



WE
ARE
ECE:

Strategic Plan
2019-2022



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THE FIRST 2,000
DAYS IS THE MOST
CRITICAL STAGE
OF THE HUMAN
LIFECYCLE

OUR VISION:

**Every child,
beginning at birth,
will be healthy and
successful.**

Early Childhood Iowa acknowledges the contributions of the hundreds of stakeholders who volunteered their time and efforts to assist in developing the “We Are ECI: Strategic Plan 2019-2022.” Because the plan is built on a comprehensive needs assessment process, we further acknowledge the individuals who completed surveys, participated in focus groups, joined data dive discussions, and provided additional input into the process.

This publication was made possible by the Preschool Development Grant Birth to Five (Grant Number 90TP0030-01-00) from the Office of Child Care, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services as part of a grant totaling \$2,190,119 with 0% financed with non-governmental sources. Its contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the Office of Child Care, the Administration for Children and Families, or the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

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TO ALL EARLY CHILDHOOD STAKEHOLDERS:

The Early Childhood Iowa State Board is proud to support the “We Are ECI: Strategic Plan 2019-2022.” The development of this strategic plan reflects the evolving partnerships and collaborative efforts to strengthen Iowa’s early childhood system.

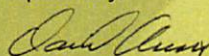
Fifteen citizens from across the state; the Iowa Departments of Education (IDE), Human Services (DHS), Public Health (IDPH), Human Rights (DHR), Workforce Development (IWD), and Management (DOM); the Iowa Economic Development Authority; and four legislators serve on the ECI State Board. We are committed to the utilization of this strategic plan to promote strategies for improving outcomes for young children and their families.

We appreciate the efforts of the many individuals and organizations who participated in developing the Early Childhood Needs Assessment and the “We Are ECI” Strategic Plan. This endeavor presents a logical acceleration of our intentional efforts toward early childhood program coordination among state and local partners on behalf of young children and their families. Because of these efforts, Iowa is moving closer to achieve the vision, “Every child, beginning at birth, will be healthy and successful.”

We recognize that we cannot achieve this vision alone. Only when we work in coordination, with clear priorities for strategic action, can we capitalize on our collective expertise as leaders, practitioners, families, and community members. We Are ECI. We support a coordinated, mixed delivery system throughout the statewide strategic plan that routinely builds on our successes and addresses our challenges. Our goal is that, through our mixed delivery system, high quality early childhood efforts will promote lifelong health, academic, and economic success.

The development, expansion and sustainability of our implementation efforts must be data-informed, and we appreciate the efforts to create and share integrated data that grant funding from the Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five provided. This plan reflects significant areas of current strength in Iowa that will be enhanced with the strategies and activities that follow, as well as specific opportunities to address gaps.

Respectfully,



David Arens, ECI State Board Chair



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“We Are ECI” is informed by a comprehensive needs assessment process that engaged stakeholders from across our early childhood system, including partners in state government, local boards, communities, and families. We reviewed prior systems development work and needs assessments. We used an integrated data system to count the number of children served. We further identified gaps in services for vulnerable and underserved children. We conducted family surveys, early childhood provider surveys, and focus groups with families and early childhood providers.

We engaged diverse stakeholders to identify gaps in early childhood system supports, services, communication strategies, and opportunities for service improvement. Our learning process engaged stakeholders in focused learning sessions to digest, discuss, and determine our system’s highest priorities in order to actualize our vision.

Our 2019 needs assessment highlighted both strengths and challenges for our early childhood system. Its key findings revealed:

- Gaps in services for minority and low-income children, those born with birth risks or with certain maternal characteristics, and families with children with disabilities
- A deepened awareness and understanding of rural child care deserts by providing additional information about the nature and extent of access problems, including extensive waiting lists and inadequate information to help families connect with available services
- Staffing shortages faced by licensed child care centers that are operating under capacity
- A range of challenges providers face related to facilities
- Existing local partnerships where programs have coordinated, shared resources, and/or created mechanisms to better facilitate family transitions
- The need to work further to systemically partner by understanding how successful partnerships are built and how we could support new or struggling relationships
- Additional gaps in our overall system infrastructure and communications strategies with stakeholders at all levels wanting more detailed information about how our early childhood system works and the role of ECI
- The need to systematically incorporate ongoing data-based learning sessions and trainings that provide more accessible data about families and services for partners

The 2019 needs assessment findings were discussed in strategic planning sessions with ECI stakeholders including community members, families, program directors, executive leaders, and providers. Iowa’s 2019-2022 strategic plan, “We Are ECI,” outlines the culmination of these efforts into a streamlined set of 5 overarching systems goals and 13 targeted strategies that will support improved coordination, family engagement and access, and program quality across the birth-to-five mixed delivery system. These goals emphasize systematic improvements in (1) overall system infrastructure, (2) comprehensive communications, (3) workforce development, (4) equitable access, and (5) quality programs. The strategies within each goal support our belief that all Iowa citizens benefit from and are a part of Early Childhood Iowa.

Comprehensive systems coordination to support healthy growth and development of children, families, and communities requires complex and strategic actions that deliberately incorporate roles and responsibilities of all citizens, and “We are ECI” provides the roadmap Iowa needs to move closer to ensuring ECI’s vision that **“Every child, beginning at birth, will be healthy and successful.”**

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

These are the central beliefs that guide our approach to analyzing our needs assessment data and defining the goals and strategies included in this plan.



CHILDREN AND FAMILIES ARE OUR "NORTH STAR"

Family voices are central to determining our plan, identifying its priorities and strategies, and deciding how to carry out our work. Effective partnerships with families allow us to truly understand needs and how best to address them. Further, the voices of all families must be heard, not just those our system serves.



BRAIN SCIENCE

The decisions we make about what services to provide, when, and for whom are grounded in the science of brain development. A child's brain develops rapidly in the first three years of life, and ninety percent of the brain's architecture is developed by the age of 5. Research shows that early childhood experiences and relationships shape the architecture of the brain, and high-quality care produces long-lasting, positive outcomes for children.*



DIVERSE PARTNERSHIPS

We cannot do this work alone. We will engage families and community members throughout the process, learning in partnership as we go. We recognize that our goals and proposed actions require the input, expertise, and collaboration of multiple partners within and across our comprehensive early childhood system. Partners enter the work together as equals committed to a shared purpose.



EQUITY

We embrace the mantra of "not about us without us" as we work toward equity within the early childhood system. We commit to shared leadership with communities of color and other underserved and underrepresented groups to work toward equitable access and outcomes for all children and families in our state. Our vision includes "every child" which requires us to examine data for disparities by race, ethnicity, family income, geographic area, language, culture, different-abledness and other distinguishing characteristics in analyzing problems, identifying solutions and defining success.



DATA IS A VALUABLE RESOURCE

We maintain high standards for data ethics while acknowledging that decision-making is more relevant and effective when we have better access to information. We commit to using data in service of the public good - to support Iowa's children and families.



ACCOUNTABILITY

We will set bold, clear priorities for action, and we will do what we say we will do. We hold ourselves accountable for measurable action on the goals of this plan. We commit to transparency and inclusion throughout all phases of our work.

* For more information about the science of policy to practice, visit: https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/three-early-childhood-development-principles-improve-child-family-outcomes/?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=august_2019

OUR VISION FOR IOWA'S CHILDREN:



Early Childhood Iowa is tasked with ensuring that our young children are healthy, ready to succeed in school, grow up in safe and supportive communities with secure and nurturing families, and have access to secure and nurturing early learning environments.

The Early Childhood Iowa Initiative
Iowa has a long and rich history of investing in young children and their families - a recognition of the impact early experiences have on health and success in school, work, and in life overall. Spurred by research on the importance of the first three years of life,¹ in 1998, the Iowa legislature created Iowa Community Empowerment.² This law provided funding for early childhood services, with annual increases over several years.

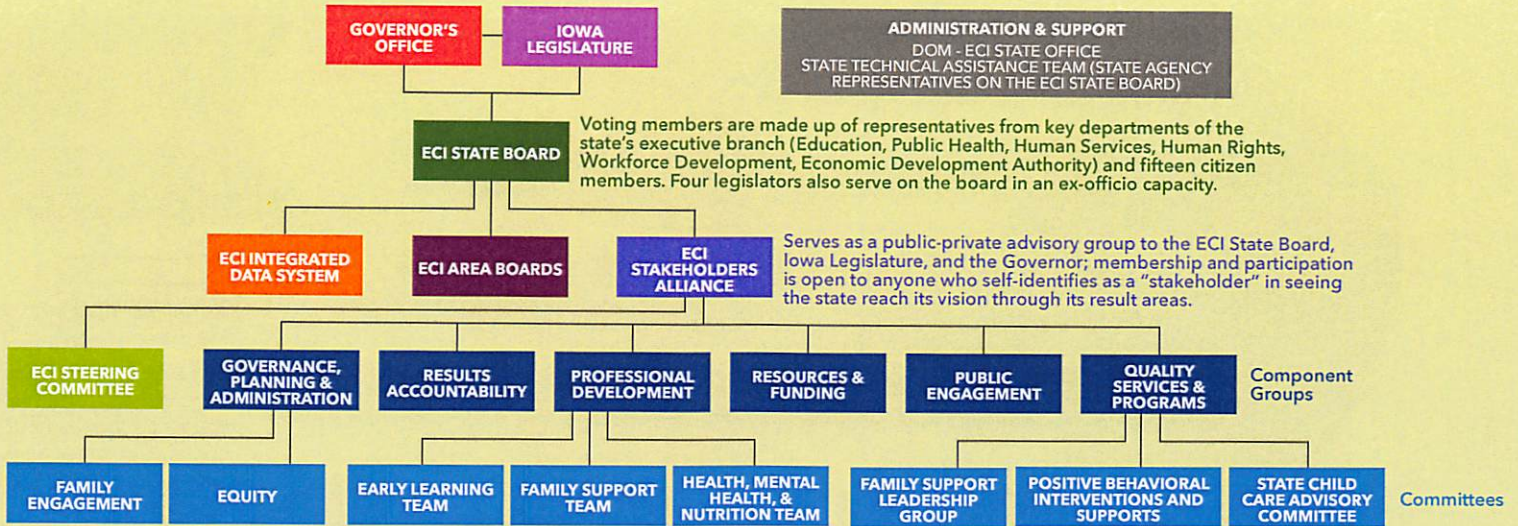
Local area boards covering all 99 counties were eligible to receive this funding and use it to support a range of services for children up to age five and their families. The law also created a state board (similar to a Children's Cabinet but with citizen and legislative members) to provide oversight through strategic planning, funding identification, guidance, tracking, and reporting on results.

