

Early Childhood Iowa State Board: Meeting Minutes

January 9, 2026; 9:00am to 12:00pm

Attendance:

Mr. Dave Arens	x	Director Beth Townsend (IWD)	
Ms. Angela Anderson		Kathy Leggett (IWD) - designee (left at 11:23am)	
Ms. Jennifer Banta		Mr. Dave Muhlbauer (9:02am)	x
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) - (9:03am)	x	Director Mckenzie Snow (DE)	
Ms. Paige Smothers (9:14am)	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): Kevin Grieme, Amy Huntington, Jillian Iowa AVEC, Lisa Hilsenbeck, Liz Crane, dlero@iastate.edu, Nancy Krause, Mallory Berkenpas, Dawn Sickelka, Katie Champlin, Mary Wirth, Sherri Hunt, Tonya Blasen, Sara Burley, Colleen Theis, Diane Martens, Michele Cullen, Murr96, Elizabeth's iPhone, Angel Smith, Chelsey Steckly, LW, AECIABA, Becky Beckner, Annie McKinley, Cyndi Mears, Amy Grunewaldt, Jared Lawrence, Salena Siefken, Sheila Hansen, Sara Ameling, Jessica Lange, Witt. Harberts, Amy Glade, Jenny Robinson, Kristy Roosa, Chris Castrey, Amy Trucke, Annette Koster, Lindsey Ingraham, James Olson, Linda Havelka, Kristen Peyton, Lauren Kallhoff, Melissa Tucker, Tammy Wetjen-Kesterson, Lynn Evans, Erin Harrison, Rachael Patterson, Jacki McCracken, Alisha Dietzenbach, Pat McReynolds, Erin George, Cindy P4F, Sam Soash, Nicki Hartwig, Taylor Nagle (Watson), Louie Hoehle, Amy McLaughlin, Kelsey Thien, Tasha Beghtol, Sheri Penney, Heidi Nederhoff, Kim Warren, PJ West, Jen Mitchell, Elizabeth Anderson, Cass Des Moines, Erin Monaghan, Kristie Nixon, lprice, Sarah Vanwyk, Kerri Hall, Nick Crawford, Jess Burger, McKinley Baliey, Ashley Otte, Laurie Nash, Carrie Soddors, Elizabeth Stanek, Shawna Lebeck, Kelly Schulte, Nicole Brua, Christy Brown, Brenda Loop, Abigail Degenhardt, Erika Kirchhoff, Ginger Knisley, Claire Carlson

In-person attendance: Jordan Morse, Patricia Russman, Deb Schrader, Barb Bremner

Welcome/Introductions

Action Item: Agenda for Today's meeting, approval of minutes from December 2, 2025, and administrative update

Motion by Dave Arens to approve the consent agenda minus the minutes

Seconded by Aaron Johnson

Passed unanimously

Motion by Dave Arens to change within the meeting minutes to change bottom of 6th page, last sentence "The board agreed that accountability structures must be established **within** creating undue administrative burdens, with an 18-month timeline for implementation and revision." - change within to without.

Seconded by Aaron Johnson

Passed unanimously

Approved by the ECI State
Board on March 6, 2026

Public Comment:

The board packet was sent on 12/31 with the following note and a link within the note and linked within the agenda: In preparation for this meeting, we will utilize a Microsoft Form for public comment sign-up. As usual, commenters will have 2 minutes. Individuals interested in sharing a public comment must sign up prior to the meeting to speak either in person or via Zoom. The first 9 people to sign up will be included in public comment time due to the allotted time on the agenda.

We left the form open until 8:40am and at that time we had to close it so we could finalize technology preparation for the meeting to begin at 9:00am.

Jordan Morse: Tool FF changes concerns with meeting 100% eligibility threshold. 75% current threshold for a reason and worried of causing a gap in services.

Deb Shrader: Would like to have a standing service types and performance measures agenda meeting in January moving forward.

Action Item: FY25 Annual Report – Winslow talks through the highlights of the FY25 Annual Report focusing on the data to more steadily share the story of impact. It was noted there are more opportunities to expand the report to better demonstrate ECI's effectiveness to legislators. Report aligns efforts with the 2023-2026 strategic plan, detailing investments per tool and corresponding amounts. A timeline of history was included as a new feature providing historical context; a minor edit needed for 2025 to make a bullet.

Key highlights include the focus on family support and life skills progression, as well as the ability to build out community planning data to illustrate impact. Home visitation data was highlighted as a primary prevention service with positive outcomes. An emphasis on Life Skills Progression data was discussed and would like to incorporate growth of impact data be added for the future, possibly in the data dashboard. It was suggested to bold the statement "87-89% of families maintaining or improving their support from 2020 through 2025."

