

Early Childhood Iowa: 2007 Activity Report

Introduction

This is the 2007 Administrative Report of the activities of the Early Childhood Iowa (ECI) and its component groups in their efforts to achieve desired results for young children birth to age five.

Research has shown that effective early care, health, and education systems must have both quality services *and* a supportive infrastructure that enables the direct services to function effectively and efficiently.¹ Component Groups, which were shaped by this research, include:

- ◆ *Quality Services and Programs*
- ◆ *Professional Development*
- ◆ *Public Engagement*
- ◆ *Governance, Planning and Administration*
- ◆ *Accountability for Results*
- ◆ *Resources and Funding*

More information about EC Iowa structure can be found at:

<http://www.state.ia.us/earlychildhood/docs/ECIStructure&OperationalGuidelines.pdf>.

ECI is a systems development effort to better coordinate and integrate the “system of systems” that serves young children, birth to five years of age, and their families. The system embraces all the work of health, social services, child care and education professionals. Members of Early Childhood Iowa and the Component Groups are catalysts in the development of Iowa’s comprehensive, integrated early care, health, and education system (ECHE). Their work is aligned with the ECI Strategic Plan:

<http://www.state.ia.us/earlychildhood/docs/StrategicPlanRevisedSpring07.pdf>.

This year the ECI Stakeholders agreed to prioritize the key elements of their plan into a Leadership Agenda which is available at <http://www.state.ia.us/earlychildhood/docs/2006ECILeadershipAgenda2-12-07.pdf>. The work of ECI involves identifying key issues and engaging those parts of the system that work directly with children and families. The work addresses unmet needs and seeks to better coordinate and integrate efforts from all areas of the system. In other words, this is not a report about what the system is accomplishing for children and families in Iowa, but about what is happening to help the all systems that support children and families (health, care, and education) work better together.

Integration, Coordination & Accountability

Early Childhood Iowa attempts to integrate and coordinate its work through a system of communication and coordinated planning. The primary means of communication and planning are quarterly meetings of the Early Childhood Iowa Stakeholders, a broad and diverse group from all individual and group members of ECI. These gatherings attract anywhere from 60 to 100 individuals.

Each of the six component groups meets individually, exchanging information, and planning for system interventions in their respective component areas.

Each component group has two co-chairs, one representing state government and the other the private sector. These co-chairs meet on a monthly basis to provide leadership and coordination for ECI. Each group has an action plan and communicates its progress in executing it. The *Governance, Planning and Administration Group* reviews the plans and monitors its progress in light of the ECI Strategic Plan to assure the orderly administration of ECI. The overall ECI leadership and direction occur at the co-chair level.

Much of the work in this report reflects alignment and integration activities of the component groups to improve system performance, especially with respect to the ECI Strategic Plan. For more information on component groups go to:

http://www.state.ia.us/earlychildhood/eci/stakeholder/component_groups/index.html.

ECI Component Group Accomplishments

Quality Services and Programs

The *Quality Services and Programs* (QSP) component group works to ensure the early care, health, and education system is adequately coordinated and capable to deliver high quality services and programs that address the needs of Iowa's young children and their families; to create and maintain links with entities that support the development and improvement of services at a local, state and regional level; and to incorporate evidence-based knowledge for early care, health, and education, family support programs, health services and other programs and services that serve young children and their families.

2007 accomplishments include:

- The group has focused on providing technical assistance and education to family support and parent education providers and Community Empowerment Areas on the Evidence-based Assessment Tool
- The group is completing work on a *Getting School Ready* brochure
- The group also worked on family support – peer review, standards, and core competencies
- The group continued with additional issue briefs that address quality services and programs. This year the group completed work on the following issue briefs: Family Support, Dental Health, Maternal Depression, Nutrition and Physical Activity, and Medical Home.

Professional Development

The *Professional Development* component group's role is to design and develop an early childhood professional development system for Iowa that supports the early care, health, and education system. This includes promoting quality training and education for early care, health, and education providers. As a system within a larger system, the professional development system strives to be comprehensive, integrated, and interoperable.

