

Standards for Early Intervention/ Early Childhood Special Education: The Development, Uses, and Vision for the Future

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Abstract

Professional Standards identify what future educators should know and be able to do when they complete a program of study from an Institution of Higher Education (IHE). With support from the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC), the first ever stand-alone Early Intervention/Early Childhood Special Education (EI/ECSE) Standards were approved in 2020. In this paper, we (a) discuss the rationale for stand-alone EI/ECSE Standards within the current context; (b) briefly introduce the Standards; (c) present an overview of how the Standards were developed; and (d) provide a vision for and guidance to the field in the development of personnel systems that ensure application of the EI/ECSE Standards for preservice and in-service preparation, IHE program accreditation, cross disciplinary collaboration, research and development, and policy and advocacy.

Keywords

preparation, personnel, policy issues, systems change, collaboration

The national landscape of services for young children, including those who have or are at-risk for developmental delays and disabilities, has changed dramatically over the past four decades. The passage of the Education for All Handicapped Act (EHA) of 1986, P.L. 99-457 resulted not only in dramatic increases in the number of young children receiving services, but also an increase in professional interest and research related to the characteristics of appropriate services that effectively address the needs of this population of young children and their families. Concurrently, professional organizations, policymakers, and researchers have studied and re-envisioned the roles, practices, and educational requirements of early interventionists and early childhood special educators responsible for providing intervention and instruction for young children. To facilitate the readability of this manuscript, the term young children hereafter is used to refer to children birth through 8 years of age who are at-risk for or have developmental delays and disabilities.

High quality educator preparation aligned with professional standards equates to early intervention/early childhood special education (EI/ECSE) professionals' competence in the knowledge, skills, and dispositions required to directly impact outcomes for children and families. Professional standards as the foundation of a systems

approach for the preparation of the EI/ECSE workforce has precedence in the comprehensive system of personnel development (CSPD) requirement of the Education for All Handicapped Children's Act of 1975 and more recently in state initiatives to develop such a comprehensive system (Bruder et al., 2021). This manuscript introduces the new, stand-alone *Initial Practice-based Professional Preparation Standards for Early Interventionists/Early Childhood Special Educators* (Council for Exceptional Children [CEC] & Division for Early Childhood [DEC], 2020) (hereafter referred to as the EI/ECSE Standards) and their role in establishing a comprehensive, coordinated personnel development system. Specifically, we (a) discuss the rationale for stand-alone EI/ECSE Standards within the current context; (b) introduce the EI/ECSE Standards; (c) present an

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overview of how the EI/ECSE Standards were developed; and (d) provide a vision for and guidance to the field in the development of personnel systems that ensure the application of the EI/ECSE Standards for preservice and in-service preparation, IHE program accreditation, cross disciplinary collaboration, and research and development. The paper ends with recommendations for policy and advocacy for each of these applications.

Rationale for Stand-Alone EI/ECSE Standards

The rationale for stand-alone EI/ECSE Standards is multifaceted and based on a variety of needs. EI/ECSE Standards have the potential to (a) ensure specialization in the unique knowledge, skills, and dispositions required of EI/ECSE professionals within a systems approach; (b) provide for a continuum of standards for special educators from birth through grade 12; and (c) facilitate teaming and collaboration among professionals who serve young children birth through 8 years of age and their families.

Ensure Specialization in the Knowledge, Skills, and Dispositions Required of EI/ECSE Professionals

The roles for EI/ECSE professionals differ widely, reflecting not only the varied settings in which services may occur, but also the unique set of values and practices that have emerged from research and experience (Bartlett & Mickelson, 2019). EI/ECSE professionals must be prepared to work with young children, covering a period of rapid developmental change. For young children with delays and disabilities, EI/ECSE professionals must intentionally reflect on how dynamic and evolving social and cultural contexts impact their understanding of children's development and learning, and the lives and experiences of children and families. They must be able to integrate knowledge of the child and family's context as they identify functional goals and outcomes, as well as design and implement an array of interactions, interventions, and instructional approaches appropriate for each age range within natural and inclusive environments (Barton & Smith, 2015). In addition to preparation in this unique set of values and practices, EI/ECSE professionals also must be prepared to partner with young children and families in a wide range of service delivery models (e.g., interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary, primary service provider, consultation, coaching), which are administered through a variety of organizations/agencies (e.g., childcare, Head Start, private preschool, public preschool and primary schools), and implemented in a variety of locations (e.g., homes, childcare centers, schools, university child development centers).

