



2024

# Early Childhood Iowa Annual Report

January 2025



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Early Childhood Iowa (ECI) is a statewide initiative housed within the Iowa Department of Health and Human Services that unites public and private agencies, organizations, and stakeholders under one common vision, **“Every child, beginning at birth, will be healthy and successful.”**

The ECI system is composed of the ECI State Board with involvement and collaborations between the public and private sectors to promote efforts that build public awareness of the importance of early childhood development.

At the local level there are 34 Early Childhood Iowa areas representing all 99 counties. Each area has a citizen-led board to support activities to promote collaboration and develop systems in the community for young children and their families. In their role, ECI area boards develop a comprehensive community plan that includes data gathered through various assessment processes. This information assists the community in planning, funding, professional development and overall support of early childhood programming in the community.

Early Childhood Iowa exists to help every community in Iowa develop the capacity and commitment for using local, informed decision-making to achieve desired results for Iowa's youngest children and their families. Research has demonstrated, **“the first three years of life are a critical period for the human brain’s development.”** Furthermore, 90% of a human’s brain is developed in the first five years of their life. In response, Early Childhood Iowa works for Iowans to collaborate across early care, education, and health systems for the benefit of young children and their families.

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## ECI Works to:

- Promote evidence-based programs that increase quality of services to children and families.
- Collaborate across early care, education, and health systems for the benefit of young children.
- Bring together a variety of perspectives to problem-solve.
- Engage citizens in finding solutions to local needs and prioritizes investments.

During the early childhood years (0-age 5), yields real results (up to \$17.07 for each dollar spent in early childhood programming).

Research shows that investment in programs that provide child development services from the prenatal period until kindergarten entry had a scientifically positive impact on child outcomes.

Source: Zero to Three. (2024). Understanding brain development in babies and toddlers.

# Result Areas

Early Childhood Iowa was legislated to prioritize children, prenatal through age five, to increase their positive early childhood experiences along the pathways aligned with five legislated result areas: healthy children, safe and supportive communities, secure and nurturing families, secure and nurturing early learning environments and children ready to succeed in school.



Safe and Supportive Communities



Secure and Nurturing Families



Secure and Nurturing Early Learning Environments



Ready to Succeed in School



Healthy Children

## Iowa's early childhood system collaborates to ensure children are **healthy**



**1,994** children with special health care needs received a care plan from a child care nurse consultant.

**7,427** technical assistance contacts were made to child care programs.

**\$2,023,490** invested from local ECI Areas to support health and safety practices in child care programs.

## Iowa's early childhood system extended children's opportunity to be **ready to succeed in school**



**45,627** families received early literacy support and developmentally appropriate books for their children, ages 0-5, from local ECI Areas financially partnering with their local libraries for distribution of books.

**343** children from 11 ECI areas received safe and reliable transportation to access their early learning program (i.e. Head Start or preschool program) who otherwise would not have been able to attend.

## Iowa's early childhood system supports **safe and supportive communities**



**471,820** children ages birth through age five need every community's dedication to their first 2,000 days (2023, Woods and Poole Population Estimate).

## Iowa's early childhood system partners to support **secure and nurturing families**



**93%** of families served were able to improve or maintain their healthy functioning, problem-solving, or communication skills.

**39.9%** of families enrolled in an ECI funded family support home visitation program were first time moms (first time parenting children).

**70** evidence-based family support home visitation services funded across the state by local ECI Areas.

**4,543** families were served in home visitation prevention services.

**63.9%** of families served had a household income of 125% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) or below.

## Iowa's early childhood system prompts and funds **secure and nurturing early learning environments**



**\$556,447** invested to provide start-up, expansion, business education, health and safety improvements, or quality improvement activity grants to child care businesses (known as the Business Investment Program).

**\$1,428,822** invested to increase the quality of programming in early childhood environments. Supporting recruitment and retention of staff via wage enhancements, awarding achievement bonuses for participation in the Iowa Quality for Kids (IQ4K®), and completing professional development courses were efforts for increasing quality child care slots.

