

# Appendix C: Connecticut Early Learning and Development Standards (CT ELDS)

## Development Process

Early learning and development standards are statements of what children from birth to age five should know and be able to do at various ages across their earliest years of development. These learning progressions serve as guides for the adults who support children's growth and development over time, providing a basis for planning experiences and providing support through the early childhood years. The Connecticut Early Learning and Development Standards (CT ELDS) will serve as the foundation for supporting ALL young children, no matter where they live, play and learn.

The Governor's Early Childhood Education Cabinet, along with the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) and the newly formed Office of Early Childhood, has devoted significant fiscal and human resources to creating rigorous and developmentally appropriate early learning and development standards. This process has taken place over the course of 2 ½ years, with development completed in October 2013.

## Background Work

As a part of Connecticut's 2009 application for American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funds for Head Start State Advisory Councils, early learning standards were identified as a priority area. The goal for this priority area was: By September 2013, Connecticut will adopt comprehensive and multi-domain early learning standards that reflect a progression of skills, birth through age five, aligned with kindergarten through grade 12 standards. A workgroup to address this goal was selected with the intention of ensuring wide, cross-sector input. The first meeting of the Learning Standards Workgroup was convened on June 22, 2011, and included representatives from the Connecticut Early Childhood Education Cabinet, the Connecticut

Department of Education, Head Start, higher education, early intervention, the Regional Education Service Centers, home care provider networks, public schools and the state chapter of the National Association for the Education of Young Children. A full list of workgroup members and their affiliations can be found in Appendix D.

The Learning Standards Workgroup relied heavily upon two guiding documents to inform the process of standards development:

- The Joint Position Statement of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education (NAECS/SDE): Early Learning Standards: Creating the Conditions for Success (NAEYC, 2012)
- Early Learning Guidelines Resource: Recommendations and Issues for Consideration When Writing or Revising Early Learning Guidelines (Scott-Little, Kagan, & Frelow, 2010)

In order to provide a strong background for members, the workgroup reviewed both current Connecticut documents and other state and national sets of early learning standards. After members had an opportunity to explore specific characteristics of these valuable documents, the group began addressing the various issues set forth by Scott-Little, Kagan & Frelow (2010) including: guiding principles, age ranges and groupings, domains and subject areas and the structure of the standards.

In the fall of 2011, shortly after the workgroup began this process, the United States Department of Education released its Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge application. Connecticut opted to address early learning and development standards as a key strategy under Focused Investment Area C of the Early Learning Challenge. The efforts of the



Standards Workgroup were coordinated with the Connecticut Leadership Team for the Race to the Top application and a detailed plan was developed for the learning standards work. Although funding was not granted to Connecticut, the plan outlined in the application served as a guide for the continued work of the Standards Workgroup.

The specific steps in the development process are outlined below. These efforts involved many local and national experts, in addition to the contribution of the Standards Workgroup members. A full listing of those who contributed to the various stages of this work is included in Appendix E.

### **Alignment and Gap Analysis**

The first critical step in creating new learning standards was a detailed and thorough alignment and gap analysis of Connecticut's current learning standards. The workgroup chose to draw upon existing documents as much as possible, both in an effort to ease the transition to new learning standards and to effectively capitalize on previous investments and resources used in creating standards documents. Determining the existing alignments of standards and identifying gaps involves intensive consideration of documents, which often have very different structure and language. Below is a list of the various alignment

projects conducted. The information gathered through this work was integral to the development of the first draft of the CT ELDS.

- Comparison of Common Core State Standards and Connecticut's preschool standards (the Connecticut Preschool Curriculum Framework): this process involved CSDE consultants as well as outside local experts in the area of Mathematics and English Language Arts. The alignment between documents was examined and a crosswalk document, including guidance for practice, was issued.
- Comparison of Connecticut's preschool standards (the Connecticut Preschool Curriculum Framework) and the Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Framework: the CSDE and the Connecticut Head Start Association engaged in an intensive and collaborative process to determine the alignments and gaps between these two documents. This process involved rating the degree of matches found, a cross check for agreement on the matches and the reconciliation of any discrepancies. The completion of this work resulted in the report: Crosswalk between the Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Framework

and the Connecticut Preschool Curriculum and Assessment Frameworks (Connecticut Head Start Association, 2012).

- SRI International’s Standards Alignment Study. This study included the following documents: Connecticut’s Preschool Curriculum Framework, Connecticut’s Kindergarten Science Curriculum Standards, Connecticut’s Kindergarten Social Studies Framework and the Connecticut Guidelines for the Development of Infant and Toddler Early Learning. A full report dated May 30, 2012, detailed the process and outcomes of this study (Hebbeler and Taylor, 2012).

### Drafting New Standards

On June 25 and 26, 2013, groups of experts in each of the identified domains were gathered to create a first draft based upon the structure outlined by the Learning Standards Workgroup. Each group utilized the information from the alignment and gap analysis studies, additional resources and research (including other state standards documents, K-12 standards and research) and crafted an initial draft of new birth-to-five standards across seven age bands.

This initial draft was reviewed by multiple experts throughout the state for further refinement in July and August of 2012. These reviewers considered the initial draft of the CT ELDS from one of several perspectives:

- Domain-specific feedback, including:
  - Breadth, depth and relative difficulty of skills addressed
  - The age appropriateness of the indicators
  - The placement of the indicators within the domain
  - The wording of the indicators
- The cultural relevancy of the indicators for diverse populations

- The appropriateness of the indicators for children who are dual-language learners
- The appropriateness of the indicators for children with special needs

Finally, EASTCONN, the acting fiduciary of the Connecticut Early Childhood Education Cabinet, worked with CSDE to synthesize the input and make revisions based upon the expert input. This resulted in the draft CT ELDS.

### Content Validation

The Standards Workgroup decided to adhere to the recommended practices for standards development set forth by Scott-Little, Kagan & Frelow (2010). Requests for Proposal were issued for both a Content Validation Study and an Age Validation Study. The review of the proposals submitted resulted in the recognition that additional funding would be necessary to support a methodologically sound age validation study. However, as a result of the RFP process, the Connecticut Early Childhood Education Cabinet entered into a contract with the National Association for the Education of Young Children to conduct a Content Validation Study. This study involved gathering feedback from national experts as to whether the skills, knowledge and dispositions in the Connecticut Early Learning and Development Standards reflect critical, comprehensive goals and a continuum of growth and development. This study was completed in September 2013 and revisions to the draft standards were made as a result of this report (Snow, 2013).

The Content Validation Study contributed greatly to the robust and thorough process Connecticut engaged in to create the Connecticut Early Learning and Development Standards, thereby ensuring that our efforts to support *All Children, In All Settings, Every Year*, are based on the strongest of foundations: sound early learning and development standards.