No matter what the role of the EI/ECSE professional in practice, the core foundation of the profession is grounded in research, professional opinion, policy, and Recommended Practices (DEC, 2014a). EI/ECSE Standards based on this core foundation have the potential to ensure specialization in the unique knowledge, skills, and dispositions required of EI/ECSE professionals to provide services for young children and families in a variety of professional roles.

Further, a study of the perceived competence and confidence of personnel providing Part B 619 and Part C of IDEA services for young children and families by Bruder et al. (2011) supported the need for specialization in EI/ECSE and thus, stand-alone standards. The results indicated that 84% of Part B 619 and 53% of the Part C providers surveyed held certification in either ECSE, ECE, or special education. However, 80% reported not receiving the training needed to work with children with delays or disabilities in their preservice programs, and only 50% reported that their state required completion of specialized training beyond initial certification. Focusing more specifically on seven practice areas that align with the DEC (2014a) Recommended Practices, Part C and B 619 providers' self-ratings of both competence and confidence were low ($\leq 49\%$ and $\leq 54\%$, respectively).

Research has also suggested that the lack of national standards in EI/ECSE has resulted in inconsistencies in training, qualifications, and certification policies nationally for the birth through 8-year age range of young children (Chen & Mickelson, 2015; Sindelar et al., 2019). In reviewing, data from all 50 states and the District of Columbia, Chen and Mickelson (2015) found that only 55% of those jurisdictions had ECSE certification and another 11% had blended ECE and ECSE certification. The remaining 34% of states required some other type of license or endorsement (e.g., kindergarten through grade 12). The age range for ECSE certification was even more varied with 23 different certification age ranges reported. A more recent study (Sindelar et al., 2019) reported comparable results with 36 states having ECSE or ECE and ECSE blended or dual certification with multiple age ranges represented.

Stayton et al. (2012) conducted a content analysis of 18 state certification policies to determine the extent to which the state certification standards required to provide ECSE services were consistent with the CEC Professional Standards. For states with blended certification standards, the analysis also included the NAEYC Professional Standards. Standards from only three states were consistent at 80% or higher with national standards, 11 states were consistent at 50% or less, and three states were consistent at 0%. This variability in certification policies may be due in part to the lack of specific guidance as to what EI/ECSE professionals should know and be able to do that is provided through professional standards.

Provide a Continuum of Special Education Standards Birth Through Grade 12. Development of the *Unifying Framework for the Early Childhood Education Profession* (Power to the Profession Task Force, 2020) occurred over a 3-year period by a task force representing 15 national organizations, including the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the Division for Early Childhood (DEC) of the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC). A key component of the framework is defining early childhood education (ECE) as a profession with nationally agreed-upon professional standards and competencies (knowledge, understanding, abilities, and skills) for early childhood educators. The framework identified the EI/ECSE role as a specialization role that builds on the ECE foundation, though with its own required qualifications and standards. Thus, the *Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators* (National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEYC], 2019b), while providing the foundation for what every early childhood educator must know and be able to do, did not articulate what every EI/ECSE professional must know and be able to do to support young children and their families.

A set of standards unique to EI/ECSE, however, was not available prior to 2020. CEC is the professional association responsible for the development of professional standards for special educators, including EI/ECSE, as they are the specialty association (SPA) member of the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP). Prior to the development of the EI/ECSE Standards, the role of DEC as a division of CEC was to develop initial and advanced Specialty Sets of knowledge and skills to inform the CEC Standards, rather than develop separate DEC standards. Thus, the expectation of Institutions of Higher Education (IHEs) EI/ECSE programs was that their curricula be based on the CEC Standards as informed by the DEC Specialty Sets (CEC, 2015).

For over two decades, IHE programs used the CEC Standards as informed by the DEC Initial Specialty Set for EI/ECSE for program development and recognition through CAEP. IHE faculty and those in other leadership roles, however, argued that while the Specialty Sets facilitated the design of curricula with an EI/ECSE focus; they were not sufficient. That is, they did not adequately address current Recommended Practices (DEC, 2014a) because they did not focus on the multiplicity of roles and settings representative of services provided to young children and their families. The use of the Specialty Sets to inform IHE program development was further complicated, and their usefulness minimized with the development of new *CEC Initial Practice-Based Professional Preparation Standards for Special Educators K-12* (Berlinghoff & McLaughlin, 2022) as they would no longer inform the CEC Standards for accreditation purposes (Blanton et al., 2017). This change in the use of Specialty Sets created an even greater and

immediate need for stand-alone EI/ECSE Standards to ensure that the preparation of special educators birth through grade 12 is guided by professional standards.

