



Early Childhood Iowa – District Transition Planning Meeting

February 6, 2026 – 10:00 a.m.

Committee Members Present: Marsha Platt, Stephanie Musser, Jennifer Hahn (virtual until 11:58 a.m.), Chad Reckling (until 12:00 p.m.), Katy Wethal, Nin Flagel, Marie Hassel (10:17 a.m.–1:35 p.m.), Elizabeth Weyer Davis, Steve Williams, Cyndi Mears, Reverend Paris White, Chris Castrey

ECI Staff Present: Tasha Beghtol, Diane Martens, Kristen Peyton, Amy Grunewaldt, Sherri Hunt, Laurie Nash, Abigail Degenhardt, Brenda Loop

The meeting began at 10:05 a.m.

➤ **Welcome and Purpose:**

Grunewaldt welcomed attendees, reviewed housekeeping items, and outlined the purpose of the meeting:

- Share the current planning process
- Review legislative information
- Identify advocacy next steps
- Develop common messaging although proposed legislation created uncertainty about meeting, the group agreed it was important to convene.

➤ **Introductions:**

ECI staff and committee members introduced themselves, shared their roles, the ECI area they represent, personal background, and what they hoped to gain from the meeting.

➤ **Key Priorities & Guiding Principles in District 7: Overview of What Exists Today, by ECI Area:**

Legislative Update

- HB 623 was tabled. Committee members included Rep. Wilz, Rep. Elhert, and Rep. Bergen.
 - Considered a positive development.
 - The Association Board coordinated testimony strategically during the subcommittee meeting.
 - Legislators emphasized the need for collaboration with the HHS Department to secure federal match funding.
 - Rep. Wilz indicated interest in some level of reduction or consolidation.

- Rep. Bergen highlighted the need to view community collaboration as service, not administration.
- The group discussed concerns and implications of the bill.
- SSB 3111 (Senate companion bill) has been introduced; no subcommittee meeting scheduled yet.
- These priorities emerged from Amy Grunewaldt's one-on-one meetings with each committee member:
 - Importance of rural voice
 - Equitable access to services and funding
 - Value of early intervention
 - Commitment to invest in quality programs with strong outcomes

Guiding Principles

- Preserve local voice and relationships
- Maintain or strengthen services for children and families
- Equity-driven decision making
- Fiscal responsibility and transparency
- Efficiency without sacrificing effectiveness
- Compliance with ECI statute and administrative rules

Local Communities & Investments

Each ECI Director presented:

- Local programming and service investments
- Key partnerships and community assets
- What their communities value about the current ECI model

➤ **Lunch & Networking:** 12:10–12:45 p.m.

➤ **Legislative Discussion and Updates:**

SSB 3111

- Subcommittee members:
 - Senator Kara Warme – kara.warme@legis.iowa.gov
 - Senator Lynn Evans – lynn.evans@legis.iowa.gov
 - Senator Sarah Trone Garriott – sarah.trone.garriott@legis.iowa.gov

Committee members were encouraged to contact subcommittee legislators.

➤ **Advocacy Planning – Common Messaging:**

Large-group discussion identified shared advocacy themes:

- Local freedom and flexibility

- Rural voice and understanding
- Matching services to community needs
- Accountability and quality
- Demonstrating that ECI already achieves the outcomes the state says it wants
- Active collaboration already occurring
- Access to services
- Strong local relationships
- Community connectedness
- Fiscal efficiency, transparency, and responsibility
- Clarifying what “local” means (e.g., whether 14 counties can be considered local)

Key concerns raised:

- Concern about Board members representing a 14-county region and the burden placed on volunteers. Directors noted decisions would be grounded in data and community needs assessments.
- Fear of reduced funding for many currently supported services.
- Concern that prescriptive state direction could reduce meaningful Board engagement and lead to loss of local knowledge.
- Provide fiscal tools that demonstrating responsible stewardship.
- Question raised about whether districting will remain a priority under a new Governor; unclear, but HHS interest in reduction remains.

➤ **Reflections & Next Steps:**

- Maintain consistent messaging used in the subcommittee meeting.
- District 7 Directors will continue meeting regularly and develop work plans aligned with legislative developments.
- Committee members will receive regular updates, clear decision points, and consistent messaging to share with providers and communities.
- Continue monitoring legislation.
- Senate subcommittee meeting for SSB 3111 expected soon.
- Amy will send an email template for Committee members to use when contacting legislators; members should highlight local community impact.
- Encourage strong communication with legislators about local partnerships.

Meeting adjourned at 1:53 p.m.