

# **EXPAND PRESCHOOL FUNDING FOR CHILDREN IN POVERTY**

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*The Community Legislative Action Team recommends an increase in weighted funding in the Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program (SWVPP) for children living at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level.*

## **Background**

- The Des Moines Public School district manages various early education programs, funded by a variety of sources, including Head Start, Shared Visions, and the Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program (SWVPP).
- The SWVPP was established in 2007 to provide 10 hours per week of early education to all four year-old children in Iowa.
- During the first four years of the program, the state funded students at .6 per pupil cost for one full-time student. In the 2011-2012 school year, the funding allocation was decreased to .5 per pupil cost for one full-time student. While funding has decreased, costs for the program continue to rise.
- Iowa has the highest rate in the nation of households with all available parents working outside of the home.
- Providing only 10 hours per week of early learning programming presents challenges to parents having to secure an environment to care for their children during the remaining hours of the week while they work.
- One in six Iowa children lives in poverty while one in five is food insecure.
- Preschool funding has limitations and does not cover costs such as physical buildings, transportation, food, interpretation and translation services, or support staff.

## **Why This is a Good Investment**

- Supports a Child's Educational Success. Providing a high-quality early learning environment for children establishes a solid foundation that enables children to start school ready to learn. Without a quality early learning experience, children can start school up to 18 months behind their peers.
- A Solid Return on Investment. Research found that for every \$1 spent on a quality early learning environments, \$7 are saved in the long term on expenditures such as special education, high school dropouts, juvenile and criminal justice, and social welfare programs.

## **Why This is Urgent**

Iowa Reading and Retention Law, enacted in 2012, expects children to be proficient readers by third grade. If unsuccessful, children could be required to attend summer reading programming. If they continue to fall short of proficiency standards, students may be retained in third grade. Unfortunately, the Iowa Legislature has failed to fund a third grade reading program. Research has shown that low-income children who experience high-quality preschool environments score better on third grade reading assessments than their peers without a strong preschool experience.