Facilitate Teaming and Collaboration With Related Services Disciplines

For approximately three decades, DEC has provided leadership to the field for adapting program and personnel guidelines to align them with changing policy and Recommended Practices in EI/ECSE and related disciplines. In addition to Power to the Profession (PtP), briefly discussed above, DEC has worked closely with NAEYC for over three decades on a variety of initiatives specific to personnel qualifications and standards. DEC has also collaborated with other professional discipline organizations on the development of competencies for practitioners providing services for young children and their families.

Facilitated by the Early Childhood Personnel Technical Assistance Center (ECPC); a work group with representatives from DEC; the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA); the American Physical Therapy Association (APTA); the American Speech and Hearing Association (ASHA); NAEYC, and Zero to Three, met over a 10-year period to identify shared areas of practice. This resulted in identification of four competency areas: family centered practice; evidenced based interventions; teaming and collaboration; and professionalism and ethics (Bruder et al., 2019). However, these collaborations were complicated by the fact that DEC had a Specialty Set of knowledge and skill statements versus a more equivalent set of personnel standards to facilitate and guide continued collaborative initiatives.

EI/ECSE Standards

The strong rationale for stand-alone EI/ECSE Standards resulted in the CEC Board of Directors (BODs) approving the DEC proposal to develop EI/ECSE Standards in summer 2018. A brief description of the resulting EI/ECSE Standards is below, while a later section of the manuscript describes the EI/ECSE Standards' development process. The EI/ECSE Standards define the essential knowledge, skills, practices, and dispositions required of EI/ECSE candidates at the completion of an initial educator preparation program.

Developmentally appropriate and family-centered practice as they apply to young children with delays and disabilities and their families provide the conceptual foundation for the EI/ECSE Standards. The Standards intentionally cross age ranges and settings, including children and their families from birth through 2 years receiving EI services and children from 3 through 5 years of age and children from 6 through 8 years receiving ECSE services. The EI/ECSE Standards reflect current evidence-based practices in

EI/ECSE, which stem from current research as well as professional and family wisdom and values. The Standards provide a foundation that is consistent across EI/ECSE preparation programs, as well as provide guidance for state licensure aligned with research, policy, and professional opinion related to young children and their families.

The EI/ECSE Standards include seven essential content areas. Additionally, an eighth standard defines field and clinical experiences that support candidates in applying knowledge and practicing skills. Supplemental Table 1 identifies the eight Standards and provides a summary of the key content of each Standard. The complete Standards' statements, components for each Standard, and supporting explanations can be found at <https://www.dec-spced.org/ei-ecse-standards>. Each content area builds upon five underlying foundational themes which are elevated within and integrated across all eight Standards (Berlinghoff & McLaughlin, 2022; CEC & DEC, 2020). They include the following:

- an emphasis on family partnerships,
- recognition and respect for diversity,
- an expectation for equitable access for all children and families,
- an expectation for individually appropriate intervention and instruction, and
- an emphasis on collaborative partnerships.

EI/ECSE Standards Development Process

The Development Team

A Standards Leadership Team that included representation and resource support from DEC and ECPC with additional support from CEC facilitated the EI/ECSE Standards development process (see Early Childhood Personnel Center [ECPC], 2020 for more detail). Through an application process, a 15-member Standards Development Task Force (SDTF), which included primarily DEC members with representation from NAEYC and CEC, drafted the Standards and related products required for the CAEP application. The SDTF membership included 14 females and one male, representing 12 states. The primary role for 13 SDTF members was as IHE faculty and two provided professional development through a statewide system. The majority of members had direct service experience across the birth through 8-year age range. Years' experience in members' current roles ranged from 2 to 31 years. All SDTF members had experience in using personnel standards for program development while several members had been involved in developing state personnel standards. The representative from NAEYC was also an auditor for early childhood submissions to CAEP, and the CEC representative conducted program

reviewer training and audited special education submissions through the CAEP process. A stakeholder group whose purpose was to review drafts of the Standards included task force applicants not selected as SDTF members.

The Development Process

The EI/ECSE Standards were developed using an iterative process. Before each major task, the Standards Leadership Team met one or more times to plan the agenda, develop needed materials, and determine facilitation roles. During face-to-face meetings, small groups of the SDTF members drafted the standards-related products with input from the full group. The small groups also had work assignments to complete between virtual and/or face-to-face meetings with each revision of products by the small groups receiving feedback from the whole group. All products were developed in adherence to CAEP guidelines and completed parallel to CEC's Standards Development Work Group (SDWG) that was drafting standards for K-12 special educators. A review of research, related Standards, such as NAEYC (2019b), CEC (2015), Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (InTASC) (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2017), the DEC Recommended Practices (DEC, 2014a), and the CEC High Leverage Practices (McLeskey et al., 2017) informed the content of the Standards and components.

