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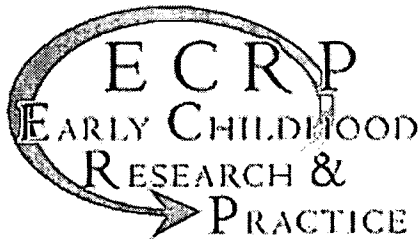
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ABSTRACT

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Creating the Conditions for Success with Early Learning Standards: Results from a National Study of State-Level Standards for Children's Learning Prior to Kindergarten*

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Abstract

Historically the field of early care and education has focused on one type of standards—program standards to define requirements for important features of the services children receive. Recently another type of standards has come to the forefront of early care and education policy and practice—early learning standards that define expectations for children's learning and development. This article reports the results of a national study undertaken to collect data on early learning standards across the country. Using the position statement on early learning standards recently adopted by the National Association for the Education of Young Children and the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education as a framework for analyzing data from the study, this article presents data on which states have early learning standards, how they were developed, and how they are being used. The article suggests that many of the "conditions for success" described in the position statement are being addressed but also outlines several recommendations for improvements in how early learning standards are developed and implemented.

Introduction

The field of early childhood education has a long and rich history of observing and describing the development of young children. Seminal works by theorists such as Froebel, Pestalozzi, and Piaget articulated stages of development and described typical or expected trajectories of development. Recently, however, there has been a marked shift from the theoretical descriptions of how development should unfold to more explicit articulations of what is expected of children's development during the years before children start school. Recent findings from brain research; reports such as *Eager to Learn* (Bowman, Donovan, & Burns, 2001); and numerous studies such as the Perry Preschool project (Schweinhart, Barnes, & Weikart, 1993), the Abecedarian research (Campbell & Ramey, 1994; 1995), the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development study (2001), and the Cost, Quality, and Outcomes

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study (Cost, Quality, and Outcomes Study Team, 1995; Peisner-Feinberg et al., 1999) show that young children can, indeed, learn a great deal and that their development is highly impacted by the learning environment to which they are exposed. The potential for facilitating positive child outcomes coupled with the desire for accountability of funds invested in early care and education have led to increasing pressure for more explicit articulations of just what children should know, be like, and be able to do before they enter kindergarten.

Known as *early learning standards* (NAEYC & NAECS/SDE, 2002), these formal articulations of what is expected for children's growth and development differ significantly from the other type of standards that the early care and education field has had for several decades—program standards. Program standards provide criteria for important program features such as adult:child ratios, group sizes, and curricula. Although experts in the field may differ as to the specifics they recommend for program features, there is widespread agreement on the need for program standards and the general elements that should be included.

Early learning standards, however, are relatively new within the field of early care and education and somewhat contentious. First, the very nature of children's development does not lend itself to "standards." Preschool children's development often is uneven across developmental areas, with development in one area outpacing development in other areas. Furthermore, development often is sporadic. A child may make relatively little progress in one developmental area for a significant period of time and then suddenly master a series of skills or demonstrate more advanced characteristics almost overnight (Shepard, Kagan, & Wurtz, 1998). Second, children's development at this age is highly influenced by the environment to which they are exposed, and preschool children's home, community, and educational environments differ substantially (Kagan, Moore, & Bredekamp, 1995). Third, early childhood pedagogy has traditionally relied on child-centered or child-initiated approaches where the learning curriculum originates from the child's own unique developmental level and interests (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; Lay-Dopyera & Dopyera, 1990; Schweinhart, 1988). Therefore, one might argue that "standards" for this age are counter to what we know about children's growth and development and what we have espoused as features of high-quality early childhood curricula.

Despite these concerns, pressure has been mounting to develop early learning standards. In the K-12 educational arena, standards-based education has become the norm over the past decade. Almost every state in the nation, plus the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico, have standards to outline what children should know and be able to do in kindergarten through grade 12 (American Federation of Teachers, 1999). Furthermore, federal, state, and local governments, along with numerous foundations and community organizations, have invested significant resources into providing early care and education services for children before they enter kindergarten (Doherty, 2002; Schulman, Blank, & Ewen, 1999). It seems reasonable, and perhaps inevitable in this age of accountability, that policy makers and others want to know just what children are supposed to be learning in these early care and education settings.

Standards that articulate expectations for what children should learn also have potential benefits beyond addressing pressures for increased accountability. They can clarify expectations for what should be taught, provide a common set of expectations for child outcome goals, and focus attention on important aspects of children's growth and development (Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning, 2003). Indeed, Ravitch (1995) argues that we commonly expect standards for things such as construction of public buildings and processing of drinking water because standards can protect the well-being of the public. Education can also be improved by clearly defining what is to be taught, expectations for what children will learn, and how they will demonstrate what they have learned.