Iowa also formed the Stakeholders Alliance, a public-private group that focused on early childhood system development, including governance, planning and administration, results accountability, professional development, quality services and programs, public engagement, and resources and finance. The

Stakeholders Alliance was originally formed under an Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems grant and began within our Iowa Department of Public Health (IDPH). Later, in 2009, it was designated the Early Childhood Advisory Council as promoted by the Head Start Act of 2007.⁴ As our system coordination matured, the Stakeholders Alliance structure added component groups to represent the key areas of work. This structure provides organizational support and capacity for cross-system teams to implement the work of this forthcoming strategic plan.

In 2010, the Iowa Legislature passed additional legislation⁵ designating Early Childhood Iowa as an umbrella for the local area boards (of which there are 38 at

HOW THE CURRENT SYSTEM IS STRUCTURED



present), the state board, and the Stakeholders Alliance and clarifying their purpose and functions in Iowa's early childhood system. The law directed that the same vision, result areas, and strategic plan be used throughout the entire system, ensuring coordination of efforts - a critical step for our system to address the needs of young children and their families.

In 2013, capitalizing on funding and support provided by the Early Childhood Advisory Council Grant, Early Childhood Iowa conducted a needs assessment and adopted its first joint strategic plan since the 2010 merger language to improve outcomes for young children and

families. The plan began with a needs assessment using publicly available data to identify strategic priorities related to system infrastructure, equitable access to high quality services, and building public support for a comprehensive early childhood system. With updates to the plan completed in 2016 and again in 2018-2019, we welcomed the support of the Preschool Development Grant in January 2019 as an opportunity on which to build and enhance our prior efforts.

The Preschool Development Grant also provided an opportunity to accelerate the development of an Integrated Data System for

use in a longitudinal cohort study integrating administrative data from public education, health, and human services systems. This study provided the foundation for our comprehensive needs assessment and informed the strategic plan that follows. Combined, these efforts allowed us to expand stakeholder engagement, fill gaps in the existing needs assessment with new data, and inform an enhanced strategic plan driven toward systematic change.

¹Beginning in the mid-1990s, a campaign titled "I Am Your Child" highlighted the importance of early brain development on child development. This campaign and appearances by Dr. Bruce Perry, an expert on early childhood development, drew the attention of Iowa's Governor, legislators, administrative officials, and professionals.

²Reference: formerly Iowa Code Chapter 28.

³This concept was informed by North Carolina's SmartStart initiative.

⁴42 USC 9801 et seq.

⁵Reference: Iowa Code Chapter 256i.

OUR APPROACH TO STRATEGIC PLANNING

Stakeholder Engagement

Our commitment to thoughtful, inclusive stakeholder engagement served as the foundation for all planning efforts throughout the summer of 2019.



We established a "Core Team" to facilitate our strategic planning efforts, including representatives from Iowa's Department of Human Services, Department of Management/ECI, Department of Education, Department of Human Rights, the Head Start State Collaboration Office, the Iowa Association for the Education of Young Children, and Iowa State University.

As a team, we began with intentional pre-planning activities to identify a thoughtful strategic planning process, paying particular attention to addressing the needs of vulnerable and underserved children and families.

At the May Stakeholders Alliance meeting, we previewed our overall process and approach to strategic planning to stakeholders representing the main sectors of the early childhood system (health, mental health, and nutrition; early learning; and family support). Leaders from our early childhood system further vetted the process and approach at our Steering Committee meeting on June 6.



150+ PEOPLE
involved over a total of three days and two webinars

For a full list of participants and their involvement throughout the process, see Appendix page 30.

Iowa's strategic planning process was accomplished in tiered phases, with each phase engaging an ever-broader cross-section of stakeholders from Iowa's early childhood system.



JULY

Stakeholders representing Iowa's early childhood system attended two day-long learning sessions where findings from the 2019 needs assessment were presented and discussed across the following topics:

1. Who are the children 0-5 in Iowa
2. Underserved and vulnerable populations
3. Access to care
4. Quality of early care
5. Workforce and professional development

Stakeholders also engaged in a preliminary, high-level review of goal statements from the strategic plan adopted in January 2019. At the conclusion of each day, attendees provided feedback on the structure and overall outcomes for each of the learning sessions. Their evaluations, reflections, and insights helped shape the approach for Phase II.



AUGUST

Building on the rich conversations begun in Phase I, stakeholders (many of whom attended the July learning sessions) participated in a day-long strategic planning work day intended to challenge the status quo.

Attendees applied what we learned from the needs assessment to:

- Refine our goals and strategies
- Identify new opportunities to improve our system
- Prioritize the strategic direction of our system for the next three years



AUGUST

Throughout August, we synthesized learning from the needs assessment and strategic priorities identified by system stakeholders into the plan that follows.

In order to maximize broad involvement, we hosted a two-part, interactive webinar series on August 9 and 13, in each of which 60 individuals participated. The first webinar reviewed the needs assessment; the second webinar offered the same opportunity related to the strategic plan. Both webinars were shared with the public by posting the opportunities on the Early Childhood Iowa website and via email to more than 1,500 individuals. We surveyed stakeholders publicly on the Early Childhood Iowa website and received responses with questions, suggestions, and other feedback.



SEPTEMBER

Our strategic planning process concluded with formal presentations to the Stakeholders Alliance on September 5 and the State Board on September 6.



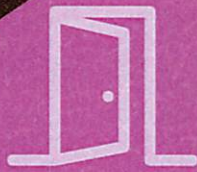
2019 & ON

The plan that follows provides a path forward for Early Childhood Iowa, policy makers, and the children and families we serve. We recognize, however, that the landscape of what Iowa's children and families need is ever-changing. In that sense, our plan is viewed as a "living document"—one that we will revisit and revise on an ongoing basis to ensure we're able to quickly adjust our course when needed.

ONGOING STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Our process benefited from the widespread responses from families and early childhood providers across our state. We will continue to engage with families and providers to implement the identified goals and strategies of this plan.

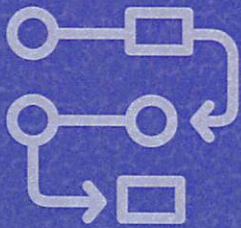
IOWA'S STRATEGIC PLAN 2019-2022



EQUITABLE ACCESS



QUALITY



INFRASTRUCTURE



COMMUNICATION



WORKFORCE

GOALS 1, 2 AND 3 CREATE THE FOUNDATION FOR GOALS 4 AND 5.

GOAL 1

Promote a coordinated infrastructure to advance the early childhood system.

STRATEGY 1.1: Expand collaboration and coordination among state and local programs and agencies serving young children and their families.

STRATEGY 1.2: Develop and nurture effective public-private partnerships at a state and local level.

STRATEGY 1.3: Infuse data-based discussions and decision-making processes throughout the early childhood system.

GOAL 2

Build public will for investing in young children and their families.

STRATEGY 2.1: Communicate the value of The First 2,000 Days as the most critical stage of the human lifecycle.

STRATEGY 2.2: Partner with families and communities to improve communication about what young children and families need and how the system responds.

STRATEGY 2.3: Engage families as leaders and advocates for a comprehensive early childhood system.

GOAL 3

Transform the early childhood workforce through formal education, greater professionalism, increased skills and competence, and new approaches to implementing best practices.

STRATEGY 3.1: Create a larger, more skilled early childhood workforce.

STRATEGY 3.2: Provide new or expanded early childhood workforce supports to enhance the quality of early childhood programs and services.

GOAL 4

Ensure that young children and families receive the services they need when they need them.

STRATEGY 4.1: Improve equitable access to early learning opportunities and services for vulnerable and underserved children and families.

STRATEGY 4.2: Expand and improve access to high quality early learning opportunities and services for young children and their families.

STRATEGY 4.3: Improve transitions among early childhood programs and between the early childhood and K-12 education systems.

GOAL 5

Improve the quality of early childhood services for young children and their families across early care and education; health, mental health, and nutrition; and family support services.

STRATEGY 5.1: Promote and incentivize the use of evidence-based programs and services across the early childhood system.

STRATEGY 5.2: Adopt a collective impact approach to investing in high-quality, evidence-based services, programs and activities across the early childhood system.



GOAL 1

Promote a coordinated infrastructure to advance the early childhood system.

Iowa's commitment to advancing an integrated, coordinated, and comprehensive early childhood system is reflected in ECI's legislative priorities and related guidelines for infrastructure development. We understand that a strong, well-coordinated infrastructure that balances public and private participation is the foundation for any future improvements in early care, health, and education services in the state. Early Childhood Iowa has valued broad-based systems development and sought to strengthen stakeholder engagement, strategic planning, and prioritizing collaboration. While we have made progress, we have recognized that three constituencies have been

insufficiently represented across the ECI structure: the business sector, families, and communities of color. This remains an issue for our system, which this plan seeks to address.

Our recent needs assessment process tested new strategies, including using an integrated administrative data system and strategic two-way learning sessions with stakeholders. Through this process, we identified several areas that need improvement to support our coordinated infrastructure.

Through surveys, focus groups, and learning sessions, stakeholders shared that there is insufficient understanding of ECI's purpose

and how it functions relative to state and local early care, health, and education systems serving families. Further, the essential make-up of ECI as a public-private partnership has not always been leveraged to advance the common mission. Examples of effective partnerships exist in our state, but we do not strategically document or replicate these to improve the system. Lastly, our use of interactive data-to-decision-making frameworks revealed gaps in capacity that we must address, as well as the need for additional processes to facilitate strategic thinking in the "use" of data.

