

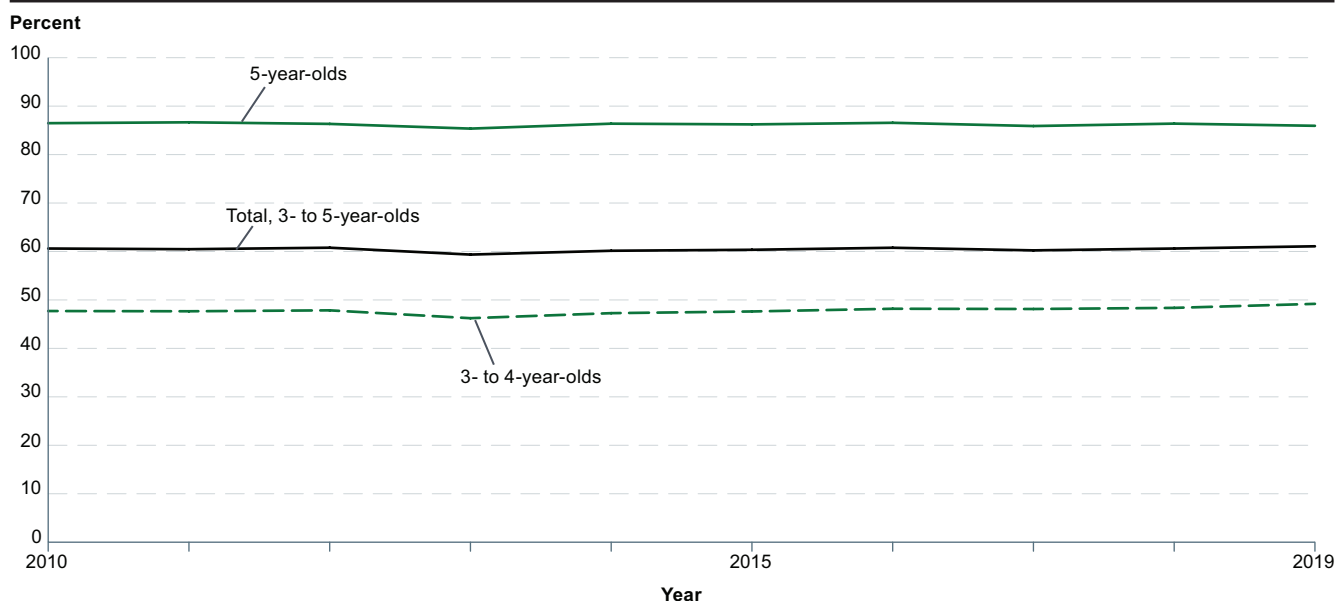
## Enrollment Rates of Young Children

*In 2019, the enrollment rate was higher for 3- to 4-year-olds whose parents had higher levels of educational attainment. Specifically, the enrollment rate for 3- to 4-year-olds ranged from 35 percent for those whose parent(s) had not completed high school to 60 percent for those with at least one parent who had attained a bachelor's or higher degree. A similar pattern can be observed for the enrollment rates of 5-year-olds.*

Research has shown that children's lifelong well-being is positively associated with early childhood services, including formal schooling such as preschool and kindergarten; this relationship is especially noteworthy among children at greater risk of poor outcomes for lifelong well-being.<sup>1</sup> As formal schooling is an important component of early childhood services, this indicator looks at the school enrollment rates of 3- to 5-year-olds.

This indicator also compares enrollment rates by various child and family characteristics, within the 3- to 4-year-old and 5-year-old age groups. In this indicator, children who were reported to have attended school in the 3 months preceding the survey are considered to be enrolled in school. Respondents were instructed to include only nursery or preschool, kindergarten, elementary school, or home school.<sup>2</sup>

