



CEDAR/JONES
EARLY CHILDHOOD IOWA

Early Childhood Community Plan

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INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

PURPOSE OF THE PLAN

The purpose of the Early Childhood Plan is to guide local efforts to improve the lives of children prenatal through five years of age in Cedar and Jones Counties. Created to be a collaborative tool to facilitate decision making and planning, the Community Plan reviews community data, partner needs assessments, focus group discussions, and financial investments in young children. This Community Plan identifies early childhood strengths and challenges in Cedar and Jones counties. Leaders in a community should be able to use the plan, set priorities, and guide decision-making.

This document is in fact, a living, breathing, ever-changing document that reflects the early childhood culture of the Cedar/Jones Early Childhood Iowa area regarding children 0 through 5 years of age and their families. Trend data and content updates are done annually.

It is the goal that this Early Childhood Community Plan will be utilized:

- to understand the needs of young children and their families in Cedar and Jones Counties,
- to understand the data collection, community input, and needs assessment that was done to establish such priorities,
- to understand early childhood services in the Cedar/Jones ECI area,
- to understand collaborative efforts amongst providers in serving the area's youngest,
- to understand the area's dedication to quality services,
- to understand the blending and braiding of funds utilized to support Iowa's Early Care, Health, and Education system, and
- to collectively work together to move the local early care, health, and education system forward.

This Early Childhood Community Plan was framed and created through the collaborative work of community members and organizations serving children and their families in Cedar and Jones counties. The following organizations are part of our local system and many of which are part of the on-going work to address the goals and priorities identified in this plan.

- Hawkeye Area Community Action Program (HACAP)
- Community Action of Eastern Iowa (CAEI)
- Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR&R) – Region 5
- ISU Extension and Outreach – Cedar County
- ISU Extension and Outreach – Jones County
- Community Partnership for Protecting Children (CPPC) – Cedar & Jones
- Jones County Family Council
- Anamosa & Tipton Rotary
- Little Knights Child Care Centers – Lowden & Mechanicsville
- Little Friends Preschool – Tipton
- Sycamore Learning Center – Tipton
- Taylor's Tots – Tipton
- West Branch Community Child Care Center
- Mother Goose Preschool – Monticello
- Little Lion Learning Center – Olin
- Kidz R Us & Kidz R Us Too – Anamosa
- Unity Point Trinity Muscatine Public Health
- Dental Providers in Cedar & Jones Counties
- Iowa Dept. of Health & Human Services
- Lutheran Services in Iowa (LSI)
- Young Parents Network (YPN)
- Grant Wood AEA
- Rise Counseling - Anamosa
- Jones County Economic Development
- Cedar County Consortium
- Jones County Community Connections
- Cedar and Jones County Community Foundations
- Cedar County School Districts – Bennett, Durant, North Cedar, Tipton, & West Branch
- Jones County School Districts – Anamosa, Midland, Monticello, & Olin
- Head Start & Early Head Start – Anamosa & Tipton
- Sacred Heart School – Monticello
- St. Patrick's School - Anamosa
- Campus for Kids - Durant
- Cedar County Coordinated Care - Tipton
- St. John's Day Care Center – Monticello
- Cedar & Jones Counties Libraries
- Jones Regional Medical Center
- Cedar County Public Health
- Jones County Public Health
- Lee County Public Health
- Scott County Public Health
- Cedar and Jones County Board of Supervisors
- McDonough Foundation
- Theisen's Home Farm Auto
- Anamosa Police Dept.
- Jones County Sheriff
- Various churches and Ministerial Associations
- Riverview Center
- Cedar & Jones County Volunteer Centers
- United Way of East Central Iowa
- Mental Health/Disability Services of the East Central Region (ECR)
- Eastern Iowa Mental Health & Disability Services Region

BRIEF HISTORY

Early Childhood Iowa (ECI) (formerly Community Empowerment) was established in Iowa Code in 1998 to create a partnership between communities and state government to improve the well-being of children ages 0-5 and their families. This law created a system and framework that enabled legislators to provide funding for early childhood services through local area boards covering all 99 counties. Within ECI areas, local citizens lead collaborative efforts to unite agencies, organizations, business, and community partners to speak one message – All children, beginning at birth, will be healthy and successful.

The statewide system consists of a State Early Childhood Iowa leadership board, a technical assistance team, and local ECI areas, all housed within the Iowa Department of Health and Human Services. Together the Early Childhood Iowa system is tasked with ensuring that our children are healthy, ready to succeed in school, grow up in safe and supportive communities with secure and nurturing families, and have access to secure and nurturing early learning environments.



ECI brings communities together – parents, childcare, human service, and health care providers, educators, business community, private community partners, and the faith community – to identify strengths, needs, and gaps in services in the community. Through the identification of the community's gaps in services, ECI area boards provide tools and resources to fully engage young children in learning opportunities so they can grow to be healthy, productive, and well-rounded students, parents, workers, and leaders.

