrangements for young children because of their comfort and familiarity with the provider. And, free or low-cost home-based arrangements often serve as an important support for low-income families. Many low-income parents work in low-wage jobs with nonstandard, variable, and potentially unpredictable hours, and need flexible care options that are also affordable. Other work completed as part of this brief series (see “About this series”) shows that low-income Hispanic, white, and black parents generally rate relative care more favorably than center-based care and non-relative home-based care. But, it is also the case that Hispanic parents rate relative care lower than white parents do on nurturance, flexibility, and affordability, and lower than both black and white parents on safety and educational preparedness.<sup>a</sup>

The NSECE public use files provide information about families’ use of three types of home-based care according to whether the provider had a prior relationship with the child and whether the provider receives payment: 1) *paid, no prior relationship*; 2) *paid, prior relationship* (includes family members, friends, and neighbors who receive pay/subsidy); and 3) *unpaid* (most, but not all, of these providers had a prior relationship with the child). Given that use of specific types of home-based care did not vary substantially by child age, we discuss the findings for children birth to age 5 as a group.

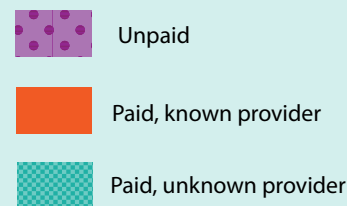
As shown in Figure 6 and Table 3, **Hispanic, white, and black children in low-income non-immigrant households who have home-based arrangements are more likely to be with an unpaid versus paid provider**, which suggests relatively high levels of family, friend, or neighbor care. Notably, however, **Hispanic children in low-income immigrant households are significantly less likely than Hispanic and white children in non-immigrant households to be in unpaid home-based care and more likely to be in paid home-based care with an unfamiliar provider.**

<sup>a</sup> Guzman, L., Hickman, S., Turner, K., & Gennetian L. (2016). *Hispanic Children's Participation in Early Care and Education: Perceptions of Care Arrangements, and Relatives' Availability to Provide Care*. Bethesda, MD: The National Center for Research on Hispanic Families & Children.

**Figure 6.** Hispanic children in immigrant households are *less likely* than their Hispanic and white peers in non-immigrant households to be in unpaid family/friend care, and *more likely* to be in paid home care with an unfamiliar provider.



**Percentage of low-income children (birth to age 5) in ECE who experience three types of home-based care, by household nativity and race/ethnicity**



Source: Authors’ analysis of 2012 National Survey of Early Care and Education. The following notation is used consistently throughout the brief. If a letter does not appear in the figure above, it means the particular pairwise difference was non-significant.  
<sup>a</sup> Significant difference ( $p < .05$ ) between Hispanic children of immigrants and non-immigrants.  
<sup>b</sup> Significant difference ( $p < .05$ ) between Hispanic children of immigrants and white children.  
<sup>c</sup> Significant difference ( $p < .05$ ) between Hispanic children of immigrants and black children.  
<sup>d</sup> Significant difference ( $p < .05$ ) between Hispanic children of non-immigrants and white children.  
<sup>e</sup> Significant difference ( $p < .05$ ) between Hispanic children of non-immigrants and black children.  
<sup>f</sup> Significant difference ( $p < .05$ ) between white children and black children.

## Summary and implications

Drawing on newly released data from the NSECE, this brief offers a snapshot of ECE participation by young children (birth to age 5) from low-income U.S. Hispanic households. Given their possible implications for ECE access and utilization, we examined rates of participation by child age and household nativity status, and also considered how rates compare to those reported for low-income white and black children from non-immigrant households. To date, research literature has rather consistently noted an ECE participation gap between Hispanic children and their non-Hispanic peers, especially in terms of participation in center-based programs. Given mounting evidence of the benefit of high-quality ECE experiences for low-income children's transition into school and early academic success, public investments and outreach efforts have sought to reduce participation barriers and increase access. Our analysis of the NSECE (which represents some of the most current nationally representative data available) suggests that long-observed participation gaps may be closing.

First, we found that roughly half of all Latino children (birth to age 5, not yet in kindergarten) from low-income households are in ECE arrangements, including nearly two thirds of those ages 3 to 5. Hispanic children from immigrant households are somewhat less likely to be in care than their white and black peers, particularly in infancy and toddlerhood. However, Hispanic children from U.S.-born households are as likely as white children to be in ECE arrangements across the early childhood years, though both groups participate at lower rates than black children. The general pattern of less ECE utilization for infants and toddlers than for preschoolers across race-ethnic groups has been documented in the broader literature. While this may suggest parental preferences for keeping very young children at home when possible, it may also reflect the fact that ECE arrangements for infants and toddlers tend to be more costly, less available, and of lower quality than ECE options for older children. Greater research and continued discussion of policy implications regarding ECE utilization for very young children, particularly among low-income Hispanic families, is needed.