**Figure 1. Percentage of 3- to 5-year-olds enrolled in school, by age group: 2010 through 2019**



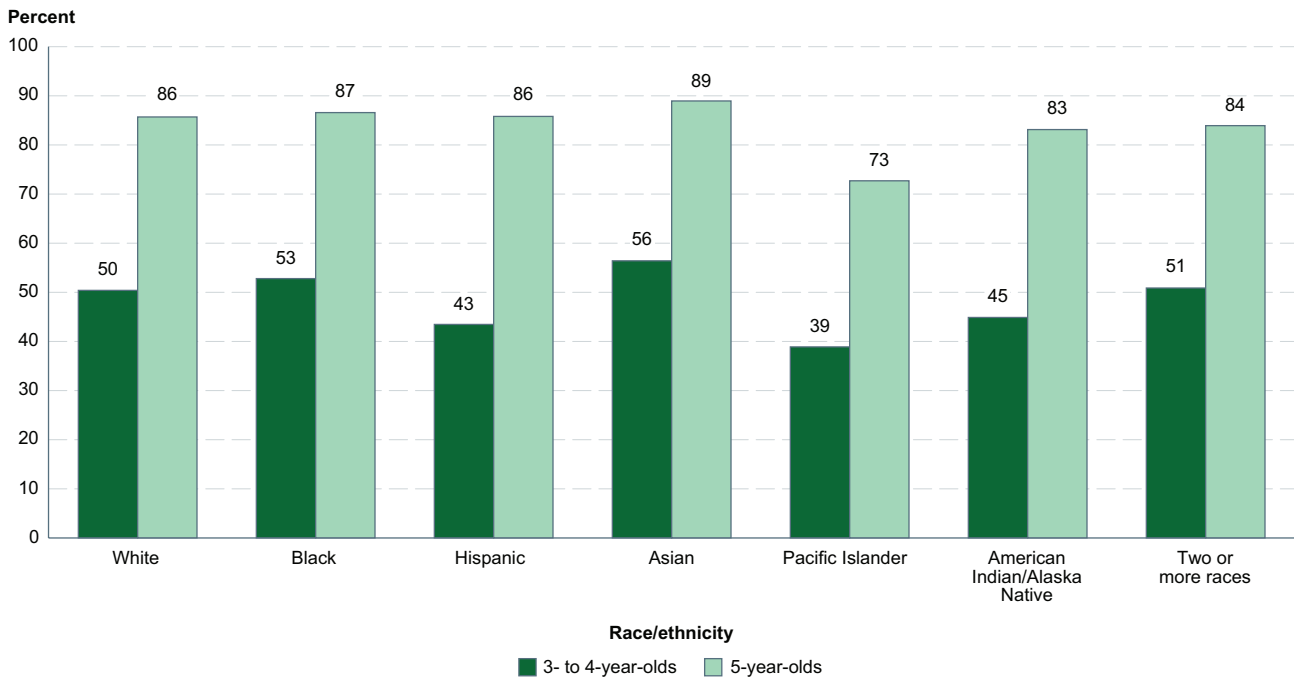
NOTE: Data are based on sample surveys of the entire population residing within the United States, including those living in group quarters (e.g., shelters, healthcare facilities, or correctional facilities).

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 2010 through 2019. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2020*, table 202.20.

In 2019, about 61 percent of 3- to 5-year-olds were enrolled in school, overall. The enrollment rate was lower for 3- to 4-year-olds than for 5-year-olds (49 vs. 86 percent). Among 3- to 4-year-olds, the percentage enrolled in school was

1 percentage point higher in 2019 than in 2010 (49 vs. 48 percent). For 5-year-olds, however, the enrollment rate in 2019 was not measurably different from 2010.

Figure 2. Percentage of 3- to 4-year-olds and 5-year-olds enrolled in school, by race/ethnicity: 2019

