

## Using Existing Large-Scale Data to Study Early Care and Education Among Hispanics: Search and Decision-Making

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### **Abstract:**

New research is needed to learn more about how, when, and why Latino parents access certain early childhood programs and services, and not others. As highlighted in this brief series, numerous existing large-scale data sets offer potentially valuable information about the ECE experiences of Hispanic populations. This brief on Latino child care search and decision-making focuses in particular on what these studies have to offer about how Hispanic families seek out and select ECE settings. Researchers can use this review and associated data tables to identify the study/studies, samples, and variables most appropriate for their research questions.

**Keywords:** Hispanic families | Hispanic children | Early care education | Childcare | Preschool | Decision-making

**\*\*\*Note: Full text of article below**

## Using Existing Large-Scale Data to Study Early Care and Education Among Hispanics: Search and Decision-Making

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

Hispanic children currently make up roughly one in four of all children in the United States,<sup>a</sup> and by 2050 are projected to make up one in three, similar to the number of white children.<sup>b</sup> Given this, how Hispanic children fare will have a profound and increasing 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. (2014). *America's Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being, 2014, Table POP3*. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office. <http://www.childstats.gov/americaschildren/tables.asp>

<sup>b</sup> Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics. (2012). *America's Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being, 2012, Tables POP1 and POP3*. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office. <http://www.childstats.gov/americaschildren/tables.asp>

<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, DC: U.S. Department of Commerce, U.S. Census Bureau. <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, DC: Pew Research Hispanic Center. <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. <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. <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. <http://www.childtrends.org/?indicators=health-care-coverage>

As participation in early care and education (ECE) has become a more common experience for young children (birth to age 5), considerable research has explored the reasons why parents seek out care and the processes by which they select certain arrangements, but not others. In this research, large-scale survey data have often been used to infer parents' child care preferences from observed associations between use patterns and child, family, and community characteristics. However, the assumption that use necessarily reflects parents' choices may not adequately acknowledge issues of access. Recent conceptual work on parents' ECE decision-making underscores the complexity and fluidity of this process.<sup>1,2</sup> Parents, especially those with limited incomes, must negotiate multiple preferences, priorities, opportunities, and constraints in the context of changing work demands, child and family needs, financial resources, and policy and program parameters.

As the largest and fastest-growing ethnic minority group among children, Hispanics<sup>a</sup> have garnered increased attention in ECE-focused research in recent years. Much of this work has focused on between-group comparisons of Hispanic, non-Hispanic white, and non-Hispanic black children. Historically, research has shown lower rates of ECE enrollment among Hispanics, especially in center-based programs.<sup>3,4</sup> This disparity has often been attributed to culturally-based preferences for maternal (or familial) care of young children; however, recent studies suggest a more complex and nuanced narrative. ECE use among Latinos is on the rise and has been found to vary by such factors as child age and program type; for example, Hispanic preschool-aged children have a strong presence in Head Start, representing approximately 38 percent of those enrolled.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, Hispanics tend to underuse other ECE services, such as child care subsidies.<sup>6,7</sup>

New research is needed to learn more about how, when, and why Latino parents access certain early childhood programs and services, and not others. As highlighted in this brief series (see "Description of ECE data brief series" text box), numerous existing large-scale data sets offer potentially valuable information

<sup>a</sup> In this brief series, we use the terms *Hispanic* and *Latino* interchangeably. Most of the large-scale surveys included in this review give respondents the option of identifying themselves (or their minor children) as being "of Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino origin."

about the ECE experiences of Hispanic populations. This brief on Latino child care search and decision-making focuses in particular on what these studies have to offer about how Hispanic families seek out and select ECE settings. Researchers can use this review and associated data tables to identify the study/studies, samples, and variables most appropriate for their research questions.

