

# Early Childhood Iowa State Board Update

## Program Status Report

Reporting Period: Fiscal Year 2025

Report Date: September 1, 2025

**I2D2 is authorized by the ECI State Board and Department Directors and advised by the I2D2 Data Stewardship Committee:** Amanda Winslow (ECI; HHS); Heather Rouse & William Abraham (ISU); Ryan Page (Child Care; HHS); Shelley Horak (Early Intervention, HHS); Kelsey Feller (HHS); Jay Pennington & Monica Garner (Education); Wendy Greenman & Donna Burkett (Workforce).

### Early Childhood Iowa VISION for I2D2:

*Iowa's early childhood system will be effectively and efficiently coordinated among health, social service, and education agencies to support healthy and successful families. This work will be informed by actionable intelligence derived from a statewide integrated data system that comprehensively identifies and addresses the needs of Iowa's young children and their families.*

**Overview:** Iowa's investment in an integrated data system approach to help address the comprehensive needs of families began in 2015, with full implementation and completion of three demonstration projects funded by the Administration for Children and Families (Preschool Development Grant) and the Iowa Department of Public Health in 2019. Between 2019 and 2021, advancements in technology, governance, and communications were made possible through additional state contracts, university awards, and federal research grants. In 2022, Early Childhood Iowa initiated an annual contract to support the foundational operations of I2D2 to facilitate more efficient and effective use. Annual funds in FY25 supported infrastructure operations including technology maintenance, governance and legal support, and project management so that projects using the system run more smoothly and so that data are available when needed to respond to high-priority state requests. In addition to the 11 original contract activities, two new projects were initiated that were not part of the original scope of work but were determined to be integral to support ECI transition activities. These were accomplished with slight changes to existing contract goals, though did not significantly hinder the operations of the I2D2 system.

The following report provides details about accomplishments in FY25.

### Activities Update for the Current Reporting Period:

Activities accomplished across the 11 deliverables during the current year include:

- 1) **Governance:** The Data Stewardship Committee met twice as a full group, with several meetings with subgroups during this fiscal year. The work included discussing changes to the proposal process to allow projects that only require data use from one agency, thus minimizing the need for cross-agency approval. This discussion led to changes to the governance document that were shared with the group in May 2025 and are currently on schedule for formal approval in FY26. Additional changes may be necessary, pending the current revisions of HHS Data Sharing Agreement and related processes. Data Use License processes were also updated to match the

governance changes. Additionally, study teams presented several planned policy briefs that are in progress related to Head Start, Home Visiting, and ECILS findings from approved projects.

- 2) **Staffing:** I2D2 provided staffing support for multiple meetings including:
  - a) Data Stewardship Committee (3 meetings)
    - i) October 10<sup>th</sup>, 2024
    - ii) March 19<sup>th</sup>, 2025
    - iii) May 8<sup>th</sup>, 2025
  - b) (P01) ECILS Community Advisory Groups – multiple meetings with local area Board Directors to review indicators and discuss community needs assessments; 1 meeting with Head Start (HS) State Advisory Office to discuss annual indicators potential and next steps with HS recipients; 1 meeting with HS Directors to discuss legal agreement amendments
  - c) (P02) Multiple Risks and Home Visiting Community Advisory Groups – findings from completed work were shared with the DSC as well as advisory groups from Iowa HHS home visiting leadership teams.
- 3) **Legal:** several discussions about updated legal agreements were held, though no new agreements were signed during this reporting period. The following activities related to legal agreements were completed:
  - a) After a preliminary draft from I2D2 director was provided to Iowa HHS in November 2023, a revised draft with HHS input was distributed in June 2025. This version included edits to streamline multiple projects and provide more detail for leadership to track activities. It is anticipated this agreement will be signed in the first quarter of FY26.
  - b) Iowa Department of Education provided a draft to ISU of a new agreement that would extend the approvals for 5 years. A minor requested edit was given to DE in late June, and it is anticipated this agreement will be signed early in FY26.
  - c) New discussions were initiated with leadership from the Regents University to determine if they would like to join the I2D2 effort. Ongoing discussion about how the system could support some of their post-secondary to workforce interests is currently underway in partnership with the DE.
- 4) **Technology:** Monthly audits and logging of the Azure cloud based virtual server solution are ongoing, including tracking of use according to approved project protocols.
- 5) **Datasets:** During this reporting period we completed the following data activities:
  - a) Vital Statistics Birth and Death Record intake, cleaning, and cataloging
  - b) DAISEY deduplication across programs
  - c) CCA data documentation
  - d) Development of a new data request report with ChildPLUS, which is the primary system used by Head Start data partners. This process will streamline and standardize the new data sharing with these agencies. It is expected that new data will be updated from the last 5 years and include more comprehensive sets of data to allow for expanded project prioritization.
- 6) **Project Proposals:** One new and one extension project were initiated during FY25:
  - a) **NEW: Workforce Recruitment and Retention: Understanding and Strengthening Iowa's Early Care and Education Systems** – this project builds on the 2023 Iowa Workforce Study and expands work to inform statewide efforts to advance the profession of Iowa's early childhood child care and education workforce. It will specifically address recommendations related to understanding workforce retention strategies, expanding data capacities to regularly monitor and support the child care workforce, and cultivating a process for developing workforce designation criteria to support professional advancement in the field.

