



Transition Considerations of Empowerment (Early Childhood Iowa) to DE

With the Governor's announcement and proposed legislation to house Empowerment at the Iowa Department of Education (DE), the staff at the DE is committed to making the move as easy and effortless as possible. To that end, we want to ensure everyone who is concerned that the goals to support young children and their families will remain the same. It is imperative that no matter where Empowerment [now renamed Early Childhood Iowa] has an administrative home, that the collaborative and holistic efforts continue to improve and expand. The Department supports that young children are healthy, safe, have quality opportunities to grow emotionally, behaviorally, and academically and families receive needed assistance.

Last summer many individuals collaborated in a LEAN event to determine actions to improve services to our youngest Iowans. These recommendations should not be put aside and the proposed legislation embraces many of the recommendations. Even with a change in the administrative home for Early Childhood Iowa, the Department is committed to endorsing and assisting with the implementation of the recommendations included in the proposed legislation. Any other recommendations within this system that the stakeholders feel should still be discussed and acted upon, will certainly be taken into consideration by the Department.

To fulfill the reasons for the proposed move, it will be possible to provide a unique identifier to each child provided services through Early Childhood Iowa. This is a unique identifier that is confidential and secure so that no young child will have their identity compromised. What it will provide for the state over time is the ability to determine the success of the child as they move through an educational system and into the workforce. The DE has demonstrated the ability through the establishment of Project EASIER to assign the identifier across all levels of the education system including buildings, districts and our area education agencies and then transfer the data to the DE's statewide longitudinal data system. With the implementation of such a system, we will actually be able to obtain an accurate count of the number of children served in various programs and through various funding streams. It will be necessary to collaborate across agencies and local empowerment areas to develop the plans and methods by which this system can become operational at the local level. A state structure, such as that already in place at the DE, is necessary for this type of collection and tracking of data to determine the impact of the resources that have been provided through empowerment to children and their families.

The Department also has a history of collecting consistent and reliable data through secure web-based reporting systems. Currently, many state agencies must provide data on services and supports to young children and their families to the federal government. State programs also require reporting on various indicators. In many cases, the same data is reported through different venues because each agency and program require their own reports. Through collaborative efforts, not only across state agencies, but with local Early Childhood boards, it is desired that key data is collected only once and then pre-populated into the various federal and state reports to minimize reporting burdens at the local level. Of course, it may not be possible to accomplish this for all programs, etc., but any efficiencies would be welcome in this day of high data needs.

Web-based reporting systems can also be established to report revenues and expenditures within defined accounting codes. Fiscal agents can have the same reporting formats so that it is possible for the state/legislature to know that all funds are being expended for the purposes established.

Any state agency that receives direct state/federal appropriations cannot by law divert the funds received for any other purposes. Thus, the concern that the DE could divert funds received for specific purposes for Early Childhood Iowa is unfounded. We are bound by law and ethical behavior to abide by the purposes established for the use of any state/federal funds. It is clear that the legislature and the Governor's office wish to maintain the essential and necessary services provided through Early Childhood Iowa by retaining separate funding appropriations. The appropriations will be directed to the DE but must be spent for the specific purposes intended.

Legislation cannot provide every detail needed for a smooth transition to a different administrative home. The Department will work with local Early Childhood Boards to address transition needs to minimize disruption to services, funding needs, and board operations. The Department plans to have specific staff available to support not only transition needs but long term operational needs of Early Childhood Iowa.