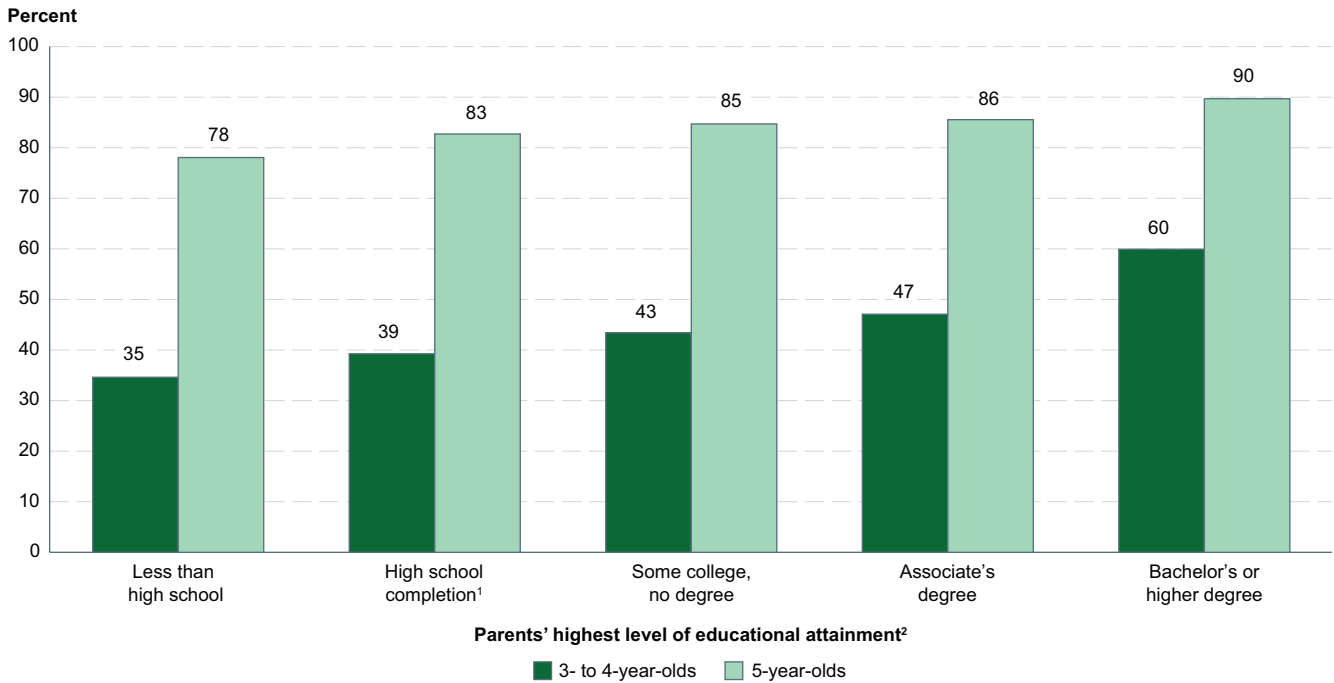


NOTE: Data are based on sample surveys of the entire population residing within the United States, including those living in group quarters (e.g., shelters, healthcare facilities, or correctional facilities). This figure excludes respondents who wrote in some other race that was not included as an option on the questionnaire. Race categories exclude persons of Hispanic ethnicity. Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded data.  
 SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 2019. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2020*, table 202.20.

The enrollment rate varied across racial/ethnic groups<sup>3</sup> in 2019. Among 3- to 4-year-olds, the enrollment rate was higher for Asian children (56 percent) than for children who were Black (53 percent), of Two or more races (51 percent), and White (50 percent); these rates were all higher than the enrollment rates for children who were American Indian/Alaska Native (45 percent), Hispanic (43 percent), and Pacific Islander (39 percent). In addition, the enrollment rate among 3- to 4-year-olds was higher for Black children than for White children. Fewer measurable differences by race/ethnicity were observed in the enrollment rates of 5-year-olds than

in the rates of 3- to 4-year-olds. Among 5-year-olds, the enrollment rate was higher for Asian children (89 percent) than for children from most other racial/ethnic groups; the exception was that the enrollment rate for Asian children was not measurably different from that for Black children (87 percent). In addition, the enrollment rate among 5-year-olds was higher for Black children than for children of Two or more races (87 vs. 84 percent). In 2019, enrollment rates did not measurably differ by sex for either 3- to 4-year-olds (49 percent each for males and females) or 5-year-olds (86 percent each for males and females).

**Figure 3. Percentage of 3- to 4-year-olds and 5-year-olds enrolled in school, by parents' highest level of educational attainment: 2019**



<sup>1</sup> Includes parents who completed high school through equivalency programs, such as a GED program.

<sup>2</sup> Highest education level of any parent residing with the child (including an adoptive or stepparent, excluding a foster parent).

