

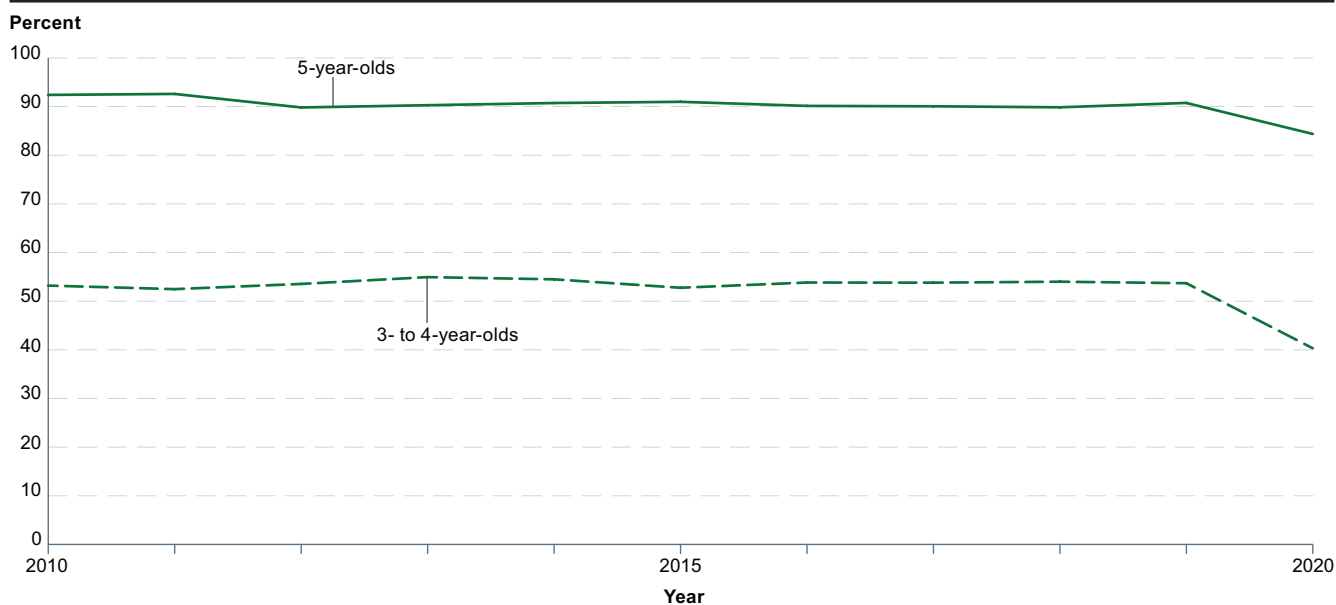
Enrollment Rates of Young Children

Between 2019 and 2020, the enrollment rate for 3- to 4-year-olds decreased 13 percentage points to 40 percent and the rate for 5-year-olds decreased 6 percentage points to 84 percent.

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.¹ 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 using 2020 data from the Current Population Survey (CPS), October Supplement. 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. Using 2019 data from the American Community Survey (ACS), this indicator also presents the enrollment rates for 3- to 5-year-olds by state.²

Figure 1. Percentage of 3- to 5-year-olds enrolled in school, by age group: 2010 through 2020



