



Characteristics of Migrant and Seasonal Head Start Children and Families

Select Findings from the Migrant and Seasonal Head Start Study 2017

Introduction

This brief presents select characteristics of children and families served by Migrant and Seasonal Head Start (MSHS) programs (see Box 1) using data from the MSHS Study 2017 (see Box 2).

This brief highlights child and family characteristics such as race/ethnicity, nativity status, household composition, and language skills. This information may help Head Start better tailor services to the needs of MSHS children and their families and work collaboratively with MSHS programs around continuous program improvement. Understanding the characteristics of children and families participating in MSHS may also inform program decisions related to family needs, strengths, and resources as well as children's developmental contexts. This information may be important for MSHS programs to consider as they identify the best ways to serve their communities. For more information about the characteristics of MSHS children and families, see the [MSHS Study 2017: Data Tables](#).

Box 1: About Migrant and Seasonal Head Start

Migrant and Seasonal Head Start (MSHS) programs provide child development, family support, and family engagement services to young children and their migrant and seasonal farmworker families.

Migrant farmworker families are those families engaged in agricultural labor that have changed their residence from one geographic location to another in the preceding two-year period. Seasonal farmworker families are those families engaged primarily in seasonal agricultural labor that have not changed their residence to another geographic location in the preceding two-year period.

Just like other Head Start programs, MSHS programs offer access to medical and dental care, nutritional services, mental health services, and other community resources. MSHS programs are designed to meet the unique needs of migrant and seasonally working families. MSHS programs usually provide bilingual services and sometimes operate in non-standard hours or in varying locations throughout the agricultural season. MSHS programs offer services to children from birth until they reach the age of mandatory school attendance.

MSHS programs operate in 38 states and are administered by the Regional Office for Migrant and Seasonal Head Start (Region XII), located in Washington, D.C., within the Office of Head Start, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health & Human Services.



Box 2: About the Migrant and Seasonal Head Start Study 2017

The Migrant and Seasonal Head Start (MSHS) Study provides a national picture of MSHS programs, centers, families, and children.

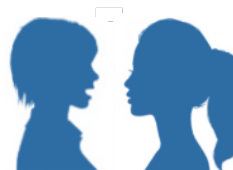
The MSHS Study was designed through extensive engagement and input from the MSHS community to better understand:

- characteristics of MSHS programs, centers, staff, families, and children;
- services that MSHS provides;
- instructional practices in MSHS classrooms; and
- MSHS supports for child, parent, and family well-being.

This brief highlights selected MSHS Study 2017 findings collected from:



Surveys of program directors

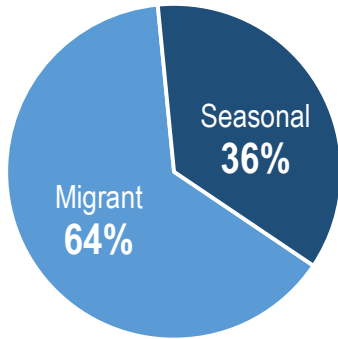


Interviews with parents



For additional findings see the [MSHS Study 2017 Data Tables](#).

Who are the children served by MSHS programs?

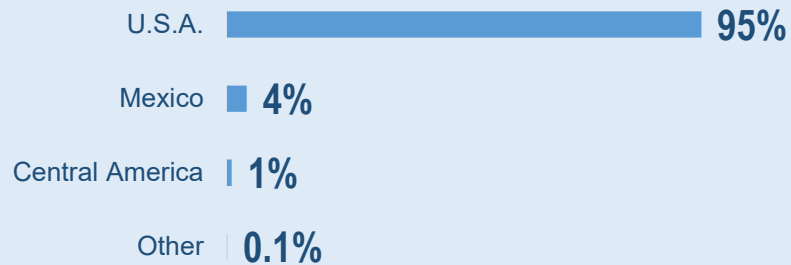


On average, more than one-third (36%) of children in MSHS centers are from **seasonal farmworker families** and less than two-thirds (64%) of children in MSHS centers are from **migrant farmworker families**.

