



Southeast Iowa Early Childhood

Early Childhood is Everyone's Business



# Southeast Iowa Regional Early Childhood Plan

2022 COMPREHENSIVE UPDATE

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# Introduction and Overview

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## Purpose

The purpose of the 2022 Edition is to provide a comprehensive update of the Southeast Iowa Regional Early Childhood Plan 2018. This document reviews progress toward goals, highlights ongoing assessment activities, identifies relevant community changes, and establishes new and/or revised indicators.

## 2022 Edition – COVID impacts and system changes

The EC Advisory Committee met in November 2021 and began the work of assessing next steps and evaluating the process for a new plan. Several key issues had a significant impact on the focus of conversation and planning.

- The impact of COVID on how programs function and families participate was profound. Access to, and delivery of services was still being re-defined and developed in a pandemic/post pandemic community.
- Significant state level system changes were underway with unknown impact. The [alignment](#) of the Iowa Department of Human Services (DHS) and Department of Public Health (IDPH) into one Health and Human Services (HHS) agency was in the initial stages.
- Several key organizations that provide a substantial number of programs to young children and families were planning for contract and service area changes with the Collaborative Services Area ([CSA](#)) process through IDPH. Service area boundary changes for key early childhood organizations were expected.
- Pandemic relief funds increased resources at an overwhelming pace and had already raised concern for sustainability beyond COVID.

# Assessment Process & Analysis

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## Assessment Process

The EC Plan updates were developed through a process of reviewing other local assessments, collecting and analyzing data, and gathering feedback throughout state fiscal year 2022. Presentations of data and discussion were formally completed with the DHLW (Des Moines, Henry, Louisa, Washington) Early Childhood Area and Children First (Lee, Van Buren ECI) during board retreats and at EC Advisory Committee meetings. Other opportunities for feedback included regular childcare networking in Donnellson, a childcare focus group in Washington (May 2021), and various city level childcare discussions across the region.

Parent focus groups were planned for in October 2021 offering families several different ways to join in a discussion. Although efforts were made for virtual, in-person, and hybrid discussions only one parent completed an interview and shared their experiences. The one parent interview was not used in the planning

process to protect confidentiality. Local parent feedback was provided through the state-wide family survey conducted by Iowa State University in partnership with Early Childhood Iowa.

## Early Childhood Advisory Committee

The EC Advisory Committee met in November 2021 and reviewed regional program data, census data, and demographics. 19 participants, representing ECI, CCR&R, family support, AEA, Community Action, Public Health, 1<sup>st</sup> Five, and childcare, provided feedback on current indicators and suggestions for new ones. The uncertainty of state level system changes along with COVID related impacts on all programs, influenced consensus to build on and enhance what the region

currently has rather than develop and plan for new initiatives. The pandemic paused services and required stakeholders to re-examine what the system might look like over the next several years. It was determined that the *EC Plan 2018* goals are still relevant and the work is not done.

A SWOT analysis was completed from the initial EC Advisory Committee meeting and edited with additional planning meetings and discussion by the local ECI Area Boards. Results from the SWOT guided discussions on what has been accomplished since 2018 and potential new strategies was compiled. Common themes were identified during planning meetings. Workforce, mental health/behavioral health, and family engagement are 3 main topics effecting the early childhood system.

### WORKFORCE

The need for staff, and retention of staff has consistently dominated the discussion of childcare, but the significant lack of workforce now affects all early childhood services today.

### MENTAL & BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

Behavioral health was identified in the original plan and given priority as one of the 4 goals. The pandemic amplified concerns about the need for increased and new resources.



## FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

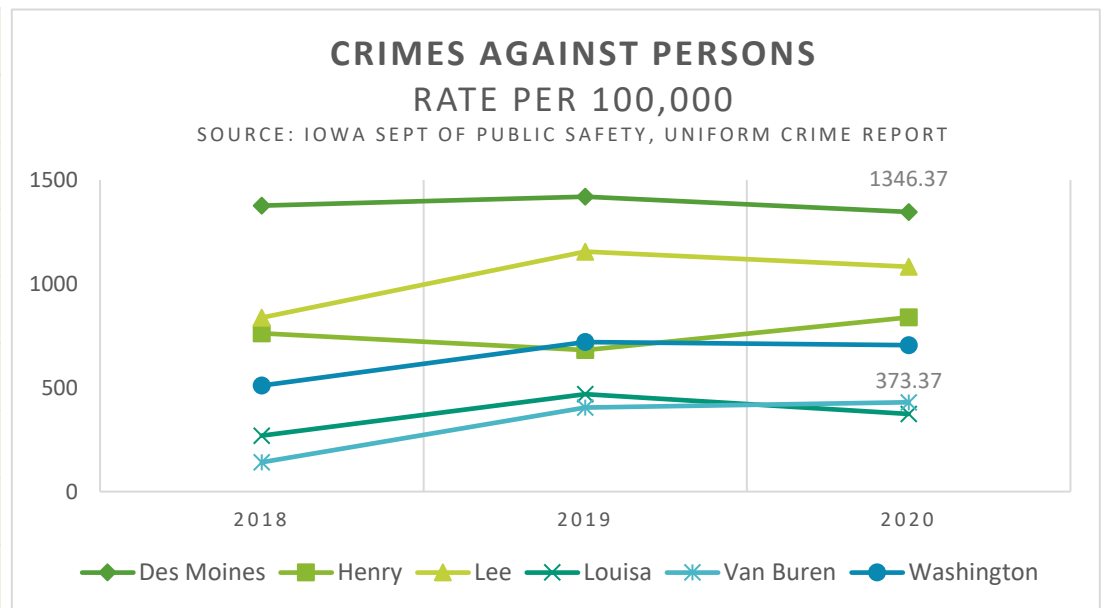
Family participation in programs and community activities was declining pre-pandemic. Virtual participation has generated new options, but engagement in direct resources and services has not rebounded to pre-pandemic numbers.