# Strategic Plan Goals

System-building is the paramount function of ECI and cannot be done unless all pieces of the system interact with each other to perform a particular function as a whole. Equally important is the notion that a system maintains its existence through the mutual interaction of its parts.

At a state-level, professional development for the early care, education, health, and family support workforce is one of these system-level collection of parts designed to strengthen opportunities for establishing a qualified field of professionals who are ready to meet families where they are in need. All initiatives are aligned with the ECI Strategic Plan and support professional development activities across the areas of early learning, family support, health, mental health, and nutrition. Across each of the five strategic plan goals, the use of allocated funds and extended partnerships are highlighted accordingly.



## Goal 1

Promote a coordinated infrastructure to advance the early childhood system.



## Goal 2

Build public will for investing in young children and families.



## Goal 3

Transform the early childhood workforce through formal education, improved professionalization, increased skills and competence, and new approaches to implementing best practices.



## Goal 4

Ensure young children and families receive the services they need when they need them.

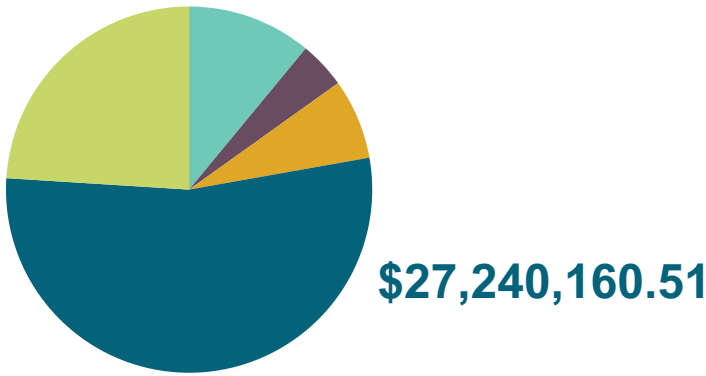


## Goal 5

Improve the quality of early childhood services for young children and their families across early care and education; health, mental health, and nutrition; and family support services.

# Funding Amounts

ECI local investments per strategic plan goals



## Strategic Plan Goal 1

Local Administrative Expenses	\$2,560,488.00
Coordinated Intake	\$272,894.00
Preschool Scholarship Coordination	\$168,080.02

**Total Investments: \$3,001,462.02**

## Strategic Plan Goal 2

Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation	\$577,274.00
Public Awareness/Child Fair Family Events/Resource Community Events	\$192,654.90
Mental Health Supports: EC-PBIS (training, coaching, consultation)	\$358,716.78

**Total Investments: \$1,128,645.68**

## Strategic Plan Goal 3

Professional Development (local conferences for child care providers)	\$75,643.12
Professional Development (training for child care providers)	\$396,407.23
Technical Assistance: Consult, Mentor, Coach for Child Care Providers	\$1,463,518.74

**Total Investments: \$1,935,569.09**

Overall FY24 investments (inclusive of FY24 allocations and FY23 carry-forward amounts)

## Strategic Plan Goal 4

Concrete Goods (car seats)	\$33,437.33
Crisis Emergency Child Care	\$15,158.73
Preventative Dental Care	\$491,160.16
Early Care and Education Scholarships	\$1,626,826.00
Family Support Home Visitation Services	\$11,019,080.00
Family Support Parent Education	\$1,010,060.00
Health Prevention (nurse partnerships, hearing screening, ASQ screening, referral assistance)	\$36,100.75
Prenatal/Postnatal (Nest programs- incentive-based group-based programs, nurse partnerships)	\$281,734.94
Transportation (access to Head Start and preschool programming)	\$179,924.00

