

**The Status of Preschool in Iowa:
Opportunities for Continuous Improvement and Development**

Over the last decade, Iowa has made major advances in developing preschool for children. This has included expanded funding under Community Empowerment to provide vouchers for preschool, continued investment in Shared Visions, and creation and expansion of the Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program (SVPP). With Head Start and preschool provided under Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, Iowa now provides a publicly-supported preschool experience for almost two-thirds of all 4-year-olds in the state. Table One, below, shows approximate current funding and children served by these programs (including the increase in the Governor’s budget for SVPP in 2011).

Table One: Public Preschool Programs and Children Served in Iowa: FY2011 Estimates

<u>Program</u>	<u>Funding</u>	<u>Population Served</u>	<u># 3- to 5-Year-Olds Served</u>	<u>Estimated 4-Year-Olds</u>
SVPP	\$65.0M	all 4-year-olds	16,700	16,700
Empowerment	\$ 8.8M	3–5 at-risk	2,500	1,500
Head Start	\$45.0M	3–5 poverty	5,900	3,600
Shared Visions	\$ 7.8M	3–4 130% of poverty	2,200	1,600
Part B	\$20.0M	Special Education	3,300	2,000
Totals	\$126.6M		30,600	25,400
			All Iowa 4-year-olds	39,000
			% 4-year-olds served	65%

[Note: These are broad estimates. More detailed information could be routinely collected and compiled by the Legislative Services Agency to provide up-to-date and trend information.]

While there may be some duplication across the programs (e.g. a child may be in both Empowerment or Head Start and SVPP), it is clear that a very significant share of Iowa’s 4-year-olds now have a public preschool experience. The Statewide Voluntary

Preschool Program now serves almost two-thirds of all 4-year-olds who are served by one of the programs, and its funding is a little over half of all public preschool funding in the state.

The data available from these different programs varies and, with the exception of Shared Visions, there is not a great deal of Iowa research and evaluation on their impacts. Moreover, it is clear, given the location of the two largest programs—SVPP and Head Start—that some parts of the state have very little public preschool programming.

In addition, there are reasons to believe that there are some children who are less likely than others to participate in preschool. Parental reports from the American Community Survey suggest that participation is lower among lower-income children and among Hispanic children, in particular. While the American Community Survey involves self-reporting of parents (and likely includes many privately funded preschool programs, as well as public ones, for higher income families), it gives an indication of different levels of participation of different groups. The relatively low levels of participation of Hispanic children on the American Community Survey also corresponds to the findings from two studies of preschool programs in Iowa regarding participation by different groups.¹

Further, while SVPP has expanded to many districts, there are many districts that do not yet have this program. Currently, 175 of Iowa's 361 school districts have SVPP funding, independently or part of a consortium. Many of those that do not have SVPP also do not have Head Start programs in the vicinity. A number of districts have not yet applied for funding during any of the first three rounds of competitive applications. Even with a fourth round of funding, there will be significant gaps in availability of SVPP, although over half the school districts in the state should be participating.

There is a reason for having different preschool programs to meet the different needs of children. Head Start and Shared Visions, for instance, are more comprehensive in their focus than most SVPP's and serve children who are more likely to have additional needs of support to start school healthy and equipped for success. At the same time, coordination across these programs is left up to local areas to navigate and there is no explicit direction or support from the state for coordinating or integrating these efforts.

While Head Start has a number of performance standards and reporting requirements that it must meet, SVPP has relied upon its requirement for credentialed teachers and adherence to regulations for its major quality monitoring and accountability, along with some verification visits. The Department of Education monitors SVPP for its compliance with quality preschool program standards, but limited information has been released to date regarding this monitoring or the verification visits.

At this point in time, as Iowa is seeking to complete its work on creating a system of preschool programs where all children can participate, it is timely to look at what next steps and legislative direction might be provided to achieve these results. This includes

¹ Child and Family Policy Center studies of Council Bluffs and Des Moines preschool programs.

a review of the SVPP statute, the Early Childhood Iowa (Community Empowerment) statute, and Shared Visions, in particular.

