

Early Childhood Licensing Structure and Standards Work Group:

Summary of Process and Recommendations

INTRODUCTION

The Early Childhood Licensing and Standards Work Group was asked to prepare for an open review of the PELSB Early Childhood Licensure Structure and Standards. Specifically, we were asked to:

1. Look at alignment, gaps, discrepancies and create crosswalks between PELSB Early Childhood content standards and other standards;
2. Look at other state models and innovative credentialing models;
3. Get feedback from stakeholders;
4. Create a draft proposal for the EC Licensing framework, and EC content standards, synthesizing inputs from stakeholders.

Work Group membership was composed of representatives from Minnesota's Early Childhood Education Higher Education community. Three members, Hope Doerner, Early Childhood faculty from Minneapolis Community and Technical College, Dr. Layna Cole, Associate Professor from Bemidji State University, and Ann Ruhl Carlson, Early Childhood faculty and Coordinator of EC Licensure from the University of Minnesota, met weekly throughout the Fall of 2019, and reported regularly to Carmen Cook, Project Manager, from the Minnesota Department of Education. Our overarching goal was to make sure the PELSB Early Childhood content standards address the needs of the youngest learners in our state.

As we began the work, we agreed on several critical assumptions:

1. Early care and early education cannot be separated
2. Unaligned state systems prevent *any* system from accomplishing its full potential (education, care, and professional preparation)

3. Children’s early years—especially prenatally to age 5--are the most critical time in a child’s development.
4. Early Childhood is a unique field of study with specialized knowledge and competencies. It is DIFFERENT than Elementary Education.
5. Higher Education’s role in Minnesota’s early childhood landscape is to prepare and support professionals to meet the needs of young children and their families.

THE CROSSWALKS & SCANS

The work began with two main tasks. The first involved doing crosswalks between the PELSB EC standards and other pertinent standards, which included Minnesota’s Knowledge Competency Framework, the Child Development Associate standards, the National Association for the Education of Young Children’s (NAEYC) Higher Education standards, Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP), and Minnesota’s Early Childhood Indicators of Progress. The goal of this work was to determine alignment, gaps and discrepancies in the documents. A summary from the crosswalk work revealed that the PELSB standards are:

- Too prescriptive and detailed leading to an excessive number of standards
- Not written using the current science of child development, not using what we know about how children grow and learn. Developmental domains are short-changed in PELSB standards.
- More focused on primary age rather than 0-5 aged children. Their focus is more on individual reading skills than on the “whole” child.
- Not nimble enough to make easy adjustments as research and field develops
- Missing key concepts, including meeting the needs of multilingual learners, and using culturally and trauma informed practices.

The second task involved performing a multi-state scan of early childhood degree and licensure options and innovative credentialing models from other industries to determine what structure might show promise for Minnesota's EC degree and licensure scope and structure.

(A complete copy of the of the report can be found at:

<https://ecworkforcemn.org/early-childhood-teacher-licensing-revision-process/>)

The major recommendations from the scan are summarized below:

- **Continuity is Needed.** We need a comprehensive system to bridge the “systems gap” between the Department of Human Services and the Minnesota Department of Education. In order to best meet the needs of Minnesota's children, we need to create an alignment of expectations, curricula, methods, around a shared knowledge base, with common expectations, language and terminology, and professional learning systems.
- **Clear and comprehensive pathways are needed for teacher credentialing.** Educators need knowledge and competency in promoting **both** learning and development. Preparation must be driven by the science of child development with a consistent orientation across higher education. With clear connections and pathways between 2- and 4-year institutions, we have an **opportunity to recruit Teachers of Color into the profession.** Many teachers of color are currently working in early childhood without MDE recognized credentials.
- **Consideration should be given to the vastly different training needs of teachers of infants and toddlers versus those of elementary-aged children.** There is national consensus that early childhood education encompasses children from birth to age 8 years; however, Minnesota should consider a variety of approaches to teacher preparation and credentialing to best meet the needs of our youngest learners.

As part of this process, **we need to think carefully about how the Elementary Education licensure scope** impacts the hiring options of Early Childhood licensed teachers. We recognize that public school principals can be reluctant to hire B-age 8 credentialed teachers. (Some experts recommend breaking up the Elementary Education license into a Pre-k- grade 3, a 4-8 to line up with student development.) We know that children under age 8 need teachers **prepared to support the development of whole children as well as content learning**. These teachers must be prepared to facilitate the social and emotional learning needed to be successful in school.

