

The Conversion of Enrollment Slots from Head Start to Early Head Start (HS2EHS) Case Studies

Methodology Appendix

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Sample

The study team used purposive sampling to identify programs to include in the case studies. The set of programs was not intended to be representative of all programs that convert slots from Head Start to Early Head Start. Rather, the team sought a sample that reflected variation across dimensions hypothesized to affect the conversion process. In addition, we intended to include grant recipients with a promising approach to conversion.

In November 2021, the study team convened two group conversations with key informants from the Office of Head Start and technical experts with content expertise in Head Start and Early Head Start policies and program implementation to inform our sampling strategy. Collectively, this group of experts had deep knowledge of the Early Head Start home-based option; Early Head Start–child care partnerships; racial equity and cultural competence; Head Start and Early Head Start financing; infant and toddler education and child development services supply; and the broader context of early care and education. Based on expert feedback, we prioritized variation in our sample in terms of the following:

- grant recipients' history of providing Early Head Start services (including some with no prior experience and some with prior experience)
- prior conversion experience (including some that had completed prior conversions and some that had not)

To the extent possible, the team also intended to include variation along dimensions such as these:

- geographic region
- urbanicity
- share of slots converted to home- versus center-based
- length of time between conversion application to approval
- policy context (e.g., state preschool)
- agency type
- grantee size (enrollment)

The team began by building a sampling frame of grant recipients that had undergone conversion between 12 and 18 months before the anticipated start of data collection. This initial list included 31 grant recipients with conversions approved between April and October 2021. The team constructed a dataset with information about these grant recipients from the Head Start Program Information Report and the Head Start Enterprise System to understand program attributes along the dimensions listed above.

Next, the study team reached out to the Office of Head Start’s regional program managers to gather recommendations. We asked regional program managers to identify programs from the eligible list that we should consider for participation in the study (in particular, those with promising approaches to conversion of enrollment slots) and any programs we should not consider, due to risk of recompetition, recent leaders’ turnover, or involvement in other major research studies.

The study team, in consultation with OPRE, then purposively selected six grant recipients and six backup grant recipients. The team reached out to each program’s director to schedule a screening call to make an initial eligibility determination. During this discussion, we requested information about key characteristics of the program to ensure the program was eligible to participate. This call covered topics such as which key staff were involved in the conversion and whether they were still employed by the program; confirmation of information about the conversion, such as timing and conversion size; whether the program had submitted any other requests for conversion; when the program began offering Early Head Start services (if at all); and whether the program was participating in other research projects.

Recruitment

After the team identified eligible grant recipients, we began recruiting. The first step in the recruitment process was to reach out to the Office of Head Start's regional program managers to inform them that we planned to invite a grant recipient from their region to participate in the study. We also asked regional program managers to send a letter to the selected grant recipients notifying them about the project and the study team's forthcoming outreach. After this initial contact with grant recipients, the project team sent an email to the grant recipient director asking if they would be willing to participate and, if so, to identify an onsite coordinator to assist the study team in scheduling a virtual site visit.

Participating programs reflected variation along certain dimensions:

- **Geographic region.** The selected programs were located in five ACF regions (two in Region 4, and one each in Regions 6, 8, 9, and 10).
- **Urbanicity.** Programs in rural (3) and urban (3) communities were represented.
- **Program size.** Two programs had funded enrollment under 400, one program had enrollment between 400 and 800, and three had enrollment higher than 800.
- **Agency type.** The selected programs included three public or private nonprofits, two community action agencies, and one government agency.
- **Length of time between submission of the conversion application and approval.** The time to conversion approval, according to the Head Start Enterprise System, ranged from 23 days to 128 days.
- **Prior Early Head Start history.** Five programs had delivered Early Head Start services previously, and one had not.
- **Conversion to home-based Early Head Start.** Two programs¹ included home-based slots in their application and four did not.

¹ However, the study team later learned that one of the programs initially identified as having included home-based slots ended up moving forward with only establishing center-based slots with the focal conversion.

Data Collection

The study team collected data beginning in fall 2022. The team conducted virtual site visits via videoconference interviews from November 2022 through March 2023.

