Meeting the Educational Requirements for Teachers Working in State-Funded Programs: A History of the Early Childhood Teacher Credential (ECTC)

Legislative Context
Public Acts 11-54, 12-50, and 15-134 amended CGS 10-16p outlining the educational requirements for publicly-funded early childhood programs. The legislation now states that by 2017 each program funded by the state shall have 50% of their teachers hold a Bachelor degree with a concentration in early childhood and/or a degree in early childhood, child development, child studies, human growth and development and the remaining teachers hold an Associate degree in the same areas. By 2020 100% of teachers in state funded programs shall hold a Bachelor degree in these areas.

The Associate and Bachelor programs are to be approved by the Office of Early Childhood in coordination with the Board of Regents or the Office of Higher Education as outlined in legislation. After July 1, 2015, individuals with a bachelor’s degree and 12 early childhood credits that did not graduate from an approved institution are eligible to be grandfathered as meeting the educator requirements. To obtain grandfathering status the individual must be working in a state funded program on June 30, 2015.

History
There have been advisory groups of higher education faculty, representatives of the State Department of Education, early childhood education providers and other stakeholders involved in the development of the standards, process, and implementation of the ECTC. The purpose of the ECTC is to improve teaching and learning in the early childhood classroom by providing higher education opportunities through colleges that utilize common standards of early childhood teacher preparation. The ECTC college approved path brings institution’s early childhood planned program of study in alignment with the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Professional Preparation Standards. Using NAEYC standards assists with articulation and transfer between colleges and provides consistency for the student.

2005:
- Public Act 05-245 was passed requiring a teacher with a bachelor’s degree in early childhood education or related field, approved by the Commissioner, in every School Readiness classroom by July 2015.
- A memo from Higher Education Early Childhood Coordinators was sent to the Early Childhood Task Force proposing a Birth to Age Five Teaching Credential and an Ad Hoc committee be formed to frame out the details.

2006-2007:
- The Ad Hoc committee was formed and became known as the Early Childhood Higher Education Consortium. This group consisted of early childhood coordinators from Community Colleges and Bachelor level institutions. Throughout the year, sub-groups of the Consortium framed out details that informed the work of the Early Childhood Cabinet Workforce Sub-Committee.

2008-2009:
- The Workforce Sub-Committee of the Early Childhood Cabinet (2008) developed a framework introducing the idea of an Early Childhood Teacher Credential.
  - A credential workgroup made up of representatives from higher education faculty, state agencies, the head start collaboration office, CT Charts-A-Course, CT AEYC, the Hartford Area Collaborative, and child care providers worked on standards and competencies, an alternative route, a program approval process, practicum experience requirements, Associate to Bachelor transfer, and out-of-country and out-of-state candidate requirements. This work was presented to the Commissioners of Higher Education and Education.

2010:
- The State Department of Education determined that a pilot should be conducted to see how prepared higher education institutions would be to meet the standards developed in 2009 and to test the approval process. The Office of Workforce Competitiveness supported this effort. A report was submitted to the Office of Workforce Competitiveness (see attached).
• Work began on the recommendations from the report through the Department of Education. Correspondence from the Department of Education went out to the original 2008-2009 credential workgroup inviting participants to 1) review the draft standards, alternative route, program approval process, practicum requirements, transfer articulation, and out-of-state candidate requirements, 2) make revisions given that NAEYC revised their standards for college program approval, and 3) respond to the impending new legislation (PA 11-54). Members of the group that met represented the Early Childhood Alliance, 2-yr and 4-yr faculty, CT AEYC, Charts-A-Course, the Hartford Area Collaborative, and Departments of Higher Education and Education. Some revisions were made to the competencies to align with the new NAEYC standards and a pilot process was discussed and approved to assess a program approval process designed for existing programs or development and approval of new early childhood concentrations and degree pathways.

2011:
• Public Act 11-54 enacted the requirement for state funded programs serving infants, toddlers, and preschool age children to have 50% of their classroom teachers hold a bachelor’s degree and 50% of their teachers to hold an associate’s degree. (see state-funded program guidance documents for details).
• In March 2011 a letter from the Commissioner of Education was sent to all 2-yr and 4-yr colleges inviting them to participate in a pilot phase of revising or developing early childhood concentrations and degrees. An application, a review process, and a technical assistance mechanism were developed for the project.
• The Early Childhood Cabinet Workforce Workgroup developed strategic goals focused on 1) approval of Bachelor and Associate degree early childhood programs in alignment with the NAEYC teacher preparation standards, 2) aligning competencies associated with multiple certifications and credentials to create a State Core Knowledge and Competency Framework for Early Childhood Educators, and 3) studying disparities in compensation in the early childhood workforce.
• The project consultants conducted site visits to each of the seven institutions interested in the pilot, provided technical assistance in completing the applications, reviewed the applications, and provided written feedback. A second round of reviews occurred in December 2011 addressing those institutions that needed to revise some materials. Feedback on the second review was sent to institutions.

