

## UNIVERSAL PRESCHOOL IN IOWA

# Steps Needed to Ensure Equity and Access

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### SUMMARY

Overall public investments in pre-school in Iowa exceed \$130 million annually, but there is no single information source that can answer the straightforward question, “Who participates in publicly financed pre-school?” This is true for Iowa students as a whole, and for students grouped by family income, race and ethnicity, language, geography and special education status.

By drawing on different data sources, however, it is clear that pre-school is not available on a universal basis. Some populations—particularly those most likely to have subsequent challenges in school—participate at much lower rates than the population as a whole.

Iowa established the Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program (SVPP) in 2007. It has grown to be the largest—although not the only—public preschool program in the state. It is available without regard to family income. Iowa also supports preschool for low-income children through its Shared Visions program and Early Childhood Iowa, the early-childhood system-building initiative.

In addition, the federal government funds Head Start for low-income children and, along with the state, special education preschool for children with developmental disabilities. Some local school districts offer additional preschool slots on a fee basis or using federal Title I or local funds. Sometimes these programs “wrap-around” one another to provide longer preschool experiences. For instance, children participating in Head Start also may participate in SVPP in the same classroom, thereby extending the preschool experience to a full day. In addition to publicly financed programs, Iowa parents send their children to an array of private preschools.

Developing a composite picture of which children are served by which—or any—public preschool program is important in order to understand the degree to which Iowa’s current array of preschool programs is available to all children and to identify gaps in usage.

CFPC secured currently available information from the Iowa Department of Education’s statewide longitudinal data base to begin assessing how well SVPP and other public preschool programs reach Iowa children. The data were broken down by parental income (as measured by free and reduced-price lunch participation), race and ethnicity, disability (special education status), English Language Learner status and geography (school district). CFPC also examined U.S. Census data on the parent-reported preschool participation of Iowa 4-year-olds by income and fiscal data on publicly funded preschool programs.

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**Although fragmented, there is already sufficient data to show differences in preschool participation rates by income, race/ethnicity, English language learner status and geography.**

Although many important questions about participation remain (questions an expanded statewide longitudinal data base should be able to answer with little or no additional data-reporting requirements for districts<sup>1</sup>), there is already sufficient data to say that, although Iowa’s preschool program is described as “universal,” there are substantial differences in participation rates by income, race/ethnicity, English language learner status and geography.

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**There is no systemic approach to providing access to SVPP and other public preschool experiences across Iowa.**

Black and Latino children and English language learners are much less likely to have participated in preschool, as low-income children. This is true for the SVPP program and for parental reports of preschool participation.

There are many reasons for this gap—from lack of transportation or wrap-around care to language or cultural barriers—but there is nothing in SVPP legislation (governing the state’s largest program) to encourage or require local districts to reach out specifically to these populations or to support the services needed to do so, even though early-childhood education is one part of a broad strategy to narrow the achievement gap in subsequent years.

In addition, Iowa school districts vary substantially in the scale of their preschool offerings. Some districts provide only a small number of preschool slots relative to their kindergarten enrollment, while others provide substantially more slots (likely due to offering programming for 3- as well as 4-year-olds and serving children who go on to attend a non-public kindergarten or a school in another district). There is no systemic approach to providing access to SVPP and other public preschool experiences. As a result there are large variations in availability and use across the state and among different subgroups of children.

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<sup>1</sup> Iowa’s statewide longitudinal data base could be a source for most of this information. Obtaining information on Head Start participants would require additional information sharing agreements. Incorporating this information into the statewide longitudinal data base also would provide opportunities to assess the differences in subsequent educational experiences of children participating and not participating in preschool.

## **POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

If Iowa wants a more equitable overall preschool program (and one that is successful in reaching the children most likely to experience subsequent school difficulties), Iowa lawmakers will have to give attention to developing the following:

1. Additional outreach efforts and focus on enrolling into preschool underserved populations (low-income children and English language learners, in particular)
2. Additional options, incentives or requirements that expand preschool opportunities in underserved parts of the state.
3. A more robust statewide data system that can comprehensively track and analyze all forms of preschool participation entered into a student record.

### **SUMMARY OF AVAILABLE DATA**

The remainder of this report provides the data CFPC has been able to piece together on public preschool participation in Iowa.