Data Sources

HEAD START PROGRAM INFORMATION REPORT

The study team accessed publicly available Program Information Report data for 2020–21 to gather information about each grant recipient before initiating contact. Program Information Report data included information about the program structure, funded enrollment, and racial/ethnic composition of the populations served.

HEAD START ENTERPRISE SYSTEM INFORMATION

The study team reviewed each program’s conversion application and other information related to the conversion housed in the Head Start Enterprise System. We reviewed the applications ahead of conversations with staff and coded each conversion application during analysis. Other Head Start Enterprise System data included information about the program structure, information about the focal conversion application and approval, whether the program had completed a prior conversion, information about prior Early Head Start services, and funded enrollment.

PROGRAM MATERIALS

During the screening call and interviews with study participants, the study team requested and reviewed materials about each program related to the conversion. These varied by grant recipient but included materials such as the conversion application, community needs assessment, self-assessment, budget justification narrative, and a written workplan or implementation plan.

INTERVIEWS

Members of the study team interviewed participants via videoconference. All team members participated in a training on the semistructured interview protocols and qualitative interviewing techniques ahead of the virtual site visits. Two team members conducted each interview—one who led the conversation and another who took notes. With participant consent, interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. The team conducted between 11 and 16 interviews per site, and interviews ranged from 15 minutes to 90 minutes.

The roles of specific personnel who participated varied by grant recipient. Types of interview participants included the following:

- **Head Start leaders.** Chief executive officers, chief operating officers, program directors, and managers or coordinators (e.g., education, health and nutrition, human resources, eligibility, recruitment, selection, enrollment, and attendance)
- **Head Start family-facing staff.** Site supervisors, family advocates, and Early Head Start teachers
- **Finance staff**
- **Board members**
- **Community partners** (e.g., staff of organizations that regularly partnered with the Head Start program to serve families)
- **Office of Head Start Regional Office staff.** Regional program manager, program specialist, fiscal specialist
- **Training and technical assistance providers**
- **Experts with knowledge about the local early care and education context** (e.g., Head Start state collaboration director)

The study team developed two protocols: a protocol for Head Start staff that was modular, allowing us to tailor interviews to participants, and a protocol for staff outside of Head Start (e.g., community partners or state administrators). The modular format of the protocols allowed site teams to tailor them based on the staffing structure of each grant recipient. Table 1 lists the topics covered in each protocol.

TABLE 1

Topics Addressed in Interview Protocols

Interview protocol	Purpose	Topics covered
Full interview protocol for Head Start staff	Interviews with any Head Start staff associated with the program, including staff from the Regional Office and relevant staff from training and technical assistance providers, as well as program staff	<p><i>For admin/management staff:</i> what motivated the program to pursue conversion; decisionmaking processes related to conversion; process for developing the request to convert slots; use of data in request; how program prepared for and implemented Early Head Start services; comparison with prior or subsequent conversions</p> <p><i>For Office of Head Start Regional Office staff:</i> communication with program before the program developed request to convert; role in developing request to convert slots; process for review of conversion application; communication with the program after the conversion application was approved</p> <p><i>For Office of Head Start technical assistance staff:</i> communication and supports provided to program before the request was submitted, while they were actively developing the request, and after the conversion application was approved</p> <p><i>For staff who oversee fiscal operations:</i> process for building budget to implement conversion and deliver Early Head Start services; financial aspects of planning for and implementing conversion; comparison to prior or subsequent conversions</p> <p><i>For staff working directly with families:</i> involvement in early conversations on conversion (i.e., decision to convert, developing the request); experiences during the transition to Early Head Start; working with children and families; professional development and support; challenges and successes related to Early Head Start services</p>
Full interview protocol for non-Head Start staff	Interviews with state and local early care and education leaders (e.g., a knowledgeable staff person from a state's Department of Early Learning or a Head Start collaboration director) and staff from community organizations that partner with the included Head Start programs	State and local context, including gathering information about the supply of infant and toddler education and child development services, potential competition from public preschool programs, and workforce issues relevant to the conversion

Source: Developed by the authors.