INPUT FROM STAKEHOLDERS

Two facilitated discussions, led by Judy LaPlante from Lanterna Consulting and the members of the Work Group, were held with stakeholders who were interested and involved in preparation of early childhood professionals around two broad questions to gain stakeholder feedback on future directions of preparation of early childhood professionals in Institutes of Higher Education in Minnesota. There were over 40 attendees at a full day meeting on September 20, 2019. Participants included coordinators from many large urban and suburban school districts and several smaller districts, coordinators from Head Start, two year and four year faculty from colleges and universities both public and private, one large child care corporation, representatives from Child Care Aware Minnesota, Department of Human Services and the Minnesota Association for the Education of Young Children. The question posed to the group that day was ***What should early childhood licensure look like in Minnesota?***

Stakeholders were presented with key findings from our crosswalks and multi-state scan and credentialing work, which were summarized above. We presented several promising ideas to the stakeholders, which included:

- The creation of a basic Early Childhood Educator credential
- Creating specializations that focus on developmental stages

- Creating clear pathways in higher education that utilize existing quality teacher preparation systems that use evidence-based practices that support better outcomes for all children.
- Reducing the state investment in trainings that do not lead to a recognized credential
- Reducing the number and complexity of standards, and condensing standards to make them less prescriptive
- Aligning standards to other EC materials locally and nationally, which include Minnesota’s Knowledge Competency Framework, Early Childhood Indicators of Progress and NAEYC Standards for Higher Education Programs.

Stakeholders were asked to evaluate the state’s current early childhood content standards and the teacher licensure structure. They expressed clearly that current standards are “too big” and are heavily weighted on the primary grades (particularly in reading) of elementary. Stakeholders demanded the early childhood content standards be streamlined and focus on an ***understanding and application of child development***. Stakeholders were also interested in revising the current scope of the EC licensure in order to be more responsive to the needs of the field. Stakeholders were presented with a variety of licensure structure options and were asked to provide feedback at the meeting. It was determined that ***very few stakeholders like the licensure framework the way it is***. In addition, we learned that:

- The idea of offering new options for licensure scope was exciting to many. EC programming in the state has varied needs that the current credentialing system is not meeting. Flexibility in licensure is crucial.
- Offering a leveled system of credentialing offers promise in terms of “growing” teachers and recruiting teachers of color.
- We need everyone that is in the field to stay in the field. There is a statewide shortage of well-prepared, credentialed Early Childhood teachers.

- There was some concern expressed about having too many licensure options or creating a complex system for credentialing and hiring. There was a strong desire for clarity about what the scope options might be.

CREATING THE REVISED CREDENTIALING STRUCTURE AND CONTENT STANDARDS

Feedback from the September stakeholder meeting led the work group to begin looking for ways to both revamp the licensure structure and revise the EC content standards. After examining and discussing multiple states' credentialing structures and content standards along with the work of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) we found that NAEYC's Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators aligned most closely with our overall goals and assumptions. This model focuses on the ***understanding and application of child development*** as well as recognizes different levels of responsibility and preparation needed by different professionals in the field of early childhood education. Using this model as a framework:

- Allows Minnesota to create an **aligned** teacher preparation system, recognizing different levels of preparation within the field of early childhood education.
- Allows early childhood teachers to continue their professional preparation by removing systemic barriers in the preparation system.
- Allows early childhood teachers to earn **recognized credentials** across the levels of their education.
- Allows early childhood teachers to focus on the birth to Kindergarten population at the bachelor's degree level.
- Allows institutions of higher education flexibility in licensure program offerings, potentially creating opportunities for institutions to offer the Parent Education licensure paired with the Birth through Kindergarten licensure.

- Provides strong preparation for Birth through Kindergarten licensure teachers to best meet the needs of Minnesota’s youngest children.
- Provides critical early childhood education preparation Birth through Grade 3 teachers will bring into the public-school system.
- Eliminates the need for the MinnState Early Childhood Transfer Pathway because content standards are clearly leveled for 2-year and 4-year programs. The pathway is integrated into the standards. All ECE permit coursework would be recognized by ECE licensure programs.
- Additionally, this model reduces the number and complexity of the standards for teacher licensure.