2007 accomplishments include:

The ECI Professional Development component group's steering committee met throughout 2007 with representatives from the Office of Empowerment to provide leadership and direction for the state-wide professional development

funding decisions. These funds supported dozens of training and professional development activities across the state.

An issue brief on professional development system building was created and shared with the Legislature in February, as well as with partners statewide through ECI's Web site.

Working with a consultant from New Mexico, six full-day meetings, attended by professional development partners from throughout the state, developed vision and direction for an Early Childhood Professional Development System. The vision reads: *Iowa's Early Care, Health, and Education Professional Development System provides multiple pathways of learning and skill building for all individuals working in various roles to support young children, prenatal through age eight, and their families.*

Professional development partners from the Iowa Department of Education set up a Web site (linking to ECI's Web site) for professional development system building efforts. The Web site is located at: <http://www.iowa.gov/educate/ecpd/>

The progress made during the year was shared at the full component group meeting in December, clarifying the relationships among the Professional Development component group, the steering committee, the statewide professional development funds through Empowerment, and the system building efforts led by the Department of Education. Other information addressed at this meeting included:

- Changes in how Professional Development funding through Empowerment will be addressed.
- A summary of the professional development systems work accomplished to date.
- New staff at the Iowa Departments of Education, and Human Services, who will assume professional development work.

Four ad-hoc committees were formed to move the projects forward:

1. To develop the Educational Pathways work begun in the systems development meetings, developing clear and articulate-able levels and competencies for Iowa that align with the NAEYC personnel preparation standards.
2. To assess the need for a new workforce study, describing and defining Iowa's early care and education workforce in the areas of education, compensation, benefits, and supports.
3. To create "best practice" recommendations around training including: 1) Training Approval and Assessment, 2) Trainer Approval and Assessment, and 3) Assessing training needs within the early childhood field.
4. To develop an Iowa Professional Development "Blueprint", including vision for the project, history, partnerships, and accomplishments.

The two hundred "members" of the Professional Development component group receive information and updates through email regularly. To be part of this distribution list, contact Barb Merrill at bmerrill@iowaaeec.org.

Public Engagement

The *Public Engagement* component group works for the constructive engagement of parents, strategically-determined target audiences, and the general public in the development of an early care, health, and education system. The Public Engagement group works to raise awareness of the importance of the first five years of a child's life.

2007 accomplishments include:

- Continued work refining and rolling out ECI's *Quality Counts* campaign.
- Managed legislative relations through communications such as *Tuesdays for Tots* and overseeing the annual Early Care, Health, and Education Day on the Hill advocacy event during the 2007 Legislative Session.
- Developed and distributed promotional materials that communicated strategic messages about quality, including booth displays at numerous statewide events such as the Public Health Conference and the Early Childhood Iowa Congress.
- Continued promotion of the ECI Parent Web site, by distributing mouse pads and bookmarks containing Web site information.
- Partnered with Every Child Counts to sponsor a gubernatorial candidate survey relating to early childhood policy for the second year.
- Distributed ECI/*Quality Counts* postcards to legislators throughout the months before session. These postcards included a variety of hand written messages around the importance of investing in *quality* for children 0-5.

Governance, Planning and Administration

The *Governance, Planning and Administration* component group addresses issues related to the governance, planning and administration of Iowa's Early Care, Health, and Education System.

2007 accomplishments include:

- Beginning with an intense retreat mid-year, the Governance group worked to develop a design for a new structure for ECI to address some weaknesses. The proposed structure will be refined and implemented in the coming year.
- Hosted a day-long diversity conference to discuss diversity issues and early childhood, to encourage broader diversity within early childhood systems development, and to increase sensitivity of the system to better address the need of diverse communities in Iowa.

