



PRELIMINARY REPORT ON INFORMATION FROM 2011-12

Preschool Participation and Third-Grade Reading Proficiency

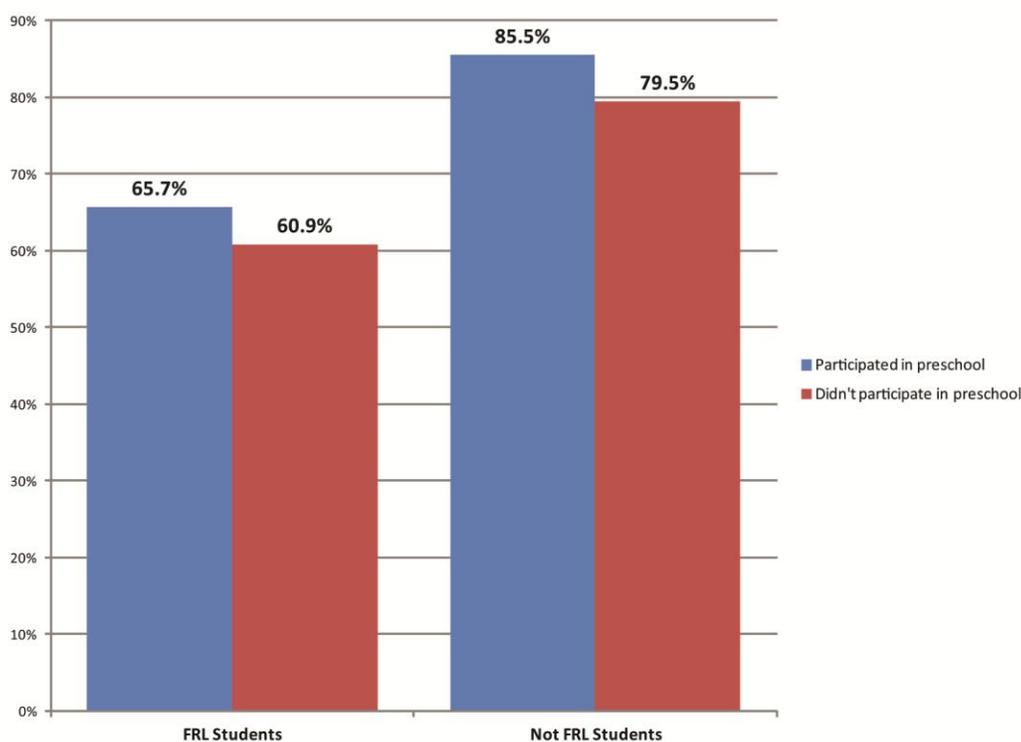
May 2013

Over the last two decades, Iowa has increased public support for preschool programs through Shared Visions, Early Childhood Iowa, Part B (special education) preschool and the Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program (SVPP). SVPP was initiated in 2007-8 and designed to phase in universal coverage over four years. Most of those 2007-8 preschool participants were in third grade—the grade when Iowa Test of Basic Skills scores are reported to the state—in the 2011-12 school year. Included in student records and ITBS scores reported to the Iowa Department of Education is parental reporting on whether the child participated in preschool, as well as the child’s race and free and reduced-price lunch (FRL), English-language learner (ELL) and special education status.

This brief analyzes the relationship between reported preschool participation and third-grade reading proficiency. Parental reports do not distinguish the specific type of preschool program in which the child participated, but they do allow for comparisons of third-grade proficiency rates by reported preschool participation and by other child and family factors.*

Since family income is known to relate to student academic performance, proficiency information first was broken down by preschool participation both for students on and not on the free and reduced-price lunch program (see Chart 1). The data show that children with reported preschool participation were more likely to be proficient in reading in third grade

Chart 1. Percent of third-grade students proficient in reading by free and reduced-price lunch status and preschool participation



than those who did not participate. The difference—roughly 5 percentage points for both the FRL and non-FRL groups—existed four years after the preschool experience itself. While it is not possible to attribute causality, these differences are consistent with research on the benefits of preschool programs.