The following strategic priorities were identified as a result of these identified needs.

STRATEGY 1.1:

Expand collaboration and coordination among state and local programs and agencies serving young children and their families.

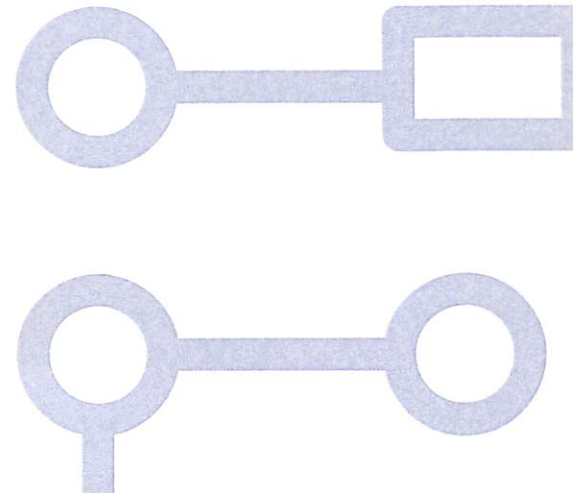
ACTION 1. Explore opportunities and limits to collaboration within legislation that impacts young children and families. We will conduct a full scan of legislation and policies, including ECI and other state departments involved in funding and implementing the early childhood system. We will further identify opportunities for revisions or clarifications to policies and law that would facilitate greater collaboration, access to services, and equitable outcomes.

ACTION 2. Define the specific roles and responsibilities of ECI relative to state and local systems. We will review and revise existing documents that describe the system, in order to clarify and operationalize how we collaborate. This will include each component of ECI that serves as a system connection with other state and local entities, including the ECI State Board, Agency Administrators, Stakeholders Alliance, and Component Groups. All entities within ECI will include representation from underserved groups, including those from diverse racial, ethnic, cultural, linguistic and differently-abled communities.

ACTION 3. Create routine communications strategies and training about the ECI system. We will develop a plan to consistently communicate roles and responsibilities, expectations for collaboration, and the processes by which we facilitate collaboration and coordination. We will also develop training materials for current and future stakeholders to better understand how the system is designed to work and the unique roles and responsibilities of all the players.

"Make sure the dots are connected. So what I mean by that, there could be high level collaboration between the head of the Department of Public Health, the head of the Iowa Department of Education, the head of the Iowa Department of Human Services, but it may not trickle down to the boots-to-the-ground folks here that this is a policy change, and this is how it's going to be."

- Provider



STRATEGY 1.2:

Develop and nurture effective public-private partnerships at a state and local level.

ACTION 1. Create a process for documenting and replicating effective public-private partnerships. We will create a routine process to gather information about effective partnerships to facilitate sharing and replication. This will include identifying successful partnerships, documenting how they were established and what were the key elements, and generating routine processes to collect the information and make it available to others.

ACTION 2. Support building and improving public-private partnerships across the system. We will provide technical assistance and training for local early childhood boards to develop and leverage community-specific partnerships. We will encourage peer-to-peer support between those already implementing effective partnerships and those wanting to build them. We will also organize and host an annual networking meeting to share best practices and generate opportunities for new partnerships.

Examples raised during stakeholder meetings include:

- Private businesses that provide care for children in collaboration with state-funded voluntary preschool and share transportation or space
- Businesses that involve human resources, recruiters, and managers in implementing workplace policies that support families with young children
- Businesses that deliberately support local area boards through paid time to volunteer
- Local boards that have raised public funds to leverage tax-exempt status.

ACTION 3. Showcase and reward successful partnerships. We will share noteworthy public-private partnerships and their strategies.

STRATEGY 1.3:

Infuse data-based discussions and decision-making processes throughout the early childhood system.

ACTION 1. Enhance the capacity of Iowa's Early Childhood Integrated Data System (IDS) to capture population-based information about child and family needs, services, and outcomes. We will better analyze and use data we have and expand the IDS capacity to identify gaps in data and research. We will also implement and improve governance and technology for the IDS.

ACTION 2. Provide state and local decision-makers with routine data analysis and reports. This work will include a "state of the state" report and local reporting tools to support local-level decision-making. We will consider other audiences and stakeholders that may need or benefit from regular/routine reporting on cross-systems information generated from IDS.

ACTION 3. Improve our "data culture" across the comprehensive early childhood system. We will adopt the habits of data-based decision making, grounding our understanding of issues in data and research and our solutions in field-recognized, research-informed practices. We will also create tailored training and technical support for stakeholder groups to "use" data in strategic planning/decision making.

ACTION 4. Create flexible accountability structures that emphasize the use of data in decision-making. We will generate plans to use the priorities identified through data findings and related stakeholder discussions to inform the state budget in areas that impact the early childhood system. We will also use data-informed priorities to strengthen ECI's component groups.

ACTION 5. Improve our capacity to measure outcome change. We will create clear processes for how indicators will be identified, measured, monitored, and routinely updated to align with our intended outcomes. We will then develop training for state and local level partners in how to create and monitor indicators.



GOAL 2

Build public will for investing in young children and families.

The resources needed to fully fund an early childhood system will only become available when there is a public will that believes the well-being and success of its young children are of primary importance. In order to shift public will, we must improve understanding of the necessary components of an early childhood system, the contribution it makes to community development, and how children and families benefit.

Universal recognition of the value of investments in early childhood and what constitutes “quality care” remains a challenge for our state. While executive leaders have made

investments in programs, a solid understanding of the necessary components of a mixed-delivery system is lacking. Policymakers often lack data when making decisions about where to spend public dollars and promote policies putting families and children first. Without adequate information about values and priorities, they are challenged in deciding how best to move forward.

Family voices are too rarely utilized to determine the scope and shape of early childhood services. A responsive system must listen and respond to those voices – including ones from diverse linguistic, racial,

ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Our needs assessment identified that two-way communication strategies would help our state fully “hear” family voices and incorporate them into strategic decision-making processes.

The following strategic priorities address these needs and build a more solid and comprehensive communication approach. These strategies will establish the universal importance of a vital early childhood system. Our communications efforts will also ensure that parents become the leaders of changes needed in the early childhood system.

STRATEGY 2.1:

Communicate the value of The First 2,000 Days as the most critical stage of the human lifecycle.

ACTION 1. Utilize “The First 2,000 Days” as the unifying message for all communication efforts. We will create a message that connects the value of early childhood to later life outcomes (education, economic, and health) that can be tailored for diverse audiences. This work will also include identifying opportunities to connect our message to other state and local priorities and initiatives, such as Future Ready Iowa* and community economic development groups.

ACTION 2. Develop and implement an external communication plan. Recognizing that information must be tailored to different audiences, we will develop a variety of ways to increase awareness, educate, engage, and lead to action for families, students, businesses and other partners, policy makers, and community leaders. We will explore options to secure formal support/capacity to implement the plan with consistency across state and local communication efforts.

ACTION 3. Coordinate our communication efforts. We will identify opportunities to streamline and coordinate our communication and messaging efforts with state and local partner organizations and initiatives. Key to this effort will be identifying message “champions,” including local leaders to engage community, civic, and other relevant groups in the desired action.

“Well, we need to fund early childhood like we do K through 12, that’s the bottom line, and until lawmakers put that as their priority, we’re going to be struggling with the same story”

- Provider

* Future Ready Iowa is the state’s premiere initiative to connect Iowans to the training and education required for good paying jobs and careers. For further information, visit <https://www.futurereadyiowa.gov/>.

STRATEGY 2.2:

Partner with families and communities to improve communication about what young children and families need and how the system responds.

ACTION 1. Create an “information hub” for families.

We will streamline and improve options for families to access information by creating a centralized information “hub.” We will provide accurate, accessible, culturally-responsive, multi-lingual, high-quality information about the early childhood system. From the start, we will engage families and communities directly to provide feedback on existing sources of information about early childhood services and supports.

ACTION 2. Partner with community-specific leaders.

We will partner with leaders from underserved and underrepresented populations to assist our efforts to improve how families access culturally- and linguistically-responsive information about and engage with early childhood services and programs. Community-specific leaders could include respected individuals who serve in a civic, educational, social service, faith, or other community leadership capacity.



“If we’re overwhelmed [by the system], we know parents are.”

- Provider

STRATEGY 2.3:

Engage families as leaders and advocates for a comprehensive early childhood system.

ACTION 1. Identify and adopt a framework for engaging families as leaders in system change.

From the outset, we will build our system’s capacity to effectively engage families, hear their voices, and openly respond to feedback about how to improve the system. We will do this by leveraging existing frameworks and models for successful family leadership, such as the Head Start Parent, Family and Community Engagement Framework, which includes efforts to engage and strengthen families in performing roles of caregiver, teacher and advocate.

ACTION 2. Develop and implement a “family academy.”

The “family academy” will provide training for families to develop their ability to act as leaders for improved child, family, and community outcomes. The academy will also provide support to families as they assume leadership positions as leaders and advocates for system change. Informed and empowered parents would continue as leaders and advocates as their children enter the K-12 system as well.

ACTION 3. Create a standing mechanism for families to participate in shaping the direction of our early childhood system. This effort will include both formal (e.g., a parent advisory board or parent summit) and informal (e.g., focus groups and surveys) opportunities for families to lead.

ACTION 4. Increase engagement of family advocates in system events.

We will increase the presence of parents, grandparents, caregivers, and other community advocates at conferences, legislative, and other special events. We will center their voices when delivering key messages about the importance of the early childhood system.

My sister-in-law already had a daughter at our day care, and that’s kind of where we just went.”

- Parent



GOAL 3

Transform the early childhood workforce through formal education, improved professionalization, increased skills and competence, and new approaches to implementing best practices.

