



# INITIAL PRACTICE-BASED PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS

FOR EARLY INTERVENTIONISTS/  
EARLY CHILDHOOD SPECIAL  
EDUCATORS

## An Introduction

[Initial Practice-Based Professional Standards for Early Interventionists/Early Childhood Special Educators \(EI/ECSE\)](#)

Today we will review the 2020 Initial Practice-Based Professional Standards for Early Interventionists/Early Childhood Special Educators. Yes, it is a long title so as we move forward we will refer to them as EI/ECSE Standards. Today we will look at the importance of having standards, the themes that connect them, and the standards themselves.

# Objectives

- Define EI/ECSE Standards,
- Discuss the rationale for and development of the EI/ECSE Standards,
- Identify themes associated with the EI/ECSE Standards,
- Provide an overview of the knowledge and skills included in the EI/ECSE Standards,
- Identify uses for the EI/ECSE Standards, and
- Share resources for understanding and using the EI/ECSE Standards.



# What are the EI/ECSE Standards?

The knowledge, skills,  
and dispositions  
professionals need to  
practice competently.

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The EI/ECSE Standards define the unique and essential knowledge, skills, and dispositions required of early intervention/early childhood special education professionals at the completion of an initial educator preparation program. The standards are applicable across the early childhood age-range (B-8), settings, and child support needs. There are 7 standards plus a Field/Clinical Experience Standard for a total of 8 standards.

## Why EI/ECSE Standards?

- Prepare the EI/ECSE workforce to support positive outcomes for children and families, and
- Specify the knowledge and skills IHE programs must include in programs of study.

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A high-quality workforce is essential to ensuring positive outcomes for children and families. Developing agreed upon standards helps identify how educator preparation programs, professional development and technical assistance providers can help ensure such a workforce. The standards can be used to develop and revise curriculum, learning activities, and field experiences for educators. Therefore, the standards can help ensure recipients of EI/ECSE services receive competent care aligned with outcomes that families want for their child and family. Additionally, because the standards identify the unique knowledge areas for EI/ECSE professionals, they help identify where and how practitioners can collaborate with others to better serve children and families.

Finally, the standards reflect the required knowledge and skills that EI/ECSE educator preparation programs at institutes of higher education must align with when seeking CAEP accreditation. CAEP is an independent organization that aims to support excellence in educator preparation through accreditation of educator preparation programs that reflect certain established quality standards. CAEP accreditation requires that programs show alignment with the standards across their curriculum and assessment measures. Whether a preservice program seeks CAEP accreditation or some other accreditation, DEC expects programs to align their curriculum with these standards.



## How Were the Standards Developed?

CEC/DEC task force which used:

- Iterative Process
- Established Resources
- Public Input & Feedback

The EI/ECSE Standards define the unique and essential knowledge, skills, and dispositions required of early intervention/early childhood special education professionals at the completion of an initial educator preparation program. The standards are applicable across the early childhood age-range (B-8), settings, and child support needs. There are 7 standards plus a Field/Clinical Experience Standard for a total of 8 standards.

# Six Themes within the Standards

- Families as partners in decision making,
- Respect for diversity,
- Equity for all children and families,
- Individually, developmentally, age, and functionally appropriate intervention, and instruction,
- Partnerships, collaboration and team interaction, and
- Multi-faceted use of technology and interactive media.

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There are six themes that are common across all the standards. The themes reflect underlying values and priorities in the EI/ECSE field.

First, **families should be seen as partners in decision making**, meaning that educators should collaborate with families in ways that strengthen family capacity, support family priorities, and promote children's development and learning.

Additionally, all EI/ECSE educators should demonstrate **respect for the diversity** of cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and socioeconomic conditions of families, staff, and programs. Additionally, EI/ECSE educators should respect the many ways children may develop and approach children and families in strengths-based ways, regardless of their cultural or linguistic backgrounds, socioeconomic conditions, or developmental delays and disabilities.

Relatedly, EI/ECSE educators should help advance **equity for all children and families**, with an emphasis on supporting children and families' full access to, participation in, and support from programs and professionals. Supporting equity requires educators to be cognizant of the ways that children and families may differ in their support needs and be willing and able to provide supports in line with their expertise in individualized ways, including considerations of children and families' culture, language, socioeconomic status, or other identities or backgrounds. Finally, supporting equity entails educators advocating for the inclusion and belonging of young children with disabilities and their families, particularly those who may be experiencing disadvantages due to their race, culture, language, socioeconomic status, nationality, sexuality, or other identities and backgrounds.

The fourth theme is that EI/ECSE educators provide **individually, developmentally, age, and functionally appropriate intervention and instruction** based on sound knowledge of each child's and each family's assets, needs, and preferences for services.