While many of the issues raised in this review have unique or particularly relevant implications for Latinos, others are applicable for low-income families with young children more generally. Hispanics have been under-represented in research literature about ECE, and warrant focused consideration as a rapidly growing, key segment of the population. For example, although a growing body of work documents the challenges that nonstandard work schedules pose for many low-income parents trying to care for and educate their children;<sup>8</sup> relatively little is known about how Latino parents experience and navigate work schedule constraints, despite their overrepresentation in the types of jobs that involve nonstandard schedules.<sup>9</sup>

## Key findings

- **Large-scale, publicly available data sets with information about young Hispanic children include different aspects of families' ECE search and decision-making, though this information is limited in most cases.** Conceptually, search and decision-making includes: parents' preferences and priorities given the opportunities and constraints they face; parents' search activities, sources of information on care, and awareness of available options; and the decision-making processes families engage in related to ECE, including any barriers or supports they encounter. While each of these elements was measured in some way in at least one study, there is wide variation in the availability, comprehensiveness, and level of specificity of data across studies.
- **While several studies measured parents' general perceptions of ECE availability, few asked about the information sources that Hispanic families relied on to learn about these options.** Several surveys asked parents to rate the quality of ECE options in a neighborhood, or how

easy or difficult it was for them to locate child care when needed, yet parental awareness of various ECE programs and services remains relatively unexamined within Latino samples. Qualitative research suggests that immigrant parents (a population that includes a sizable proportion of Latinos) may have limited knowledge about the ECE opportunities available in their community.<sup>10</sup>

- **Most national surveys did not ask parents directly about perceived barriers to ECE utilization; however, opportunities exist to examine barrier and access issues for Hispanic families indirectly, including with ECE supply data.** Only one study included in this review (LACHS 2011) asked parents (when applicable) about the reasons why child care was difficult to find and/or why they were not currently using non-parental care. However, characteristics of Hispanic families that may be considered barriers to ECE utilization, such as language spoken or residency status, are available in most of these data sets and could be examined in relation to ECE search and decision-making. In addition, given that contextual factors are critical in understanding access to ECE, in some data sets, respondent data can be linked to geographic data, such as residential density of Hispanics, or other indicators, to inform questions on barriers. See Brief 1 in this series for more detail.
- **Understanding of the multiple elements that comprise search and decision-making is expanding.** Several studies have inquired where parents are spending time—such as at work or school—while children are enrolled in ECE. However, the NSECE was explicitly designed to expand data about parents' ECE decisions by including questions about the most important reasons for using child care, and the level of correspondence between parents' employment activities and children's participation in ECE settings. By asking about the search process for multiple children in households, the NSECE captured the reality of the search process for many families more fully than other data sources did, and may yield new insight about how Hispanic families decide to allocate resources and coordinate care.

## Description of ECE data brief series

**Goals:** By providing an inventory and critical assessment of the ECE-related data elements available within existing large-scale data sets that contain large samples of Hispanics, this brief series aims to:

1. provide an inventory and critical assessment of data elements related to ECE search, access, decision-making and utilization that have been measured in large-scale, publicly available data sets with sizable Latino samples;
2. discuss the methodological strengths and challenges of available data, and consider how current knowledge may be limited by existing data elements describing Hispanic children and families; and
3. offer recommendations for potential new research questions that could be answered using some of these data sets, with a goal of building a more nuanced understanding of ECE access, decision-making, and utilization among low-income Hispanic families.

**Data sets:** The 12 studies<sup>a</sup> listed below were selected for review based on the following criteria: they are representative samples that included sizable numbers of Hispanic households with young children (i.e., more than 500), they include substantive information about ECE, they were conducted after 2000, and they are publicly available (with or without restricted access).

- *Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Birth Cohort (ECLS-B)*
- *Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Kindergarten Cohort 2011 (ECLS-K:2011)*
- *Fragile Families and Child Well-Being Study (FFCWS)*
- *Head Start Family and Child Experiences Survey (FACES), 2009*
- *Head Start Impact Study (HSIS)*
- *Los Angeles County Health Survey (LACHS), 2011*
- *National Agricultural Worker Survey (NAWS), 2012*
- *National Household Education Survey—Early Childhood Program Participation Survey, 2005 (NHES-ECPP:2005)*
- *National Household Education Survey—Early Childhood Program Participation Survey, 2012 (NHES-ECPP:2012)<sup>b</sup>*
- *National Survey of American Families (NSAF), 2002*
- *National Survey of Early Care and Education (NSECE)*
- *Study of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), 2008*

It is important to note that the surveys analyzed for this project were developed to answer different research questions, and therefore vary in the types of ECE data elements they include. For example, some aim to collect detailed information about household economic activity (e.g., SIPP), while others represent prospective developmental studies focused on a target child (e.g., ECLS-B). Still others (e.g., NHES-ECPP, NSECE) were developed for the express purpose of better understanding families' ECE experiences. Along with variation in amount and type of ECE data available across the datasets, there is likely variation in the quality of measures and their validity for addressing particular research questions. Because it is beyond the scope of this brief series to provide detailed commentary on data quality, researchers are urged to give this careful consideration once they have used this review to identify potentially relevant dataset(s).