NAEYC-NAECS/SDE Position Statement in Response to Recent Trends

Recognizing that early learning standards are becoming increasingly common and that there are significant concerns about what is contained in the standards and how they are used, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education (NAECS/SDE) issued a joint position statement on early learning standards in 2002. Titled *Early Learning Standards: Creating the Conditions for*

Success, the position statement addresses the content of standards, how they should be developed and used, and the programmatic supports necessary to ensure that early learning standards are beneficial. The position statement is intended to provide policy makers, state education agencies, and other organizations guidance that can lead to development and implementation of early learning standards that maximize the potential benefits and minimize the risk of harm.

Purpose of the Study

This paper provides findings of a descriptive study of early learning standards in the United States. Data were collected on which states have early learning standards, what the standards contain, how they were developed, and how they are being used. Data from this study can inform us about the extent to which the "conditions for success" articulated in the NAEYC-NAECS/SDE position statement are present in states that have developed standards. The paper extrapolates from the data to draw some conclusions about the extent to which issues described in the NAEYC-NAECS/SDE position statement are being addressed in the field and provides recommendations to guide future standards development work.

Methodology

This descriptive study utilized data from multiple sources to gain a picture of early learning standards within each state. Telephone survey data were augmented by reviews and analysis of early learning standards documents. A telephone survey protocol was developed to determine (1) whether a particular state had early learning standards (or was engaged in a standards development process); (2) the impetus for the standards; (3) the nature of the standards; (4) the process of their development, including issues related to leadership, participation, and funding; and (5) how the standards are disseminated and implemented.

Recognizing the possibility that a standards development initiative might take place within a state under the auspices of any number of agencies or organizations, the research team triangulated data from interviews with representatives from three target groups: (1) the early childhood specialist in the state department of education, (2) the president of the state Association for the Education of Young Children (AEYC), and (3) the chief child care administrator in the state's lead child care agency. The strategy of collecting data from these diverse sources worked well, in that persons in different roles often provided different knowledge bases, perspectives, and data sources.

Initial contact was made through a letter to respondents to explain the purpose of the survey and provide a copy of the questions that would be addressed during the interview. Approximately 2 weeks after the letter was mailed to a respondent, a phone contact was made to schedule an appointment for the interview. During the interview, participants were asked to respond to a series of open-ended and closed-ended questions to describe any early learning standards activities in their state. The interviews were conducted between November 2001 and May 2002. A written summary of each interview was completed and either mailed electronically or faxed to respondents so that they could provide suggested changes for the write-up and then approve the way the write-up reflected their conversation with the researcher.

Respondents were asked to forward copies of early learning standards documents to the research team, along with any supplemental materials that might be available to support implementation of the standards. Materials were received from each of the states in which respondents indicated that their state had standards. Interview responses regarding the name of the standards, the age groups addressed, and the developmental domains and subject areas covered were confirmed by examination of the standards documents and any Web-based materials the respondent provided.

A total of 177 persons were contacted as potential respondents for the survey. Seventy-seven persons able to provide data regarding early learning standards in their state. The remainder either indicated that their states did not have early learning standards or that they were not informed sufficiently to answer the questions about their state's standards. Fifty of the 77 respondents who were able to answer questions

about the standards in their states were early childhood specialists in state departments of education. Thirteen informants were child care administrators, and 14 were AEYC liaisons. Data were collected from more than one informant in 20 states. In these cases, the separate interview responses were compared, and respondents were re-contacted to clarify any discrepancies in the information provided.

Quantitative and qualitative data analysis techniques were used to extract themes or commonalities among the states. For the quantitative analysis, two primary strategies were used: (1) counts of the number of early learning standards documents that exhibited the specific characteristics examined or the numbers of respondents who reported a given response, and (2) ratings of standards on various scales that were developed to describe the nature of the standards.

Qualitative analytic methods were used to analyze responses to the open-ended interview questions. The research team studied the interview responses carefully, looking for emerging patterns, themes, and categories. A coding system was developed, and data were sorted according to "families of codes" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 171). As a particular theme was identified, the team looked for consistency across multiple respondents within a state and then evidence of the theme in respondents' answers across multiple states.

