Qualifications and Competencies of Staff in Head Start Programs That Are Converting Enrollment Slots to Early Head Start

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Federal guidance allows Head Start[1] grant recipients to submit an application to the Office of Head Start (OHS) to shift funding (i.e., convert enrollment slots) from services for Head Start preschool-age children to Early Head Start services for pregnant women, infants, and toddlers. Grant recipients that receive approval to convert enrollment slots from Head Start to Early Head Start are required to ensure staff have the appropriate qualifications and competencies needed to serve Early Head Start children and families in accordance with the Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS) staff qualification and competency requirements. This brief describes changes in the Early Head Start staff qualifications and competencies of grant recipients that converted enrollment slots and the approaches grant recipients planned to ensure Early Head Start staff had the appropriate qualifications and competencies after a conversion.

Grant recipients that convert enrollment slots have a variety of options to ensure that staff have the qualifications and competencies necessary to deliver high-quality services to Early Head Start children

[1] The term Head Start refers to grant recipients that offer Head Start services to preschool-age children and their families. The term Early Head Start refers to programs that offer services for families with children from birth to age 3, and many also serve expectant families of infants.

and families. For example, they may hire new staff who either already have the appropriate qualifications and competencies to deliver Early Head Start or who need additional training or education. Alternatively, they may choose to shift existing Head Start staff into Early Head Start, including both those who already have the appropriate qualifications and competencies to deliver Early Head Start and those who need additional training and professional development. In each of these scenarios, grant recipients must anticipate several potential challenges, including the time and potential costliness of the recruitment and hiring process or the need to invest in staff training or education to ensure staff can attain the qualifications and competencies necessary to deliver high-quality Early Head Start services. See table 1 for more on Head Start and Early Head Start staff qualification and competency requirements.

TABLE 1

HSPPS Qualification and Competency Requirements

Position	HSPPS requirements
Early Head Start center-based teacher	Have a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential or comparable credential and have been trained or have equivalent coursework in early childhood development focusing on infant and toddler development.
Head Start center-based teacher	Have an associate or bachelor's degree in child development or early childhood education, have equivalent coursework, or otherwise have met the requirements of section 648A(a)(3)(B) of the Head Start Act.
Head Start assistant teacher	Have a CDA credential or a state-awarded certificate that meets or exceeds the requirements for a CDA credential, be enrolled in a program that will lead to an associate or bachelor's degree, or be enrolled in a CDA credential program to be completed within two years of being hired.
Family child care provider	Enrolled in a Family Child Care CDA program or state equivalent or an associate or bachelor's degree program in child development or early childhood education before beginning service provision. The credential must be acquired within 18 months of beginning to provide services. By August 1, 2018, a child development specialist, as required for family child care in §1302.23€, must have a bachelor's degree in child development, early childhood education, or a related field.
Home visitor	Have a home-based CDA credential or comparable credential, or equivalent coursework as part of an associate or bachelor's degree.

Sources: "Head Start Act," US Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center, accessed August 23, 2023, https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/policy/head-start-act; "Head Start Policy and Regulations: 1302.91 Staff Qualifications and Competency Requirements," Head Start Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center, accessed May 30, 2023,https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/policy/45-cfr-chap-xiii/1302-91-staff-qualifications-competency-requirements.

OHS released an information memorandum[2] in November 2022 highlighting the importance of considering staffing and training needs in programs that convert enrollment slots. In the IM, OHS

[2] "Enrollment Reductions and Conversion of Head Start Slots to Early Head Start Slots: ACF-IM-HS-22-09," Head Start Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center (ECLKC), November 7, 2022, https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/policy/im/acf-im-hs-22-09.

encouraged programs that convert enrollment slots to consider the availability of qualified staff in their community and the types of training, education, compensation, and supports necessary to attract and retain staff.

The early care and education workforce struggles to rebound from significant pandemic-related job losses (Coffey and Khattar 2022). In fact, a 2023 report from the National Head Start Association noted that Head Start is in the middle of an ongoing workforce crisis (NHSA 2023). In response to labor shortages because of the pandemic, OHS released guidance on strengthening the workforce and ensuring that staff are qualified and able to provide high-quality Early Head Start services. In two IMs,[3] released in summer and fall 2022, OHS encouraged Head Start grant recipients to look holistically at their organizational structures to identify sustainable ways to stabilize their workforce. OHS suggested offering hiring bonuses and supports for educational attainment and career advancement, such as covering staff costs for obtaining a degree or credential. These strategies may be particularly salient for grant recipients that convert enrollment slots, as they may have to hire new staff or shift existing staff who need additional training or education to meet or exceed the Early Head Start staff qualification and competency requirements.

About This Brief

This brief examines whether and how the staff qualifications and competencies of grant recipients that converted enrollment slots changed after a conversion. It also describes grant recipients' approaches to ensure staff have the appropriate qualifications and competencies after conversion and their anticipated staffing challenges. This information may be useful to OHS staff, training/technical assistance (T/TA) staff, and Head Start grant recipients.

