Germino-Hausken, E., Walston, J., & Rathbun, A. H. (2004). Kindergarten teachers: Public and private school teachers of the kindergarten class of 1998-99 [Executive summary] (NCES 2004-060). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics.

Executive Summary

Kindergarten is an important transition year for young children. Kindergarten classroom activities typically cover many of the language arts and mathematics concepts and skills that provide important foundations for learning throughout the elementary school years. Kindergarten teachers play an important role in children's kindergarten experiences. The importance of quality teachers in students' educational experiences has been highlighted with the passage of the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB, P.L. 107-110). The Act requires that schools have a highly qualified teacher in every classroom by the 2005–06 school year.

This report examines aspects of the kindergarten experience through a national profile of teachers of the kindergarten class of 1998–99 in the United States. It presents data collected from questionnaires completed by 3,102 kindergarten teachers participating in the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Class of 1998–99 (ECLS–K). It describes the demographic characteristics and professional qualifications of kindergarten teachers in both public and private school kindergartens. Moreover, the report examines data on the schools and classrooms where they teach. The study's sample of kindergarten teachers represents all of the nation's kindergarten teachers from public and private schools that have kindergarten programs. All differences cited in this report are significant at the 0.05 level.

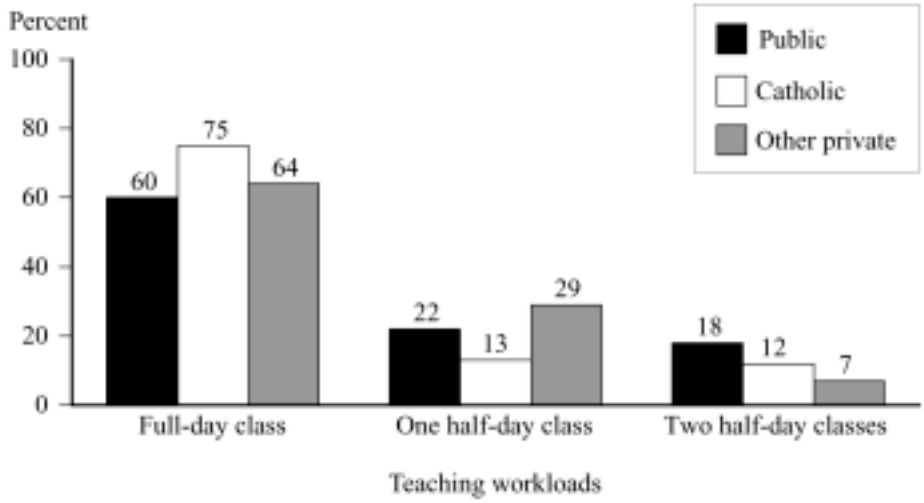
School Sector and Teaching Workload

In the fall of 1998, over 190,000 teachers were teaching in public and private school kindergarten programs. Approximately 80 percent worked in public[1] schools and about 20 percent worked in private schools, with 5 percent teaching in Catholic schools and 15 percent teaching in a diverse group of private schools such as those affiliated with non-Catholic religious organizations and non-religious school associations, and those not affiliated with any association. Overall, about 61 percent of all kindergarten teachers taught a full-day class, 22 percent reported they taught one half-day kindergarten class, and 16 percent reported they taught two half-day kindergarten classes. Figure A shows the same data disaggregated by school sector. A higher proportion of kindergarten teachers in Catholic schools taught a full-day

[1] The public schools in this report include regular public schools, special purpose schools such as magnet schools and special education schools, charter schools, Bureau of Indian Affairs or tribal schools, and schools that enroll preschoolers, kindergartners, and early elementary grade students.

kindergarten class (75 percent) compared with the proportion of their peers in public schools (60 percent) (figure A).

Figure A. Percent of kindergarten teachers with different teaching workloads, by school sector: Fall 1998



SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Class of 1998–99 (ECLS–K), "Teacher Questionnaires," fall 1998, Restricted-Use Data File.

Demographics

The demographic profile of kindergarten teachers in the fall of 1998 was very similar to that of all elementary school teachers in the 1999–2000 school year (U.S. Department of Education forthcoming). The majority of kindergarten teachers in the fall of 1998 were female (98 percent) and White, non-Hispanic (84 percent), and had completed at least a bachelor's degree (98 percent). Their average age was 41.

Kindergarten teachers were more likely to teach in classrooms with high concentrations of children of the same racial/ethnic backgrounds as themselves (table A). Fifty-five percent of White teachers were working in classrooms where 75 percent or more of the children were also

White. Sixty percent of Black teachers taught in classrooms where 75 percent or higher of the enrolled children were Black and 61 percent of Hispanic teachers taught in classrooms where 75 percent or more of the children were Hispanic.[2]

Many kindergarten teachers of racial/ethnic minority backgrounds worked in classrooms with high concentrations of minority children. Seventy-three percent of Black, non-Hispanic teachers, 76 percent of Hispanic teachers, and 62 percent of teachers of other minority races reported teaching in classrooms with enrollments of 75 percent or higher minority children compared with 15 percent of White, non-Hispanic kindergarten teachers. Moreover, racial/ethnic minority teachers were more likely to have taught in classrooms with high concentrations of children of the same racial/ethnic backgrounds as themselves than were teachers of majority racial/ethnic backgrounds (table A).

Table A. Percent of kindergarten teachers in classrooms with 75 percent or higher concentrations of a racial/ethnic group enrolled, by teacher race/ethnicity: Fall 1998

Racial/ethnic classroom enrollment	Teacher race/ethnicity			
	White, non-Hispanic	Black, non-Hispanic	Hispanic	Other, non-Hispanic
75 percent or higher White children in classroom	55	5	6	6
75 percent or higher Black children in classroom	4	60	4	4
75 percent or higher Hispanic children in classroom	3	3	61	5

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Class of 1998–99 (ECLS–K), "Teacher Questionnaires," fall 1998, Restricted-Use Data File.

