Early Childhood Education (ECE) Participation

Prior participation of children in ECE before starting school has steadily increased in the last ten years. The amount of time children participate in ECE each week has also increased in the last three years with a higher percentage participating for 10 hours or more per week at the age of 3 and 4.

Indicator Description

This indicator includes prior participation and participation intensity.

Prior participation is the percentage of children who regularly attended ECE services in the six months prior to starting school.

Participation intensity refers to the percentage of children attending ECE for 10 or more hours per week on average at aged 3 and at aged 4.

Why This Is Important

Early Childhood Education (ECE) participation is associated with positive outcomes in the short and long term (Mitchell et al. 2008), especially for vulnerable children. Several studies have also identified links between participation in ECE and better social and economic outcomes for children when they reach older ages (Mitchell et al. 2011); such as higher earning, reduced reliance in the welfare programme and reduction in crimes.

Children from vulnerable communities and low socio-economic backgrounds are especially benefited by ECE, showing better social interactions and emotional maturity (Bakken et al. 2017) and greater learning ability. Studies shows that engagement in ECE results in educational and vocational gain (Campbell et al. 2008) and reduces social inequalities in academic performance up to adulthood (Laurin et al. 2015).

In New Zealand, children who participate in ECE generally show well developed social and emotional skills before starting school (Thomas et al. 2019) and perform better in maths, reading, communication and logical problem solving during their primary school years (Wylie & Thompson, 2003) and adolescence (OECD 2016).
Prior Participation

How We Are Going

The number of children participating in ECE before starting school has steadily increased since 2011 (Figure 1). In 2011 prior participation was 95% and in 2019 it was 97%, corresponding to a 2 percentage point increase.

However, since 2016, the increase in prior participation has slowed down; with an average 0.2 percentage point increase compared to the average 0.4 percentage point increase from 2011 to 2015.

No differences exist in prior participation between genders (female and male).

Figure 1. Prior participation in ECE before starting school has increased between 2011 and 2019.

Ethnic Group

Since 2011, Pacific and Māori children showed the greatest increase in participation in ECE before starting school (Figure 2). Prior participation in ECE of Pacific children increased from 87% in 2011 to 93% 2019 (7 percentage points); while prior participation in ECE of Māori increased from 91% in 2011 to 96% in 2019 (5 percentage points).

These large increases mean that since 2011 the differences in prior participation in ECE between ethnic groups has decreased considerably. In 2011 this difference was 11 percentage points while in 2019 it was 5 percentage points.

Between 2018 to 2019, the average prior participation in ECE among most ethnic groups showed a small increase of 0 and 0.2 percentage points; however prior participation in ECE of Pacific children decreased by 0.4 percentage point.
Figure 2. Pacific and Māori prior participation in ECE increased significantly between 2011 and 2019.

Socio economic status (SES)

Since 2011, children that attended low SES schools have shown the greatest increase in prior participation in ECE before starting school (Figure 3). Prior participation increased from 88% in 2011 to 94% in 2019 (6 percentage point increase).

Prior participation in ECE of children in medium SES schools increased from 96% in 2011 to 98% in 2019 (2 percentage point increase); while prior participation in ECE of children in high SES schools increased from 98% in 2011 to 99% in 2019 (1 percentage point increase).

Since 2011, the difference in prior participation in ECE between children that attend low and high SES schools had decreased considerable. In 2011, the difference was 13 percentage points while in 2019 it was 6 percentage points.

Figure 3. Children that attend low SES schools showed the greatest increase in ECE prior participation between 2011 and 2019.
Participation Intensity

How Are We Doing

Children aged 3 and 4 participating in ECE for 10 hours or more per week has steadily increased in the last three years (Figure 4). Participation of children aged 3 increased from 69% in 2017 to 75% in 2019 (5 percentage points); while participation of children aged 4 increased from 79% to 84% (5 percentage point increase). Children aged 4 have higher participation than children aged 3 (around 10 percentage point difference).

Figure 4. ECE participation for 10 and more hours of children aged 3 and 4 has steadily increased between 2017 and 2019.

Ethnic Group

Participation in ECE for 10 hours or more a week for Māori and Pacific children aged 3 (Figure 5) and 4 (Figure 6) is lower than that of the total population. While all ethnicities participation has increased in the last three years (Figure 5) Māori and Pacific children’s participation has increased more slowly.

Participation in ECE for 10 hours or more a week of Māori children aged 3 increased from 58% in 2017 to 62% in 2019 (4 percentage point increase); while participation of Pacific children increased from 64% to 67% (4 percentage point increase), and participation of the total child population increased from 69% in 2017 to 75% in 2019 (6 percentage points increase).
Participation in ECE for more than 10 hours a week has increased more slowly for Māori and Pacific children aged 3 between 2017 and 2019 than the total population. Participation of the total child population increased from 79% in 2017 to 84% in 2019 (5 percentage points increase).

Participation of children aged 3 in ECE for 10 hours or more a week showed the greater increase in participation in the last three years for those who live in high SES areas. Children who live in high SES areas increased participation from 67% in 2017 to 75% in 2019 (8 percentage point increase); while children who live in medium SES areas increased from 68% to 75% (7 percentage point increase). Participation of children from low SES areas increased from 64% in 2017 to 68% in 2019 (4 percentage point increase).
Participation of children age 4 in ECE services for 10 hours or more a week who live in low SES areas showed the slowest increase in the last three years (Figure 8). Children from high SES areas increased participation from 77% in 2017 to 84% in 2019 (7 percentage point increase) and children from medium SES areas from 77% to 85% (7 percentage point increase). Participation of children who live in low SES increased from 73% in 2017 to 77% in 2019 (4 percentage point increase).

Figure 8. Participation of children aged 4 in ECE 10 hours or more a week who live in low SES areas showed the slowest increase in the last three years.
Where to Find Out More

- For more information about participation in Early Childhood Education visit the ECE Statistics Participation page on the Education Counts website.
- For a large range of other early childhood education statistics visit the Early Childhood Education statistics pages on Education Counts.

References


