



## LEGISLATIVE BRIEFING

Iowa Department of Education

# Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program for Four-Year-Olds

### ➔ What is it?

Iowa's Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program for Four-Year-Old Children (Preschool Program) is an important part of the state's comprehensive early childhood effort, providing more opportunities for young children to access quality preschool and enter school ready to learn.

Today, more than 13,000 Iowa preschoolers in 175 school districts benefit from the Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program, which is provided in collaboration with other state and federally funded preschool programs and community partners. Many additional students are served in other quality programs, including Head Start, Early Childhood Special Education, Title I, and Shared Visions.

Through the Preschool Program, Iowa public school districts and partners provide at least 10 hours per week of developmentally appropriate instruction. The Preschool Program is part of Iowa's efforts to implement early childhood core curriculum, the Early Learning Standards, in alignment with the school-age Iowa Core.

In addition, quality preschool programming is based on meeting 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 Program Standards and Accreditation Criteria, or the Head Start Program Performance Standards.

School districts and their collaborative partners must demonstrate compliance with all quality preschool program standard requirements, such as providing:

- an appropriately licensed teacher;
- rigorous and relevant curriculum and assessments to enhance children's strengths, interests, and knowledge (basis of the Iowa Early Learning Standards);
- appropriate adult child ratios and group size;
- family involvement opportunities such as home visits, preschool visits, and conferences;
- developmentally appropriate materials and space;
- staff development for teachers to improve instructional skills.

School districts submit annual data on children participating in the Preschool Program using the Iowa Student State ID system. This allows for both long-term evaluation of the program as well as an understanding of student success for preschool program participants.

### Statewide Voluntary Preschool by the Numbers

#### 2007-2008

- 182 applications received
- 66 districts awarded grants
- 5,126 children enrolled

#### 2008-2009

- 161 applications received
- 49 districts awarded grants
- 9,676 children enrolled (cumulative)

#### 2009-2010

- 125 applications received
- 53 districts awarded grants
- 13,666 children enrolled (cumulative)

#### Total

- **468** applications received
- **168** districts awarded grants (175 including consortiums)
- **13,666** children enrolled



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### → When did it come about?

The Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program for Four-Year-Old Children was established May 10, 2007, when Governor Chet Culver signed House File 877. The rules (281-Iowa Administrative Code Chapter 16) provide guidance for districts and partners to implement the Statewide Voluntary Preschool for Four-Year-Old Children, as created in new Iowa Code chapter 256C.

### → How do school districts participate?

Iowa public school districts apply for Preschool Program funding through a competitive grant process. The awarded school districts receive funds based on the number of four-year-old children in the approved local program. After being approved and successfully operating for one year, funding moves to a state funding mechanism. The allocation of state funds for the Preschool Program is intended to provide a predictable, equitable, and sustainable funding method to improve access to quality early childhood education and to increase the number of children participating in quality programming.

### → Where does this initiative currently stand?

The Iowa Department of Education (Department) continues to provide support for districts and collaborative partners to implement quality preschool programming.

To ensure high-quality programs, the Quality Preschool Program Standards Verification process was created, which includes on-site program reviews. In addition, districts are required to submit data to the Department for the purpose of accountability and program evaluation. The Kindergarten Literacy Assessment data as well as academic progress in later years will help evaluate program results.

The Department is striving to maintain quality preschool programs through ongoing professional development based on the Iowa Professional Development Model. Iowa's Area Education Agencies assist with these efforts. Professional development funds are critical to boosting preschool program quality by supporting teachers in their efforts to effectively apply program standards aligned with core curriculum and assessment. The many efforts to enhance student achievement in Iowa begin with the quality preschool programs.

### → How has this initiative helped Iowa school-age students?

Research increasingly shows the benefits of quality early learning environments in a child's development are long-term and far-reaching. Young children exposed to high-quality settings exhibit better language and math skills, better cognitive and social skills, and better relationships with classmates than do children in lower-quality settings. With Iowa's student identifier, the state can do more to evaluate how high-quality early learning programs help improve academic achievement, lower the dropout rate, and better prepare students for their future. Continued funding of this program is critical to nurturing the success of all Iowa's children.

### → Where can I get more information?

For additional information, please visit the Iowa Department of Education website at [www.iowa.gov/educate](http://www.iowa.gov/educate), and click on "Early Childhood" on the left-hand side of the homepage.

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