- b) **EXTENSION: Improving Equity and Access: A Statewide Mixed-Methods Study of Head Start Enrollment and Retention among Eligible Children** – This project uses the existing ECILS dataset (created as part of the 2019 Preschool Development Grant efforts) to extend analyses focused on Head Start and Early Head Start. The primary objective of this study is to enhance access to HS programs by understanding the individual, community, and program-related factors associated with HS eligible children’s enrollment status. It addresses the goals of this HS grant program to advance research that has capacity to inform HS program and policy and address questions of importance to early childhood policy and practice, further contributing to the broader field of early care and education.
- 7) **Project Management:** During the 2025 contract period, I2D2 enhanced our approach to project management by advancing our Smartsheet protocols and improving our ability to track ongoing work and create communications materials to update stakeholders throughout the year. The following activities were completed:
- a) Enhanced our Smartsheet infrastructure to include a dedicated I2D2 Systems Workspace that houses all firewall tracking, data system transfer, data use licenses, VM incidents, and all VM logins with a dashboard that summarizes the needs and projects for data management.
  - b) In Smartsheet, protocol and systems were updated to organize and track progress on active projects such as award budgets, staff allocation, and deliverables for Project Management. These new systems were integrated into our Project Management Dashboard on Smartsheet.
  - c) A Smartsheet was developed to track all Project Deliverables to ensure contract requirements such as budget reports, fiscal year reports, and other necessary project management deliverables are charted out for PI’s and project management to prepare and disseminate.
  - d) We also developed an award intake and legal intake system in Smartsheet to efficiently track the progress of agreements with partner agencies and the collaborative effort needed to complete awards with Iowa State University REACHS and OSPA systems. It ensures I2D2’s project management can follow the progress and inform all collaborators on the status of pending agreements.
  - e) General team processes were implemented to include streamlined project meetings led by Project Management and assigned team leaders. The process includes project management initiating meetings with detailed agendas and minutes, with assigned team leads driving the discussions. Team leaders are the point of contact for PI’s, Project Management, and staff to provide project progress updates weekly to ensure timely deliverables.
- 8) **Integration Protocol:** No new activity related to the integration algorithm was performed during this contract period, although our technical team participated in several discussions with other experts in our network about integration protocols. Travel to the AISP national meeting and the international network at IPDLN included technical consultation. It is anticipated we will be re-visiting our integration protocol in the coming year as we engage in at least 1 new integration project with multiple years of longitudinal data from the DE.
- 9) **Communications:** During fiscal year 2025, I2D2 completed the following:
- a) Developed a communications management plan that includes Smartsheet management processes with a specific dashboard for communications needs. New I2D2 branded social media templates were created for a unified look and message across platforms.
  - b) Produced three newsletters for the public that included system updates, project updates, upcoming presentations and public features of I2D2 systems, and regular data bytes from completed projects.
  - c) Developed and posted 65 social media posts (including shared posts from partners) that disseminate findings from completed projects and raise awareness about ongoing activities (including the state’s workforce efforts, Shared Services/C3, ECI partnership, and Head Start

study findings). Shared posts came from partners promoting work or projects related to I2D2 or our partnership.