EARLY CHILDHOOD AREA

SNAPSHOT

Following a State of Iowa restructure and a merger of Cedar and Jones County ECI Areas, Cedar/Jones ECI was designated as an ECI area in July of 2012. The purpose of Cedar/Jones Early Childhood Iowa is to empower and enable local citizens to lead collaborative efforts on behalf of children 0-5 years of age and families residing in Cedar and Jones counties.

VISION & MISSION

The Cedar/Jones Early Childhood Iowa Board supports the State of Iowa vision:

- ***Vision*** – *Every child, beginning at birth will be healthy and successful.*
- ***Mission*** – *To strengthen the health, education, and well-being of children 0-5 and their families, supporting services and increasing the quality of these services through collaboration.*

BASED ON THE PRINCIPLES OF

- ❖ Children and their families as first priority
- ❖ Partnerships that avoid duplication
- ❖ Focus on outcomes
- ❖ To the extent possible, services should be accessible within the community
- ❖ Need-based services
- ❖ Assessment for continuous improvement
- ❖ Efficient, consumer-friendly service delivery
- ❖ Open collaborative, communications

ELIGIBILITY FOR SERVICES

All children 0-5 and their families living within the Cedar/Jones ECI area are eligible for services funded by Cedar/Jones Early Childhood Iowa.

The Cedar/Jones ECI Board recognizes that not all needs and services for young children are clear-cut and fall under the premises of our area. Sometimes children in need of services fall through the cracks, despite what we consider clear and well-defined boundaries between ECI areas. Our community partners work hard to make referrals to services closest to where the individual resides.

In the event that an individual is not eligible for services in their ECI area and/or chooses to utilize services in the Cedar/Jones ECI area while not meeting current eligibility, the Board will evaluate individual requests for consideration of services. The Board believes that while some may deem looking at children and their families on an individual basis to be time consuming and subjective, this can be ultimately necessary to make sure that all children receive services.

While specific procedures are not in place with other ECI area boards regarding services for young children, Cedar/Jones ECI policies allow for evaluation of individuals and their situations in an ever-changing system of delivery for early childhood services.

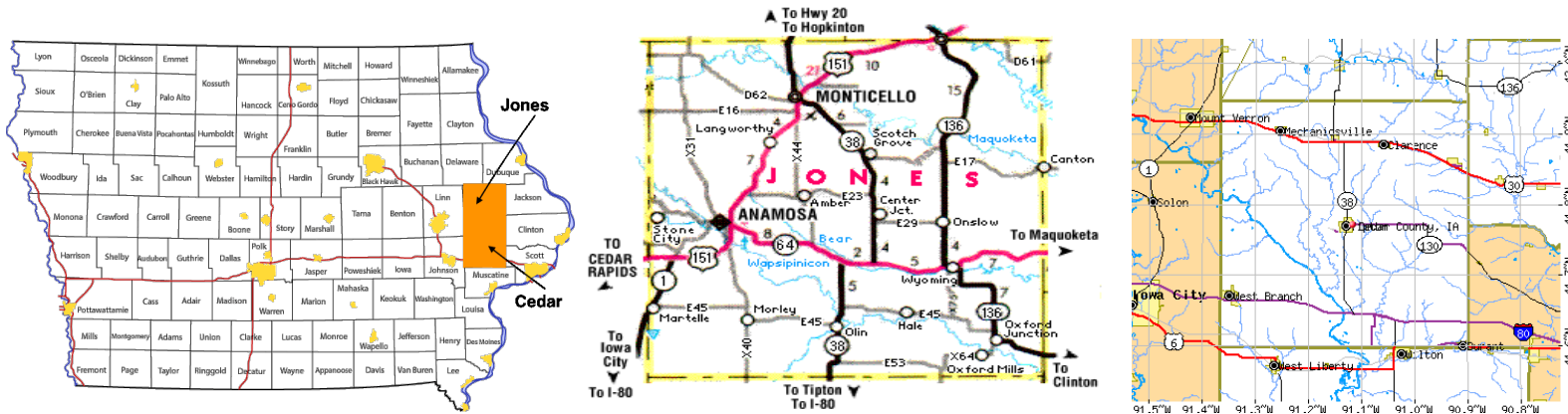
OVERVIEW OF CEDAR/JONES SERVICE AREA

Cedar/Jones Early Childhood Iowa serves the counties of Cedar and Jones located in East Central Iowa. Predominately rural, the region has seven (7) towns that have populations in excess of 1,000 persons and nine (9) towns with a population under 1000. Larger towns offer basic amenities, such as groceries, health care services, and limited retail. Other smaller towns in the area often relay on their local convenience store or gas station for quick access to basic or essential items.

