

# Pennsylvania's Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators (PA PSCECE)

## How Did We Get Here?

Since 2004, Pennsylvania has encouraged or required the Early Childhood Education (ECE) workforce to assess individual professional competencies and make ongoing professional development choices based on personal growth goals. The Pennsylvania Core Knowledge Competencies (PA CKCs), informed by research and other national standards, were developed and released by the Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL) in 2004. A revised version was released in 2015. Pennsylvania values continuous quality improvement and strives to align with national standards to the extent practicable, while continuing to address ECE workforce professional development needs.

In response to the recent National context, Pennsylvania is adopting a new set of PA PSCECE [PA Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators](#). This set of standards and competencies replace the PA CKCs and have been adopted from the national [Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators](#). The PA PSCECE are the general knowledge and skills that educators need to know and be able to demonstrate. They are not the specific standards and competencies needed for specific professions and occupations within the early childhood field (see listing below).

This transition is timely and is informed by trends and shifts occurring nationally to ensure consistency and reliability in early care and education. Following the release of the seminal 2015 Institute of Medicine *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation* ([IOM Report](#)), the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) announced a collaborative initiative called [Power to the Profession](#). This initiative established the first ever [Unifying Framework](#) for the early childhood profession with the goal of advancing early childhood education as a recognized professional field of practice.

The PA PSCECE are designed to increase the reliability, portability, and relevance of ECE professional development (including higher education programs) nationwide. These standards help to ensure Pennsylvania's ECE professionals are prepared to support the growth and development of every child, birth through age 8, across the commonwealth. The standards include seven areas. The first six areas are adopted directly from the national standards; the seventh standard in Health, Safety and Mental Health is Pennsylvania specific. In addition, the standards include resources that are Pennsylvania-specific and can be integrated into coursework and trainings. These PA PSCECE will guide Pennsylvania's early learning professional development system, including both educator preparation and non-certification programs in ECE; ongoing professional growth and development activities; and credentials.

## Pennsylvania's Career Pathway

Our early childhood workforce is the key to ensuring the early childhood system continues to benefit young children and their families. There is value in creating opportunities for career progression through the attainment of credentials. However, in a profession that sometimes

lacks clarity on what credentials are valued and/or required in various settings, it can be challenging to set professional goals and decide on the career pathway to get there. In order to guide Pennsylvania's ECE workforce towards credentials that are relevant and lead to advanced opportunities in the ECE profession, the state has transitioned to a Career Pathway for all early childhood educators. This Career Pathway is built upon nationally recognized professional standards to ensure a shared set of core knowledge and competencies across the commonwealth. This alignment will lead to an integrated workforce development system, greater consistency and preparation for early childhood educators, and high-quality learning experiences for children birth through grade 3.

### **Why does Pennsylvania include Health, Safety and Mental Health Standards and Competencies?**

Though not found within the national Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators, the PA PSCECE include Standards and Competencies in Health, Safety and Mental health to align with current research and health related trends.

According to the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), "learning and health are interrelated" (2014, 3). Health-promoting environments early in life are critically important for building a strong foundation for learning. "The science of child development shows that the foundation for sound mental health is built early in life..." (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2015). In addition, "students' social and emotional welfare is important for academic success. Schools are responsible for teaching academics and promoting the mental health of students." (National Association of School Psychologists, 2010).

The Health, Safety and Mental Health Standards and Competencies cover four main topics: Health and Safety; Nutrition; Mental Health (Staff); and Mental Health (Child/Family). Educators' knowledge and competency in these areas are relevant to the entire birth through age 8 span and important due to linkages between physical and mental health and learning outcomes (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2015 and 2020). Health and Safety competencies cover sanitation and supervision practices, and health habits. Nutrition competencies include safe food handling practices and meal planning guidelines. Mental health competencies are included to assist educators in supporting their own mental health and the children and families they serve.

In addition to the Health, Safety and Mental Health Standards and Competencies, educators are encouraged to reference current health and safety regulations/requirements relevant to their specific program setting. Setting specific regulations/requirements are included in the [Resources](#) section.

### **Why Pennsylvania-specific resources?**

The six national standards (Child Development and Learning in Context; Family–Teacher Partnerships and Community Connections; Child Observation, Documentation, and Assessment; Developmentally, Culturally, and Linguistically Appropriate Teaching Practices; Knowledge, Application, and Integration of Academic Content in the Early Childhood Curriculum; Professionalism as an Early Childhood Educator) and the Pennsylvania-specific standard ([Health and Safety](#)) include national and state resources. The included resources are not meant to be an exhaustive list of resources and as coursework and trainings are being

developed instructors are encouraged to use multiple resources to enhance teaching of the standards and competencies. The resources included detailed seminal content specific to Pennsylvania that should be included by Institutions of Higher Education (IHEs), ECE Professional Development Organizations (PDOs) and professional learning organizations (PLOs) to develop coursework, professional development, and trainings.