Limitations of the Study

Several factors impact the efficacy of the findings from this study. First, the data are limited to what respondents told us in the interview, and their responses reflect their own perspective. Although we made every effort to find respondents within each state who could inform the work, we may have missed a key respondent and, therefore, have limited or biased data regarding an individual state. Second, considerable confusion exists within the field about early learning standards, with many persons not understanding the distinction between program standards and standards that describe expectations for children's growth and development. Furthermore, the nature of early learning standards varies tremendously. Therefore, respondents may not have fully understood the subject matter of this study and their responses may have been off topic, depending on their knowledge of the subject and our ability to clearly articulate the purpose of the study and the type of data we aimed to collect. Third, the standards development process in states is clearly a "moving target." This type of standards development is a relatively new phenomenon within the field, and many states are still in the standards development process. Our data were collected between November 2001 and May 2002 and, therefore, reflect where states were at the time of the interview, not necessarily where they are now in the process. Finally, we may have unintentionally minimized the variability among states in our reporting on the nature of the standards, their development process, and how they are being used. States are truly unique in how they have approached the issue of early learning standards. In our effort to extract themes from across the states, we may have inadvertently minimized the differences among states. Given these limitations, data from the study present a rich picture of early learning standards activities within states.

Findings

One significant question for the research team was the extent to which the four essential features of "developmentally effective" early learning standards outlined in the NAEYC-NAECS/SDE position statement are present in states' standards development/implementation activities. Therefore, our findings are presented within the framework of issues raised in the position statement. Following a brief discussion of which states had early learning standards at the time of the interview, findings related to the content of the standards; the process used to develop standards; implementation and assessment strategies; and supports for programs, professionals, and families are discussed. Finally, findings related to the potential risks and benefits outlined in the position statement are addressed.

Who Has Early Learning Standards?

Data indicate that a significant number of states have developed early learning standards and that there is

wide variation in the status of standards within states. Some states have completed an early learning standards development process, while others have not begun to study the issue. Within states that have standards, some are revising their current standards, while others already have or are developing a second set of early learning standards for their state.

Table 1 indicates that 27 states had developed a document of some type to articulate expectations for children's learning and development in at least one developmental domain or content area for some age range prior to kindergarten entry. Two of the 27 states—Maine and Washington—have two separate sets of standards that were applicable for children before they enter kindergarten. Therefore, the total number of early learning standards documents available for review in this study was 29. States where respondents indicated that early learning standards had been developed and published were subdivided into two categories: standards that had been officially adopted or endorsed by a governing body or governmental agency at the time of the interview and states that had published standards that had not been officially adopted or endorsed. Nineteen states had standards that had been officially adopted or endorsed by government boards or agencies (Category I). An additional eight states reported that they had standards for at least one developmental domain but that the standards had not been officially adopted or endorsed at the time of the survey interview (Category II).

Table 1
Status of Early Learning Standards in States

Category I Have Standards That Have Been Officially Adopted or Endorsed	Category II Have Standards That Have Not Been Officially Adopted or Endorsed	Category III Standards in Process	Category IV No Early Learning Standards
Arkansas Connecticut Florida Georgia*** Illinois Maine*, *** Maryland Massachusetts*** Michigan Minnesota Mississippi New Jersey** New Mexico New York South Carolina*, *** Texas Utah** Vermont*** Washington***	California Colorado* Louisiana Missouri* Ohio** Oklahoma Pennsylvania Rhode Island	Arizona**** Delaware**** Hawaii**** Indiana**** Kentucky Nevada North Carolina Oregon Tennessee Virginia**** Washington, DC Wisconsin Wyoming****	Alabama Alaska Idaho Iowa Kansas Montana Nebraska New Hampshire North Dakota South Dakota West Virginia
* Standards developed to address limited number of developmental/subject areas and standards addressing additional developmental/subject areas in process. ** Current standards under revision. *** Two sets of standards in place and/or being developed. **** Have published standards document since May 2001.			

Data indicated that the standards development process is a relatively new phenomenon within the field. A few pioneer states (Michigan, Texas, Vermont, and Washington) had standards covering preschool-age

children prior to 1996. The preponderance (18 out of 29 sets of standards) had standards that were finalized in 2000 or later. The early learning standards development process is also a "moving target." Four states (see states with * in [Table 1](#)) reported that they had early learning standards for one or more areas of development and were in the process of developing additional standards to address additional developmental/subject areas. For example, South Carolina reported that standards for mathematics had been completed and adopted by the State Board of Education and that the state was in the process of developing language arts, science, fine arts, and social studies standards. Likewise, Colorado had early learning standards addressing reading, writing, and math, with standards addressing social-emotional competence, science, and art in the development process. A few states that had standards in place were in the process of revising them (states with ** in [Table 1](#)). Three states with early learning standards in place fall into this category—New Jersey, Ohio, and Utah.

