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Who is Least Likely to Attend Pre-School?

Elias Lopez, Ph.D.

*Prepared at the Request of Assemblymember Kerry Mazzoni,
Chair of the Assembly Education Committee*

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Who is Least Likely to Attend Pre-School?

Introduction

This paper provides estimates on the number of children who are of pre-school age. In addition, it gives information on their ethnicity and family income. The following data show that minority children are far less likely to go to pre-school. This paper also shows that attending pre-school is a function of family income, since enrollment rates go up with family income.

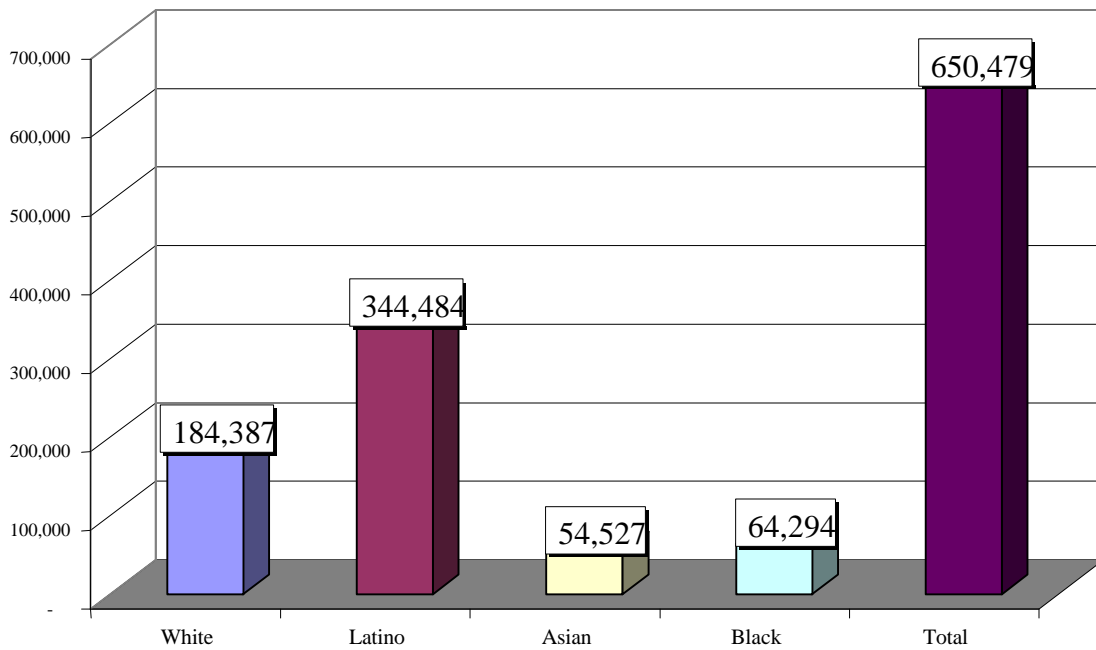
The analysis is based on the Census Bureau's 1997 October Current Population Survey on school enrollment. As with any survey, estimates are subject to sampling error.

Number of Children Not in Pre-School or Kindergarten

According to the 1997 October Current Population Survey, there are approximately 650,000 children, ages three to five, who are neither in pre-school nor in kindergarten. Of these, 28 percent are White, 53 percent are Latino, 8 percent are Asian, and 10 percent are African-American. Estimates for the total number of children are provided in the chart below:

Chart 1

**Children Ages 3 to 5 Not in Pre-K or in Kindergarten
by Ethnic Group (1997)**



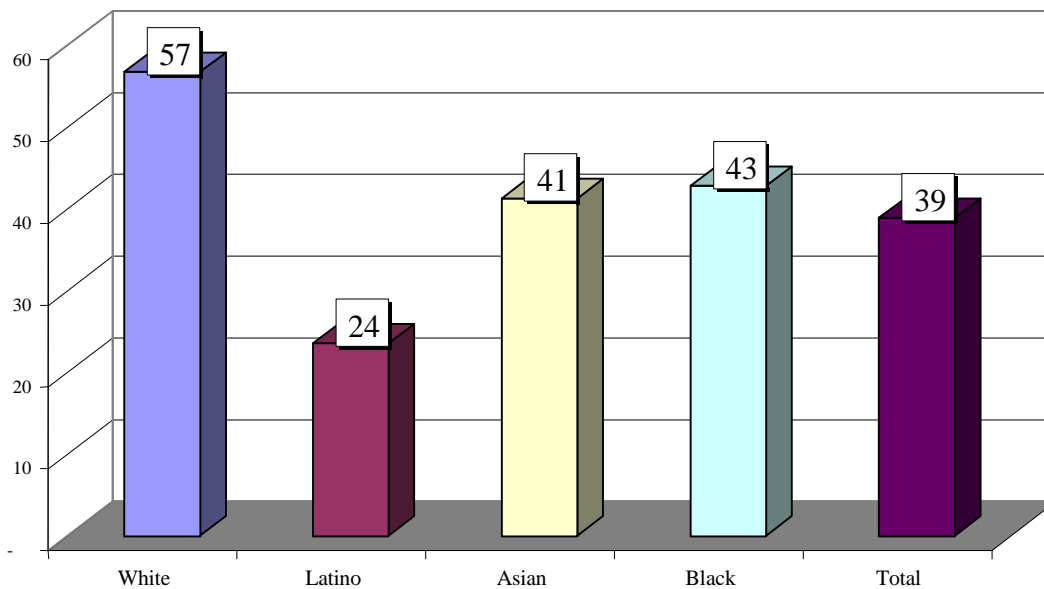
Source: California Research Bureau of the California State Library using the 1997 October Current Population Survey.

Latino, Asian, & African-American Children Are Less Likely to Have Gone to Pre-School

Currently California has around half a million children in kindergarten. Of those in kindergarten, how many went to pre-school the year before? The chart below shows that 57 percent of White children in kindergarten attended pre-school the year before. Asians and Blacks were less likely to attend pre-school¹ with 41 and 43 percent attending pre-school, respectively. Latino children were even less likely to attend pre-school. Only 24 percent attended pre-school.

Chart 2

Percent of Children in Kindergarten Who Attended Pre-School or Nursery School the Year Before, by Ethnic Group(1997)



Source: California Research Bureau of the California State Library using the 1997 October Current Population Survey. Estimates for this graph on Asians and Blacks are based on a small sample size and thus may be unreliable.

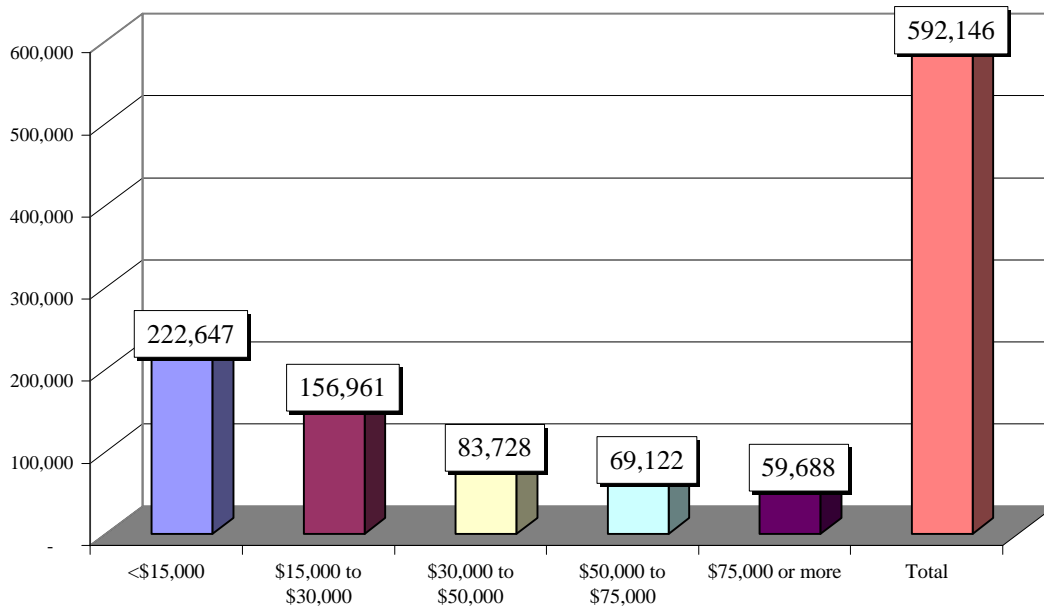
¹ The percentages for Asians and Blacks are based on small sample sizes and thus may be unreliable.