Input From the Field in Fall 2018 and Winter 2019

External review of the initial brainstorming of content areas occurred through listening sessions at the DEC and CEC Teacher Education Division (TED) 2018 annual conferences. Seventy-two individuals participated in the DEC and TED listening sessions and provided input to the following questions: (a) What have been your challenges in using the CEC Standards for EI/ECSE programs? (b) What critical competencies for beginning EI/ECSE professionals would not fit into one of these topical areas? and (c) What are the critical competencies that should be reflected in each of these topical areas? Additional revisions of the Standards, components, and supporting explanations resulted from that input. A complete summary of the feedback and how it was used to edit the Standards and related products can be found at ECPC (2020) <https://ecpcta.org>.

A webinar introducing the draft Standards and components preceded a request for input on the draft Standards and components through a public survey in winter 2019. Of the 131 respondents, the majority provided personnel preparation (i.e., higher education faculty [$n=43$, 33.59%], professional development providers [$n=8$, 6.25%]). The other respondents included school/program administrators

($n=13$, 10.16%), EIs ($n=13$, 10.16%), state agency personnel ($n=10$, 7.81%), ECSEs ($n=10$, 7.81%), consultants ($n=6$, 4.69%), related service providers ($n=2$, 1.56%), and ECEs ($n=2$, 1.56%). Most respondents were DEC members ($n=69$, 54.33%) and had been involved in the early childhood field for 15 or more years ($n=85$, 65.89%). Quantitative responses were received for three statements per each of the seven Standards using a Likert-scale with 1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree. The three statements were: (a) The Standard describes critical aspects of beginning EI/ECSE educator's practice; (b) The Standard clearly describes what beginning EI/ECSE educators should know and be able to do; and (c) The components, as written, are feasible for Educator Preparation Programs to assess candidates' attainment. The total responses per item ranged from 88 to 99 and the means ranged between 4.06 and 4.44. Responses to the following open-ended request provided additional recommendations for future work on the Standards: *Tell us why you selected the ratings that you recorded for this Standard.* Results of the survey in combination with feedback obtained during the listening sessions were used to make further revisions in the Standards and components and inform drafts of supporting explanations. A summary of the complete survey results and their use in informing the Standards can be obtained at <https://ecpcta.org>.

The CEC Professional Standards and Practices Committee (PSPC) reviewed the Standards, components, and supporting explanations in spring 2019 and referred them to the CEC Board of Directors (BODs) which reviewed the document in April 2019 and recommended submission to CAEP by July 1, 2019, for review by the CAEP Specialized Professional Association (SPA) Standards Committee. The SPA Standards Committee is responsible for reviewing new or revised standards, policies, and procedures developed by member professional associations that are then used by the respective professional association to nationally recognize educator preparation programs in that specialization area.

Input From the Field in Summer and Fall 2019

After the submission of the draft application to CAEP, the SDTF continued to work on the development of supporting explanations for each Standard and additional products to illustrate each Standard (i.e., knowledge bases grounded in research, Recommended Practices, legislation, and policy; and performance indicators). The SDTF again conducted a series of face-to-face meetings and virtual meetings, followed by completion of small group assignments with input from the full group. The Standards Leadership Team also reviewed and edited products to accompany the Standards. Additional listening sessions held at the June 2019 NAEYC Professional Learning Institute, and the DEC and TED fall

2019 conferences and a second public survey focused on the Standards, components, and supporting explanations provided for further input from DEC members and the broader ECE and EI/ECSE professions. The recommendations obtained via the listening sessions were incorporated into revisions of the Standards, components, or supporting explanations. The listening session recommendations were based on the following two questions: (a) What would you want to have greater emphasis? and (b) What do you want to have included that was not included? As with results of the previous listening sessions, a summary of the feedback and their application in making revisions can be obtained at <https://ecpcta.org>.