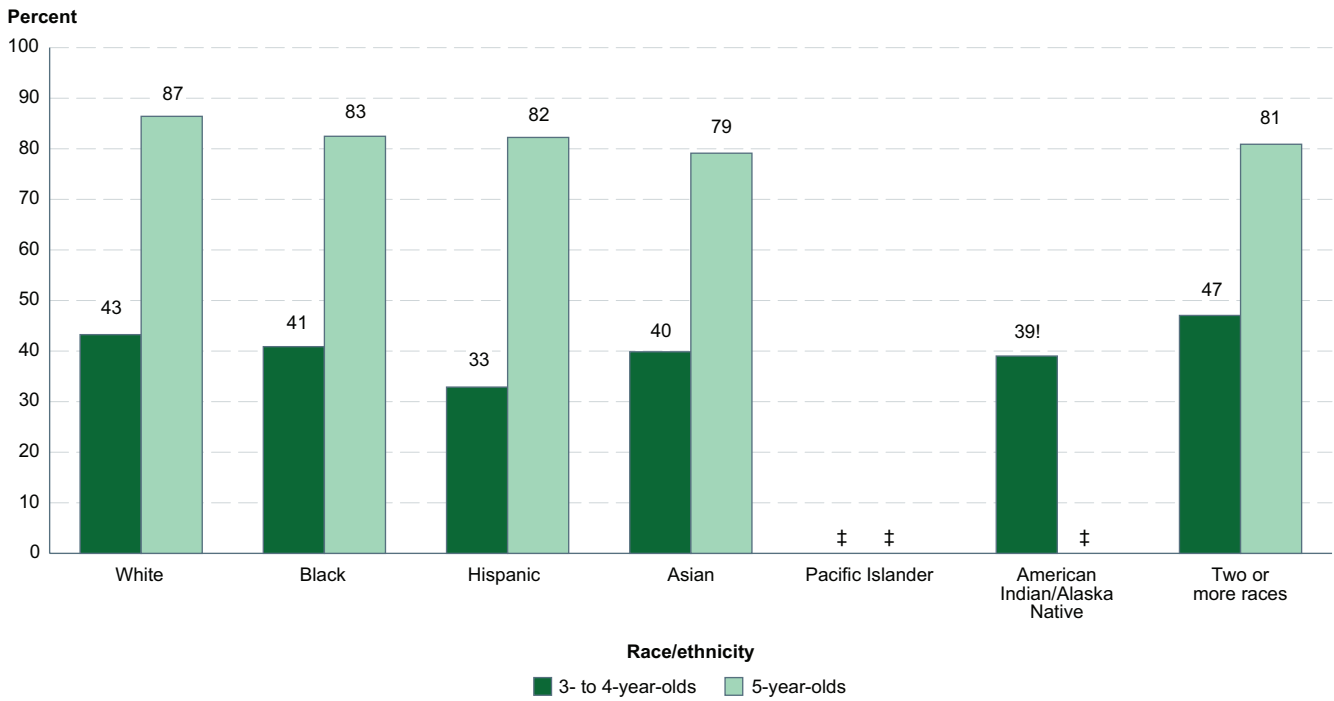
NOTE: Data exclude children living in institutions.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, Current Population Survey (CPS), October, 2010 through 2020. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2021*, table 202.20.

In 2020, about 55 percent of 3- to 5-year-olds were enrolled in school overall. The enrollment rate was higher for 5-year-olds than for 3- to 4-year-olds (84 vs. 40 percent).³ For both age groups, enrollment rates were lower than they had been in 2019, prior to the coronavirus pandemic. From 2019 to 2020, enrollment rates for 5-year-olds fell 6 percentage points (from 91 to 84 percent), while enrollment rates for 3- to 4-year-

olds fell 13 percentage points (from 54 to 40 percent). In comparison, there was no measurable difference in enrollment rates for either age group in 2019 compared with 2010.⁴ Enrollment drops during the coronavirus pandemic were also observed in other NCES surveys (see indicators [Public School Enrollment](#) and [Racial/Ethnic Enrollment in Public Schools](#)).

Figure 2. Percentage of 3- to 4-year-olds and 5-year-olds enrolled in school, by race/ethnicity: 2020



! Interpret data with caution. The coefficient of variation (CV) for this estimate is between 30 and 50 percent.

‡ Reporting standards not met. Either there are too few cases for a reliable estimate or the coefficient of variation (CV) is 50 percent or greater.