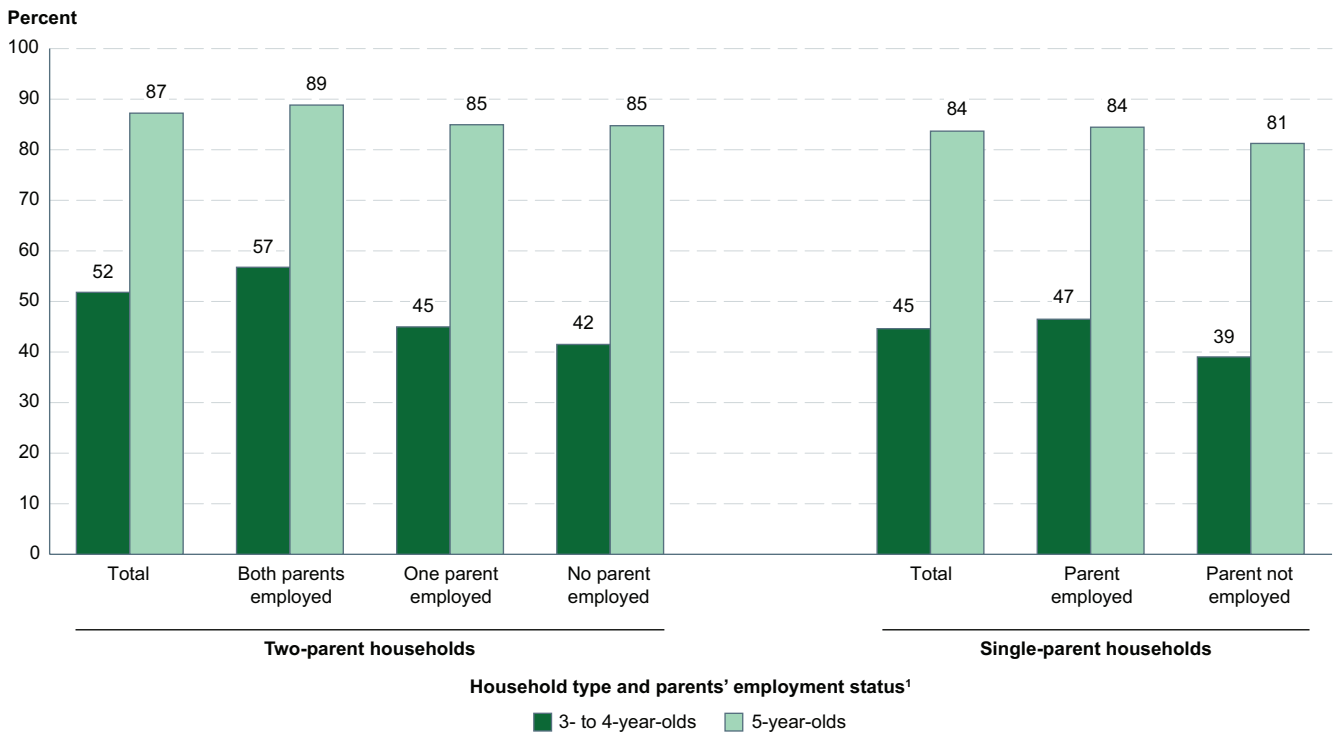
NOTE: Data are based on sample surveys of the entire population residing within the United States, including those living in group quarters (e.g., shelters, healthcare facilities, or correctional facilities). This figure includes only children who resided with at least one of their parents.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 2019. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2020*, table 202.20.

In 2019, the enrollment rate was generally higher for children whose parents had higher levels of educational attainment.<sup>4</sup> Specifically, among 3- to 4-year-olds, the enrollment rate was 35 percent for those whose parents had not completed high school,<sup>5</sup> 39 percent for those whose parents had a high school credential, 43 percent for those whose parents had some college but no degree, 47 percent for those whose parents had an associate's degree, and 60 percent for those whose parents had a

bachelor's or higher degree. A similar pattern can be observed for the enrollment rates of 5-year-olds, which ranged from 78 percent for those whose parents had not completed high school to 90 percent for those whose parents had attained a bachelor's or higher degree. However, the differences in enrollment rates by parents' educational attainment were often smaller among 5-year-olds than among 3- to 4-year-olds.

**Figure 4. Percentage of 3- to 4-year-olds and 5-year-olds enrolled in school, by household type and parents' employment status: 2019**



<sup>1</sup> Children in single-parent households resided with only one parent, while those in two-parent households resided with two parents. Estimates for parents' employment status do not include children with at least one parent younger than 16 years old, because the American Community Survey only asks employment questions for those 16 and older.