External review of the draft Standards, components, and supporting explanations also occurred through a public survey conducted in September 2019 that was preceded by a webinar. Although 27 individuals responded to the demographic items, there were only 15 responses to the questions for Standard 1 and 13 responses for the remaining six Standards. The majority of respondents indicated that they provided personnel preparation (i.e., higher education faculty [33.33%], professional development providers [7.41%]). The other respondents included (a) school/program administrators (11.11%), (b) early interventionists (18.52%), (c) state agency personnel (7.41%), (d) early childhood special educators (3.7%), and (e) inclusive ECE and ECSE (3.7%). More than half of the respondents were DEC members (59.26%) and had been involved in the early childhood field for 15 or more years (62.96%). Quantitative responses for four statements per each of the seven Standards were obtained using a Likert-scale with 1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree. Three of the statements were the same as those included in the winter 2019 survey; the fourth statement was: the supporting explanation provides guidance for the scope and focus of the component. Means ranged from 4.0 to 4.62. Qualitative recommendations for future work were based on responses to five open-ended prompts which asked respondents to provide: (a) a rationale for their responses regarding each draft Standard; (b) additional examples for supporting explanations; (c) examples of performance indicators similar to one provided as an example; (d) feedback regarding the degree to which the Standards, components, and supporting explanations would meet the need of their area of initial special education preparation; and (e) additional things for the SDTF to consider as possible revisions.

In fall 2019, the SDTF reviewed summaries of feedback from the listening sessions, the September public survey, and the CAEP SPA Committee. In addition, the SDTF small groups received comprehensive notes from the listening sessions, CAEP feedback, and survey results to integrate that feedback, as appropriate, into revisions of the Standards, components, and supporting explanations. Submission of the edited Standards, components, and supporting explanations

to CEC for copyediting occurred in January 2020. The summary of the SPA Committee's feedback and use of the feedback in revisions can be viewed at <https://ecpcta.org>.

Final Steps in the Process

After submission of the final draft of the Standards, components, and supporting explanations for copyediting, the SDTF small groups continued drafting knowledge bases and performance indicators for each standard and component. The entire SDTF then reviewed the knowledge bases and performance indicators with final review and editing by the Standards Leadership Team for submission to CEC for copyediting. The final task for the SDTF was to draft an introduction to the Standards, rubrics, and a glossary. The Standards Leadership Team conducted a final review of these products and edited them as needed. The SDTF Leadership Team completed a crosswalk between the EI/ECSE Standards and the CAEP national SPA program review structure of 6 to 8 key assessments (e.g., content tests, observations, projects or assignments, and surveys), a summary of the process for Standards development, and statements about the inclusion of technology and cultural and linguistic diversity in the Standards. The PSPC reviewed the Standards, components, and supporting explanations in May 2020, and the CEC BODs approved the Standards on June 18, 2020. CAEP received the Standards' application on July 1, 2020, with CAEP feedback and approval received in fall 2020. IHE programs could then begin using the EI/ECSE Standards for CAEP accreditation purposes in spring 2021, and all IHE programs that seek CAEP accreditation had to begin using the EI/ECSE Standards in winter/spring 2023 for CAEP accreditation. Upon approval, the EI/ECSE Standards, in addition to CAEP accreditation, were available for use for multiple purposes as discussed in the next section.

Using the EI/ECSE Standards to Direct the EI/ECSE Workforce

The EI/ECSE Standards were developed to be used for multiple purposes and by multiple audiences. Uses for the multifaceted EI/ECSE Standards should: (a) guide EI/ECSE preservice program development and accreditation, (b) facilitate professional development content, (c) foster cross disciplinary collaborations, and (d) promote an EI/ECSE personnel preparation research agenda. The following sections discuss each of these purposes in more detail.

Higher Education Programs of Study

Beginning in the early 1980s, IHE programs placed increased emphasis on expectations for students based on rigorous and measurable standards and assessed students' performance on the knowledge and skills represented by

those standards (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). Studies of preservice programs report that preservice students say they are better prepared, remain in the field longer, and positively impact children's learning and development when the program is based on clearly defined standards used to guide and evaluate coursework and field work (Darling-Hammond, 2012). Both the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) and the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (InTASC) have influenced the move toward performance-based standards by identifying what education majors should know and be able to do (Darling-Hammond, 2020).

Consequently, the EI/ECSE Standards are critical in the development of preservice programs to prepare highly qualified and effective EI/ECSE professionals who provide services for young children and their families. Standards provide guidance for the development of courses, field experiences, and assessment of the proficiency in standards by students in the program (Lifter et al., 2011). Further, the EI/ECSE Standards guide program evaluation. The expectation is that in a personnel preparation systems approach all preservice EI/ECSE programs will be based on the EI/ECSE Standards for program development and continuous improvement.