#### **TABLES**

1. Matrix of preschool programs available in Iowa (including child care assistance), number of 3- to 5-year-olds served and funding
2. 2012-13 kindergarteners who participated in SVPP in 2011-12 by demographic group
3. Data by school district on total pre-K participation and its relationship to kindergarten participation
4. Reading proficiency in third grade by parent reports of preschool participation and FRPL status
5. U.S. Census American Community Survey data on parent-reported preschool participation by income

TABLE 1

**Iowa Public Preschool Programs, Funding and Children Served,\* FY 2012-13 Estimates**

Sources: Iowa Departments of Education, Human Services and Management, U.S. Department of HHS, Office of Head Start

Program	Funding	Eligible	3- to 5-yr-olds served	4-year-olds served
SVPP	\$60.40 M	All 4-yr-olds**	23,617	21,429
ECI	\$5.48 M	3 to 5 yrs at risk	4,146	n/a
Head Start***	\$59.27 M	3 to 5 yrs 100% pov	7,266	3,831
Shared Visions#	\$6.540 M	3 to 5 yrs 130% pov	1,810	1,202
Part B	TBA	3 to 5 yrs w disability		
Child care assistance	\$94.77 M	0 to 12 yrs 145% pov	11,267	n/a

\* Children may participate in more than one program \*\* 3- and 5-year-olds may participate when space is available \*\*\* FY 12 # FY 2011-12

Here are descriptions of the major public preschool programs in Iowa, as well as the state’s child care assistance program, which is another important funder of early-childhood services in Iowa:

**Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program (SVPP)**, established in 2007, provides preschool experiences of at least 10 hours per week to 4-year-olds. It is administered through local school districts. In the 2012-13 school, 314 of Iowa’s 348 districts participated. Districts can operate preschools themselves or contract with other providers, and districts decide how many classrooms and slots to establish. The costs for SVPP are included in the school-aid formula and paid by the state (.5 weighting), but districts seeking to add classrooms or slots must fund those classrooms or slots for the first year of expansion without school aid formula funding.

**Costs for SVPP are paid by the state, but districts seeking to add classrooms or slots must fund them for the first year of expansion without state school aid formula funding.**

**Early Childhood Iowa (ECI)** does not operate preschool programs, but provides funding through local boards to support preschool experiences of low-income children (up to 200 percent of poverty), often in the form of scholarships to attend school-based or private preschools.

**Head Start** is a primarily federally funded preschool program that provides classroom-based early education and other supports to 3-5 -year-olds from families under 100 percent of poverty. It also provides home-based early-learning opportunities to low-income toddlers and their

families through Early Head Start.

**Shared Visions** is an Iowa grant program that provides more comprehensive preschool to 3-, 4- and 5-year-olds with family incomes up to 130 percent of poverty.

**Part B preschool** (named for the section of the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and often referred to locally as Early Childhood Special Education) provides preschool for children with disabilities ages 3 through 5.

**Child care assistance** is available to parents with incomes of up to 145 percent of poverty while they work or attend school. Families with incomes over 100 percent of poverty pay part of the cost, based on a sliding scale. Child care assistance is supported by a mix of federal and state funds.