### Data snapshot

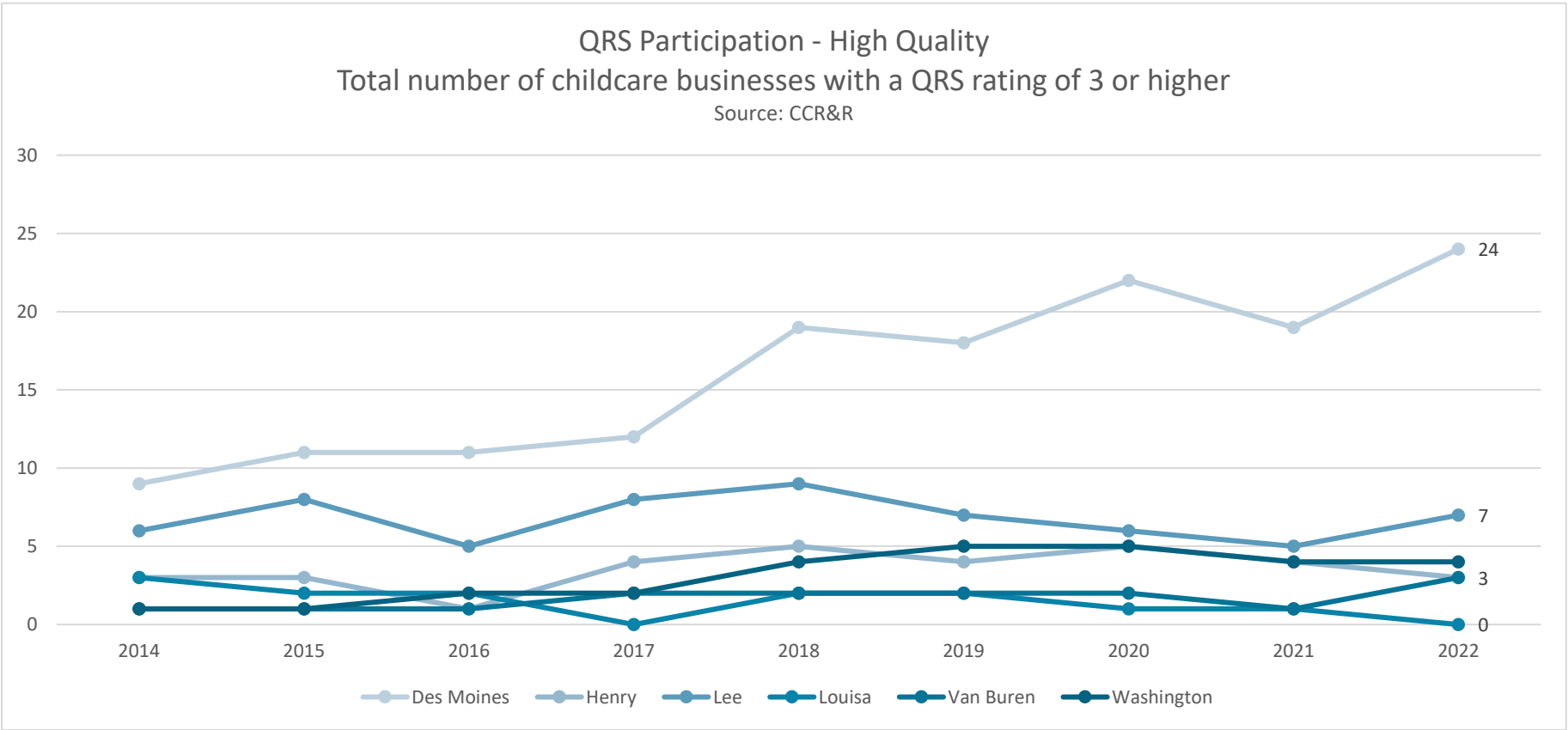
Data was regularly updated and reviewed during planning meetings. The challenge of analysis in 2021 was gauging the level of impact on numbers by the pandemic. Census 2020 information was delayed and limited in some categories. Some education statistics were not available. Population and childcare trends were noted as a couple key issues impacting the early childhood system.

The majority of the region is rural and is declining in population. Only 2 out of the 6 counties increased in population since 2010, Henry by 1% and Washington by 3%. The increases are not sufficient to offset the losses in Des Moines and Lee counties. Washington County is a 30 minute or less commute to Iowa City, attracting families seeking residence closer to an urban setting. Crime rates in Lee and Des Moines counties trend high and may deter new families.

Population by County			
Source: US Census Quick Facts (April 2010 & Estimates July 2021)			
	2010	2021	Percent Change
Des Moines	40,325	38,491	-5%
Henry	20,145	20,387	1%
Lee	35,862	33,215	-8%
Louisa	11,387	10,749	-6%
Van Buren	7,570	7,243	-5%
Washington	21,704	22,491	3%
Total	136,993	132,576	-3%



The need for additional high-quality childcare has been a priority in the region for several years, but has recently dominated discussions across communities and included new stakeholders. The business community and economic development partners are more involved in direct efforts to increase supply and access. The advantage of new partnerships has helped with advocacy and awareness, but the emphasis on quality is sometimes lost in the focus on slots. Des Moines County has the largest number of registered homes (58) and licensed centers (16) along with a positive trend of childcare businesses who have earned high quality ratings. Increased awareness of childcare has potentially increased parents understanding of quality. As families prioritize childcare based on level of quality, childcare businesses prioritize the need to achieve it.



## Other assessments

### *Resilient Communities*

The planning process included a review of other regional and community-based assessments that relate to families and young children. Two projects received *Resilient Communities* grants and have completed comprehensive assessments. The Burlington Community School District received a grant to focus on homelessness and has established the Des Moines County Resources and Resiliency project as a network of resources for students and families. The Lee County Health Department received a Resilient Communities grant to focus on child abuse and prevention. The report identifies that Lee County has one of the highest rates of child abuse in Iowa. Contributing factors to the high abuse rate include, childcare challenges, violent crime, substance abuse, mental health, poverty, and various at-risk parental characteristics.

