

Tama County Empowerment Board Members will be meeting with Benton County Empowerment Board members to discuss joint merger options, in response to SF 2088, on Thursday, April 15, 2010 at Windsor Manor in Vinton, IA.

This bill allowed for State and Local Level Changes to the Empowerment organization.

At the local level (Tama County) – this bill means the following changes will need to take place by July 1, 2011:

- Local boards, effective July 1, 2010 will be called Early Childhood Iowa Areas (ECI).
- An ECI area may not encompass more than four counties, and all counties in an area must have contiguous borders. Currently Tama and Benton County are single county areas.
- 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. Tama County, from U.S. Census Bureau 2008 estimates, has 1,331 children 0 – 5 years of age. Benton County has 1,909.
- Counties that do not meet that criterion must combine with at least one other county to serve as an Early Childhood Iowa Area.
- A ‘level of excellence’ rating system will be developed that will allow for more recognition of each level of achievement. Currently areas go through a re-designation process.
- Does allow funding to be carried forward to the newly created merged area.
- Governing board (newly defined/merged local area) members cannot be a service provider or person working for any other entity that receives funding from Early Childhood Iowa.
- State ECI Board may offer funding flexibility for those local ECI areas that receive the highest designation of excellence, but only what is allowed by Legislative Appropriation.
- Unique student identifiers will be assigned to children who receive funding through ECI to measure the impact of ECI programming.

Current funding priorities in Tama County are Healthy Children, Children Ready to Succeed in School, Safe, Secure, Nurturing Families and Child Care Environments. Benton County’s priorities are: access to education opportunities for child care providers, parents and extended families; access to quality preschool and daycare opportunities, access to quality health care services, and address family violence issues.

Currently Tama County Empowerment funds the following programs: Child Care Consultant, Professional development for Child Care Providers, Nurse Consultant, Home Visits, Healthy Families Coordination, Parents as Teachers Home Visitation Program, Care for Kids, Stork's Nest, Dental Hygienist, Spanish Interpreter, Respite Scholarships, Lead Care Coordination, Preschool Scholarships, Quality Improvement for Preschool Facilities, Transportation, and the Coordinator.

Currently Benton County funds the following programs: Nurse Consultant, Provider Classes, Child Development Fair, Newsletter for Home Providers, Child Care Coordinator, QECE, scholarships/preschool tuition, Healthy Families Home Visits, Child Home Care Consultant, and the Coordinator.

Iowa's community empowerment program is nationally recognized as an exemplary model of citizen engagement in developing programs and services to improve young children's healthy development and readiness for success in school. Iowa invests in local community boards that have designed and funded strategies to strengthen and support families in nurturing their young children from birth to five years; improve the quality of care of children in all settings; and foster coordination across health, education and other services children and families need. These local boards leverage community resources and voluntary organizational efforts and community activities, often through civic and faith organizations, to support Iowa's young children.

This year, the governor and Iowa Legislature rewrote the community empowerment statute and changed the name from Iowa Community Empowerment to Early Childhood Iowa. Through an extensive debate and review of the operations of both the state and local community empowerment boards, the Legislature reaffirmed the citizen structure and multi-agency emphasis of Early Childhood Iowa.

Community Empowerment was subject to more scrutiny and review than almost any other state government program, and it passed with flying colors. The review showed that, with limited staffing but strong citizen engagement, Community Empowerment demonstrated its ability to maintain sound financial records and strong oversight over expenditures while designing programs to meet the needs of each community.

Community Empowerment has a particularly strong emphasis upon tracking the quality and impacts of the services it provides, with performance and child outcome measurement used for continuous improvement. This statewide early childhood initiative was established in 1998 with nearly unanimous bipartisan support and included an innovative and ground-breaking provision which required the reporting of results.

For more information regarding Empowerment/Early Childhood Iowa you can visit www.tamacounty.org/Empowerment or contact Lori Johnson, Tama County Empowerment Coordinator, at

641-484-4788 or www.bcepowerment.com Heidi Schminke, Benton County Empowerment Coordinator, at (319) 472-4543.
