

**EARLY CHILDHOOD IOWA
STRATEGIC PLAN
2016-2018**



(Compiled Results of ECI Strategic Planning Day – 4/22/15; ECI Department Directors – 5/1/15; ECI Stakeholders Alliance- 5/12/15 and 12/8/15; Component Group Input; ECI Area Directors – 9/16/15 and 12/9/15; ECI State Board 10/22/15; 11/6/15; and ECI Technical Assistance Team)

Early Childhood Iowa System Vision:

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

There is no single strategy to accomplish our vision. It takes a system of systems, from both the private and public sectors, for a child to reach their potential. These individual systems include early care, health and education. The Early Childhood Iowa (ECI) State Board, the ECI Stakeholder Alliance and local ECI Area are charged with developing, supporting and maintaining effective, efficient and integrated systems.

The founding legislation for ECI (formerly Iowa Community Empowerment) established five results to be achieved at both the state and local level and utilized the Accountable Government Act as the standard for measuring progress toward accountability. A result was defined as “*the effect desired for all Iowans.*” The results described in legislation are:

- Healthy Children
- Children Ready to Succeed in School
- Safe and Supportive Communities
- Secure and Nurturing Families
- Secure and Nurturing Early Learning Environments

Our Guiding Principles for Achieving the Results:

- Results-focused decision making
- Promote evidence-based practices
- Accountability
- Collaboration
- Respect for all
- Cultural Competence

During the planning phases, the ECI State Board conducted a SWOT exercise. Below is a summary of that experience to produce their perspective of the current reality:

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|--|--|
| <p><u>Strengths – In reference to the Board</u></p> <p>Commitment Engaged Experience Want to make a difference Willing to share our opinions Broad representation Foundation for a strong system, beginning with communities</p> | <p><u>Benefits-In reference to the System</u></p> <p>Increased Access Resources are maximized Families know where to look for help Outcomes oriented services Families will seek us because they know where to go for services Stakeholder involvement (the Board is a place for discussion to identify needs/solutions) If done correctly, there are long-term economic benefits Collaborative Approaches</p> |
| <p><u>Weaknesses- In reference to the Board</u></p> <p>Can't accomplish the huge vision Don't represent members of low socioeconomics Lack of diversity (ethnic/cultural) Leadership strategies to connect with various languages of those that ECI serves Hear more from the local boards- strengthen communication Communication with partners before birth, 0-5, and after Clarity of the mission Operational board or an oversight board? Scope Accountability for the policies that this Board instigates and staff are to make work</p> | <p><u>Dangers- In reference to the System</u></p> <p>Can't accomplish the huge vision Complacency Too high of expectations Thinking everything is ok and not recognizing the reality or being as responsive If successful, the need to ECI wouldn't be there Challenges will always be there but may look differently as generations progress/change Institutionalize too far, such as with parenthood and take away the need to parents to parent Demand too much accountability (too much paperwork) Too successful</p> |

What Do We Know about Iowa's Children and Families?

While Iowa historically has been one of the most homogenous states with respect to race and ethnicity, the state is becoming notably more diverse. In this regard, children are leading the way. Children of a race other than white and/or who are Hispanic represent 21.1 percent of Iowa's under-6 population and 17.2 percent of the 6-17 population, but only 2.9 percent of the 65-plus population. Over the last two decades, the Hispanic young-child population in Iowa has more than doubled, and, in fact, people of Hispanic descent are now the largest minority group in the state. All other minority groups, including people who identify two or more races, have grown significantly as well. Iowa's population is projected to continue becoming more diverse over the next decade, although at a slower rate than during the 2000s.

Iowa, like the U.S. as a whole, has seen a decline in the proportion of children living in households headed by two parents. While the state still has lower rates of single parenting relative to the nation, Iowa has experienced the same notable, long-term rise in the share of households headed by single parents—both those headed by a male and those headed by a female—and in the share of grandparents or other relatives raising children. The rate of growth in single parenting slowed slightly during the 2000s compared to the previous decade, but remains at an all-time high in Iowa and the country.

Many more married women with young children are in the workforce today than 50 years ago, although the sole parent in a single-parent family is still more likely to be working than both parents in a married-couple family. In fact, Iowa is among the top five states in the nation in households with young children where both parents or the only parent are in the workforce (74 percent compared with 63 percent nationally). The growth in workforce participation has increased demands on families to secure child care and raised the need for care that not only meets basic safety standards but also provides high-quality, developmental support.