Notably, when we examined the types of ECE settings accessed by low-income households, we found that Latino children (regardless of household nativity) are as likely as their same-age white and black peers to attend center-based programs. Among those in ECE arrangements, more than 60 percent of Latino preschoolers from immigrant households and 55 percent of those from non-immigrant households are in center-based care. Recent investments to expand publicly funded programs serving low-income preschoolers (e.g., state pre-K and Head Start programs), as well as targeted outreach efforts for underserved populations (e.g., immigrant families) may be supporting increased use among Hispanic families. For example, a recent study of Hispanic enrollment in publicly funded ECE programs in Chicago found that after controlling for demographic factors, Hispanic children have a

*higher* probability than non-Hispanic children of participation, particularly for Head Start and the city's Preschool for All programs. The probability of participation is especially high for Hispanic children with a foreign-born parent and those who speak Spanish at home. These findings may reflect a publicly funded ECE system in Chicago that is responsive to the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse families.<sup>11</sup>

We also found no nativity or race/ethnic differences in the use of home-based arrangements among low-income children; in other words, low-income Hispanic children from immigrant and non-immigrant households are no more or less likely to be in home-based settings than their low-income white and black peers. Interesting differences exist, however, for home-based care, depending on whether the provider is paid or unpaid, and familiar or unfamiliar to the family. Immigrant Hispanic parents are less likely than non-immigrant Hispanic and white parents to use familiar home-based providers (i.e., relatives, friends, or neighbors), and conversely, are more likely to use paid home-based care with an unfamiliar provider. Free or low-cost care arrangements with family and friends may be less accessible to immigrant Hispanic households. A recent analysis of NSECE household survey data as part of this brief series shows that Hispanic households in poverty are less likely to have relatives nearby who can provide free child care than poor white or black households.<sup>12</sup> Notably, Hispanic parents also rated relative care somewhat less favorably than white parents on several dimensions of care, which runs counter to the commonly held perception that Hispanic parents have stronger preferences for relative care than other racial/ethnic groups.

Finally, we found that similar to low-income black children, approximately one third of low-income Hispanic children (regardless of age or household nativity) who are in non-parental care spend time in multiple arrangements; this is a somewhat smaller share than the nearly half of low-income white children who do. In future work, the NSECE calendar data can be used to help understand the different combinations of care arrangements used by Hispanic families and how these are scheduled in relation to parents' work and school activities.

Together, these findings challenge a prior narrative that Hispanic parents are less likely to use non-parental care for young children and that when they do, they strongly prefer home-based arrangements and are reluctant to use more formal, center-based programs. This work joins a growing body of literature that suggests a more nuanced story. Future research with the NSECE should capitalize on the detailed information it offers about both supply and demand characteristics to better understand low-income Hispanic parents' ECE decisions as they accommodate a dynamic set of child and family needs, ECE preferences and options, work demands, and family and community resources. This more complete and detailed picture of how Latino families make these accommodations can inform policies aimed at expanding access to the types of quality ECE settings that can benefit children and their families.



**Table 1.** ECE utilization by young children in low-income households, by child age, household nativity, and race/ethnicity

	Hispanic		White	Black
	Immigrant household	U.S.-born household	U.S.-born household	U.S.-born household
Any non-parental care in past week	46% <sup>b,c</sup>	53% <sup>e</sup>	56% <sup>f</sup>	67%
Child is 0-2 years	37% <sup>b,c</sup>	44% <sup>e</sup>	50%	58%
Child is 3-5 years	57% <sup>c</sup>	63% <sup>e</sup>	63% <sup>f</sup>	77%
Any center-based care in past week	20% <sup>c</sup>	19% <sup>e</sup>	21% <sup>f</sup>	28%
Child is 0-2 years	6% <sup>c</sup>	7% <sup>e</sup>	9%	15%
Child is 3-5 years	35%	34%	36%	44%
Any home-based care in past week	22% <sup>a,b,c</sup>	30%	30%	34%
Child is 0-2 years	23% <sup>a,c</sup>	32%	31%	35%
Child is 3-5 years	20% <sup>b,c</sup>	27%	28%	32%
Sample size	1562	831	1717	1043
Child is 0-2 years	822	432	903	552
Child is 3-5 years	740	399	814	491

Source: Authors' analysis of 2012 National Survey of Early Care and Education

Notes: Results in the appendix table and figures are based on the same analysis.

The following notation is used consistently throughout the brief. If a letter does not appear in the table above, it means the particular pairwise difference was non-significant.

<sup>a</sup> Difference between Hispanic children of immigrants and non-immigrants is significant at  $p < 0.05$  level.

<sup>b</sup> Difference between Hispanic children of immigrants and white children is significant at the  $p < 0.05$  level.