Specifically, this brief presents answers to the following research questions:

1. How did staff composition change after a conversion?
2. How did Early Head Start staff qualifications and competencies change after a conversion?
3. What approaches did grant recipients plan for to ensure that their Early Head Start staff had the appropriate qualifications and competencies after a conversion, and what challenges did they anticipate?

Methods

To identify grant recipients that converted enrollment slots from Head Start to Early Head Start, we searched the Head Start Enterprise System (HSES)—the central reporting website for OHS. We

[3] "Competitive Bonuses for the Head Start Workforce ACF-IM-HS-22-04," Head Start ECLKC, June 21, 2022, https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/policy/im/acf-im-hs-22-04; " Strategies to Stabilize the Head Start Workforce: ACF-IM-HS-22-06," Head Start ECLKC, September 12, 2022, https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/policy/im/acf-im-hs-22-06.

identified all Head Start grant recipients in Regions 1 through 10[4] that submitted applications through the HSES to convert enrollment slots in either 2018 or 2020 and had those applications approved.

To examine changes in staff qualifications and competencies, we analyzed Program Information Report (PIR) data from the years before and after the conversion application was approved for each cohort (i.e., 2017 and 2019 PIR data for the 2018 cohort and 2019 and 2021 PIR data for the 2020 cohort). We chose to focus on data from two cohorts of grant recipients—one before the COVID-19 pandemic and one after the pandemic started. We focused on these two cohorts based on evidence of how the pandemic affected the child care workforce's employment rates (Crouse, Ghertner, and Chien 2023).

To answer the first research question, we compared grant recipient staff numbers in the years before and the year after conversion. To answer the second research question, we focused on Early Head Start center-based teacher and home visitor qualifications and competencies and compared staff numbers in the years before and after conversion for grant recipients that had converted enrollment slots. To answer the third research question, we examined approved conversion applications from 2018 and 2020. We used an emergent coding scheme[5] to code them for key themes of anticipated hiring challenges and approaches to support staff in meeting required qualifications and competencies. See table 2 for more information on the sample of grant recipients and data sources used for analyses. See box 1 for an overview of the sample.

TABLE 2

Cohort Samples and Data Sources

		2018 cohort	2020 cohort
Sample size		Recipients that converted: 49	Recipients that converted: 41
Data sources	Research question 1 and 2: staff composition and qualifications and competencies	▪ 2017 and 2019 PIR data (years before and after conversion)	▪ 2019 and 2021 PIR data (years before and after conversion)
	Research question 3: approaches and challenges	▪ 2018 conversion applications from HSES for the 49 grant recipients that converted enrollment slots	▪ 2020 conversion applications from HSES for the 41 grant recipients that converted enrollment slots

Source: Urban Institute analysis of 2018 and 2020 PIR data.

Notes: In the 2018 cohort, 49 unique grant recipients submitted 50 applications. In the 2020 cohort, 41 unique grant recipients submitted 41 applications. One grant recipient from the 2020 cohort was not included in the analysis because the grant recipient was inactive in 2021, the year after the conversion.

[4] Grant recipients in Region 11 (the region representing grant recipients providing services to federally recognized American Indian and Alaska Native tribes) are not required to follow the same process as grant recipients in other regions, and those from Region 12 (the region representing grant recipients providing services to Migrant and Seasonal Workers) provide services for children from birth through age 5; therefore, grant recipients from these regions were not included in the sample.

[5] Emergent coding is a practice in which researchers apply the codes as they recognized themes. This is typically used with broad and exploratory research questions.

BOX 1

What Did the Grant Recipients We Examined Look Like?

- **Eighty percent** of grant recipients that converted enrollment slots from Head Start to Early Head Start in 2018 and **68 percent** of grant recipients that converted enrollment slots in 2020 offered Early Head Start the year before the conversion application was approved.
- Across both cohorts, about **65 percent** of grant recipients that converted enrollment slots did not change program options (e.g., center- versus home-based options) after a conversion. Instead, they added slots to existing options.
- The **Early Head Start center-based option was the most common program option** among grant recipients that converted enrollment slots.

Source: Urban Institute analysis of 2018 and 2020 PIR data.