Analysis

The team analyzed the study's qualitative data using Dedoose, a cloud-based qualitative analysis software platform,² to code interview transcripts and program documents. The study team conducted two rounds of coding using codes linked to the multi-case study research questions and other domains of interest identified by the team, experts, and stakeholders in preceding project activities. We updated the codebook iteratively as analysis proceeded. All coders were trained on the codebook and coding procedures.

Unit analysis took place on a rolling basis, after each site visit was completed. For each grant recipient, the team that conducted the site visit began by doing a first round of deductive coding based on the codebook. The team permitted some amount of open coding to allow emergent themes to surface but, through group discussion, worked to link these emergent themes back to one of the primary research questions. During this first round of coding, the team met to discuss any challenges that arose, clarify codes, and update the codebook. Following the first round of coding, the site team identified specific themes to explore in greater depth through a second round of selective coding. Each site team drafted a site summary memo, which included an overview of the Head Start program and its conversion before addressing the research questions from the perspective of the site.

Cross-case analysis began when all site visits were completed and all data were coded. Each research question was assigned to a member of the team; that team member examined the summary memos and relevant coded excerpts from all six sites. The team first compared themes across programs participating in the multi-case study; then compared what emerged across the different categories of grantees that we prioritized in sampling (e.g., urbanicity and size of conversion). The team met to discuss findings and draw out the cross-site narrative about conversion of enrollment slots presented in this report.

Table 2 presents the list of codes the team used when analyzing case study data. All but one of the codes was specified a priori; we added the remaining code during analysis when our team agreed that we wanted to capture information about the ages of children that programs served in Early Head Start following conversion.

² Dedoose Version 9.0.17 is a cloud application for managing, analyzing, and presenting qualitative and mixed-method research data, produced by SocioCultural Research Consultants, LLC, in 2021. More information can be found at www.dedoose.com (accessed November 29, 2023).

TABLE 2

Codes Used in Qualitative Analysis

Code	Description
Motivation	Describes why programs consider converting and/or decide to convert enrollment slots
<i>Reasons for converting</i>	Reasons provided for pursuing conversion
<i>Deliberation, determining whether to convert</i>	Descriptions of consideration of conversion, including conversations with stakeholders, reviewing data sources, etc.; may also include description of lack of deliberation (e.g., converting was a “no-brainer,” didn’t require extensive consideration)
Application	Describes all activities undertaken during development of the application to convert slots (e.g., writing the narrative, putting together the budget, consulting with the Regional Office)
Preparation for conversion	Describes all activities undertaken to prepare to deliver new or expanded EHS services as a result of conversion
Postconversion implementation	Describes all activities undertaken following the launch of new or expanded EHS services as a result of conversion
Implementation plan	Denotes discussion of development and/or use of an implementation plan to support delivery of new or expanded EHS services
Phase-in, ramp-up	Discussion of any graduated implementation of new or expanded EHS services (also includes statements about lack of phased-in implementation)
Program changes	Changes to program (e.g., changes to organizational structure, services provided, curriculum used) as a result of conversion
Appraisal (how it’s gone, are services meeting needs)	Respondents’ assessments of how the conversion has gone, whether the conversion is meeting community needs, and how they feel about conversion
Barriers	Challenges encountered during the conversion process. <i>Not to be used alone. Always select at least one of the phases of conversion (motivation, application, preparation for conversion, or postconversion implementation) to use with the barriers code.</i>
Facilitators	Facilitators of the conversion process. <i>Not to be used alone. Always select at least one of the phases of conversion (motivation, application, preparation for conversion, or postconversion implementation) to use with the facilitators code.</i>
Preconversion services	References to operations and services before conversion; ideally only child codes are used
Preconversion HS services	References to delivery of Head Start services before conversion
Preconversion EHS services	References to delivery of Early Head Start services before conversion
ECE context	Descriptions of the environment for ECE services in the state or community (e.g., presence of state pre-K, initiatives to expand infant and toddler education, and child development services)
Policy	Describes state or local policies related to ECE
Funding	Describes funding streams (e.g., state, local, private, EHS–CC partnership, stimulus/ARP) for ECE services or other relevant services
Supply	Describes the availability of ECE services generally and for specific groups
Systems (coordination, competition)	Describes state or community efforts and initiatives to establish, expand, or maintain coordination in the ECE sector; also describes competition among ECE sectors
Workforce (state or local context)	Information about the ECE workforce in the state or community.
Regional Office	Describes Regional Office operations related to conversion, as well as interactions with the program undergoing conversion

