



Highlights of [GAO-06-807](#), a report to congressional requesters

# CHILD CARE AND EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

## More Information Sharing and Program Review by HHS Could Enhance Access for Families with Limited English Proficiency

### Why GAO Did This Study

Questions have been raised about whether parents with limited English proficiency are having difficulty accessing child care and early education programs for their children. Research suggests that quality early care experiences can greatly improve the school readiness of young children. GAO was asked to provide information on (1) the participation of these children in programs funded through the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) and Head Start, (2) the challenges these families face in accessing programs, (3) assistance that selected state and local entities provide to them, and (4) actions taken by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to ensure program access. To obtain this information, GAO analyzed program and national survey data, interviewed officials in 5 states and 11 counties, held 12 focus groups with mothers with limited English proficiency, and interviewed experts and HHS officials.

### What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that HHS help states explore cost-effective ways of collecting data on the primary language of CCDF subsidy recipients and that HHS develop means of reviewing how states provide access to CCDF subsidies. In comments, HHS generally agreed with our recommendations and provided additional information on its actions and plans to implement them.

[www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-06-807](http://www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-06-807).

To view the full product, click on the link above. Translated report summaries are available in selected languages at <http://www.gao.gov/translations/childcare.html> For more information, contact Cornelia Ashby at (202) 512-7215 or [ashbyc@gao.gov](mailto:ashbyc@gao.gov).

### What GAO Found

HHS's Child Care Bureau (CCB) did not have information on the total enrollment in CCDF programs of children whose parents had limited English proficiency, but data collected by its Office of Head Start in 2003 showed that about 13 percent of parents whose children were in Head Start reported having limited English proficiency. The most recent (1998) national survey data showed that children of parents with limited English proficiency were less likely than other children to receive financial assistance for child care from a social service or welfare agency or to be in Head Start, after controlling for selected characteristics. Eighty-eight percent of these children were Hispanic, and their results differed from Asian children.

**Likelihood of Selected Outcomes for Children of Parents with Limited English Proficiency, after Controlling for Other Factors**

	Compared to similar children of parents proficient in English		
	All children of parents with limited English proficiency	Hispanic children of parents with limited English proficiency	Asian children of parents with limited English proficiency
Receipt of financial assistance for child care	Less likely	Less likely	No significant difference
Head Start	Less likely	Less likely	More likely

Source: GAO analysis of Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Class of 1998-99.

Analysis of data from focus groups and site visit interviews held by GAO revealed that mothers with limited English proficiency faced multiple challenges, including lack of awareness of available assistance, language barriers during the application process, and difficulty communicating with English-speaking providers. Some of the challenges that low-income parents with limited English proficiency experienced, such as lack of transportation and shortage of subsidized child care slots, were common to other low-income families.

The majority of state and local agencies that we visited offered some oral and written language assistance, such as bilingual staff or translated applications. Agencies in the majority of locations visited also made efforts to increase the supply of providers who could communicate with parents. Officials reported challenges in serving parents with limited English proficiency, such as difficulty hiring qualified bilingual staff. Some officials indicated that additional information on cost-effective strategies to serve this population would facilitate their efforts.

HHS issued guidance, translated materials, and provided technical assistance to grantees to help them serve children of parents with limited English proficiency. The Office of Head Start reviewed programs' assessments of their communities' needs and conducted formal monitoring reviews, but could not ensure that review teams consistently assessed grantees' performance on the standards related to language access. CCB reviewed states' plans on the use of CCDF funds generally and investigated specific complaints, but had no mechanism for reviewing how and whether states provide access to CCDF subsidies for eligible children of parents with limited English proficiency.