Next, it is important that EI/ECSE educators recognize that **partnerships, collaboration and team interaction** are essential to effective service provision. EI/ECSE professionals should collaborate with families and other professionals to support the availability and quality of services for children and families. That requires using various team structures and processes for collaboration within and across programs and service systems.

Finally, the last theme is that EI/ECSE professionals should use **multi-faceted technology and interactive media** to support and enhance education and communication at every level of program practices. Technology and interactive media is also be helpful when used by children, families, and staff.

Two of these themes -families as partners in decision-making & partnerships, collaboration, and team interaction -are both themes across the standards and stand-alone standards, reflecting their centrality to EI/ECSE practice. Partnering with families is Standard 2 and the use of collaboration and teaming processes is Standard 3.

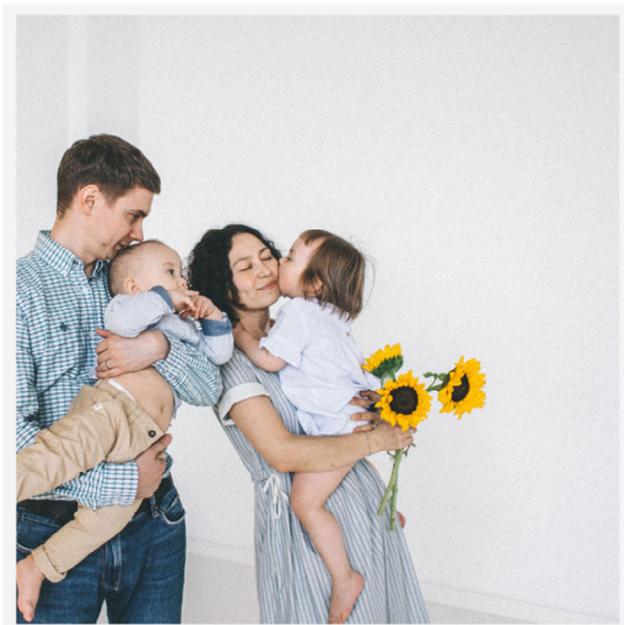
You can find three statements that align with several of these themes on the DEC Standards website -they explain how the standards support inclusion, technology, and respect for cultural and linguistic diversity.



# Examples of Themes

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Here are a few examples to illustrate the application and importance of the themes across the standards and EI/ECSE practice.



## Families as Partners in Decision-Making

- Standard 2: Partnering with Families
- Families are essential sources of knowledge about their children during assessment processes (Standard 4.4)
- Families should contribute to decisions about curriculum & individualized supports (Standard 5.1; Standard 6.1)

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Partnering with families is so important that it is both a theme and a stand-alone standard - Standard 2. The importance of partnering with families when making decisions is reflected in all standards. For example, educators should collaborate with families and recognize them as an important source of knowledge about their children throughout the process of selecting, implementing, and interpreting assessments to determine eligibility, develop child and family-based outcomes/goals, plan for interventions and instruction, and monitor progress, as described in Standard 4.4 (Standard 4, component 4). EI/ECSE professionals should also partner with families when identifying curriculum and learning opportunities because families can offer important information about children's abilities and support needs, and should be included in decisions about what their children learn and how they should be supported. That is reflected in Standard 5.1 (Standard 5, component 1), which states that professionals should partner with families to design and facilitate meaningful learning opportunities, and Standard 6.1 (Standard 6, component 1), which states that professionals should partner with families to identify systematic, responsive, and intentional evidence-based practices.

language ethnicity  
religion age  
experiences race  
culture skills  
gender abilities  
sexual orientation  
perspectives  
education job level

## Respect for Diversity

- Understand development occurs within a social, cultural, & linguistic context; refrain from deficit perspectives (Standard 1.2)
- Select assessment tools that are culturally- and linguistically-appropriate (Standard 4.1)
- Partner with families in ways that are culturally- and linguistically-responsive (Standard 2.1)

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Again, all EI/ECSE educators should demonstrate **respect for the diversity** of cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and socioeconomic conditions of families, staff, and programs. Additionally, EI/ECSE educators should respect the many ways children may develop and approach children and families from a strength-based perspective.

In the standards, we see the importance of respecting diversity and how that informs practice in all of the standards. EI/ECSE educators should recognize that development happens within a social, cultural, and linguistic context, which is apparent in Standard 1.2 (Standard 1, component 2). For example, the language of a child who is a dual language learner develops differently from a child who is monolingual. Those differences should not be viewed as deficits or as a disability. Additionally, EI/ECSE educators should pay attention to children's and families' strengths, cultural values and priorities when trying to understand the child's abilities and support needs. Some differences in development between the child's abilities and educator expectations may be because of cultural differences that shape how the family supports their child's development and what their expectations and priorities are.

