

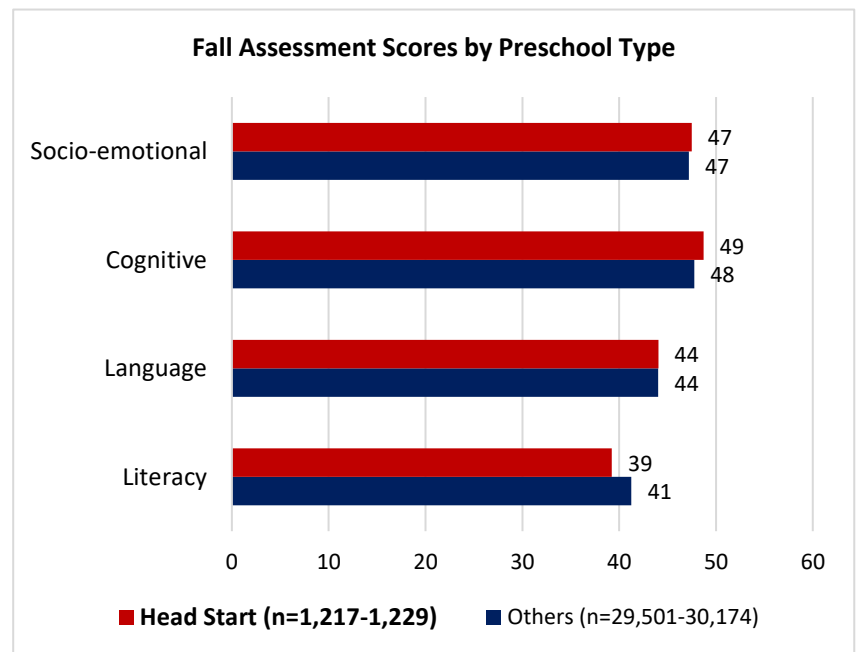
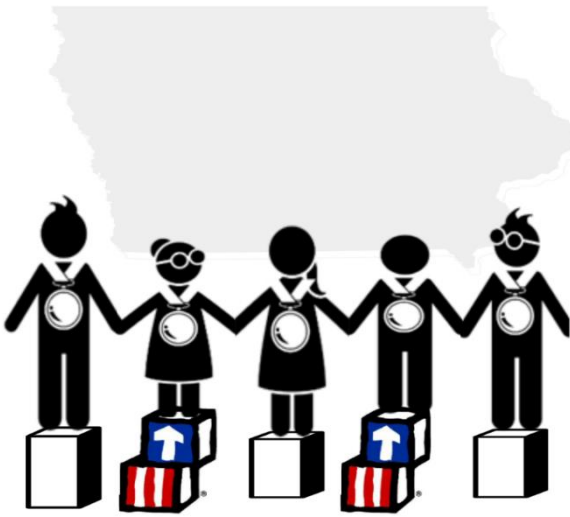
# IOWA HEAD START:

## Successfully Serving the Comprehensive Needs of Low-Income Children

Head Start is a federally funded program designed to promote school readiness and offer comprehensive services to low-income children under age 5. Nationally, this program serves more families with diverse needs related to poverty than any other preschool aged program. The purpose of this brief is to describe the diverse characteristics of Iowa Head Start children compared to children attending other programs. **Findings demonstrate that despite higher levels of risk and need, Iowa Head Start children evidence equivalent preschool achievement scores compared to children in other programs, suggesting the comprehensive success of Iowa Head Start services.**

**In IOWA**, Head Start serves approximately 8,500 3-to 4-year-old children across 18 Head Start recipient agencies serving all 99 counties. 63% of Head Start children are born in rural counties in Iowa.

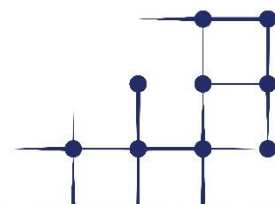
### Iowa Head Start children have equivalent preschool achievement scores as other children.



The fall assessment score shows the result after the first three months of Head Start and other preschool programs.