To identify potential content missing from NAEYC’s Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators model that is addressed in our current standards, we created a crosswalk between current MN PELSB EC content standards and the NAEYC Standards and Competencies. All current Minnesota PELSB standards for EC content were mapped to the NAEYC levels to determine areas of alignment and to identify what was covered and what was missing. We found multiple areas where the PELSB standards were lacking current content knowledge (concepts like brain development, executive function, relationship-based teaching, trauma-informed, culturally responsive teaching, adversity, mental health and ELL to name a few) and a few areas the NAEYC standards did not address (such as health, safety and nutrition and specific reading standards). We used this crosswalk to guide drafting of the language for new EC content standards, using the NAEYC framework model. This draft was presented to stakeholders at a second meeting on December 6th, 2019.

FEEDBACK ON DRAFT STRUCTURE AND STANDARDS

Most of the stakeholders from the September gathering returned for the second discussion on December 6, 2019. They were presented with an overarching question: ***Are we on the right track with the proposed credentialing structure and content standards?***

Drafts of a revised Early Childhood credentialing structure and revised EC content standards were presented to stakeholders for input and feedback. The proposed credentialing structure included new credentials:

- PELSB-issued “permit” to be a lead teacher in a 0-5 classroom candidates completing approved 2-year programs
- Option of obtaining either a 0-5, or a Pre-K – Grade 3 teaching credential.

Stakeholders were asked these questions:

Credentialing Structure Questions:

- Is this the right credentialing structure? Why or why not?
- What do you like about this structure? What don't you like about this structure?

New Standards Questions:

- Are these strands the right areas for the credential? Why or why not?
- Is this the right content for this standard strand?
- Are we using the right verbs in the draft leveling of the standards?
- How specific should we be in identifying specific developmental domains and/or content areas in the language of the standards?
- Is this the right balance? Is it too general or too specific anywhere? Is there anything missing? Is there too much of anything?
- What might be some unintended consequences of this approach to credentialing? What are some solutions?
- Anything else we should be thinking about?

Stakeholders shared answers to the above prompts in person to work group members during the December meeting. Stakeholders were also invited to provide additional input and responses by email, or by completing a survey distributed the list of stakeholders provided by MDE.

In addition to gathering feedback on the draft proposal at the December meeting, Dr. Erin Gillett, Professor, Minnesota State University Moorhead, facilitated a stakeholder discussion specifically to gather input on revising the current reading standards for early childhood teacher licensure. She is working on a draft revision of Early Childhood Teacher reading standards using this input as well as other sources. She will share this draft with MDE in January of 2020.

Stakeholders responded very positively the proposed EC content standards. To summarize:

- Stakeholders responded favorable to the organization and content of the standard strands.
- Stakeholders liked “less is more” in terms of the number of standards. Most respondents approved of the standards’ content, overall, and felt that aligning with the national standards is a plus. At least one stakeholder felt that the proposed standards are too wordy and complex, however.
- Stakeholders expressed a desire to build in some sort of the continuous improvement process for the standards so that new knowledge can be incorporated as it becomes available. Folks did not like the idea of waiting 7 to 10 years to revise the standards.
- Stakeholders applauded the concept of aligning early childhood teacher preparation across institutes of Higher Education and see great potential for early childhood teachers and young children alike. They also acknowledged it will take the hard work of many; but would be well worth the effort.

Numerous specific suggestions about the language and content of specific standards were made. These ideas were captured by work group members, carefully considered and used to improve the clarity and focus the proposed standards. Stakeholder input from the December meeting led to

additional content being added, clarification of wording, and many verbs being changed to more appropriate reflect competencies of teacher candidates in preparation programs. Specific stakeholder feedback regarding the draft content standards is available by request.

