

Early Childhood Iowa State Board: Meeting Minutes

February 2, 2026; 3:00pm to 5:00pm

Attendance:

Mr. Dave Arens	x	Director Beth Townsend (IWD)-	
Ms. Angela Anderson		Kathy Leggett (IWD) - designee	
Ms. Jennifer Banta (joined 3:59pm)	x	Mr. Dave Muhlbauer	
Director Debbie Durham (IEDA)-		Ms. Melissa Miller (resigned on 11/7/25)	
Ms. Nicole Hansen (IEDA) (designee)	x	Ms. Mary Peterson	
Director Larry Johnson (HHS)		Mr. Brook Rosenberg	x
Janee Harvey (HHS designee)	x	Director McKenzie Snow (DE)---	
Ms. Paige Smothers (Berg)	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-	
Amanda Winslow	x	Sen. Cindy Winckler	x
Amanda McKee	x	Sen. Lynn Evans-	
Liz Ernst	x		

Guests (names captured from the electronic listing per individual sign-in for Zoom meeting): Claire Carlson, Amy Trucke, Mike Bunde, Deena Recker, Jordan Morse, Tammy Wetjen-Kesterson, Annette Koster, Taylor Nagle (Watson), Jean Heiden', Barb Grant, Erin Monaghan, Sheri Penney, Diane Martens, Amy McLaughlin, Jmckeen, April L. Yusten

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Adams, Kayla Mayer, Jean Logan, Abigail Degenhardt, Julie Hamann, Lori Jahn, Shawna Lebeck, Linda Cavazos, Erika Fuentes, Kerri Hall, Carrie Kube, Elizabeth Stanek, Debra Schrader, W.M., Monica Crawford, Dana Cockrell, LW, Cindy Duhrkopf, Patricia Russmann,, Sheila Hansen, Chris Castrey, Ashley Otte, Tasha Beghtol, Kassie Ruth, Trisha Wilkins, Sam, Ryan Page, SCICAP, Ryan Meester, Tracey, Salena Siefken, Kelsey Thien, Amy McGinn, Sam Early, Brenda Fry, Pat McReynolds, Lori Jahn, Chad Jensen, Amy Grunewaldt, Sherri Hunt, Sarah Vanwyk, Barb Bremner, Matt Eide, Nikki Hartwig, PJ West, Kristen Peyton, Erin Harrison, Julie Hanlin, Mallory Berkenpas, Brenda Loop, Ginger Knisley, Jody Kanne, Carrie Soddors, Bart Greenwood, Amy Blanchard, Jennifer Gibbs, Witt Harberts, Jesse Behrends, Arin Jones, Jeremy Koerselman, Kyle Torkelson, Colleen Theis, Rachael Ostermyer, Gaylyn Mercer, Lexy Klemish, Tfrein, Eric Tubbs, Dlero, Kyle Torkelson, Kim Scorza, M Faldet, AHFA, Linda Havelka, Jenna Fleener, Angel Smith, Nicole Wiegand, Josh Laraby, Sarah Guillatt, Cass Des Moines, Jenny Robinson, James Olson, Alyssa Barton, Abby Patterson, Crystal, Christina, Teri Bos, Garrett Ross, Dawn Sickelka, Deb Martens, SWCC Pat Kristie Nixon, Kristy Roosa, Erin Barkema, Cyndi, Gloria, Steven's iPad, Jessica Ryan, Beth, Jacki McCracken, Paige Chickering, Nancy Krause, Shelley Conover, Alexius Aguiar, Alisha Dietzenbach, Nick Crawford, Jen Mitchell, Sarah Ekstrand, Alicia C, Kelly Schulte, Malisa Rader, Deidre DeJear, Chelsey Steckly, Amy Glade, Dionne, Sam Soash, Elizabeth Kehret, Wendy Hoogeveen, Jada Bahls-Kargalskiy, Katie Champlin, Richard Lukensmeyer, Kate Walton, CT, Melissa Tucker, Wayne, Shelley Horak, Carrie Malone, Amber Brown, Siouxland District Health Department, Tonya Blasen

In-person attendance: N/A

Welcome/Introductions - special meeting scheduled to facilitate an on the record discussion amongst State ECI Board members in regard to HSB 623 Legislation. Chapter 21 Law and bylaw concerns raised regarding 24-hour notice requirements for bylaws, to which Emily indicated an email was sent on Sunday, February 1, 2026, was sent 28 hours before the meeting.

Action Item: Agenda for Today's meeting -

Motion by Aaron Johnson to approve the consent agenda and agenda as presented

Seconded by Paige Smothers (Berg)

Passed unanimously

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Public Comment:

- **Jared Lawrence** - signed up for public comment via the provided Microsoft Form but was not present at the start of the meeting; no public comment statement.

Information Item: HSB623 Legislation – Proposed legislation would shift contract and fiduciary responsibility to HHS. Seven advisory boards would be created in alignment with Behavioral Health districts, providing local input. The goals being to standardize services, maximize federal drawdown, minimize duplication, and reduce contract numbers. There is a proposed effective date of July 1, 2027. Concerns were raised about the bill being introduced without prior board knowledge or discussion. Central question being what is the board’s role if the legislation passes, if it does not, and what should the board be doing in the meantime?

Members agreed that clarity was needed and the floor was opened for questions. It was requested that the presentation slides be shared, emphasizing the importance of oversight and tracking. Several members noted that they were hearing significant pushback from the various sources, and that there was room for improvement and compromise. Despite differing perspectives, there was a shared sentiment that everyone involved ultimately wants what is best for children and families. Some members view the legislation as a consequence of the board’s past inaction and hesitancy to implement strong oversight. Reference to a past incident was highlighted as a perceived lack of accountability and clear lanes of authority within the ECI structure. Emphasis on the need for transparent accountability, learning from past incidents, and clearly defining responsibilities.

Several members noted that meeting only five (5) times a year is insufficient for the level of oversight required, and that a more consistent cadence is necessary. Historical context was presented noting that the State Board is no longer functioning as originally intended. Concerns were raised that the bill introduces new language rather than clear comparison to existing code. Addition concerns raised of the impact of understaffed citizen board positions.

Conversation shifted towards maximizing federal dollars, setting standards within guardrails, gathering feedback, and identifying efficiencies. Suggestion of a gap analysis was raised to identify discrepancies between current operations and desired outcomes, and how to bridge them. It was recommended to continue moving forward with implementing new policies and procedures, such as minimum standards for ECI’s and defining the designation process. It was suggested attending subcommittee meeting to contribute ideas identifying the deadline of February 20th for subcommittee action. It was

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also suggested that areas complete a community plan, so they have data to support their areas. A task force made up of Emily, Brook, Dave A., and Unity was formed to help with accountability. A meeting will be scheduled by the end of the week and establishing membership and timelines before the March meeting.

Public Comment:

- **Gaylyn Mercer** – Their board did nominate a citizen board member for the State Board.

Action Item: Adjourn

Motion: Adjourn

Made By: Aaron Johnson

Seconded By: Dave Arens

The motion was approved and board meeting ended at 4:22pm

Next meeting – March 6, 2026

Reminder of 2026 ECI State Board Meeting (9:00am – noon)

Dates: June 5, September 4, November 6

Respectfully Submitted, *Elizabeth Ernst*

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