**TABLE 2**

**2011-12 SVPP Participation of 2012-13 Public School Kindergarteners by Group\***

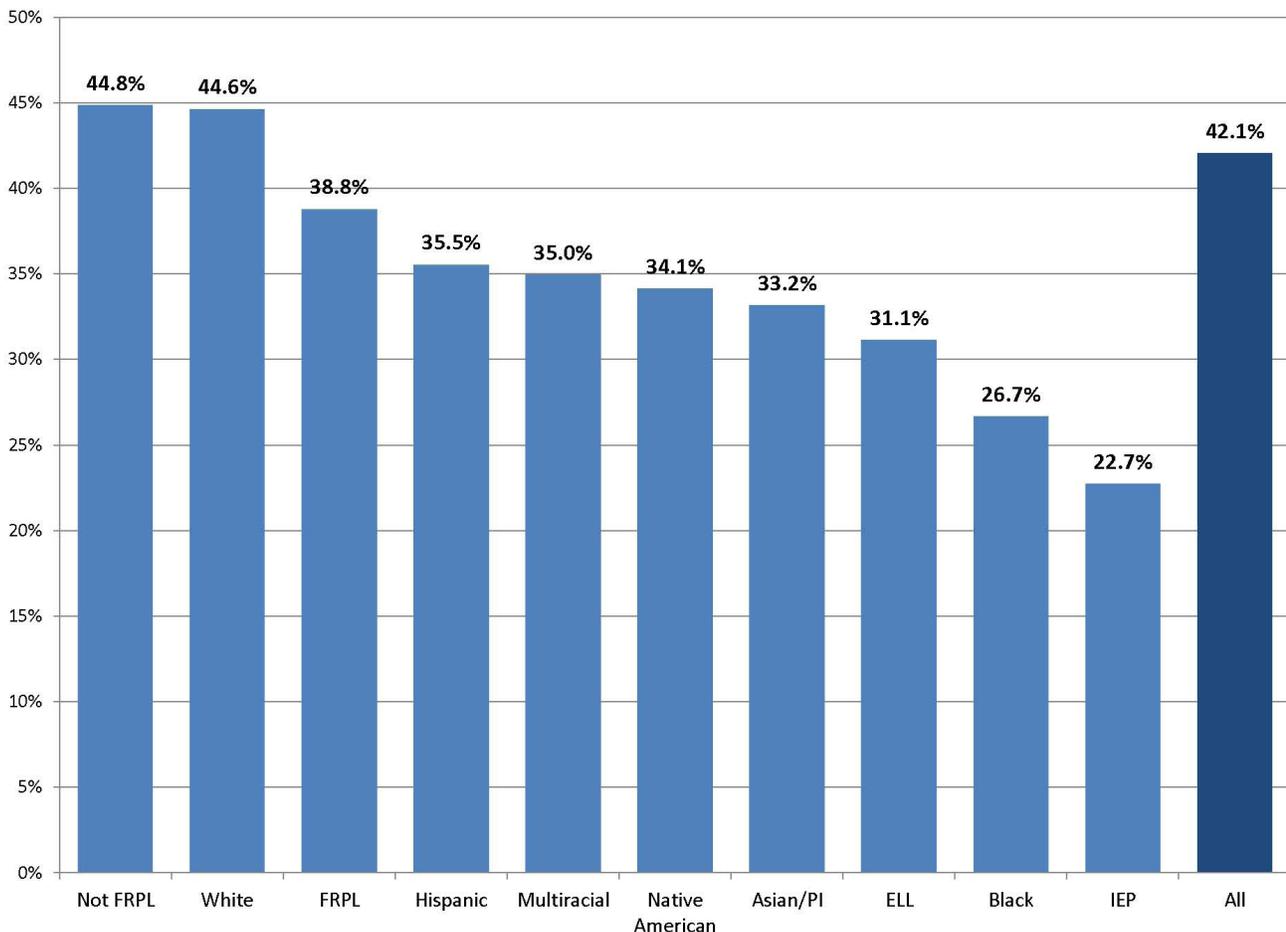
Source: Iowa Department of Education

	Total	SVPP participants	Pct SVPP
All 2012-3 kindergartners	40,649	17,102	42.1%
Free and reduced-price lunch	18,625	7,225	38.8%
Not FRPL	22,024	9,877	44.8%
White	31,456	14,041	44.7%
Hispanic/Latino	4,448	1,581	35.5%
Black/African American	2,187	583	26.7%
Asian/Pacific Islander	898	298	33.2%
Native American	164	56	34.1%
Multiracial	1,496	523	35.0%
English Language Learner	3,044	948	31.3%
Special education	3,311	753	22.7%

Children not on free and reduced-price lunch, white children, and children who were not English Language Learners or in special education were more likely to have participated in SVPP than children receiving free and reduced-price lunches, non-white children, and children who were not in special education or ELL programs. Some of these children are participating in other programs, such as ECSE, Head Start or Shared Visions, but all operate at much smaller scale than SVPP.

\* Kindergarten enrollment includes some transitional kindergarten students who may have participated in SVPP in 2010-11. Kindergarten enrollment is about 5,000 students higher than 1st grade enrollment, so these figures may under-represent children who participated in preschool.