**Total Investments: \$14,693,481.91**

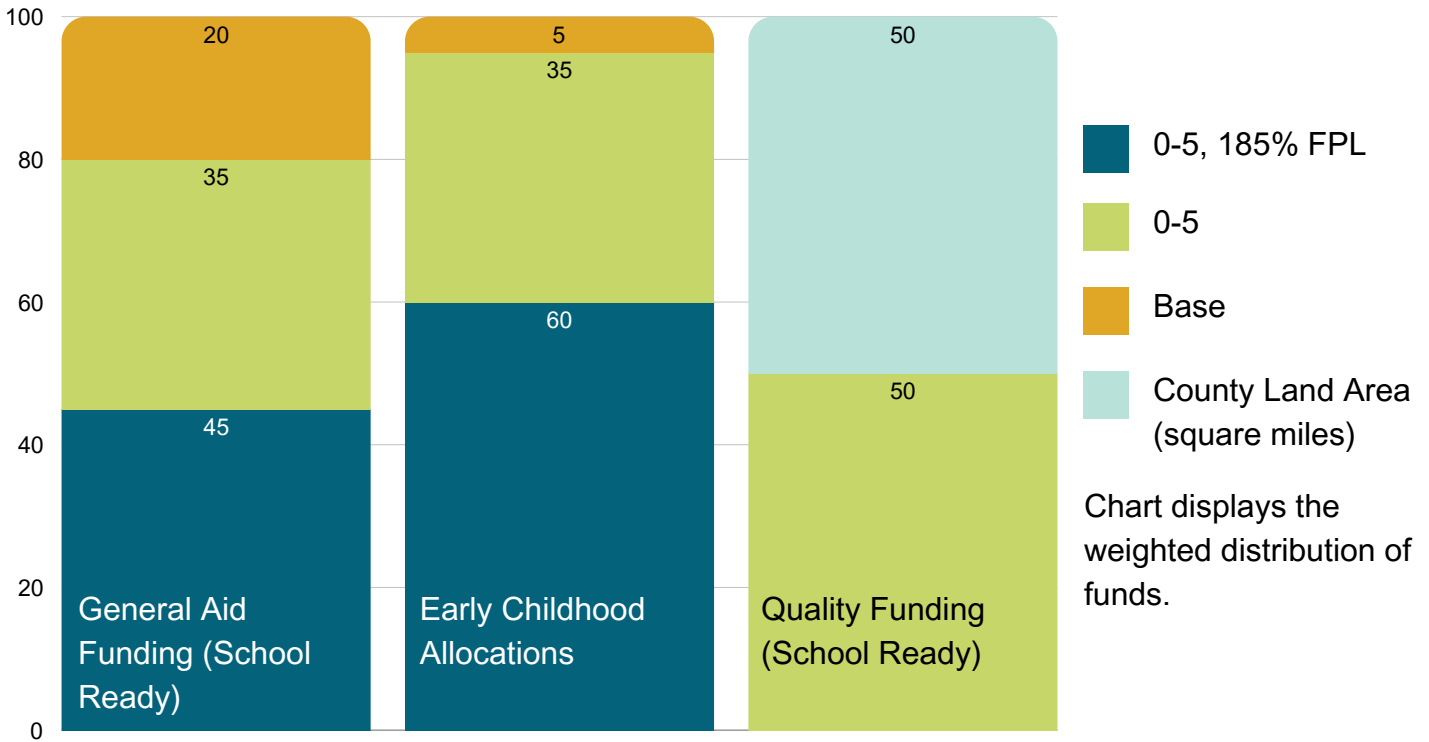
## Strategic Plan Goal 5

Child Care Business Investment Program	\$556,447.21
Child Care Nurse Consultants	\$2,023,490.36
Early Care and Education Supportive Services (expanding the day for Early Head Start & Head Start, full-day preschool opportunities)	\$2,876,779.00
Literacy	\$131,632.36
Child Care Business Investment Program	\$968,296.00

**Total Investments: \$6,556,644.93**

# ECI Funding Model

- Early Childhood Iowa’s funding has three distinct areas that receive the funds.
  - General Aid Funding (School Ready)
  - Early Childhood Allocations
  - Quality Funding (School Ready)
- Each area has a formula for fund allocation.
- In addition to the base allocation for each area, the following measures are factored in as area funding decisions are made:
  - The number of 0–5-year-olds at or below 185% of Federal Poverty Level (FPL)
  - The total number of 0–5-year-olds
  - Land area



## Total Fund Allocation

- The funding formula is applied to the entire state allocation.
- The ECI State Board makes decisions using the formula for the amount of funds available to the local boards.