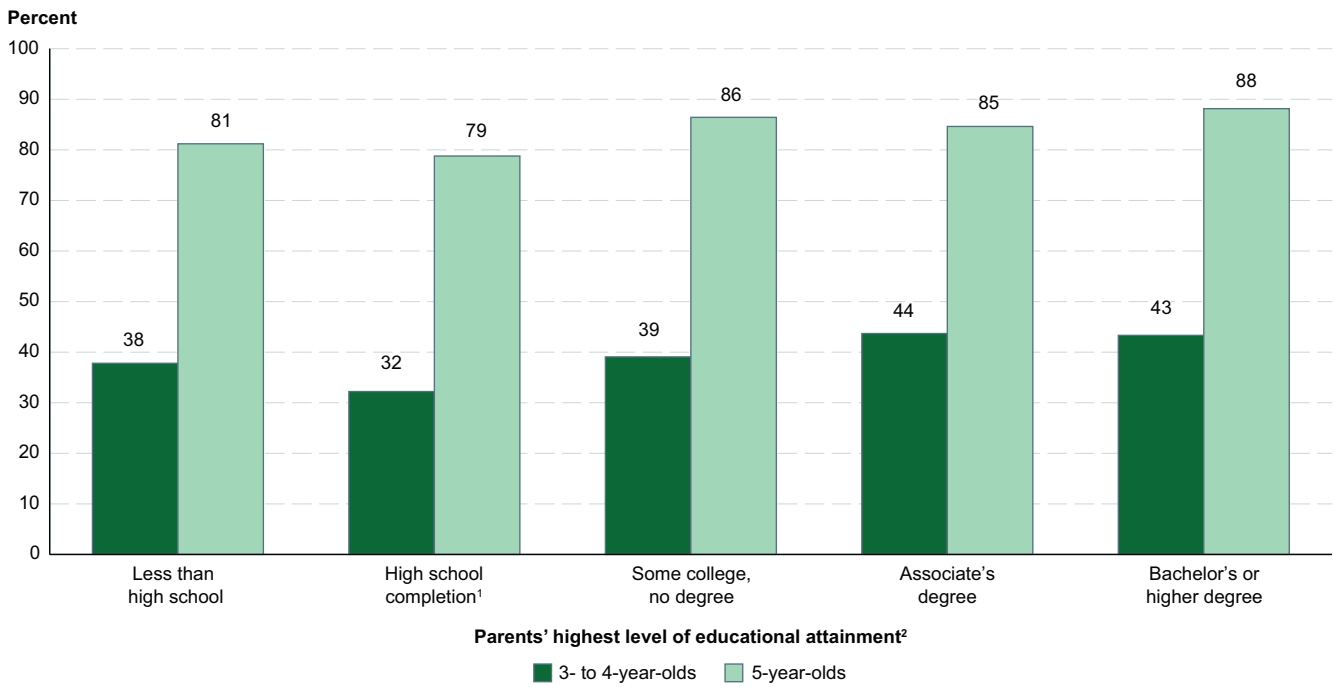
NOTE: Data exclude children living in institutions. Race categories exclude persons of Hispanic ethnicity.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, Current Population Survey (CPS), October, 2020. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2021*, table 202.20.

Overall, there were few measurable differences in enrollment rates of young children by racial/ethnic group or by sex in 2020. The 2020 enrollment rates were higher for 3- to 4-year-olds who were of Two or more races (47 percent) and White (43 percent) than for those who were Hispanic (33 percent). However, the enrollment rates

for 3- to 4-year-olds did not vary across other racial/ethnic groups.⁵ Additionally, the enrollment rates for 5-year-olds did not measurably differ across racial/ethnic groups.⁶ In 2020, enrollment rates did not measurably differ by sex for either 3- to 4-year-olds or 5-year-olds (not shown in the figure).

Figure 3. Percentage of 3- to 4-year-olds and 5-year-olds enrolled in school, by parents' highest level of educational attainment: 2020



