

IMPLEMENTING 15 ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS FOR HIGH-QUALITY PRE-K: Iowa

Iowa has two state-funded pre-K programs: Shared Visions and the Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program (SWVPP). The Shared Visions program has provided services to 3-, 4-, and 5-year-olds since 1989 through competitive grants to public schools, licensed non-profit child care centers, other public non-profit agencies, and Head Start. In 2007, Iowa began the SWVPP to increase 4-year-olds’ access to pre-K. Funding for SWVPP is based on a school funding formula in which 4-year-olds are funded at 50% of the K–12 student aid amount.

An important difference between the two state-funded pre-K programs concerns child eligibility. Shared Visions is a targeted program where at least 80% of children are required to meet income eligibility guidelines (family income at or below 130% FPL). Children can also qualify for the program based on other risk factors but may be required to pay a fee based on a sliding scale. Services within this program are provided in 31 locations (through 32 grants); less than 7% of school districts. In addition, services are provided in 34 other community-based locations, representing 16 organizations (through 35 grants). In contrast, SWVPP is available in 97% of school districts and all children in the state who turn four by September 15 are eligible to attend.

Essential Elements

Fifteen Essential Elements clustered in three categories—Enabling Environment, Support for Educators and Young Learners, and High-Quality Instruction—have been identified among exemplary pre-K programs (Minervino, 2014). Note that practice in the field may vary so as to be either better or worse than might be expected based on specific policy or guidance. Consistency or quality of practice across large-scale programs is more difficult to assess than policy.

Shared Visions

Enabling Environment		Rigorous, Articulated Early Learning Policies								Strong Program Practices				
Political Will	Strong Leaders	BA + comp	Class size	Two Adults	Hours/ Dosage	EL Standards	Effective Curriculum	Special Ed	DLL support	HQ Teaching	PD	Child Assessments	Data Driven	Integrated System
–	–	–	●	●	–	●	○	●	○	ND	○	●	–	○

Key: ● Fully Met ○ Partially Met – Not Met ND Not determined

Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program (SWVPP)

Enabling Environment		Rigorous, Articulated Early Learning Policies								Strong Program Practices				
Political Will	Strong Leaders	BA + comp	Class size	Two Adults	Hours/ Dosage	EL Standards	Effective Curriculum	Special Ed	DLL support	HQ Teaching	PD	Child Assessments	Data Driven	Integrated System
–	–	○	●	●	–	●	○	●	○	ND	○	●	○	○

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Political will. At the beginning of former Gov. Terry E. Branstad (R)’s tenure in 1998, there was a move to change UPK to be more needs-based or targeted. Current Gov. Kim Reynolds (R) is campaigning for a second term, and pre-K has not been included in her platform. In 2018-2019, the pre-K budget was cut by an estimated \$5 million.

In 2016-2017 Iowa enrolled 26,310 children, serving almost 63% of the state’s 4-year-old population and 3% of 3-year-olds. Iowa’s pre-K programs saw a 2.5% increase in state funding and an increase of \$57 per child adjusted for inflation in 2016-2017. For Shared Visions, the 2016-2017 school year was the second year of a five-year competitive grant cycle and due to budget constraints in the fourth quarter services were reduced. The state’s pre-K spending for both programs ranks 36th out of 43 states (plus D.C. and Guam) that offer pre-K.

Compelling vision and strong leadership. The Iowa State Department of Education (DOE) oversees Shared Visions and SVPP within the Bureau of Educator Quality under the Division of Learning and Results. There are 2 FTEs responsible for Shared Visions and 1.6 FTEs for SWVPP in the DOE. In addition, other staff members support pre-K, but have other responsibilities, such as IDEA staff. A few years ago, there was a division reorganization and people within early childhood were dispersed into other bureaus or divisions within DOE, but they continue to do some pre-K work. Recently, a longstanding ECE state-leader retired; it is too early to evaluate current state leadership.

