

## 2025 Early Childhood Legislation FAQ

### **Early Childhood Continuum of Care**

#### **What is the intent of the Early Childhood Continuum of Care grant opportunity?**

While the Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program (SWVPP) is widely available to Iowans, some working families still cannot participate if the program only covers a portion of the day or would require mid-day transportation to child care. To build a solution that meets the demands of the busy lives of parents, the intention of the grant is to offer full-day options while preserving the state's child care infrastructure. By leveraging existing child care capacity, the grant is intended for SWVPP providers and child care providers to come together to create a full-day continuum of care for preschool aged children.

#### **Who is administering this grant?**

With anticipation that the bill will pass the legislature, the Iowa Department of Health and Human Services (Iowa HHS) is the lead state agency who will release the grant opportunity. This grant is in collaboration with the Department of Education and local Early Childhood Iowa (ECI) districts.

#### **Who is eligible to apply for this grant?**

A licensed child care center and an approved local SWVPP are eligible to submit a joint, collaborative application in accordance with this Request For Proposal (RFP). Applicants may not serve in both preschool and child care roles to receive an award.

#### **What does it mean to be a community-based provider?**

A community-based provider is approved by the Department of Education and follow the SWVPP assurances and program requirements as an independent entity. This may include charter schools, non-public schools and independent preschools interested in offering SWVPP.

#### **Who is the lead applicant for this grant?**

The SWVPP provider and licensed child care center will be joint applicants, one of which will be the lead with fiscal oversight.

**I am an interested community school district but don't have a child care partner. What do you recommend?**

Please see Iowa's Child Care Connect to review licensed child care centers in your community who may be interested. [Child Care Search – Iowa Child Care Connect](#)

**I am an interested child care center but don't have a SWVPP partner. What do you recommend?**

Consider contacting your local community school district and any other SWVPP providers in your area.

**Is Head Start an eligible partner?**

Yes. A Head Start can apply to be an independent entity providing SWVPP. A Head Start can also apply to be a community partner for the child care portion of the day and then be eligible for the grant. A Head Start program cannot serve in both roles and receive a partnership grant.

**Our Head Start program follows Head Start Performance Standards and does not participate in SWVPP. Can we still be an independent entity?**

A Head Start program would be required to follow SWVPP Assurances while adhering to Head Start performance standards. The program would then be eligible to serve as the educational component of the grant application.

**I am a Head Start and still have questions, who should I contact?**

All Head Start entities are encouraged to work with their Office of Head Start contacts to ensure flexibility around funding allowances to ensure no supplanting of funding.

**What is happening with other wrap-around child care grants?**

Iowa HHS is not re-procuring for the wrap around child care grant and will continue to communicate with current grantees on opportunities under the Early Childhood Child Care Continuum of Care Grant as they become available. In the meantime, programs are encouraged to work with families to apply for Child Care Assistance to ensure continuity of care. [Child Care Assistance | Health & Human Services](#)

### What are some examples of how funding can be utilized?

- A school district offers SWVPP and would like to get additional children enrolled by partnering with a local child care facility for SWVPP with an option of wrap-around child care. The child care facility does not have funding to support additional staffing. The application could include a salary/hourly wage to cover the cost of staff for child care portion of the day.
- School district and child care facility partners need transportation for students to get to and from SWVPP instructional time. The child care program would like to purchase a vehicle. The application could include vehicle purchase and/or wages for staffing for bussing hours.
- A child care program has a licensed teacher to provide SWVPP however they are unable to fund a comparable salary of the team member for the full day. A portion of the teacher's pay is funded by the .5 per pupil allocation for SWVPP. The application could include a wage parity to fund that staff for the full day.
- A Head Start program already operates a partial day but has available space to operate a child care classroom. The Head Start may partner with a SWVPP site to offer child care that wraps around preschool hours. Funding could support staffing for this classroom.

### What are examples of how the partnership could work?

- The Agency will award one contract per partnership. Funding of more than three awards per partnership will be contingent on available funding. Applicants may not serve in both preschool and child care roles to receive an award.
- *“ABC (SWVPP) provider” partners with “DEF child care center”, this partnership is eligible for one contract for \$100,000 per year for up to three years. “ABC (SWVPP) provider” could also apply with a separate application with “GHI child care center” for another \$100,000 award per year for up to three years.*
- Community-based providers may not singly serve as a SWVPP and child care provider. School district providers of SWVPP may not singly serve as SWVPP and child care provider.

### What happens after grant funding is over?

All grantees will be required to build a sustainability plan to continue the project beyond grant timeline.

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**Who will make the decision on what projects/grants to fund? What will that process be?**

Iowa HHS will collaborate with appointed local ECI district boards from each of the 7 newly established ECI districts. Iowa HHS and local ECI district boards will jointly determine grantees based on a formal RFP process that includes specific scoring criteria.

**How will Child Care Assistance eligibility criteria be administered in this new Early Childhood Continuum of Care initiative? Will school districts be the eligibility determining entity for wrap-around services?**

Families who need tuition assistance for child care services will be required to apply for Child Care Assistance (CCA) through the Iowa HHS website [Child Care Assistance | Health & Human Services](#)

**What is the plan to serve three-year-old preschoolers through Shared Visions or wrap-around grant funding?**

The Early Childhood Continuum of Care Grant opportunity is to specifically support children enrolled in SWVPP.