Data also reveal that a number of states are in the process of reviewing and, in some cases, developing additional sets. Maine, Massachusetts, and Vermont each had one set of standards that included standards for pre-kindergarten-age children within their K-12 standards. In these three states, respondents reported that efforts were underway to develop a second set of standards to better articulate standards for children younger than kindergarten age. Therefore, the data do indicate that a number of states are involved in reviewing and revising their standards, although it is not clear that the review process reflects a "systematic" approach as described in the position statement. It seems that the review/revision process is typically in response to dissatisfaction with current standards rather than systematic or regularly scheduled review/update processes.

In addition to this variation within the states that reported having published early learning standards, respondents from 12 states plus the District of Columbia (see category III in [Table 1](#)) indicated that their state did not have early learning standards at the time of the interview but that an initiative was in place to develop early learning standards. These states ranged from having just started a standards development process to those who were just short of publishing a document. Indeed, at least six of these "in process" states have completed their standards development process since the time of the interview (see states marked with **** in [Table 1](#)).

Finally, respondents from 11 states indicated that their states did not have published early learning standards and were not in the process of developing such standards at the time of the interview. A variety of explanations were provided by respondents in these states. Explanations ranged from practical (i.e., the state was involved in other initiatives such as developing program standards), to political (i.e., the state was a local-control state, and standards developed at the state level would not be used), to philosophical (i.e., concerns over potential negative impacts of standards to define expectations for children's growth and development).

Content of the Standards

The NAEYC-NAECS/SDE position statement indicates that developmentally effective early learning standards must include "significant, developmentally appropriate content and outcomes." The document emphasizes that standards must incorporate all developmental domains; emphasize content that has been shown to be important for children's learning and development; be based on knowledge of the process by which children develop in the early years; and include cultural, community, linguistic, and individual perspectives. An extensive content analysis would be necessary to determine the degree to which the early learning standards documents included in this research address each of these features. Although the current study did not include a detailed analysis of the content, relevant data on the nature of the standards were collected and are described below.

Developmental Domains. Data indicate that states have addressed a variety of developmental domains in their early learning standards (see [Table 2](#)). Respondents were asked to indicate which of the domains were included in their standards. In addition, we examined the actual documents to determine which developmental domains were addressed, using the National Education Goals Panel's developmental domain descriptions as indicators for what is included in each domain.

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Table 2
National Education Goals Panel Developmental Domains Included in Standards

State	Physical Health	Cognition	Approaches to Learning	Social-Emotional	Language
Arkansas	X	X	X	X	X
California	X	X	X	X	X
Colorado		X			X
Connecticut	X	X		X	X
Florida	X	X	X	X	X
Georgia	X	X		X	X
Illinois	X	X		X	X
Louisiana	X	X		X	X
Maine Learning Results Early Learning Results	X X	X IP*		X	X X
Maryland		X			X
Massachusetts		X			X
Michigan	X	X		X	X
Minnesota	X	X	X	X	X
Mississippi	X	X		X	X
Missouri	IP	IP	IP	IP	X
New Jersey	X	X		X	X
New Mexico	X	X		X	X
New York		X			X
Ohio		X			X
Oklahoma	X	X	X	X	X
Pennsylvania		X			X
Rhode Island	X	X	X	X	X
South Carolina		X			IP
Texas	X	X		X	X
Utah	X	X		X	X
Vermont	X	X	X	X	X
Washington ECEAP OSPI	X	X X		X	X X
Total	20	27	7	19	28
*IP = In process (at the time of the interview, the state was actively working on early learning standards addressing this domain).					

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As shown in Table 2, all states except South Carolina and Missouri had developed standards that include more than one domain (both had early learning standards in process to address at least one additional domain). Seven of the states had standards that address all five developmental domains. Respondents eleven states reported that their standards cover four of the domains, and seven states reported that their standards cover two or three of the domains.

Language is the most common domain to be included in early learning standards. All of the states except South Carolina addressed this domain (and South Carolina had language standards in process). Cognition was also very commonly included in the standards (27 of 29 sets of standards). Physical health was the next most commonly addressed domain, with 20 of the 29 standards documents including this domain. The data indicate that the approaches-to-learning domain was the domain least likely to be addressed in the early learning standards. Of the 29 sets of standards, only 7 include approaches to learning. The social-emotional domain is the next least likely domain to be addressed, with 19 sets of standards covering social-emotional development.

Linkage to K-12 Standards. The position statement points out that effective early learning standards should reflect content that is meaningful and based on research from child development at the preschool age, rather than simplifying standards developed for older children. The statement also points to potential negative impacts of "back mapping" early learning standards from K-12 standards.

