

Early Childhood Iowa State Board: Meeting Minutes

September 5, 2025; 9:00am to 12:00pm

Attendance:

Mr. Dave Arens	x	Director Beth Townsend (IWD)	
Ms. Angela Anderson (9:16am)	x	Kathy Leggett (IWD) - designee (11:00am)	x
Ms. Jennifer Banta	x	Ms. Melissa Miller	x
Director Debbie Durham (IEDA)		Mr. Dave Muhlbauer	x
Ms. Nicole Hansen (IEDA) (designee)	x	Ms. Mary Peterson	x
Director Kelley Garcia (HHS)		Mr. Brook Rosenberg	x
Janee Harvey (HHS designee)	x	Director McKenzie Snow (DE) --	
Ms. Paige Smothers	x	Dr. Kimberly Villotti, Designee (DE)	x
Ms. Unity Stevens	x	Mr. Aaron Johnson	x
Ms. Emily Westergaard	x	Non-Voting	
		Rep. Michael Bergan	x
Staff		Rep. Tracey Ehlert	x
Amanda Winslow	x	Sen. Cindy Winckler	x
Amanda McKee	x	Sen. Lynn Evans	x
Liz Ernst	x		

Guests (names captured from the electronic listing per individual sign-in for Zoom meeting):

Bridget Godes, Sam Early, Lexy Klemish, Annette Koster, Beth Ownby, Amy Stegeman, Lacey Waller, Abby Patterson, Tiffany Bertrand, Abigail Degenhardt, Angie, Amy Grunewaldt, Gaylyn Mercer, Shawna Lebeck, Cindy Duhrkopf, Deidre DeJear, Jenny Robinson, Erin Barkema, Jillian Herink, Deb Martens, Kelly Schulte, PJ West, Jacki

Approved on 10/17/2025

McCracken, Christy Brown, Nick Crawford, Diane Martens, Ashley Otte, Linda Havelka, Melissa Tucker, Robin Opsahl, Dave, Erin Binneboese, Carrie Sodders, Mary Breyfogle, Erika Fuentes, Cass Murra, Lisa Hilsenbeck, Melissa Juhl, Daniel Bittinger, Kristy Roosa, Alicia, Cindy Fiester, James Olson, Kami Madsen, Louie Hoehle, Laurie Nash, Heather Rouse, Matt Ohman, Sherri Hunt, SKD, Siouxland District Health Department, Liz Crane, Kris Rankin, Amy McLaughlin, Erin Harrison, Nancy Krause, Patricia Russmann, Erin Monaghan, Kelsey Thien, Liz Melcher, Jennifer Weber, Jenny Robinson, Jordan Morse, Nicole Wiegand, Becky, Pat McReynolds, Ryan Page, KGAN, Mindy Baylor, Nichole Hansen, Sarah Hogan, Monica Shuey, Mary Wirth, Garrett Ross, Lucas Grundmeier, Jen Mitchell, Desmond Wilcox, Meredith Mickelson, Sheila Hansen, Amy Blanchard, Kate Walton, Sarah Vanwyk, McKinley Bailey, Tammy Wetjen-Kesterson, Carrie Kube, Lindsey Ingraham, Claire Carlson, Dawn Sickelka, Rebekah Hungate, Brenda Loop, Jay CUCCC

In-person attendance: Tasha Beghtol, Ginger Knisley, Deb Schrader, Barb Bremner, Kerri Hall, Matt Ohman, Jessica Ryan, Elizabeth Stanek, Witt Harberts, Shelley Horak, Nick Crawford

Welcome/Introductions

Action Item: Agenda for Today's meeting, approval of minutes from June 6, 2025, and administrative update

- Emily gave thanks for Aaron, and ECI TA Team
- Intent of Early Childhood Iowa
- Intent of board meeting highlighting respect and professionalism

Motion: To approve the consent agenda, inclusive of the meeting minutes and administrative update.

Made By: Brook Rosenberg

Seconded By: Aaron Johnson

The motion was approved unanimously.

Public Comment:

- Jessica Ryan - Siouxland Human Investment Partnership (SHIP)
 - Collaborative system-building, exemplified by administering statewide voluntary preschool program funds.
 - Emphasized continuum of care and family resource centers

Approved on 10/17/2025

- Concerns about the potential impact of districting on families falling between the cracks
- Elizabeth Stanek - Association for Early Childhood Iowa Area Boards and Advocates
 - Appreciation for citizen board members' dedication
 - Stressed the importance of information sharing and local impact assessment before making decisions
- Sam Early - Polk County ECI Board Members
 - Urges civil and respectful discourse, open dialogue, and a focus on ECI's vision
 - Concerns about collaborative and inclusive approach departures harming local boards and programs
- Daniel Bittinger - Woodbury County Board of Supervisors/SHIP Vice Chairperson
 - Open to merging ECI boards if mutually beneficial, ensuring local voices are heard
 - Encourages careful consideration and notes Iowa Code requires waivers for boards larger than four counties
- Sarah Hogan - Clinton/Jackson Early Childhood Iowa Board
 - Advantage of being small is the flexibility with funding to stand by when there are staffing shortages
- Kevin Green - Siouxland District Health Department
 - Importance of local collaboration and governance
 - Ability to compound and add to funding of impact on 0-5 population is greater when the focus is local
- McKinley Bailey – Building Families Early Childhood Iowa Director
 - Importance of remembering history and original vision of ECI and timeline revisions