Economic circumstances dictate how well families are able to provide for their basic needs. Because the data is readily available, the most common criterion used to identify young children with high needs is family income—usually those whose families fall below 100 percent or 200 percent of the federal poverty level. This translates to 21 percent and 44 percent of U.S. children and 16 percent and 38 percent of Iowa children, respectively.

Maternal education and single parenting are indeed a factor in child well-being in Iowa. Of the over 38,000 total births in Iowa in 2010, 8 percent were to adolescent mothers—almost all of whom were unmarried and with a high school diploma or less. Another 22 percent were to older mothers with a high school diploma or less who are not married. Young children in these two groups clearly fall into the category of those most likely to become struggling students.

What about our Communities?

Looking at communities, the outlying metropolitan counties—places like Dallas, Washington and Bremer counties—were the fastest growing, most homogenous, and generally most prosperous. Central city metropolitan counties—places like Polk, Scott and Woodbury counties—showed great internal heterogeneity, with pockets of great need and great opportunity. Some of the highest levels of overall stress at the county level were in the state’s regional centers—places like Webster, Wapello and Clinton counties—where relatively low levels of income and educational attainment and relatively high levels of single parenting and unemployment often combined.

While there are clear differences among counties and even more pronounced differences within some neighborhoods, all counties have areas of need and concern regarding their young children and their families. Even the most stable Iowa counties are home to families struggling to afford child care, juggle work and school commitments or manage special child health needs.

The current reality in Iowa is that programs, policies and systems are inadequate to do all the work necessary to ensure that ‘Every child, beginning at birth, will be healthy and successful.’ In order to achieve the results, ECI has adopted a system-wide strategic plan and the goals below focus and guide their work with current resources in developing an integrated and quality early childhood system of systems for young children and their families.

GOALS and Areas of Focus**Establish and Promote a Solid Infrastructure to Advance the Early Childhood System**

- Establish effective communication strategies among the ECI System

Ensure Access to High Quality Services for Young Children and their Families

- Identify, promote and invest in high quality services, programs and systems.
- Be good stewards of tax dollars by ensuring the effectiveness of services and impact on children and families using data informed decision making.
- Promote and invest in high quality services and programs

Build Public Will for Supporting Young Children and their Families

- Inform, educate, and actively engage all Iowans in the value of the First 2000 Days as the most critical stage of the human lifecycle, so that young children are nurtured and supported.

Goals and Strategies

GOAL 1: Establish and Promote a Solid Infrastructure to Advance the Early Childhood System

Focus Area 1-1: Establish effective communication strategies among the ECI System.

Strategies:

- 1-1-A Increase communication between the ECI State Board, ECI Areas, and the ECI Stakeholder Alliance
- 1-1-B The ECI System will focus on policy, system guidance and advocacy.

Goal 2: Ensure Access to High Quality Services for Young Children and their Families

Focus Area 2-1: Promote and invest in high quality services, programs and systems.

Strategies:

- 2-1-A Identify and implement evidence-based services, programs and activities across the early childhood system.
- 2-1-B Ensure equity of access to high-quality programs for all children, particularly children living in poverty, in families of color or living in other at-risk circumstances.
- 2-1-C Increase investments in high-quality programs and services.

Focus Area 2-2: Be good stewards of tax dollars by ensuring the effectiveness of services and impact on children and families using data informed decision making.

Strategies:

- 2-2-A To best serve the needs of children and families, identify where public funds are being spent on early childhood and identify gaps and overlaps.

Goal 3: Build Public Will for Supporting Young Children and their Families

Focus Area 3-1: Inform, educate, and actively engage all Iowans in the value of the First 2000 Days as the most critical stage of the human lifecycle, so that young children are nurtured and supported.

Strategies:

- 3-1-A Develop and implement a marketing plan

GOAL 1: Establish and Promote a Solid Infrastructure to Advance the Early Childhood System

Focus Area 1-1: Establish effective communication strategies among the ECI System.

