

Kindergarten Readiness

For children raised in low-income homes, disparities in learning begin to emerge as early as 9 months, and the gap continues to widen as they grow older (ChildTrends Report, June 2009). There is a clear achievement gap in Linn and surrounding counties between low-income students, defined as those who qualify for Free or Reduced Price Lunch (FRLP), and higher-income students before children even enter school. Only 50% of low-income kindergartners are proficient in early literacy skills, in contrast to 72% of their higher-income peers (Iowa Department of Education: Basic Educational Data Survey, Address and Enrollment files, 2009).

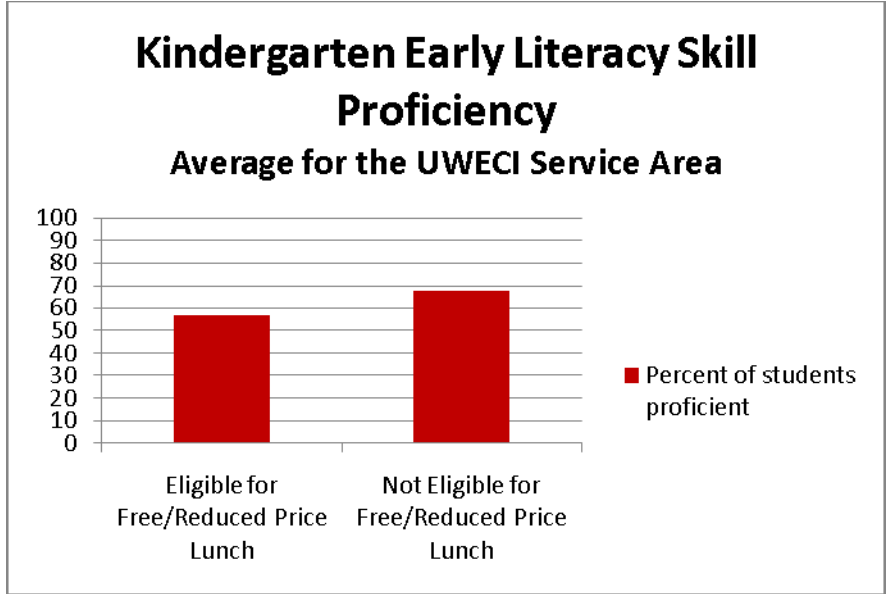
Unfortunately, 73% of Americans wrongly believe that if children enter kindergarten unprepared, they will catch up in elementary school. (“*Survey Reveals Americans Unaware of Long-Term Consequences Preschool Children Face Without Early Literacy Skills*,” Sept. 2009). Instead, research has shown that the longer a parent waits to help a struggling reader, the harder it will be for the child to read at grade level.

To address these gaps, interventions must start early in children’s lives. Research has shown that 44 of 50 students who were poor readers at the end of first grade remained poor readers at the end of fourth grade. (Juel, *Journal of Educational Psychology* 80, no. 4 (1988): 437-447.)

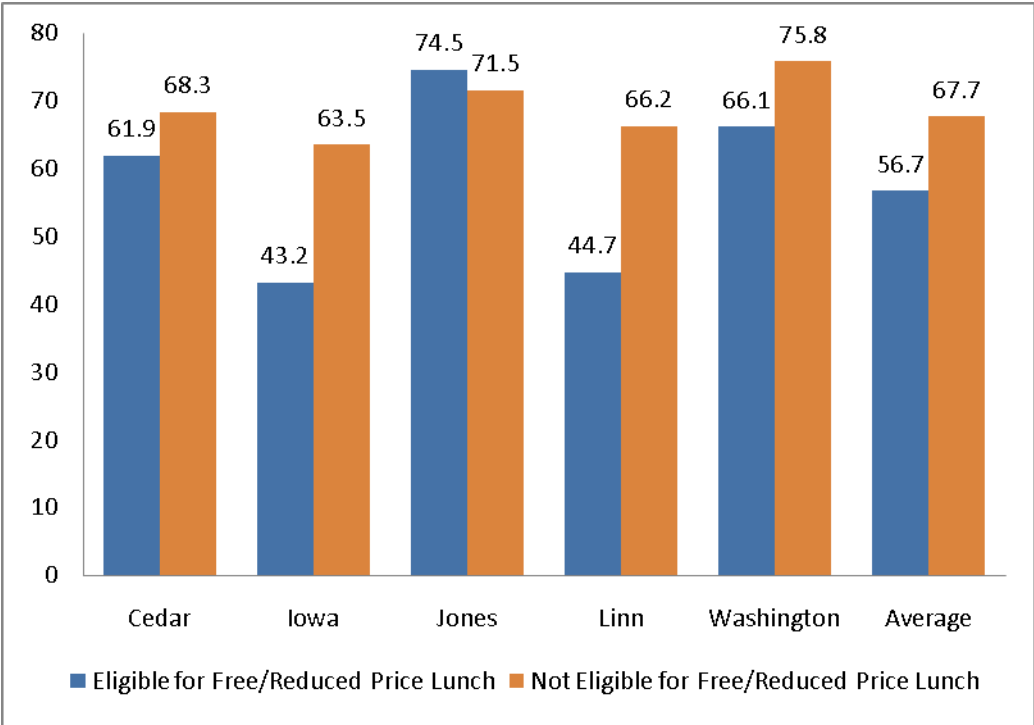
There is no one measure of kindergarten readiness. In the state of Iowa several different assessments of early literacy skills are used. The data below reflects three different assessments used in the six counties served by United Way of East Central Iowa.

Linn County Pre-Literacy Skills (% proficient on identifying beginning sounds, DIBELS)	State Empowerment website (Kindergarten Literacy Assessment)	2005-06 Linn Co 70.12% State 53%	2006-07 Linn Co 58.03% State 56%	2007-08 Linn Co 53.52% State 60%	2008-2009 Linn Co 57.16% State 62%
Benton County Percentage of children entering kindergarten ready to learn.	Department of Education Kindergarten Literacy Report	FY 06 – 16.67% proficient	FY 07 – 10.05% proficient	FY 08 – 12.50% proficient	FY 09 – Unavailable
Jones County % Students <6 years of age proficient in DIBELS Assessment	State Empowerment/Dept. of Ed	50.84% (2004-2005)	Na	62.07% (2007-2008)	62.30% (2008-2009)

Source: County Empowerment FY 09 Annual Reports



Early Literacy Skill Proficiencies by County



Source: Iowa Department of Education, Bureau of Planning, Research, Development and Evaluation, Basic Educational Data Survey, Address and Enrollment files.