Findings

Staff Composition

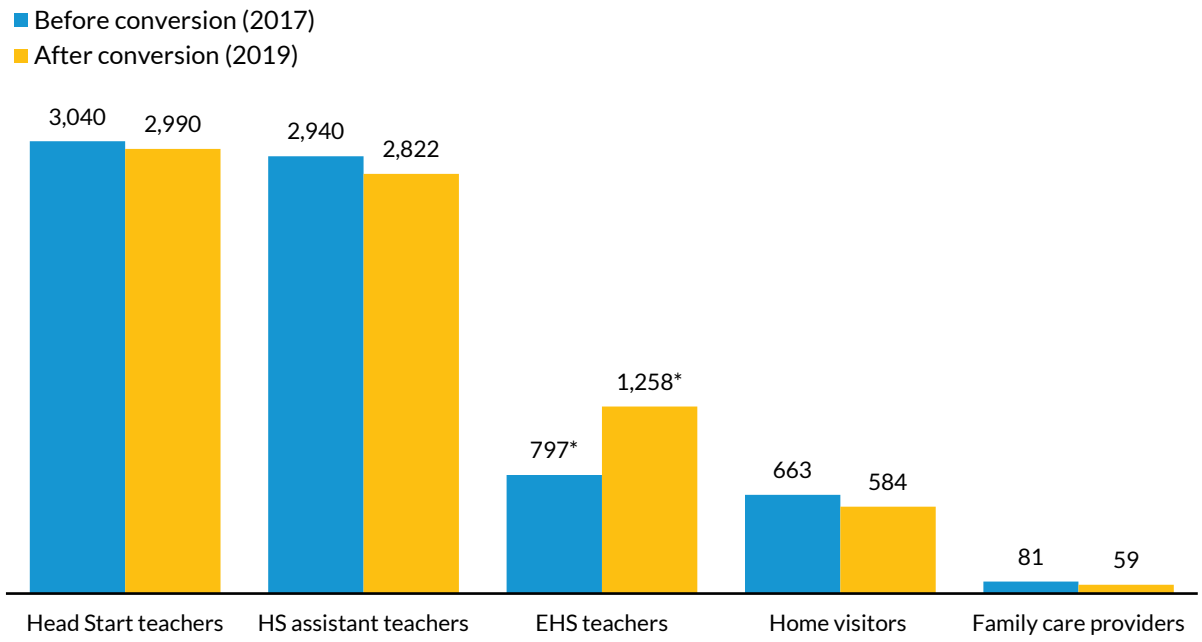
How did staff composition change after a conversion?

An increase in the number of Early Head Start classroom teachers was observed in the year after the conversion for the 2018 cohort of grant recipients. No changes in the number of Head Start staff were observed for home visitors or family care providers. See figure 1 below.

FIGURE 1

2018 Cohort Staff by Position

Change in nonsupervisory child development staff by position in the years before and after a conversion



Source: Authors' analysis of 2017 and 2019 PIR data.

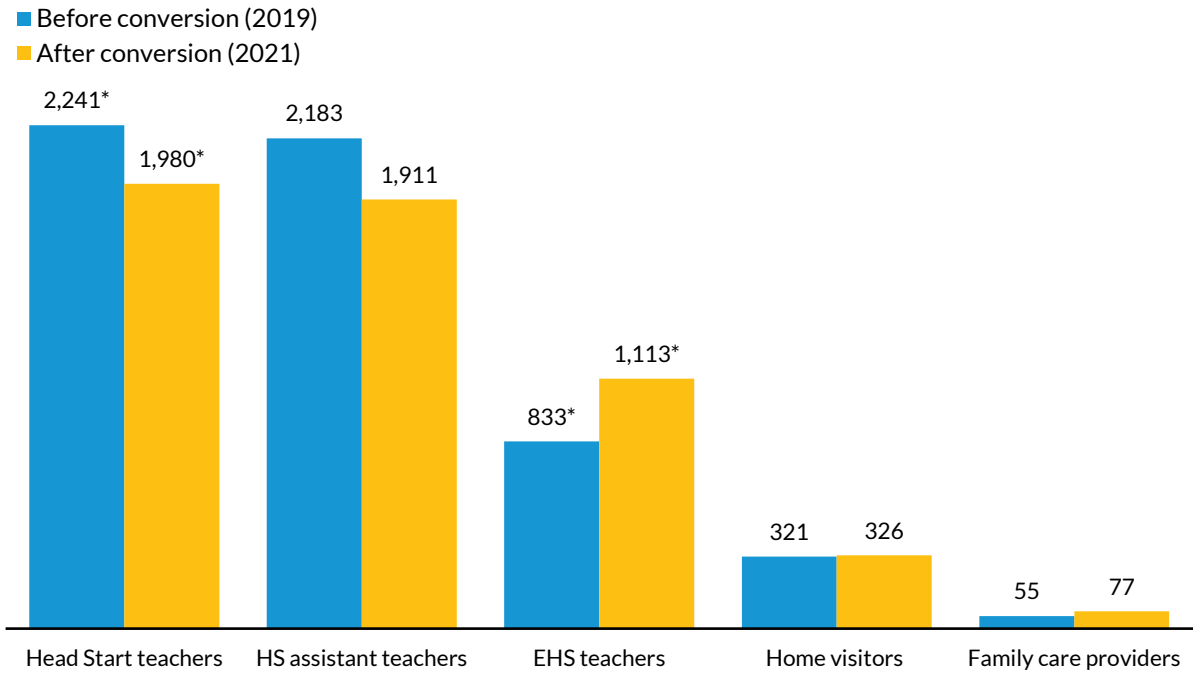
Notes: Blue bars represent the year before a conversion. Yellow bars represent the year after a conversion. * Indicates statistically significant change between 2017 and 2019, $p < .05$.