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

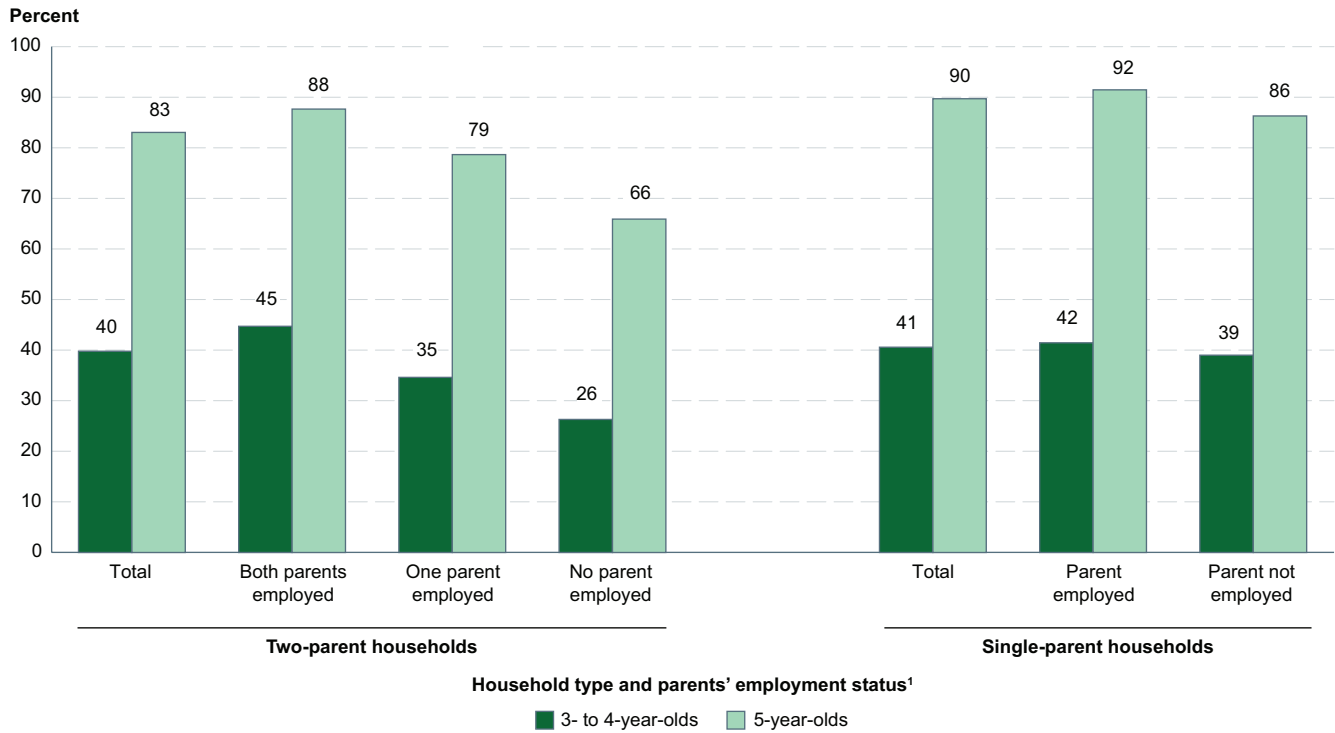
² Highest education level of any parent residing with the child (including an adoptive or stepparent, excluding a foster parent).

NOTE: Data exclude children living in institutions. This figure includes only children who resided with at least one of their parents (including an adoptive or stepparent).
 SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, Current Population Survey (CPS), October, 2020. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2021*, table 202.20.

There were also few measurable differences in enrollment rates of young children by parental education. The enrollment rates were higher for 3- to 4-year-olds whose parents had an associate's degree (44 percent) or a bachelor's or higher degree (43 percent) than for those whose parents had completed high school (32 percent).⁷ Although enrollment rates had been higher for 3- to 4-year-

olds whose parents had a bachelor's or higher degree than for those whose parents had an associate's degree in every year from 2010 to 2019, there was no measurable difference between these groups in 2020. For 5-year-olds, enrollment rates ranged from 79 percent for those whose parents had a high school credential to 88 percent for those whose parents had a bachelor's or higher degree.

Figure 4. Percentage of 3- to 4-year-olds and 5-year-olds enrolled in school, by household type and parents' employment status: 2020