The following outlines some of the steps that might be taken:

1. Develop a more comprehensive and integrated data system for Iowa preschool programs.
 - A. Collect uniform basic demographic information from all state-funded preschool programs according to a template [see Appendix One for prototype] and require student identifier designations, to the extent allowed under existing federal and state confidentiality provisions.
 - B. Develop cooperative agreements with Head Start for similar data.
 - C. Establish a core kindergarten assessment based upon state early learning standards and covering the five domains of school readiness, for use by preschools and schools.
2. Develop appropriate outreach to ensure participation of all groups in preschool.
 - A. Provide expectations for regularly reviewing all those served by preschool programs by different subgroup characteristics (e.g. race, income, and ethnicity) and develop additional outreach and engagement strategies for identified underserved populations.
 - B. Develop strategies for all districts to participate in SVPP, if and as it is further expanded, including provisions that enable existing districts that are funded to expand as needed to serve their entire populations of eligible children.
3. Develop protocols for coordination and integration of efforts at the local level to ensure seamless responses for families.
 - A. Require basic assessments by both local Early Childhood Iowa Boards and school districts of the preschool programs in their jurisdictions [see Appendix Two for prototype] and development of plans and protocols for referring children to preschool programs and services that best meet their needs, including potential common outreach and intake provisions across programs.
 - B. Examine how these local governance structures can best be coordinated in the provision of voluntary preschool [see Appendix Three for data].
4. Increase emphasis upon performance measurement, continuous improvement, and reporting on and accountability for results.
 - A. Develop common reporting forms through the longitudinal statewide data base on preschool participation.
 - B. Enlist research and evaluation expertise in Iowa to help in developing data systems and making use of them for evaluation and research purposes.
 - C. Establish performance measures for use by preschool programs tied to state early learning standards.

Appendix One

Prototype for Information Collection For All Publicly-Funded Preschool Programs

[Note: CFPC presented this information to Representative Mascher and Department of Education representatives in 2008, with an agreement that this information would be part of a data collection system for preschool.]

The following information could be collected from each participating school district/preschool program, and then aggregated at the state level.

Children Served

Number of Programs/Sites	_____
Number of 4-year-olds served	_____
Number of 3- to 5-year-olds served	_____
Ethnicity of children served	
White	_____
Black	_____
Hispanic	_____
Other	_____
Language background of children served	
English	_____
Spanish	_____
Other	_____
Income level of children served	
100% of poverty or below	_____
100–185% of poverty	_____
above 185% of poverty	_____

Teaching Force

Teachers	_____
Teaching assistants	_____
Ethnicity of teachers	
White	_____
Black	_____
Hispanic	_____
Other	_____
Ethnicity of teaching assistants	
White	_____

Black	_____
Hispanic	_____
Other	_____
Language of teachers	
English only	_____
Bilingual	_____
Teacher backgrounds	
Prior elementary teacher, no preschool exp.	_____
Prior elementary teacher, also preschool exp.	_____
Prior preschool teacher	_____
No prior teaching experience	_____
Type of teacher certification	
K-6	_____
Pre-K-3	_____
Pre-K	_____
B.A. in child development/related field	_____
AA in child development	_____

Program Characteristics

Location of program	
In public school building	_____
In nonpublic school building	_____
In child care center	_____
In other setting (describe)	_____
Weekly hours of operation	
10 hours per week	_____
11-15 hours per week	_____
16-24 hour per week	_____
25+ hours per week	_____
Curriculum employed	
Describe _____	
Classroom Standards Employed	
Head Start Performance Standards	_____
NAEYC Standards	_____
QPPS	_____
Parent Involvement Activities	
Describe _____	

Wraparound services

When, during a preschool day, a student is not in the public preschool setting he/she is:

- In their home _____
- In a child development home _____
- In a child development center _____
- In a Head Start program _____
- Other:
Describe:_____

Collaboration Activities

Participants in Ongoing Planning Work

- Community empowerment _____
- Head Start programs _____
- Child Care Resource and Referral _____
- Individual Child Care Centers _____
- Family Child Development Providers _____
- Other _____

Form and Frequency of Planning Work

Describe _____

Assessment

What forms of child assessments are employed

Describe _____

Outcomes of those assessments

Appendix Two

Prototype for Applications for Grant Funding Under Voluntary Preschool and ECI

[Note: This form is adapted from a form CFPC submitted to the Department of Education for consideration in use with Voluntary Preschool grant applications in 2008–09)

1. Provide an estimate of the number of 4-year-olds living in your district/ECI area:

Total # of 4-year-olds	_____
White, non-Hispanic	_____
Black/African American	_____
Asian/Pacific Islander	_____
Native American	_____
Other	_____
Hispanic	_____

