
Establish Core Competencies

Establish a core body of knowledge, skills, and expertise providers and caregivers should know and have to care for babies and toddlers.

WHY? RESEARCH SAYS:

Providers and caregivers who care for young children need to understand the full range of child development and learning; the individual strengths, interests, and needs of each child; and the social and cultural contexts of each child. When caring for infants and toddlers, it is important that providers and caregivers are able to establish warm, responsive relationships with children and form partnerships with families. Infants and toddlers develop at their own paces. Providers and caregivers need the skills to notice, adapt, and respond to individual babies' and toddlers' changing interests and abilities, including those children with disabilities or special needs. Providers and caregivers must also be able to recognize when infant/toddler development does not occur within expected ranges. Core knowledge defines the content of the developmental needs of children birth to three while core competencies describe the skills that providers and caregivers should have to address the developmental needs of these very young children. States can play a leading role in bringing attention to the unique needs of babies and toddlers in child care by providing training, technical assistance, and funding to help providers and caregivers understand core knowledge and competencies relevant to babies and toddlers.¹

HOW? STATE POLICY OPTIONS:

Support more providers to attain state infant-toddler credentials that are credit-based and address the core body of knowledge and competencies.

At least 16 states have established an infant/toddler credential requiring a specific set of coursework and practical experience; nine more are in the development stage.² Illinois' infant/toddler credential includes six levels of competency and is linked to the state child care career lattice.³ States can encourage providers to take credit-bearing courses relevant to caring for infants and toddlers and work toward earning state infant/toddler credentials or other education goals by helping cover the costs and providing supports for non-traditional students.

Provide contracts and grants to child care providers caring for infants and toddlers who receive child care assistance to ensure that they have acquired core knowledge and competencies.

States can provide funds directly to centers and family child care networks to ensure that infant/toddler providers who care for low-income babies and toddlers receiving child care assistance are well-qualified and have prerequisite training, credentials, or degrees. California child development program contracts include standards and guidelines related to staff education, as well as other quality indicators.⁴

Ensure that state quality rating and improvement systems (QRIS) include provisions that infant/toddler providers and caregivers have a core body of knowledge and competencies.

States can use QRIS to encourage providers to demonstrate they have acquired knowledge and experience specific to infants and toddlers. Iowa's QRIS awards more points to centers and family child care homes as providers earn higher education levels specific to the age group for which they care.⁵ States should provide scholarships to help providers access higher education and training and pay a higher subsidy rate for programs with providers who have acquired this knowledge.

Train providers, caregivers, and parents on developmentally and culturally appropriate early learning guidelines on what babies and toddlers need, how they learn, and what they are able to do.

States can provide training on early learning guidelines to educate providers, caregivers, and parents about child development birth to 3. While all states have developed guidelines for preschool age children, only about 21 states have them for children birth to age 3.⁶ Washington has developed birth to age 5 guidelines that integrate attention to cultural competency throughout and has conducted outreach to educate providers and parents on the provisions.⁷

¹ For additional resources and complete references, see Rachel Schumacher, *Core Knowledge and Competencies: Charting Progress for Babies in Child Care Research-Based Rationale*, CLASP, forthcoming, and <http://childcareandearlyed.clasp.org/babiesinchildcare.html>.

² *Credentials for the Infant/Toddler Child Care Workforce: A Technical Assistance Tool for Child Care and Development Fund Administrators*, National Infant & Toddler Child Care Initiative, http://www.zerotothree.org/site/DocServer/ITC_TA_Tool.pdf?docID=4245.

³ See Gateways to Opportunity, <http://www.ilgateways.com/itccredentials.aspx>.

⁴ California Department of Education, *Funding Terms and Conditions for Child Development Contracts for 2008-09*, <http://www.cde.ca.gov/fg/aa/cd/ftc2008.asp>.

⁵ Iowa state law 441--118, Child Care Quality Rating System, <http://www.state.ia.us/earlychildhood/docs/QRrules.pdf>.

⁶ As of July 2007, Alaska, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, New Hampshire, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, and Washington had released early learning guidelines for birth to 3. Catherine Scott-Little, Sharon Lynn Kagan, Victoria Stebbins Frelow, and Jeanne Reid, *Inside the Content of Infant-Toddler Early Learning Guidelines*, <http://www.uncg.edu/hdf/facultystaff/ScottLittle/FINAL%20FULL%20REPORT%20-%202.28.08.pdf>; *State Early Learning Guidelines*, National Infant and Toddler Child Care Initiative, <http://www.nccic.acf.hhs.gov/itcc/publications/itelg.htm>.

⁷ Washington Department of Early Learning, *Washington Early Learning and Development Benchmarks*, <http://www.del.wa.gov/publications/development/docs/BenchmarksColor.pdf>.