



RACIAL AND ETHNIC MATCH BETWEEN CHILDREN AND PROVIDERS IN EARLY HEAD START

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This brief is part of a series about Early Head Start. Additional briefs are available at the [CSCH website](#).

Background

Researchers have previously noted that within early childhood education and home visiting programs, a racial and ethnic match between children and their providers is related to positive outcomes for children and their parents. For example, some research has found that when children enrolled in pre-kindergarten and kindergarten share the same race/ethnicity with their teachers, teachers are more likely to rate children favorably in their behavior and academic skills.^{1,2} Conversely, when teachers and children's race/ethnicity is mismatched, teachers may be more likely to perceive children as having more behavioral difficulties.^{1,3} This is more evident for white teachers' perceptions of Black children.^{1,3} Among families enrolled in home visiting programs, some research has found that parents who match their children's provider are more likely to stay enrolled longer in these programs.⁴ Although there is a growing literature on child-provider racial/ethnic match, little is known about match for younger children—infants and toddlers—and their parents. Early Head Start (EHS) is a federally funded program intended to support low-income infants and toddlers (up to age 3) and their families through holistic child development and family support services. As a two-generation program aimed at both parents/guardians and children, EHS provides an ideal setting to further investigate child-provider racial/ethnic match and related outcomes for very young children and their parents.

In a recent study, we investigated child-provider racial/ethnic match among children (ages 1-3) who were receiving Early Head Start services and addressed two main research questions:

- Do children and families in Early Head Start have providers who match their race/ethnicity?
- How do children who had more racial/ethnic matches with their providers differ in terms of child, family, and EHS characteristics?

Research Methods

This study utilized data from the Early Head Start Child & Family Experiences Study (Baby FACES) 2009-2012.⁵ The sample consisted of 407 children who entered EHS by 12 months and remained through age 3 years, their parents, and Early Head Start providers. Children were 53% male; 42% white, 19% Black, and 39% Latinx; 42% children had a non-English home

language. Data were collected at three time points (at ages 1, 2, and 3 years). Analyses were conducted using descriptive statistics and weighted ordinary least squares regression models for the full sample (all children included) as well as each subsample (by race/ethnicity), accounting for child, family, and EHS program characteristics.

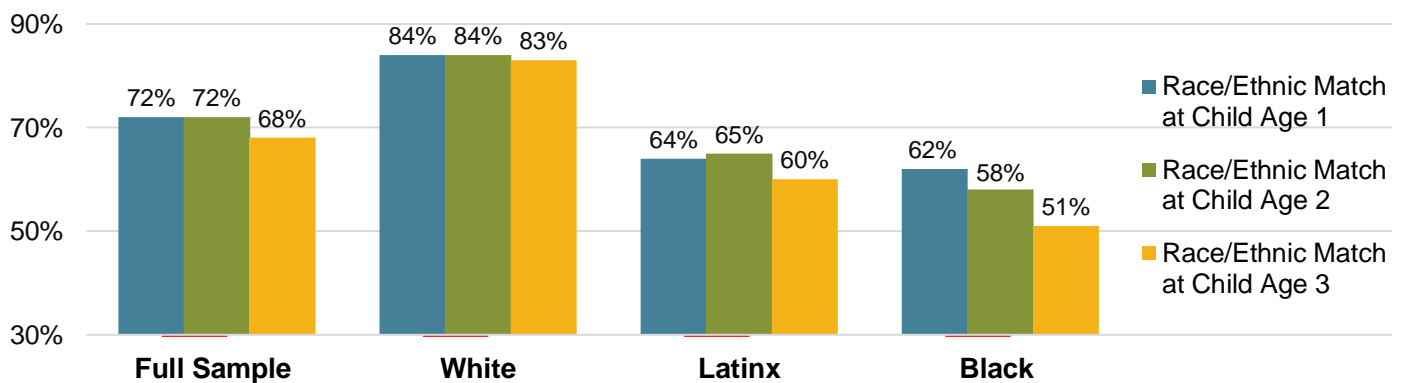
Research Findings

Children’s Experiences with Racial/Ethnicity Match in EHS

- White children had the most racial/ethnic matches with their providers over ages 1 to 3 years, while Latinx and Black children were less likely to experience a match with their providers (Figure 1).
- About 63% of all children had a match with their providers all three years, however white children had a higher likelihood of experiencing a match every year.
- Black (34%) and Latinx (28%) children were more likely to never experience a match with their providers during their time in EHS, relative to white children (13%).

Figure 1. Race and Ethnic Match for Children ages 1 -3 during EHS

Percentage of children who experienced match.



Significant Predictors of Child and Provider Racial/Ethnic Match

We found two characteristics that predicted children having a match with their provider in EHS.

- **Race/ethnicity.** White children had more years of a match with their provider relative to Black and Latinx children. Black and Latinx children’s likelihood of experiencing match was the same.
- **Home language.** White children whose home language was non-English had significantly less match experiences in comparison to white children whose home language was English. Latinx children whose primary language was non-English had more years of a match with their provider relative to Latinx children whose home language was English.

Implications

Many children in Early Head Start had a provider with their same race/ethnicity. However, Black and Latinx children were less likely to have a match. In light of this finding, early childhood programs like Early Head Start could consider ways to increase employment opportunities for Black and Latinx educators in their programs.

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For more information about this research see the full journal article available at: Cook, K. D., Ferreira van Leer, K., & Lombardi, C. M. (2023). Exploring predictors and outcomes of racial/ethnic match between children and providers in early head start. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 62, 275–286. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2022.09.002>.

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¹ Bates, L. A., & Glick, J. E. (2013). Does it matter if teachers and schools match the student? Racial and ethnic disparities in problem behaviors. *Social Science Research*, 42(5), 1180–1190. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssresearch.2013.04.005>.

² Downer, J. T., Goble, P., Myers, S. S., & Pianta, R. C. (2016). Teacher-child racial/ethnic match within pre-kindergarten classrooms and children's early school adjustment. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 37, 26–38. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2016.02.007>.

³ Accavitti, M. R., & Williford, A. P. (2022). Teacher perceptions of externalizing behaviour subtypes in preschool: Considering racial factors. *Early Childhood Development and Care*, 192(6), 932–946. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03004430.2020.1825405>.

⁴ Daro, D., McCurdy, K., Falconnier, L., & Stojanovic, D. (2003). Sustaining new parents in home visitation services: Key participant and program factors. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 27(10), 1101–1125. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2003.09.007>.

⁵ Vogel, C. A., & Boller, K. (2009–2012). Early Head Start Family and Child Experiences Survey (Baby FACES) spring 2009–spring 2012. ICPSR36074-v1. Ann Arbor, MI: Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research. <https://doi.org/10.3886/ICPSR36074.v1>