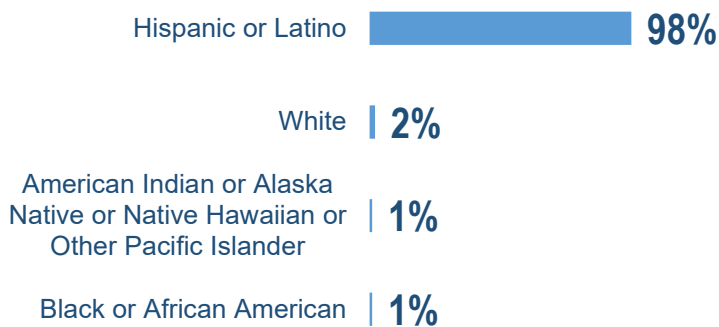
Source: MSHS Center Director Survey, Table D.11.
 Note: Statistics are weighted to represent all MSHS center directors in 2017.

Nearly all (95%) of MSHS children were born in the United States.

Few children are born in Mexico or Central America (5%) or are born elsewhere (0.1%).



Source: MSHS Parent Survey, Table G.1.
 Note: Statistics are weighted to represent all MSHS children in 2017.



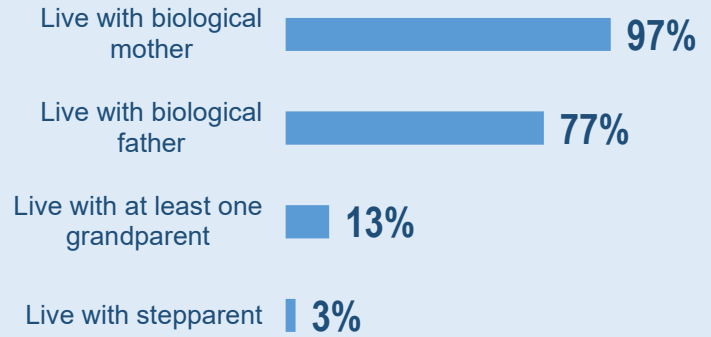
Nearly all (98%) MSHS children are **Hispanic or Latino**.

Few children are White (2%), American Indian or Alaska Native or Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander (1%), or Black or African American (1%).

Source: MSHS Parent Survey, Table G.1.
 Note: Statistics are weighted to represent all MSHS children in 2017. These percentages may not add up to 100 because parents could mark one or more race/ethnicity.

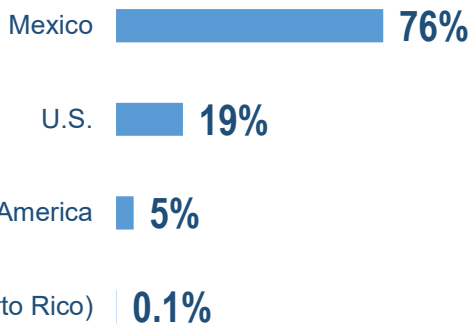
Nearly all (97%) of MSHS children **live with their biological mother**, and more than three-quarters (77%) **live with their biological father**.

Some (13%) children live with at least one grandparent, and few (3%) live with a stepparent.



Source: MSHS Parent Survey, Table G.2.
Note: Statistics are weighted to represent all MSHS children in 2017.

Who are the parents served by MSHS programs?



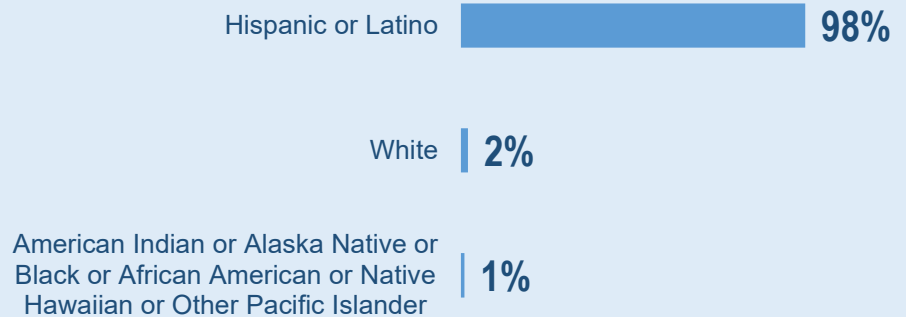
More than three-quarters (76%) of MSHS parents were **born in Mexico**. Nearly one-fifth (19%) were **born in the United States**.