Strategy: 1-1-A Increase communication between the ECI State Board, ECI Areas, and the ECI Stakeholder Alliance

| Suggested Action Steps for this Strategy | ECI State System Proposed Activities | Timeline for Completion | Leadership Role for Activities |
|---|---|--|--|
| Gain understanding of local issues and challenges and observe operations at the local level | <p>Have a presentation of local level system focus annually during ECI State Board meetings. This would include an early childhood program, activity or work of an area board.)</p> <p>Conduct an annual site visit</p> <p>ECI State Board members attend designation review meetings to learn about current issues.</p> | Annually | ECI State Board |
| Build, define and support an early care, health and education system. | <p>Clarify roles, authority and chain of communication between the ECI State Board, ECI Stakeholders Alliance and ECI Areas.</p> <p>Provide oversight for the early childhood systems work.</p> <p>Encourage attendance of ECI State Board Members at ECI Stakeholders Alliance meetings.</p> <p>Annually review the ECI strategic plan to assess work completed. Review and adjust priorities as needed.</p> | <p>December 2016</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>September- October, Annually</p> | <p>ECI State Board, ECI Steering Committee</p> <p>ECI State Board</p> <p>ECI State Board</p> <p>ECI Steering Committee and ECI State Board</p> |

| Suggested Action Steps for this Strategy | ECI State System Proposed Activities | Timeline for Completion | Leadership Role for Activities |
|---|---|---|--|
| Establish protocols for communication between the ECI State Board and the ECI Stakeholder Alliance | <p>Develop a procedure for communication to be shared between the ECI State Board and the ECI Stakeholders Alliance; i.e. The ECI State Board will ask the ECI Stakeholders Alliance to assist with items and the ECI Stakeholders Alliance will share items with the ECI State Board</p> <p>The ECI State Office shall serve as the conduit between the ECI State Board and ECI Stakeholders Alliance</p> <p>Annual review ECI State Board performance</p> | <p>December 2016</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Annually</p> | <p>ECI State Board, ECI Steering Committee</p> <p>ECI State Board</p> <p>ECI State Board</p> |
| Create equal representation or membership reflective of the early childhood system on the ECI Steering Committee. | <p>Seek broader system representation on the ECI Steering Committee. Encourage racially, culturally linguistic groups to join in the ECI efforts.</p> <p>Seek at least two ECI Area Directors to actively serve on the ECI Steering Committee</p> <p>Strive to gather input and have involvement of parents of young children</p> | Annually, September | <p>ECI Steering Committee</p> <p>ECI Steering Committee</p> <p>ECI State Board, ECI Steering Committee</p> |

GOAL 1: Establish and Promote a Solid Infrastructure to Advance the Early Childhood System

Focus Area 1-1: Establish effective communication strategies among the ECI System.

Strategy: 1-1-B The ECI System will focus on policy, system guidance and advocacy.

| Suggested Action Steps for this Strategy | ECI State System Proposed Activities | Timeline for Completion | Leadership Role for Activities |
|---|---|--------------------------------------|---|
| Host an early childhood congress/summit to educate participants on early childhood system building. | Reconvene a committee within the ECI Stakeholders Alliance | 2017 | ECI Steering Committee |
| Ongoing opportunities for stakeholders to learn more about systems development. | Systems-level agenda items at ECI State Board meetings Training and other Professional Development Opportunities | Ongoing | ECI State Board ECI Steering Committee |
| Strive for stronger coordination and collaboration between state agencies that operate programs that serve young children and their families. | Meeting of state agency Leadership | Ongoing | ECI State Board |
| | Identification of examples of private/public partnerships | Ongoing | ECI State Board, ECI Steering Committee |
| Encourage stakeholders to meet with policymakers to educate about the needs in the early childhood system | Research how other states encourage this activity. | Ongoing | ECI Steering Committee |
| | Request time to share to legislative committees. | During Legislative Session, annually | ECI State Board |
| | Individually meet with legislators in your district. | Ongoing | ECI State Board Members |
| | Support local areas to host legislative events or forums | Ongoing | ECI Steering Committee |
| Seek other funding sources to support the ECI System. | Provide grant writing professional development opportunities to stakeholders. | Annually | ECI Steering Committee |
| | Share grant opportunities as available. | Ongoing | ECI Steering Committee |

Goal 2: Ensure Access to High Quality Services for Young Children and their Families

Focus Area 2-1: Promote and invest in high quality services, programs and systems.