Children of Low Income Families Are Less Likely to be Enrolled in Pre-School

In addition to ethnicity, family income is a strong predictor for whether or not a child attends pre-school. Thirty-eight percent of the children not in pre-school are in families with incomes below \$15,000. Another twenty-seven percent of the children not attending pre-school are in families with incomes between \$15,000 and \$30,000. Thus, two-thirds of the children not in pre-school come from families with incomes below \$30,000 (or the equivalent of about 250% of the poverty level). The chart below shows the number of children by income group.

Chart 3

Children Ages 3 to 5 Not in Pre-K or in Kindergarten by Income Group (1997)



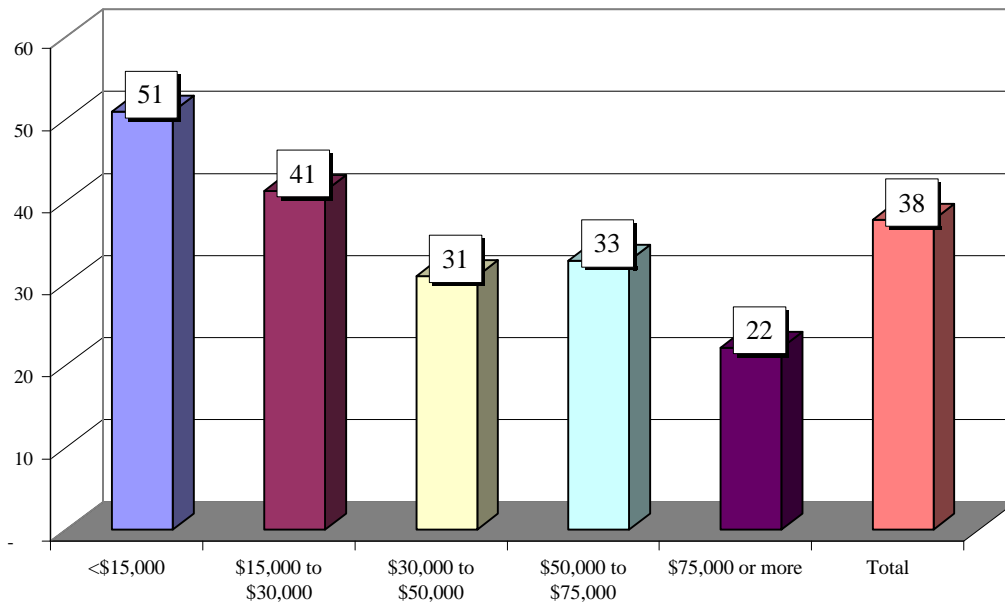
Source: California Research Bureau of the California State Library using the 1997 October Current Population Survey.

Note: The data in the chart above does not add up to the figure of 650,479 shown earlier because information on family income was missing for some records.

Proportionately, the higher the family income, the higher the likelihood that the child will be in pre-school. At the lower end of the income spectrum, there are an estimated 438,000 children, ages three to five, with family incomes below \$15,000. Of these, 51 percent or 222,647 are not attending pre-school or kindergarten. At the other end of the income spectrum, there are an estimated 270,000 children in families with incomes above \$75,000. The percentage of children in this group not attending pre-school is 22 percent or 59,688.

Chart 4

Percent of Children Ages 3 to 5 Not in Pre-K or in Kindergarten by Income Group (1997)



Source: California Research Bureau of the California State Library using the 1997 October Current Population Survey.