Respect for diversity is also important when selecting assessment tools. Standards 4.1 (Standard 4, component 1) emphasizes that EI/ECSE educators should select assessment tools and methods that are culturally- and linguistically-appropriate in order to get an accurate picture of the child's and families' support needs. When educators understand that, they may select assessment tools that have been translated to the child or family's home language, mode and style of communication, and/or use an assessment that accounts for differences in development when a child is a dual language learner or comes

from a certain cultural background. The educator should also make sure to select assessment tools that have been normed on a population that is similar to the child in terms of their racial, social, and cultural background.

As a final example (though this theme shows up in other standards), EI/ECSE professionals should be careful to partner with families in ways that are culturally- and linguistically-responsive and affirming, as addressed in Standard 2.1 (Standard 2, component 1). This may mean having conversations with families about what respectful and good communication looks and sounds like to them, and interacting with them accordingly. It also means that educators should respect and follow a family's priorities for their children's development, even if the educator disagrees, as long as it is not found to be harmful to the child. When educators respect diversity, it is important that they approach all families from a strength-based perspective that recognizes that all families want the best of their children, even if they support them in ways that are different from the educator ideas.



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The EI/ECSE Standards define what early intervention and early childhood special education professionals should know and be able to do. There are 7 content standards and one field/experience clinical standard for a total of 8. The standards are built upon the underlying foundational themes outlined above, which are elevated within and integrated across all standards.

Each standard has two or more components for a total of 27 components across the standards. The components align with the standard statement and further explain the standard. Each component has a supporting explanation that discusses actual application with examples of the component in a preservice preparation program or professional development content.

## Standard 1: Child Development and Learning

Emphasizes knowledge of:

- relevant theoretical perspectives,
- developmental sequences, and individual differences in development and learning based on biological and environmental conditions,
- etiologies, characteristics, and individual differences across a range of abilities, and
- application and translation of that knowledge in developing assessment, curriculum, instruction, and intervention.



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**Standard 1, Child Development and Learning,** has four components.

Standard 1 emphasizes the importance of knowledge of relevant theoretical perspectives (e.g., Piaget, Vygotsky), developmental sequences, and individual differences in development and learning based on biological and environmental conditions. It also addresses etiologies, characteristics, and individual differences across a range of abilities, including developmental delays and disabilities, and their impact on development and learning. The application and translation of knowledge about child development and early learning in assessment, curriculum, instruction, and intervention is a key aspect of Standard 1.

## Standard 2: Partnering with Families

Focuses on using knowledge of:

- family systems theory and family-centered practices,
- family capacity building practices to support informed decision-making and advocacy, and
- professionals engage families as active team members.



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**Standard 2, Partnering with Families,** has three components.

Standard 2 focuses on using knowledge of family systems theory and family-centered practices to build partnerships with families, apply family capacity building practices to support informed decision-making and advocacy, and engage families as active team members in planning and implementing assessment, intervention, instruction, and transition.

## Standard 3: Collaboration and Teaming

Centers around:

- applying teaming and collaboration models, skills, processes, and strategies,
- engaging in individualized intervention, and
- developing transition plans.



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**Standard 3, Collaboration and Teaming,** has three component.

Standard 3 centers around applying teaming and collaboration models (e.g., interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary) , skills, processes, and strategies (e.g., coaching, consultation) with families and other professionals (e.g., physical therapists, speech/language therapists) to engage in individualized intervention and transition plan development.

## Standard 4: Assessment Processes

Reflects the importance of:

- understanding assessment purposes,
- choosing appropriate assessment tools and methods,
- administering, interpreting, sharing, and utilizing assessment results, and
- collaborating with families to determine eligibility, develop child and family-based outcomes/goals, plan intervention/instruction, and monitor progress.



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**Standard 4, Assessment Processes**, has four components. Standard 4 reflects the importance of understanding assessment purposes (e.g., eligibility, identifying appropriate assessments), choosing and administering appropriate informal and formal assessment measures and methods that are reliable and valid. It also addresses interpreting, documenting, and sharing assessment results using a strength-based approach when collaborating with families to determine eligibility, develop child and family-based outcomes/goals, plan intervention/instruction, and monitor progress.



## Standard 5: Application of Curriculum Frameworks in the Planning and Facilitation of Meaningful Learning Experiences

Focuses on:

- understanding and applying curriculum frameworks that address developmental and content domains to create high quality,
- designing and facilitating equitable, and meaningful learning opportunities, and
- planning learning experiences in natural and inclusive environments.