After funding amounts are determined, the following process takes place:

Local ECI boards issue RFPs in January-March (associated with the needs within the ECI area).

ECI area boards submit budgets to HHS through Iowa Grants for review by HHS staff.

The school ready and early childhood budgets are reviewed for allowable uses of the funds through the use of a scoring tool.

Local areas are issued contracts by HHS for the approved funding amounts.

Local ECI areas create contracts with local services that align with approved funds.



# ECI Funding History

All grants are distributed via formulas (see ECI Funding Model).

## Early Childhood Grants

The Iowa State Legislature appropriates state general funds (prior to FY 14 these were federal Child Care Development Block Grant Funds) for community grants to enhance the quality and capacity of child care through:

- Regular child care and provider recruitment
- Child care for mildly ill children
- 2nd and 3rd shift child care
- Provider training
- Support for registration and licensure

## Timeline

- Oct. 2009** An across the board reduction of general funds resulted in a funding decrease of \$500,000 to the ECI area boards.
- FY14** the Iowa Legislature changed the source of the early childhood funds from federal Child Care Development Block Grant Funds to state general funds. This change reduced the fiscal requirements that were associated with federal funds and local area boards felt were burdensome.
- FY19** ECI began a 4-year process to phase in a new formula for early childhood grants. In previous years, the formula was based on the number of Family Investment Plan (FIP) cases per county.

## School Ready Grants

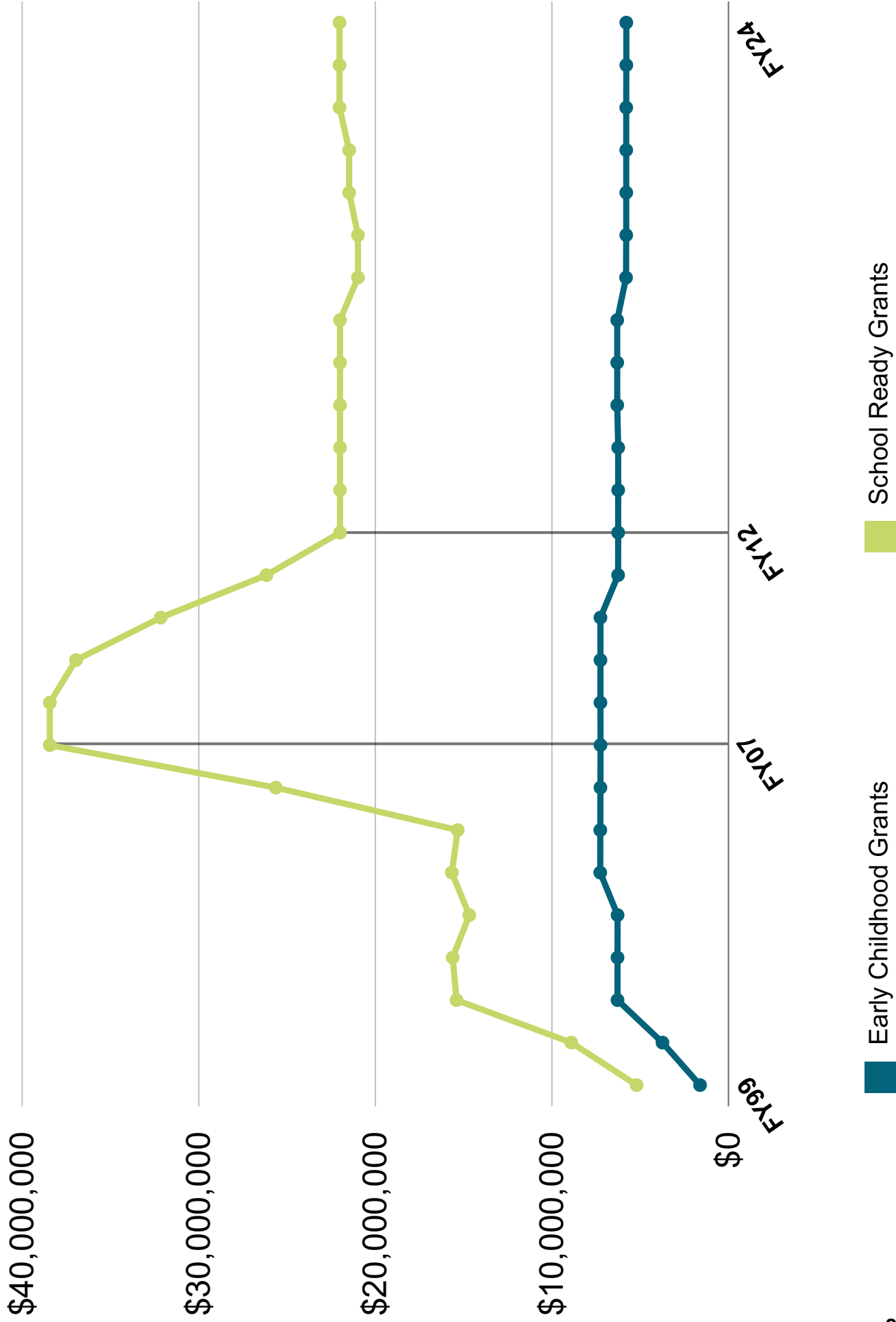
The Iowa State Legislature appropriates state general funds (and Healthy Iowans Tobacco Trust (HITT) funds in 2002- 2009) for community grants to support comprehensive services for children ages 0 through 5 including:

