Connecticut Office of Early Childhood

Connecticut Core Knowledge and Competency Framework for Professionals Working with Young Children and Their Families

October 2016

Special thanks to: Peg Oliveira, an independent consultant who facilitated many conversations and authored numerous drafts of this Framework; the 2012 Workforce Workgroup of the Early Childhood Cabinet for initial funding to support large stakeholder meetings and subcommittee work; Alison Lutton, independent consultant; and Linda Warren, President of Early Childhood Associates, for insightful comments on earlier drafts.

Document design and layout by Studio 63, LLC, Bethany, Connecticut.

Connecticut Office of Early Childhood

I am pleased to introduce the **Connecticut Core Knowledge and Competency Framework for Professionals Working with Young Children and Their Families (CT CKCs)**. The CT CKCs serve as the foundational knowledge and skills for the early childhood workforce, no matter where interactions with children and families occur.

> *Core Knowledge and Competency Frameworks refer to the expectations for what the workforce should know (content) and be able to do (skills) in their role working with and/or on behalf of children and their families. They provide a foundation for professional learning decisions, professional development design, and quality improvement efforts.*[1]

The CT CKCs were developed based on the recommendations outlined in the *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation* authored by the Institute of Medicine and National Research Council of the National Academies (2015). The Connecticut Office of Early Childhood (OEC) is excited to present this work as a valuable resource across disciplines and settings to build professional learning opportunities and quality improvement. You will notice two parts to the document: a "shared core" that represents knowledge and skills evident in roles such as teachers and caregivers, home visitors, health and mental health consultants, and interventionists such as birth to three providers; and a unique core that represents additional knowledge and skills for teachers and caregivers in any setting.

Levels 1 and 2 of the CT CKCs are considered the shared core to promote a unified basic understanding across early childhood roles about:

- How children develop and learn;
- The importance of nurturing stable and engaging relationships;
- Understanding environmental factors that positively or negatively impact development, such as toxic stress and trauma;
- Supporting healthy environments;
- Understanding how observation and assessment work together to help identify child and family needs that inform a meaningful and relevant plan for child and family success;
- Promoting positive social and emotional behaviors; and
- Serving as a professional and advocate for all young children and their families.

Connecticut's vision is that all who assist young children and families, no matter the setting, will be confident and competent individuals able to support each child's growth and development in partnership with families as well as resource and referral networks.

Myra Jones-Taylor, Ph.D.
Commissioner, Connecticut Office of Early Childhood

[1]LeMoine, S., NAEYC 2008. *Workforce Designs: A Policy Blueprint for State Early Childhood Professional Development Systems.*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Overview

Introduction 7
Core Beliefs 10
Guiding Principles of Practice 12
Document Organization 13
Domain Descriptions 16
Conceptual Framework 23

Domains and Indicators 25

Domain 1: Promoting Child Development and Learning 29
Domain 2: Using Developmentally Effective Approaches for Facilitating Experiences 45
Domain 3: Building a Meaningful Planned Program of Learning and Development 61
Domain 4: Observing, Documenting, and Assessing 81
Domain 5: Building Family and Community Relationships 97
Domain 6: Promoting Health, Safety, and Wellness 113
Domain 7: Practicing Professionalism and Advocacy 131

Appendix

Glossary of Terms 145
References 151
Stakeholder Engagement 155

Young children thrive when they have secure, positive relationships with adults who are knowledgeable about how to support their development and learning and responsive to their individual progress.

IOM/NRC, 2015

THE CONNECTICUT CORE KNOWLEDGE AND COMPETENCY FRAMEWORK FOR PROFESSIONALS WORKING WITH YOUNG CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES

Those closest to children and families are critically important to holistically support each and every child, birth to age five, and their families. The research is clear that young children thrive when supported by nurturing adults who are intentional about engaging the whole child. Research about the developing brain and the importance of supportive environments and interactions that impact brain development is relevant to the entire early childhood workforce, regardless of role. Therefore, in consideration of the Institute of Medicine and the National Research Council recommendations regarding shared competencies, Connecticut created a shared set of core knowledge and competencies as foundational for interdisciplinary professional development and pre-service education. While the scope of this Framework is inclusive of children birth to age five, we recognize the overlap with public school systems that serve young children within the age band considered early childhood, which is through age eight. The core knowledge and competencies outlined in this Framework intersect, not in entirety, with the core knowledge and certification requirements for personnel serving young children in the public school system.

