



Heartland AEA: Improving Services

Early Childhood

Volume III Issue 4

The purpose of this newsletter is to provide information about the current improvement efforts at Heartland AEA 11. For more information, please contact Steve Jones, Communication Specialist, at 515-270-9030 or 800-255-0405.

Why is Iowa emphasizing Early Childhood?

There have been ongoing efforts in Iowa to improve the quality education and outcomes for citizens. The Iowa Learns Council met for more than a year to determine what Iowa needed to do to provide a world-class, seamless educational opportunity for our children. The council recommended that we begin with our youngest children. Gov. Vilsack indicated in his State of the State address in January 2005 that we must have a comprehensive commitment to these young learners that coordinates and integrates early childcare and education.

How has NCLB impacted early childhood?

We have seen a substantial increase in accountability and outcomes focused on kindergarten through 12th grade achievement. Many children begin school at levels defined as failing, and schools immediately experience the challenge of helping them catch up. It is unnecessary for many children to begin at these levels of failure because effective early childhood programs and interventions can significantly impact their educational future. AEAs have a responsibility to support these efforts.

What are the AEAs' continuous improvement priorities in early childhood?

The following six priorities were developed by the Early Childhood Special Education Leadership Network:

- Integrate Early Childhood Special Education services with Iowa's Early Care, Health and Education System and coordinate our efforts within the evolving statewide system.
- Implement the Iowa Department of Education's Quality Preschool Program Standards to ensure quality placements for children receiving ECSE services.
- Help implement the Iowa Early Learning Standards.
- Create a comprehensive plan of personnel preparation and professional development.

- Provide leadership to advance assessment practices and data use that serve to improve developmentally appropriate practices, instruction and outcomes for young children.
- Strengthen our vision, goals and leadership in early childhood and our ability to advocate for all young children, including those with disabilities.

What is Heartland AEA doing to improve support for early childhood efforts?

Heartland currently provides a full array of services to children from birth to school age. Heartland partners with the Department of Education and other service providers across central Iowa. To improve these services and provide assistance to more children and families, additional early childhood staff will be hired for the 2005-06 school year.

What changes in speech-language pathology services will support early childhood efforts?

Heartland's speech-language pathology services area is realigning for the 2005-06 school year. As a result, each school district will have speech-language pathologists assigned to provide services as either an early childhood SLP or K-12 SLP.

This alignment will allow the speech pathologists to focus more on the communication and literacy needs of the specific age groups. We know that children begin school with a five-year language and literacy history and that the experiences and interactions during that time have a significant impact on future school achievement. We are excited to have the opportunity to significantly impact the outcomes of students in your districts by a realignment of services and support to children prior to coming to kindergarten. In addition, the K-12 SLPs will continue to support student literacy outcomes both by direct service and by consultation and collaboration particularly in the areas of phonemic awareness, vocabulary and comprehension.