

# **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 children living at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level.*

## **Background**

- The Des Moines Public School district manages various early education programs funded by a variety of sources, including Head Start, Shared Visions, and the Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program (SWVPP).
- The SWVPP 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 program, the state funded students at .6 per pupil cost for one full-time student. In the 2011-2012 school year, the funding allocation was decreased to .5 per pupil cost for one full-time student. While funding has decreased, costs for the program continue to rise.
- Iowa has one of the highest rates in the nation of households with all available parents working outside of the home. Providing only 10 hours per week of early learning programming presents challenges to parents having to secure an environment to care for their children during the remaining hours of the week while they work.
- One in seven Iowa children lives in poverty.
- Preschool funding has limitations and does not cover costs such as physical buildings and meals.
- However, current preschool funding not only has to cover instruction, but also transportation, interpretation and translation, support staff, and snacks.
- Translation services alone cost the preschool program more every year: \$25,184.35 for school year 2020-21; \$16,601.42 for school year 2019-20; and \$15,308.34 for school year 2018-19.

## **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. Our data shows that students who attend preschool are more than twice as likely to meet their kindergarten through 5<sup>th</sup> grade literacy benchmarks, and nearly twice as likely to meet their math benchmarks throughout elementary school.
- A Solid Return on Investment. Research found that for every \$1 spent on a quality early learning environment, \$7 are saved on long-term expenditures such as special education, high school dropouts, juvenile and criminal justice, and social welfare programs.

## **Why This is Urgent**

Our data shows that children who attend preschool are better prepared for kindergarten than those who do not, both academically and socially. Only 29% 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 24%. If a child attends preschool, they are more than twice as likely to meet reading benchmarks. Children living in poverty are almost three-times as likely to meet reading benchmarks if they attend preschool. Preschool evens the playing field for students now! The time children spend in preschool programs is used to develop a foundation for a lifetime of learning - and that matters!