### *Childcare studies*

Childcare market studies were completed for Lee and Washington counties. First Children's Finance provided comprehensive market analysis of the current childcare landscapes. The Washington County study was completed in 2021 and determined a potential need of an additional 844 fulltime year-round childcare spaces. The Lee County study was completed in 2022 and determined a potential need of an additional 1611 fulltime year-round childcare spaces. Both studies included parent surveys and identified that the preferred type of childcare desired is a licensed center.

### *Family Survey*

An ECI Family Survey was conducted winter/spring of 2022 by Iowa State University and [I2D2](#). Responses specific to the 6-county region were provided to local ECI Area Directors. A total of 129 respondents shared feedback regarding services for families in the area. Key results from the survey that were incorporated into committee discussion include:

- 80% (Lee/Van Buren) & 72.4% (DHLW) identified **cleanliness** as the most important factor for selecting childcare
- 62.5% (Lee/Van Buren) & 60.4% (DHLW) identified **waiting lists** as the factor that makes using services difficult
- The top 2 services identified as low adequacy in DHLW were **crisis intervention** and **domestic violence support**
- The top 2 services identified as low adequacy in Lee/Van Buren were **mental health** and **domestic violence support**
- Lee/Van Buren families identified **'jobs that cover my expenses'** as the most important (62.1%) area of support needed
- DHLW families identified **'awareness of available services'** as the most important (46.2%) area of support needed

# Goals

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As a result of the planning process and feedback gathered from the EC Advisory Committee and local ECI Area Boards the *EC Plan 2018* primary goals and areas of focus remain in effect for the region. Accomplishments relating to those goals and new areas of interest or strategies were identified and incorporated in this comprehensive update. Strategies and potential projects will be reviewed and revised by stakeholders at various early childhood stakeholder meetings throughout the year.

## Goal 1 – Promote professional quality child care business.

### *Accomplishments*

- ❖ New childcare centers: Two new licensed childcare centers opened in 2021. The Mt. Pleasant Community Childcare renovated a vacant Family Video building and opened July 2021 to serve 30-40 children. The Burlington Community School District utilized an old elementary building and created Corse Early Childhood Center. The project brought multiple services under one building including, Head Start, district 4 year preschool, 3 year old preschool, and a licensed childcare center serving children 1-4 years of age.
- ❖ Public Private Partnerships: Awareness of childcare as a critical piece of community development has increased significantly. New community and business leaders are a part of the conversation and willing to help with efforts to increase access.

### *Strategies*

- ❖ Develop opportunities to increase the average earning wage of childcare professionals. Include efforts to improve benefits and stipends for time spent in professional development.
- ❖ Create initiatives or incentives for centers and homes to implement evidence-based curriculum.
- ❖ Continue efforts to research the feasibility of a substitute pool for childcare.
- ❖ Build on new relationships with business community to enhance funding supports for quality childcare and to promote family friendly workplaces.



## Goal 2 – Cultivate a local mental health system that is clear and accessible.

### *Accomplishments*

- ❖ Early Childhood – Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (EC -PBIS): A pilot project was developed in collaboration with 4 ECI Area boards to create an EC-PBIS program serving childcare homes and centers in a 10-county region. The project began with start up funding by Children First and was fully launched in July 2022 through Henry County Agricultural Extension, funded by all 4 ECI Areas. The program includes 3 EC-PBIS consultants available to childcare professionals seeking support in working with children experiencing challenging behavior. Services include face to face consultation and ongoing training and coaching.
- ❖ Collaboration: The SEIL Mental Health Region has created a Children’s Behavioral Health Advisory Board. The current Chair and Vice – Chair roles are filled by ECI Area Directors and meetings are regularly attended by various early childhood system stakeholders. As a result, communication among stakeholders has increased, resources are being shared, and all stakeholders are better informed to serve families.
  - ✓ The Children’s Behavioral Health Advisory Board completed an asset map that connects families to mental resources in each county.