Jones County encompasses 9 incorporated communities and their surrounding rural areas, including Anamosa, Cascade (part of), Martelle, Monticello, Morley, Olin, Onslow, Oxford Junction, and Wyoming. The county seat is Anamosa and has a land area of 575 square miles and approximately 36 persons per square mile. Jones County is within a 30-50 minute drive to the Cedar Rapids, Dubuque, and Iowa City areas. Major highways include U.S. 151 along with Highways 64, 38, 136 and 1. Counties bordering Jones County include Delaware, Dubuque, Jackson, Cedar, Clinton, and Linn. Jones County is named after George Wallace Jones, a United States Senator and member of Congress.

Cedar County encompasses 8 incorporated communities and their surrounding rural areas, including Bennett, Clarence, Durant, Lowden, Mechanicsville, Stanwood, Tipton, and West Branch. Tipton is the county seat for Cedar County which has a land area of 580 square miles

and has approximately 32 persons per square mile. Cedar County is positioned between and contiguous with Clinton, Jones, Johnson, Linn, Muscatine, and Scott counties and is within a 15-45-minute drive to Iowa City, Muscatine, and Davenport. Major highways include US Highways 30, 38, and 130, Route 6, and Interstate 80. Cedar County is named for the Cedar River, which runs through the county and is the only Iowa county which has a name which is also the name of a tree. Cedar County has the distinction of being one of thirteen counties in the United States that houses a Presidential library – the Herbert Hoover Library, located in West Branch.



There are 9 public school districts within the area, serving kindergarten through 12th grade students with enrollments ranging from 40 students to 1094 students. Jones County also has 2 private, parochial schools, one in Anamosa and one in Monticello. Cedar County is the home of Scattergood Friends School and Farm and supports kids in grades 6th through 12th. All public and parochial schools also offer various preschool options. Kirkwood Community College has satellite educational centers in both Monticello and Tipton.

Residents of the area travel to one regional hospital in the area, eight small medical clinics, limited mental health services and many times to an urban area for other specialized services. Transportation is the number one barrier to receiving and utilizing services.

Employees in both Cedar and Jones counties have a shorter commute time than the normal US worker with the average being 24 minutes compared to a State mean of 18.5 minutes. In Cedar County, 8.9% of employees work from home compared to 4.8% in 2000. In Jones County, 10.5% of employees work from home compared to 7.4% in 2000. There are 466 Employer establishments in Cedar County and 501 in Jones County.

POPULATION

Total population in Cedar County is estimated at 18,479. Tipton is the largest community in Cedar County with a population of 3,054, followed by West Branch with a population of 2,754. Tipton and West Branch's population represents just 16.7% and 15% respectively of the total population of Cedar County with an additional 31% of residents residing in the other 6 remaining small towns and 37.3% in the rural areas.

Population in Jones County is estimated at 20,733 with Anamosa and Monticello being the major population centers and representing 46.7% of the county's population. 11.7% of the county's total population reside in the other small towns while 41.6% inhabit rural areas.

Persons under 5 years of age represent 6.2% of the population in Cedar County, 6.4% in Jones County. Over the last 8 years there has been an average of 172 births in Cedar County and 195 births in Jones County.

Population by community			
Cedar		Jones	
Town	Population	Town	Population
Bennett	335	Anamosa	5,704
Clarence	1,004	Martelle	247
Durant	1,815	Monticello	4,056
Lowden	778	Morley	94
Mechanicsville	1,146	Olin	655
Stanwood	620	Onslow	196
Tipton	3,054	Oxford Junction	424
West Branch	2,754	Wyoming	527
Source: iowa-demographics.com;			

Population by age			
Cedar		Jones	
Total Population	Age 0-5	Total Population	Age 0-5
18,479	1,147	20,733	1,340
Percent of Population	6.2%	Percent of Population	6.4%
I2D2			

DIVERSITY

Increasing diversity is a state-wide trend that slowly is showing up in our rural communities. According to the US Census Bureau, White race in Cedar County decreased from 98.5% in 2000 to an estimated 96.4% in 2023. Similar trends were seen in Jones County with the White race decreasing from 96.7% in 2000 to an estimated 95% in 2023.

Other race categories increased slightly, with the largest increases for the total population identifying as Hispanic in both Jones County and Cedar County. The State of Iowa also saw its largest population increases in the Hispanic race as well.