**Briefs:** The three companion briefs focus on specific types of ECE data available for Latino samples within these data sets:

- **Brief 1** describes the project methodology and summarizes key design features of the selected data sets.  
Crosby, D. & Mendez, J. (2016). Using Existing Large-Scale Data to Study Early Care and Education among Hispanics: Project Overview and Methodology. Research brief. Bethesda, MD: National Research Center on Hispanic Children & Families.  
[http://www.childtrends.org/?post\\_type=publications&p=18720](http://www.childtrends.org/?post_type=publications&p=18720)
- **Brief 3** describes elements related to ECE utilization.  
Mendez, J., Crosby, D., & Helms, H. (2016). Using Existing Large-Scale Data to Study Early Care and Education among Hispanics: Families' Utilization of Early Care and Education. Research brief. Bethesda, MD: National Research Center on Hispanic Children & Families. [http://www.childtrends.org/?post\\_type=publications&p=18722](http://www.childtrends.org/?post_type=publications&p=18722)
- **Brief 4** describes elements that capture child and parent experiences within ECE settings.  
Mendez, J., Crosby, D., Helms, H., Johnson, A., & Rodriguez, Y. (2016). Using Existing Large-Scale Data to Study Early Care and Education among Hispanics: How Hispanic Parents and Children Experience ECE Settings. Research brief. Bethesda, MD: National Research Center on Hispanic Children & Families. [http://www.childtrends.org/?post\\_type=publications&p=18723](http://www.childtrends.org/?post_type=publications&p=18723)

**Additional resources:** In addition to the four ECE data briefs that comprise this series, the Center has created two companion, online, interactive data tools that allow researchers to explore the data elements present or absent in the data sets reviewed. Specifically, we used the data elements in the [tables on search and decision-making](#) as well as [utilization](#) to create these tools. The tools showcase specific items that are indicators of each data element, and provide direct hyperlinks to the actual survey instruments used in the studies included in the review. These additional online resources include:

- Schwartz, G. & Bradshaw, J. (2016, February). Data Tool: ECE Search & Decision-Making among Hispanic Families.  
<http://www.childtrends.org/nrc/resources/>
- Bradshaw, J. & Schwartz, G. (2016, February). Data Tool: ECE Utilization among Hispanic Families.  
<http://www.childtrends.org/nrc/resources/>

<sup>a</sup>Three data sets originally included in the review—the Panel Study of Income Dynamics-Child Development Supplement, the National Longitudinal Study of Youth, and the Three-City Study—were determined to have relatively small samples of Hispanic children younger than age 6 and were dropped from further analysis.

<sup>b</sup>We analyze and present both the 2005 and 2012 NHES-ECPP surveys because of a significant redesign, as it changed from being telephone-administered to being a mailed paper survey. With the change in format, items were modified, the length of the survey was shortened, and information was collected for only one child per household (versus up to two children in earlier surveys).

## Description and availability of data elements

[Table 1](#) presents the data elements related to search and decision-making that are contained within the reviewed data sets. The organization of the table into “general” elements and “specific” elements reflects two different approaches used in large-scale surveys to gather information about ECE. General items were those asked of all parents of young children regardless of current ECE use, and may or may not be about a particular child. Specific items, on the other hand, were anchored to families’ most recent ECE search and/or decisions (e.g., reasons for selecting a current provider) and tend to focus on a target child. Most of the data sets included in this review contain both types of items.

**General ECE preferences and priorities.** The first two data elements summarized in [Table 1](#) capture parents’ general beliefs and perceptions regarding ECE settings and providers. For example, in the ECLS-B 9-month data collection, parents were asked about the importance of caregiver training, location, cost, group size, availability of sick care, and English exposure in considering care arrangements for their child (regardless of whether the family was currently using or seeking care). In the ECLS-B 48-month data collection, this list was expanded to include kindergarten preparation, flexible hours, shared child-rearing beliefs, shared racial-ethnic background, shared language, and religious affiliation. None of the other studies included this type of item at the general level (i.e., not tied to a specific arrangement or provider). However, the NSECE study asked parents a series of questions about how well they believed different modes of care (i.e., centers, nonrelative caregivers, relative caregivers, and parents) provide a nurturing environment, school preparation, social skill development, and safety for children in the same age range as the focal child, as well as affordability and flexibility for parents. In the L.A. County Health Study (LACHS), parents were asked solely about their perceptions of preschool, specifically whether or not they believed children should attend prekindergarten, whether such experiences help children perform better in school, and whether the government should fund prekindergarten programs.