The Connecticut Core Knowledge and Competency Framework for Professionals Working with Young Children and Their Families includes perspectives from Education, Special Education and Early Intervention, Health, Mental Health, and Social Service disciplines to address the early childhood workforce that works most closely with children ages birth to five and their families. The roles addressed in this document include teachers in any variety of settings, home visitors, interventionists, and mental health professionals as appropriate. This "shared core" provides a set of competencies from a multidisciplinary lens that will be used as a foundation to construct or adopt role-specific competencies beyond those addressed in the shared core. Levels 1 and 2 in the Domains and Indicators section identify the shared core across roles, and Levels 3 and 4 identify the unique knowledge and competencies that build upon the shared core for the role of teacher and/or caregiver in any setting. Figure 1 depicts how the concept of a shared core is the foundation for building unique sets of competency frameworks for various early childhood roles.

Integrated Early Childhood Professional Development System:

A comprehensive system of preparation and ongoing development and support for all early childhood professionals working with and on behalf of young children. An integrated system crosses sectors serving early childhood education professionals working in direct and non-direct service roles.

NAEYC Workforce Designs

What Foundational Competencies are Shared Across Early Childhood Roles and What Competencies are Unique in Any Given Role?

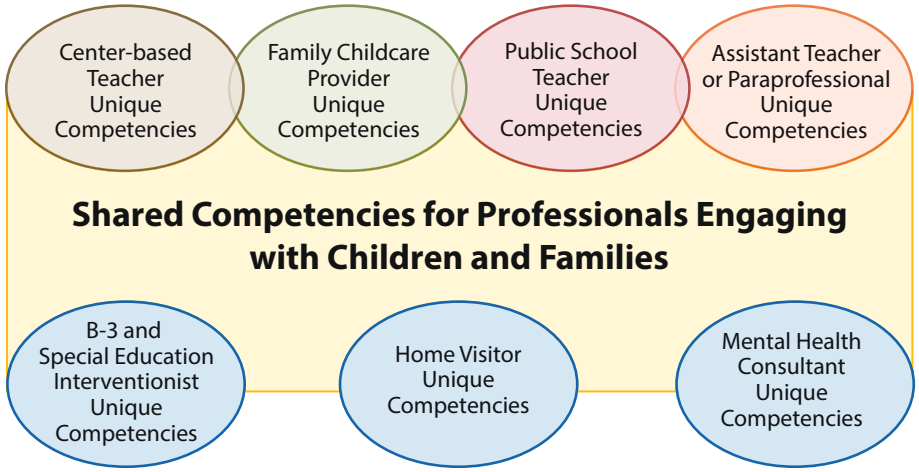


Figure 1

What are Core Knowledge and Competency Frameworks?

- Core knowledge and competencies refer to the expectations for what the workforce should know (content) and be able to do (skills) in their role working with and/or on behalf of children and their families. They provide a foundation for professional development design (including instructional practices) and other quality improvement efforts. LeMoine, S., NAEYC 2008. *Workforce Designs: A Policy Blueprint for State Early Childhood Professional Development Systems.*

Why Have Shared Core Knowledge and Competencies?

- To create a common language across disciplines and roles.
- To create a common thread of professional development expectations for competency growth.
- To better serve children and families in reaching their goals, as "the more we know, the better they grow." Connecticut Office of Early Childhood (OEC)
- To develop interdisciplinary training and support aligned articulation across higher education institutions, professional development entities, and public policy work across agencies.

