

Kentucky

Core Content Standards



1

Standard 1: Child Growth and Development

Early childhood and school-age youth development professionals are grounded in an understanding of the development of all children regardless of age (birth through 12) across developmental domains (physical, cognitive, social-emotional, and linguistic)

- 1a. They understand each child as an individual with unique developmental variations.
- 1b. They understand that children learn and develop within relationships and within multiple abilities and contexts, including families, cultures, languages, communities, and society.
- 1c. They use this multidimensional knowledge to make evidence-based decisions about how to carry out their responsibilities.

2

Standard 2: Health, Safety, and Nutrition

Early childhood and school-age youth development professionals provide a safe and healthy environment.

- 2a. They must adhere to federal and state health, safety, and nutrition regulations, including special education standards and regulations.
- 2b. They promote both physical and mental well-being to keep adults and children healthy, safe and supported to reduce risks in the environment.

3

Standard 3: Professional Development/Professionalism

Early childhood and school-age youth development professionals identify, model, and participate as members of the early childhood profession.

- 3a. They serve as informed advocates for children, families, and the early childhood and school-age youth development profession.
- 3b. They know and follow the applicable national codes of ethics.
- 3c. They have professional skills that include competency in formal and informal verbal and written communication and emerging technology, which effectively support their relationships and work with children, families, and colleagues.
- 3d. Professional development plans are collaboratively created and updated at least annually and as needed for continuous professional growth specific to their individual needs.
- 3e. They engage in continuous, collaborative learning to inform teaching practices that are responsive to the learning needs of each child.
- 3f. They develop and sustain the habit of reflective and intentional practice in their daily work with children as members of the early childhood and school-age youth development profession.

Standard 4: Learning Environments and Curriculum

Early childhood and school-age youth development professionals know that developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate environments and curricula have a positive impact on the whole child.

- 4a. They create nurturing, engaging, accessible indoor and outdoor environments, which are inquiry-based and play-based enabling children to thrive.
- 4b. They know and demonstrate that positive, caring, supportive relationships between peers and nurturing adults are the foundation for their work with children.
- 4c. They use varied approaches to positive guidance strategies for individual children and groups to help children learn skills for self-regulation, resolving problems, developing empathy and positive attitudes about learning.
- 4d. They plan individualized, diverse activities and experiences to aid children's development across applicable learning standards and developmental milestones.
- 4e. They link observation and documentation to curriculum planning to meet the needs of each individual child.
- 4f. They select and implement an evidenced-based curriculum that is culturally and linguistically responsive to the needs and abilities of the children and families they serve.

Standard 5: Child Assessment

Ongoing assessment and observation help early childhood and school-age youth development professionals help evaluate all areas of a child's growth and development.

- 5a. They ensure children (birth through 5) receive a developmental screening and use results to determine the need for further evaluation and interventions.
- 5b. They observe, assess, interpret, and document children's skills, behaviors, and abilities.
- 5c. They use screening and assessment (birth through five) approaches and tools that are ethically grounded and developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate to document developmental progress and promote positive outcomes for each child.
- 5d. They build collaborative partnerships with families and professional colleagues around screening and assessment.

Standard 6: Family and Community Partnerships

Early childhood and school-age youth development professionals collaborate with the families of the children they serve.

- 6a. They appreciate and value the diversity in family characteristics and acknowledge families as the primary influence and are responsible for their children's development.
- 6b. They initiate respectful, responsive, reciprocal relationships with families to engage as partners in their children's development and learning.
- 6c. They use community resources to support children and families' learning and development.
- 6d. They build connections between early learning settings, schools, and community organizations and agencies. These connections will support seamless transitions to promote continuity of care.

Standard 7: Program Management and Evaluation

Early childhood and school-age youth development professionals sustain a program that is respectful and responsive to children and families using all available resources to deliver comprehensive services.