2. Complete the following information about publicly-funded preschool programs operating in your district/ECI area:

	# children served	# of 4-year-olds (if available)
Head Start (not early Head Start)	_____	_____
Shared Visions	_____	_____
ECI voucher program	_____	_____
Part B Special Education	_____	_____
Existing District program	_____	_____
Voluntary Preschool	_____	_____
Other _____	_____	_____

(If there is an existing district program, please describe who it serves, any fee structure that exists for it, and how children are recruited)

3. Complete the following information about the total number of 4-year-olds you expect to have served by public programs in 2008–09

	#
Preschool for All	_____
Shared Visions	_____
ECI voucher program	_____
Part B Special Education	_____
Existing District Program	_____
Other	_____
Total	_____
Total as % of all four year-olds in district/ECI area	_____

If any figures are different for the number of 4-year-old children served in questions 2 and 3, please describe the reasons and how funding will continue to be used to support young children and Preschool for All funding will not supplant that funding.

Appendix Three

Governance and Administration of Early Childhood Programs at the Community Level: A Comparison of Community Empowerment Areas and School Districts

Over the last decade, Iowa lawmakers have established two major initiatives to expand early childhood services in Iowa. The first, Community Empowerment, now has 58 Community Empowerment Boards that cover the entire state in providing services, organized by county units of government. The second, the Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program (SVPP), is now operating in 175 of Iowa's 361 school districts, most (169) established to serve a single district. Many of the districts that do not yet have SVPP grants are among Iowa's smaller school districts.

One of the purposes of the LEAN event was to create more efficiency in the administration of community empowerment funds at the local level, with a particular focus upon reducing the number of local Empowerment Boards. The LEAN event recommendations were to require consolidation of Community Empowerment Boards that were serving single counties that had a population of children in those counties of fewer than 5,000 children birth through five.

Since both SVVP and Community Empowerment serve 4-year-olds, it is important that they coordinate their efforts to ensure a seamless system of services and supports for those children and their families. The actual jurisdictional boundaries for the two programs, however, are quite different. Further, as SVPP moves into its fourth year, any expansion to cover the full state and all the school districts not now participating should take into account the efficiency of developing programs on an individual school district. There also is the important issue of reaching children who will be attending nonpublic schools for their elementary education, which may require additional efforts to support voluntary preschool programs in non-public preschool settings.

As there is an effort to streamline and create more efficiency in local Community Empowerment Boards, the same attention should be given to Voluntary Preschool for Four-Year-Old Children expansions. Even if Community Empowerment Boards are reduced, their tasks of collaborating with 361 different school districts will not be reduced, and in many instances will require more relationships to be developed.

Virtually all the attention to date in this legislative session has been directed to restructuring Community Empowerment to be more efficient, coordinated with other services, and accountable, but this cannot be fully achieved without also reviewing how SVPP also can be made more efficient, coordinated with other services, and accountable.

The following table shows the current configuration of both Community Empowerment Boards and School Districts in relation to the number of children birth through five in their jurisdictions. This table is shown both with respect to Community Empowerment

Boards and School Districts with a cut-off of 5,000 and 3,000 children (the latter figure was recommended as a more logical cut-off for use in restructuring Community Empowerment Boards under the LEAN event).

	<u>Number of Boards</u>	<u>Total Counties</u>
All Community Empowerment Boards	58	99
Single County Boards with more than 5,000 children 0–5	8	8
Multi-County Boards with more than 5,000 children 0–5	1	4
Single County Boards with 3,000 to 5,000 children	5	5
Multi-County Boards with 3,000 to 5,000 children	11	34
Single County Boards with 1,000 to 3,000 children	13	13
Multi-County Boards with 1,000 to 3,000 children	9	24
Single County Boards with less than 1,000 children	11	11
		<u>Total Districts</u>
Total School Districts		361
Voluntary Pre-School School Districts		175
Participating Districts with more than 5,000 children 0–5		7
Non-participating Districts with more than 5,000 children 0–5		0
Participating Districts with 3,000 to 5,000 children		1
Nonparticipating Districts with 3,000 to 5,000 children		4
Participating Districts with 1,000 to 3,000 children		19
Nonparticipating Districts with 1,000 to 3,000 children		9
Participating Districts with less than 1,000 children		148
Nonparticipating Districts with less than 1,000 children		173



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