Connecticut's Core Knowledge and Competencies Will Be Used To:

- Inform practice.
- Guide professional development design to keep current with emerging practice across disciplines and roles.
- Inform policy regarding workforce development.
- Provide a common language in contracting and planning for professional development.
- Provide guidance in settings where professional development goals are developed.
- Provide the Office of Early Childhood and other agencies with language to collaborate with higher education institutions and professional development designers around shared workforce goals.
- Support higher education institutions to assess their current planned programs of study using the CKCs to address articulation across institutions.
- Assist the OEC Early Childhood Professional Registry in organizing data on training offered and individual learning recordkeeping.
- Build upon evidence-based models.

CORE BELIEFS

The following Core Beliefs were adapted from other states' work, such as New York[1], and reviewed by Connecticut stakeholders to form the foundation of the seven competency Domains in this Framework:

- Children are born ready to learn.
- The family is where children gain their first experiences in life and is the most prominent and continuing influence in a child's life.
- All children and their families, regardless of their racial or ethnic origins, value systems, faiths, abilities, customs, languages, and compositions, must be equally respected and deserving of the opportunity to succeed.
- Families and children have the right to access support systems that foster their growth and development.
- Every human being is unique, with diverse modes of learning and expression as well as experiences, interests, and strengths.
- Children are worthy of the same respect as adults.
- Children's needs for shelter and for physical, intellectual, emotional, and social nourishment must be met for them to grow, develop, and reach their fullest potential.
- Children are social beings who need to be engaged in meaningful relationships.
- Children develop the capacity to reach their optimal development when they are in secure, trusting relationships with adults that provide safe, nurturing environments.
- Children learn through play, both simple and complex. Teaching and learning are dynamic, integrated, and reciprocal processes.

- Children learn through self-directed play as well as meaningful, intentionally planned experiences, in a typical sequence of awareness, exploration, inquiry, and application.
- Social and emotional learning are critical to every child's ability to self-regulate, to identify their own feelings, to cultivate flexibility in thinking, and to interact successfully with others.
- Children construct knowledge based on their curiosity and are driven by their interests as well as through interactions with adults and other children.
- Children learn best when exposed to and engaged in high-quality environments, interactions, and relationships.
- Children learn best through everyday activities with nurturing people in familiar contexts and when the adults in their life work in partnership with one another.

[1]NYC Early Childhood Professional Development Institute 2012.
New York Core Body of Knowledge: New York State's Core Competencies for Early Childhood Educators.
Available from http://www.earlychildhood.org/pdfs/CoreBody.pdf

GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF PRACTICE

- Build productive and reciprocal **partnerships with children, families, and communities,** recognizing that children are best understood in the context of their family, culture, and society.
- Support **child development and learning** by understanding that children develop at individual rates, but in a predictable sequence, and applying this knowledge in practice.
- Maintain a **safe, healthy, and nurturing environment** for children.
- Support **essential dispositions** that foster competent learners as outlined in the *Connecticut Early Learning and Development Standards* for children ages birth to five.
- Build a **meaningful planned program** to advance all areas of each child's development, including social, emotional, intellectual, communication, and physical competence.
- Use developmentally appropriate techniques to **facilitate effective learning**.
- Systematically **observe, document, and assess** children's behavior and development to inform planning for individual experiences, as well as to recognize and meet individual needs.
- Make a commitment to **professionalism and advocacy** by maintaining an open mind to inclusion while engaging in ongoing development of skills, and working collaboratively with others to improve the quality of early care and education services for all children and families.

DOCUMENT ORGANIZATION

This Framework is organized by Domains that mirror, with some modifications, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Standards and Guidelines for Professional Development and the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) Initial Educator Preparation Standards for Early Childhood Specialists. These Domains were intentionally included for the shared core as well as the teacher/caregiver unique competencies so that pre-service and in-service entities could utilize this Framework in alignment with their approval systems and consider how interdisciplinary modifications could be made to their existing work. Domains, Subdomains and Categories are listed below. The Indicators are represented later in the Framework.