Ethnicity	Cedar		Jones		Iowa	
	2000	2023	2000	2023	2000	2023
White	98.5%	96.4%	96.70%	95%	93.90%	89.6%
Black/African American	0.2%	1.0%	1.80%	3.0%	2.10%	4.5%
American Indian & Alaska Native	0.2%	0.30%	0.30%	0.50%	0.30%	0.60%
Asian	0.3%	0.70%	0.20%	0.60%	1.30%	2.70%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Island	--	0.10%	--	--	--	0.30%
Hispanic	0.9%	2.70%	1.10%	2.70%	2.80%	7.40%
Two or more Races		1.5%		.90%		2.2%

INCOME, UNEMPLOYMENT, HOUSING, & POVERTY

In 2024, the annual median household income in the area ranged from \$89,375 in Cedar County to \$79,221 in Jones County, a difference of more \$8,000 per year. This household income gap between the two counties has narrowed from \$11,000 in 2019. Income levels for Cedar and Jones counties fell between the State of Iowa median house income of \$85,197. The median household income in Jones County increased from the previous year's value of \$68,781 and Cedar County increased from the previous year's value of \$76,959.

Data consistently shows that Jones County has a higher number of residents in poverty than does Cedar County, but the gap in difference narrows when factoring in ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) data. 35% of households in Jones County are considered below the ALICE Households threshold compared to this same figure of 31% in Cedar County.

Unemployment rates in 2022 in both Cedar and Jones counties were below the state average while unemployment rates are up from 2019 with both counties holding a higher unemployment rate compared to the State of Iowa and with increased rates compared to 2019.

Median Household Income		Housing Data			Unemployment Rate		
2024			Cedar	Jones		2019 Annual	2022 Annual
Cedar	\$89,375						
Jones	\$79,221	Housing Units (2019)	8,365	8,899	Cedar	2.50%	2.80%
Iowa	\$85,197	Owner occupied housing unit rate 2018-2022	80.60%	80.60%			
Source: CCR&R					Jones	3.20%	3.80%
Percent Persons in Poverty		Median Gross Rent, 2018-2022	\$830	\$693			
2022		Households, 2018-2022	7,508	8,062	Iowa	2.70%	2.70%
Cedar	7.80%	Persons per household, 2018-2022	2.42	2.42	Source: I2D2		
Jones	11.4%	Living in the same house 1 year ago	89.8%	89.5%			
Iowa	11.1%	Source: census.gov					
Source: I2D2							

EDUCATION

95.6% of residents in Cedar County hold a high school diploma compared to 94.3% in Jones County. Similarly, 20.9% of residents in Cedar County hold a bachelor's degree or higher compared to 22.5% in Jones County with both counties falling below the state average of 30.3%.

There are 9 public school districts and 2 private parochial schools in Cedar and Jones counties. Changes in public schools over the years have resulted in larger districts that serve many small communities. Some of these districts have buildings with different age groups in different towns, with buildings being 7-18 miles apart. The Midland Community School District provides the area's largest coverage for a district with 240 square miles. Some schools partner with neighboring school districts to serve older students. The Bennett CSD and Olin CSD have only elementary buildings in their districts. Charter Schools have not yet expanded in Cedar or Jones County but are becoming increasingly popular throughout the State.

All public and parochial schools in the area participate in the Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program (SWVPP), offering free preschool for four-year-old children. A varying number of schools also provide space in their buildings for partnering Dept. of Health and Human Services three-year-old preschool programs and

before and after school programming.

Education (persons age 25+ years 2018-2022)			
	Cedar	Jones	Iowa
High school graduate or higher	95.6%	94.30%	89.1%
Bachelor's degree or higher	20.9%	22.5%	30.3%

Cedar County School Data (Iowa Dept. of Ed)			
District	Total Enrollment 23-24 (K-12)	Free/Reduced Lunch Eligible Students 23-24	
		#	%
Bennett	57	34	59.6%
Durant	649	181	27.9%
North Cedar	548	237	43.2%
Tipton	857	306	35.7%
West Branch	814	172	21.3%

Jones County School Data (Iowa Dept. of Ed)			
District	Total Enrollment 23-24 (K-12)	Free/Reduced Lunch Eligible Students 23-24	
		#	%
Anamosa	1094	426	38.9%
Midland	456	217	47.6%
Monticello	981	313	31.9%
Sacred Heart Monticello	40	--	--
St. Patrick's Anamosa	55	--	--
Olin	65	34	38.1%