- Preschool support for low-income families
- Family support and parent education
- Quality improvements
- Other early care, health and education services

## Timeline

- Healthy Iowans Tobacco Trust Funds
- |             |             |             |             |
|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| <b>FY02</b> | \$1,153,250 | <b>FY06</b> | \$2,153,250 |
| <b>FY03</b> | \$1,153,250 | <b>FY07</b> | \$2,153,250 |
| <b>FY04</b> | \$2,153,250 | <b>FY08</b> | \$2,153,250 |
| <b>FY05</b> | \$2,153,250 | <b>FY09</b> | \$2,153,250 |
- FY18** Through legislation, the spending categories for preschool and family support are rolled into the general aid category allowing for more flexibility at the local level.
- FY18** \$2,229,368 shall be used for efforts to improve the quality of early care, health and education programs.
- FY18** \$18,753,801 is appropriated for supporting family support, preschool support service and general aid.
- FY22** Administrative expenditure limit of 3% of the School Ready Grant award was legislatively raised to 5%.

# ECI Funding History





## Featured Local Story

### Impact in Action

In June, Louisa Healthy Families held their annual picnic. This event is highly anticipated by families throughout the year. This year, families enjoyed participating in multiple activities which included a handprint or footprint painted craft, coloring station, summer bucket list project and fruit loop necklace activity. While families were enjoying the activities together, the service coordinator was able to connect with families, gather feedback and each family completed a client satisfaction survey.

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One conversation stood out as I was connecting with families on the impact Louisa Healthy Families has had on them. [S] was in tears as she shared their family was getting ready to graduate from the program this fall when their son enters kindergarten. [S] shared how the program has connected her family to multiple needed resources, identified vision concerns while [their child] was under 12 months of age (ended up having eye surgery), helped find financial support while being diagnosed with diabetes during pregnancy with her most recent child, taught their family the importance of reading (Mom shared this was not part of their culture) and continues to bring engaging activities for all children in the home and how to best prepare each to enter school. Mom shared multiple times how the family support professional (parent educator) has been a blessing in their life and will always be part of their family.

