

# COMMUNITY SNAPSHOT: Early Childhood Education



United Way  
of East Central Iowa



# Education

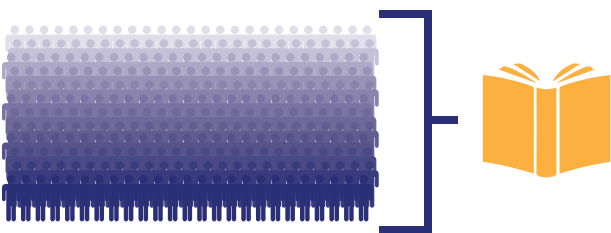
## What Is Early Childhood Development?

The first five years of life are essential for young children. Each day is a new opportunity to learn their first words, how to form relationships, manage emotions, and build trust. With 85% of all brain development occurring between the ages of 0–5,<sup>1</sup> early childhood is one of the most important times in life.

Unfortunately, not every child receives the same opportunities. Low-income children have fewer written resources at home, making it harder for them to learn to read. By age two, low-income children are already behind their peers in listening, counting, and other literacy skills.<sup>2</sup> This will affect the child's readiness for kindergarten. Kindergarten is a predictor for lifelong reading achievement; 44 of 50 children who experience difficulty learning to read in kindergarten will still have trouble in third grade.<sup>3</sup>

Many factors contribute to a low-income child's development. A parent's childhood affects their ability to learn skills needed to be a strong parent. Single-parent households cut time spent with children in half while keeping most of the responsibilities, and some parents may work multiple jobs. This leaves little time to focus on a child's development as they struggle to meet basic needs. Quality childcare can help parents create a learning environment for their child while they balance work, but finding a safe, reliable caregiver is often beyond their financial means.

**Low-income ratio: 1 book per 300 children**



**Middle-income ratio: 13 books per child**



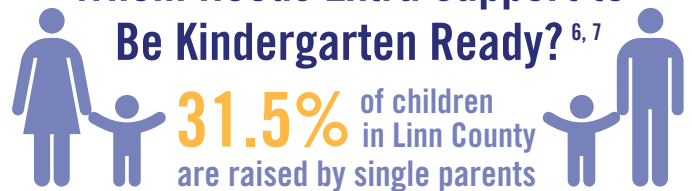
## Is This a Problem in Our Area?

In UWECI's service area, about one out of three children enter kindergarten without skills needed to succeed.<sup>4</sup> For low-income students, 49% do not score proficiently on their fall kindergarten assessment.<sup>5</sup> Overall, 1,167 out of 3,676 children in East Central Iowa are not ready for kindergarten. Even with better schools and stronger services, many children already start behind before they even have a chance to set foot in a school.

### Number of Kindergarteners

Benton County 289	Linn County 2,788	Jones County 205
Iowa County 159		Cedar County 235

## Whom Needs Extra Support to Be Kindergarten Ready? <sup>6, 7</sup>

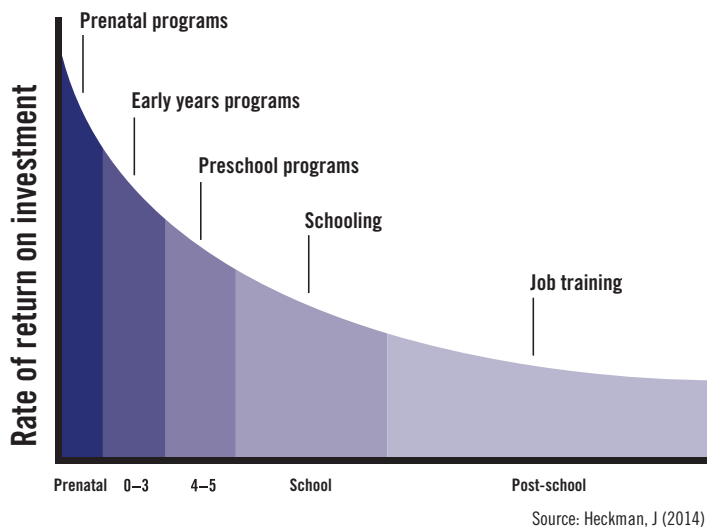


## Why Is Early Childhood Important for Me?

Even if you do not know a child under age five, early childhood efforts are important to everyone. Not only does early intervention help children stay on track and prevent future learning issues,<sup>8</sup> it also provides a strong economic benefit to the community.

Every dollar spent on early childhood has a much higher return than those spent later in a child's life. Dr. James Heckman, a Nobel laureate in Economics, stated that early childhood development directly influences economic, health, and social outcomes. One study showed every dollar invested in a high quality early childhood program yielded a \$7 return on investment in individual and societal benefits.<sup>10</sup>





## What We Are Doing about It

### RED AHEAD: CLOSING THE 30 MILLION WORD GAP

Children from economically disadvantaged families hear 30 million fewer words than their higher-income peers by age four. This gap results in children who have dramatically smaller vocabularies than those with more enriching early language experience.<sup>11</sup>

That is why RED Ahead starts early, enrolling expecting mothers in their third trimester through the babies first birthday. RED Ahead provides low-income families free age-appropriate books, modeling activities parents can use at home, and screenings for developmental delays to ensure that children from birth to age five have skills needed to succeed. The program served 2,024 low-income families last fiscal year, with 88% of these families living at less than 100% of the Federal Poverty Level.