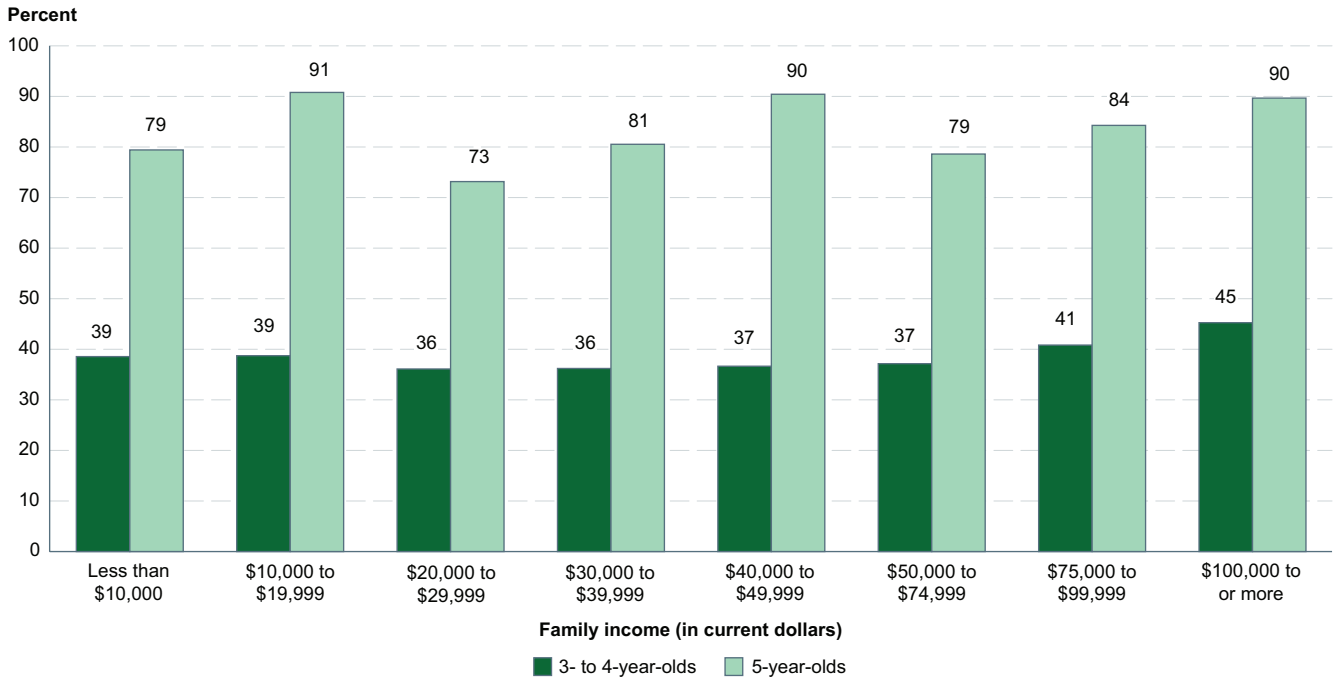


¹ Children in two-parent households resided with two parents, while those in single-parent households resided with only one parent.
 NOTE: Data exclude children living in institutions. This figure includes only children who resided with at least one of their parents (including an adoptive or stepparent).
 SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, Current Population Survey (CPS), October, 2020. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2021*, table 202.20.

In 2020, the enrollment rate for 3- to 4-year-olds in two-parent households was not measurably different from the corresponding rate for those in single-parent households (40 vs. 41 percent). For 5-year-olds, by comparison, the enrollment rate was lower for those in two-parent households than for those in single-parent households (83 vs. 90 percent). Considering the enrollment rates of children with similar family structures more closely, enrollment rates differed by parents' employment status.

For 3- to 4-year-olds in two-parent households, the rate was higher when both parents were employed (45 percent) than when only one parent was employed (35 percent) or when neither parent was employed (26 percent). Similarly, the enrollment rate for 5-year-olds in two-parent households was 88 percent for those with both parents employed, compared with 79 percent for those with only one parent employed and 66 percent for those with neither parent employed.

Figure 5. Percentage of 3- to 4-year-olds and 5-year-olds enrolled in school, by family income: 2020