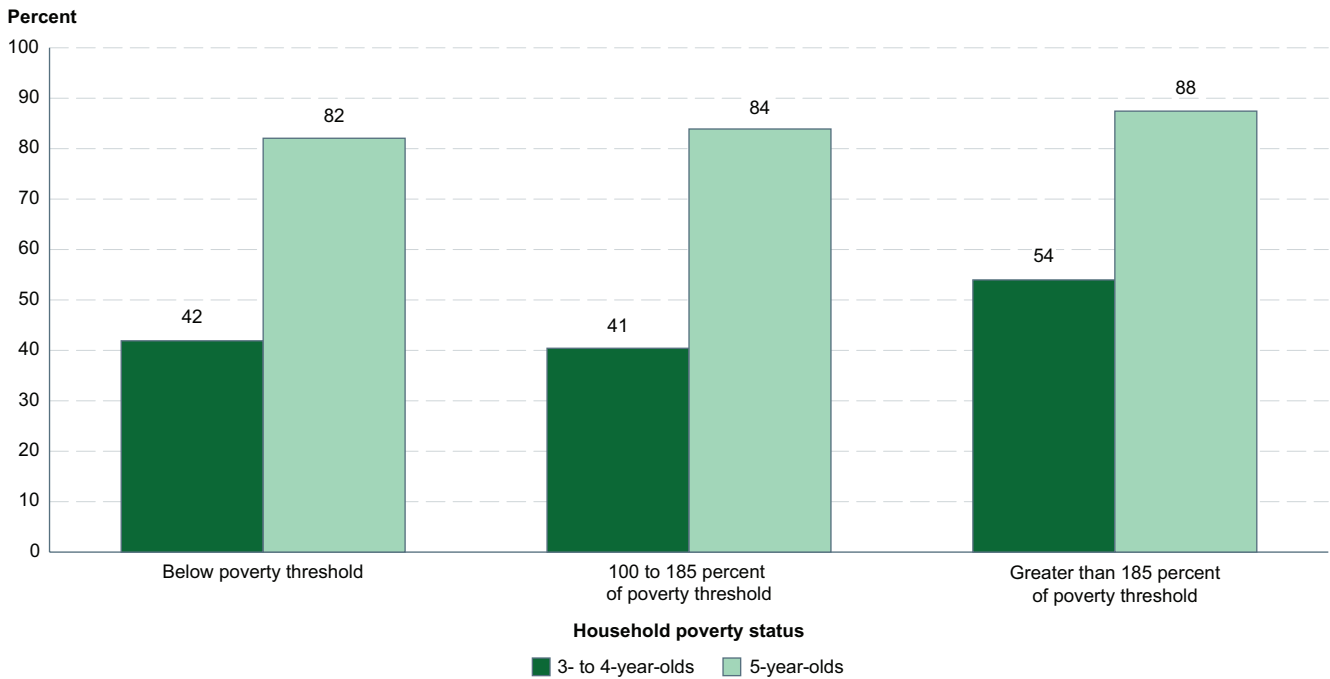
NOTE: Data are based on sample surveys of the entire population residing within the United States, including those living in group quarters (e.g., shelters, healthcare facilities, or correctional facilities). This figure includes only children who resided with at least one of their parents (including an adoptive or stepparent). Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded data.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 2019. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2020*, table 202.20.

In 2019, the enrollment rate was higher for children in two-parent households than in single-parent households among both 3- to 4-year-olds (52 vs. 45 percent) and 5-year-olds (87 vs. 84 percent). Considering the enrollment rates of children with similar family structures more closely, enrollment rates also differed by parents' employment status. For 3- to 4-year-olds in two-parent households, the rate was higher when both parents were employed (57 percent) than when only one of the two parents were employed (45 percent) or when neither parent was employed (42 percent). Additionally, the enrollment rate in single-parent households was higher for 3- to 4-year-olds whose parent was employed (47 percent) than for those whose parent was not employed (39 percent).

Some of the differences observed for 3- to 4-year-olds by parents' employment status were observed for 5-year-olds as well, though the differences in enrollment rates were smaller for 5-year-olds than for 3- to 4-year-olds. Among 5-year-olds in two-parent households, the enrollment rate was 89 percent for those with both parents employed, compared with 85 percent for their peers with only one of the two parents employed. Similarly, the enrollment rate was higher for 5-year-olds in single-parent households where the parent was employed (84 percent) than for those in single-parent households where the parent was not employed (81 percent).