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## Featured Local Story

### Referral for Service

Jasper, Marion, Poweshiek (JMP) ECI Area Board

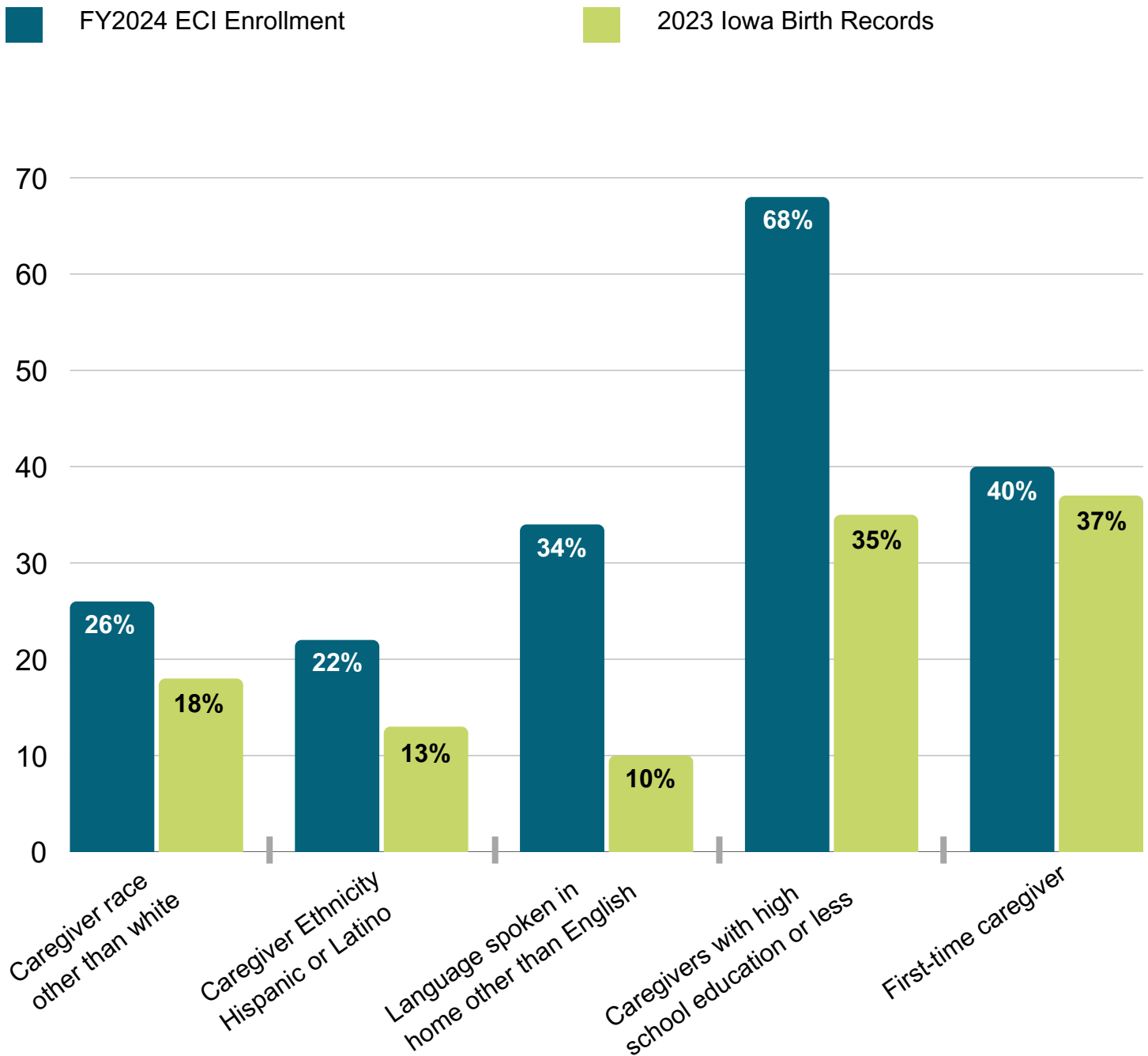
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“A local physician requested a postpartum visit for new parents who were young and hadn't had much education. This visit ended up being almost 3 hours. Considering this couple was barely out of high school, a lot of education was needed. I assisted with breastfeeding. Mom had decided to stop formula feeding and pumping all the time, to nursing at breast. After many tries, we got baby to latch using different positions. They hadn't had any education on home safety, back to sleep, purple crying, CPR basics, breastmilk storage, how to cope with crying, WIC, maternal health services, developmental guides and general care. They don't have support in the area and the mother doesn't know how to drive a car. We discussed postpartum depression at length, and she is now receiving medical care, but will soon be on her own, with her partner returning to work. This visit was a very gratifying one, as I felt there was teaching needed and done in almost every basic parenting subject. A good relationship was developed, and I strongly encouraged her to reach out if she has anymore needed. I felt I had made a big difference in the couple's parenting role, breastfeeding, and just in general”