- d) Maintained updated website pages that include priority pages to align with ECI priorities, approved project, the Data Stewardship Committee page, I2D2 Team member page, all pages in the Connect section, and released timely news releases on I2D2 and C3 features.
- e) Fourteen presentations about I2D2 and I2D2 projects included:
  - i) Rouse, H.L. (July 2024). Development of a Flexible and Responsive System to Inform Early Childhood Policy: Highlights from Iowa. Presentation within the symposium session, “Using Early Childhood Data to Improve Policy and Practice” at the National Forum on Education Policy, Education Commission of the States. Washington, DC.
  - ii) Kim, H., & Rouse, H. (2024). Using Integrated Administrative Data for Promoting Access to Early Childhood Education Programs. Poster presented at International Population Data Linkage Network Conference, Chicago, IL, United States.
  - iii) Kim, H. & Rouse, H. (May 2025). Mapping Opportunity: The Role of Family Characteristics and Neighborhood Context in Head Start Access. Poster presented at Society for Research in Child Development. Minneapolis, MN
  - iv) Rouse, H.L., & Abraham, W.T. (September 2024). Iowa’s Integrated Data System for Decision-Making (I2D2): A Collaborative Approach for Responsive and Relevant Use of Population Data. Paper presentation at the International Population Data Linkage Conference, Chicago, IL.
  - v) Rouse, H.L., & Abraham, W.T. (September 2024). Data Integration to Support Child Care Business Sustainability: Iowa Child Care Connect. Rapid-Fire presentation at the International Population Data Linkage Conference, Chicago, IL.
  - vi) Abraham, W.T., Rouse, H.L., Herbkersman, C., & Chighladze, G. (September 2024). Birthing Unit Closure: Impacts and Opportunities in Iowa. Paper presentation at the International Population Data Linkage Conference, Chicago, IL.
  - vii) Kim, H.\*, & Rouse, H.L. (September 2024). Using Integrated Administrative Data for Proposing Access to Early Childhood Education Programs. Poster presentation at the International Population Data Linkage Conference, Chicago, IL.
  - viii) Kim, H., Rouse, H., Betancur, L., & Arabzadehjafari, F. (May 2025). Childcare for Families with Young Children: A Statewide Investigation of Pre- and Post- COVID-19 Patterns. Poster presented at Society for Research in Child Development. Minneapolis, MN.
  - ix) Betancur L., Rouse, H., Choi, J., & Kim, H. (May 2025). Concurrent and sequential care experiences among Head Start Children: Is more childcare better? Poster presented at Society for Research in Child Development. Minneapolis, MN.
  - x) Choi, J., Rouse, H., Betancur, L., & Kim, H. (May 2025). Early Head Start participation: Who enrolls and what are the associated child outcomes? Poster presented at Society for Research in Child Development. Minneapolis, MN.
  - xi) Arabzadehjafari, F., Rouse, H. (May 2025). Mental Health Service Disparities Among Mothers Parenting Alone with Young Children. Roundtable presented at Cross University Collaborative Mentoring Conference 2025. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.
  - xii) Rouse, H.L., Kim, H., & Abraham, W. (June 2025). Program Eligibility, Enrollment and Outcomes: A Demonstration of Integrated Data System Inquiry to Support Head Start. Oral presentation at the Administrative Data Research Conference 2025, Massive Data Institute, Georgetown University.