Higher Education Program Accreditation

The EI/ECSE Standards meet the requirements of CAEP. Specifically, CEC developed these and the other special education standards to meet the requirements of national accrediting agencies for SPA Standards and recognition of EI/ECSE preparation programs (Berlinghoff & McLaughlin, 2022). Additionally, the EI/ECSE Standards comply with recommendations of the CEC Standards Framing Paper Workgroup (Blanton et al., 2017), which emphasized a shift to practice-based standards for professional preparation. States have the responsibility for reviewing and approving educator preparation programs, and they use a range of processes (Council for Accreditation of Educator Preparation, n.d.). Several states require programs through individual partnership agreements with CAEP to obtain national accreditation. Some states mandate CEC SPA program review while other states have it as optional. For those EI/ECSE IHE programs required to seek CAEP accreditation or those that voluntarily seek national recognition, three major changes in the EI/ECSE field must be addressed. First, the role of EI/ECSE professionals has evolved as has our knowledge of recommended and effective practices. Second, as noted earlier, the EI/ECSE Standards represent a shift to practice-based Standards. Educator preparation aligned with practice-based standards changes the emphasis in program design and implementation from acquisition of knowledge to one of demonstration of the ability to

effectively apply knowledge and skills in real world settings with children and their families (Blanton et al., 2017). Finally, EI/ECSE IHE programs must shift from an input focus to an output focus. That is, programs must document candidates' attainment of proficiency in essential content through the effective use of the knowledge, skills, and practices. Accreditation through the CAEP framework requires IHE "programs to continually self-assess and conduct evidence-based analysis of their programs and efficacy" (CAEP, n.d.) to ensure that graduates have the preparation needed to successfully enter the EI/ECSE workforce. The EI/ECSE Standards, resources, and tools provided by Division for Early Childhood (DEC, n.d.), and ECPC (n.d.) should prove useful to faculty as they pursue CAEP Accreditation and CEC SPA National Recognition.

Professional Development

To ensure a highly qualified and effective EI/ECSE workforce, another use of the EI/ECSE Standards is to provide guidance for ongoing professional development content at the national, state, and local levels. EI/ECSE professionals have reported that their preservice programs did not adequately prepare them to work with young children with delays and disabilities and their families (Bruder et al., 2011). Now that the EI/ECSE field has its own Standards, those gaps in preparation can be addressed by first aligning professional development needs assessments with the EI/ECSE Standards, and then designing and implementing effective professional development activities that reflect the content of the EI/ECSE Standards. These activities can include in-person and online topic-specific learning, webinars, podcasts, and conferences within EI/ECSE state systems. At the local level, employers can use the EI/ECSE Standards to facilitate EI/ECSE professionals' self-assessment of their strengths and needs to guide the development and implementation of a professional learning and development plan. This may occur separately or in conjunction with program administrators' use of the Standards to assess staff competencies for continuing education, coaching, and supervisory plans. Lastly, program administrators could use the EI/ECSE Standards to guide staff evaluation and improvement plans in practice areas addressed by the Standards (Lifter et al., 2011).

Cross Disciplinary Collaboration

Various terms have been used to describe preservice and in-service preparation that jointly prepares professionals representing multiple disciplines (e.g., interdisciplinary, interprofessional, cross disciplinary). For this discussion, we use the term cross disciplinary. The EI/ECSE Standards serve an important purpose of fostering teaming and collaboration to ensure that personnel from various disciplines

are qualified to work effectively as team members in serving young children and their families. Although emphasized as vitally important for many years (Bruder, 2016; Kilgo et al., 2019; Stayton, 2015), efforts to develop cross disciplinary preservice preparation programs and professional development content have been complicated and hindered because DEC did not have stand-alone personnel standards. The EI/ECSE Standards provide clearly defined knowledge, skills, and dispositions in EI/ECSE that are integral to cross disciplinary preservice and in-service personnel preparation programs' use of the Standards in birth through eight curriculum development and modification. The EI/ECSE Standards will assist IHEs in the preparation of graduates that are highly qualified to work in partnership with professionals representing other disciplines and to effectively engage in teaming and collaboration as members of EI/ECSE teams.

Research and Development

The EI/ECSE Standards also have the potential to serve as a valuable tool for those engaged in research and development work within the field of EI/ECSE. First and most directly, the EI/ECSE Standards provide information on the knowledge and skills of effective EI/ECSE professionals. While the DEC Recommended Practices (DEC, 2014a), CEC High Leverage Practices (McLeskey et al., 2017), and currently available best evidence informed development of the knowledge and skills, some of the practices may not have the depth and breadth of empirical evidence needed. Thus, the EI/ECSE Standards together with Recommended Practices and High Leverage Practices provide a guide to areas in need of further study including systematic replication research. Furthermore, as the EI/ECSE Standards by design reflect broad concepts and approaches, research is needed to identify the fundamental or critical elements that must be implemented with high fidelity to achieve families' intended outcomes. This is particularly important since the implementation of these practices occurs in the real world of children and their families representing all social identities (e.g., ability, race, language) (Morgan & Cheatham, 2021).