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# ECI Family Support Program Enrollment Versus Statewide Averages

## ECI Family Support Enrollment Compared to all 2023 Iowa Births



Note: The 2023 Iowa Birth Records data was retrieved from HHS's 2023 Vital Statistics Birth Records data. Demographic data from Iowa Birth Records is based on Parent A, which is most often the mother of the child.

# Prevention Focused:

## Family Support is Child Abuse Prevention

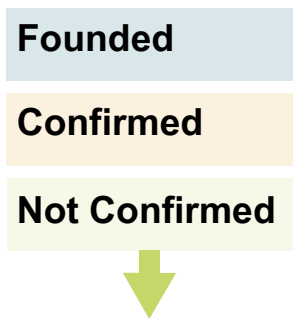
ECI is invested in primary prevention services. ECI supports the investment in family support programming through home visitation and parent education services, ensure children have a safe and stable family and that all families have access to support services to safely and successfully raise their children.

Primary prevention plays a significant role in nurturing the lives of families toward a trajectory of preventing Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) that lead to child abuse and neglect. Focusing on prevention shifts the focus from relying on the child welfare system to investing in communities by supporting family stability and wellbeing.

Family support home visiting takes place in the homes of at-risk families that often lack support, experience and knowledge of basic parenting skills. Families are referred to home visiting programs from a variety of sources including medical providers, childcare providers, Women, Infants & Children (WIC) program and public health. Family risks are self-reported and plans of risk intervention are created by trained family support professionals. Families complete developmental, depression, parent child interaction and relationship assessments. Studies have found a return on investment of \$1.80 to \$5.70 for every dollar spent on home visiting. This strong return on investment is consistent with established research on other types of early childhood interventions. (National Home Visiting Research Center Yearbook)