1. Promoting Child Development and Learning

A. Child Development

1. General Knowledge of Domains, Stages, and Milestones
2. Fostering Healthy Relationships

B. Influences on Development

1. Environmental Influences
2. Risk Factors Impacting Children
3. Meeting Individual Needs

2. Using Developmentally Effective Approaches for Facilitating Experiences

A. Fostering Competent Learners

1. Essential Dispositions
2. Interactions and Experiences

B. Facilitating Learning

1. Intersect of Content and Implementation
2. Use of Diverse Approaches
3. Individual Ways of Knowing and Learning

DOCUMENT ORGANIZATION *(continued)*

3. Building a Meaningful Planned Program of Learning and Development

A. Using Content Knowledge to Build a Meaningful Planned Program

1. Building a Planned Program
2. Language Development and Communication
3. Domains of Learning

B. Contextual Factors in Building a Meaningful Planned Program

1. Developmentally Appropriate Environment
2. Interactions with Materials
3. Daily Routines and Support
4. Families and Communities

4. Observing, Documenting, and Assessing

A. Screening and Assessment to Promote Positive Outcomes for All Children

1. Early Childhood Screening and Assessment
2. Conducting Appropriate Screening and Assessment
3. Observing and Documenting to Inform Planned Program

B. Communicating Screening and Assessment Results and Engaging Families and Others in the Process

1. Engaging Families
2. Professional Partnerships

5. Building Family and Community Relationships

A. Creating Respectful and Trusting Relationships with Families

1. Family Systems
2. Communication
3. Maintaining Professional Relationships

DOCUMENT ORGANIZATION *(continued)*

B. Engaging Families in Their Child's Development and Learning

1. Family Engagement Opportunities
2. Special Education and Health Needs

C. Utilizing Community Resources to Support Families

1. Connecting Families with Resources and Services

6. Promoting Health, Safety, and Wellness

A. Regulations, Best Practice Standards, and Safety Procedures

1. State, Federal, and National Standards and Practices
2. Emergency Preparedness
3. Healthy, Nurturing Environment to Promote Development
4. Children's Health Needs
5. Mental Health
6. Nutrition

7. Practicing Professionalism and Advocacy

A. Foundations in Early Childhood Profession

1. Identifying Self as a Professional
2. Commitment to Continued Professional Development
3. Ethical Standards and Professional Guidelines
4. Advocating for Children, Families, and the Profession

B. Valuing Diversity

1. Diversity and Cultural Competence

1. PROMOTING CHILD DEVELOPMENT AND LEARNING

Knowledge of child growth and development is critical to every role in the early childhood workforce. Early childhood professionals should understand how to foster young children's learning and development and help parent(s) to support growth and development. Working in partnership with families to tailor experiences that nurture individual differences supports children to reach their full potential.

Key Concepts

Professionals working with young children and families:

- Acknowledge and understand that positive relationships and supportive environments are the core of promoting healthy development.
- Understand what to expect regarding children's range of abilities in order to plan appropriate sequences of action, adjust strategies, and pose manageable tasks and challenges to extend learning.
- Recognize that while all children are born ready to learn, development in each Domain impacts and is impacted by learning and growth in other Domains.
- Understand key developmental milestones and that development is progressive yet individualized.
- Recognize the influence of culture and family context on the developing child.
- Acknowledge the impact of risk factors on development.
- Are familiar with various theoretical frameworks addressing child development, and are able to use this information to provide appropriate and meaningful experiences for all children, and to provide support for families to address development.
- Use their understanding of young children's characteristics and needs to create nurturing learning environments and help others to also create environments that are respectful, supportive yet challenging, and aesthetically pleasing for each child.
- Consider each child's individuality in terms of personality, developmental level, temperament, learning styles, and ability levels.
- Understand how executive function and self-regulation are critical to healthy development.

2. USING DEVELOPMENTALLY EFFECTIVE APPROACHES FOR FACILITATING EXPERIENCES

The use of developmentally effective strategies and tools to promote development and learning is based on an understanding of child development and that positive relationships and interactions are the foundation of practice. This competency area focuses on the practitioner's role in designing interactions and experiences.