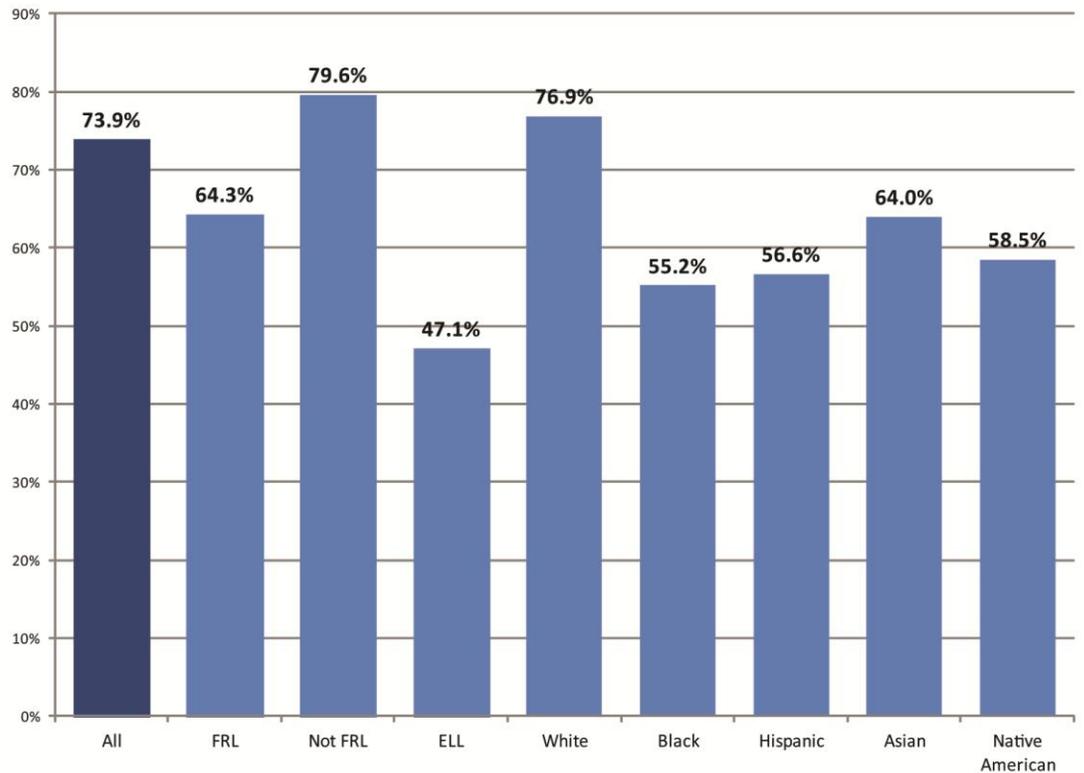
At the same time, there is a much more substantial gap—roughly 15 percentage points—between FRL and non-FRL students, whether or not they participated in preschool. This is also consistent with the research, and suggests that preschool narrows, but does

not close, the gap in educational performance of low-income and higher-income children.

The data also highlight the substantial variation in preschool participation rates by FRL and ELL status and race and ethnicity (see Chart 2).

Reported preschool participation rates among non-FRL children were roughly 15 percentage points higher than for FRL children. Rates were also much higher for white students than students in other racial and ethnic groups, and particularly for ELL students.

Chart 2. Percent of third graders with parent-reported preschool experience, by free and reduced-price lunch (FRL) and English Language Learner (ELL) status and race/ethnicity



Parents are likely reporting private as well as public preschool experiences in these numbers, and more affluent parents are more likely to enroll their children in specialized private preschool programs, even if they have high tuition. Publicly supported preschool is designed, at least in part, to narrow that gap. The differences in reported participation rates do suggest that greater attention may need to be given to recruiting and enrolling low-income, minority and English-language learning students if preschool is going to help “close the gap” in educational outcomes.

* CFPC is working with the Iowa Department of Education to secure information that can enable similar analyses related to participation in specific publicly financed preschool programs (SVPP, Shared Visions, ECI preschools, Part B preschools, and, to the extent data is available, Head Start). This should provide for a more detailed picture of the degree to which public preschool programs relate to both third-grade proficiency scores and to reaching out to and engaging low-income children and other children for whom participation rates are low.