Stakeholders were much more cautious about the proposed credentialing structure. Specifically, two principals stated that they have policies in their districts preventing them from hiring the Birth through Grade 3 license for their elementary teaching positions. (???) They stated they wanted preschool teachers to understand what happens in kindergarten. They also said they saw no need to license teachers for 0 to 5 classrooms since virtually no programs in the state require the license. Other stakeholders were very excited about the option of pairing the Parent Education License with the Birth through 5 license and about the potential to get focused early child content at the bachelor's level. Stakeholders were strongly in favor of "permitting" early childhood teachers completing their associate degree in early childhood education. Most stakeholders viewed the structure favorably and were "excited" about the options. Many questions came up about the impact of this change. Again, the work group carefully considered this input and incorporated it into final recommendations about the EC credentialing structure.

FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

The Early Childhood Licensing and Standards Work Group is proposing three major changes to the early childhood teacher licensure system. First, we are recommending a new credentialing model for the state. Second, we are recommending new early childhood content standards. Third, we are recommending a process for ongoing review of the early childhood content standards.

The Early Childhood Licensing and Standards Work Group is proposing a new early childhood teacher credentialing model for the state. This model aligns with national standards, creates seamless pathways in professional teacher preparation, strengthens the early childhood workforce by creating an individual credential for the Birth to Age 5 classroom teacher, encourages ongoing growth for teachers

in the field through moving from a “permit” to a “license”, creates flexibility for institutes of higher education to offer programs to meet the needs of their regions (such as Birth through Kindergarten paired with Parent Education) , increases the number of credentialed teachers of color, and creates alignment with state systems.

Proposed Early Childhood Teacher Credentialing in Minnesota

| | Early Childhood Education Permit (EC II) | Early Childhood Birth through Kindergarten License (EC III) | Early Childhood Birth through Grade 3 License (EC III) |
|---------------------|--|---|--|
| Issued by: | PELSB | PELSB | PELSB |
| Qualifies one to: | Lead Teacher in Birth through 5 classroom. Provide supervision and guidance to additional classroom staff. | Lead Teacher in Birth through Kindergarten classroom. Provide supervision and guidance to ECE Permit teachers and additional classroom staff. | Lead Teacher in Birth through Grade 3 classroom. Provide supervision and guidance to ECE Permit teachers and additional classroom staff. |
| Education Required: | Completion of a PELSB approved Early Childhood Education Associate degree program | Completion of a PELSB approved Early Childhood Education B-K bachelor’s degree program | Completion of a PELSB approved Early Childhood Education B-8 bachelor’s degree program |
| Renewal: | Follow PELSB Tier II teacher requirements | Follow PELSB requirements | Follow PELSB requirements |

The Early Childhood Licensing and Standards Work Group is proposing new early childhood teacher content standards. These standards align with national standards, reflect the current knowledge base about how children grow and learn, include important content missing from current PELSB EC standards, recognize the different responsibilities and levels of preparation within the field of early childhood education and include input from multiple stakeholders from across the state . The proposed standards are included at the end of this report.

The last recommendation is that PELSB create a process to facilitate ongoing improvement of the early childhood content standards. The science of child development is exploding with new

understandings. Therefore, we recommend that a group of stakeholders review and suggest revisions to the Early Childhood content standards every three years. This will ensure our standards reflect current best practices. Ongoing review and revision will allow responsiveness to new understandings about young children and ongoing refinement and improvement. Smaller ongoing refinements will be easier for higher education programs to address than major revisions every seven to ten years.

In summary, we are proposing:

- The creation of a new early childhood teacher credentialing structure that includes a “permit” issued by PELSB to candidates completing approved associate programs, a new early childhood licensure scope from Birth through Kindergarten and maintenance of the current Birth through Grade 3 licensure.
- New early childhood content standards that are aligned with national standards and recognize different responsibilities and levels of preparation within the field.
- The creation of a task force of stakeholders to systematically and nimbly review the EC standards every 3 years to tweak and revise as needed and appropriate.

FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS

The recommendations included in this report are based on the central assumption that we can work together to provide high quality early childhood experiences for all of Minnesota’s young children. The changes suggested attempt to create infrastructure to create a well-prepared workforce to provide these experiences in communities across the state. It is important that future discussions about these revisions garner input from additional stakeholders including childcare organizations, rural school districts, Education Minnesota, business leaders and other state agencies serving the needs of young children—especially the Department of Human Services Child Development Services and Child Care Licensing. These recommendations closely align with national standards and create a foundation for a

unified vision of early childhood education in Minnesota. In order for this vision to be realized, all parties who care about young children should be invited to have a voice in the discussion.