[2] "White" and "Black" are used interchangeably with "White, non-Hispanic" and "Black, non-Hispanic," respectively, throughout this report.

The racial/ethnic distribution of public school kindergarten teachers differed by the level of poverty of the school. Higher poverty schools, in which 50 percent or more of the students were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, were compared with lower poverty schools, schools in which 0 through 49 percent of the students were eligible for subsidized meals.[3] A smaller percentage of public school kindergarten teachers in higher poverty schools were White (79 percent) compared with those in lower poverty schools (91 percent). A larger percentage of public school kindergarten teachers in higher poverty schools were Black (9 percent) and Hispanic (9 percent) compared with teachers in lower poverty schools (3 and 4 percent, respectively).

Education

In the fall of 1998, almost all (98 percent) of the nation's kindergarten teachers had at least a bachelor's degree and many had earned advanced degrees. Two percent of kindergarten teachers reported not having a bachelor's degree (table B). The highest concentration of kindergarten teachers without a bachelor's degree taught in non-Catholic private schools (13 percent). More public school kindergarten teachers reported having earned a master's degree as their highest degree (32 percent), compared with Catholic school kindergarten teachers (18 percent) and other private school kindergarten teachers (19 percent).

Table B. Percentage distribution of kindergarten teachers according to highest degree earned, by school sector: Fall 1998

School characteristic	Less than a bachelor's degree	Bachelor's degree	Master's degree	Education specialist/ doctoral degree
All kindergarten teachers	2	63	29	6
School sector				
Public school	#	62	32	7
Catholic school	3	77	18	2
Other private school	13	64	19	4

Rounds to zero.

NOTE: Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Class of 1998–99 (ECLS–K), "Teacher Questionnaires," fall 1998, Restricted-Use Data File.

[3] The school poverty analysis was restricted to public schools.

Certification

In fall 1998, most kindergarten teachers (84 percent) were fully certified, as opposed to holding a temporary, probationary, provisional, or other alternative type of certificate (12 percent).[4] Three percent reported having no certificate. However, the proportion of kindergarten teachers who were fully certified varied by the following school and teacher characteristics:

- A smaller percentage of kindergarten teachers in classrooms with 75 percent or higher minority children were fully certified (77 percent) compared with teachers in classrooms with less than 50 percent minority enrollments (86 to 87 percent).
- A smaller percentage of kindergarten teachers in large city schools were fully certified (75 percent) compared with teachers in schools in other locations (86 to 88 percent).
- Eighty-nine percent of public school kindergarten teachers were fully certified compared with 71 percent of Catholic school kindergarten teachers and 63 percent of other private school kindergarten teachers. This reflects the fact that not all private schools require teachers to have a teaching certificate.

A goal of teacher preparation programs is to enable future kindergarten teachers to earn teaching certificates in either elementary education or early childhood education, or both, as well as a postsecondary degree. Almost all kindergarten teachers (95 percent) held a teaching certificate in either early childhood education or elementary education or both regardless of level of certification.

Experience

On average, the typical kindergarten teacher in fall 1998 had been teaching kindergarten for about 8 years. Kindergarten teachers in public schools had, on average, more years of experience teaching kindergarten (8.5 years) than did teachers in non-Catholic private schools (6.0 years). More teachers in non-Catholic private schools had less than 3 years of experience teaching kindergarten (43 percent), compared with the teachers in public schools (28 percent).

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[4]In this report, teachers with regular or standard state certificates and those with advanced professional certificates were grouped together as "fully certified" because the sample size for those with advanced professional certificates was too small to be analyzed as a separate group. In the group of those with other types of certification, 2 percent had completed an alternative certification program (too small a group for analyses). The new Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) initiatives in the area of alternative certification were authorized into law after these data were collected.

Similar to what has been found in other studies of elementary school teachers (e.g., Henke et al. 2000), the average number of years teaching kindergarten was less for teachers in classrooms with the highest concentration of minority children (75 percent or higher) than for those in classrooms with lower concentrations of minority children (less than 50 percent). Teachers in classrooms with 75 percent or higher minority enrollment had an average of 6.8 years of experience teaching kindergarten, fewer years of experience than those teaching in classrooms with less than 10 percent minority classroom enrollment (9.0 years), or between 10 and 24 percent minority classroom enrollment (8.6 years), or between 25 and 49 percent minority classroom enrollment (8.7 years).

The kindergarten teaching experience of public school kindergarten teachers differed depending on whether they taught in higher poverty schools (schools where 50 percent or more of the school's total enrollment were eligible for free or reduced-priced lunch) or in lower poverty schools (schools where less than 50 percent of the students were eligible). Kindergarten teachers in higher poverty public schools were more likely to have less than 3 years of experience teaching kindergarten (31 percent) than were those in lower poverty public schools (24 percent). Twenty-two percent of teachers in higher poverty schools had 10 to 19 years of experience teaching kindergarten compared with 27 percent of teachers in lower poverty schools. While kindergarten teachers in higher poverty public schools had fewer average number of years of experience teaching kindergarten compared with those teaching in lower poverty public schools, no statistically significant differences were detected in the certification and education background of kindergarten teachers in higher and lower poverty schools.

Summary

This report provides a description of the demographic and professional characteristics of kindergarten teachers in the nation. Kindergarten teachers are not as demographically diverse as the children they teach. They are mostly female and White. Although most kindergarten teachers were fully certified in the fall of 1998 and had at least a bachelor's degree, some differences existed depending on school sector, school location, the poverty level of the student population, and the concentration of minority children in the classroom.