

WIC/First 5 LA Data Mining Survey

The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) population includes pregnant women, women who have just given birth, infants and children up to age 5. WIC services include nutrition education, referral to health care and customized food prescriptions (or checks for specific foods). To be eligible for WIC, a family must have income below 185 percent of the federal poverty level (an annual income of about \$40,000 for a family of four).

In 2005 and 2008, First 5 LA partnered with PHFE-WIC, the largest provider of WIC services in L.A. County, to survey a sample of Los Angeles County WIC participants, a population that includes over 120,000 women and over 400,000 children and infants. Through collaborations with the six other local WIC agencies and the California state WIC Branch, the survey offers a comprehensive view of WIC participants and how they have changed over time.

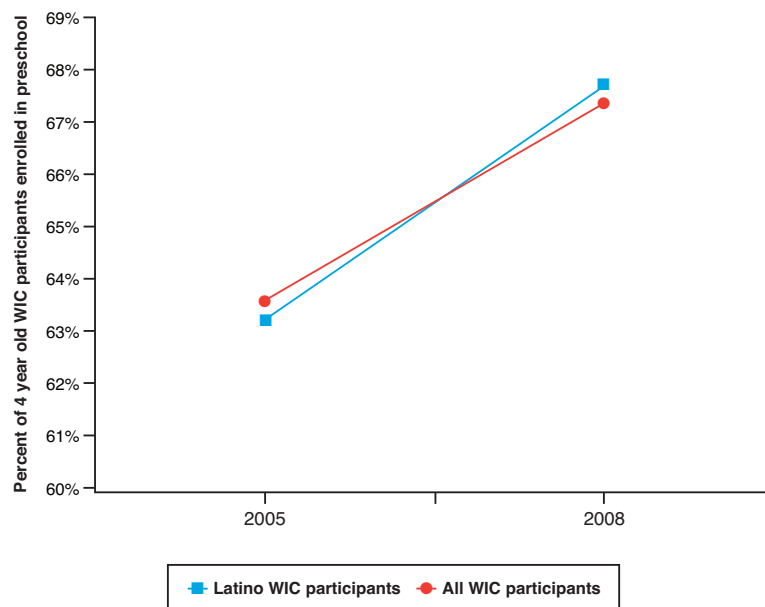
Latino Children Showing Higher Rates of Preschool Enrollment

A 2006 report by the United Way gave Los Angeles County a C-minus for its efforts to enroll Latino children in preschool. Only 42 percent of eligible Latino children were enrolled, as compared to 72 percent of white non-Hispanic children. They noted, "...Hispanic children, again, are losing out on this important educational experience."

While Latino children may still be underrepresented in preschool, according to the First 5 LA/WIC survey, **impressive improvements have been made among Latino WIC participants regarding their use of preschool services between 2005 and 2008.** Latinos make up over 80 percent of the WIC population in L.A. County. See the sidebar in this document for more information on WIC in Los Angeles.

In 2005, 63 percent of 4-year-old Latino WIC participants were enrolled in preschool, which was slightly lower than the average enrollment rate of 64 percent over all 4-year-old WIC participants. By 2008, utilization of preschool among 4-year-old Latino WIC participants increased to 68 percent.

Figure 1: Preschool use in the Latino WIC population from 2005 to 2008



Fewer Latino Parents Report Cost and Access Barriers to Preschool Enrollment

Past studies have found that language barriers and a lack of clarity regarding eligibility can prevent Latinos from accessing all services for which they are eligible, including preschool. A comparison of the 2005 and 2008 WIC survey results showed that when asked how difficult it was to enroll their children in preschool, Latino parents reported significant improvements across the following areas:

- Fewer Latino parents reported difficulty enrolling their children in preschool (Figure 2)
- Fewer Latino parents report that cost makes it difficult to enroll their children in preschool (Figure 3)
- Fewer Latino parents report that it is difficult to find preschools with space available (Figure 3)

Figure 2: Percent of WIC participants who think that preschool is difficult to access.