Few parents were born in Central America (5%) or elsewhere (0.1%).

Source: MSHS Parent Survey, Table G.2.
Note: Statistics are weighted to represent all parents of MSHS children in 2017.

Nearly all (98%) MSHS parents are **Hispanic or Latino**.

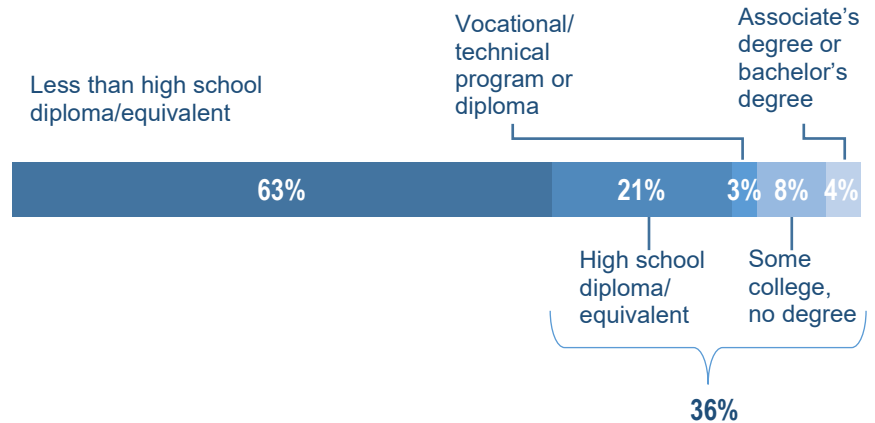
Few (3%) parents indicated that they identified as White or another race or ethnicity.



Source: MSHS Parent Survey, Table G.2.
Note: Statistics are weighted to represent all parents of MSHS children in 2017.

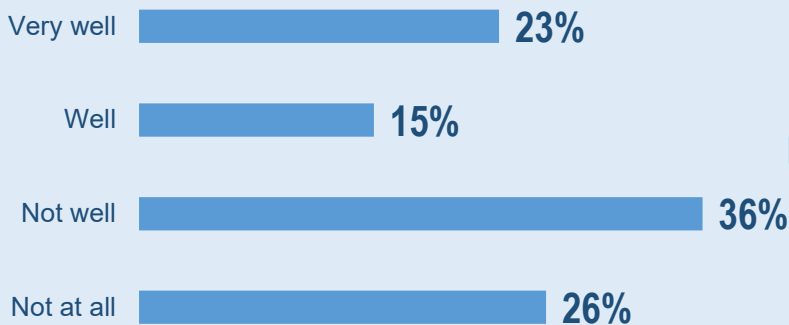
More than one-third (36%) of MSHS parents have at least a high school diploma or equivalent.

- Over one-fifth (21%) of parents have a high school diploma or equivalent.
- Few (3%) parents have attended a vocational or technical program or received their vocational/technical diploma.
- Few (8%) parents completed some college but did not receive a degree. Even fewer (4%) parents have an associate's degree, bachelor's degree, or completed some graduate school without a degree. No parents reported having a graduate school degree.



Source: MSHS Parent Survey, Table G.2.

Note: Statistics are weighted to represent all parents of MSHS children in 2017.



Nearly one-quarter (23%) of MSHS parents **speak English very well**, and 15% **speak English well**.