Danielle has used Waypoint's Childcare Program since her child was six-weeks-old and was able to afford childcare through DHS. Instead of helping her financial situation, a recent raise of \$0.33 put her above the maximum for DHS assistance.

### WAYPOINT'S SLIDING SCALE-FEE PROGRAM REDUCED HER COST FROM \$203 TO \$65,

which ensured continued childcare and employment. Thanks to United Way and Waypoint, she can move toward financial stability, while giving her child access to an education.

—Waypoint staff member

### EARLY CHILDHOOD PARTNERS: LEVERAGING PARTNER SUCCESS

In addition to direct engagement, United Way funds local partners to ensure our community has resources families with young children need. Hundreds of children receive support through Hawkeye Community Action Program's (HACAP) Crisis Childcare, Paces to Quality, and Head Start programming; Waypoint's Kidspoint early childcare program; and Young Parents Network's parenting strategies.

**From these programs, both children and parents have improved their standing in life:**

- Number of children demonstrating developmental progress in language and early literacy skills increased 140% since 2013.
- Number of parents who maintained or increased knowledge of their child's development increased 100% since 2013.
- Number of parents who improved social-emotional support or relationships with family and friends increased 106% since 2013.

*Continued on back* ►

A mother came in for her first visit with her newborn baby. When she realized she was getting the Rainbow Fish bath book, she had the most thankful look on her face. **THE MOTHER EXPLAINED SHE HAD WANTED THIS BOOK FOR HER BABY, BUT WAS UNABLE TO AFFORD IT.** In that moment, I realized the impact a brand new, hand-selected book can have on a family.

—Maya Farr-Atkins  
2015–16 AmeriCorps Member

## READING INTO SUCCESS: READING FROM BIRTH TO THIRD GRADE



Helping children flourish takes a community. That is why United Way, the Greater Cedar Rapids

Community Foundation, all four local public school districts, Xavier Catholic Schools, Grant Wood AEA, Cedar Rapids Public Library, The Gazette Company, Rockwell Collins, and others work together on Reading into Success, the local campaign for Grade-Level Reading.

Entering its second year, this campaign promotes ways for all families to learn how to support children's early development. This incorporates learning opportunities into everyday activities and the use of two childhood development apps, Text4Baby and Vroom.

“Participating in the Mayor’s Day of Service book drive was so inspiring. Seeing 900 books the community donated to young children, helping identify the grade level of each book, and knowing that **READING INTO SUCCESS WILL GET THESE BOOKS TO THOSE WHO MAY NOT HAVE ANY BOOKS AT ALL IS TRULY AMAZING.** It’s an awesome feeling that our one day of work will help impact children during the summer and well beyond our AmeriCorps service term!”

—Tommy Govert  
2015–16 AmeriCorps Member

## Two-Generation Support

Successful interventions need to address both children and their families so everyone can thrive together. The Aspen Institute calls these successful programs two-generation programs and states that successful two-generation programs address four components in a family’s life.<sup>12</sup>

- **Education** focuses on interventions children need in their early lives coupled with the education that parents receive (both formally and informally). There is a strong connection between a parent’s education level and outcomes for their children.<sup>13</sup>
- **Economic Supports** are the basic needs and asset-building components of a parent’s life that allows them to have a safe foundation as they build skills for themselves and their children.
- **Social Capital** is the connections that people build through peers or mentors, which allow them to navigate the world around them.<sup>14</sup>
- **Health and Well-being** focuses on children and families facing trauma or toxic stress. Physical and mental health have a major impact on a family’s ability to thrive.<sup>15</sup>

United Way strives to build successful strategies that support families across all four of these areas. Combined with United Way’s other efforts in financial stability and health, as well as direct neighborhood approaches, families are able to build strength together and break the cycle of generational poverty.

1 Cochran, Carol, Stuefen, Randy, and Sandberg, Kari (2004)

2 Campaign for Grade Level Reading – more thorough citation to be added later

3 Juel, Journal of Educational Psychology 80, no. 4 (1988): 437-447

4 Department of Education, Fall 2015 – students meeting benchmark in literacy  
5 ibid

6 2010 U.S. Census Bureau

7 Kids Count Data Center, 2010–2014 single parent family data

8 Heckman, J. (2008), Schools, skills, synapses. Institute for the study of labor, May report

9 Heckman, J. (2014), Invest in early childhood development: Reduce deficits, strengthen the economy. The Heckman Equation. Retrieved from: [www.heckmanequation.org](http://www.heckmanequation.org)

10 Hart, B., and Risley, T.R. (1995)

11 [0] Hart, B., and Risley, T.R. (1995)

12 Ascend at the Aspen Institute (2014). Two-Generation Playbook.

13 Child Trends and Center for Health Research. (2004). Early Child Development in Social Context. Data from K. Denton, E. Germino-Hausken, and J. West (project officer), America’s Kindergartners, NCES 2000-070, (Washington, DC. U.S. Department of Education. National Center for Education Statistics, 2000).

14 Ascend at the Aspen Institute (2012). Two Generations, One Future; Moving Parents and Children Beyond Poverty Together

15 Anda, R. F. & Felitti, V. J. The Adverse Childhood Experiences Study. Retrieved from <http://www.acestudy.org>