The PA PSCECE embed these Pennsylvania specific resources to ensure consistency, shared language, and knowledge across the commonwealth.

### **Who is the Audience?**

As recommended in the “[Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth through 8](#),” professional standards provide a core body of knowledge, skills, values, and dispositions that early childhood educators within a variety of positions must demonstrate to effectively promote the development, learning, and well-being of all young children.

The need for ECE capacity building to support equitable access to comprehensive, trauma informed, culturally and developmentally responsive, and seamless services has informed Pennsylvania’s ECE workforce development efforts. Pennsylvania has established an ECE workforce development infrastructure through the [PDOs](#), apprenticeships, and the [Career Pathway](#) to ensure a shared set of competencies, skills, and knowledge. These strategies will address inequities that exist among early childhood educators and create transformative opportunities for the development of policies, strategies, and programs that value early childhood educators statewide.

While ECE educators include those working in direct care with children on the 0-8 developmental continuum, Pennsylvania’s early learning system is much broader. As a result, opportunities also are offered for professionals with unique expertise and specialized knowledge that help children birth through age 8 thrive. While these professionals have specialized knowledge, some, but not necessarily all, PA PSCECE may be used to further develop a foundation in ECE.

The PA PSCECE are the general knowledge and skills each educator needs to know and be able to demonstrate. After acquisition of these standards and competencies, educators may choose to specialize and therefore, need to obtain competency in more specialized areas including, but not limited to:

- Early Childhood Special Educators ([PA Special Educators](#))
- Early Interventionists ([PA Early Intervention](#))
- Health Consultants ([Child Care Health Consultants](#))
- Home-visitors ([PA HV Competencies](#))
- Infant Early Childhood Mental Health Consultants ([IECMH](#))
- Infant Toddler Educator Specialty ([Zero to Three](#))
- Leadership and Program Administrators (in revision process)
- Professionals caring for school aged children 9-13 ([PA School Age](#))
- Social Workers ([PA Social Workers](#))

## What is PA PSCECE Leveling?

This document includes three distinct and meaningful designations: Early Childhood Educator I (ECE I), Early Childhood Educator II (ECE II), and Early Childhood Educator III (ECE III.) Each designation has its own meaningful scope of practice and associated level of preparation.

The PA PSCECE intentionally aligns each level with a specific credential or degree within a Career Pathway.

- a. Level 1 = ECE I – CDA completer;
- b. Level 2 = ECE II – Associate degree graduate; and
- c. Level 3 = ECE III – Bachelor’s or Master’s degree graduate (initial prep).

Leveling is meant to help the ECE ecosystem (e.g., practitioners, professional preparation programs, accreditors, licensing bodies, etc.) understand the level of knowledge and skills related to the standards and competencies they need to master or support in their professional roles. These include informing:

- Knowledge and skills early childhood educators need to have to effectively carry out their scope of practice;
- Content, assessments, and field experiences in professional preparation programs;
- Content in licensure assessments;
- Professional development offered by employers or through state professional development systems;
- State early childhood educator competencies; and
- How early childhood accrediting/recognition bodies evaluate professional preparation programs.

### PA PSCECE Layout Example (please reference the full detail of the standard at [PA Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators](#))

Standard 3	Standard 3 Detail	ECE I	ECE II	ECE III
<b>Child Observation, Documentation, and Assessment</b>	3a: Understand that assessments (formal and informal, formative, and summative) are conducted to make informed choices about instruction and for planning in early learning settings. Early childhood educators understand that child observation, documentation, and other forms of assessment are central to the practice of all early childhood professionals...	Identify the central purposes of assessment...	Describe the theoretical perspectives and core research base regarding the purposes and use of assessment...	Analyze and synthesize the theoretical perspectives and research base regarding the purposes and uses of assessment...

## What are the components of the PA PSCECE?

The PA PSCECE is comprised of an Introduction, the Standards and Competencies, and the Resource Appendix. The Introduction provides relevant information on how we got here, the intended audience, leveling, and the stakeholders involved in the process. The Standards and Competencies are the core body of knowledge, skills, values, and dispositions early childhood educators must demonstrate to effectively promote the development, learning, and well-being of all young children. The Resource Appendix lists specific, seminal content specific to Pennsylvania that IHEs, PDOs, and PLOs should include in all coursework, professional development, and trainings.

## Who were the contributing stakeholders?

The process to develop the PA PSCECE required multiple small group discussions with individuals that represented various roles and program types within Pennsylvania's ECE workforce. The following individuals were involved in the review, selection and expansion of the PA PSCECE:

Name	Organization
Jean Allison	Delaware County Community College
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## References

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