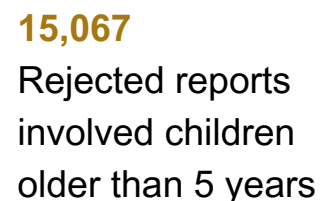
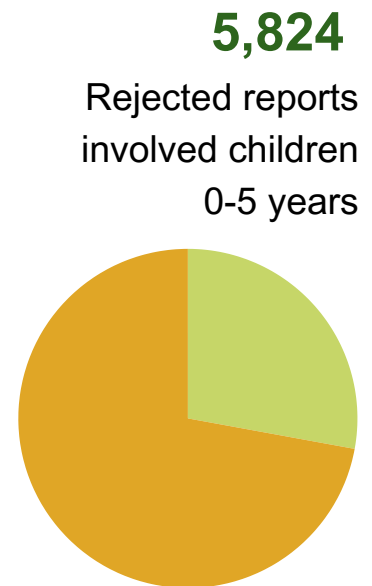
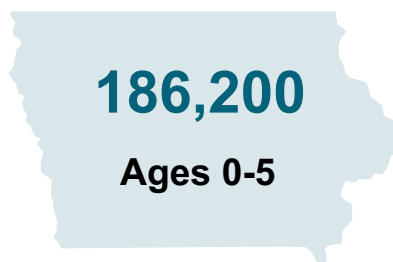
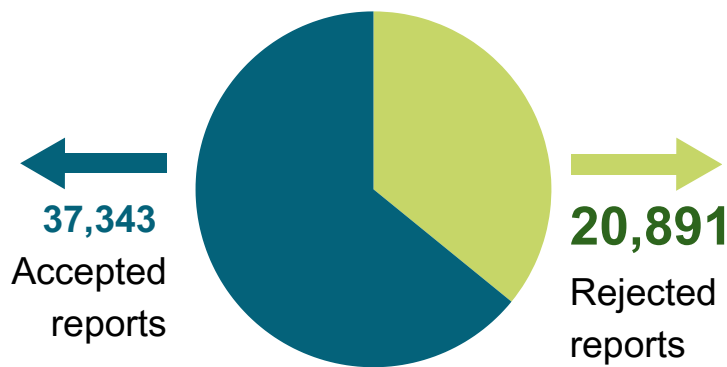
## SFY24 Total Child Abuse Reports Received

### Assessment



**6,556**

“Not confirmed” assessments involved children ages 0-5. All were referred to services.



<b>County/Counties</b>	<b>ECI Area Name</b>
Adair, Dallas, Madison, Warren	4 R Kids Early Childhood
Adams, Ringgold, Taylor, Union	Quad Counties 4 Kids
Allamakee, Clayton, Howard, Winneshiek	HAWC Partnerships for Children
Appanoose, Davis, Lucas, Monroe	4 Counties For Kids
Audubon, Carroll, Greene, Guthrie	Partnership 4 Families
Benton, Tama	Better Tomorrows
Black Hawk	Cedar Valley's Promise
Boone, Story	BooSt Together for Children
Bremer, Butler, Franklin, Grundy	Together 4 Families
Buchanan, Delaware, Fayette	Building Directions for Families
Buena Vista, Crawford, Sac	BVCS Early Childhood
Calhoun, Pocahontas, Webster	Linking Families & Communities
Cass, Fremont, Harrison, Mills, Monona, Montgomery, Page, Pottawattamie, Shelby	Thriving Families Alliance
Cedar, Jones	Cedar/Jones Early Childhood
Cerro Gordo, Hancock, Worth	North Iowa Children's Alliance
Cherokee, Lyon, Plymouth, Sioux	Northwest Early Childhood Iowa
Chickasaw, Floyd, Mitchell	FMC Early Childhood Area
Clarke, Decatur, Wayne	Kids First Communities Early Childhood Iowa Area
Clay, Dickinson, Osceola, O'Brien	Lakes Region Early Childhood Iowa
Clinton, Jackson	Clinton/Jackson Early Childhood
Des Moines, Henry, Louisa, Washington, Muscatine	DHLW - Muscatine Early Childhood Area
Dubuque	Dubuque County Early Childhood
Emmet, Kossuth, Palo Alto, Winnebago	Early Childhood North Central Iowa
Hamilton, Humboldt, Wright	Building Families
Hardin, Marshall	Iowa River Valley Early Childhood Area Board
Ida, Woodbury	Siouxland Human Investment Partnership
Iowa, Jefferson, Keokuk	Iowa, Jefferson and Keokuk Counties ECI
Jasper, Marion, Poweshiek	Jasper, Marion, Poweshiek Early Childhood Iowa
Johnson	Johnson County Empowerment
Lee, Van Buren	Children First
Linn	Linn County Early Childhood Iowa
Mahaska, Wapello	Mahaska Wapello Early Childhood
Polk	Polk County Early Childhood Iowa
Scott	Scott County Kids Early Childhood Iowa

# Local ECI Area Boards