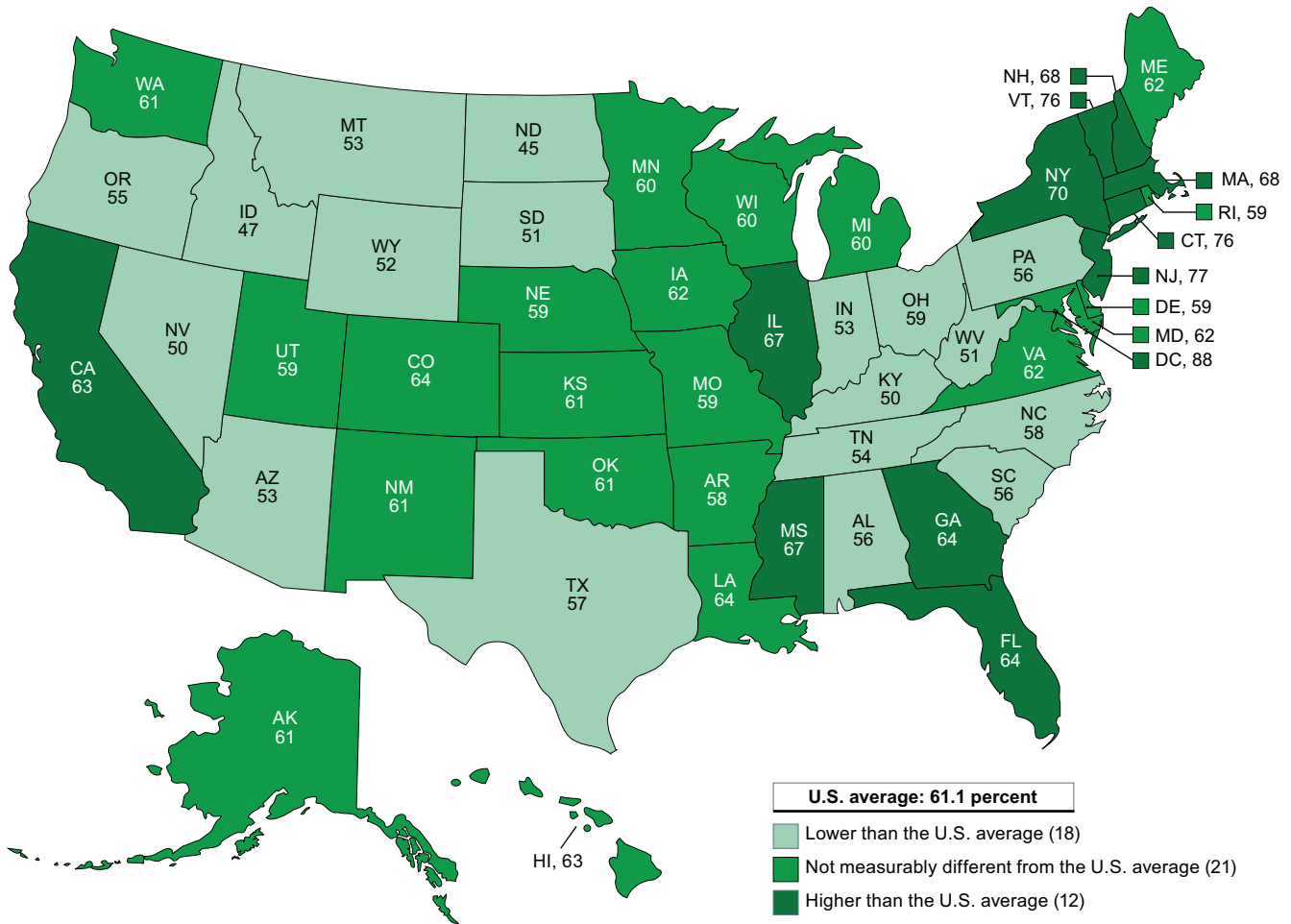
NOTE: Data exclude children living in institutions. Current dollars have not been adjusted to compensate for inflation. Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded data.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, Current Population Survey (CPS), October, 2020. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2021*, table 202.20.

There were few measurable differences in enrollment rates of young children by family income in 2020. Among 3- to 4-year-olds, the enrollment rate was higher for children in households with an annual family income exceeding \$100,000 (45 percent) than for those in

households that earned \$20,000 to \$29,999 (36 percent), \$40,000 to \$49,999 (37 percent), and \$50,000 to \$74,999 (37 percent).⁸ Among 5-year-olds, there was no consistent pattern in enrollments rates as household income increased.

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.

State-level data for this indicator come from the 2019 ACS. These data show that enrollment rates for 3- to 5-year-olds⁹ ranged from 45 percent in North Dakota to 88 percent in the District of Columbia in 2019. Eighteen states had enrollment rates for 3- to 5-year-olds that were lower than

the national average of 61 percent, 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:

¹ 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 March 1, 2022, from https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1993.html.

² Due to the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on response rates and survey administration, the Census Bureau changed the 2020 American Community Survey (ACS) release status to an experimental data product, meaning that it does not meet the Census Bureau's typical quality standards. Due to limitations of comparability over time for the experimental data product, NCES is presenting 2019 data that are comparable with prior years. For more information see https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/working-papers/2021/acs/2021_CensusBureau_01.pdf.

³ As of 2017, there were 47 states—plus the District of Columbia—that required that free education be offered by age 5; however,

schooling was only compulsory for 5-year-olds in 10 states and the District of Columbia (see [Compulsory school attendance laws, minimum and maximum age limits for required free education, by state: 2017](#)).

⁴ For historical data on enrollment rates for 3- to 4-year-olds and 5-year-olds, see *Digest of Education Statistics 2019, table 202.10*.

⁵ The enrollment rate for Pacific Islander 3- to 4-year-olds did not meet reporting standards in 2020.

⁶ The enrollment rates for Pacific Islander and American Indian/Alaska Native 5-year-olds did not meet reporting standards in 2020.

⁷ High school completion includes parents who completed high school through equivalency programs, such as a GED program.

⁸ In current dollars, which have not been adjusted to compensate for inflation.

⁹ Children who were reported to have attended school in the 3 months preceding the survey are considered to be enrolled in school in the ACS.

Reference tables: *Digest of Education Statistics 2021*, table 202.20; *Digest of Education Statistics 2020*, table 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