An additional research area is research that focuses on effective workforce development strategies that lead to highly effective EI/ECSE professionals that in turn leads to positive outcomes for children and their families. Further, the expectation is that a high quality workforce has a commitment to inclusion. That is, as a field ECE professionals recognize that equitable access, participation, and support must encompass all children inclusive of all social identities (NAEYC, 2019a). Research suggests that educator knowledge and training are two of the strongest indicators of quality in early childhood programs—as is the case with K-12 education—so efforts to strengthen the workforce are a

critical strategy (Allen & Kelly, 2015). Efforts must continue to examine what works most effectively in terms of processes and formats for conducting preparation and ongoing professional development. As a function of workforce preparation and development, there also is a need to better understand the knowledge and skills required of those engaged in personnel preparation (Hamre et al., 2017). That is, what skills and strategies do those developing and implementing preservice personnel preparation and in-service professional development programs require?

Finally, as a function of workforce development, research about effective recruitment and retention strategies for EI/ECSE and related service personnel is critical (Mullen, 2010). An important aspect of this research must be the identification of effective recruitment and retention strategies that address issues of equitable access and support for a diverse well-prepared and supported EI/ECSE workforce.

The Policy and Advocacy for the Future

This is an exciting time for the EI/ECSE profession! For the first time, the EI/ECSE field has a set of stand-alone professional Standards. The EI/ECSE Standards serve as the foundation for a comprehensive system of personnel development (CSPD) for preparing and supporting professionals to provide services to young children and their families. In particular, the EI/ECSE Standards have implications for both state and national policy and advocacy to establish requirements and guidance for application in IHEs, professional development, cross disciplinary collaboration, and research and development.

State certification/licensure requirements provide guidance for IHE programs of study. IHE faculty and other EI/ECSE professionals have the responsibility to advocate for certification/licensure standards that align with national standards and professional association policies. Both DEC and NAEYC have and continue to identify the early childhood age range as birth through 8 years. However, research specific to certification/licensure has consistently indicated great variation across states in the age range used for early childhood requirements with some states not including birth through 2 years and others not including 6 through 8 years (Chen & Mickelson, 2015; Sindelar et al., 2019). In the U.S., the variability of requirements across states to serve in the special instruction or educator role in Part C of IDEA programs is another complicating factor. Although anecdotally, we know that some states (e.g., Kentucky, Kansas) whose certification/licensure is inclusive of birth through 2 years require that certification/licensure for the EI special instruction role, comprehensive documentation of state certification/licensure requirements for EI is lacking (DEC, 2014b). Even less is known about the content of state certification/licensure requirements and the extent to which they

align with national standards. Stayton et al. (2012) found that states that used national standards instead of developing their own Standards had the greatest alignment with national standards.

Now that the field has EI/ECSE Standards at the national level, it is time to address state EI/ECSE certification/licensure to ensure that state personnel requirements align with the national standards, are inclusive of the birth through eight age range, and include reciprocity across states. Specifically, we recommend that states develop and adopt one set of certification/licensure requirements for all EI/ECSE professionals to work with young children with delays and disabilities and their families. Further, consistent with the recommendations in the Unifying Framework (Power to the Profession Task Force, 2020), the expectation is that states adopt the EI/ECSE Standards to identify what EI/ECSE professionals should know and be able to do. For example, South Carolina requires that educator preparation programs use the most updated version of the national specialty area Standards (i.e., the EI/ECSE Standards for EI/ECSE educator preparation programs) (South Carolina Department of Education, 2021). When state policies are inclusive of the birth through eight age range and require the EI/ECSE Standards as the state's professional requirements for personnel serving in EI/ECSE, reciprocity across states can be accomplished.

At the national level, it is imperative that professional associations collaboratively advocate and provide guidance to states to revise state certification/licensure policies to align with the EI/ECSE Standards. It also is important for DEC and NAEYC to continue their collaboration to implement the recommendations from the Unifying Framework for ECE and EI/ECSE professionals. Lastly, early childhood and special education professional associations should establish relationships with professional associations who work with states and/or colleges of education in the preparation and licensure of EI/ECSE professionals (e.g., National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification [NASDTEC], American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education [AACTE]).