Accountability for Results

The role of the *Results Accountability* component group is to ensure the early care, health, and education system is aligned around a clear set of indicators and is using those indicators as a guide for doing its work and improving on results. The group gathers necessary data to report on system progress and to make that data available to the entire early care, health, and education system.

2007 accomplishments include:

- The Results Accountability group recruited many members and held a face-to-face meeting in September. This meeting partly served as an orientation to new members, but was also utilized to further discuss the ECI Report Card and strategies for data/indicator collection.
- The group will continue to work on finding reliable data sets around the early childhood goals and indicators within the ECI Strategic Plan. Eventually, the group would like to finalize an early childhood data-driven document to give to legislators.

Resources and Funding

The role of the *Resources and Funding* component group is to identify and connect resources and funding within, available to or potentially useable by the early care, health, and education system. The role includes an assessment of system resource needs and the development of a funding mechanism that can better leverage current resources within the system. The group is also responsible for exploring new mechanisms to align or braid funding streams so all funding coming into the system can contribute to its overall development while delivering the results and maintaining accountability to the original funders.

2007 accomplishments include:

- This component group has promoted the idea that state funding is a primary source of revenue to fund early childhood services and has successfully seen an increase in state investments in early childhood over the past few years.
- The group is working with the Governance and Administration group to look at the organizational structure of ECI.
- This component work group is overseeing fiscal of the state budget. The work was delegated to a subgroup (Policy and Fiscal Group) and has relied on the consultation of Kay Johnson from Project Thrive.
 - A summary of the assessment analysis will be released in FY '08.
 - From the process, an increased understanding of funding (especially state and federal) that supports the early care, health, and education system is being shared.

System Collaboration Activities

Early Childhood and Diversity: Challenges and Opportunities

On September 26, Drake University, the Iowa Department of Human Rights, and the Child and Family Policy Center joined forces to present the day-long Early Childhood and Diversity Symposium under the auspices of Early Childhood Iowa. With support from half a dozen different organizations and relying on an advisory committee, the event held on Drake's campus signaled a unique effort to address how Iowa's growing diversity affects service delivery in the areas early care and education, health, family support, child welfare, and professional development.

The event was framed by three important realities facing the state:

1. Iowa is becoming more diverse and children are leading the way;
2. Troubling disparities in health and success outcomes between white and non-white young children;
3. Policy setting on early childhood issues should occur through a multicultural lens since that is the nature of the state.

The gathering represented an effort by Early Childhood Iowa to expand its membership to reflect the diversity of the state and infuse its system building efforts with multicultural perspectives. More specifically, the focus of discussions were aimed at identifying and developing strategies that increase school readiness at a society level and close the gaps across race, ethnicity, language, culture, and class. They also addressed how to reduce barriers to service access that exist for minority populations. Most important, the symposium promoted the value of cultural differences in child development that help preserve children's cultural identities (while exposing them to other cultures) but still equip them for success in overall American society. A final but crucial conversation addressed how to construct a skilled and culturally competent early childhood workforce and field that better reflects the race, language, and culture of the children and families being served.

Off to a Good Start: Symposia on an Early Childhood Health System

Through the support of the Institute for Public Health Practice at the University of Iowa, and a broad array of financial and logistical partners, these symposia in October 2005, December 2006, and September 2007 convened high-level experts and state leaders, moving the six goals under the ECI *Healthy Children* result area forward. These efforts were aimed at "framing policy for early childhood health systems integration". Their leadership paved the way for state funding for oral health and mental health efforts during the 2006 and 2007 legislative session. These gatherings show the power of ECI to provide framing and focus on complex issues, to promote a systems-perspective in policy development, and to provide a diverse array of interested parties a place to make a difference.