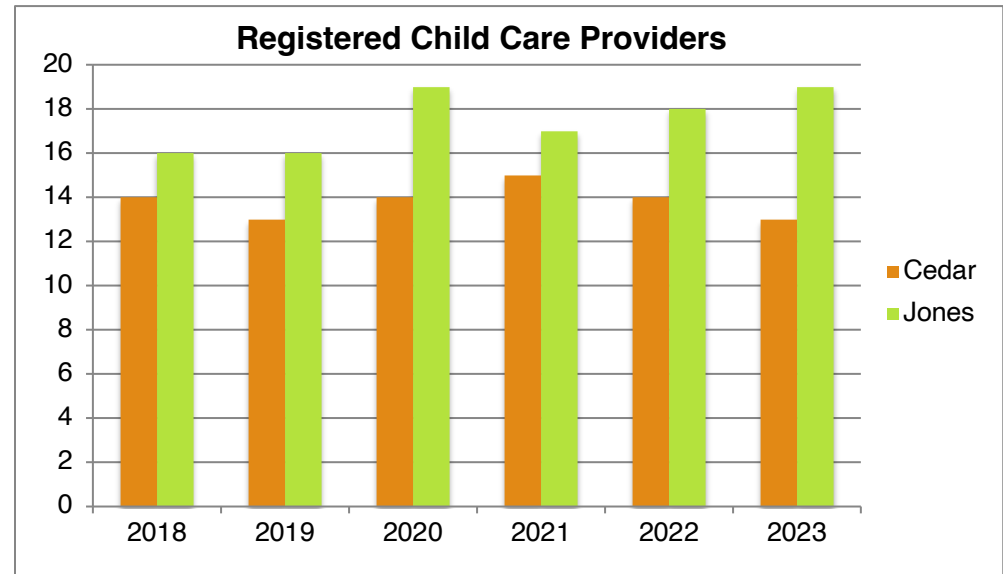
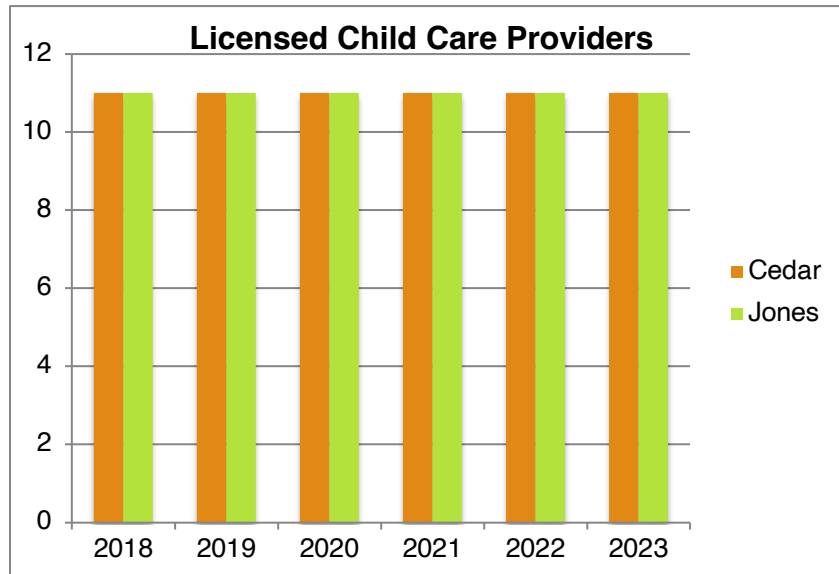
CHILD CARE

The issue of availability of childcare, let alone quality childcare, is a consistent struggle for not only young families, but the entire community. While the number of licensed childcare providers has remained relatively consistent over the last 8 years, programs continue to struggle both financially and with the ability to retain long term quality employees. It is a difficult threshold to meet the needs in small rural communities while keeping childcare rates low for families and paying an appropriate cost of living wage for employees.

There have been consistent ups and downs in the number of registered home providers, with approximately 19 Child Care Development Homes in Jones County and 13 in Cedar County providing long term childcare. Providing childcare can be a volatile business and not all providers are in the business for the long haul.

Another factor to consider regarding childcare is that in the State of Iowa, it is legal to provide care for up to 5 children in a home setting without being registered with the Dept. of Health and Human Services. Parents needing childcare often rely on family, friends, or neighbors to care for their children due to the lack of childcare, in-affordability for the working poor, and lack of quality options. The use of unregulated childcare does not allow for assessing the exact availability of childcare.

Families in Cedar County pay an average of \$145.77 weekly for In-Home Child Care while families in Jones County pay average of \$149.72. For Child Care Centers, the average is \$201.43 weekly in Cedar County and \$200.83 weekly in Jones County.



DENTAL, PHYSICAL, & MENTAL HEALTH

Access to health services is important to the entire population. Dental and health services are available in each county, however, the extent to which they are available, especially to children and families and those on Medicaid, differ.

Physical health services are more readily available in each county with medical providers in a number of clinic locations. Both counties also have active county public health departments and Child and Maternal Health grantees. However, Jones County is the only county with a hospital. Jones Regional Medical Center is considered one of the top 40 fastest growing centers in the nation and serves over 7000 individuals annually providing 24-hour emergency care, lab and radiology; inpatient hospital visits and nursing care; outpatient surgeries and clinics; counseling; and rehabilitation. There are no labor and delivery services or pediatric practitioners in either county.