**General perceptions of ECE availability.** Some studies offer information about parental perceptions of ECE availability by assessing their awareness of and satisfaction with ECE options. Two of the studies (LACHS, NAWS) asked about knowledge of specific government-funded early childhood education programs (LA Universal Preschool; Migrant and Seasonal Head Start). The more common measure, used in four of the studies (ECLS-B, HSIS, NHES:2005, NHES:2012), asked parents to rate the overall quality of ECE options in their neighborhood or community. In the LACHS study, parents rated how easy or difficult it was, in general, to find child care when needed.

**Perceived barriers to access.** Despite significant interest on the part of researchers, policymakers and practitioners in identifying access barriers to ECE services, particularly for underserved or underrepresented groups (e.g., Hispanic children

in some forms of center-based care), very few studies asked parents directly about such barriers. The study that provides the most information about perceived barriers to access is the LACHS. If parents indicated that it was generally “somewhat” or “very difficult” for them to find child care when they needed it, they were asked a series of follow-up questions about whether it was because of cost, available space, hours or location, quality, reliability, or child’s disability or special needs. The LACHS also asked parents who were not currently using child care about possible reasons for this, including high costs, no available slots, transportation problems, child’s disability or special needs, and program only offered part-day, as well as preferences for care by parents and the availability of a parent at home to care for the child. Notably, parents who were using care but did not describe their search as “difficult” were not asked about any barriers they may perceive or have experienced. Two other studies provide limited information about access barriers. In the NAWS, parents were asked why they were not using Migrant and Seasonal Head Start, a targeted program for which their children were likely eligible. In the SIPP, parents were asked about being on a waiting list for care, and whether problems arranging care had interfered with employment or attending school.

**Family ECE decision-making.** Most large-scale surveys only gathered child care information from the primary parent respondent (sometimes identified as the “most knowledgeable adult” and most often mothers) and did not ask explicitly about how families arrive at ECE decisions. Because of the methodology used to collect data, the respondent is framed as the primary or only decision-maker in these matters even though partners/spouses and other family members may be involved in the decision-making process. Moreover, decisions about ECE may be linked to family-level decisions about such things as employment and finances. Notably, one study (ECLS-B) offers the opportunity to examine how much influence resident and non-resident fathers (but not other partners in the case of same-gender couples) feel they have on major child care decisions.

**Reasons for most-recent ECE search.** Understanding parents’ needs and goals related to ECE is an important aspect of search and decision-making; however, very few of the reviewed studies include these types of data elements. Parents may seek out ECE arrangements primarily as a necessary support

for their employment and education efforts, as an enriching developmental context for their children, or for both of these reasons simultaneously. Two studies (NSAF, SIPP) provide partial information: they asked whether the parent was at work or in school during the hours their child spent with each provider or type of provider (i.e., relative care, nonrelative care, center-based care). The NHES-ECPP:2012 includes information about whether parents sought care in the past year primarily so they could work or attend school, to provide school preparation for their child, to provide cultural or language learning, to provide time for errands or relaxation, or for some other reason. The NSECE included a similar item about the main reason for parents' latest ECE search (parental employment or change in work schedule, educational or social benefits for the child, parental relief, to supplement existing care arrangements, to reduce care expenses, or because a prior provider or program was no longer available), as well as questions about how important certain features were in seeking care for their child (a loving environment, school preparation, social skill development, affordability and flexibility for parents).

**Characteristics of most-recent ECE search.** Seven of the 12 data sets evaluated in this review measured some aspect of families' most-recent ECE search. In four of the studies, parents reported how they learned about their current providers. The NHES-ECPP:2005 collected this information for each current care arrangement, while FACES and NAWS partially addressed this data element by asking how parents learned about their child's current Head Start/Migrant and Seasonal Head Start program. The NHES and NSECE studies also asked parents whether they knew each provider before arranging care for their child(ren), providing information about the potential importance of caregiver familiarity. In terms of the search process, five studies (ECLS-B, HSIS, NHES-ECPP:2005, NHES-ECPP:2012, NSECE) asked parents about how difficult it was to find the type of care arrangement or program they wanted for the focal child.