The Ages and Stages screenings were discussed as the percentage of children screened 77% and those requiring additional support 19%. 23% of eligible children not screened was a concern; potential reasons included data collection issues, timing, and ongoing cleanup with DAISEY 2.0. Expectation is closer to 90% screening. Discussion also addressed data representation and transparency. Interest in integrating social-emotional (ASQ-SE) data

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due to its prominence in current conversations, noting it's collected but not explicitly highlighted visually. It was emphasized the need for the report to clearly demonstrate program impact to legislators, especially given its role in funding decisions. Suggested adding an introductory note/executive director message to acknowledge the report as a "transition report" given ongoing data collection improvements and the January 31st deadline.

It was recommended to present the report to both HHS and education budget subcommittees. Suggested updates to the report included to bold key sentences for easier digestion. Request to cluster bullet points under "Supports for Families" into subcategories (e.g., child development, family-based, essential needs). Proposed a reference page with links to dashboards and additional data in future reports.

Motion by Dave Arens to approve the report and make the few minor changes as well as have a second read to bold key aspects within the report.

Second by Aaron Johnson

Passed unanimously

Action Item: HAWC ECI Area Board Action Plan – HAWC Board was given an action plan in September 2025. The board remains unique in its utilization of DCAT, CPPC, and ECI funds and continues to function actively, maintaining awareness of policies and procedures while engaging with multiple entities. However, governance concerns have emerged, particularly around contracting and communication. Janee raised a concern that contractors may not be receiving adequate communication, which could indicate gaps in monitoring the scope of work. The area Director has submitted their resignation but still maintains an active action plan, which is a work in progress. Efforts are underway to schedule a meeting before the regularly planned January 29th meeting to address these issues.

A key challenge involves the lack of board decisions on Tool U, leaving technical assistance stalled. Amanda Winslow suggested meeting with all stakeholders in Region 3 to confirm whether they wish to proceed with regional alignment, emphasizing that participation should be a choice rather than a mandate. Discussion included whether a formal motion is needed to pursue the move to D3 for this area and the importance of identifying a State Board member to attend meetings for support. Clear expectations for directors need to be established to ensure transparency and accountability. Updates should be provided to a designated person, but clarity is needed on what those updates

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should include and what the 30-day expectations are. Questions arose about whether the State Board can require an ECI Director to reside within the state. Emily committed to participating in HAWC Board meetings to help maintain continuity during this transition.

Motion by Unity Stevens to direct ECI TA Team to facilitate a discussion regarding a path forward for the administration of their governance functions by January 31, 2026.

Second by Aaron Johnson

Passed unanimously

Action Item: Service contracts and invoices from Lakes area - The ECI State Board and HHS are together assuming the existing service contracts the Lakes Area Board had in place for FY26. Urgent suggestion to approve invoices and authorize the ECI TA Team to pay the fiscal agent for their own portion that they're due. After that the rest of the contracts HHS will be assuming and the issuer of the payment. Janee gave an update on the requested thorough audit of the Lakes Area Board that is actively underway. The audit is placed into 3 buckets. They are looking at 1. PTO, accrual and payout review, 2. contractor vendor contracts and financials, and 3. the government's compliance procedures and controls. The current status is the priority they're placing on our number one and two because they involve money. The intention is to complete a 100% financial reconciliation starting with the cost contractor vendor financials. All audit tools have been created and are ready for data input for analysis. There have been some delays in getting access to their financial records but making headway. CIJDC has prepped digital files, and DOM DoIT is consulting with the HHS team on a secure file transfer option. The local board's files are believed to be on a laptop, and the HHS ECI Team is working to get the laptop to the Lucas building. Assuming the files are received this week, the team expects to have initial finding for number one and two in the week ending January 23rd. If the files received are not complete, then that timeline will be extended, and an update will be provided as they are received.

Motion by Aaron Johnson to approve invoices sent

Second by Dave Arens

Passed unanimously

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Action Item: Tool FF – Presented proposed changes to Tool FF were given and organized into three sections. The first section focused on the operations manual. The operations manual will be effective for all programs starting July 1st, aligning state and federal home visitation programs. This includes policies on dosage, virtual visits, and re-enrollment. 80% of programs currently utilize this manual. Additional updates include incorporating IV-E drawdown training and assessment, with all ECI funded programs required to adopt these standards. The second section addresses eligibility criteria. Following recommendations from Chapin Hall to streamline requirements. Current expectations for families enrolling remain consistent with federal guidelines. Proposed change is 100% of families must meet at least one expanded eligibility criterion from the current 75%. Analysis of 2.0 data show that 86.9% of families meet current eligibility requirements, while 98.4% would qualify under the proposed new criteria. Expanded criteria include income, teen parents, history of child abuse/neglect, low student achievement, substance use history, developmental delays/disabilities, or military family. It was emphasized that adopting the new criteria would reduce administrative burden for contractors and improve alignment with federal funding. Discussion included strategies for identifying gaps and whether similarly positioned programs could serve families who do not meet the new criteria, as part of a long-term education approach. Concerns on how to track and address cases where families need support but do not meet eligibility were raised with potential through coordinated intake systems and dedicated “tool gap” mechanisms. A discussion of a possible Grandfathering clause was proposed. Families currently receiving services who do not meet the new criteria will be grandfathered in through their service duration. New enrollments after July 1st must meet the updated criteria. Other changes included streamlining definitions, adding language to fund models to fidelity, and requiring mandatory reporter training for direct staff and supervisors. A correction was noted for the new criteria regarding pregnancy for teens under 21, removing the word “or” from that line.