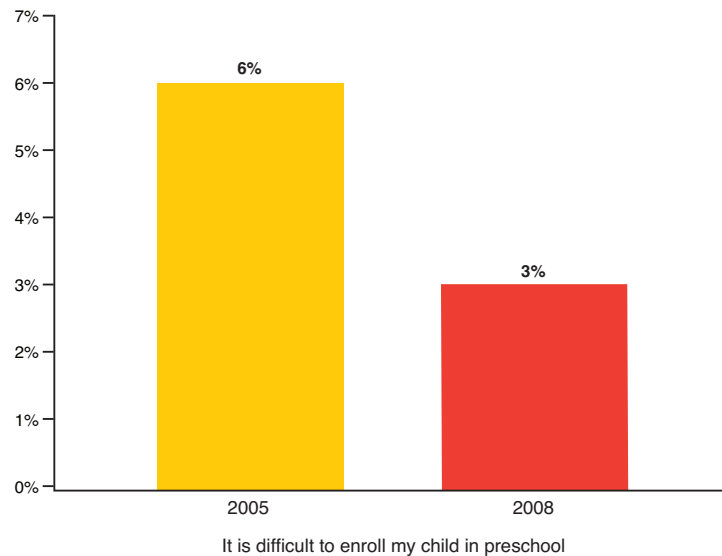
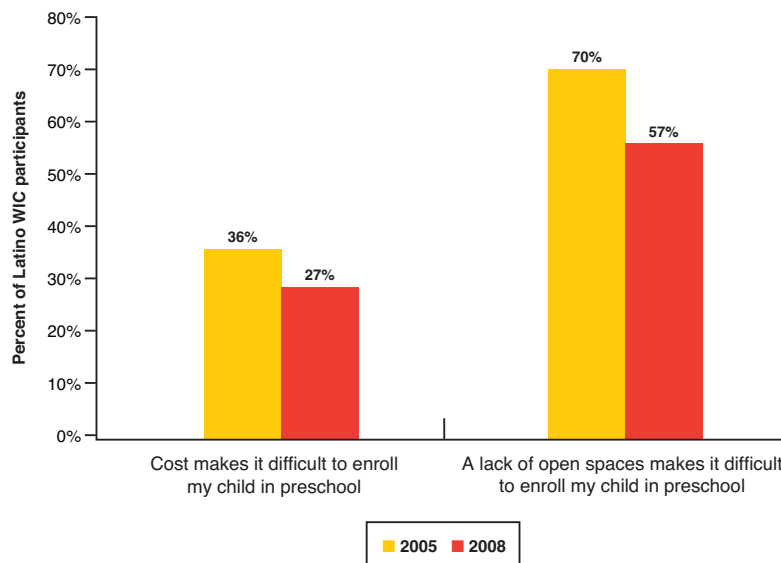


Figure 3: Barriers to accessing preschool among the Latino WIC population*



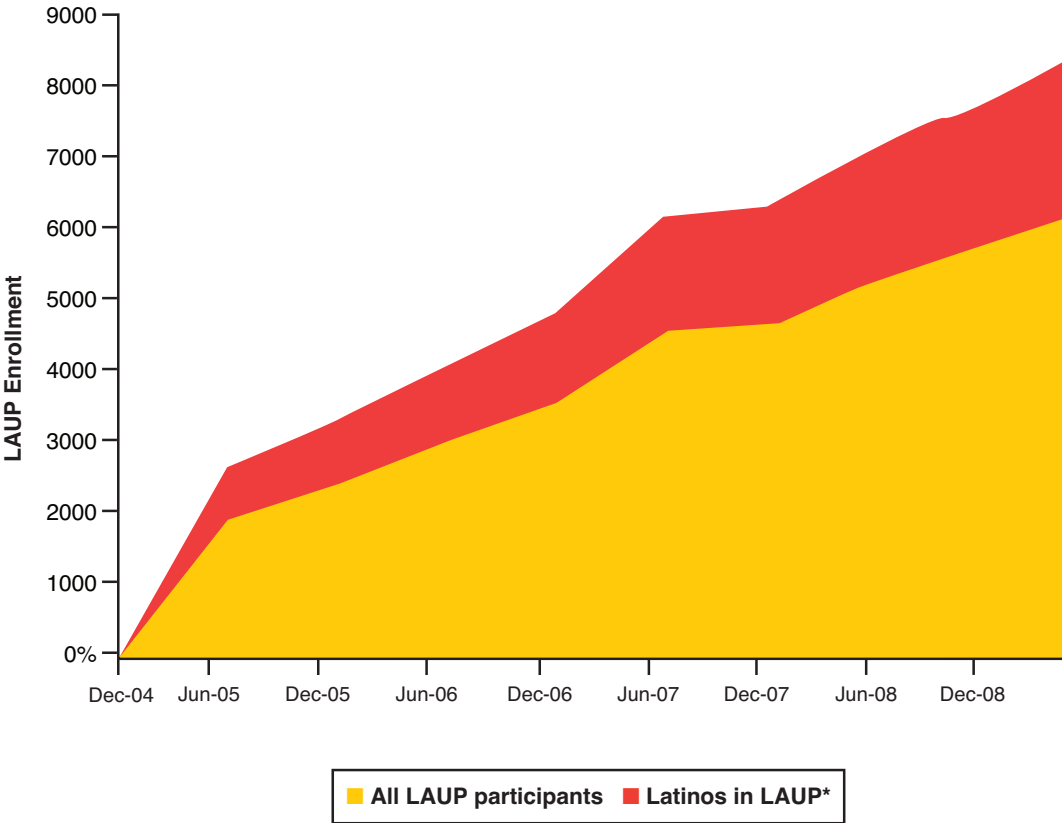
* These questions were asked of parents who considered it difficult to enroll children in preschool

