



Resultant

Iowa Health
and Human Services

What Every State Can Learn about the Workforce-Child Care Connection from Iowa

Most families at some point weigh the emotional and financial costs of obtaining available child care. In 2020-2021, 14% of Iowa children ages five and younger had a family member who quit, changed, or refused a job because of challenges with child care. Additionally, working Iowa parents and guardians lose an average of \$3,350 annually due to related issues, such as having to miss work because child care falls through. These choices carry a heavy weight not only for the family, but for the state's economy as well.

In response to Iowa Governor Kim Reynolds' [Child Care Task Force report](#), Resultant partnered with early childhood and education policy and finance nonprofit consulting firm Opportunities Exchange in spring 2022 to assess Iowa's child care transactional data integration. That led to a formal strategic partnership with Iowa Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and Iowa State University (ISU) to foster solutions to address key barriers in Iowa's child care system.

AN OPERATIONAL DATA STORE BRINGS A VISION TO LIFE.

HHS had a vision that would enable providers' child care management software (CCMS) to input data seamlessly into state systems. This would facilitate direct transactions with subsidy systems and provide insights into supply and availability. HHS had an additional goal of the interface fueling a family-facing child care search portal with real-time vacancy information.

To make those cutting-edge outcomes achievable, we first needed to solve for data integration. [Part one of the story](#) explains how we collaborated with ISU to build the operational data store (ODS) that made these outcomes possible. This second part discusses how the ODS made HHS's vision a reality.

FINDING AND FILLING THE DATA GAPS MAKES ALL THE DIFFERENCE.

For families across the country, the hunt for available, affordable, child care is overwhelming. They have to navigate numerous websites to research providers, plan routes around work and school times and locations for multiple children of different ages, and figure out costs and what potential subsidies they may qualify for.

One of the biggest challenges the original data integration overcame was enabling multiple, private business software platforms (providers' chosen CCMS) to feed relevant information into state systems while preserving business privacy. The new cloud-based Child Care Connect (C3) system has the capability to add additional systems, integrate them, and create new visualizations as needed.

But in the development process, we discovered a key gap in the data: how many seats a child care provider has available. Usually, the only way to learn if a provider truly has available openings—a number that changes day to day—is to call or stop by. Iowa was in the same boat as most states in that this specific data didn't exist anywhere in their systems.



WHY TIMELY, ACCURATE DATA MATTERS IN EARLY LEARNING.

Many data collection systems default to the metric of how many seats a provider is *legally allowed* to have. Additionally, a data collection system may count a facility's total number of rooms without the ability to indicate that certain rooms, like a gymnasium or cafeteria, don't have an associated number of full-time care spots.

And often, that data only updates once each year.

Like most states, because of these standard methods of deriving data, Iowa's real child care availability numbers were inaccurate in the reporting. We had to find ways to get accurate data into the system fast and simply. What better source of that data than the providers themselves?

We built an efficient mobile-friendly data collection form to fill data gaps and refined this process through every step of development to include information to fill other gaps discovered. Because of this work, for the first time, a state has an accurate count of the number of available child care spots.

The child care supply and demand dashboards we developed help decision-makers see where certain types of child care services are needed. With accurate data, the state can identify the number of vacancies in comparison to real-time demand, identify geographical areas where supply is misaligned with potential economic need, and use that information to build targeted solutions.

But that's just the starting point. Iowa wanted to make things easier for families to find and access child care through an intuitive, user-friendly portal with dashboards.





IOWA'S IOWA CHILD CARE SEARCH TOOL AMELIORATES THE WORKFORCE/CHILD CARE PROBLEM.

Developed in partnership with HHS and ISU, this public-facing dashboard allows users of all technology comfort levels to access Iowa Child Care Search to find child care through an array of criteria.

By starting with the number and ages of children for which they are seeking care, users can see which providers have slots available. Inputting addresses for home and work to the tool brings up a map to which users can even add additional stops (like carpool pick-ups or school drop-offs). Provider locations populate the map with availability differentiated by color and facility type by icon. Clicking the provider provides further information such as certifications, specialties, and transportation availability.

Iowa Child Care Search has access points from many state and associated websites where families are likely to seek child care information, making it an easy-to-find one-stop resource to dramatically reduce the heavy lift of connecting to quality child care.

IOWA LEADS THE WAY IN WORKFORCE/CHILD CARE SOLUTIONS.

Today, Iowa families are among the first to have accurate child care availability numbers at their fingertips. Iowa decision makers have a system that offers daily insights into overall child care supply and demand, and an accurate, comprehensive public-facing portal to connect families with the child care they seek.

The supply and demand dashboard insights support decision-making, from workforce strategies to child care provider recruitment and retention to ultimately, legislative initiatives.

The public-facing portal quite simply makes life better and easier for families, child care providers, and employers.