Parallel with national efforts drawing attention to the diverse nature and scope of early childhood workforce challenges, our recent needs assessment repeatedly identified significant gaps in the quality and quantity of our workforce relative to the need for services. Child care centers that are not enrolled at capacity report staffing as their main reason, which is a challenge to improving quality. Potential child care providers have a range of educational backgrounds, requiring diverse professional options. There is also a need to offer a career trajectory

for early childhood educators with progressive supports and growth opportunities, that “pays” for the level of quality that we need in our programs.

Improving the early care and education workforce is a necessary first step toward sharing best practices and making measurable quality improvements in early childhood settings within a mixed delivery system. These improvements will bring other benefits to communities - particularly rural ones - by expanding the availability of

quality child care for parents in the workforce, providing a career path in communities with few such opportunities, and assisting businesses in recruiting and retaining parents for their work force. To reach these goals, we will need to better partner with Iowa Workforce Development and the Iowa Economic Development Authority (Future Ready Iowa).

The following strategic priorities focus on ways we can advance our workforce along three dimensions: formal education, competence, and compensation/benefits.

STRATEGY 3.1:

Create a larger, more skilled early childhood workforce.

ACTION 1. Establish the field of early care and education as a viable post-secondary career option. We will create partnerships with the K-12 education system to promote careers and college degree attainment in early childhood for high school students.

ACTION 2. Identify and recruit untapped labor into the early childhood career pathway. We will partner with Iowa’s community college system to identify students in specific localities to pursue credentials and degrees as a cohort. We will also work to diversify the workforce by recruiting individuals from underrepresented groups to follow the early childhood career pathway.

ACTION 3. Establish consistent professional development opportunities for the early childhood workforce at all levels. We will meet providers where they are and provide training opportunities that promote best practices, role-related competencies, and understanding of evidence-based strategies. We will work to ensure that the needs of all early childhood professionals are met throughout the state.

ACTION 4. Improve access to formal education coursework linked to recommended evidence-based practices. We will partner with educational institutions to expand the availability of required and optional courses included in the career pathways (e.g., topics related to mental health, serving children with special needs in inclusive settings, and trauma-informed practices). We will emphasize online courses to ensure access for rural professionals.

ACTION 5. Promote and engage the existing child care workforce and family support workforce in continuing their degree attainment. This effort will emphasize and promote college-credit bearing coursework through financial support from T.E.A.C.H.¹ EARLY CHILDHOOD®. We will expand T.E.A.C.H. to ensure all providers, teachers and home visitors have access to coursework that leads to credentials (e.g., CDA, paraeducator license, associate and bachelor’s degrees, teacher license). We will explore policy opportunities in our QRIS and in program licensing to incentivize or require teachers/home visitors to have specific degrees or credentials.

ACTION 6. Develop a professional development hub. We will create an online hub for providers that includes access to available professional development opportunities - including education, training, and technical assistance - and the resources and support required across the early childhood systems and by professional development providers. This hub will facilitate shared understanding of best practices, as well as connect providers with trained coaches and provider networks so they can get the help they need for implementing best practices and developing their own career development plans. The hub will also interface with the early childhood and school age professional workforce registry.²

“I’ve known teachers that have worked there for 10-plus years and don’t make over \$9 an hour.”

– Parent

“I’m here because child care is my passion. It really is, but I left because I could make \$5 more an hour with a Monday through Friday, eight to five job [at a grocery store].”

– Former provider

STRATEGY 3.2:

Provide new or expanded early childhood workforce supports to enhance the quality of early childhood programs and services.

ACTION 1. Enhance workforce skill and competence. We will strengthen career pathways with competencies aligned with the national standards (e.g., Iowa Core Knowledge of Child Development) and promote the effective use of the Iowa Early Learning Standards for work with children. This expanded approach to career pathways will include multiple entry points that address the diverse education levels of our workforce.

ACTION 2. Provide formal support for ongoing competency development. We will establish formal structures for on-going workforce consultation related to documenting baseline competencies and targeting training that meets provider needs. Training will also be developed to support improving comprehensive services, coordinated supports, and quality full-day programming for young children.

ACTION 3. Expand opportunities to provide dedicated support/specialization for children’s mental health and wellbeing (e.g., Infant Mental Health Endorsement³). We will enhance knowledge and skills related to practices that support young children’s social emotional development and use of trauma-informed approaches to providing early care and education services (e.g., Infant Mental Health Endorsement³).

ACTION 4. Expand opportunities to provide dedicated support/specialization for children with special needs. We will accomplish this by expanding and replicating current models for endorsement.

ACTION 5. Address poor compensation and benefits for the early childhood child care workforce. We will address this through a targeted communications effort to raise awareness and bring focused attention to this issue. We will partner with workforce and community economic development efforts to ensure this becomes a shared goal across state initiatives. We will also increase our investment in the WAGES⁴ and PAEYS⁵ programs. These programs provide bonuses commensurate to college credit and degree attainment for the early care and education and family support workforce.

“Speaking as an in-home child care provider, in-home child care providers do not have enough support to deal with children who have a mental health issue and those kinds of things.”

– Provider

¹ T.E.A.C.H. EARLY CHILDHOOD® IOWA (Teacher Education and Compensation Helps) is a comprehensive scholarship program that provides the early childhood workforce access to educational opportunities and is helping establish a well-qualified, fairly compensated and stable workforce for our children. More information is available at <http://www.iowaaeyc.org/teach.cfm>.

² Iowa’s Early Childhood and School Age Professional Workforce Registry, or I-PoWeR

³ Infant Mental Health Endorsement is Iowa’s endorsement for culturally sensitive, relationship-focused practice promoting infant mental health (IMH-E®). More information is available at <http://promotingmentalhealthiowa.org/>

⁴ Child Care WAGES® IOWA (WAGES) is a salary supplement program offered by Iowa AEYC. As with T.E.A.C.H. IOWA, WAGES is a licensed program of Child Care Services Association. WAGES offers salary supplements (also called stipends) to the early care and education workforce, based on the individual’s level of formal education and commitment to their program.

⁵ PAEYS (Performance And Education Yield Success) provides salary supplements to MIECHV funded family support professionals based on formal educational attainment and performance.

GOAL 4

Ensure that young children and families receive the services they need when they need them.

Our early childhood system has strived for equity for children and families. We established an Equity Committee. We engaged stakeholders, leaders from communities of color and other disadvantaged groups, and partners from other systems to develop a set of Equity Guiding Principles to be applied in our decisions about funding, policy, and practices. We recognize, however, that our good faith efforts to achieve equity have lacked solid evidence to guide our path.

Our needs assessment provided us with an opportunity to examine our administrative data about whom we are serving (and who we are not) and to truly “hear” families with young children. For instance, we learned that some Iowa families are less likely to access our preschool

programs - including minority children (i.e., Hispanic, Black, and multiracial), children born to single mothers or mothers without a high school education, and children born with inadequate prenatal care.

We learned from families that the biggest barriers to finding care are waiting lists and costs that do not account for what working families can actually afford. Families also identified gaps in services for children with disabilities and behavioral health issues, inadequate mental health services and transportation, and barriers to housing supports. Furthermore, isolated services often lead to disordered or absent transitions from early childhood education settings to school district kindergarten programs. Access to services is not equitable

across urban, suburban, and rural communities. In effect, we have a shortage of early care and education services, which families living in poverty feel most acutely.

We envision a renewed commitment to equity by identifying and taking concrete action to improve the outcomes we produce, beginning with improved access equity to programs with the highest levels of quality. The following priority strategies were identified through stakeholder learning sessions that included discussions about the needs assessment data in order to determine actionable steps that could address gaps. In the three action items, we will expand partnerships with local groups such as ECI area boards for coordination efforts as appropriate.

STRATEGY 4.1:

Improve equitable access to early learning opportunities and services for vulnerable and underserved children and families.

ACTION 1. Adopt and implement a “not about us without us” approach to planning. By directly engaging vulnerable and underserved families and communities in system planning, we will address disparities in what is offered and available to whom, where, and how. We will address disparities in what is offered and available to whom, where, and how by directly engaging vulnerable and underserved families and communities in system planning. Together, we will build upon areas of strength to address these disparities in access by race, ethnicity, family income, geographic area, language, culture, different-abledness and other distinguishing characteristics.

ACTION 2. Prioritize vulnerable and underserved children and families for service access and provision. We will enhance and expand outreach and enrollment efforts for state-funded preschool programs and other services to improve participation rates for all types of vulnerable and underserved children (e.g., children born to mothers with low education levels or who received inadequate prenatal care, children in foster care, children living in poverty, children with special needs, and children from immigrant families, and dual language learners.) We will target areas where participation rates are low and expand access as needed to address increased demands and eliminate waiting list experiences for vulnerable and underserved families.

ACTION 3. Increase center-based and home-based child care provider participation in Iowa’s Child Care Assistance (CCA) program. We will partner with our State Child Care Advisory Committee and other system partners to complete, implement, and expand training and support related to participation in the Child Care Assistance program for center- and home-based providers. This approach includes operational skill-building, including training on fiscal and business practices to support participation.

“It is really difficult to find quality childcare in my area. Desired centers have years-long waiting lists. Head Start/Pre-K is even more difficult unless you know someone who knows the ropes. I feel like this could be much improved.”

– Parent

STRATEGY 4.2:

Expand and improve access to high quality early learning opportunities and services for young children and their families.

ACTION 1. Cluster services to limit family travel needs where possible. This will include leveraging public-private partnerships to develop transportation plans that support service access (e.g., DART, HERTA, carpooling incentives, and school districts).

ACTION 2. Expand the number of overall slots available for young children in the early care and education system. We will expand efforts to recruit and retain providers across the early care and education field by expanding training and support. This will include providing training and support related to overall business skill development for providers.

ACTION 3. Expand the hours of programming, care and wrap-around services available. We will promote and leverage state and local partnerships to expand the availability of non-traditional care and overall early care and education slots available for children and families. We will begin this effort with a scan of current investments across the state.*

STRATEGY 4.3:

Improve transitions among early childhood programs and between the early childhood and K-12 education systems.

ACTION 1. Promote stronger collaboration between school districts and local early care and education services. We will begin by identifying places where we have effective approaches to collaboration between the early childhood and K-12 education systems. We will then document the key elements for these successes, develop training and support to replicate and share best practices, and identify opportunities for expansion.