2012:
• Seven institutions were approved by the Board of Regents and the Department of Education as successfully modifying their current early childhood programs to meet the standards: Bachelor level (Charter Oak, Goodwin, UCONN, and Post), Associate level: (Housatonic, Gateway, Goodwin, and Tunxis). Indicating interest for approval in 2013 were Mitchell, University of Hartford, a CSU consortium as well as other community colleges engaged in the NAEYC accreditation process. We expected other 4-yr and 2-yr colleges to indicate interest within the next 18 months.
• A Credential Advisory Committee was created as a sub-group of the larger committee to provide feedback as the implementation process occurs.
• A memorandum of agreement (MOA) was signed between the Department of Education and Charter Oak State College to co-design and implement the Individual Review Process for the Department of Education for those needing to submit documentation that they meet the educational requirements. A project coordinator was hired by Charter Oak State College to manage the work.
• Scholarship assistance was provided in accordance with the criteria outlined in legislation, to assist individuals attaining degrees.

2013:
• A pilot project was conducted to test the Individual Review Process using teacher’s portfolios. Findings from the portfolio development process and the training of the reviewers were discussed with the Credential Advisory Committee for final revisions to the scoring rubrics and portfolio guidance.
• Forums for teachers and directors were conducted around the state to roll out the process. Teachers started to apply for the Individual Review Route.
• Facilitated sessions for teachers were conducted with trained facilitators to assist teachers with their thinking process in order to make connections between their existing knowledge and skills and the standards.
• CT Charts-A-Course completed the ECTC application on-line build out and teachers are now applying for the credential. Credentials began to be awarded in July of 2013.
• Six more colleges were approved to offer the ECTC track: Bachelor level (ECSU), Associate level (Naugatuck, Quinebaug, Norwalk, Capital, Three Rivers).
2014/2015:

- Over 250 Credentials have been awarded to date.
- The Individual Review Route was transferred from Charter Oak State College to the Office of Early Childhood (OEC) where the majority of the process was contracted with CAEYC.
- Reinstatement of the ECTC Advisory Workgroup will be engaged in advising the OEC on modifications to the ECTC process and procedures.
- Northwestern and Asnuntuck Community Colleges were approved in June 2015.
- Conversations continue to deliver the ECTC through a collaboration effort between the four bachelor level Connecticut State Universities.
- Central Connecticut State University is developing an interdisciplinary major that would offer the Infant/Toddler ECTC and the CT Infant Mental Health certificate. The program is under development with a potential opening of fall 2016.
The goal of the Career Ladder Early Childhood Education project was to pilot a process for awarding an Early Childhood Teacher Credential (ECTC) to graduates from associate and bachelor’s degree programs in Connecticut. This project was developed to test recommendations by an ECTC workgroup regarding educational requirements to enhance the quality of the early childhood workforce. The major outcomes of this work is 1) ECTC criteria and competencies are in place for college and university programs, 2) three college programs are ready to be approved for the ECTC and four others are close to being ready to be approved and 3) information regarding the staffing requirements for appropriate technical assistance and the program approval process has been gathered.

The following specific steps were taken under this project:

- A Committee was established in December 2010 consisting of interested members of the original ECTC Committee with additional stakeholders added. The Committee revised the process and criteria for approval of associate or bachelor’s degree programs and the competencies that need to be met in accordance with changes in the standards of the National Association for the Education of Young Children. Graduates of approved programs will be eligible for the Early Childhood Teacher Credential.

- Announcements were sent to colleges and universities in the state explaining the ECTC pilot and requesting volunteer institutions interested in participating in the pilot. Four associate degree programs (Gateway, Housatonic, Tunxis and Goodwin) and four bachelor’s degree programs (Charter Oak, Goodwin, Post and UConn) submitted complete applications. Other institutions (including Capital, Middlesex, Eastern, Mitchell, Southern, Saint Joseph, and the University of Hartford) expressed an interest in participating once the first round of the pilot is completed.