Although this study did not include a detailed content analysis of the standards, the data do indicate that states have made efforts to align their standards with K-12 standards. When asked, "To what extent are the early learning standards linked to or modeled after standards developed for your state's K-12 system?" respondents from each of the 27 states indicated that the early learning standards were in some way related to the K-12 standards. The way and the extent to which the standards were linked varied, ranging from actually being incorporated into the K-12 standards to using a similar format or including similar subject areas (see Table 3). Fifteen states had standards classified as being directly linked to the K-12 standards (the K-12 standards were part of the same document or reference numbers were provided to show where individual early learning standards related to specific K-12 standards). Seven states had early learning standards classified as moderately linked (for instance, the documents used subject areas or developmental categories that were the same as the K-12 standards), and seven states' early learning standards were classified as minimally linked (i.e., it was not obvious from the document nor the interview data precisely how the standards were linked to K-12 standards).

Table 3
Degree of Linkage to K-12 Standards

State	Direct Linkage	Moderate Linkage	Minimal Linkage
Arkansas		X	
California		X	
Colorado	X		
Connecticut			X
Florida	X*		
Georgia		X	
Illinois	X		
Louisiana	X*		

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Maine Learning Results Early Learning Results	X		X
Maryland	X		
Massachusetts	X		
Michigan	X		
Minnesota			X
Mississippi		X	
Missouri		X	
New Jersey	X*		
New Mexico			X
New York	X		
Ohio	X		
Oklahoma			X
Pennsylvania	X		
Rhode Island		X	
South Carolina	X		
Texas		X	
Utah			X
Vermont	X		
Washington ECEAP OSPI	X		X
Total	15	7	7
*Includes reference number for K-12 standards rather than actual standards themselves.			

Specific Ages or Developmental Periods. NAEYC-NAECS/SDE's position statement suggests that determining how to link expectations in early learning standards to particular age ranges or developmental levels is particularly challenging. For instance, the position statement says, "when a standard is written to cover a wide age spectrum . . . adults may assume that the youngest children should be accomplishing the same things as the oldest children, leading to frustration for both the youngest children and for their teachers." Conversely, the statement continues, "with such broad age ranges for standards, adults may also underestimate the capacities of older children" (NAEYC & NAECS/SDE, 2002).

States appear to have addressed this challenge of determining what age range to include in early learning standards in a variety of ways. Table 4 shows the age ranges addressed in the state early learning standards published at the time of the interviews. Twenty-four states addressed an age range for 3- to 5-year-olds, with some (like Florida) describing distinct expectations for 3-year-olds, 4-year-olds, and 5-year-olds. Others (like Minnesota and Mississippi) have developed standards they consider to be for children who are 4 years old. And other states (like Missouri and Oklahoma) have developed standards that address a particular point in time/age such as the end of pre-kindergarten or the beginning of

kindergarten.

Table 4
Ages Covered by Early Learning Standards

State	Infant/ Toddler	3-5	End of Pre-K/ Kindergarten Entry	Comments
Arkansas		X		
California	X	X	X	Are part of continuum of birth through 14 years
Colorado		X		
Connecticut		X		
Florida		X	X	Pre-K and K, with ages broken down (i.e., 3-year-olds, 4-year-olds, and 5-year-olds)
Georgia		X		
Illinois		X		
Louisiana		X		All 4-year-olds and 3- to 5-year-olds with disabilities
Maine Learning Results Early Learning Results	X	X X	X	Pre-K to 2 0-5 years for Special Ed.
Maryland			X	Part of pre-K to K Content Standards
Massachusetts		X	X	Part of pre-K to 12-grade (pre-K to 2 for most subject areas; pre-K to 4 for history and social science)
Michigan		X	X	Pre-K to second grade
Minnesota		X		Approximately 4 years old
Mississippi		X		4-year-olds
Missouri			X	
New Jersey		X		
New Mexico	X	X		Part of Focused Portfolios assessment system that covers birth through 5 years
New York		X		4-year-olds
Ohio		X		
Oklahoma			X	
				Pre-K to second grade but

Pennsylvania		X	X	"through pre-K" and pre-K to K" are broken out
Rhode Island			X	
South Carolina		X		Pre-K to second grade but have the pre-K separated out
Texas		X		
Utah		X		
Vermont		X	X	Pre-K to fourth grade
Washington ECEAP OSPI	X	X	X	Continuum of birth through 5 years (OSPI)
Total	4	24	12	

Accommodations for Community, Cultural, Linguistic, and Individual Differences. The position statement notes the importance of children's cultures, languages, and individual needs such as disabilities in their growth and development and suggests that "early learning standards should be flexible enough to encourage teachers and other professionals to embed culturally and individually relevant experiences in the curriculum, creating adaptations that promote success for all children." Data from the study indicate that accommodations for individual differences are valued but that specific adaptations have not been addressed in many states. Each of the respondents indicated that his or her state's early learning standards were designed to apply to all children, including children from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, as well as children with disabilities.