ACTION 2. Improve transitions between early care and education programs and school districts. These collaborations will leverage requirements in the Every Student Succeeds Act** for local education agencies to have written agreements with Head Start and other early education providers and engage in sharing of records,

formal avenues of communication, annual meetings between teachers on both sides of the agreement, and opportunities for joint training around transitions. As these requirements are encouraged, this strategic plan will use those agreements as the platform for improved coordination of services and seamless transition procedures.

ACTION 3. Improve transitions among early care and education programs. Our efforts will begin with developing a series of video "trailers" and other supports for providers within early care and education programs to enhance knowledge of other programs and services and build competencies related to improved, "hands on" referrals for child and family needs. We will identify a plan to distribute and share this resource via multiple communication pathways.

ACTION 4. Develop navigation supports for families to improve system access and transitions among programs. We will identify opportunities to adopt successful navigation models tailored to facilitate access to the early childhood system, transitions between programs and services, and transitions to kindergarten. This approach will include leveraging grassroots organizations connected with the children and families we are not reaching.

"There is not enough childcare providers for children with special needs. Not enough educated or well-rounded child care providers who deal with those children. Whether it's in-home or center based. My daughter has Autism and it was impossible to find care for her while I work."

– Parent

* For further detail, see Goal 5, Strategy 5.3.

** 2015 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act; 20 U.S.C. ch. 28 and 70 § 1001 et seq.



GOAL 5

Improve the quality of early childhood services for young children and their families across early care and education; health, mental health, and nutrition; and family support services.

Iowa has made significant investments in the early childhood system including development and implementation of a Quality Rating System (QRS), revision of Iowa Early Learning Standards, the development of the Institute¹ for family support providers, and continued alignment work among our colleges and universities for coursework leading towards degree attainment in fields that support young children in early learning care and education programs. Gaps remain, however, that were emphasized through our recent needs assessment process. These include:

1. A need for more programs to invest in using evidence-based strategies
2. A need for more provider information about the value of

and support for participating in Quality Rating System and other accreditation frameworks

3. Additional supports for our workforce to fully implement quality programming (particularly around mental health and working with children with special needs)
4. A need for ongoing workforce training for staff with all levels of education to support continued learning of best practices and current research.

The goals in this plan are all intended to serve as foundations for improving and facilitating access to high-quality programs and services. We cannot achieve high standards of quality for early care and education without a well-coordinated system, public will to

invest in quality, a highly-skilled and valued workforce to provide critical services, and options for families to choose a program or service that best meets their unique needs. The focus of Goal 5, therefore, is on building continuous quality improvement strategies to ensure rigorous standards of implementation with fidelity for evidence-based programming are in place.

To fully implement these strategies, our relationships and partnerships between state and local efforts need to be deliberately sought and continuously reviewed. The early childhood system of systems is only strengthened when we seek all voices and roles at all levels, beginning with voices of families. Coordination at a local level is key to this cyclical process.

STRATEGY 5.1:

Promote and incentivize the use of evidence-based programs and services across the early childhood system.

ACTION 1. Support continued implementation of Iowa's CCDF lead agency's² incentive structure to increase the number of providers participating in our QRS and other accreditation frameworks for early care and education programs. This action will begin by the implementation of a revised and enhanced QRIS system for Iowa which has stronger incentives for quality and workforce improvements. It also includes increased funding to make the QRIS bonuses more enticing. Finally, it means reframing efforts within a continuous improvement model where all providers understand where they are on a continuum of quality and what are the necessary next steps to improve.

ACTION 2. Expand and replicate credentialing models for family support and health, mental health and nutrition programming. We will leverage and expand existing credentialing models while continuing to address quality programming across all areas of the early childhood system. The key to quality improvement is a more educated, competent workforce. We will leverage and expand existing credentialing programs to address service availability and performance gaps, especially in areas where family support and health services (including mental health and nutrition) impact young children.

ACTION 3. Develop, enhance, and maintain a continuous quality improvement process to ensure foundational quality standards are met across core early childhood services. We will engage stakeholders throughout the early childhood system to assess baseline implementation fidelity and quality measures. This will include development of a cross-sector fidelity implementation rubric that will enable us to assess and measure quality across core services at regular intervals.

ACTION 4. Leverage statewide training and technical assistance providers to support implementation fidelity. We will leverage and expand on professional development models that include high quality adult learning strategies, a system of coaches focused on implementation fidelity to evidence-based practices, and the use of implementation fidelity data.

STRATEGY 5.2:

Adopt a collective impact approach to investing in high-quality, evidence-based services, programs and activities across the early childhood system.

ACTION 1. Conduct a fiscal scan of investments across the early childhood system to identify gaps, duplication of efforts, and opportunities to streamline funding. We will engage stakeholders at multiple levels to assess current and historical investment patterns related to early childhood programs and services.

ACTION 2. Adopt a collective impact approach to aligning funding and resources for improved quality and outcomes. We commit to developing an overall funding plan that prioritizes streamlined and targeted investments across state and local efforts to achieve improvements in the quality of programs and services available.

ACTION 3. Recommit to formally addressing resources and funding as an ECI Component Group. We will target efforts to recruit committed membership for this system component group. The work of this group will center on regular assessment of funding alignment across state and local efforts to invest in high-quality programs and services.

ACTION 4. Further evaluate identified facility needs of licensed child care providers. We will review facility needs identified by child care providers and compare to most common identified areas of non-compliance with regulatory requirements for licensed child care facilities. We will develop strategies to support and invest in programs seeking to improve their facilities.

“So I mean it wasn’t that it was just horrible, but there were just some things that were just not what we approved of, you know, as a family or as parents, but there was – there’s not options in small towns.”

- Parent

“I receive child care assistance from my state but I haven’t used it yet because I couldn’t find a child care center that accepts the state pay.”

- Parent

“It’s very difficult to find a quality center or in-home that doesn’t have a waiting list. Quality programs are very expensive.”

- Parent

¹ The Institute for the Advancement of Family Support Professionals (<https://institutefsp.org/>) was established by a HRSA MIECHV Innovation Grant and benefits family support professionals everywhere the opportunity to learn new skills and grow their careers through online modules and personalized learning map. All Institute modules and the career compass are based on the National Core Competency Framework.

² The Iowa Department of Human Services serves as the CCDF lead agency.

IMPLEMENTING THE PLAN

Creating Change for Young Children & Families

Iowa will have significant state and financial resources to support the implementation of this strategic plan. As shown below, this includes state funding for Early Childhood Iowa and federal and state funding from multiple sources benefiting young children and their families.

Also of importance in moving forward is our long history of

ongoing stakeholder engagement at both the state and local levels to work collaboratively toward improved outcomes for young children and their families. We proactively include family voices, community members, and other stakeholders as leaders in system change. This engagement is facilitated through an Early Childhood Iowa infrastructure that promotes collaboration, defines

roles and responsibilities, and sets system-wide accountability standards.

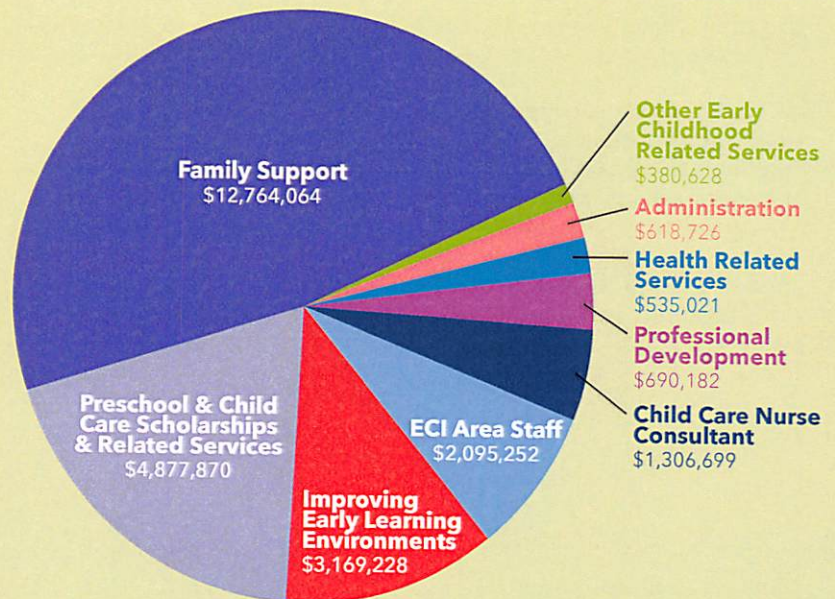
Partnering with the Integrated Data Governance Board and Resource Center, the ECI State Board will provide guidance and oversight of the efforts outlined and strengthen partnerships among state agencies and stakeholders.

2018 TOTAL ECI AREA EXPENDITURES

\$26.4 MILLION
local ECI investments

\$7.9 MILLION
additional public and private dollars expended to support programs, services and staff

2
full-time staff members within the Department of Management's Office of Early Childhood Iowa



Our system also benefits from:



Coordinated staff support from the Departments of: Education, Human Rights, Human Services, Public Health



Federal and state investments across all programs that impact young children and families

Child Care Assistance (CCA)	\$155,947,300 SFY 2020 State: \$40,816,931 / Fed: \$115,130,369
Infant and early childhood mental health consultation services (Project LAUNCH)	\$3.8 million over the next five years
Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV)	\$5,796,371 FFY 2019
Healthy Opportunities for Families to Experience Success - Healthy Families Iowa (HOPES HFI)	\$734,841 SFY 2020
Child Welfare Programs	\$152,344,397 SFY 2019 State: \$84,939,774 / Fed: \$59,126,906
Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program	\$82 million SFY 2019
Shared Visions Preschool Program	\$6,399,240 SFY 2019
Shared Visions Parent Support Program	\$695,401 SFY 2019
Head Start and Early Head Start	\$67,693,469 FFY 2018
1st Five	\$4,424,412 SFY 2020
I-Smile (ages 1-21)	\$1,950,481 SFY 2020
Healthy Child Care Iowa (HCCI)	\$215,346 (DHS) + \$78,000 (Title V) SFY 2020

Goal 1: Promote a coordinated infrastructure to advance the early childhood system.