Relative to the other studies, the NSECE gathered the most extensive information about parents' ECE search strategies and experiences, which is not unexpected given that it was a primary goal of the study. For each current provider, parents in the NSECE indicated whether a local resource and referral agency helped them find the arrangement. They were also then asked a detailed series of questions about their most recent ECE search for a randomly selected child in the family, including: 1) how they searched for providers (through family, friends, community resources, advertisements, media, social services, health care provider, or other source); 2) the types of information they sought (care type, hours and schedule, cost, availability of assistance, location, transportation options, program content, services, languages, curriculum/philosophy, licensing, teacher tenure, or other); 3) the relative cost, convenience, and quality of the two most closely considered options (if applicable); and 4) the timing and outcome of their most recent search.

**Reasons for selecting current ECE provider(s).** The final data element displayed in [Table 1](#) captures the reasons parents provided for the ECE decisions they had already made, which

may have differed from their generally stated preferences and priorities. Only four (NAWS, NHES-ECPP:2005, NHES-ECPP:2012, NSECE) of the reviewed studies collected this information and did so for the primary care arrangement being used for a randomly selected child in the family. In the NSECE, parents were asked about the main reason for their decision (cost, schedule, location, quality, "best feeling," availability, or no other options). Notably, the other three studies asked parents about multiple applicable reasons rather than having them select only one, though the types of reasons asked about varied. The NHES surveys focused more heavily on practical considerations for parents, asking about importance of cost, location, hours, reliability, learning activities, group size, and time with peers. The NAWS asked whether the provider was selected based on trust, cultural compatibility, school preparation, or flexibility/convenience.

## Summary and future directions

Given the size and growth of the Hispanic population, evidence that certain ECE programs and services are underused for young Hispanic children, and policy interest in facilitating broader access to high-quality ECE settings, it is imperative to develop a deeper and more nuanced understanding of ECE search and decision-making among low-income Latino families. Several of the data sets included in this review show great potential for yielding new information in this area. The resources provided in this brief (and the others in the series) are intended to support researchers in capitalizing on the opportunities these studies offer. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge gaps in existing data that limit their ability to fully address targeted questions for particular samples of Hispanic families.

The following recommendations are intended to highlight productive directions for future research, involving both new analyses of existing data and additional data collection opportunities. By providing a more detailed, nuanced, and comprehensive picture of which early childhood programs Latino families access, under what conditions, and for what reasons, this research agenda can inform policy and program discussions of how to more effectively serve this key segment of the population.

We recommend that future studies:

- 1. Consider the complexity and variability of Hispanic parents' preferences regarding ECE, and how these relate to decisions about utilization.** General items included in large-scale surveys assume that parents have stable preferences. To some extent, they may reflect what parents would choose in the absence of other priorities for the family.<sup>11</sup> Also, surveys are more likely to assess elements related to utilization, and overlook search and decision-making processes. (For example, the ECLS-K does not include any of the search and decision-making elements.) Other data sets, such as the NSECE, include both general and specific measures of parent preferences, which could be used to study how these relate to one another, as well as to ECE utilization patterns among Hispanic families with different

socio-demographic characteristics (e.g., number and ages of children, nativity status). For example, recent work suggests that race/ethnicity, employment, and availability are more strongly associated with ECE use for infants, while beliefs about education are more strongly associated with pre-K use for older children.<sup>12,13</sup>