Key Concepts

Professionals working with young children and families:

- Recognize that the act of facilitating development and learning is complex and will vary depending on children's ages, characteristics, and the settings within which facilitating experiences occur.
- Are familiar with a wide array of approaches, program or curriculum models, facilitation/instructional strategies, and tools.
- Have a firm understanding of content appropriate for the role (Example: child development, mental health, family systems, academic content such as math, science, language development, etc.).
- Understand that children construct knowledge through hands-on, engaging experiences.
- Understand the goals, benefits, and limitations of equipment, materials, and daily routines.
- Demonstrate the ability to develop positive, nurturing, and respectful relationships that meet the needs of children with varying abilities.
- Support play as the primary strategy for development and learning.

3. BUILDING A MEANINGFUL PLANNED PROGRAM OF LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Early childhood practitioners must have a firm understanding of relationship-based practice, child development, and appropriate resources, in order to build a meaningful planned program that outlines goals and objectives for children and families that support continuous growth.

Key Concepts

Professionals working with young children and families:

- Know and understand the essential concepts, inquiry tools, and structure of their discipline.
- Are familiar with state and national standards that guide their discipline.
- Use their knowledge to design, implement, and evaluate a planned program that promotes positive development and learning for every young child, individually and in groups where appropriate.
- Use a planning process that responds to the strengths, interests, challenges, and cultural context of the children and families they work with.
- Are able to identify resources to deepen their understanding of content as needed.
- In partnership with families, use knowledge and resources to build a meaningful and appropriately challenging plan that achieves comprehensive developmental and learning outcomes for every young child, and as appropriate, a plan for families.
- Understand language development and communication strategies.
- Utilize the environment and materials to promote growth and learning.
- Recognize that ongoing assessment informs modifications to the plan.

4. OBSERVING, DOCUMENTING, AND ASSESSING

Assessment is the systematic collection of information and the continuous analysis of growth and development. This competency area covers the knowledge and skills to conduct responsible, ethical, and effective observation, screening, and assessment of young children, including but not limited to individual variations, developmental needs, and the identification of special needs.

Key Concepts

Professionals working with young children and families:

- Understand the goals, uses, benefits, and limitations of various assessment approaches.
- Know the difference between developmental screening and assessment.
- Recognize that regular and ongoing use of appropriate screening and/or assessment is central to the practice of early childhood professionals.
- Are familiar with the need to use multiple forms of assessment, including child observation in an authentic environment.
- Use valid and reliable tools for the purposes for which they are intended.
- Understand that observation and assessment must take place continually over time.
- Actively engage families in the assessment process to use information families provide to deepen the practitioner's understanding of context, skill, and needs.
- Use assessment methods and tools that are current and congruent with what is known about developmentally appropriate and culturally responsive practice.
- Use assessment information for planning and providing experiences to support each and every child's growth and development.

5. BUILDING FAMILY AND COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS

Children live in the context of families and communities. Professionals must respect this and consider all family structures and cultures. This competency encompasses the knowledge, skills, and dispositions required to value and respond appropriately to all aspects of family diversity – such as race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, culture, family composition, religion, age, ability, and home language.

Key Concepts

Professionals working with young children and families:

- Understand the complex characteristics of children's families and the communities in which they live.
- Respectfully communicate with families in a variety of ways to develop relationships.
- Understand that reciprocal relationships between family, practitioner, and community supports should empower families.
- Seek out information and encourage involvement from families in order to mutually support and build meaningful planned programs and individualized experiences.
- Use research-based knowledge of family relationships and parenthood to support their planning of experiences for children.
- Engage families in the assessment process.
- Develop mutual goals.
- Support families through special education referrals, if necessary, and connect families with community supports for family needs, such as parent education, mental health services, etc.

6. PROMOTING HEALTH, SAFETY, AND WELLNESS

Foundational to all practice is assuring the health, safety, and wellness of young children. Central to this competency is the belief that children's health is not simply surviving, but thriving. It is more than the absence of illness or injury; it encompasses promoting safety, nutrition, wellness, fitness, as well as physical, emotional, and social well-being.

Key Concepts

Professionals working with young children and families:

- Know current state and federal regulations and research related to children's safety and health.
- Understand how to handle emergencies to ensure safety while working with children and families.
- Understand that child and family health, nutrition, fitness, and physical and emotional health interact in ways that affect overall child and family well-being.
- Promote sound health, dental, nutritional, and emotional practices of young children and their families by modeling these characteristics and connecting families to culturally appropriate community health resources.
- Understand how mental health connects to overall health and well-being.
- Understand the effects of trauma.