Strategy 1.1: Expand collaboration and coordination among state and local programs and agencies serving young children and their families.

Action	Oversight	Implementation	Resources	Time frame
1. Explore opportunities and limits to collaboration within legislation that impacts young children and families.	ECI State Board; Stakeholders Alliance	Office of Early Childhood Iowa; Governance	Collaboration with Legislative Services Agency and associated state agencies	Year 1
2. Define the specific roles and responsibilities of ECI relative to state and local systems.	ECI State Board; Stakeholders Alliance; IDS Governance Board and Resource Center	Office of Early Childhood Iowa; Governance; Local ECI Boards	Collaboration, time, expertise, memorandum of agreement	Year 1
3. Create routine communications strategies and training about the ECI system.	ECI State Board; Stakeholders Alliance; Steering Committee	Office of Early Childhood Iowa; Governance; Public Engagement; Professional Development	Collaboration (across state/local and public/private), time, expertise	Year 1

Strategy 1.2: Develop and nurture effective public-private partnerships at a state and local level.

Action	Oversight	Implementation	Resources	Time frame
1. Create a process for documenting and replicating effective public-private partnerships.	ECI State Board; Public-Private Partnerships Committee	ECI State Board; Governance; Local ECI Boards	Collaboration, time, expertise	Year 1
2. Support building and improving public-private partnerships across the system.	ECI State Board; Public-Private Partnerships Committee	ECI State Board; Office of Early Childhood Iowa; Local ECI Boards	Collaboration, time, expertise	Years 1-3
3. Showcase and reward successful partnerships.	ECI State Board; Public-Private Partnerships Committee	Office of Early Childhood Iowa; ECI State Board	Communication, time	Years 1-3

Strategy 1.3: Infuse data-based discussions and decision-making processes throughout the early childhood system.

Action	Oversight	Implementation	Resources	Time frame
1. Enhance the capacity of Iowa's Early Childhood Integrated Data System (IDS) to capture population-based information about child and family needs, services, and outcomes.	IDS Governance Board; ECI State Board	IDS Resource Center; Results Accountability	Expanded funding (grants and other opportunities), memorandum of agreement, data sharing agreements collaboration, expertise	Year 1
2. Provide state and local decision-makers with routine data analysis and reports.	IDS Governance; ECI State Board	IDS Resource Center; Results Accountability; Local ECI Boards	Funding, collaboration, expertise	Years 1-3
3. Improve our "data culture" across the comprehensive early childhood system.	ECI State Board	Results Accountability; Professional Development; IDS Resource Center	Collaboration, time, expertise	Years 1-3
4. Create flexible accountability structures that emphasize the use of data in decision-making.	ECI State Board	Results Accountability; Office of Early Childhood Iowa; Local ECI Boards	Collaboration, time, expertise	Years 2-3
5. Improve our capacity to measure outcome change.	ECI State Board; IDS Governance Board	Results Accountability; IDS Resource Center	Collaboration, time, expertise	Years 2-3

Goal 2: Build public will for investing in young children and their families.

Strategy 2.1: Communicate the value of The First 2,000 Days as the most critical stage of the human lifecycle.

Action	Oversight	Implementation	Resources	Time frame
1. Utilize "The First 2,000 Days" as the unifying message for all communication efforts.	ECI State Board	Public Engagement; Office of Early Childhood Iowa; Local ECI Boards	Collaboration, time	Years 1-3
2. Develop and implement an external communication plan.	ECI State Board	Office of Early Childhood Iowa; Public Engagement	Funding for contracted support, collaboration, expertise	Year 1
3. Coordinate our communication efforts.	ECI State Board, Public-Private Partnerships Committee	Public Engagement; Office of Early Childhood Iowa; Local ECI Boards	Collaboration, time	Years 1-3

Strategy 2.2: Partner with families and communities to improve communication about what young children and families need and inform how the system responds.

Action	Oversight	Implementation	Resources	Time frame
1. Create an "information hub" for families.	ECI State Board; Office of Early Childhood Iowa	Public Engagement; Quality Services & Programs; Governance (Family Engagement and Equity Committees)	Funding for contracted support, collaboration, expertise	Years 1-2
2. Partner with community-specific leaders.	ECI State Board; Office of Early Childhood Iowa	Governance (Family Engagement and Equity Committees); Local ECI Boards	Collaboration, time	Years 1-3

Strategy 2.3: Engage families as leaders and advocates for a comprehensive early childhood system.

Action	Oversight	Implementation	Resources	Time frame
1. Identify and adopt a framework for engaging families as leaders in system change.	ECI State Board; Office of Early Childhood Iowa	Governance (Family Engagement and Equity Committees); Local ECI Boards	Collaboration, time	Year 1
2. Develop and implement a "family academy."	ECI State Board; Office of Early Childhood Iowa	Governance (Family Engagement and Equity Committees)	Funding, collaboration, time	Years 1-3
3. Create a standing mechanism for families to participate in shaping the direction of our early childhood system.	ECI State Board; Stakeholders Alliance	Governance (Family Engagement and Equity Committees); Office of Early Childhood Iowa; Local ECI Boards	Funding, collaboration, time	Years 1-2
4. Increase engagement of family advocates in system events.	ECI State Board; Stakeholders Alliance	Office of Early Childhood Iowa; Governance (Family Engagement and Equity Committees); Local ECI Boards	Collaboration, time	Years 1-3

Goal 3: Transform the early childhood workforce through formal education, improved professionalization, increased skills and competence, and new approaches to implementing best practices.

Strategy 3.1: Create a larger, more skilled early childhood workforce.

Action	Oversight	Implementation	Resources	Time frame
1. Establish the field of early care and education as a viable post-secondary career option.	ECI State Board; Office of Early Childhood Iowa	Professional Development	Collaboration, time	Years 1-3; ongoing
2. Identify and recruit untapped labor into the early childhood career pathway.	ECI State Board; Office of Early Childhood Iowa	Professional Development; Iowa Workforce Development	Funding, collaboration, time	Years 1-3
3. Establish consistent professional development opportunities for the early childhood workforce at all levels.	ECI State Board; Office of Early Childhood Iowa	Professional Development	Collaboration, time, expertise	Years 1-3
4. Improve access to formal education coursework linked to recommended evidence-based practices.	ECI State Board; Office of Early Childhood Iowa	Professional Development	Collaboration, time	Years 1-3
5. Promote and engage the existing child care workforce and family support workforce in continuing their degree attainment.	ECI State Board; Office of Early Childhood Iowa	Professional Development; Local ECI Boards	Funding, collaboration, time	Years 1-3
6. Develop a professional development hub.	ECI State Board; Office of Early Childhood Iowa	Professional Development	Funding, collaboration, time	Years 1-2

Strategy 3.2: Provide new or expanded early childhood workforce supports that enhance the quality of early childhood programs and services.

Action	Oversight	Implementation	Resources	Time frame
1. Enhance workforce skill and competence.	ECI State Board; Office of Early Childhood Iowa	Professional Development	Collaboration, time	Years 1-2
2. Provide formal support for ongoing competency development.	ECI State Board; Office of Early Childhood Iowa	Professional Development	Collaboration, time, expertise	Years 1-3
3. Expand opportunities to provide dedicated support/specialization for children's mental health and wellbeing.	ECI State Board; Office of Early Childhood Iowa	Professional Development	Expanded funding, collaboration, time	Years 1-2
4. Expand opportunities to provide dedicated support/specialization for children with special needs.	ECI State Board; Office of Early Childhood Iowa	Professional Development	Expanded funding, collaboration, time	Years 1-2
5. Address poor compensation and benefits for the early childhood child care workforce.	ECI State Board; Public-Private Partnerships Committee; Office of Early Childhood Iowa	Professional Development	Expanded funding, collaboration, time	Years 1-3

Goal 4: Ensure that young children and families receive the services they need when they need them.

Strategy 4.1: Improve equitable access to early learning opportunities and services for vulnerable and underserved children and families.

Action	Oversight	Implementation	Resources	Time frame
1. Adopt and implement a “not about us without us” approach to planning.	ECI State Board; Office of Early Childhood Iowa	Governance (Family Engagement and Equity Committees); Local ECI Boards	Collaboration, time	Year 1
2. Prioritize vulnerable and underserved children and families for service access and provision.	ECI State Board; Office of Early Childhood Iowa	Governance (Family Engagement and Equity Committees); Quality Services and Programs; Local ECI Boards	Collaboration, time	Years 1-3
3. Increase center-based and home-based child care provider participation in Iowa’s Child Care Assistance (CCA) program.	ECI State Board; Office of Early Childhood Iowa	Quality Services and Programs (State Childcare Advisory Committee)	Collaboration, time, expertise	Years 1-3

Strategy 4.2 Expand and improve access to high quality early learning opportunities and services for young children and their families.

Action	Oversight	Implementation	Resources	Time frame
1. Cluster services to limit family travel needs where possible.	ECI State Board; Office of Early Childhood Iowa	State Agencies; Quality Services and Programs; Resources and Funding; Local ECI Boards	Collaboration, time	Years 1-3
2. Expand the number of overall slots available for young children in the early care and education system.	ECI State Board; Office of Early Childhood Iowa	State Agencies; Quality Services and Programs; Resources and Funding; Local ECI Boards	Expanded funding, collaboration, time	Years 1-3
3. Expand the hours of programming, care and wrap-around services available.	ECI State Board; Office of Early Childhood Iowa	State Agencies; Quality Services and Programs; Local ECI Boards	Expanded funding, collaboration, time	Years 1-3

Strategy 4.3 Improve transitions among early childhood programs and between the early childhood and K-12 education systems.