**What is happening to the Child Care Wrap-Around Grants?**

A review of the wrap-around grant found that families can continue to be served through the use of Child Care Assistance and that providers are likely to receive more funding than received previously under the wrap-around grant program. As a result, Iowa HHS is discontinuing this grant opportunity. Iowa HHS is working with grantees of existing grants to transition both programs and families to CCA.

**I am a school district and want to provide full-day preschool without the use of this grant, what are my options?**

Hours of child care services offered in addition to or to “wrap around” your SWVPP hours require licensing as a child care facility. You may choose to have parents pay tuition or you may have families apply for Child Care Assistance (CCA), if eligible. For example, if you provide SWVPP from 8am-11am each day but operate from 7am-4 pm, the hours between 7am-8am and 11am-4pm would be licensed child care.

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## **Early Childhood Iowa (ECI) Districts**

### **What is happening with local Early Childhood Iowa boards?**

At a local level, there are 34 citizen-led boards. These local boards will transition to serve as 7 local district boards. Local ECI district boards will continue to meet expectations established in Iowa Code 256I.

## **Early Childhood Iowa Discretionary Fund**

### **We heard that funding is being taken away from ECI, is that true?**

Funding is not being taken away from ECI and there is actually an additional \$5 million in federal funding that is being provided to support the Early Childhood Continuum of Care Grant.

### **Are some Child Care Resource and Referrals (CCR&R) or Child Care Nurse Consultants (CCNC) no longer being funded?**

No. All CCR&R supports and CCNCs will continue to be available, however the funding used for these will change. In an effort to maximize how we use both state and federal dollars, Iowa HHS is transitioning the funding to the federal Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) and will fund at existing or enhanced levels to ensure the same quality of service. Local ECI district boards will no longer use their local discretionary funds for these efforts.

### **What else is federal funding being used for that ECI used to pay for?**

Federal CCDF funds are being utilized for the Child Care Business Investment Program, CCNCs, child care professional development, and technical assistance and consultation for child care providers.

### **Are any CCDF federal funds used for ECI services today?**

No. ECI is a fully state-funded initiative however, as indicated in previous question, we are maximizing the use of federal funds to increase flexibility with available state funds made available through annual appropriations.

### **Where does the funding for the Early Childhood Continuum of Care grant come from?**

The legislature provides an annual appropriation and identifies the annual School Ready and Early Childhood allocation amounts. The School Ready funds were

historically identified as discretionary funds that were distributed to local ECI area boards via an ECI State Board approved funding formula. It is proposed that beginning in State Fiscal Year 2026 (SFY26), a portion of both the School Ready and the Early Childhood allocations will be dedicated to the grant opportunity, with an additional CCDF investment.

- \$5,215,000 from ECI's School Ready funds will be dedicated to the Early Childhood Continuum of Care grants.
- \$5,000,000 from the Child Care and Development Fund
- \$5,785,000 ECI Early Childhood allocation

### **How does the funding work for the new ECI districts?**

The ECI State Board will be required to approve a new funding formula to ensure proportionate distribution of School Ready discretionary funds across all Iowa counties to ensure a variety of early childhood services can be accessed by all Iowans.

### **ECI local areas have had a lot of flexibility with how they can use funds, how does this change?**

ECI district boards will continue to have discretionary funding to support local initiatives, however the amount of funding available will be adjusted as we prioritize the Early Childhood Continuum of Care Grant and evidenced-based family support services.

### **We use a different family support service that is not evidence-based, will this be allowed?**

This has not yet been determined by the ECI State Board. Our state is building a pathway to utilize evidence-based family support home visitation services to align with the [Family First Act](#) to increase prevention strategies to help families achieve positive outcomes. By implementing an evidence-based home visitation model to fidelity, our state will be able to begin a pathway to drawdown federal funds at \$0.50 of every \$1.00 invested. Over time this will increase funding for the early childhood system, with an emphasis in prevention and early intervention services.

### **My local area funds my organization and told me they will no longer be able to fund the project, is this true?**

Local ECI district boards may continue to fund allowable expenses as they choose, with alignment to the ECI State Board approved list of services.

**Can the local ECI district board continue to support preschool scholarships?**

While this remains an allowable expenditure, it is expected that all other funding opportunities are evaluated first, such as Child Care Assistance (CCA) for children participating in child care services at a licensed child care center.

**Are communities losing services?**

Iowa HHS is dedicated to ensuring that services continue to be available to families throughout the state. While there may be adjustments to funding priorities, there are opportunities for other funding sources or service providers to fill the spaces to continue to serve families.

**I am concerned that we will lose local supports for child care programs that help with children with behavioral concerns. What is the plan to continue this support?**

While local ECI district boards will still have service options to fund an approved project, CCR&R has a regional behavioral health specialist in all 5 of their regions as well as 2 statewide behavioral health specialists with additional expertise who support the 5 regional behavioral health specialists. CCR&R can provide the following services:

- Training and coaching on Early Childhood Education (ECE) practices that promote resilience and reduce challenging behavior
- Observe classroom environments and provide recommendations
- Support implementation of program-wide Early Childhood-Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (EC-PBIS) (systematic implementation of practices that reduce and respond to challenging behavior)
- Facilitate development of an individualized plan for children with persistent challenging behavior