- 2. Develop a deeper research knowledge base regarding barriers and constraints that impact ECE access, search, and decision-making among Hispanics.** In general, the large-scale surveys reviewed here did not ask parents many direct questions about perceived barriers and constraints, suggesting that further measurement work in this area may be needed. Within existing studies, however, these issues can be studied indirectly by examining how commonly reported constraints (e.g., income, employment characteristics) are associated with particular patterns of ECE use. For example, given that Hispanic parents are over-represented in low-wage sectors where they are likely to have less stability, predictability, and control over their schedules—constraints or pressures that may be exacerbated in the context of discrimination, language barriers, or questions about immigration status—focused research on the intersection of employment and ECE issues for low-income Hispanic families is critical.<sup>14,15</sup> Indicators of linguistic isolation in households, which are measured in some of the data sets (see Brief 1 in this series), may be important to consider in studies of access as well. In addition, the ability in many of these studies to link respondent data to geographic data (e.g., residential density, availability of center-based options, state CCDF policies) and the availability of national ECE supply data in the NSECE (see Brief 1, Table 1) could be especially useful for understanding the potential barriers Latino families encounter in accessing ECE opportunities.
- 3. Explore constructs, such as cultural and familial values, that may have unique relevance for Hispanic families.** Our review revealed that national data sets included limited items that address cultural and familial values that could impact ECE decision-making and utilization. Measures of cultural values, particularly as they relate to caring for and educating young children at different ages, could yield new perspectives. Hispanic immigrant parents have been described as committed to making sacrifices to secure educational opportunities for their children.<sup>16</sup> Such beliefs could translate into selection of child care arrangements that maximize school readiness skills. Also, research on parents' awareness of eligibility criteria for various programs (e.g., subsidies and subsidized programs) would be useful. Finally, designing large-scale studies to assess the sources of information to which Latino parents are exposed and which they seek out when making child care decisions would be informative for developing culturally responsive services or addressing ECE access for specific populations (e.g., recent immigrants).
- 4. Recognize that ECE search and decision-making occurs within a broader household context. This is true for all families, but may have unique implications for Hispanics.**

Consider the involvement of fathers (or other parents/guardians), and perhaps the role of extended family members, in the process of the selection of ECE. While the ECLS-B offers the opportunity to examine Hispanic fathers' level of involvement in child care decision-making (from their own perspective), most surveys gather child care information from the primary parent only (i.e., the "most knowledgeable adult") and do not ask explicitly about decision-making processes. This approach does not capture broader family influences on ECE decisions and may result in an incomplete picture of how families seek out and select early childhood care settings. Additional research is needed to help us better understand how ECE decision-making occurs within Hispanic families, and how it intersects with decisions about employment, finances and other household needs. Family-based models of ECE decision-making should also take decision-making for multiple children, especially those in different age groups, into account.

- 5. Investigate how policy and community contexts shape ECE decision-making for low-income Hispanic families.** To improve the current system of ECE, we must acknowledge and study local labor market and child care supply issues. In order for families to have meaningful access to a range of ECE settings, there must be a match between the structure and nature of policies and programs, and families' needs and preferences. In other words, it is not enough for good-quality options to exist. They must also be desirable, feasible, and sustainable for families. One example of how community characteristics may impact ECE decision-making for Latino parents of young children is in families' access to social networks, which may vary based on migration patterns and whether families are in an established Hispanic community or new settlement location. These networks may serve as an important source of information and/or care provision. The availability of geographical identifiers in several of the data sets (see Brief 1 in this series) makes it possible to look at search and decision-making within a broader policy and community context. In addition, the integrated study design of the NSECE (i.e., gathering data from both the supply and demand sides) offers unique opportunities to address the match and quality of available programs in particular communities—those with a high or low density of Hispanics, for example. Research on subsidy receipt suggests that state-level policy variation in eligibility and recertification, reimbursement rates, and outreach may impact ECE decision-making,<sup>17</sup> yet we know very little about these issues for Hispanics.
- 6. Account for the diversity among Latino families in terms of their characteristics, experiences, and communities.** A critical consideration that cuts across all of the research questions noted above is the tremendous heterogeneity of the U.S. Hispanic population. All of the data sets included in this review contain at least some of the 10 priority data elements recommended for research on Hispanics (see Table 2 in Brief 1 of this series).<sup>18</sup> Such characteristics as country of heritage, nativity status, English proficiency, and home

language use may help shape parents' ECE preferences and priorities, as well as the ECE options to which they have access. Researchers can use Table 1 of Brief 1 in this series to help identify which studies include socio-demographic elements of interest for capturing the heterogeneity of the Hispanic population. An important caveat, however, is that along with selecting the appropriate data set and variables for a particular question, researchers should attend to sample frame and sample size issues, which vary considerably across

the data sets reviewed here. Given that Latino children now make up more than one quarter of the U.S. child population and reside in a wider range of communities and states than a decade ago, the sample sizes of Hispanic children in national data going forward are likely to increase—making it all the more important that data elements relevant to this population are included in study designs.