Action	Oversight	Implementation	Resources	Time frame
1. Promote stronger collaboration between school districts and local early care and education services.	ECI State Board; Office of Early Childhood Iowa	State Agencies; Governance; Quality Services and Programs; Local ECI Boards	Collaboration, time	Years 1-2
2. Improve transitions between early care and education programs and school districts.	ECI State Board; Office of Early Childhood Iowa	State Agencies; Governance; Quality Services and Programs; Local ECI Boards	Collaboration, time	Years 1-3
3. Improve transitions among early care and education programs.	ECI State Board; Office of Early Childhood Iowa	State Agencies; Governance; Quality Services and Programs; Local ECI Boards	Expanded funding, collaboration, time	Years 1-3
4. Develop navigation supports for families to improve system access and transitions among programs.	ECI State Board; Office of Early Childhood Iowa	State Agencies; Governance; Quality Services and Programs; Local ECI Boards	Funding, collaboration, time	Years 1-3

Goal 5: Improve the quality of early childhood services for young children and their families across early care and education; health, mental health, and nutrition; and family support services.

Strategy 5.1: Promote and incentivize the use of evidence-based programs and services across the early childhood system.

Action	Oversight	Implementation	Resources	Time frame
1. Support continued implementation of Iowa's CCDF lead agency's* incentive structure to increase the number of providers participating in our QRS and other accreditation frameworks for early care and education programs.	ECI State Board; Office of Early Childhood Iowa	Quality Services and Programs; Professional Development; Policy Makers	Funding, collaboration, time	Years 1-3
2. Expand and replicate credentialing models for family support and health, mental health and nutrition programming.	ECI State Board; Office of Early Childhood Iowa	Quality Services and Programs	Collaboration, time, expertise	Years 1-3
3. Develop, enhance, and maintain a continuous quality improvement process to ensure foundational quality standards are met across core early childhood services.	ECI State Board; Office of Early Childhood Iowa	Quality Services and Programs; Results Accountability	Collaboration, time, expertise	Years 1-3
4. Leverage statewide training and technical assistance providers to support implementation fidelity.	ECI State Board; Office of Early Childhood Iowa	Quality Services and Programs; Professional Development	Funding, collaboration, time, expertise	Years 1-2

Strategy 5.2: Adopt a collective impact approach to investing in high-quality, evidence-based services, programs and activities across the early childhood system.

Action	Oversight	Implementation	Resources	Time frame
1. Conduct a fiscal scan of investments across the early childhood system to identify gaps, duplication of efforts, and opportunities to streamline funding.	ECI State Board; Office of Early Childhood Iowa	Results Accountability; Resources and Funding; Local ECI Boards	Collaboration, time	Year 1
2. Adopt a collective impact approach to aligning funding and resources for improved quality and outcomes.	ECI State Board	Office of Early Childhood; Results Accountability; Resources and Funding; Local ECI Boards	Collaboration, time	Year 1
3. Recommit to formally addressing resources and funding as an ECI Component Group.	ECI State Board; Steering Committee	Governance; Resources and Funding	Collaboration, time	Year 1
4. Further evaluate identified facility needs of licensed child care providers.	ECI State Board; Office of Early Childhood Iowa	Results Accountability; Resources and Funding; Local ECI Boards	Collaboration, time	Years 1-2

* The Iowa Department of Human Services serves as the CCDF lead agency.

PROGRESS INDICATORS

The current state-adopted indicators are listed below. The indicator data is published annually in the ECI State Annual Report. Indicator determination is reviewed every two years. The adoption process includes the ECI Results Accountability Component Group reviews and seeks input from

stakeholders. Upon evaluation of any possible new data sources and/or recommendations for changes, the component group presents to the Stakeholders Alliance their recommendations. Final adoption is sought by the ECI State Board prior to making any changes.

The purpose of these five columns is to demonstrate how we will measure progress and outcomes related to the strategic priorities identified in We are ECI: Strategic Plan 2019-2022. Each indicator is linked to a goal and strategy.



RESULT: HEALTHY CHILDREN

Low Birth Weight

Definition: Babies born who weigh under 2,500 grams

Immunized Children

Definition: Rate of Iowa's children immunized by age 2

Dental Services

Definition: Medicaid-enrolled children ages 0-5 who receive dental services



RESULT: CHILDREN READY TO SUCCEED IN SCHOOL

Early Literacy Skills

Definition: Kindergartners meeting the Fall benchmark for the early literacy universal screening measure requirements of Iowa Code section 279.68 (assessments with demonstrated technical adequacy for universal screening of literacy)

Educational Attainment of Mothers

Definition: Women age 15-50 with a birth in the past 12 months by educational attainment



RESULT: SAFE AND NURTURING FAMILIES

Incidence of Child Abuse

Definition: Child Abuse Incidence Rate for Children 5 years and under

Teen Births

Definition: Births to mothers under age 20

Domestic Violence Rate

Definition: Domestic Abuse Rate; and Domestic Abuse Rate where children were present



RESULT: SAFE AND SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITIES

Crime Rate

Definition: The rate of serious crime per 100,000 population

Juvenile Crime

Definition: Calculated rate that divides the number of juvenile arrests by the estimated mid-year population under age 18. Rate is 1 per 100,000 population

Unemployment Rate

Definition: The number of unemployed persons

Children in Poverty

Definition: Children under six years of age living in poverty



RESULT: SECURE AND NURTURING EARLY LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

Quality Early Learning Environments

Definition: Quality early learning environments that are NAEYC (National Association for the Education of Young Children) or NAFCC (National Association of Family Child Care) accredited and/or meet Head Start program performance standards, and/or verified IQPPS (Iowa Quality Preschool Program Standards) sites, and/or have achieved QRS (Quality Rating System) level 4-5

Working Parents

Definition: Children under six years of age with all parents in the workforce

These performance indicators measure the progress and outcomes related to the priorities identified in the strategic plan.

	SYSTEM CHANGE	COMMUNICATIONS	WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT	EQUITABLE ACCESS	QUALITY IMPROVEMENT
PROCESS AND OUTPUT INDICATORS					
Number of formal requests for policy or action made to the Governor's Office, an executive branch department, legislators, or legislative staff / Strategy 1.1	X				
Number and type of early childhood programs that participate in ECI Stakeholder Alliance meetings / Strategy 1.1	X				
Number and types of public-private partnerships with documented strategies and successes / Strategy 1.2	X				
Number of data systems included in the IDS / Strategy 1.3	X				
Number and type of data reports created and shared / Strategy 1.3	X				
Number and type of trainings and participants in data literacy and use / Strategy 1.3	X				
Number of communication materials about the early childhood system developed and distributed / Strategy 2.1		X			
Number of website visits and requests for information from information "hub" / Strategy 2.2	X				
Number of families participating in family academy / Strategy 2.3		X			
Number of individuals with early childhood degrees / Strategy 3.1			X		
Number of training resources connected to the PD hub / Strategy 3.1			X		
Number of visits to PD hub / Strategy 3.1			X		
Number of requests for coaching support / Strategy 3.1 and 5.1			X		
Number of educational credits achieved through T.E.A.C.H.® / Strategy 3.1 and 3.2			X		
Number of individuals with infant and early childhood mental health endorsements / Strategy 3.2 and 5.1			X		
Number of providers participating in the Child Care Assistance Program / Strategy 4.1				X	
Number and percentage of minority children served by all state-funded preschool, Head Start, and Child Care Assistance / Strategy 4.1				X	
Number of pregnant women receiving home visiting services (prenatal) / Strategy 4.1 and 4.2				X	
Number of children who received a developmental or behavioral health screening / Strategy 4.2				X	X
Number of transition agreements in place with local education agencies and community early childhood early education programs / Strategy 4.3					X
Number of providers that developed program-specific indicators for quality metrics / Strategy 5.1					X
Number of programs participating in national accreditation, Strategy 5.1					X
Numbers and percent of change in early care providers that are at a Level 4 or 5 in QRIS system once implemented / Strategy 5.1 and 5.2					X

APPENDIX



SUMMER 2019 DATA DIVE AND STRATEGIC PLANNING STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

NAME	AGENCY & EARLY CHILDHOOD SYSTEM ROLE
Dave Arens	Chair, Early Childhood Iowa State Board, Citizen Member Representing Polk County
Lisa Bender	Department of Human Services, Child Welfare Bureau; Co-Chair, Results Accountability Component Group; Co-Chair, ECI Family Engagement Committee
Deanna Benningsdorf	Grandparent; Local Board Member, Polk County Early Childhood Iowa Area
Amy Blanchard	Director, Jasper Marion Poweshiek Early Childhood Iowa Area
Mary Breyfogle	Iowa Department of Education, Early Childhood Education Consultant for Statewide Voluntary Preschool; PDG Core Team
Doug Cameron	Local Board Member representing education, Jasper Marion Poweshiek Early Childhood Iowa Area
Tammi Christ	Department of Human Services, Child Care Bureau; Integrated Data System Taskforce
Kelly Davydov	Iowa Department of Human Rights, Division of Community Action Agencies; Integrated Data System Taskforce; PDG Core Team; Co-Chair, ECI Steering Committee and Stakeholders Alliance
Cass Dorius	Iowa State University, Human Development and Family Studies; PDG Core Team; Integrated Data System Taskforce
Tami Foley	Department of Human Services, Child Care Bureau; ECI State Technical Assistance Team
Sheila Hansen	Child & Family Policy Center, Policy Director
Jillian Herink	Iowa Association for the Education of Young Children, Executive Director
Heidi Hotdvedt	Iowa Department of Public Health, Child Care Nurse Consultant
Marcus Johnson-Miller	Iowa Department of Public Health, Bureau of Family Health
Kristi Judkins	Iowa Workforce Development, Designee to the ECI State Board
Nancy Krause	Lutheran Services in Iowa, Early Childhood Services Director
Marion Kresse	Director, BooST Together for Children; Co-Chair, Results Accountability Component Group; Integrated Data System Taskforce