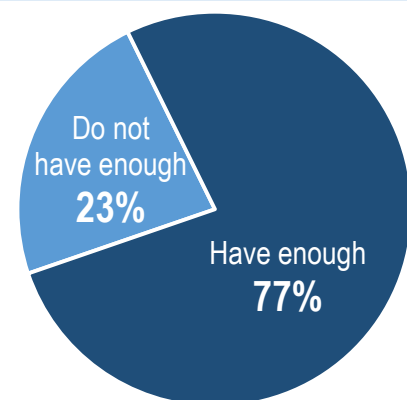
Over one-third (36%) of parents do not speak English well, and over one-quarter (26%) do not speak any English.

Source: MSHS Parent Survey, Table G.3.

Note: Statistics are weighted to represent all parents of MSHS children in 2017.

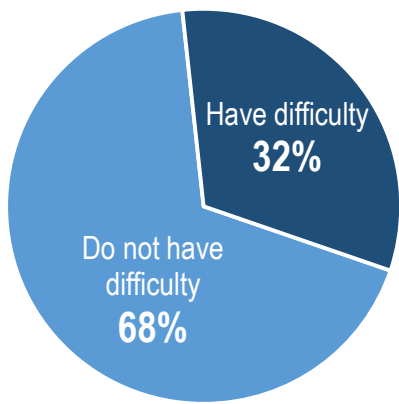
More than three-quarters (77%) of **parents of MSHS children** report that they have enough money each month to make ends meet.

Less than one-quarter (23%) of parents report they do not have enough money each month to make ends meet.



Source: MSHS Parent Survey, Table G.7.

Note: Statistics are weighted to represent all parents of MSHS children in 2017.



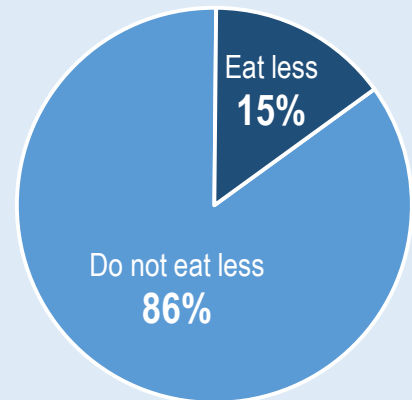
Source: MSHS Parent Survey, Table G.7.
 Note: Statistics are weighted to represent all parents of MSHS children in 2017.

About two-thirds (68%) of MSHS parents report that they have no **difficulty paying their bills each month.**

Less than one-third (32%) of parents report that they have difficulty paying their bills each month.

Most (86%) MSHS parents **do not report eating less than they feel they should because there isn't enough money to buy food.**

Few (15%) parents report eating less than they feel they should because there isn't enough money to buy food.



Source: MSHS Parent Survey, Table G.7.
 Note: Statistics are weighted to represent all parents of MSHS children in 2017. Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

Summary

This brief highlights descriptive findings from the MSHS Study 2017. It presents select characteristics of children and families in MSHS programs. Overall, this portrait underscores the diverse population served by MSHS. This national picture of MSHS (Region XII) provides information that Head Start may consider when setting and tailoring goals for the program. For more extensive information about other child and family characteristics such as information about family history, household composition, and family economic security, read the [MSHS Study 2017 Data Tables](#). For more information about MSHS parents' health and well-being, read the brief [Migrant and Seasonal Head Start Parents' Well-Being](#).

References

- Caswell, L., Bumgarner, E., Barrueco, S., López, M., Wolf, A., & Layzer, C. (2019). [Migrant and Seasonal Head Start Study 2017: Data Tables](#), OPRE Report #2019-66. Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.
- Gatewood, K. (2019). [Migrant and Seasonal Head Start Parents' Well-Being](#). OPRE Report #2019-101. Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.



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This brief relies on data collected and analyzed as part of the 2017 MSHS Study conducted by Abt Associates working with Catholic University of America and Westat. The ACF Project Officer is Wendy DeCoursey. For additional information visit: <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/research/project/migrant-and-seasonal-head-start-study>

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