<sup>c</sup> Difference between Hispanic children of immigrants and black children is significant at the  $p < 0.05$  level.

<sup>d</sup> Difference between Hispanic children of non-immigrants and white children is significant at the  $p < 0.05$  level.

<sup>e</sup> Difference between Hispanic children of non-immigrants and black children is significant at the  $p < 0.05$  level.

<sup>f</sup> Difference between white children and black children is significant at the  $p < 0.05$  level.

**Table 2.** Types of arrangements used by young low-income children in non-parental care, by household nativity, race/ethnicity, and child age

	Hispanic		White	Black
	Immigrant household	U.S.-born household	U.S.-born household	U.S.-born household
Among children participating in ECE:				
Any center-based care in past week	43%	37%	38%	42%
Child is 0-2 years	18%	15% <sup>e</sup>	18%	26%
Child is 3-5 years	61%	55%	57%	57%
Any home-based care in past week	47%	56%	53%	51%
Child is 0-2 years	63%	72%	61%	61%
Child is 3-5 years	35%	43%	45%	41%
Any irregular care in past week	13% <sup>b</sup>	19% <sup>d</sup>	28% <sup>f</sup>	14%
Child is 0-2 years	16% <sup>b</sup>	22%	31% <sup>f</sup>	15%
Child is 3-5 years	11% <sup>b</sup>	17%	25% <sup>f</sup>	13%
Any "other" care in past week	15%	16%	13%	18%
Child is 0-2 years	17%	14%	12%	17%
Child is 3-5 years	13%	18%	14%	19%
Child is in 2+ arrangements	37% <sup>b</sup>	32% <sup>d</sup>	48% <sup>f</sup>	38%
Child is 0-2 years	32% <sup>b</sup>	32% <sup>d</sup>	45% <sup>f</sup>	33%
Child is 3-5 years	40%	32% <sup>d</sup>	50%	43%
Primary arrangement is center-based	38%	33%	32%	39%
Child is 0-2 years	16%	11% <sup>e</sup>	17%	24%
Child is 3-5 years	55%	52%	45%	52%
Primary arrangement is home-based	44%	48%	45%	44%
Child is 0-2 years	61%	67%	56%	58%
Child is 3-5 years	31%	32%	34%	31%
Sample size	698	445	933	676
Child is 0-2 years	301	194	422	306
Child is 3-5 years	397	251	511	370

Source: Authors' analysis of 2012 National Survey of Early Care and Education

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<sup>f</sup> Difference between white children and black children is significant at the  $p < 0.05$  level.

**Table 3.** Types of home-based arrangements used by young children in non-parental care, by child age, household nativity and race/ethnicity

	Hispanic		White	Black
	Immigrant household	U.S.-born household	U.S.-born household	U.S.-born household
Among children participating in ECE:				
Any unpaid home-based care	24% <sup>a,b</sup>	40%	38%	31%
Child is 0-2 years	30% <sup>a,b</sup>	51%	44%	36%
Child is 3-5 years	19% <sup>a,b</sup>	30%	33%	27%
Any paid home-based care, prior relationship	7%	6%	8%	8%
Child is 0-2 years	10%	7%	8%	10%
Child is 3-5 years	4%	4%	8%	6%
Any paid home-based care, no prior relationship	19% <sup>a,b</sup>	13%	11%	14%
Child is 0-2 years	26% <sup>a,b</sup>	16%	13%	17%
Child is 3-5 years	14% <sup>b</sup>	10%	8%	11%
Sample size	698	445	933	676
Child is 0-2 years	301	194	422	306
Child is 3-5 years	397	251	511	370

Source: Authors' analysis of 2012 National Survey of Early Care and Education

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<sup>c</sup> Difference between Hispanic children of immigrants and black children is significant at the  $p < 0.05$  level.

<sup>d</sup> Difference between Hispanic children of non-immigrants and white children is significant at the  $p < 0.05$  level.

<sup>e</sup> Difference between Hispanic children of non-immigrants and black children is significant at the  $p < 0.05$  level.

<sup>f</sup> Difference between white children and black children is significant at the  $p < 0.05$  level.

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## Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank the Steering Committee of the National Research Center on Hispanic Children & Families, as well as Nicole Forry, for valuable feedback and insights on this work.

**Editor:** August Aldebot-Green

**Designer:** Catherine Nichols

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## About the Center

The National Research Center on Hispanic Children & Families is a hub of research to help programs and policy better serve low-income Hispanics across three priority areas—poverty reduction and economic self-sufficiency, healthy marriage and responsible fatherhood, and early care and education. The Center was established in 2013 by a five-year cooperative agreement from the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation within the Administration for Children and Families in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to Child Trends in partnership with Abt Associates and New York University, University of North Carolina at Greensboro, and University of Maryland, College Park.

The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, the Administration for Children and Families, or the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

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