A decrease in the number of Head Start classroom teachers and an increase in the number of Early Head Start classroom teachers in the year after the conversion was observed for the 2020 cohort of grant recipients. No changes in the number of home visitors or family care providers were observed. See figure 2 below.

FIGURE 2

2020 Cohort Staff by Position

Change in nonsupervisory child development staff by position in the years before and after a conversion



Source: Authors' analysis of 2019 and 2021 PIR data.

Notes: Blue bars represent the year before a conversion. Yellow bars represent the year after a conversion. * Indicates statistically significant change between 2019 and 2021, $p < .05$.

For both cohorts, all grant recipients offering Early Head Start before the conversion reported in the PIR that at least one existing Early Head Start teacher met the credential or degree requirements the year before converting enrollment slots. Additionally, for both cohorts, all grant recipients reported having at least one qualified home visitor the year before converting enrollment slots.

Of note, only a few grant recipients coupled their slot conversion with an enrollment reduction, which may partially explain the postconversion decreases in Head Start teachers and assistant teachers. Additionally, roughly 35 percent of grant recipients across both cohorts changed their program options (e.g., center-based, home-based, family care), which may also have contributed to the decrease in Head Start teachers and assistant teachers the year after the conversion.

Staff Qualifications and Competencies

How did Early Head Start Staff qualifications and competencies change after a conversion?

The HSPPS stipulates that an Early Head Start center-based teacher must have a minimum of a CDA credential or comparable credential and have been trained or have equivalent coursework in early childhood development focusing on infant and toddler development. In both the 2018 and 2020 cohorts, the majority of Early Head Start teachers appear to have met or exceeded the basic CDA in a

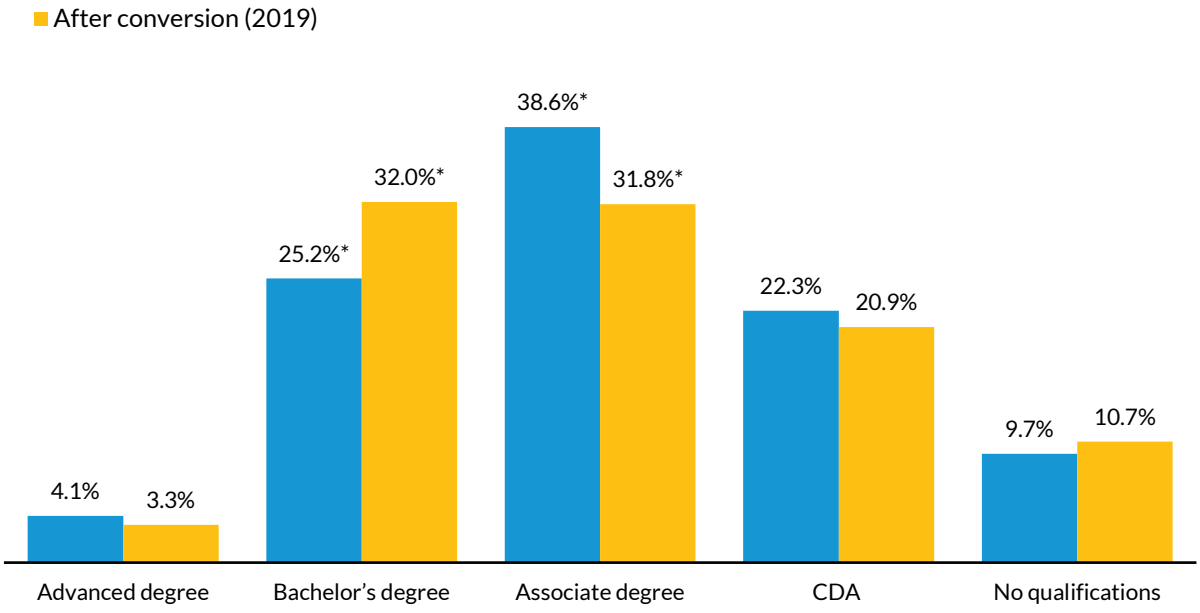
relevant field requirement. Also, across both cohorts, the share of Early Head Start teachers with bachelor's degrees increased the year after grant recipients converted enrollment slots compared with the year before converting enrollment slots (see figures 3 and 4). The were no changes in home visitor qualifications after a conversion across both cohorts.

In the 2018 cohort, the share of Early Head Start teachers with an associate degree decreased the year after grant recipients converted enrollment slots compared with the year before converting enrollment slots.