**Table 1:** Data elements measuring Hispanic parents' ECE preferences, priorities, search, and decision-making, by data set

	General					
Data set	Priority ECE characteristics	ECE type preferences	Awareness of ECE options	Satisfaction with ECE options	Access barriers	People involved in ECE decisions
ECLS-B						
9 mos.	✓					✿
24 mos.						✿
48 mos.	✓			✓		✿
ECLS-K 2010-11						
FACES 2009						
FFCWS						
Age 1						
Age 3						
HS FACES 2009						
Fall 2009						
Spring 2010						
HSIS						
Fall 2002				✓		
Spring 2003		✿				
LACHS 2011		✿ <sup>a</sup>	✿ <sup>a</sup>	✓	✓ <sup>+</sup>	
NAWS 2010			✿		✿	
NHES-ECPP: 2005				✓		
NHES-ECPP: 2012				✓		
NSAF						
NSECE	✓	✓				
SIPP 2008					✿	

Notes. ✓+ = extensive information available; ✓ = data element included in the study; ✿ = partial or limited information available

O = available overall (in general), across providers; P = available for primary provider only; T = available for primary provider of each type of care (center, relative, nonrelative); E = available for each provider

ECLS-B = Early Childhood Longitudinal Birth Cohort; ECLS-K = Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Cohort; FFCWS = Fragile Families and Child Well-Being Study;

HS FACES = Head Start Family and Child Experiences Survey; HSIS = Head Start Impact Study; LACHS = LA County Health Survey; NAWS = National Agricultural Workers Survey;

NHES-ECPP = National Household Education Survey, Early Childhood Program Participation Module; NSAF = National Survey of American Families; NSECE = National Survey of Early Care and Education; SIPP = Survey of Income and Program Participation

a. While most child-care-related items in the LACHS come from the child survey component, this set of items about perceptions of preschool appears in the adult survey.

**Table 1 Cont.:** Data elements measuring Hispanic parents' ECE preferences, priorities, search, and decision-making, by data set

Data set	Specific to last search and/or current arrangements				
	Reason for ECE search/ use	Information sources	Familiarity with provider	Reason for selecting provider(s)	Difficulty of ECE search
ECLS-B					
9 mos.					
24 mos.					
48 mos.					✓
ECLS-K 2010-11					
FACES 2009					
FFCWS					
Age 1					
Age 3					
HS FACES 2009					
Fall 2009		✦			
Spring 2010					
HSIS					
Fall 2002					✓
Spring 2003					
LACHS 2011					
NAWS 2010		✦		✓ P	
NHES-ECPP: 2005		✓ E	✓ E	✓ P	✓
NHES-ECPP: 2012	✓		✓ P	✓ P	✓
NSAF	✦				
NSECE	✓	✓+ O	✓ E	✓ P	✓
SIPP 2008	✦				

Notes. ✓+ = extensive information available; ✓ = data element included in the study; ✦ = partial or limited information available

O = available overall (in general), across providers; P = available for primary provider only; T = available for primary provider of each type of care (center, relative, nonrelative); E = available for each provider

ECLS-B = Early Childhood Longitudinal Birth Cohort; ECLS-K = Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Cohort; FFCWS = Fragile Families and Child Well-Being Study; HS FACES = Head Start Family and Child Experiences Survey; HSIS = Head Start Impact Study; LACHS = LA County Health Survey; NAWS = National Agricultural Workers Survey; NHES-ECPP = National Household Education Survey, Early Childhood Program Participation Module; NSAF = National Survey of American Families; NSECE = National Survey of Early Care and Education; SIPP = Survey of Income and Program Participation

a. While most child-care-related items in the LACHS come from the child survey component, this set of items about perceptions of preschool appears in the adult survey

## Endnotes

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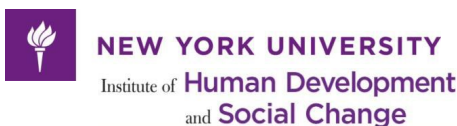
## About the Center

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 (OPRE) within the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to Child Trends in partnership with Abt Associates and New York University, University of North Carolina at Greensboro, and University of Maryland, College Park. This publication was made possible by Grant Number 90PH0025 from OPRE. Its contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of OPRE, ACF, or HHS.

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