Some states have worked to provide guidance on how to use early learning standards with children with disabilities. In California, an initiative has been funded to look specifically at how the Desired Results system can accommodate children with disabilities. Maine's Early Learning Results are designed for use in programs serving children with disabilities. However, when the standards documents were examined, relatively few addressed specific strategies on how children with disabilities should be included when the standards are implemented at the classroom level. Perhaps even more telling is the lack of guidance on how the early learning standards should be applied with children who are learning English. At the time that data were collected, Texas was the only state with specific guidance for accommodations that should be made for English-language learners. A few respondents spoke of plans to translate the standards into other languages, but at the time of the interviews, little guidance was provided to teachers or others using the standards as to how children's individual circumstances can or should be accommodated.

The Process for Developing Early Learning Standards

The position statement suggests that effective early learning standards are developed through a process that includes "appropriate expertise, stakeholder involvement, and regular evaluation and revision." Data from this study indicate that the early learning standards development process in most of the states has been consistent with these recommendations. As shown in [Table 5](#), states included a wide range of stakeholders and individuals with various areas of experience and expertise. Although state departments of education were by far the agency most likely to have the lead in the standards development process (22 out of 27 states), they included representatives from local school districts, higher education, human service agencies, parents, and external consultants in the process. Furthermore, almost all respondents reported that their state had solicited public feedback on their draft documents through focus groups, public forums, mailings, and/or Web postings. The process for developing standards has, in most states, been highly inclusive.

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Table 5
Partners in the Standards Development Process

State	Local School Districts	Dept. of Social Services/ Human Services	Dept. of Special Education	Higher Education	Parents	External Consultants	Other
Arkansas	X		X	X		X	
California	X	X	X	X	X	X	Researchers Practitioners
Colorado	X	X	X	X	X		Business
Connecticut	X			X		X	
Florida	X	X	X	X		X	Library assoc./ Business
Georgia						X	Public health
Illinois	X			X	X		
Louisiana	X	X		X			
Maine Learning Results Early Learning Results	X X						Child dev. service sites
Maryland	X			X		X	
Massachusetts	X						
Michigan	X	X	X	X	X		State reading assoc.
Minnesota	X		X	X	X		Community agencies
Mississippi	X	X		X			
Missouri	X	X			X		Literacy grant program/PAT
New Jersey	X	X		X	X		Advocacy groups/Lucent Tech.
New Mexico						X	
New York	X		X		X		
Ohio	X			X			Dir. of State's Literacy Init.
Oklahoma	X			X			
Pennsylvania	X		X				
Rhode Island	X	X	X	X	X		Dept. C,Y, &F

South Carolina	X	X					State Legislature
Texas	X					X	
Utah	X			X			
Vermont	X	X		X	X	X	Business
Washington ECEAP OSPI	X			X	X	X X	
Total	26	11	9	18	11	11	

Respondents also indicated that the persons developing the early learning standards for their states consulted a variety of resource materials. The most important resource used to develop the early learning standards was the state's own K-12 standards. Respondents from all 27 states indicated that their state had used the state's K-12 standards in some way when developing early learning standards. States developing early learning standards consulted a number of other resources, including developmental theories, national early childhood standards, National Education Goals Panel's dimensions of readiness, and Head Start's Performance Standards, as well as assessment tools and curricula. In short, the standards development process in most states was characterized by widespread stakeholder involvement and efforts to bring to bear the most relevant knowledge and expertise available.

Implementation and Assessment Practices

The relationship between early learning standards and assessments or other accountability tools is a significant issue. The NAEYC-NAECS/SDE position statement suggests that effective standards must be linked to effective curriculum and classroom practices and that the relationship between assessments and standards must be evident. Data from this survey suggest that plans for implementation of the standards are still underway and that, in many cases, the relationships among standards, assessments, and curricula are not clear.

Intended Uses of Early Learning Standards. First, it is important to gain an understanding of how the standards were intended to be used, where they are intended to be used, and the degree to which programs are being held accountable for using the early learning standards. Table 6 shows that early learning standards were developed for many different purposes. Respondents from each of the states indicated that one of the purposes of the early learning standards was to improve curriculum and instruction. The hope was that by articulating expectations for children's growth and learning, teachers would focus their curriculum on significant learning experiences to support the skills and characteristics described in the standards. Respondents also indicated that their states intended for the standards to improve informal classroom assessments (14), improve the skills and abilities with which children enter school (13), and improve the general quality of early childhood programs (11).