7. PRACTICING PROFESSIONALISM AND ADVOCACY

Professionals should identify and conduct themselves as members of the early childhood profession. Professionals value the diversity of lifestyles, languages, beliefs, and cultural backgrounds that can be found in all aspects of our society, and advocate for policies that are free of bias and responsive to the varied needs of children and families.

Key Concepts

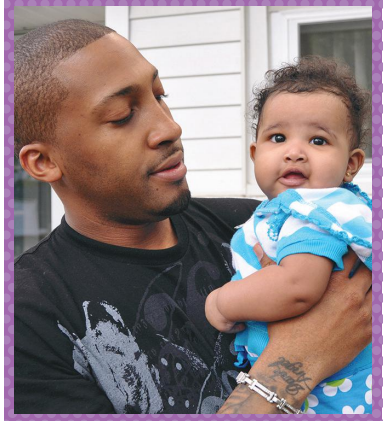
Professionals working with young children and families:

- Understand the complex services that constitute and shape the early childhood profession by engaging in activities that cross disciplines.
- Know and use ethical guidelines of their discipline and related disciplines.
- Are committed to continuous, collaborative learning about their discipline and related disciplines.
- Are aware of larger public and private systems that shape the quality of services available to children and families.
- Value feedback, reflective input, and critical perspectives on their work.
- Are committed to continuous, collaborative learning about their discipline, and to lifelong personal and professional growth.
- Are informed advocates for sound practices and policies that support child growth and development.
- Are cognizant of the relationship-based and intimate nature of working with diverse families, and engage in reflective practices, including reflective supervision.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR DEVELOPING THE CORE KNOWLEDGE AND COMPETENCIES INDICATOR LEVELS

Two theoretical structures, *Bloom's Taxonomy Revised* and *Webb's Depth of Knowledge*, were reviewed as considerations for indicator level development. Each Framework suggests that individuals develop depth and breadth in their thinking as they increase their understanding when supported with materials, concepts, and processes that support application and creation of new ideas or constructs.

Inherent in each of the seven Domains of the CT CKCs is the assumption that adults must have content knowledge about their discipline, be able to integrate that knowledge within the contexts in which they work, apply their understanding of content in a culturally responsive and inclusive manner, and maintain self-awareness about their thinking processes. The indicator levels in the shared core (Levels 1 and 2) describe the common intersect of knowledge, understanding, and emerging practice across early childhood roles described earlier. Levels 3 and 4 represent the specific role of teacher/caregiver and build upon Levels 1 and 2.



CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR DEVELOPING THE CORE KNOWLEDGE AND COMPETENCIES INDICATOR LEVELS *(continued)*

How Connecticut's Shared Core Knowledge and Competencies Were Developed

This work is a product of thoughtful coproduction by many individuals that represent a variety of agencies, child care settings, funding sectors, and roles, bringing a multidisciplinary lens of social service, education, intervention, mental health, and health to the process. The original draft of this document began in 2012, using the federal criteria outlined in the *Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge* proposal. At that time, partners engaged across disciplines, settings, sectors, and roles to share perspectives on the development of a Framework for the role of teachers working with children in all types of settings.

In 2015, the Framework has transformed to keep pace with the evolving landscape of early childhood policy and practice in Connecticut. First, government oversight for early childhood in Connecticut shifted from the State Department of Education to a new agency with a more expansive scope, the Office of Early Childhood. Additionally, the Institute of Medicine report on *Transforming the Early Childhood Workforce* was published, further informing the work of Connecticut's CKC plans. Finally, Connecticut's goals for reconstructing a professional development system in the context of an emerging quality improvement system continue to take form.

In response, this CT CKC Framework is designed to take on the challenge of creating a shared core that addresses each role described earlier and to outline the unique set of competencies for the role of teacher/caregiver. Future work on supporting documents to accompany this Framework, as well as the addition of a Technical Assistance Provider core knowledge Framework, is underway and will be available as additions to this Framework.