- xiii) Rouse, H.L., & Abraham, W. (June 2025). Estimating childcare supply and demand to inform strategic planning: A population-based study using integrated administrative data. Oral presentation at the Administrative Data Research Conference 2025, Massive Data Institute, Georgetown University.
  - xiv) Kim, H.\* & Rouse, H.L. (June 2025). Head Start Children of Single Mothers: Exploring ECE Experiences Using Integrated Administrative Data. Poster presentation at the Administrative Data Research Conference 2025, Massive Data Institute, Georgetown University.
- f) I2D2 and the systems maintained by I2D2, such as C3, were featured in the following national spaces:
- i) Resultant Podcast. (August 2024). Ensuring safe, successful learning environments for Iowa's young students through an integrated data system [Audio podcast episode]. In Data Driven Leadership. Resultant. <https://resultant.com/podcasts/ensuring-safe-successful-learning-environments-for-iowas-young-students-through-an-integrated-data-system/>
  - ii) Davidson, N. (September 2024). Can real-time state data ease parents' child-care woes? GovTech. <https://www.govtech.com/biz/data/can-real-time-state-data-ease-parents-child-care-woes>
  - iii) Data Quality Campaign. (October 2024). Transform State early childhood data to meet the needs of children, families, and those who support them. Data Quality Campaign. <https://dataqualitycampaign.org/resource/transforming-state-early-childhood-data/>
  - iv) Opportunities Exchange. (December 2024). Iowa Child Care Connect webinar [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FZP7cH1BMvI>
  - v) Budlong, J. (February 2025). University assists state with child care website [News article]. Inside Iowa State. <https://www.inside.iastate.edu/article/2025/02/20/website>
  - vi) Hunt Institute. Rouse, H. (June 2025). Connecting Early Childhood Data to Support People and Systems | Three State Use Cases [webinar]. Hunt Institute and the Data Quality Campaign.
- 10) **IA Data Drive:** Early activities included pulling  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the indicators that are available from state sources and I2D2 data holdings and preparing the data for publishing. Approvals were obtained from the HHS Vital Records team for use of birth indicators. Mid-year, final indicators were pulled, cleaned, and aggregated. Updates for the statewide and local area reports were completed. Additional discussion with the ECI Results Accountability workgroup, home visiting leadership, and Head Start leaders have helped refined an additional set of indicators that will be added for the next annual update, *Iowa Data Drive 2.0*. The updated version in progress will better guide decision-makers for early childhood programs across the state. In addition to the current Early Childhood Iowa indicators available on the Dashboard upgrades will include the ability to see risk-ranking by county. Downloaded reports for program areas, similar to the functions of the current IA Data Drive, will also be available with the updated indicators.
- 11) **ECI Annual Report:** Approved indicators for the ECI annual report were calculated and submitted as an appendix to the report. An additional report about Family Support investments and outcomes was created that expanded on prior year data and included trends in enrollment and outcomes over the last 5 years. New discussions are underway to determine an interactive online report option for next FY.

## Unanticipated Opportunities

ECI leadership is in a period of transition, with legislative changes impacting how the program operates and what activities they are funding. As such, there were opportunities this year to help support this transition with work that was not anticipated in the original contract. Fortunately, the team worked with ECI leadership to ensure the basic necessary functions of I2D2 were maintained and we could allocate resources to help support these new project initiatives. What this meant was that we could not move the IA Data Drive 2.0 updates forward as quickly as originally anticipated, though these are still in process and will be completed early in FY26. All management and maintenance functions were sustained, legal and technology solutions were prioritized, and the project delivered each of the annual reporting requirements needed to support ECI.

In addition to the originally scoped work, the following two activities were initiated and implemented during the current contract period:

1. ***New work to support ECI area services.*** Early in the contract year, ECI leadership approached I2D2 to discuss the possibility of supporting a new data collection effort that would supplement IowaGrants and help with future annual reporting. This work was not part of the original contract, but aligned well with the desire to expand the IA Data Drive to include more services data in the future. The team invested time brainstorming what the data collection would entail, and how we would incorporate all the service types, funds allocated, and performance measures reflected in ECI approved tools. A Qualtrics survey was developed and pilot tested with a subgroup of Area Directors. A mid-year survey was collected in January 2025 to explore how directors are receiving their funds and what activities are underway as a 6-month interim data collection. This was something new for area directors, who historically were only asked to provide end-of-the-year data about their work. Many hours of TA and work with directors to ensure data quality was invested, and enhancements were made to the data collection tool for the next round of annual reporting which is underway (end of year summary data for FY25 will be collected by end of August 2025).

In the next fiscal year, as reflected in the new amendment to this contract, these data will be collected annually and analyzed to summarize yearly investments that I2D2 will develop into an interactive report and use to add indicators to the IA Data Drive.

2. ***New work to support pilot project THRIVE:*** Another extension of this contract involved support for a new program involving service navigation for families in crisis. ECI leadership approached the I2D2 team for support to create a data collection tool that would monitor investments in this program and provide monthly reports for leadership to guide their decision about future expansion or termination of the program. This work involved developing a data collection tool to capture intake information and follow-up data from ECI Thrive pilot sites focused on navigation services and attainment of available resources. The pilot began in November 2024 and is expected to continue through fiscal year 2026 where 4 sites will continue navigation services. The work in the current year involved on-going data collection tool support for the pilot sites, edits to the tool in response to feedback, monthly analyses and the creation of internal reports, and a final report for the first 6 months of implementation.



For more information about any of these projects or I2D2 processes, please visit our website or contact us. Stay in touch via [i2d2.iastate.edu](https://i2d2.iastate.edu) or follow us on LinkedIn via the QR code.