### *Strategies*

- ❖ Research viable ways to increase mental health professional recruitment in SE Iowa. Work with local community colleges and other schools to advocate for students getting into the field of mental health.
- ❖ Promote healthy mental health activities in community events and parent groups.

## Goal 3 – Enhance safe and healthy environments for young children.

### *Accomplishments*

- ❖ Child Care Nurse Consultants (CCNC): All 6 counties are covered by a CCNC. Collaboration between Trinity Muscatine Public Health, DHLW Area, and Muscatine Area created a sustainable fulltime CCNC position to expand services. Childcare centers and homes across the region had access to specialized nurses during the pandemic to provide consultation and support.
  - ✓ 24 childcare businesses achieved a QRS 3 or higher in 2022.

### *Strategies*

- ❖ Increase awareness of CCNC services, especially with home providers.
- ❖ Enhance access to health and safety items such as car seats and pack-n-plays through programs like [Safe Kids](#).

## Goal 4 – Ensure ongoing early childhood advocacy and education for parents, caregivers, and communities.

### *Accomplishments*

- ❖ Southeast Iowa Early Childhood Summit: The annual EC Summit is a collaborative event primarily funded by 3 ECI Areas, with additional support from local CPPC, Decat, 1<sup>st</sup> Five, Public Health, and family support programs. The summit completed its 7<sup>th</sup> annual event in April 2022. The 2022 EC Summit hosted 3 concerts by Jim Gill in 3 different communities, and 55 childcare providers representing 11 counties received 6 hours of DHS approved training.

### *Strategies*

- ❖ Improve efforts to invite individuals not typically attending early childhood activities/meetings to be involved.
- ❖ Increase early childhood advocates who are representative of the community.
- ❖ Enhance efforts to gather parent/family feedback. Utilize the summit to improve survey responses and increase parent involvement.

# Indicator Revisions

Results from the comprehensive update identified that some previously used indicators did not provide appropriate and/or reliable data to inform decision making. The chart below outlines changes to *Appendix A – Indicator Trend Data* in the Southeast Iowa Regional Early Childhood Plan.

INDICATOR – EC PLAN 2018	INDICATOR EC PLAN 2022 UPDATES	REASON FOR CHANGE
# of childcare business with a QRS	# of childcare business with a QRS	No change
# of childcare business with a QRS 3 or higher	# of childcare business with a QRS 3 or higher # of childcare business with an IQ4K rating	Aligns data with implementation of the new quality rating system released in 2022. Childcare businesses will remain in both systems until QRS is phased out.
# of registered homes, non-registered homes, and licensed centers/preschools	# of registered homes, non-registered homes, and licensed centers/preschools	No change
% of students with an IEP		Remove - Data not helpful in evaluation. Additional indicators relating to mental/behavioral health are being considered for future use.
# of suicides by county	# of suicides by county	No change
# of pediatric Physicians		Remove - Data not useful
# of domestic abuse victims by county	# of domestic abuse victims by incident characteristics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children present, unharmed</li> <li>• Children present, harmed</li> </ul>	Replaced - Data by type provides more information on how children are directly impacted
% of adults with a BMI of 30 or more	Child Immunization Rate	Replaced - Childhood obesity was a key issue, but community indicator data is not available. Immunization rates added to reflect current assessment and discussion about child health.
% of households spending 30% or more of income on housing	% of households spending 30% or more of income on housing	No change
Violent crime rate by county	Violent crime rate by county	No change
Child Abuse	Child abuse	No change
Child poverty rate	Child poverty rate	No change
% of students reading proficient at 3 <sup>rd</sup> grade level	% of students reading proficient at 3 <sup>rd</sup> grade level	No change
Graduation rate		Remove – data did not inform decision making