**Figure 5. Percentage of 3- to 4-year-olds and 5-year-olds enrolled in school, by household poverty status: 2019**

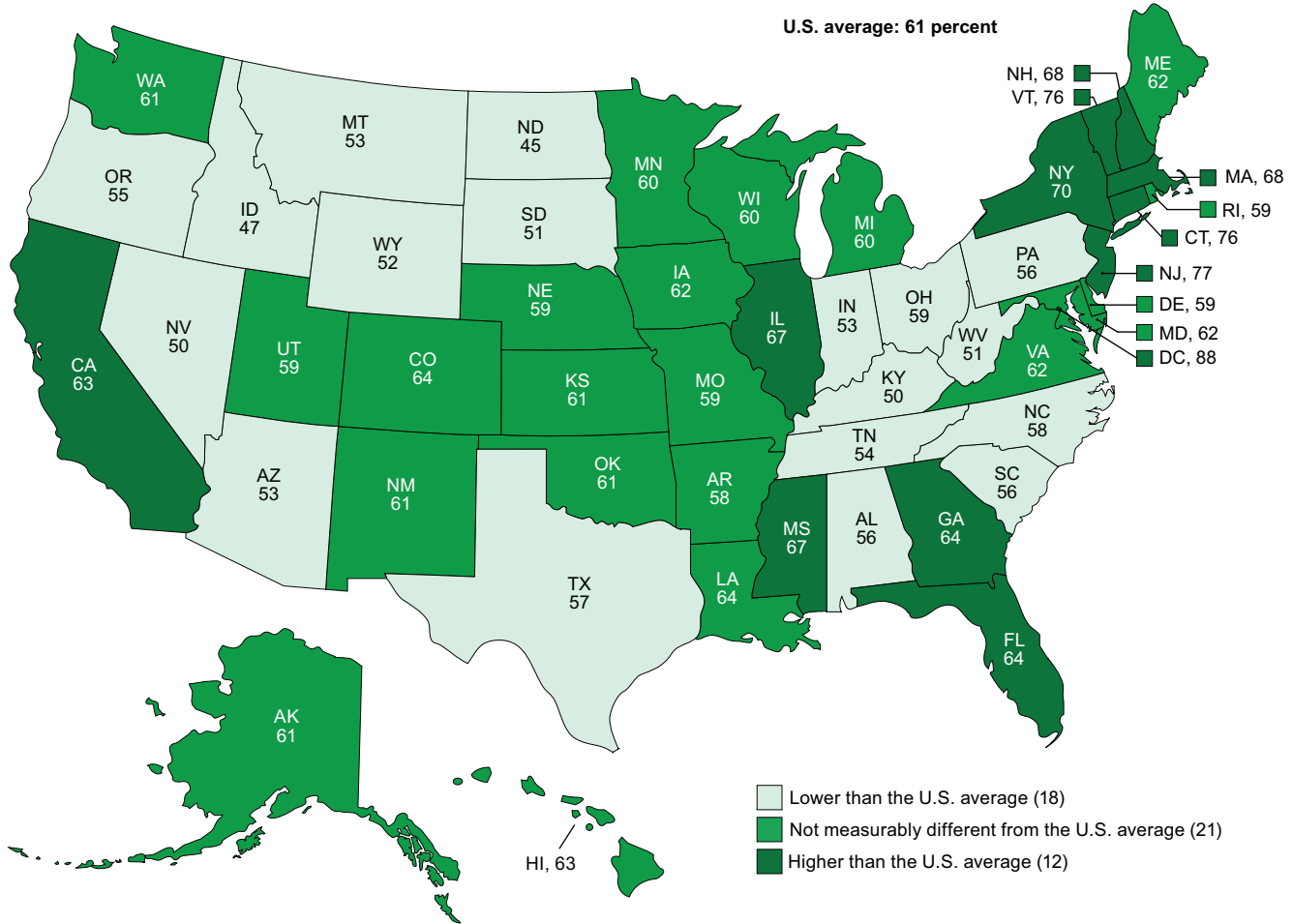


NOTE: Includes only children who are related to the householder by birth, marriage, or adoption. The householder is the person (or one of the people) who owns or rents (maintains) the housing unit. Children are considered to be in poverty if their family income falls below the Census Bureau’s poverty threshold, which is a dollar amount that varies depending on a family’s size and composition and is updated annually to account for inflation. For example, the poverty threshold for a family of four with two children was \$25,926 in 2019. Respondents were interviewed throughout the year and reported on the income they received during the previous 12 months. Poverty status cannot be determined for unrelated children (e.g., foster children) because their family income is not known.  
 SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 2019. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2020*, table 202.20.