Angela Lensch	ECI State Board, Citizen Member representing Carroll County; Head Start
Pat McReynolds	Director, Mahaska Wapello Early Childhood Iowa Area; Co-Chair, Quality Services and Programs Component Group
Becky Miles-Polka	Campaign for Grade-Level Reading
Lesia Oesterreich	Iowa State University Extension and Outreach, I-Consult ECE Professional Development Support
James Olson	Iowa Department of Public Health, First Five; ECI State Technical Assistance Team; Co-Chair, Public Engagement Component Group
Ashley Otte	Iowa Association for the Education of Young Children, T.E.A.C.H and WAGES
Ryan Page	Department of Human Services, Child Care Bureau; Integrated Data System Taskforce; PDG Core Team
Abby Patterson	Prevent Child Abuse Iowa, Iowa Child Abuse Prevention Program
Lora Patton	Child Resource and Referral, Director for Region IV
Rhonda Rairden-Nelson	Iowa Department of Public Health, Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health; Co-Chair, Professional Development (Health, Mental Health, Nutrition) Subcommittee
Tom Rendon	Iowa Department of Education, State Head Start Collaboration Office; PDG Core Team; Co-Chair, ECI Equity Committee; Integrated Data System Taskforce
Betsy Richey	Iowa Department of Public Health, Director of Data Management; Integrated Data System Taskforce
Bobbi Riedemann	Child Care Resource & Referral Region 1; Co-Chair, Public Engagement Component Group
Rick Roghair	Iowa Association for the Education of Young Children, Professional Development Manager; PDG Core Team
Brook Rosenberg	ECI Board Member, Citizen Member Representing Polk County
Heather Rouse	Iowa State University, Human Development and Family Studies; PDG Core Team; Integrated Data System Taskforce
Melissa Schnurr	Iowa Department of Education, Early ACCESS (IDEA Part C); Co-Chair, Professional Development Component Group
Carrie Sodders	Mid-Iowa Community Action Agency, Head Start; Co-Chair, Professional Development Component Group
Travis Starr	Parent; Board Chair, BooST Together for Children
Kimberly Villotti	Iowa Department of Education, Early Childhood Education Administrator
Rachel Voas	Iowa State University, Integrated Data System Project Manager
Shanell Wagler	Iowa Department of Management, Early Childhood Iowa Administrator; Co-Chair, Governance Component Group; PDG Core Team
Stacey Walter	Iowa Association for the Education of Young Children, Early Childhood Quality Improvement Project
Tonya Weber	New Opportunities, Inc., Head Start Director
Cindy Weigel	Iowa Department of Education, Early ACCESS (IDEA Part C)
PJ West	Iowa Department of Public Health, Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visitation Program (MIECHV); Co-Chair, Quality Services and Programs Component Group
Amanda Winslow	Iowa Department of Management, Early Childhood Iowa Systems Coordinator; PDG Core Team; Integrated Data System Taskforce
Karolyn Zeller	Heartland Area Education Agency (IDEA Part B and Part C); Co-Chair, ECI Governance Component Group



Iowa's Area
Education
Agencies

IOWA STATE
UNIVERSITY
Extension and Outreach

IOWA STATE
UNIVERSITY



LSI
LUTHERAN SERVICES IN IOWA

Prevent Child Abuse
Iowa





**Early
Childhood
IOWA**
Strategic Plan
2019-2022

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PUBLISHED SEPTEMBER 2019

3 STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE CHILD CARE IN IOWA



IS CHILD CARE IMPACTING YOUR COMMUNITY?

In Governor Reynolds's State of the State address, she shared that one of her priorities is 'Preparing a Future Ready Iowa'. Child care plays an important role. "One of the most significant barriers to entering the workforce is the availability and affordability of child care. Over the past five years, Iowa has lost 40 percent of its child care businesses and it's estimated there is a shortfall of more than 350,000 child care slots across the state. The child care crisis is not only affecting families,

it's impacting the state's workforce at a time when Iowa is missing out on nearly \$675 million in annual ADP because of a shortage of employees."

The Early Childhood Iowa Private Public Partnership (ECIPPP) is a long-term collaboration between the private and public and sectors to promote efforts that build public awareness of the importance of early childhood development. The primary focus of this partnership is to create awareness among

businesses and community leaders of the critical role child care plays in retaining reliable, productive employees.

The ECIPPP is recommending three strategies for consideration of the Iowa Legislature to strengthen the awareness and commitment to this issue. We support these strategies as we align our efforts with the Iowa Women's Foundation, the Iowa Association of Business and Industry, and the Iowa Business Council.

1 Create a Private Public Partnership Fund

Appropriate \$500,000 to a private public partnership account in Early Childhood Iowa (ECI) to support increasing the availability and quality of child care. Funds would be distributed through grants by the ECI State Board, require matching dollars from local contributions, and would align with other grants offered through private opportunities.

ECI's 2019 Needs Assessment identified significant gaps in access to and quality of child care, particularly for our most vulnerable children and families, including those in rural areas. Funding would support community efforts to address these gaps by building capacity to improve child care facilities and the child care workforce. Over 40 percent of child care centers reported quality concerns, with finding and retaining staff the primary barrier, particularly in rural areas. Findings also revealed strengths

in local partnerships, but these were not systematic – suggesting a need to better document and support effective partnerships as a mechanism for sustainable quality improvement.

This model of private public partnership will foster collaboration and identify local innovations to improve child care access and quality. With these funds, we will be able to document "what works" in order to replicate successes, such as that of the Black Hawk County Child Care Coalition, in other areas of Iowa. We will improve services in areas identified in our Needs Assessment, including expanding access to care for underserved populations and building stronger partnerships between public and private businesses to expand services, improve transitions, and support workforce training.



2 Expand T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® IOWA and Child Care WAGE\$® IOWA

Our 2019 Needs Assessment revealed significant gaps in the education and compensation of the early childhood education workforce. Child care centers serving our most vulnerable young children have staff with the lowest educational attainment and are paid the least, resulting in higher turnover. (In 2017, the median wage for a child care worker was \$9.20.) According to child care center directors, the inability to hire and retain staff - particularly in rural areas - hinders program quality improvement efforts. Families bear the brunt of these challenges, as many child care centers are forced to face program quality issues, reduce enrollment or close.

We propose expanding the Teacher Education and Compensation Helps (T.E.A.C.H.) Early Childhood® IOWA and Child Care WAGE\$® IOWA programs to improve and retain Iowa's early childhood education workforce and attract new, untapped labor. Both programs are licensed and nationally monitored by Child Care Services Association, which assures programs are implemented with fidelity by requiring semi-annual reports and biannual competency assessments.

Expanding T.E.A.C.H. will ensure all providers, teachers and home visitors have access to coursework that leads to credentials (e.g., CDA, associate and bachelor's degrees, teacher license). T.E.A.C.H. provides individualized professional development counseling, support for tuition and books, paid time away from work, increased compensation, and requires a commitment to work for the sponsoring organization after completing the program to reduce turnover.

T.E.A.C.H. has been available in Iowa since 2003, and the Iowa Association for the Education of Young Children has been the administrative home since 2007. Since then, T.E.A.C.H. has provided scholarships to over 2,500 early care and education providers; 1,726 have earned credentials, degrees, or licensure, with a turnover rate of 5% for the last 2 fiscal years. Additionally, T.E.A.C.H. recipients receive an average of 10% increase in annual wages related to these advances in credentials. Current program funding supports scholarships for about 400 early care and educators annually.

Second, we propose expanding WAGE\$® to increase continuity and retain educated early childhood education professionals. WAGE\$® awards education-based salary supplements to address key issues of under-education, poor compensation and high turnover. Supplement awards are based on education achieved and employment period with the child care program. Iowa implemented WAGE\$® in 2014 and has expanded the program annually. To date, 602 early childhood education professionals have received at least one payment from WAGE\$®. Current program funding levels support supplements for about 250 early childhood education professionals annually.



3 Create a Multi-Pronged Approach to Support Child Care Through Tax Credits

Child Care Expense Tax Credit

The tax credit is available to families who have a child under the age of six during that tax year, and attended a child care facility with an Iowa Quality Rating System rating of at least two stars or nationally accredited. The amount of the credit increases with the level of stars (quality of the child care facility).

Child Care Business Tax Credit

The refundable tax credit is available to child care providers who own and operate a child care business with an Iowa Quality Rating System rating of at least two stars or nationally accredited, and is based on the number of low-income children served (as determined by participation in the Child Care Assistance Program or foster care). The value of the credit increases with the level of stars, and is designed to help address the higher expenses associated with providing higher quality services to low-income children. Funds from the tax credit are in addition to – not in lieu of – child care assistance subsidy reimbursements. Refundable tax credits function as annual grants to child care businesses, many of which have tight budgets that make it hard to maintain and improve the quality of their services.

Child Care Teachers/Directors/Staff Tax Credit

The refundable tax credit is available to teachers, directors and eligible staff who have attained higher training and education, as measured by Iowa's Pathways Child Care Career Development System. Child development home providers are eligible for a refundable tax credit if they work at least six months for a child care facility that participates

in the quality rating system (at least two stars) and enroll in Iowa's Pathways Child Care Career Development System.

Business-Supported Child Care Tax Credit

The refundable credit is available to businesses that support quality child care in child care facilities with an Iowa Quality Rating System rating of at least two stars or nationally accredited. The credit amount is based on a range of eligible expenses and depends on the child care facility's star rating. Eligible support includes:

- Expenses to construct, renovate, expand, or repair an eligible child care center, purchase equipment for a center, maintain or operate a center, not to exceed \$50,000 in expenses per tax year;
- Payments made to an eligible child care facility for child care services to support employees, not to exceed \$5,000 per child per tax year; and/or
- The purchase of child care slots at eligible child care facilities actually provided or reserved for children of employees, not to exceed \$50,000 per tax year

Donations to Resource and Referral Agencies Tax Credit

The tax credit is available to businesses that make donations to Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) Agencies, non-profit, community-based organizations that contract with the Department of Human Services to provide training, technical assistance and other supports to child care facilities and parents of young children. The refundable credit is a dollar-for-dollar investment tax credit for businesses that contribute up to \$5,000 per tax year to CCR&R.

For more information, contact the ECI State Office, Shanell Wagler. Shanell.wagler@iowa.gov