Adoption of the EI/ECSE Standards by each state as their certification/licensure requirements for EI/ECSE professionals will require IHEs to align their programs of study with the EI/ECSE Standards. Revision of state policies, however, is typically a time intensive process. Therefore, as IHE faculty advocate for and participate in the revision of state policies, they must simultaneously begin the process of revising their programs of study to align with the EI/ECSE Standards. ECPC and DEC will continue to develop resources to support the alignment process, as well as facilitate the development of comprehensive systems of personnel development (CSPD). The CSPD is an integral component of a state system framework for high quality EI/ECSE (see Kasprzak et al., 2020). The DEC Recommended

Practices and the CEC High Leverage Practices also support the EI/ECSE Standards, and, as such, should be incorporated into IHE programs of study (Berlinghoff & McLaughlin, 2022; DEC, n.d.; ECPC, n.d.).

For several years, OSEP has required applications for personnel preparation grants to integrate the DEC Recommended Practices into the proposed curriculum resulting in models for IHE programs. OSEP can continue to provide leadership for the EI/ECSE field by requiring applications for personnel preparation programs, as well as technical assistance centers to align with both the EI/ECSE Standards and DEC Recommended Practices. OSEP since 2017 has required that personnel preparation grants have an interdisciplinary focus and OSEP-funded technical assistance centers typically have focused on all disciplines providing EI/ECSE services. OSEP's definition of professional disciplines for interdisciplinary funding, however, has not included ECE, thus eliminating the opportunity for IHEs to develop and/or revise blended ECE and EI/ECSE programs that could serve as models for other IHEs. A modified definition of interdisciplinary and EI/ECSE Standards that are parallel with those of other professional associations, will facilitate advocacy for and support of cross disciplinary collaboration.

As discussed above, the EI/ECSE Standards were intentionally developed in adherence to CAEP guidelines to be used for accreditation of EI/ECSE educator preparation programs. Thus, IHE programs participating in CAEP accreditation must document how their program aligns with the EI/ECSE Standards. The reality, however, is that not all IHE programs seek CAEP accreditation; yet all IHE programs that lead to state certification/licensure must be accredited through a national and/or state process. Regardless of the type of accreditation required, the expectation is that all IHE programs and accreditation processes align with the EI/ECSE Standards.

Application of the EI/ECSE Standards for professional development purposes was discussed previously. All states, whether on a statewide and/or local basis, provide some type of professional development for EI/ECSE professionals. However, few states have an actual professional development *system* (Bruder, 2016). The ECPC has been successful in providing technical assistance for state teams in developing a CSPD based on personnel standards that is inclusive of both preservice and in-service preparation (Bruder et al., 2021). The Education for All Handicapped Children's Act, P.L. 94-142, initially required states to develop a CSPD for all special education programs. A later amendment to the legislation, only required Part C programs to have a CSPD, and the CSPD requirement has now been eliminated from the legislation.

However, the 2-year collaborative process implemented by the Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center to develop a conceptual framework for high-quality state EI/

ECSE systems emphasizes the role of a CSPD in a state system (Kasprzak et al., 2020). Personnel/workforce which is one of the six components of this framework includes the same subcomponents as required of a CSPD. Therefore, advocacy by EI/ECSE professionals and professional associations for states to employ this framework in developing and improving their EI/ECSE systems will be critical. Further, OSEP can continue to build on the state team model implemented by ECPC (Bruder et al., 2021) by requiring that future technical assistance centers that focus on personnel development use and refine this CSPD development model with the EI/ECSE Standards as the foundation for the CSPD.

For the first time perhaps, the EI/ECSE Standards allow for the development of a coordinated research agenda aligned with the EI/ECSE Standards which focuses on both the content of the Standards and the content and processes of preparation programs. Relevant professional associations and the EI/ECSE field as a whole should play a leading role in advocating for the development, dissemination, and implementation of that research agenda. While refereed publications (e.g., *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education*, *Journal of Early Intervention*) must be a primary vehicle for disseminating the research results, OSEP also has a role in ensuring that personnel preparation grantees collect program evaluation data based on program design, implementation, and the impact on scholars' proficiency in the EI/ECSE Standards and then, in disseminating those program evaluation results.

In summary, the EI/ECSE Standards provide guidance for systemic change at both the state and national levels. They contribute to a unified vision for the EI/ECSE profession as organizations and policy makers strive to further professionalize the preparation of those providing services to our youngest citizens and their families. The time is now for EI/ECSE professionals to coordinate advocacy efforts to ensure that comprehensive systems of personnel development for preparing and supporting EI/ECSE professionals to provide services to young children and their families are in place at both the state and national levels.

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Supplemental Material

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