Table 6
Intended Purposes of Early Learning Standards

State	Intended Purposes			
	Inform Curriculum and Instruction	Improve Program Quality	Improve School Readiness	Provide a Basis for Instructional Assessments
Arkansas	X	X	X	X

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California	X	X	X	X
Colorado	X		X	
Connecticut	X	X		
Florida	X		X	
Georgia	X	X		
Illinois	X			
Louisiana	X	X		X
Maine Learning Results Early Learning Results	X X		X	X
Maryland	X			
Massachusetts	X	X		
Michigan	X	X	X	
Minnesota	X			X
Mississippi	X			
Missouri	X		X	X
New Jersey	X	X	X	
New Mexico	X			X
New York	X		X	
Ohio	X	X		
Oklahoma	X			X
Pennsylvania	X		X	X
Rhode Island	X	X	X	X
South Carolina	X			X
Texas	X		X	
Utah	X			
Vermont	X			X
Washington ECEAP OSPI	X X	X	X	X X
Total	29	11	13	14

Typically, the early learning standards were developed for a specific program. Twenty-two of the 29 sets of standards were for the states' publicly funded early care and education programs, which in most cases are the states' publicly funded pre-kindergarten programs or school readiness programs (typically located, at least in part, in public schools). Even though the standards were developed for specific programs, almost all of the respondents indicated that their states are making the standards available to other programs with the hopes that they, too, would use them. States varied as to the degree to which they required programs to actually use the early learning standards. Descriptions of the standards ranged from "mandatory," to "required," to "suggested," to "expected." Only eight—Connecticut, Minnesota, Missouri,

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Oklahoma, Rhode Island, Texas, Utah, and Washington—were reported as voluntary.

Assessment and Data Collection Related to Early Learning Standards. States also varied as to the type of data they plan to collect on programs' use of the early learning standards. Two states—Illinois and Louisiana—plan to collect data on the extent to which programs use the standards in their curriculum planning. These states are developing systems to monitor how the standards are incorporated into planning and daily activities or lesson plans.

Other states are planning to collect data on children's progress toward meeting the expectations outlined in the early learning standards. This type of program accountability, as it is commonly understood, means that programs or schools are held accountable not only for implementing standards but also for children's performance outcomes. In four states—California, Maine (Early Learning Results), New Mexico, and Washington (ECEAP)—the early learning standards are the basis for a data collection system, and programs are, therefore, going to be evaluated in some way based on the performance of children within their programs. Although none of these states had implemented their accountability systems at the time of the interview, respondents from each of these states indicated that at some time in the future, programs would be held responsible for child assessment data that indicate whether children have made progress on the standards.

In other states, the relationship between the early learning standards and child assessment data is less clear. For example, four states—Florida, Georgia, Michigan, and Ohio—have early learning standards and also have child assessment systems. Data from the interviews and from examining the early learning standards document indicate that the standards and the assessments may not be directly aligned. The standards and the assessment systems may address similar areas of children's development, but a more in-depth analysis would be necessary to determine the degree to which they are aligned. However, from our survey data, the assessment systems were not an integral part of the standards development process. Respondents from these and other states indicated that they did think that assessment systems tied to the early learning standards are a possibility for the future. Respondents in 19 states indicated that programs are not currently held accountable for the standards; 11 of these respondents indicated that they anticipate that such a system is at least a possibility in the future.

The Use of Standards and Assessments to Benefit Children. A chief concern among early childhood professionals, policy makers, and parents is the potential impact of such systems on individual children. The NAEYC-NAECS/SDE position statement identifies the most significant risk of any standards movement as the possibility of placing the responsibility for meeting standards on "children's shoulders rather than on the shoulders of those who should provide opportunities and supports for learning." Standards, and the assessments that accompany them, should benefit children rather than be used to label children as failures, keep them from advancing into the next level of education, or deny educational services.

Data from the survey indicate that states have been highly cognizant of the potential for negative consequences for individual children as they have developed standards. No respondent reported that his or her state had plans for holding children accountable for meeting the expectations articulated in the early learning standards or using assessment data in such a manner. In fact, a number of the standards documents contained language that specifically indicated that such use was NOT a purpose of the standards. For instance, the Washington Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) document states, "These learning frameworks are not intended for use as a group of individual screening tools to place children in programs or to make determinations of readiness for school. They are not intended to be used as an assessment checklist nor as an evaluation tool to make high-stakes decisions about children's program placements" (OSPI, 2000, p. ii). Rhode Island early learning standards state that the document "SHOULD NOT be used to: assess the competence of young children; mandate specific teaching practices or materials; determine rewards or penalties for educational personnel; prohibit children from entering kindergarten; or exclude groups of children because of disabilities or home language" (Rhode Island Department of Education, 2002, p. 3). Clearly, the potential for negative consequences for children has been taken into account during the standards development process.

