

FAQ for Community Empowerment/Early Childhood Iowa

➤ **Why is there legislation regarding the transfer of the state Empowerment office?**

Community Empowerment was created 12 years ago and Iowa was on the forefront of developing a state-community partnership to building early learning systems. Questions regarding the efficiencies and statewide consistency of Community Empowerment are often asked. The intent of this legislation is to make a good system better. The Early Childhood Iowa (ECI) portion of SF 2088 makes changes to the structure of Community Empowerment, based upon the recommendations of a Lean Design event that occurred in June 2009, and drafted into the I-GOV “Early Childhood Initiative (ECI).”

In an on-going effort to reduce duplicative services and increase state-level efficiencies, the proposed Early Childhood Iowa Legislation relocates the state’s administration of the Community Empowerment office from the Department of Management to the state Department of Education (DE). This move will consolidate the state’s management and fiscal oversight efforts. The DE’s Early Childhood Bureau currently includes 0-5 programs including Shared Vision, Head Start, IDEA Part C and B.

The savings will be in efficiencies of state staff and stakeholders through the consolidation of administration into one agency. For example, the statewide Community Empowerment Board housed in the Department of Management will be consolidated with the Early Childhood Iowa Board which was housed in the Department of Public Health. This legislation does not change services for children.

The new Early Childhood State Council will advise all early childhood programming, including Shared Visions, IDEA Part C, and the new Early Childhood Initiative. This repackaging of early childhood programs is a first step at better coordination of services for Iowa’s 0-5 populations.

At the Department of Education, all children who receive services will receive a unique student identifier. This will allow that state to develop longitudinal data to track outcomes of these children as they progress not only through K-12 but post-secondary education as well. This longitudinal data can show us where we are doing great and where we need to improve services. The data can also support the significant amount of state funds that we spend on these services. The Department of Education also currently provides fiscal, budgetary, and data support for existing Community Empowerment areas.

➤ **How does the legislation impact local areas?**

It is important to note that there will be no changes in services to children under this legislative proposal. In fact, local area boards may receive more/additional technical assistance under this proposed move.

The legislation still requires significant and strong local involvement through the local boards, now renamed Early Childhood Iowa Area boards. These local boards still have specific authority to administer the funds appropriated by the state. The local boards will also be able to choose a

fiscal agent, either an AEA or request a waiver to choose another fiscal agent that meets the requirements set by the state for all fiscal agents.

➤ **Will Community Empowerment (now Early Childhood Iowa) focus solely on education?**

Absolutely not--the Governor and Legislature have a clear commitment to comprehensive and integrated early care systems that are critical to the future success of Iowa's children. There is absolutely no intent to change the collaborative and integrated efforts with stakeholders, parents, public health professionals and other state agencies. Current birth to five programming at the Department is not solely focused on education. The Iowa Department of Education will continue and build upon those collaborative efforts. In addition, there will be an advisory council which will include early childhood experts along with department directors of the agencies that have programs for young children and their families. This Advisory Council is specifically tasked to:

- assist in oversight of the early childhood areas
- assist in managing and coordinating provision of funding
- assist in the development of a strategic plan
- provide input in adopting common performance measures and data for local boards
- provide input into the development of a levels of excellence rating system
- promote alignment of state agencies
- work with bureau to develop public-private partnerships

A recent House amendment increases the number of public members from 3 to 7, out of the 13 member council.

➤ **Will the existing state employees still be employed in their current roles with Empowerment?**

This legislation does not address any employees, salary, contracts, or job descriptions of state employees working in Empowerment.

➤ **How does the legislation impact existing Empowerment funded programs?**

This legislative proposal does not impact any Empowerment funding, including School Ready Grants, Family Support Grants, or Early Childhood Development Grants. Funding decisions are made in Appropriations bills. Empowerment funding has always been located in the Education Appropriations bill and it will continue to be located in that appropriations bill. The Department of Education has managed disbursement of these funds since the inception of Empowerment.

A recent House amendment removes the requirement for a local ECI area to return carryforward funds to the Department of Education.

In addition, the Governor did not propose any reductions to Empowerment funding in his FY 2011 budget.

➤ **Why should we continue to work on mergers with other Empowerment areas?**

Legislation proposed that an ECI area may not encompass more than four counties, and all counties in an Area must have contiguous borders, per the LEAN event recommendations. For a single county to serve as an Area, it must have a minimum population of children ages zero to 5 in excess of 5,000, based on the latest U. S. Census data. Counties that do not meet that criterion must combine with at least one other county to serve as an Early Childhood Iowa Area.

There is also an ability to request a waiver from the criterion if there are exceptional circumstances.

➤ **Why weren't all of the LEAN recommendations implemented?**

The Early Childhood Iowa (ECI) portion of SF 2088, as written, makes changes to the structure of Community Empowerment, based upon the recommendations of a Lean Design event that occurred in June 2009, and drafted into the I-GOV "Early Childhood Initiative (ECI)." SF 2088 recreates Community Empowerment as a part of an effort to do the following:

- Align early childhood programs and initiative to improve efficiencies both at the state and local level.
- Find a balance between maximizing flexibility at the local level and meeting state level requirements, including but not limited to, fiscal, quality and legislative.
- Establish consistent performance accountability for the services offered to Iowa's 0-5 population.

➤ **How can you reassure local Empowerment Board members that school districts are not going to eventually take over community empowerment?**

The legislation (current sections 355 and 356) created the local Early Childhood Iowa boards and their duties. School Board duties are in Code Chapter 256 (state board) and 279 (local board). These two Code chapters are two different sections and functions of law and practice.

➤ **Why does the legislation seem to affect the Empowerment Family Support Program?**

The legislation is a work in progress. This is a repackaging of early childhood programs and is a first step at better coordination of services for Iowa's 0-5 populations. Amendments and clarifications are sure to occur to make clear that programs and services currently funded by local Empowerment Boards will not be disturbed. The language in this section is the current Shared Visions language but moved to the new chapter of the Code. It is not the intent to change the Empowerment's Family Support Program. A recent House amendment included language to clarify that a social work degree and/or license is eligible for family service program provider.

➤ **How will the transition work with the July 1, 2010 date?**

There may be situations where there will need to be some flexibility in that transition date. The recent House amendment included flexibility in transition language.

➤ **Does the legislation merge other early childhood advisory councils?**

The Child Development Coordinating Council has been merged with the ECI Council since both councils have the same goals and advisory areas of responsibilities.