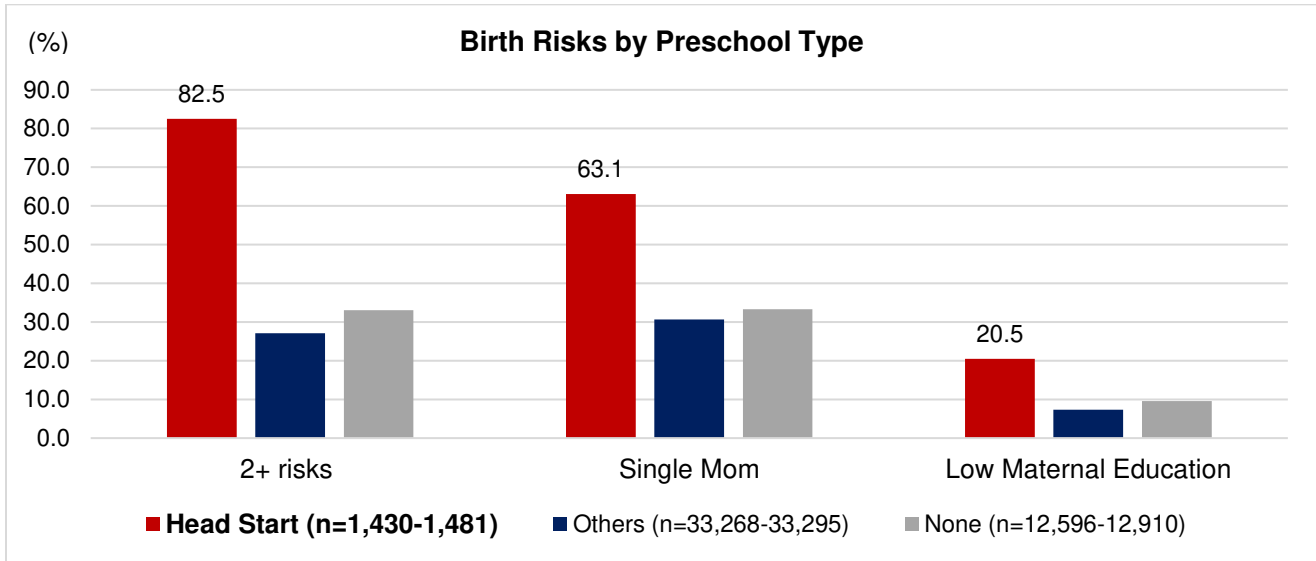
The purpose of Head Start is to promote the school readiness of children ages 3 to 5 years. Most of these programs are based in centers. In other programs, children and families may receive services from educators and family service staff who regularly make home visits. Families are valued by Head Start as the first and most important teacher for their child. Programs build relationships with families that support positive parent-child relationships, family well-being, and connections to peers and community. Additionally, Head Start services are designed to be responsive to each child and family's ethnic, cultural, and linguistic background.

*(Program information provided by the Iowa Department of Education, Head Start State Collaboration Office)*



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**Head Start children experience significantly more challenges associated with low-income status and exposure to various risks than children in other programs.**



- More than **90% of Head Start children** are born into **poverty**.
- **82.5% of Head Start children** are exposed to **2 or more risks at birth** compared to 50% or less in all other types of preschools.
- **Over two-thirds** of Head Start children are born into a **single mother** household.
- Head Start has the **highest percentage of children born to mothers with less than a high school education**.

**Head Start is the most diverse preschool program compared to other types of preschools.**

- Head Start serves more diverse children than other preschool programs, having **37% of nonwhite children** compared to 17-16% of children in other (or no) preschool programs.
- While 16% of children in Head Start were identified as **English Language Learners** in kindergarten, the corresponding percentage for children in other preschool programs ranged from 5% to 7%.

**Main Takeaway**

**Iowa Head Start programs serve preschool-aged children with more diverse characteristics and needs related to low-income status, but the comprehensive services provided support to children’s development across a range of academic, socio-emotional, and physical outcomes.**

*This brief is provided by I2D2, a program of Iowa State University and Early Childhood Iowa committed to putting the state’s most informed, passionate, and data-driven resources to work ensuring all Iowa children are successful from birth.*



For more information about the findings presented here, please scan the QR code or visit [i2d2.iastate.edu](http://i2d2.iastate.edu)