

# Early Childhood Essentials: A Framework for Aligning Child Skills and Educator Competencies

Beth Meloy and Abby Schachner

The Early Childhood Essentials Framework presents the essential skills and competencies children should be acquiring before they enter kindergarten and the related skills and competencies early childhood educators (early educators) must cultivate in order to provide high-quality early learning experiences. It provides a baseline of knowledge to **help decision-makers think critically** about how to improve the early learning programs they oversee.

## Essential Child Skills Are Diverse and Interrelated

The **essential skills children need to succeed in school** span the areas of social-emotional, cognitive, language and literacy, mathematical and scientific reasoning, and physical development. Although these skills are presented as distinct areas of development, **they are interrelated**: Progress in developing one skill set can accelerate or impede progress in another area.

## Early Childhood Educators Must Master a Complex Set of Competencies

Early educators need to acquire and work to refine a **wide range of essential competencies**. Effective educators must be able to utilize developmentally appropriate practices and environments to support, observe, and assess children's development and learning and, ultimately, provide individualized supports and inclusion-based practices. These individual competencies do not exist in a vacuum. Likewise, educators' competencies in continuous improvement and professionalism and in engaging in family support and partnership **will either support or hinder their capacity to provide high-quality learning experiences** that fulfill the promise of early education for every child.

## Why Decision-Makers and Leaders in Early Learning Need the Framework

State and local policymakers, administrators, and leaders influence preparation and professional development, play an important role in funding to support compensation for early educators, and often directly oversee early learning environments. However, **child development is multifaceted, and providing high-quality early learning experiences is complex work**.

Although not every decision-maker with influence over early childhood programs needs to understand the nuances of these complex concepts, it is **critical that decision-makers develop and maintain a basic understanding** of the essential child skills and the essential educator competencies and acknowledge the **foundational conditions necessary** for children's readiness to learn and educator's ability to succeed. This **fundamental understanding will support leaders in making informed decisions** to ensure that educators have the resources they need to provide every child with the opportunity to enter school ready to thrive.

### Expert Workgroup

This work was prepared in consultation with and benefited from the insights and expertise of Ranae Amezquita, Krischa Esquivel, Nancy Hurlbut, Sydney Fisher Larson, Peter Mangione, Scott Moore, Mary Vixie Sandy, Vilma Serrano, Deborah Stipek, Erin Sullivan, Ross A. Thompson, and Marlene Zepeda.

The full report can be found at <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/early-childhood-essentials-framework>.

# Early Childhood Essentials Framework

## Essential Educator Competencies

### Within the Learning Setting

- Developmentally appropriate practice and environments
- Observation and assessment of development and learning
- Individualized supports and inclusion-based practices



### Supporting the Learning Setting

- Family support and partnership
- Continuous improvement and professionalism



## Essential Child Skills

- Social-emotional development
- Cognitive development
- Language and literacy development
- Mathematical and scientific reasoning
- Physical development



## Foundational Conditions

### For Educators to Succeed

- Facilitative leadership
- Competitive compensation and benefits
- Job-embedded professional development
- Paid planning and collaboration time
- Emotionally supportive environment

### For Children to Learn

- Adequate nutrition
- Continuity of care
- Access to physical, dental, and mental health services
- Stable and safe housing
- Access to specialized educational supports