Strategy: 2-1-A Identify and implement evidence-based services, programs and activities across the early childhood system.

| Suggested Action Steps for this Strategy | ECI State System Proposed Activities | Timeline for Completion | Leadership Role for Activities |
|---|---|--------------------------------|---|
| Identify accreditation or 'field accepted' standards for both workforce and programs across sectors and categories of services. | <p>Research what is already available in regard to accreditation or 'field accepted standards.' Conduct a landscape of those items.</p> <p>Determine status of workforce across service categories.</p> <p>Continue funding for early childhood programs that meet a minimum level of standards and move the system forward with positive impacts on children and their families.</p> | 2016 | ECI State Board, ECI Steering Committee |
| Develop and establish a core set of services that should be available to families with young children. | Convene a committee within the ECI Stakeholders Alliance to develop recommendations regarding this concept. | 2017 | ECI State Board, ECI Steering Committee |
| Use data to inform decision making and sharing | <p>Utilize disaggregated data whenever possible to better understand specifics based on certain populations.</p> <p>Use data to share in education materials developed.</p> | On-going | ECI State Board, ECI Steering Committee |
| Research and identify best system building practices for infusing evidence-based programs and services | <p>Organize a statewide meeting on Implementation Science and provide guidelines to programs, services, etc. Research and pull together work on common principles of evidence-based services.</p> <p>Develop implementation guidelines, including equitable availability and access to services.</p> | Fall 2016 | ECI Steering Committee, ECI State Board |
| Develop and distribute 'white papers' on adopting and implementing evidence-based services, programs and system building. | <p>Analyze what is already in existence. Determine a comprehensive approach to sharing that includes trauma-informed care practices and evidence-based professional development.</p> <p>Share 'white papers' with interested audiences.</p> | 2017 | ECI State Board, ECI Steering Committee |

| Suggested Action Steps for this Strategy | ECI State System Proposed Activities | Timeline for Completion | Leadership Role for Activities |
|---|--|--------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Develop a resource of best practices. | Assess existing resources/data Identify programs and evaluate services Add an evaluation component Utilize materials from established and accepted national resources | 2017 | ECI Steering Committee |

Goal 2: Ensure Access to High Quality Services for Young Children and their Families

Focus Area 2-1: Promote and invest in high quality services, programs and systems.

Strategy: 2-1-B Ensure equity of access to high-quality programs for all children, particularly child living in poverty, in families of color or living in other at-risk circumstances.

| Suggested Action Steps for this Strategy | ECI State System Proposed Activities | Timeline for Completion | Leadership Role for Activities |
|--|---|--------------------------------|---|
| Infuse cultural competence in all services and programs serving young children and their families. | Review ECI Statewide needs assessment data from 2011-12. | 2016 | ECI Steering Committee |
| | Continue with Build Initiative Opportunity | | |
| | Share statewide cross-oval cultural competence professional development materials with stakeholders. | | |
| | Share and utilize the ECI professional competencies regarding cultural competencies. | | |
| | Determine definitions for at-risk, high-needs and underserved children | Fall 2016 | ECI State Board, ECI Steering Committee |
| | Develop a set of guiding principles for agencies to assist with addressing cultural competence and accessing services | Winter 2016 | |
| | Develop a process for monitoring progress towards successful integration of changes to address cultural competence | Winter 2016 | ECI Steering Committee |
| Publish characteristics of programs that demonstrate equitable access to services. | Spring 2017 | ECI Steering Committee | |

| Suggested Action Steps for this Strategy | ECI State System Proposed Activities | Timeline for Completion | Leadership Role for Activities |
|--|---|-------------------------|--|
| Strive to have high-quality programs serving at-risk children/families | Determine where to begin, consider children/families participating in Child Care Assistance and served in QRS rated facilities. | Winter 2016 | ECI Steering Committee |
| | Develop a white paper promoting this concept with policy makers. | Winter2016 | ECI Steering Committee and ECI State Board |
| | Explore incentive opportunities to promote this action step. | | |

Goal 2: Ensure Access to High Quality Services for Young Children and their Families

Focus Area 2-1: Promote and invest in high quality services, programs and systems.

Strategy: 2-1-C Increase investments in high-quality programs and services.

| Suggested Action Steps for this Strategy | ECI State System Proposed Activities | Timeline for Completion | Leadership Role for Activities |
|---|---|-------------------------|--------------------------------|
| | | | |
| Collect and report implementation, outcome and disparity data to make a case for investing in quality programs and services. The report will include local examples as well as statewide information. | Collect wage parity data Child Care data – specifically on infant and toddlers | Summer 2016 | ECI Steering Committee |
| Identify resources to increase funding for quality improvement of programs and services | Research private and philanthropic organizations | 2016 | ECI Steering Committee |
| | Research any grant opportunities for quality improvement projects | 2017 | |

Goal 2: Ensure Access to High Quality Services for Young Children and their Families

Focus Area 2-2: Be good stewards of tax dollars by ensuring the effectiveness of services and impact on children and families using data informed decision making.