Enrollment rates varied by poverty status in 2019. Specifically, the enrollment rate was higher for 3- to 4-year-olds with family incomes that were greater than 185 percent of the poverty threshold (54 percent) than for those with family incomes between 100 and 185 percent of the poverty threshold (41 percent) or below the poverty threshold (42 percent).<sup>6</sup> The same pattern can be observed for 5-year-olds, though the differences in enrollment rates

by poverty status were smaller among 5-year-olds than among 3- to 4-year-olds. Specifically, the enrollment rate was 88 percent for 5-year-olds with family incomes that were greater than 185 percent of the poverty threshold, compared with 84 percent for those with family incomes between 100 and 185 percent of the poverty threshold and 82 percent for those with family incomes below the poverty threshold.

**Figure 6. Percentage of 3- to 5-year-olds enrolled in school, by state and comparison with the national average: 2019**



NOTE: Data are based on sample surveys of the entire population residing within the United States, including those living in group quarters (e.g., shelters, healthcare facilities, or correctional facilities).  
 SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 2019. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2020*, table 202.25.

While the national average enrollment rate for 3- to 5-year-olds was 61 percent in 2019, the rates ranged from 45 percent in North Dakota to 88 percent in the District of Columbia. Eighteen states had enrollment rates for 3- to 5-year-olds that were lower than the national average,

11 states and the District of Columbia had rates that were higher than the national average, and 21 states had rates that were not measurably different from the national average.

**Endnotes:**

<sup>1</sup> Cannon, J.S., Kilburn, M.R., Karoly, L.A., Mattox, T., Muchow, A.N., and Buenaventura, M. (2017). *Investing Early: Taking Stock of Outcomes and Economic Returns From Early Childhood Programs*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation. Retrieved December 8, 2020, from [https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR1993.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1993.html).

<sup>2</sup> Children in private homes in which essentially custodial care is provided are not considered to be enrolled in school.

<sup>3</sup> Analyses by race/ethnicity exclude respondents who wrote in some other race that was not included as an option on the questionnaire.

<sup>4</sup> Refers to the highest education level of any parent residing with the child (including an adoptive or stepparent, excluding a foster parent). Analyses by parents' educational attainment include only children who resided with at least one of their parents.

<sup>5</sup> High school completion includes parents who completed high school through equivalency programs, such as a GED program.

<sup>6</sup> Children are considered to be in poverty if their family income falls below the Census Bureau's poverty threshold, which is a dollar amount that varies depending on a family's size and composition and is updated annually to account for inflation. For example, the poverty threshold for a family of four with two children was \$25,926 in 2019. In this indicator, 185 percent is presented as a threshold because it is the guideline for reduced-price lunch; children with family incomes that are greater than 185 percent of the Federal income poverty guidelines are not eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (see <https://www.fns.usda.gov/cnp/fr-032019> for detailed information about Income Eligibility Guidelines).

**Reference tables:** *Digest of Education Statistics 2020*, tables 202.20 and 202.25

**Related indicators and resources:** [Early Childcare and Education Arrangements](#) [*Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Groups*]; [Early Childhood Care Arrangements: Choices and Costs](#) [*The Condition of Education 2018 Spotlight*]; [Kindergarten Entry Status: On-Time, Delayed-Entry, and Repeating Kindergartners](#) [*The Condition of Education 2013 Spotlight*]; [Kindergartners' Approaches to Learning Behaviors and Academic Outcomes](#) [*The Condition of Education 2015 Spotlight*]; [Kindergartners' Approaches to Learning, Family Socioeconomic Status, and Early Academic Gains](#) [*The Condition of Education 2016 Spotlight*]; [Private School Enrollment](#); [Public School Enrollment](#); [Risk Factors and Academic Outcomes in Kindergarten Through Third Grade](#) [*The Condition of Education 2017 Spotlight*]

**Glossary:** Associate's degree; Bachelor's degree; College; Educational attainment (Current Population Survey); Enrollment; High school completer; Household; Preschool; Racial/ethnic group