Motion by Aaron Johnson to approve Tool FF with the adjustment of pregnant and under 21, to the eligibility criteria. If families are enrolled in home visitation by July 1, 2026, who do not meet the adjusted criteria, then they would be grandfathered in to continue their service through successful completion through their duration of service need. If after July 1, 2026, families do not meet criteria we explore additional services.

Second by Unity Stevens

Passed unanimously

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Information Item: Scott County letter – A letter was sent to the ECI TA Team requesting to move \$221,077.58 from Family Support funding stream to Program Discretionary. The request involves shifting funds from Home Visitation to a miscellaneous category, prompting questions about the plan for these funds and the compelling reason for reallocating resources away from home visitation. Currently Scott County ECI has \$123,783.05 of unallocated funds in Program Discretionary. Capacity data was presented along with the note that Scott County ranks among the top 10 in Iowa for foster care, underscoring the need for strong family support services. The ECI Director for Scott County emphasized that the board fully supports home visitation but has exhausted options after an unsuccessful RFP process. The carryforward amount exceeds the 20% threshold, and the goal is to maximize spending to avoid further issues. LSI currently has 13 open spots and is hiring to fill coverage gaps. Winslow explained that if \$123,077.58 in other flexible funds are spent down, the request transfer would bring home visitation carryforward below the 20% threshold. Emily proposed developing a professional development plan to help identify and attract programs in the area. Scott County has faced longstanding challenges in establishing home visitation, raising concerns about future sustainability and fund utilization. The group discussed learning from successful areas and exploring partnerships to strengthen local capacity. There was a discussion about whether the low price per slot is a barrier for contractors. It was requested that a presentation from Scott County with relevant data points including barriers and historical context to inform decision-making. The discussion concluded with agreement on the need for strategic planning and collaboration to address these challenges.

Information Item: Tools from the Toolkit into an operations manual – The proposed operations manual aims to provide guidance and standardize policies for ECI boards, with a plan for weekly work sessions to gather input. Development of a comprehensive operations manual would help organize existing tools and provide standardized guidance for local ECI boards. The manual covers topics of governance and board operations, personnel and staffing, contracting, monitoring, and compliance, and fiscal agent and budgeting. Recommendations were made for clear communication, maintaining local board independence, and addressing current operational challenges. A proposal was given for weekly work sessions to review the manual and gather input from various stakeholders. A task force is also proposed to enrich the designation process, focusing on innovation and outcomes. The goal is to define minimum designation criteria for ECI areas by July 1, 2026, emphasizing independence with accountability while also focusing on peer engagement,

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best practices, innovation, and outcomes. Task force will include ECI State board members, ECI directors, area board members, ECI TA Team, and I2D2.

Information Item: Workshop focused on an updated designation process – Emily conducted four feedback sessions with ECI Area Directors and board members to gather input on improving statewide outcomes and ensuring clarity and consistency for directors. A key concern raised was whether directors have the capacity to address existing gaps without creating process overreach. The Board discussed several recommendations, including adopting minimum designation criteria for all boards by July 2026 and establishing a task force of stakeholders to draft a recommendation for a four-year designation cycle focused on standardizing excellence in outcomes. Additional discussions included a four-year designation schedule, an annual calendar for board oversight outlining key metrics, and requiring all ECI areas to complete the minimum designation process. These steps aim to provide clear operational expectations without mandating mergers. The board will also discuss with District 6 whether they wish to proceed with a merger. To strengthen governance, the Board agreed to meet monthly until the end of the fiscal year and create a Board calendar to ensure transparency and a regular cadence for addressing governing topics. Updates to bylaws were identified as necessary, along with establishing committees as outlined in the bylaws and voting on engaging legal counsel if needed. Emily emphasized the importance of clarity, transparency, and structured oversight to drive improved outcomes across the state.

Action Item: Adjourn

Motion: Adjourn

Made By: Aaron Johnson

Seconded By: Brook Rosenberg

The motion was approved and board meeting ended at 12:18pm

Next meeting – March 6, 2026

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

Dates: June 5, September 4, November 6

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Board on March 6, 2026

Respectfully Submitted, *Elizabeth Ernst*

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Board on March 6, 2026