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**Standard 5, Application of Curriculum Frameworks in the Planning and Facilitation of Meaningful Learning Experience**, has two components. Standard 5 focuses on understanding and applying curriculum frameworks that address developmental and content domains (e.g. literacy, numeracy) to create and facilitate high quality, equitable, meaningful, and culturally responsive learning opportunities across natural and inclusive environments. This standard also addresses learning experiences that are challenging, developmentally appropriate, and universally designed.

## Standard 6: Using Responsive and Reciprocal Interactions, Interventions, and Instruction

Addresses planning and implementation of evidence-based practices, with fidelity and in partnership with families and other professionals, including:

- embedded instruction,
- practices to promote social and emotional competence, opportunities for young children to learn play skills and engage in meaningful play, and
- data-based decision making in planning, implementing, and adapting intervention and instruction.



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**Standard 6, Using Responsive and Reciprocal Interactions, Interventions, and Instruction**, has seven components. Standard 6 addresses planning and implementation of systematic, responsive, evidence-based practices, with fidelity and in partnership with families and other professionals. This standard emphasizes designing natural and inclusive learning environments to integrate a range of evidence-based practices including flexible and embedded instruction, practices to promote social and emotional competence, opportunities for young children to learn play skills and engage in meaningful play independently and with others, as well to use data-based decision making in planning, implementing, and adapting intervention and instruction.

## Standard 7: Professionalism and Ethical Practice

Captures the importance of:

- engaging in professional activities and reflective practices,
- accessing evidence-based information for professional growth,
- advocating for improved outcomes for children, families, and the profession, and
- understanding and adhering to ethical and legal policies and procedures.



**Standard 7, Professionalism and Ethical Practice**, has four components. Standard 7 captures the importance of engaging in professional activities and reflective practices; accessing evidence-based information for professional growth; advocating for improved outcomes for children, families, and the profession; and understanding and adhering to ethical and legal policies and procedures.

## Standard 8: Field and Clinical Experience Standard

Field and clinical experiences are:

- sequenced to facilitate increasing responsibilities,
- based on licensure, reflecting a range of age ranges (B-3, 3-5, 5-8), abilities, and natural and inclusive settings, and
- supervised by qualified professionals.



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In addition to the seven content standards, professional associations may also include an eighth standard that provides guidance on field work and more intensive clinical experiences (e.g., internships, student teaching). This standard does not have components, however, it does have a supporting explanation.

**Standard 8, EI/ECSE Field and Clinical Experience Standard**, focuses on planned field experiences designed to link EI/ECSE research and theory to practice and provide rich, scaffolded, developmental, and graduated experiences with increasing responsibilities for prospective early interventionists and early childhood special educators. The licensure should determine what age bands, child abilities, and settings field and clinical experiences take place in. In particular, clinical experiences should take place in the same age ranges covered by the license. If the license covers all three early childhood age ranges, the program must provide clinical experiences in at least two of the three age ranges and a field experience in the third age range. These field and clinical experiences are supervised by qualified professionals.

# Using the EI/ECSE Standards



Apply for accreditation,



Develop/revise initial preservice program curricula/programs of study,



Design professional development systems to build on/compliment preservice preparation, and



Provide guidance for certification/licensure requirements.

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As the nationally validated professional standards for early interventionists and early childhood special educators, DEC policy views these standards as having multiple purposes/applications.

1. Higher education programs submitting for accreditation through the Council for Accreditation of Educator Preparation Programs (CAEP) must align their initial preparation programs of study with these standards. The EI/ECSE Standards may be used for this purpose beginning in spring 2021. All initial preparation programs seeking CAEP accreditation must use these standards beginning in winter/spring 2023. All standards and components must be reflected in the program of study.
1. As the national professional standards in EI/ECSE, the expectation is that all higher education preservice programs preparing early interventionists and early childhood special educators align their curriculum/program of study with these standards. Therefore, all course work and field experiences should align with the standards.
1. The EI/ECSE Standards provide guidance for professional development content.
1. The EI/ECSE Standards also provide guidance for the development of states' certification/licensure standards for the preparation of EI/ECSE professionals. DEC highly recommends that states adopt the EI/ECSE Standards as their state standards versus developing a separate set of standards.



# Resources

Initial Practice-Based  
Professional Standards  
for Early  
Interventionists/Early  
Childhood Special  
Educators (EI/ECSE)

Early Childhood  
Personnel Center  
(ECPC)

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Multiple resources can be found at each of these sites to assist higher education faculty and professional development providers in using the EI/ECSE standards. In addition, resources should be beneficial as individuals advocate for state and local policies that adhere to the EI/ECSE Standards.



# INITIAL PRACTICE-BASED PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS

## FOR EARLY INTERVENTIONISTS/ EARLY CHILDHOOD SPECIAL EDUCATORS

To Access the Standards, visit: <https://www.dec-sped.org/ei-ecse-standards>

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