**Percentage of 2012-13 kindergartners who participated in SVPP the previous year, by group**



**TABLE 3**

**Preschool Enrollment Compared with Kindergarten Enrollment by School District, 2012-13**

Source: Iowa Department of Education (available at <https://www.educateiowa.gov/document-type/district-level-enrollment>)

	No. Districts	Pre-K enroll	K enroll	Avg Pct	Pct of St K Pop
0 to 19.9% kindergartners	32	180	2,730	6.6%	6.6%
20 to 39.9% kindergartners	13	1,140	3,384	33.7%	8.2%
40 to 49.9% kindergartners	21	1,429	3,080	46.4%	7.5%
50 to 59.9% kindergartners	35	2,950	5,501	53.6%	13.4%
60 to 69.9% kindergartners	51	5,078	7,909	64.2%	19.2%
70 to 79.9% kindergartners	38	3,516	4,699	74.8%	11.4%
80 to 89.9% kindergartners	39	5,578	6,668	83.7%	16.2%
90 to 99.9% kindergartners	29	2,137	2,269	94.2%	5.5%
100% or more kindergartners*	89	5,985	4,903	122.1%	11.9%
<b>State Totals</b>	<b>347</b>	<b>27,933</b>	<b>41,143</b>	<b>68.0%</b>	<b>100%</b>

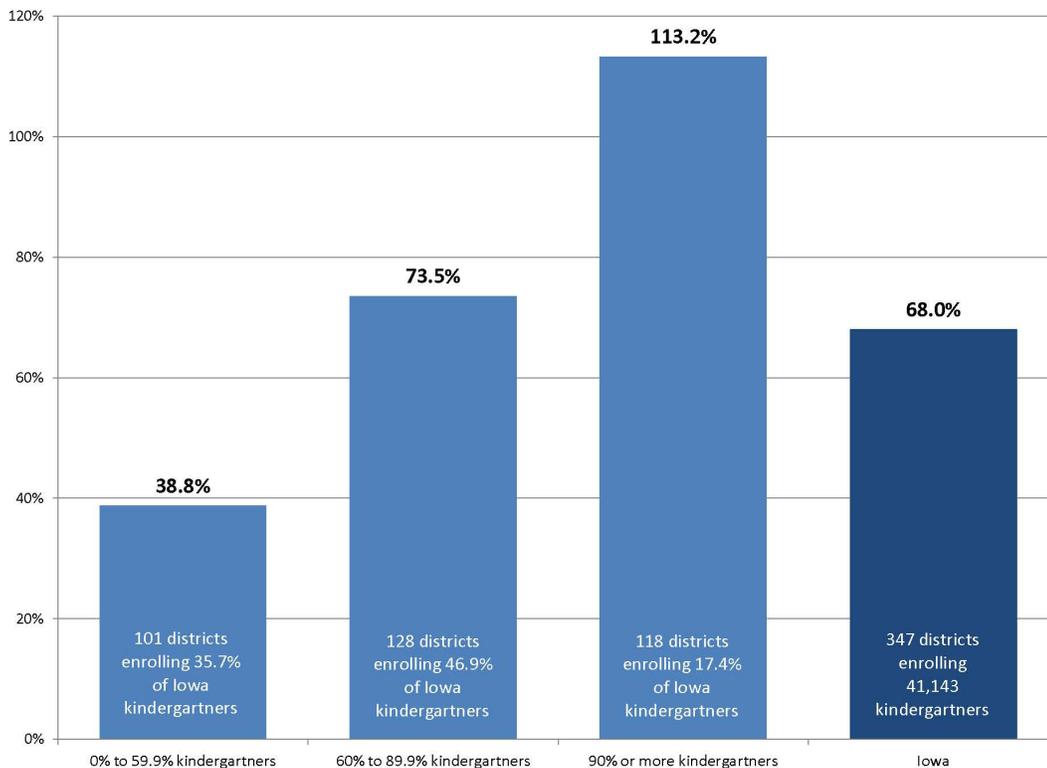
There is very wide variation across the state’s 347 school districts in preschool participation relative to kindergarten participation. Some districts provide preschool services to very few students; others enroll more preschoolers than kindergartners!

This table categorizes districts by the level of reported pre-K enrollment (in all district-run pre-K—

SVPP, Shared Visions, Part B, Early Childhood Iowa, Title I and others) compared with kindergarten enrollment.

\* Pre-K programs often include 3- as well as 4-year-olds, and districts may provide preschool to students who do not go on attend kindergarten in that district (either going to nonpublic schools or other districts), so the figures exceed 100 percent in some cases.