Over 130 Iowa participants gathered in Iowa City on September 28, 2007, to outline a strategy for improving health outcomes for Iowa's young children. The success of policy initiatives at the state and national levels since the first gathering in 2005, created renewed energy. Participants also had an opportunity to discuss issues with Michael Fraser, PhD, newly appointed CEO of the Association of Maternal and Child and Health Programs (AMCHP). Other Iowa experts in attendance included the Iowa Department of Public Health Dental Director, Dr. Bob Russell; the president of the Iowa Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, and healthy policy expert, Dr. Jody Murph; and Director of the Child and Family Policy Center, Charles Bruner. Several Iowa legislators participated in the event and shared their comments on the next steps. A new element of the conference was the inclusion of a panel of governmental leaders from Iowa Medicaid Enterprise, the Iowa Departments of Public Health and Education, and the Governor's Office. Their messages demonstrate that collaboration and communication among agencies is essential to future success. Among the many policy recommendations stemming from the symposium were:

- Focus on postpartum women for early identification and intervention
- Follow up on high-risk women, with prior adverse pregnancy outcomes
- Assure SCHIP passage
- Develop policy with multiple mechanisms for covering all kids, including extending *hawk-i* to higher incomes with buy-in
- Create a system of change that provides opportunities for families, providers, and local agencies to obtain the training and education needed to impact their knowledge, attitudes, and practice
- Address billing and reimbursement barriers that prevent primary care physicians from providing early identification and intervention for young children

Iowa Early Care, Health and Education Congress

The Early Care, Health, and Education Congress was renamed in 2007 as The Early Childhood Iowa Congress, signaling its enhanced role as a tool for early childhood system collaboration. Attracting some of largest participation ever in the Congress's 15 years, the 2007 Congress challenged participants to be leaders in a new and changing Iowa.

The congress featured two keynote speakers: Karen Ponder, past president of the North Carolina Partnership for Children, outlined 8 keys to building stronger partnerships, and Luis Hernandez, from the Head Start Training and Technical Assistance Services at Western Kentucky University, discussed the impact of new immigrants on Iowa. With the support of almost 30 partners and sponsors, the Congress offered 28 breakout sessions covering emerging trends in the area of early care and education, economic development, community partnerships, family support, health, and assessment and evaluation. Over 400 individuals participated.

Conclusions and Recommendations

At the Early Care, Health, and Education Congress in 2005, Max Phillips, president of Quest Communication in Iowa, told the gathering that organizations must change or die. The most exciting result from 2007 may not be specific outcomes, but the clear proof that Early Childhood Iowa is willing to change, evolve, and adapt to meet the demands of the future. This initiative is hardly five years old and yet it looks very different than it did even two years ago. The commitment to be transformed and to be transformative is the good news that emerges from a review of 2007 activities. Even better news, is how this transformation is reflected not only in ECI itself, but in its stakeholder, who themselves are different—more responsive to the changing demands for better and different early childhood services, more willing to set turf issues aside and work side-by-side so services are integrated and more accessible to all Iowa families, more focused on the unifying results and vision that *every child, beginning at birth, will be healthy and successful.*

The continuing challenge for ECI is to integrate new initiatives and proposals that are being launched as the legislature awakens to the needs of young children and their families into the fabric of early childhood services already available in the state. The experience of ECI is that the key to accomplishing this integration work is to focus not on the specific projects and funding streams, but on results in the five key result areas:

1. Healthy Children
2. Children Ready to Succeed in School
3. Safe and Supportive Communities
4. Secure and Nurturing Families
5. Secure and Nurturing Early Care and Education Environments

In the midst of great change these key areas have remained an important organizing tool for the work so many do together.

This was the year when the structures of ECI had to be reconsidered so they could better serve the purpose and promise of a comprehensive, integrated early childhood system. ECI must move forward with these plans so to assure all the efforts are sustainable and create the impact needed so services to young children and their families are available and deliver on all the promised results.

ECI Initiatives More detailed information about these key Iowa initiatives can be found at: http://www.state.ia.us/earlychildhood/iowa_Early_Childhood_Initiatives/index.html.

ⁱ Kagan, S. (September 2001) Back to Basics: Essential Components of an American Early Care and Education System. New York: Teachers College, Columbia University.