Information Item: Ideal State of Early Intervention and Support – Dr. Shelley Horak presented an overview centered on building a supportive, accessible statewide system that meets families' basic needs and fosters hope, reinforcing that tomorrow can be a better day. Core elements of this system include social capital, physical and digital access points, supportive and non-judgmental mindsets, high-quality parenting information, and a well-educated, empathetic, and supportive workforce. Pathways towards family stability through prevention and early intervention, emphasizing 0-5 programming, family support and home visiting, warm lines, family resource centers, resource navigation, and community development addressing housing, transportation, employment, food, and health. The anticipated results include preventing adversity before it occurs, reducing foster care placements and child welfare involvement, and strengthening programs

through collaboration across HHS teams. The service system strategy involves a statewide assessment, segmented planning, and system-wide activities, with an emphasis on incorporating local communities so that resources are not determined by zip code. This vision aligns with opportunities to leverage federal dollars, including under the Family First Act.

Information Item: Service Delivery Model for Early Childhood Iowa – Amanda Winslow led a discussion on the service delivery model for early childhood, reflecting on the workgroup that assessed strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats related to districting. The goal is to improve alignment and efficiencies within ECI areas, considering resources disparities and increasing family needs.

The process has been ongoing since 2023. The board was urged to consider what kids and families need to establish responsive structures. HHS conducted analysis of county-level data in 2023 that still applies today. Panel of guests shared their active experiences in working towards helping these spaces in Iowa and our system move towards improving the system. Context included reflections on the last board meeting and the history beyond that in alignment and efficiencies within ECI.

There were real realities and data to show that there are resource disparities across rural and urban areas within HHS service delivery models, ECI, community services, and family services. In 2022 HHS and Public Health were separated with a lot of logistics. In 2023 HHS partnered with Health Management Associates (HMA) to assess service delivery across 19 areas, establishing 7 district geographies based on population, rural/urban classifications, access to care, mental health, socioeconomic indicators, and healthy behaviors. The HMA report was informed by 7 town halls, 34 stakeholder interviews, surveys with over 3,000 responses, and up to seven roundtables with leadership, local providers and legislators. The geography of seven districts is set, however, how ECI organizes operations within them remains open for development.

Prolonged uncertainty about timelines has caused stress for local leaders and contractors. Unity Stevens spoke on balancing collective goals with local needs, the importance of navigation support for families, and grounding goals in the vision that “every child, beginning at birth, will be healthy and successful.” Janee Harvey noted service delivery varies by geography, stressing that core services must be consistent but flexible in implementation. Also emphasized maximizing federal funds through the Family First Act and ensuring access is not determined by location. Tasha Beghtol and Pat McReynolds shared local experiences of collaboration, challenges with uncertainty and benefits of

districting to streamline funding and reduce the administrative burden. Others raised concerns about balancing state vs. local control, piloting districts in willing areas, and ensuring families don't fall through the cracks.

While some see districting as a way to improve efficiency, others cautioned about losing flexibility and responsiveness to local needs. Melissa Miller stressed the importance of streamlined processes for contracts, fiscal management, and data collection. Efficiency, common language, and federal compliance are essential. Garret Ross highlighted rural challenges, including provider shortages and transportation barriers. Emphasized the value of resource-sharing and partnerships to ensure equitable access regardless of zip code. The aim is to maximize federal drawdown by ensuring fidelity to evidence-based models and continuous quality improvement (CQI) while addressing the lack of uniform core services across different regions. Standardizing processes and data collection is crucial for efficient fund management and achieving better family outcomes.

The discussion also touches on ECI role, funding inconsistencies, and potential restructuring to improve service delivery and accountability. Using the SWOT analysis derived from the districting workgroup, details were added by the ECI State Board to add to the creation of an action plan. Strengths are local relationships, history of community driven work, and a dedicated workforce. Weaknesses/Threats are fragmented systems, siloed funds, varied local leadership capacity, administrative burdens, and uncertainty around timelines. Opportunities included streamlining contracts, improved collaboration, maximizing federal drawdown, aligning prevention and early childhood services with broader HHS strategies. Threats include risks of eroding local control, inequities between rural and urban areas, and potential gaps during transition.

It was determined a special meeting would be held in October to continue the discussions. This will be an open meeting. Until that meeting, ECI State Board members will talk with their local stakeholders and gather input ahead of the special meeting. ECI TA Team will prepare an interim report on the \$29 million investment for the next board meeting.

Action Item: Updates to Tool U

Motion: Recommendation to use Tool U as a framework for districts, removing time constraints and allowing for local adaptation.

Made by: Dave Arens

Seconded By: Melissa Miller

The motion was passed unanimously.

Approved on 10/17/2025

Action Item: Adjourn

Motion: Adjourn

Made By: Kimberly Villotti

Seconded By: Paige Smothers

The motion was approved and board meeting ended at 12:00pm.

Information Item: ECI Admin Update & 2025 ECI State Board Meeting Dates

Adjournment

Next meeting – November 7, 2025

Reminder of 2025 ECI State Board Meeting (9:00am – noon)

Dates: January 3, March 7, June 6, September 5, November 7

Respectfully Submitted, *Elizabeth Ernst*