FIGURE 3

2018 Cohort Early Head Start Center-Based Classroom Teachers

Change in degree and credential for Early Head Start teachers in the years before and after a conversion



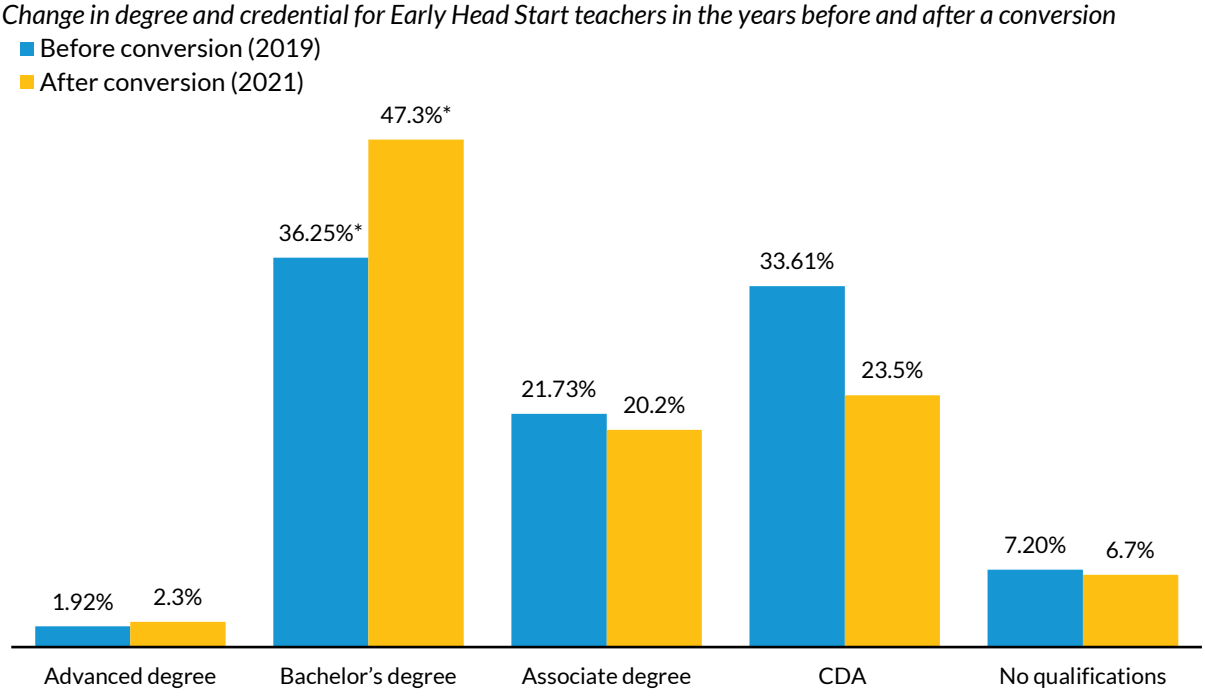
Source: Authors' analysis of 2017 and 2019 PIR data.

Notes: Blue bars represent the year before a conversion. Yellow bars represent the year after a conversion. * Indicates statistically significant change between 2017 and 2019, $p < .05$.

FIGURE 4

2020 Cohort Early Head Start Center-Based Classroom Teachers

Change in degree and credential for Early Head Start teachers in the years before and after a conversion



Source: Authors' analysis of 2019 and 2021 PIR data.

Notes: Blue bars represent the year before a conversion. Yellow bars represent the year after a conversion. * Indicates statistically significant change between 2019 and 2021, $p < .05$.

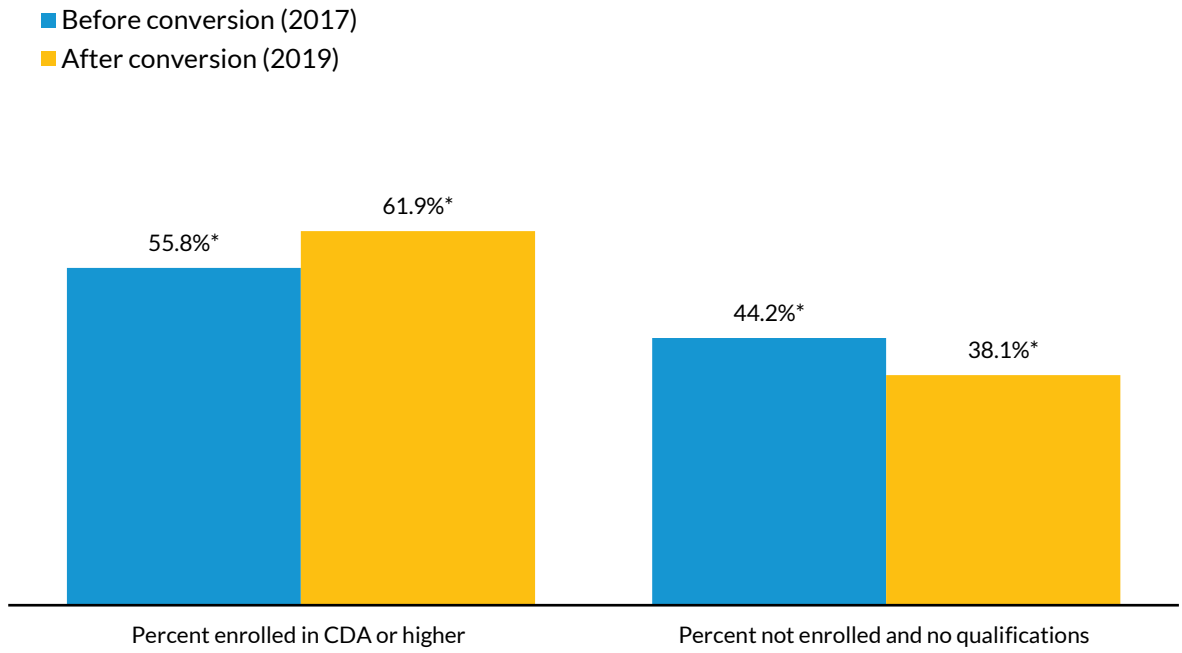
Grant recipients reporting in the PIR that some staff have "no qualifications" were asked to answer a follow-up question. In response to the follow-up question, the grant recipient reported how many of the staff with "no qualifications" were enrolled in a degree or CDA program. In the 2018 cohort, the share of Early Head Start teachers that had no qualifications but were enrolled in a program to attain a CDA credential or a higher degree increased in the year after a conversion, compared with the year before. Additionally, the share of Early Head Start teachers who were neither qualified nor pursuing a CDA credential or higher degree decreased the year after grant recipients converted enrollment slots compared with the year before converting enrollment slots. See figure 5 below.

