**Head Start and Public School: An Investigation of Collaboration and Disconnection in Early Childhood**

**Background.** Persistent achievement gaps for low-income children, stemming from preschool age, call attention to the need for quality early childhood experiences. Established in 1965 during Lyndon B. Johnson’s “War on Poverty,” Head Start is a federally funded preschool program that provides comprehensive services including education, health, and social support for low-income families. Evidence suggests that children enrolled in Head Start display considerable gains in academic skills while in the program (Deming, 2009; Miller, Farkas, Vandell, & Duncan, 2014; Miller, Farkas, & Duncan, 2016). In Iowa, 18 HS grantees serve approximately 6,500 preschoolers across 92 counties. With recent increases in education, health, and social support for low-income children, stemming from preschool age, call attention to the need for quality early childhood experiences.

**Purpose:** The present study investigated whether the most vulnerable children in Iowa are served by Head Start and the extent to which Head Start centers collaborate with public schools to support transitions and shared programming during the preschool years. Three Primary Research Aims guided this study:

1. Identify Iowa counties in which disproportionate numbers of children and families are considered vulnerable.
2. Summarize the collaboration efforts between Iowa Head Start grantees and local education agencies.
3. Identify opportunities to expand collaboration and communication to improve preschool coordination and transitions between preschool and kindergarten.

**Dataset.** Data used in the present study were drawn from the 2018 Head Start Needs Assessment Survey administered annually by the Head Start State Collaboration Office to 18 Head Start grantees. Information is collected on topics such as the level of collaboration between grantees and Local Education Agencies, child care, child welfare, and family literacy services. To supplement the survey, data drawn from 2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates Table S1702 was employed.

**Summary of Key Findings:**
- HS Grantees reported having no collaboration with 68% of Iowa school districts.
- Of those HS Grantees that have communication and coordination with Iowa school districts, 70% reported it being “not at all difficult”.
- HS Grantees reported having no transition policies and procedures with 62% Iowa school districts.
- 11 of 18 HS Grantees reported that Adverse Childhood Experiences impact a lot of families they serve.

**Implications and Future Research:**
- Opportunities for improving statewide collaboration among critical partners in provision of high-quality early childhood services.
- Examine how collaborations relate to school readiness outcomes to further inform quality improvement opportunities.

**Selected References:**
- U.S. Census Bureau; American Community Survey, 2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates. Table S1702; American FactFinder: http://factfinder.census.gov