

EXPAND PRESCHOOL FUNDING FOR CHILDREN IN POVERTY

The Community Legislative Action Team recommends an increase in weighted funding in the Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program (SWVPP) for Iowa children living at or below 185% of the Federal Poverty Level.

Why this is Urgent

DMPS data shows that children who attend preschool are better prepared for kindergarten than those who do not, both academically and socially. Only 23% of kindergarten students who did not attend preschool met Fall kindergarten reading assessment benchmarks. When a child is living in poverty, the number drops to 15%. Children who do not attend preschool continue to lag behind their classmates through 6th grade. The State of Iowa needs to level the playing field and give every Iowa family the choice to access preschool - a solid foundation for a lifetime of learning.

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.
- The Positive Impact of Preschool Over Time. DMPS data shows that students who attend preschool are more likely to meet their kindergarten through 6th grade literacy and math benchmarks.
- A Solid Return on Investment. Research found that for every \$1 spent on a quality early learning environment, \$17 are saved on long-term expenditures such as special education, high school dropouts, juvenile and criminal justice, and social welfare programs.
- Workforce Development. Iowa has more jobs than people in the workforce. When students are supported in a half-day or full-day preschool program with childcare, parents/caregivers who want to return to work can do so. That's good for Iowa's economy!

Background

- Des Moines Public Schools manages early education programs funded by a variety of sources, including Head Start, Shared Visions, and the Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program, which was established in 2007 to provide 10 hours per week of early education to all 4-year-old children in Iowa.
- During the first four years of the SWVPP, the state funded students at .6 per pupil cost for one fulltime student. In the 2011-2012 school year, the funding allocation decreased to .5 per pupil cost for one full-time student. While funding has decreased, costs for the program continue to rise.
- Current preschool funding must cover instruction, transportation, interpretation and translation, support staff, and snacks for students.
- Translation services alone cost the preschool program more over time: \$39,756 for school year 23-24; \$32,065 for school year 2022-23; \$26,210 for school year 2021-22.
- Preschool funding also has limitations and does not cover costs such as physical buildings and meals.
- Providing only 10 hours per week of early learning programming presents challenges for parents who must secure childcare during the remaining hours of the week while they work. In some families, this results in one adult in the home remaining out of the workforce.
- More than 91,000 Iowa children live in poverty in both rural and urban counties.