For Early Head Start teachers in the 2020 cohort no differences were observed. Additionally, no difference was observed in the share of Early Head Start home visitors who did not meet the qualifications or competencies the year after grant recipients converted enrollment slots compared with the year before converting enrollment slots across both cohorts.

FIGURE 5

2018 Cohort Early Head Start Classroom Teachers with No Qualifications

Change in degree and credential enrollment for Early Head Start teachers in the years before and after a conversion



Source: Authors' analysis of 2017 and 2019 PIR data.

Notes: Blue bars represent the year before a conversion. Yellow bars represent the year after a conversion. * Indicates statistically significant change between 2017 and 2019, $p < .05$. Percent enrolled in CDA or higher is the sum of two categories: percent enrolled in CDA and percent enrolled in a degree program.

Ensuring Appropriate Qualifications and Competencies

What approaches did grant recipients plan to ensure their Early Head Start staff had the appropriate qualifications and competencies after a conversion, and what challenges did they anticipate?

To answer this research question, we coded each application for conversion that Head Start grant recipients submitted in 2018 and 2020. When developing a conversion application, grant recipients are asked to consider the proposed conversion's influence on staff and staff qualifications.[6] While grant recipients are not required to outline staffing-related challenges in the conversion application, many include this information. We coded the frequency of applications that described planned approaches for filling new positions and any anticipated new hiring challenges.[7] Below we present the most commonly cited challenges.

[6] For more on what grant recipients are asked to consider in a conversion application, see "Enrollment Reduction and Conversion Considerations," Head Start Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center (ECLKC), last updated November 7, 2022, https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/program-planning/article/enrollment-reduction-conversion-considerations.

[7] A limitation of these data is that grant recipients were not required to list expected challenges around hiring in their conversion application. As such, our analysis reflects information from grant recipients that voluntarily

Nearly all of the grant recipients reported plans to offer postconversion roles to existing staff before posting for external hires. The application data are unclear on whether all existing staff met the Early Head Start qualifications and competencies or if grant recipients planned to train existing staff to ensure they had the specialized qualifications and competencies necessary to serve infants, toddlers, and pregnant women. This aligns with PIR data (presented in findings associated with the first research question) suggesting that the majority of grant recipients had at least one staff member who met the Early Head Start qualifications and competencies in the year before a conversion.

Nevertheless, 70 percent of grant recipients across both cohorts noted the need to hire new staff because of the conversion. In many of these cases, grant recipients noted that even when offering a new role to existing staff, grant recipients had additional staffing needs that necessitated new hires. For example, multiple grant recipients reported a need to hire additional infant and toddler teacher assistant floaters, aides and teachers, health assistants, nutrition clerks, family education specialists, educational supervisors, coaches, special needs coordinators, cooking staff, social workers, accountants, and maintenance workers in their conversion applications.

About a quarter of grant recipients anticipated staffing challenges after the conversion, based on our analysis of conversion applications. However, it is unclear if grant recipients would face these challenges in the absence of a conversion. Grant recipients cited the following reasons for anticipating challenges:

- **A lack of qualified applicants** and a **shortage of qualified teachers** in the area was the most commonly reported staffing concern.
    - » Some reported that a lack of access to higher education created this challenge. Moreover, several grant recipients mentioned that competition from local or state preschool programs that could offer higher salaries, better benefits, and more coaching and training made it difficult to hire potentially qualified staff.
- A few grant recipients cited the **high cost of hiring**. In these cases, grant recipients noted the time and financial cost of advertising, screening, and interviewing applicants.