Area Education Agency 267 (AEA 267) is one of nine AEAs created in 1974 by the Iowa legislature to ensure equal educational opportunities for all children from birth through age 21. AEA 267 provides supports to educators and parents of children aged birth to 21 in the areas of quality instructional materials, curriculum planning, best practices in teaching and learning, safe and caring learning environment, appropriate educational opportunities for all learners, technology planning, professional learning, assessment, special education, and leadership development. Each of the Shared Vision grantees has a designated AEA contact person based on the program’s location.

Education and compensation.

Shared Visions: Shared Visions lead teachers are required to have at least a BA degree if they are employed by public schools. Lead teachers employed by nonpublic settings follow NAEYC standards that require at least 75% to have a BA in ECE or a related field. The other teachers are required to have at least an AA degree in ECE or CD. There are no salary parity policies for Shared Vision teachers.

SWVPP: All SWVPP lead teachers must have at least a BA and an Iowa teaching license with an early childhood endorsement. SWVPP teachers who work in public schools have the same starting salary and for all years of service as K-3 teachers and the schedule is prorated for differences in length of work day or year. For those in nonpublic schools, only salary is prorated for differences in length of work day or year, there are no other salary parity policies.

Adult-child ratio and two adults in the classroom.

Shared Visions: The maximum class size for 4-year-olds is 20 and 3-year-olds is 18. The maximum staff to child ratio is 1:8 for all classrooms.

SWVPP: The maximum class size for 4-year-olds is 20, with a teacher to student ratio of 1:10. For 3-year-olds the class size maximum is 18 with a ratio of 1:9. Mixed-age classrooms with 3- and 4-year-olds must not exceed a maximum group size of 20; but may be lower if the majority of class has 3-year-olds.

Learning time. Children may attend both Shared Visions and SWVPP for different portions of the day or different days of the week, allowing for a full- or extended-day; however, participation in a program may not be funded by both sources at the same time as supplanting of funds is not allowed.

Shared Visions: The operating schedules for Shared Visions is determined locally and is expected to be based on community need as reflected in the application process. There is no minimum number of hours per day or days per week required.

SWVPP: SWVPP classrooms are required to operate a minimum of 10 hours per week; with the average being about 14 hours per week. Programs may collaborate with Head Start, other preschool programs, or child care programs to offer full-day services.

Age-appropriate learning standards. The Iowa Early Learning Standards (IA ELS) are currently under revision. The last version (2012) was comprehensive, aligned with the state's K-3 standards and the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework. The state provides professional development opportunities to support use of IA ELS.

System that ensures effective curriculum. The state offers guidance on criteria for selecting evidence-based curriculum models for both Shared Visions and SWVPP. Curriculum is locally determined but must be research- or evidence-based and must align with the IA ELS. Programs may use grant funds to support curriculum implementation or training. During 2016-2017, materials were made available and state-sponsored training sessions were offered on curriculum. Other curricula trainings are determined locally, but may be provided by the local program, intermediary agencies (e.g., Area Education Agencies (AEAs)), and/or vendors. AEAs provide additional support for curriculum adoption, implementation, and guidance for implementing with fidelity.

Support for students with special needs. For both programs, the proportion of children with an IEP in each preschool classroom is limited to 50%. In addition, preschool teachers are required to possess specific qualifications for working with children with special needs or there needs to be a teacher who is properly licensed and endorsed who is responsible for special education services in collaboration with the general education teacher.

Shared Visions: In 2016-2017, a total of 205 children enrolled in the Shared Visions Program (15% of all children enrolled) received Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) services through an IEP. Of these, 127 already had an IEP when they enrolled in Shared Visions and 78 began receiving services through an IEP after enrollment.

SWVPP: In 2016-2017, 1,242 SWVPP children had an IEP; almost 5% of the total enrollment.

Support for dual (English) language learners (DLL). For both of Iowa's programs, a home language survey is required to be administered at the beginning of the school year. Information about enrolled children's program and performance must be presented to families in their home languages. Programs are required to screen and assess all children in their home languages. The state allows the following program options to support DLLs: monolingual non-English classes; transitional bilingual programs; DLL immersion classes; summer language programs; and DLLs can be pulled out for ESL.