**Percentage of preschoolers compared to kindergartners by school district**



**Figures show wide variation across the state’s 347 school districts in preschool participation relative to kindergarten participation.**

TABLE 4

**Parent-Reported Preschool Participation and Third Grade Reading Proficiency, 2011-2012**

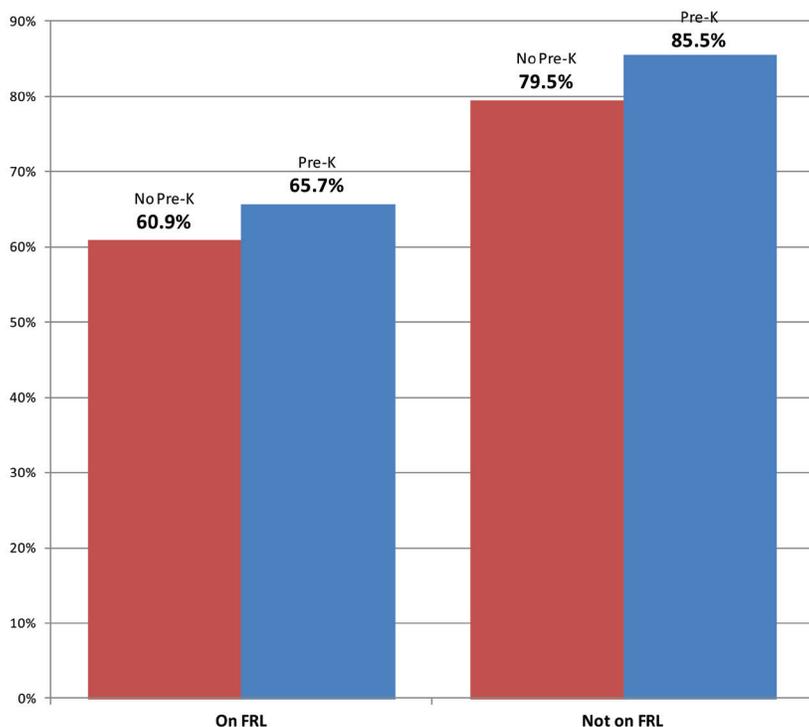
Source: Iowa Department of Education

	All students			Attended PreK			No PreK		
	Tested	Proficient	Pct Profic	Tested	Proficient	Pct Profic	Tested	Proficient	Pct Profic
Total	36,006	27,607	76.7%	26,597	21,027	79.1%	9,409	6,580	69.9%
FRL	13,515	8,646	64.0%	8,689	5,709	65.7%	4,826	2,937	60.9%
No FRL	22,491	18,961	84.3%	17,908	15,318	85.5%	4,583	3,643	79.5%
Wht	30,497	24,253	79.5%	23,445	18,940	80.8%	7,052	5,313	75.3%
Blk	1,882	1,028	54.6%	1,038	633	61.0%	844	395	46.8%
Hisp	2,703	1,589	58.8%	1,531	971	63.4%	1,172	618	52.7%
Asian	777	641	82.5%	497	428	86.1%	280	213	76.1%
NAm	147	96	65.3%	86	55	64.0%	61	41	67.2%
IEP	2,190	1,056	48.2%	1,635	785	48.0%	555	271	48.8%
ELL	2,094	1,177	56.2%	986	606	61.5%	1,108	571	51.5%

The 2011-2012 school year was when the first class of SVPP reached third grade. CFPC could not secure information specifically regarding SVPP participation of third graders, but was able to secure data on preschool participation given by parents at kindergarten entry and made part of the student record.

This table compares third grade reading proficiency (on

**Percentage of third graders proficient in reading by Pre-K and free and reduced-price lunch participation**



the Iowa Assessments) of children receiving and not receiving free and reduced-price lunch. Data are further broken down by whether or not parents reported the child had participated in preschool.

They show that children with reported preschool participation were more likely to be proficient in reading in third grade 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—nearly 20 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.

**Preschool narrows, but does not close, the gap in educational performance of low-income and higher-income children.**

TABLE 5

**Four-Year-Old Reported Preschool Participation by Family Income (Under and Over 200 Percent of Poverty), 2005-06 and 2010-11**