LAUP has Contributed to the Trend in Latino Enrollment in L.A. County

Since 2005, First 5 LA has invested a significant portion of its funds in Los Angeles Universal Preschool (LAUP), which supports preschools across L.A. County. As of March 2009, LAUP preschools were serving 9,550 children, most of whom are Latino.

First 5 LA considers improvements in access among the Latino population to be a major success, particularly since Latinos in California have historically been underserved by other preschool programs, including state preschool. It is a success not only for LAUP, but also for the myriad other programs dedicated to improving preschool access for disadvantaged families in L.A. County.

Figure 4: LAUP Enrollment of Latinos from 2005 to 2008



* Number of Latinos in LAUP estimated to be 74% of total enrollment (MPR 2009)

Summary

Significantly more Latino WIC participants in L.A. County accessed preschool in 2008 than in 2005. In addition to this increase, there has also been a significant *decrease* in parental perceptions of barriers to enrolling children in preschool. The number of Latinos reporting difficulties in enrolling their children in preschool fell by half, and there were sizable reductions in the number of parents reporting cost and accessibility issues with preschool enrollment.

Latinos have been traditionally underrepresented in preschool in California, and Latino WIC participants are even more at-risk for reduced academic achievement given their socioeconomic disadvantage. The ability of Latinos to access preschool for their children is a critical policy concern for First 5 LA and all organizations committed to the underserved in L.A. County.

For more information on the analysis methodology for the WIC survey or for the list of citations used for this document, please contact the First 5 LA Research and Evaluation department at F5LAResearch@first5la.org, or go to the following url for the technical document:

<http://www.first5la.org/Research>

REFERENCES:

- “Latino Families Value Early Education,” A First 5 LA / CICCQ / Packard Foundation Report
- Lynn A. Karoly, J. H. Bigelow. The Economics of Investing in Universal Preschool Education in California. RAND Corporation, Santa Monica, CA.
- Mathematica Policy Research. Los Angeles Universal Preschool Programs, Children Served, and Children’s Progress in the Preschool Year: Final Report of the First 5 LA Universal Preschool Child Outcomes Study. April 2, 2009.
- Karoly, Lynn, Bonnie Ghosh-Dastidar, Gail L. Zellman, Michal Perlman and Lynda Fernyhough. Prepared to Learn: The Nature and Quality of Early Care and Education for Preschool-Age Children in California. Santa Monica: RAND, June 2008.

The Data Mining Project

The Data Mining Project is a Research Partnership between PHFE-WIC and First 5 LA. The primary goal of the Project is to provide comprehensive data about the low-income 0–5 population in Los Angeles County served by the WIC Program.

WIC is the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children. The 2005 L.A. County WIC Survey was conducted with a random sample of 5,015 WIC families. For more information about the survey, please visit www.lawicdata.org and click on the link “Report #1 Overview of the Survey.”

Data Mining Project Staff

Shannon Whaley, PhD
Denise C. Gee, MPH, RD
Judy Gomez, MPH, RD
Lu Jiang, Ph. D.
DataMining@phfewic.org

First 5 LA

First 5 LA is a unique child advocacy organization created by California voters to invest tobacco tax revenues in programs for improving the lives of children in Los Angeles County, from prenatal through age 5. First 5 LA champions health, education and safety causes concerning young children and families. For additional information about First 5 LA, our partners and projects, visit www.first5la.org.

First 5 LA Staff

Christine Aque, MPH, MA
Katie Kurutz
Patricia Lozano, MA
Teryn Mattox, MPA
F5LAResearch@first5la.org