Data shows that 4.9% of residents in Jones County do not have health coverage and 4.5% of residents in Cedar County. Of the population that has health coverage, 15.7% of residents in Jones County are receiving Medicaid and 8.58% of the residents in Cedar County have Medicaid coverage.

Dental services seem to be somewhat available, however the number of dentists that accept Medicaid is limited. Services to young children are available and children seem to be a priority to dentists, with many dentists reporting working with family's financial situations to serve children. All dentists will refer children that require restorative treatment to a pediatric dentist outside of the area.

	Family Practitioners (DO, MD, PA-C, ARNP, FNP)	Labor & Delivery	Hospitals	General Dentists	Licensed Mental Health Organizations
Cedar	11	None	None	8	1
Jones	13	None	1	6	4

Mental health services in the area, much like across the State of Iowa, are lacking for the entire population. Services for young children are even more difficult to access. Most area mental health professionals serve teens and adults, and those that serve young children may or may not have specialized training in pediatric therapies. Finding providers that accept Medicaid and/or prescribe medications is also a significant barrier to receiving services. Families may seek services in a more urban setting, such as Cedar Rapids, Iowa City, or Davenport, but time and travel, in addition to waiting periods and cost of services, limit access to services for many.

COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

DEVELOPMENT OF

The Cedar/Jones Early Childhood Community Plan was developed using a mixed assessment process that included

- a thorough data and demographic review of the area,
- review of other community needs assessments,
- a series of meetings with community providers representing different sectors of services,
- a Strengthens, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats Analysis (SWOT) with community partners,
- and identification of priorities for the Cedar/Jones Early Childhood Iowa area.

Cedar/Jones ECI Board members and community partners participated in a strategic planning process where the above information was shared, summarized, and reviewed and priorities identified. Follow up meetings were held to dive deeper into strategies to address the identified priorities.



DATA REVIEW

Board members reviewed various data points and chose which data points would be indicative of the early childhood system and provide a comprehensive picture relative to the needs of young children and their families. The community wide data points selected are as follows with the State ECI Result Area alignment. Complete data is located in the attachments.

Healthy Children

- Low Birth Weights
- Preterm or Low Birth Weight
- Prenatal Tobacco Exposure
- Medicaid-enrolled children ages 0-5 who receive dental services
- Preterm Birth
- Inadequate Prenatal Care
- Immunized Children

Children Ready to Succeed in School

- Early Literacy Skills
- Children Entering Kindergarten with Preschool Experience

Safe & Supportive Communities

- Poverty at Birth
- All People in Poverty
- Cumulative Birth Risk - 2 or more risk factors
- Free & Reduced Lunch Rates
- Child Poverty Rate
- Unemployment

Secure & Nurturing Families

- Teenage Mother
- Unmarried Mother
- Incidence of Child Abuse
- Domestic Violence

Secure & Nurturing Early Learning Environments

- Availability of Childcare - Licensed Centers & Preschools & Child Development Homes
- Working Parents

Comprehensive data was reviewed with community partners and Board members at the EC Strategic Planning Meeting. See data five year trends attached.

Key points regarding collected data were noted.

- Increasing Domestic Violence Rates - possibly related to the pandemic
- Increase in Free and Reduced Lunch Rates
- Cedar County - increase in Child Poverty Rates
- Increase in both parents working outside of the home
- Steady decline in births
- Significant increase in Child Abuse Rates
- Question regarding child care slots compared to capacity

ASSESSMENTS REVIEWED

The following Community Assessments were reviewed at the ECI Strategic Planning Meeting.

- ❖ Iowa Child Care Workforce Study - 2023
- ❖ Jones County Childcare Market Study - 2022
- ❖ Alice County Reports - Assets Limited, Income Constrained, and Employed
- ❖ Iowa Dept. of Health and Human Services System Snapshots
- ❖ United Way of East Central Iowa - 2021 Community Impact Assessment
- ❖ Cedar and Jones County Community Health Assessment and Health Improvement Plans - 2023

Noted from the assessments reviewed was the following information:

- ⇒ Poor child care worker wages and lack of access to benefits.
- ⇒ Problems with child care availability, high waitlists for infants, and lack of availability especially on weekends and evenings.
- ⇒ Consideration for a new child care center on the western edge of the Jones County and continued promotion of Child Care Development Homes.
- ⇒ Jones County -- shows no plans for expansion of child care slots.
- ⇒ Child Care Development Homes -- concerns with providers aging out of providing care.