- 7a. They participate in a collaborative effort of ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the program's daily practices for continuous quality improvement.
- 7b. Evaluation of the program should include input from staff, families, and the community.
- 7c. Programs must develop policies that are equitable and promote recommended practices.
- 7d. They engage in a collaborative staff evaluation that includes feedback from the educator and various stakeholders.

Glossary of Key Terms

Assessment: The ongoing process of gathering and interpreting information about a child's development, skills, and learning. Assessments help educators make informed decisions about instruction, support, and goals for individual children and groups.

Benchmark: A specific, measurable skill or concept that falls under a broader standard.

Child Development Associate (CDA): A national credential for early childhood professionals, emphasizing competencies in health, safety, relationships, learning environments, professionalism, and communication.

Collaborative Effort: Educators, families, healthcare providers, and community organizations working together to support the developmental needs of young children, recognizing that no single system can meet all needs alone.

Commonwealth Child Care Credential (CCCC): Kentucky's entry-level credential awarded after completing 60 hours of approved training.

Comprehensive Services: Integrated supports that address the full range of a young child's needs—health, nutrition, early learning, mental health, family support, and special services—all working together for holistic development.

Community Resources: Local services and organizations that support children and families, such as health clinics, libraries, food banks, mental health services, and early intervention programs. Early educators often connect families to these resources as part of holistic care.

Continuity of Care: Maintaining consistent relationships with caregivers and routines over time, which is critical for infants and young children to develop secure attachments and emotional well-being.

Culturally Diverse: Acknowledges the variety of culture, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender, and ability—important in ensuring inclusive and responsive educational environments.

Culturally and Linguistically Responsive: Practices that recognize, respect, and incorporate the cultural backgrounds, home languages, and traditions of the children and families served. These practices promote equity, inclusion, and meaningful learning experiences for all children.

Developmental Continuum: A sequence that outlines the progression of a child's skills and performance in relation to a benchmark.

Developmental Domain: An area of development (e.g., approaches to learning, communication, motor development, social emotional, etc.) used to organize learning standards.

Developmental Milestones: Developmental milestones are key skills or abilities that most children achieve by a certain age as they grow and develop. These milestones cover areas such as physical, cognitive, social-emotional, language, and self-help skills. They serve as general guidelines to help parents and early care professionals track a child's growth and identify any areas where additional support may be needed.

Developmental Screening: A standardized tool used to identify children who may be at risk for developmental delays. Screenings help determine whether further evaluation or support services are needed and are often used as an early intervention strategy.

Director's Credential: Awarded to directors after 12 credit hours of approved higher education coursework.

Documentation: The process of recording and collecting evidence of children's learning and development, often through notes, photos, work samples, or checklists. Documentation helps educators track progress, plan curriculum, and communicate with families.

Early Childhood Standards: Developmental domains (e.g., cognitive, social–emotional, motor, language) to support school readiness.

ECE-COLT: The statewide system that tracks approved early childhood training hours and records for professionals.

Emerging Technology: As technology advances and changes it is important to stay knowledgeable about new technology that can be used as a support for your job and communication.

Ethically Grounded: Acting in ways that are guided by a clear set of professional values and moral principles, especially those found in a code of ethics. For early childhood educators, this means making decisions that prioritize children's well-being, respect families, and uphold professional integrity.

Evaluate: To carefully examine and judge the quality, effectiveness, or value of a program, activity, or child's progress. In early education, evaluation may apply to teaching strategies, curriculum, or child outcomes based on observation and assessment data.

Evidence-based: Practices and strategies that are backed by current and best available research around a specific topic.

Evidence-Based Curriculum: A curriculum that is grounded in research and proven to be effective in supporting children's learning and development. It includes developmentally appropriate content and teaching strategies that align with child development theories and standards.

Family-Centered Services: Approaches that allow families to determine the services and resources for their children, recognizing the family's role as key decision makers.

Formal and Informal verbal and written communication: Includes verbal communication, as well as text, email and written communication with children, families, and partners.

