



Department of Education

Iowa Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program for Four-Year-Old Children Fact Sheet

Funded Enrollment

5,126 children in 2007-08

9,676 children in 2008-09

13,666 children in 2009-10

19,799 children in 2010-11

19,900 children in 2011-12

21,629 children in 2012-13

22,265 children in 2013-14

22,695 children in 2014-15

23,141 children in 2015-16

23,518 children in 2016-17

24,610 children in 2017-18

25,215 children in 2018-19*

25,330 children in 2019-20*

22,877 children in 2020-21*

24,462 children in 2021-22*

24,497 children in 2022-23*

24,311 children in 2023-24*

*These numbers indicate only the children funded through the Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program. Amended code language for the SWVPP effective for FY2018 increased flexibility in the use of SWVPP funds, inclusive of paying the cost of attendance of a child older or younger than age 4 based on local school board decision. However, only 4-year-olds generate state funding. The number of 4-year-olds who were counted for state funding in 2019-20 was 25,080. In addition to children funded through the SWVPP, children also attended with support from other funding sources.

Participating School Districts

In 2023-24, the SWVPP was provided in:

322 districts
out of 324 statewide

238 community
partners

More Opportunities for Quality Learning Experience

Iowa's Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program for Four-Year-Old Children (SWVPP) is an important part of the state's comprehensive early childhood effort, providing more opportunities for young children to build a strong foundation for learning. The preschool programs are expected to serve four-year-old children with a range of abilities representing the social, linguistic, cultural, and economic diversity of families within the communities.

The SWVPP was established May 10, 2007, in House File 877.

In the Fall of 2023, approximately 27,067 Iowa preschoolers in 322 school districts benefited from the SWVPP by providing at least 10 hours per week of developmentally appropriate instruction. More children than are reflected in the funded enrollment count have access to this preschool program through other funding sources.

The SWVPP along with other state and federally funded preschool programs and community partners in Iowa—such as Head Start, Early Childhood Special Education, Title I, and Shared Visions—make up Iowa's preschool landscape.



The Benefits

The majority of brain development occurs well before the age of four.¹ Quality early childhood programming is the best way to prepare children for success in life.

Participants in high quality state-funded preschool programs are more likely to:

- Develop social/emotional skills and have reduced problem behaviors
- Have reduced likelihood of repeating grades
- Have reduced likelihood of school suspension, addiction or arrest
- Graduate on-time, and to earn a high school diploma or gain some college experience
- Be employed full-time or be self-employed

Many SWVPP classrooms provide inclusive learning environments for children with disabilities. Studies have shown the tremendous benefits of inclusion for all children in multiple developmental areas including language acquisition and use, early literacy skills, and early numeracy concepts.

There are also positive effects in social-emotional behavioral health development as children are provided access and support in building friendships and participating in learning with their peers.²

In an analysis of recent research, most state-funded preschool participants experienced both short-term and long-term effects previously listed, while 30% demonstrated converging effects. Short- and long-term gains were greatest for low-income children and dual language learners. “Spillover effects” occurred for non-participants, when they were placed in elementary classrooms with children who did attend state-funded preschool.³

Economists have shown that high-quality early childhood programs bring impressive returns on investment to the public. Long-term studies have found the return on investment could be as high as \$17 for every dollar invested in early learning programs.⁴ Program participants followed into adulthood benefit from increased earnings. Returns on investment to the public include reduced special education, welfare and crime costs, and increased earnings and tax revenues from program participants later in life.⁵



1. Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University (2016)
2. Barton, E. E. & Smith, B. J. (2014). Brief fact sheet of research on preschool inclusion. Pyramid Plus: The Colorado Center for Social Emotional Competence and Inclusion. Denver, CO. <http://www.pyramidplus.org/>.
3. Education Commission of the States (2020). Exploring New Research on Pre-K Outcomes. <https://www.ecs.org/exploring-new-research-on-pre-k-outcomes/>
4. Meloy, B., Gardner, M., & Darling-Hammond, L. (2019). Untangling the evidence on preschool effectiveness: Insights for policymakers. Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute.
5. Phillips, D.A., Lipsey, M.W., Dodge, K.A., Haskins, R., Bassok, D., Burchinal, M.R., Duncan, G.J., Dynarski, M., Magnuson, K.A., & Weiland, C. (2017). The Current State of Scientific Knowledge on Pre-Kindergarten Effects. Brookings Institution and the Duke Center for Child and Family Policy.

Funding

\$15 million in 2007-08

\$32 million* in 2008-09

\$45 million* in 2009-10

\$64 million* in 2010-11

\$58 million** in 2011-12

\$60 million** in 2012-13

\$66 million** in 2013-14

\$70 million** in 2014-15

\$73 million** in 2015-16

\$76 million** in 2016-17

\$78 million** in 2017-18

\$82 million** in 2018-19

\$86 million** in 2019-20

\$82 million** in 2020-21

\$81 million** in 2021-22

\$88 million** in 2022-23

\$91 million** in 2023-24

* Both grant allocation and formula funding

**Formula funding only

Allocation of state funds for the Preschool Program is intended to provide predictable, equitable, and sustainable funding.

State aid received for SWVPP children is equal to one-half of the state cost per pupil.

Rankings

According to the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER), in 2023, Iowa's national rank was:

5th for four-year-old access to quality preschool programming.

39th for state spending on access to quality preschool.

What the Four-Year-Old Preschool Program Offers

A licensed teacher. An early childhood licensed teacher is responsible for designing and implementing effective learning environments using instructional strategies to enhance children's learning.

A minimum of 10 hours per week of quality preschool instruction. Providers may provide more hours and childcare through other federal, state or local programming. There may be a charge for these services if not funded through state or federal sources.

Community collaboration. The delivery of quality preschool services are provided by an appropriately licensed teacher. These services could be provided in the public school setting, or the district could collaborate with community-based early childhood programs, non-public, faith-based, non-profit or for profit centers. Programs must also provide family involvement opportunities such as home visits, family nights and conferences.

High quality program standards. School districts and partners select and implement at least one of three approved program standards: the Iowa Quality Preschool Program Standards, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Early Learning Program Accreditation Standards and Assessment Items or the Head Start Program Performance Standards.

Appropriate adult-child ratio of 1 to 10 and a maximum group size of 20.

High quality learning standards. Programs must have rigorous and relevant curriculum and assessments to enhance children's strengths, interests, and knowledge (based on the Iowa Early Learning Standards); and alignment with K-12 standards and academic expectations.

Early Indicators of Success

The Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program continues to meet high quality standards that support positive effects on Iowa's incoming kindergarteners. Participating school districts implement the Iowa Early Learning Standards. These standards identify the knowledge, skills, motivation and attitudes needed by preschoolers that lead to success as students and as adults. Additionally, participating programs must meet one of three program standards: Head Start Program Performance Standards, Iowa Quality Preschool Program Standards, or National Association for the Education of Young Children Early Learning Program Accreditation Standards and Assessment Items. Each set of program standards is indicative of high quality programming efforts.

Studies continue to show increased proficiencies in beginning reading skills among all children who attend preschool programs. In Iowa, all students in grades K-3 are required to be assessed three times per year with a universal literacy screening tool. The vast majority of districts use the Formative Assessment System for Teachers (FAST). The number of students proficient in early literacy skills upon kindergarten entry is increasing overall. In the Fall of 2014, 53 percent of kindergarteners were proficient on the FAST assessment. In the Fall of 2023, 67 percent of kindergarten children were proficient on approved early literacy screeners.