Code	Description
Communication	Describes any form of communication with the HS program about conversion
Review	Describes Regional Office procedures for reviewing conversion applications generally and regarding the review of the HS program's application(s) specifically
Head Start Program Performance Standards	Flags any discussion of the Head Start Program Performance Standards
Data usage	Any discussion of data use; most likely to be used in conjunction with the motivation (1) or application (2) codes
Community needs	Description of need for HS or EHS services in the community that the HS program serves; types of needs may include need for infant and toddler education and child development services, need for nontraditional-hour care, need for translation services for immigrant populations, etc.
Community needs assessment	For excerpts specific to the community needs assessment the HS program prepares at least once every five years to fulfill its requirement for HS funding
Community partnerships	Describes any collaboration, cooperation, or coordination with community organizations to deliver HS and/or EHS services or otherwise support families the HS program serves
Capacity to support ECE credentialing	Community capacity to train ECE providers
Technical assistance	Describes technical assistance received or provided to support any aspect of the conversion process; generally will be used in conjunction with at least one of codes 1–4
Professional development	Describes grant recipient's training and professional development capacity, plans, and activities
Governance	Use with mentions of HS program's policy council, board of governors, board of trustees, etc.
Finances and budgeting	Use for discussion of financial considerations, budgeting, etc., at any point in the conversion process; generally will be used in conjunction with at least one of codes 1–4
Non-HS funding sources	Describes any funding sources the HS program draws down or considers drawing down to augment HS and/or EHS funds
Workforce (HS program)	Descriptions of staffing or workforce issues specific to the HS program; generally will be used in conjunction with at least one of codes 1–4
Training/professional development	Describes any training considered or provided to support new or existing staff in implementing the conversion
Facilities	Needs related to the physical plant or changes to the physical plant related to the conversion
Transportation	Needs related to transportation or changes to the program's transportation services related to the conversion
Monitoring/record-keeping	Needs related to monitoring and record-keeping or changes to the programs' monitoring and record-keeping related to the conversion
Enrollment	Describes enrollment practices, needs, or considerations
Recruitment	Describes recruitment practices, needs, or considerations
Pregnant women	Flags any discussion of services for pregnant women
Home-based services	Flags any discussion of home-based EHS services
Community culture	Descriptions of the local community's culture, including the value placed on early childhood and early education
Program culture	Descriptions of organizational culture (as opposed to individual staff attitudes and opinions—see code 29)

Code	Description
Staff attitudes and opinions	Individual staff attitudes and opinions, especially those regarding conversion and infant and toddler education and child development services
Knowledge of infant and child development	Describes degree to which grant recipient staff have knowledge of infant and child development
Role of grant recipient leadership in conversion	Describes the role of the grant recipient's leadership (e.g., director, COO, etc.) in the conversion
COVID-19	Flags any discussion of the COVID-19 pandemic, how it affected the program or community, and changes the program made because of the pandemic
Comparison to prior conversion(s)	Flags comparisons of the focal conversion to prior conversion(s); generally will be used in conjunction with at least one of codes 1–4
Comparison to subsequent conversion(s)	Flags comparisons of the focal conversion to subsequent conversion(s); generally will be used in conjunction with at least one of codes 1–4
Recommendations	Flags any recommendations to improve the conversion process; generally will be used in conjunction with at least one of codes 1–4
Gems	Use to highlight any particularly descriptive, evocative, or otherwise notable excerpts
Ages of EHS children	Flags discussion of the age range of children served in EHS. Added during coding.

Source: Authors' coding scheme.

Notes: ARP = American Rescue Plan, COO = chief operation officer, ECE = early care and education, EHS = Early Head Start, EHS-CC = Early Head Start-Child Care, HS = Head Start.

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