- ⇒ Data shows concerning ALICE rates in both counties. ALICE households are households that earn more than the Federal Poverty Level, but less than the basic cost of living. Financial hardship is not equally distributed and more likely in single, female-headed households with children, in households under 25 years of age, and non-white households.
- ⇒ Parts of both counties have a shortage for Primary Care Physicians, shortage of Dental Care Providers, shortage in Mental Health providers, and lack of providers willing to accept Medicaid.
- ⇒ Alarming report of leave time needed from employees related to mental health days.
- ⇒ Over 39% or more of residents in both counties have an unhealthy body weight.
- ⇒ State of Iowa as a whole not reporting good health outcomes.
- ⇒ Top three areas of concern were housing, childcare, and safety net services.
- ⇒ Food Insecurity - a big and increasing problem. Data regarding need was lower during pandemic because of additional federal, state, and local supports being offered, but food insecurity data being reported is worse today than pre-pandemic.
- ⇒ Cedar County and Jones County are ranked 9th and 10th respectively in overall general health status in Iowa.
- ⇒ Health priorities include access to basic living needs, increased recreational opportunities, addressing mental health care, obesity, nutrition, and addictive behaviors.

SWOT ANALYSIS

Attendees at the ECI Strategic Planning Meeting broke out into small groups and completed a SWOT Analysis of the early childhood community following the review of data and other community needs assessments. The following were identified:

STRENGTHS:

- ❖ Very good infrastructure in services and programming, but often lacking staff to provide the services.
- ❖ Faith and community support and great collaborations amongst organizations.
- ❖ Behavioral interventionist programming in child care settings.
- ❖ Collaboration and closeness of communities.

- ❖ Food pantries - a large number of them in the counties.

WEAKNESSES:

- ❖ Child Care Availability
- ❖ Access to care and clear communication of resource sharing.
- ❖ Availability/marketing of resources - where to find families in need and families can be hard to reach.
- ❖ Lack of prenatal care and birthing centers in the counties.
- ❖ Lack of industry helping to create partnerships for child care.
- ❖ Inadequate funding to support 0-5 year olds.

OPPORTUNITIES:

- ❖ Coalition building - including representation from outside of human services, include school districts.
- ❖ Find substitutes for childcare - possibility of folks looking for new opportunities or retired folks looking for work.
- ❖ Quality Mental Health Care.
- ❖ Increase teen training for child care with the opportunity to increase the future workforce.

THREATS:

- ❖ Uncertainty with funding
- ❖ Changes to the Area Education Agencies
- ❖ State of Iowa reorganization and potential changes
- ❖ Medicaid reimbursement rates

COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Collaboration is realized when partners engage in a process through which they constructively build an interdependent system which includes a common mission, comprehensive communication and planning, pooled resources, and shared risks and products.

Community providers serving Cedar and Jones Counties are committed to the children and family they serve, and they work to do what is in their best of interest. Providers report being supportive of each other's work, making referrals to each other, sharing information about services, and collaborating when possible, to meet the needs of our area's youngest.

Both Cedar and Jones counties host collaborative groups where agency providers meet and share their organizational updates and find ways to network and collaborate. These groups have been pioneer groups that have met on an ongoing basis since the 1980's. Membership fluctuates depending on the culture of service organizations and funding streams, but regular attendance has been maintained with 20-30 members participating in each of the county coalitions.

Cedar and Jones counties also both have active and collaborative Community Partnerships for Protecting Children Shared Decision Making Teams and Jones County also has a very active Child Abuse Prevention Council.

Cedar/Jones Early Childhood Iowa is involved with these groups that support or address the needs of young children and their families, including:

- ***Cedar County Consortium*** -- provides input on community needs, seeks collaborative opportunities, and shares information about services and opportunities in Cedar County.
- ***Jones County Community Connections*** – provides input on community needs, seeks collaborative opportunities, and shares information about services and opportunities in Jones County.
- ***Cedar County CPPC***– provides input on community needs, part of cohort of providers serving as a Shared Decision-Making Team and collaborates on community projects and programming for children and families in Cedar County.
- ***Jones County CPPC/Family Council*** -- provides input on community needs, part of cohort of providers serving as a Shared Decision-Making Team and collaborates on community projects and programming for children and families in Jones County.

Finally, Cedar/Jones ECI hosts bi-annual collaborative meetings of early childhood providers to share information regarding the work being done in our area to support children 0-5 years of age and their families.

A wide variety of community partners were noted earlier in this community plan, and all are invited and encourages to attend community coalition meetings and/or early childhood partner meetings.

FISCAL ASSESSMENT

According to Iowa Code, an Early Childhood Iowa area at a minimum is required to identify all federal, state, local, and private funding sources available in the area that are being used to provide services to children from prenatal through 5 years of age.

Thus, the Fiscal Assessment is important and informative for the community to obtain an understanding of all funding in the area that supports children 0-5. This is yet another piece of the complex Early Childhood puzzle. What else is going on in regard to young children? What financial supports are in place? Where are the gaps in funding?