Informed Advocates: Teachers are informed about current best practices and strategies for children and families, and appropriately speak for the best practices for their profession.

Inquiry-based Learning: Learning that uses children's natural curiosity to encourage children to question, explore, problem-solve by making real observations in their experiences.

Kentucky Early Childhood Advisory Council (ECAC): The body that approves early childhood credentials and supports policy and standards for early childhood care.

Multidimensional Knowledge: Professionals can take into consideration the different aspects of an individual child's life including culture, language, families, abilities, and contexts.

National Codes of Ethics: All professions have a code of ethics to ensure that the core values, responsibilities, and expected ethical conduct of early childhood educators are clearly defined and upheld. It serves as a guiding framework for decision making and professional behavior in early childhood settings.

Observation/Observe: The intentional process of watching, listening, and recording children's behaviors, interactions, and development in a natural setting. Observation helps educators understand each child's needs, interests, and progress, and informs planning and assessment.

Ongoing Monitoring: Regular observation and assessment of a child's developmental milestones, learning progress, and well-being, used to identify strengths, address delays early, and inform individualized support.

Partnerships: Collaborative relationships between educators, families, community members, and organizations that support the healthy development and learning of young children. These partnerships are built on mutual respect, communication, and shared goals.

Play-based Learning: Learning that uses play to help children develop skills that support their social, physical and cognitive development. Play-based learning uses play based experience as learning experiences.

Positive Guidance: A quality practice to guide children to develop healthy self-esteem, respect, and self-regulation skills. Positive guidance encourages positive reinforcement, strength-based language and positive choices to reinforce positive behavior.

Professionalism: The conduct, behavior, and attitude expected of someone in a professional role. In early care and education, professionalism includes ethical practice, continuous learning, respectful communication, reliability, and a commitment to high-quality care.

Professional Colleagues: Other individuals working in the early care and education field, including teachers, assistants, specialists, and administrators. Respectful and supportive relationships with professional colleagues are essential for maintaining a positive work environment and ensuring high-quality care.

Professional Development Plans: A plan of professional development including required trainings, ongoing education, and skill-building activities designed to enhance the knowledge, competencies, and practices of early care and education professionals. These plans support career growth, ensure compliance with regulatory standards, and promote high-quality learning environments for children.

Primary Influence: The most significant people or environments shaping a child's early development—typically parents, family members, and early childhood educators who model behavior, language, and emotional responses.

Reciprocal Relationships: Two-way, trusting relationships between children and caregivers/educators where both parties respond to and influence each other. This builds emotional security and supports social-emotional growth.

Recommended Practices: Evidence-based strategies and methods that are widely recognized as effective in supporting children’s development and learning. These practices are typically grounded in research and endorsed by professional organizations (e.g., NAEYC, DEC).

School-Age Youth Development Professional: In Kentucky, the term “School-Age Youth Development” is used to describe a provider or teacher who serves children 6 years of age or older and attends kindergarten, elementary or secondary school. This also includes out-of-school time providers and teachers.

School Readiness: The condition in which a child is prepared to benefit from early learning, defined across five developmental categories: approaches to learning, health, language, social/emotional, and cognitive/general knowledge.

Seamless Transitions: Supporting children and families as they move between settings (e.g., home to child care, infant room to toddler classroom, preschool to kindergarten), minimizing stress and ensuring consistency in care and expectations.

Self-regulation: The ability of early care and education professionals to manage their emotions, thoughts, and behaviors in a way that promotes positive interactions, responsive caregiving, and effective teaching. Self-regulation supports maintaining composure under stress, modeling appropriate behavior for children, and creating a calm, predictable learning environment.

Staff Evaluation: A systematic process for assessing the performance, strengths, and areas for improvement of early childhood educators and staff. It often includes observations, feedback, self-reflection, and goal setting to support professional growth and program quality.

Trainer Credential: Issuance for individuals qualified to provide professional development training to early care and education professionals.