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Public Use Microdata Sample

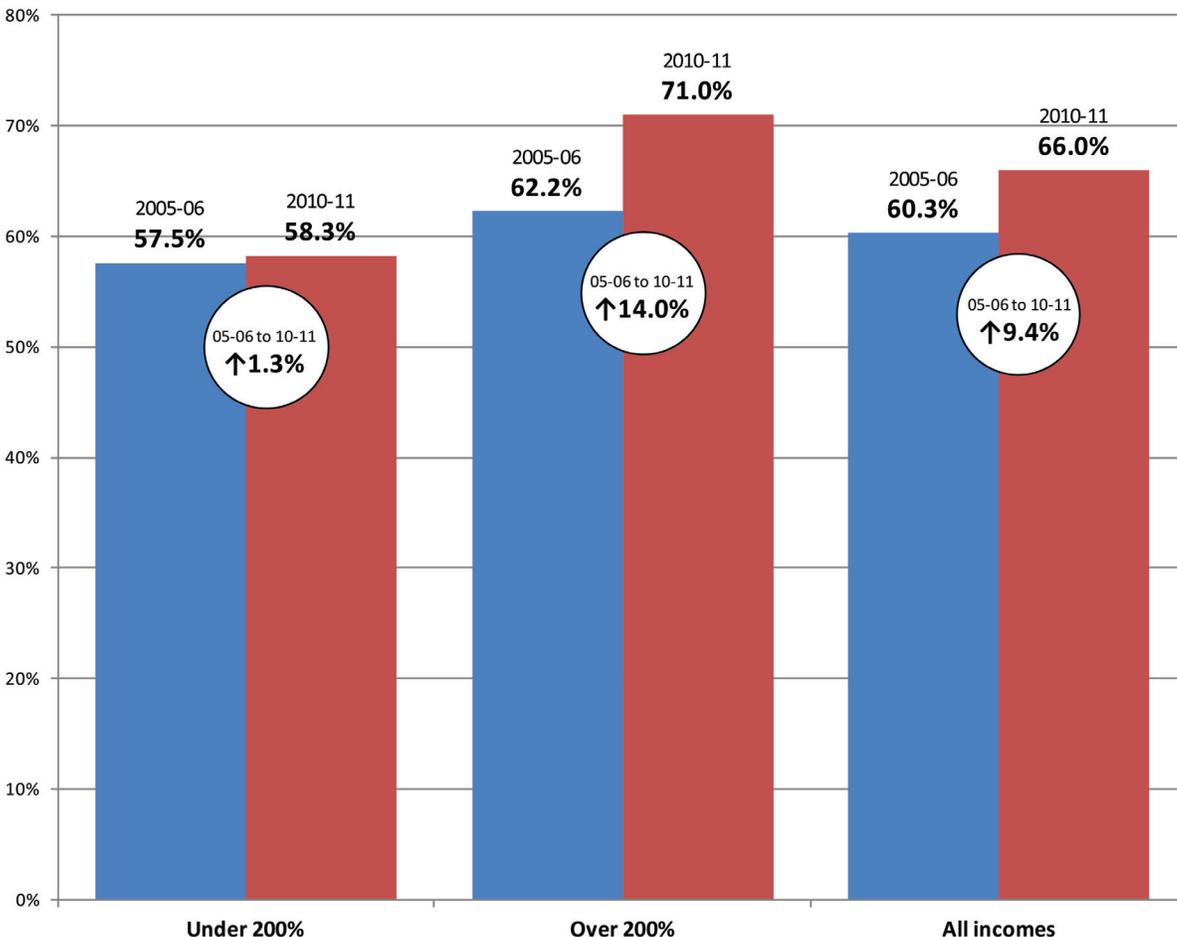
	2005-06	2010-11	Pct Chg
Under 200%	31,936	32,328	1.2%
In preschool	18,378	18,837	2.5%
<i>Pct in preschool</i>	57.5%	58.3%	1.3%
Over 200%	44,567	49,603	11.3%
In preschool	27,739	35,208	26.9%
Pct in preschool	62.2%	71.0%	14.0%
All incomes	76,503	81,931	7.1%
In preschool	46,117	54,045	17.2%
<i>Pct in preschool</i>	60.3%	66.0%	9.4%

Low-income children in Iowa are less likely to attend preschool than their higher-income peers, and the share of low-income children attending has grown at a much slower rate than their higher-income peers, even during a period of major expansion of publicly funded programs.

This table draws on the U.S. Census data to assess family income and parent-reported preschool participation for all 4-year-olds in the sample. For a larger and more statistically robust

sample, this table combines the two years preceding SVPP establishment (2005-06) and the two most recent years for which data is available (2010-11), at which point SVPP had expanded to its current level.

**Percentage of 4-year-olds whose parents reported a preschool experience by family income, 2005-06 and 2010-11**



The share of low-income children in preschool has grown at a much slower rate than that of higher-income peers.



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