The Fiscal Assessment identifies program, agency, oversight, and source of funding for initiatives serving children prenatal through 5 years of age. The matrix offers a general overview of funding flowing into the community through various service and community providers. The data should be reviewed with an understanding of the challenges in reporting such information and margins for error in an ever changing system.

Program fiscal information cannot be compared with identical timeframes. Programs operate on a variety of annual, school, state, and federal calendars. Several initiatives are part of a larger regional system serving numerous counties. Information for these initiatives offers a fiscal picture that is larger than the Cedar/Jones Early Childhood area. A service area including rural and more urban counties may have a greater percentage of funding going to larger populated cities and it cannot be assumed that rural families are served proportionately. It is also important to note that some funds reported by community partners in Jones or Cedar counties did not serve just 0-5 year olds.

Taking into considerations the limitations of this fiscal information, the assessment provides broad information that may help early childhood planning efforts and guide decision-making processes.

See Fiscal Assessment Matrix Attached.

Summary of Fiscal Assessment Findings

- ❖ State funds make up a greater portion of funding contributions for young children as opposed to the federal funds identified.
- ❖ The Iowa Department of Health and Human Services serves as a catalyst for many of the programs serving children 0-5 years of age.
- ❖ Four-year-old children received considerable education funding through Statewide Voluntary Preschool Programming (SWVPP). However, gaps still exist with variances among individual communities within the Early Childhood Iowa area.
- ❖ Local CAP agencies, both through Iowa Department of Health and Human Services and the Federal Dept. of Health and Human Services, play a key role in services for families in Cedar and Jones Counties.
- ❖ There are significantly more \$\$ invested in 3-5 year olds early care and education than there is for 0-3 year olds.
- ❖ Private funding allows for small initiatives to support families in need.
- ❖ Early Childhood Iowa funding plays a vital role in supporting high risk families in need while promoting development, social, and emotional health, in supporting childcare providers through the promotion of high quality, safe, and healthy learning environments, and through the support of gaps in high quality, early education.

NEEDS AND PRIORITIES

Based on the data reviewed and feedback gathered through the community needs assessment, two goals were renewed, and one new goal was identified as a top priority in the Cedar/Jones Early Childhood Iowa area to improve the lives of children 0-5 and their families.

Early Childhood Priorities



GOAL 1: Improve access to quality early care and education opportunities for young children and their families.



GOAL 2: Promote the development of a local mental health system that identifies and addresses the needs of young children and their families.



GOAL 3: Support community collaboration and resource sharing to enhance the lives of children 0-5 years of age and their families.

Following the identification of needs and priorities, strategic planning meetings were then held to “dive deeper” into the three identified needs & priorities. Strategy groups were targeted towards individuals who had knowledge of the identified need. Who was missing at the table from previous conversations that could help all understand and address these complex issues? Current community partners were also invited into these groups, and all worked collectively to identify strategies to address the three common goals.

Result Areas

As previously mentioned, Early Childhood Iowa (ECI) identifies 5 desired results areas that every child needs to be healthy and successful. The result areas include Healthy Children, Child Ready to Succeed in School, Secure and Nurturing Early Learning Environments, Secure and Nurturing Families, and Safe & Supportive Communities. Aligning with the State ECI system, each identified goal provides objectives and strategies to support the ECI Result areas.

GOAL 1:

Improve access to quality early care and education opportunities for young children and their families.

Objectives and Strategies:

- Promote and increase availability of high-quality childcare
- Promote and support access to high quality early learning opportunities
- Increase access to early literacy opportunities

Indicators

- Number of DHS Licensed & Registered Providers
- IQ4K Participation
- Kindergarten & 3rd Grade Literacy Proficiency

State Result Area

- Secure and Nurturing Early Learning Environments
- Safe and Supportive Communities
- Children Ready to Succeed in School

GOAL 2:

Promote the development of a local mental system that identifies and addresses the needs of young children and their families

Objectives and Strategies:

- Support young children & their families through access to parent education and home visitation opportunities
- Identify and address issues regarding the social emotional well-being of children and families

Indicators

- Incidence of Child Abuse
- Domestic Violence Rates
- Crime Rates

State Result Area

- Healthy Children
- Children Ready to Succeed in School
- Secure and Nurturing Families
- Safe and Supportive Communities

GOAL 3:

Support community collaboration and resource sharing to enhance the lives of children 0-5 years of age and their families.

Objectives and Strategies:

- Participate in community activities/events to educate families and share early childhood resource materials.
- Continue to promote collaboration amongst early childhood community partners.
- Continue work with wide variety of community partners to support all aspects of the needs of families in our community.
- Increase virtual opportunities for parent engagement.

Indicators

- Incidence of Child Abuse
- Children in Poverty
- All individuals in Poverty

State Result Area

- Safe and Supportive Communities
- Secure and Nurturing Families