The challenge that we face with this goal area is around the high cost for advertising for new hires. Each [web]site that we use to recruit new employees carries a price tag.
—grant recipient conversion application

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reported this information. Therefore, these findings may underrepresent the anticipated challenges around staffing that grant recipients expected after a conversion.

- A few applications reported potential challenges associated with **training new staff** and getting staff prepared before the start of the school year or the start of Early Head Start service delivery.
    - For example, one grant recipient shared that some current teachers were long-term substitute teachers without the proper early childhood qualifications and competencies. The majority of those substitute teachers were hired within a week of school starting, so they did not have enough time to train and onboard these staff. Another grant recipient cited difficulty obtaining background checks for potential staff promptly.

The program does not hire staff until a background clearance is returned. This leaves positions open for a long time and diminishes the services the program provides.
—grant recipient conversion application

Conclusion

We found that grant recipients that converted enrollment slots in 2018 and 2020 experienced an increase in the number of Early Head Start classroom teachers in the year after the conversion. Only for the 2020 cohort did we note a decrease in the number of Head Start classroom teachers. Changes in the number of home visitors and family care providers across both cohorts were small and not statistically significant. The majority of grant recipients that converted enrollment slots offered Early Head Start the year before the conversion, which is likely why most grant recipients had staff who already met Early Head Start qualifications. It is possible that grant recipients that offer both Head Start and Early Head Start are more likely to convert enrollment slots from Head Start to Early Head Start than those that offer Head Start only, although more research is needed to confirm this.

In both the 2018 and 2020 cohort, the majority of Early Head Start teachers were qualified and met or exceeded the basic CDA requirement outlined in the HSPPS. Additionally, across both cohorts, the share of Early Head Start teachers with bachelor's degrees increased the year after grant recipients converted enrollment slots compared with the year before converting enrollment slots.

Only for the 2018 cohort did the share of Early Head Start teachers with an associate degree decrease in the year after a conversion. For the 2018 cohort, the share of Early Head Start teachers with no qualifications who were enrolled in a program to attain a CDA credential or a higher degree increased in the year after a conversion, while the share of Early Head Start teachers who were neither qualified nor pursuing a CDA credential or higher degree decreased the year after a conversion. None of these differences were observed in the 2020 cohort. Further research is needed to understand whether

grant recipients hired more staff with bachelor's degrees in anticipation of a conversion or if existing staff pursued higher education as they transitioned from Head Start to Early Head Start services.

When filling positions, most grant recipients reported that they planned to offer new positions to existing Head Start staff before hiring new staff. Yet the majority of grant recipients still reported the need to hire new staff to fill various roles, many of which were outside of the classroom. Analysis of conversion applications revealed that grant recipients anticipated numerous challenges in hiring new staff. These include competition for staff from local preschools that can offer higher wages, a lack of qualified applicants, and timeline challenges and delays in the hiring process (e.g., background checks). Such hiring challenges could be a barrier to conversion because difficulties finding staff with the appropriate qualifications and credentials can be costly and delay classroom openings. This is supported by recent research that suggests there is a scarcity of child care for infants and toddlers at a national level (Horm 2019; Jessen-Howard, Malik, and Falgout 2020). More research is needed to understand if these challenges were specific to the planned conversion or if they are consistent and enduring.

Several grant recipients noted that competition from local or state preschool programs that could offer higher salaries made it difficult to hire qualified staff. Infant and toddler teachers earn less than teachers serving children ages 3 to 5, even when they have the same credentials (Whitebook et al. 2018). A review of national salary data in the 2022 PIR data suggests that Head Start teachers make more than Early Head Start teachers.[8] These differences may be tied to higher qualification requirements for Head Start teachers. In addition to lower wages, and even with the same credentials, providing Early Head Start services may be seen as less illustrious or prestigious in light of this gap (Horm 2019).

In an effort to better support the early care and education workforce, OHS recently released guidance[9] on strategies for stabilizing the workforce and encouraging grant recipients to appropriately compensate and support their staff. Future research is needed to explore how implementation of various strategies may yield improvements in hiring staff with the qualifications and competencies necessary to offer high-quality Early Head Start services, both for grant recipients that convert enrollment slots as well as those that do not.

Appendix. Methodology

We accessed the HSES to identify all conversion applications enrollment slots that were approved by the regional office in 2018 and 2020. This yielded a sample of 49 grant recipients (who submitted 50 unique applications) in the 2018 cohort and 41 grant recipients (who submitted 41 unique applications) in the 2020 cohort for a total of 91 independent conversion applications.

[8] Authors' analysis of 2022–23 PIR national level salary data.

[9] "Strategies to Stabilize the Head Start Workforce ACF-IM-HS-22-06," Head Start ECLKC, September 12, 2022, https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/policy/im/acf-im-hs-22-06.

