Fast Facts: WIC Survey Findings

Latino Children Showing Higher Rates of Preschool Enrollment

A 2006 report by the United Way gave L.A. 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 2](image1)

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

![Figure 3](image2)

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

* 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 under-represented 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.