- The ECTC applications required extensive information about the ECE program and how that program met the stated criteria and ECE competencies. In addition, the institution was required to demonstrate through five key assessments that students were meeting those standards and how data from those key assessments would be used for program improvement. Applications were reviewed by Dr. Deb Adams from the State Department of Education and the consultants on this project. In most cases, the institutions were asked to submit additional information. Since the two-year programs all recently prepared NAEYC Self-Study reports that addressed most of the pilot program criteria and competencies, only minor revisions were requested. The four-year institutions needed to submit more substantive information to address some criteria and assessment questions.

- To assist four-year institutions with the assessment process, a workshop was held in September on developing Key Assessments and rubrics. All applicant institutions and other four-year institutions were invited. This was done to provide technical assistance to institutions considering submitting applications in the future.
• The additional information submitted by the institution was reviewed. The process has been completed for Gateway, Housatonic and Tunxis Community Colleges and once the official approval process is determined, students graduating from these programs will receive the ECTC through an individual application process to SDE. Final revisions are being made by Goodwin (A.S. and B.S.) and the University of Connecticut, Charter Oak and Post.

• Technical assistance visits, phone conferences, meetings and electronic support for the development of assessments and rubrics for many of the colleges involved in the pilot effort.

• The Committee established in 2010, with additional people representing ECE providers, was called together in December 2011 to discuss the pilot and gather suggestions to further delineate the Alternate and Expedited Routes. In addition, the need for a renewal process was raised and is under discussion.

• Presentations have been made to the Community College ECE Coordinators, faculty from four-year institutions with early childhood teacher education programs, regarding the pilot. The information was also presented to the ECE Cabinet’s Workforce Committee. A meeting was held with Dr. Christine Thatcher from the Office of Financial and Academic Affairs for Higher Education to clarify that office’s role in the approval process. A meeting was held with Dr. Louise Feroe, Board of Regents Vice President, to discuss the approval process for new programs and to encourage participation by BOR institutions.

Program Challenge:

• Because of new legislation creating the Board of Regents, the approval process originally designed was no longer viable. Under this legislation, the Governance structure for the community colleges, state universities and Charter Oak State College was consolidated. In addition, the Department of Higher Education’s responsibilities were divided between the Board of Regents and a new Office of Financial and Academic Affairs for Higher Education. As noted above, meetings were held to determine how ECTC programs will be approved and what organization will award the Credential. It is anticipated that the process will be in place by early spring. The Alternate and Expedited Route procedures should also be determined by late spring.

Future Work:

• The development of new ECTC programs will require considerable technical assistance to diminish the staff time needed in the review process. Dr. Adams is developing a framework for staffing this work on an ongoing basis, as well as a proposal for the ongoing approval process.

• Considerable effort to provide technical assistance for colleges designing new ECE programs will be needed.

• Collaboration between colleges and SDE to track data on the progress of candidates while engaged in the program as well as after they leave the program needs to be coordinated and viable data systems created.

Overall Findings:

• There is general support among ECE professionals in centers and in higher education for degree programs that focus on early childhood education for both the current and future workforces. However, the concern remains regarding the retention of people in this field given the low level of compensation.
The process for review has encouraged reflection on the part of ECE Coordinators and faculty and has resulted in many program modifications which should have a positive impact on the quality of the workforce. It will also be possible to begin to gather data to demonstrate that graduates from a college are prepared and where program changes will be needed.

More resources are needed to assure that field work is appropriately mentored. This is particularly true if fieldwork experience is to be allowed at an individual’s work site, a need for those currently supporting themselves and families while pursuing a degree.

Additional resources needed to provide the infrastructure at the agency level and independent consultant level to support the technical assistance process, the candidate application and review process for the expedited and alternative routes, and the ECTC issuance process with data collection systems.

College ECTC Approval Process for Programs Currently Offering an ECE Program and Approval Process for New Programs

- College applies to SDE through application materials created by the ECTC committee.
  - (Time to complete application 6-8 weeks – longer for new programs)

- Review by a committee of at least 3 members.
  - Technical assistance provided with feedback through a process or revision and review.
  - Committee report submitted to Dept. of Education Division, Office of Fiscal and Academic Affairs and/or the Board of Regents (depending on public or private institution designation).
  - (Time to complete TA process and revision process 8 weeks – longer for new programs)

- OFAA re-approval needed if substantial changes made to existing program. Initial approval needed for new programs.

- BOR re-approval needed if substantial changes made to existing program. Initial approval needed for new programs.

- SDE approval at the Division level based on OFAA and BOR letter of support for previously approved programs.
  - SDE approval at the Board level in coordination with OFAA and BOR.

- Program approved for ECTC. Individuals apply for ECTC through SDE upon graduation.