To address the first two research questions, we reviewed PIR data reported in the year before and after the conversion for each cohort of grantees. That is, for the 2018 cohort we reviewed PIR data from 2017 and 2019. For the 2020 cohort we reviewed PIR data from 2019 and 2021. We used Stata to clean and analyze the data. The PIR dataset included only grant recipients with Head Start and Early Head Start programs from Regions 1 to 10 to align with the sample inclusion criteria used to pull HSES data. Thus, the PIR dataset did not include data from American Indian and Alaskan Native or Migrant and Seasonal Head Start programs.

Analytic Techniques

We performed descriptive statistical analysis and paired sample *t*-tests in Stata to compare PIR data in the years before and after a conversion for grant recipients that converted enrollment slots in either 2018 or 2020.

To compare the number of Early Head Start and Head Start teachers employed before and after a conversion we performed a paired *t*-test. Analysis of the 2018 cohort revealed a statistically significant difference in the number of Early Head Start teachers employed in 2017 (M = 15.94, SD = 21.76) compared with 2019 (M = 25.16, SD = 32.48); $t(49) = 3.8$, $p = .0002$ (for a one-tailed test where Ha: diff<0). Similarly, analysis of the 2020 cohort revealed a statistically significant difference in the number of Early Head Start teachers employed in 2019 (M = 20.31, SD = 23.01) compared with 2021 (M = 21.14, SD = 36.34); $t(40) = 1.9$, $p = .031$ (for a one-tailed test where Ha: diff<0). Finally, analysis of the 2020 cohort revealed a statistically significant difference in the number of Head Start teachers employed in 2019 (M = 54.65, SD = 93.58) compared with 2021 (M = 48.29, SD = 88.71); $t(40) = -3.55$, $p = .0005$ (for a one-tailed test where Ha: diff<0).

We also used a paired *t*-test to examine the number of Early Head Start home visitors before and after a conversion for both cohorts. However, no significant differences emerged.

To compare the number of Early Head Start teachers with bachelors and associates degrees before and after a conversion we performed a paired *t*-test. Analysis of the 2018 cohort revealed a statistically significant differences in the number of Early Head Start teachers with a bachelor's degree in 2017 (M = 4.02, SD = 6.95) compared with 2019 (M = 8.04, SD = 17.81); $t(49) = 2.3$, p = .012 (for a one-tailed test where Ha: diff>0). Similarly, analysis of the 2020 cohort revealed a statistically significant difference in the number of Early Head Start teachers with a bachelor's degree in 2019 (M = 7.36, SD = 13.41) compared with 2021 (M = 12.82, SD = 27.98); $t(40) = 1.97$, $p = .027$ (for a one-tailed test where Ha: diff>0). In regard to those with associate degrees, analysis of the 2018 cohort revealed a statistically significant difference in the number of Early Head Start teachers with an associate degree in 2017 (M = 6.16, SD = 12.32) compared with 2019 (M = 8.0, SD = 14.45); $t(49) = 3.04$, $p = .001$ (for a one-tailed test where Ha: diff>0).

To compare the share of Early Head Start teachers that had no qualifications we performed a paired *t*-test. Analysis of the 2018 cohort revealed a statistically significant difference in the number of Early Head Start teachers with no qualifications program in 2017 (M = 1.54, SD = 3.98) compared with 2019

(M = 2.7, SD = 5.15); $t(49)$ = 2.58, p = .006 (for a one-tailed test where Ha: diff>0). These differences did not emerge in the analysis of the 2020 cohort.

To compare the share of Early Head Start teachers that had no qualifications but were enrolled in a program to attain a CDA credential or a higher degree we performed a paired t-test. Analysis of the 2018 cohort revealed a statistically significant difference in the number of Early Head Start teachers with no qualifications but enrolled in a CDA or higher degree program in 2017 (M = 0.86, SD = 2.32) compared with 2019 (M = 1.82, SD = 3.97); $t(49)$ = 2.22, p = .015 (for a one-tailed test where Ha: diff>0). These differences did not emerge in the analysis of the 2020 cohort.

To answer the third research question, three trained researchers on our team reviewed each application and coded for the following relevant codes: (1) anticipated challenges, if any, around hiring staff and (2) approaches for filling new Early Head Start positions. After the first round of data entry was complete, a second researcher on our team provided a quality assurance check by reviewing each of the variables.

Limitations

Limitations of the data exist. Our data analysis is based on a sample of grant recipients that submitted applications to convert enrollment slots in 2018 and 2020. The sample is not representative of all conversion applications because it includes only grant recipients with applications that were approved during this period and does not include applications that were submitted through the competitive grant cycle. The sample of grant recipients that converted enrollment slots does not include grant recipients that submitted applications that were withdrawn or not approved.

The PIR data are administrative and entered by grant recipient staff. As such, there may be some inconsistencies in data entry. The HSES data rely on the narrative grant recipients submit as part of their application for conversion. We report themes we identified based on the coding and analysis of these narratives. The percentages calculated from coding these narratives are based on information grant recipients voluntarily reported. A systematic closed-ended survey of hiring challenges and strategies to support staff qualifications could reveal a clearer picture of retention efforts.

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