Shared Visions: The number of DLLs is not able to be reported.

SWVPP: In 2016-2017, less than 5% of SWVPP students were identified as DLLs.

High quality teaching. Statewide data on CLASS or ECERS are not available.

Professional development.

Shared Visions: Shared Vision program standards require staff receive PD in curriculum, assessment, working with diverse families, child development, and working with children with special needs, in addition to health, safety and emergency procedures. Staff members with a teaching license must renew their license every five years, including six credit hours of PD. Nonpublic settings which must be licensed by DHS require six clock hours of PD annually. Program standards require that teaching staff receive ongoing reflection and feedback from their supervisors.

For Shared Vision programs that operate in public schools, mentoring, coaching, and professional development must be included in a program's PD plan, but it is locally developed.

SWVPP: State policy requires PD but does not specify hours. Districts are required to make PD available to non-district SWVPP teachers in the same manner it is offered to district personnel. Guidance recommends that SWVPP teachers have 15 clock hours of PD each year. Each staff member is expected to have an individualized PD plan that is used to inform continuous PD. The content of the PD is mandated and must include: curriculum, assessment, working with diverse families, child development, and working with children with special needs per requirements of program standards.

Program standards state that mentoring, coaching, and professional development must be included in a program's professional development plan when SWVPP operates in public schools, but it is locally developed.

Child Assessments. The Child Development Coordinating Council (state advisory board) policy and Iowa Code 279.60 require Shared Visions and SWVPP grantees to record Teaching Strategies GOLD data during three checkpoints in the fall, winter and spring. However, the assessment is administered on an ongoing basis over the course of the year. The assessment has been aligned with IA ELDS. Conducting child assessments is one of the required content areas of PD.

Data-driven decision-making. As part of the state longitudinal data system, all children enrolled in both Shared Visions and SWVPP receive a unique state identification number. Beginning in 2016-2017, the Differentiated Accountability Model was scaled statewide to offer universal, supplemental, or intensive student supports as needed.

Shared Visions: Program standards, which are mandated by state law, require teaching staff to receive ongoing reflection and feedback from their supervisors. Additionally, programs receive visits at least annually, but as needed, by AEA staff. Classroom assessment instruments are selected, and the reliability and validity of assessors is supported and monitored at the local level, with many programs reporting use of ECERS and CLASS. The state does not receive the results of the observations/visits. The state does, however, review and approve the annual renewal application submitted by state consultants to verify Iowa law and program requirements are being met through implementation of the submitted service plan.

Shared Visions has undergone formal evaluations; the most recent ones reviewed teachers' PD and implementation of Teaching Strategies GOLD.

SWVPP: All SWVPP classrooms are required to implement a set of program standards approved by the Iowa Department of Education: Iowa Quality Preschool Program Standards, NAEYC Accreditation Standards and Criteria, or the Head Start Program Performance Standards. Onsite monitoring by trained assessors and AEA visits include review of program records and classroom observations using a tool that reviews the degree to which the Iowa Quality Preschool Program Standards and Criteria are implemented. Following visits, the DOE cross checks data with student reporting and teacher licensure. Data collected are used by the state to provide program staff with technical assistance and/or mentoring; identify programs for corrective action or sanctions; and to identify needs that will guide teacher training or professional development.

SWVPP is included in the Annual Condition of Education Report that provides statewide data for pre-K through grade 12. For SWVPP the information reported is student demographic data.

Integrated System. Components of Iowa's system that are integrated include the IA ELDS and the use of a common child assessment that has adequate PD support for its use; however, there is no clear coordination with curriculum implementation. Even though coaching is expected to occur in both programs, the state does not have a system to ensure its adequacy and quality. There are different policies between the two pre-K programs, specifically around the collection and use of structured classroom observation data.