# Story County Empowerment

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Vision:
Our Vision - Communities with the capacity and commitment to achieve these goals:

- Healthy children, ready for school
- Excellent childcare
- Nurturing families in safe environments

Mission:
The mission of the Story County Empowerment Board is to empower individuals and their communities to improve the well-being of children, age's birth to 5, and their families.

**Local Success Story ~** A pregnant single mother enrolled in the Meld Parenting Group program in the fall. Her infant had been born with a hearing disability, and the mom reported feeling stressed by both being a single parent and having extra responsibilities of numerous doctor appointments for testing and treatment with her child. Through involvement in the Meld program, this mom has made friends with experienced parents in the Meld parenting group who are supportive of her, and have acted as informal mentors to her. She has taken advantage of the childcare services offered during Meld programming, and has reported that having a break from parenting during the Meld group and experiencing the extra support from the other parents has been helpful in reducing her stress levels. She has also been introduced to community resources, including the Stork's Nest and Homeward (for breastfeeding support). Hospital personnel had already referred her to AEA. She is also consulting with one of the People Place staff members who is trained in teaching cued speech (a combination of lip-reading and signing). Research shows that parents who are less stressed and have a support network are more likely to be resilient, less likely to abuse or neglect their children. This is an example of the result of both the mom's group participation and the consultation efforts of the Meld facilitator.

## Why are the programs we support important to reaching our vision and mission?

- Families should have access to quality child care that provides a safe environment for their child when they cannot be with their family.
- Parents and primary caregivers sometimes need support to know how to help their child learn and grow to their potential.
- Quality preschool programs can help young children develop the skills (e.g., mental, social, emotional, physical) that will help them succeed when they begin Kindergarten and throughout their lives.

## COMMUNITY PLAN PRIORITIES:

1. Provide affordable, quality, accessible child and infant care.
2. Provide coordinated prenatal and postnatal services.
3. Provide affordable, quality, accessible early childhood experiences.
4. Provide educational training and support for parents and providers.

## What services/programs/activities do we support?

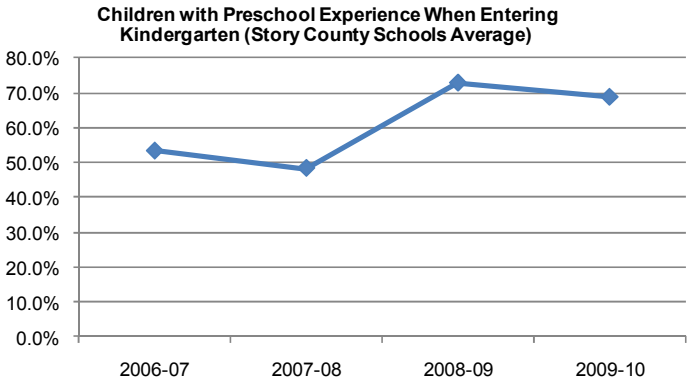
Early Success & Early Childhood Programs *(Ames Community School District)*, Child Care Nurse Consultant *(Mid Iowa Community Action, Inc.)*, Colo-Nesco Preschool Programs *(Colo-Nesco Community School District)*, Crisis Child Care Program *(Lutheran Services in Iowa)*, McCallsburg Child Care Program *(Colo-Nesco Community School District)*, Meld Parenting Groups *(Lutheran Services in Iowa/The People Place)*, Preschool Tuition Scholarships *(various providers)*, Provider CPR/First Aid Certification Training *(Center for Child Care Resources)*, Quality Child Care Project *(Center for Child Care Resources)*, Stork's Nest Program *(Youth and Shelter Services, Inc.)*, MICA Preschool Program *(Mid Iowa Community Action, Inc.)*, Story County Family Nutrition Program *(ISU Extension Story County)*, Story County Healthy Futures Program *(Youth and Shelter Services, Inc.)*, Story County Infant Network *(Center for Child Care Resources)*, Story County Parents as Teachers *(Lutheran Services in Iowa/The People Place)*, The Comfort Zone *(University Community Childcare)*, Countywide Needs Assessment Project *(facilitated by United Way of Story County, coordinated by a subcommittee of the Mid Iowa Quality of Life Alliance),* Empowerment Coordination Services

## How do we measure our progress?

### 1. Percent of children with preschool experience when entering Kindergarten.

#### How are we doing?

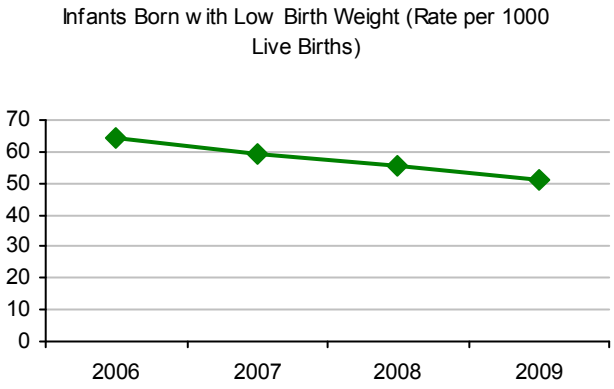
An increasing number of children entering Kindergarten in Story County schools are reported to have preschool experience. For the 2009-10 school year, the average percent of children entering Kindergarten in Story County schools dropped slightly compared to the prior school year. The Story County Empowerment Area supports initiatives to address quality in early learning environments, and to help children from low income families access quality preschool programs. Kindergarten Literacy Assessment (KLA) data by Story County schools for 2009-10 indicated three buildings used the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (i.e., DIBELS) assessment to report 75% of children were proficient (compared to 62% for the 2008-09 school year), and another six buildings used the Phonological Awareness Test (PAT) to report 35% of children were proficient (compared with 43% for the 2008-09 school year). The Empowerment area will continue to promote efforts to help children access quality early learning programs.




### 2. Incidence of infants born with low birth weight.

#### How are we doing?

Since 2006, the rate of infants born with low birth weight has decreased in Story County. The Story County Empowerment Area supports initiatives to provide education and supports for at-risk families during the prenatal period. Presence of fertility specialists in the local regional hospital may contribute to some fluctuations that have been noted over the years. The Empowerment Area will continue to promote efforts to provide supports and education for families during the prenatal, as well as the postnatal, periods.




### What can you do to help?

- Talk with child care and/or preschool providers, and those who offer family support and parent education focused programs; ask what they do to make sure they provide quality services for young children and their families.
- Learn more about early childhood initiatives and available programs and services in Story County. The Story County Empowerment website (www.storycountyfamily.org) is a good place to start; or contact the local Empowerment Coordinator.
- Attend a Story County Empowerment board meeting. The Board meets the first Wednesday of each month at 5:00 p.m. If you like the experience and want to become more involved, volunteer to serve as a member on the board.

### Others within our community working on similar issues:

- Story County Childhood Collaboration/Prevention Council
- Story County Community Partnership for Thriving Families (local CPPC initiative)
- Story County Decategorization
- Analysis of Social Services Evaluation Team (Story County ASSET ~ includes City of Ames, ISU Government of the Student Body, Story County, United Way of Story County, and Department of Human Services)