Strategy: 2-2-A To best serve the needs of children and families, identify where public funds are being spent on early childhood and identify gaps and overlaps.

| Suggested Action Steps for this Strategy | ECI State System Proposed Activities | Timeline for Completion | Leadership Role for Activities |
|---|--|--------------------------------|---|
| Review current funding/spending practices | <p>Conduct a fiscal assessment of how government funds are being invested and the percent of funds targeted toward high-quality programs and services</p> <p>Determine if a cost benefit ratio of funded services can be conducted utilizing services from outside organizations, i.e. Pew-MacArthur Results First Initiative</p> <p>Share the fiscal assessment with state agencies and policy makers</p> | Fall 2016 | <p>ECI Steering Committee</p> <p>ECI Steering Committee and ECI State Board</p> |

Goal 3: Build Public Will for Supporting Young Children and their Families

Focus Area 3-1: Inform, educate, and actively engage all Iowans in the value of the First 2000 Days as the most critical stage of the human lifecycle, so that young children are nurtured and supported.

Strategy: 3-1-A Develop and implement a public awareness plan

| Suggested Action Steps for this Strategy | ECI State System Proposed Activities | Timeline for Completion | Leadership Role for Activities |
|--|--|--|--|
| Research and develop different strategies and messages for families, business, policy makers, community leaders. | Research effective strategies from other states. Survey local areas on how they market themselves to businesses and community leaders Develop materials that ‘connect the dots’ for business sector Seek professional marketing assistance Explore the use of social media as a marketing tool. Strengthen the ECI State Annual Report to include system strengths, highlights as well as emerging needs yet to be addressed. | June 2016 Summer 2016 Winter 2016 Winter 2016 Summer 2016 January, annually | ECI Steering Committee |
| Establish ECI priorities to promote the value of the first 2000 days of a child life | Create monthly PSAs by partners (health, education, human services, economic development) – if it seems appropriate in the public awareness plan Develop a prioritized public awareness plan. Review public awareness plan to evaluate the effectiveness of actions and activities, adjust priorities as needed. Annually assess federal legislation that provides direction | June 2017 Annually Annually January, annually | ECI Steering Committee and ECI State Board |

| Suggested Action Steps for this Strategy | ECI State System Proposed Activities | Timeline for Completion | Leadership Role for Activities |
|--|---|--|---------------------------------------|
| Develop eye-catching materials, tools, templates and products with a common branding (2000 Days) | <p>Make use of simple info graphics to help garner public awareness and support.</p> <p>Seek design firm that would offer pro bono work</p> <p>Recruit marketing expertise to serve on the group</p> <p>Develop templates and tools for persons to use to educate various audiences</p> | <p>January 2016</p> <p>January 2017</p> <p>March 2016</p> <p>October, annually</p> | |
| Develop a 12-month calendar for continuous public awareness activities | <p>Create a 12-month plan for awareness activities if it seems appropriate in the public awareness plan</p> <p>Distribute and promote the calendar with all interested stakeholders.</p> | Annually | ECI Steering Committee |

Goal 3: Build Public Will for Supporting Young Children and their Families

Focus Area 3-1: Inform, educate, and actively engage all Iowans in the value of the First 2000 Days as the most critical stage of the human lifecycle, so that young children are nurtured and supported.

Strategy: 3-1-B Increase private, non-public support for promoting the early childhood system.

| Suggested Action Steps for this Strategy | ECI State System Proposed Activities | Timeline for Completion | Leadership Role for Activities |
|--|---|--------------------------------|--|
| Seek sponsorship from business for producing marketing materials developed | Share public awareness plan and documents with business leaders serving on the ECI State Board and ECI Stakeholders Alliance. | September 2016 | ECI State Board and ECI Steering Committee |
| Align public awareness efforts with other organizations such as Prevent Child Abuse Iowa, Every Child Counts, Save the Children Action Network | Engage and encourage participation of advocacy organizations in the work of ECI Stakeholders Alliance. | Ongoing | ECI Steering Committee |