Support for Early Childhood Programs, Professionals, and Families

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We turn now to the final feature of effective standards addressed in the position statement—support for programs, professionals, and families as they interpret and implement the early learning standards. NAEYC and the NAECS/SDE suggest that standards can be used effectively only within the context of programs that have the support needed to provide high-quality services and access to professional development related to implementation of standards, and that include parents as key partners in helping children develop the skills and characteristics outlined in early learning standards.

Data from our study indicate that the resources allocated to the development of the standards have outpaced the resources allocated to implementation of the standards. *Table 7* shows that the standards documents are being disseminated widely, most commonly through mailings and often by posting them on a Web site. In some states, thousands of copies of the document have been disseminated.

Table 7
Dissemination Strategies for Early Learning Standards

State	Mass Mailing	Mail by Request	Posted on the Web	Video
Arkansas		X		
California		X	X	X
Colorado			X	
Connecticut	X	X		
Florida		X	X	
Georgia		X	X	
Illinois		X	X	X
Louisiana	X	X	X	
Maine		X		
Maryland		X		
Massachusetts Learning Results Early Learning Results		X X		
Michigan	X	X		
Minnesota	X	X	X	
Mississippi		X	X	X
Missouri	X	X	X	
New Jersey		X	X	
New Mexico		X		
New York		X	X	
Ohio		X	X	
Oklahoma		X	X	
Pennsylvania			X	
Rhode Island		X		
South Carolina	X	X	X	
Texas	X	X	X	

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Utah		X	X	X
Vermont		X		
Washington ECEAP OSPI		X X	X X	
Total	7	27	19	4

However, when asked about the training and support provided for programs implementing the standards, respondents typically described relatively short-term efforts, such as conference presentations or workshops. For example, in Connecticut, the Bureau of Early Childhood Education models the standards in workshops and seminars for different constituencies. Minnesota provides 12 one-day regional workshops throughout the year on their standards. Likewise, Mississippi provides frequent trainings and workshops on the early learning standards. Both New Jersey and Ohio report that training on how to use or implement early learning standards is incorporated into regular professional development opportunities provided throughout the year. Data from this study do not allow us to compare the number of persons who have received the standards documents with the number who have received some form of training. Only Colorado reported that the state provides copies of the standards documents only to persons trained by a trainer who has completed an approved training on the standards.

Some states have used different approaches to provide training and professional development to support the use of the standards. Respondents from Arkansas, Connecticut, Michigan, and New Jersey mentioned that teacher education programs in their states are incorporating the state's early learning standards into their courses to promote understanding of the standards. In Arkansas, early childhood education students at the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville study the standards as part of their teacher preparation courses. In Connecticut and Michigan, preschool education programs in the college and university system use the standards as part of their courses. States have made efforts to infuse their standards into teacher preparation programs as a means of reaching a wider audience. Connecticut has also established model centers to demonstrate how standards can be used in practice.

Ongoing technical assistance was provided by a number of the states. The methods of technical assistance most commonly reported were phone support and mentor teachers. State specialists receive phone calls from programs and individuals with specific questions about the standards and provide individualized assistance via telephone. In Rhode Island, Resource and Referral centers train mentor teachers to provide support and professional development to teachers in the pilot programs that are using the standards. New Mexico also utilizes the state's Resource and Referral agencies to provide training on the standards, although the training is provided directly to program staff rather than through mentor teachers. Clearly, the type of support needed to fully implement a standards-based care and education system will require additional supports for programs, personnel, and families.

Summary and Recommendations

Using the NAEYC-NAECS/SDE position statement as a framework for examining states' efforts to develop and use early learning standards provides a useful analysis of where our country is and what is needed to maximize the potential benefit of early learning standards. Almost 40 states have or are developing early learning standards. Clearly, this issue is significant for the field and warrants attention and careful consideration. Data from this analysis suggest that states have incorporated a number of the features of effective early learning standards identified by NAEYC-NAECS/SDE.

In terms of content, our data show that states have typically addressed multiple domains of children's development in their standards, although approaches to learning and social-emotional development are more likely not to be addressed. The standards are linked to K-12 standards, although the manner in which they are linked varies. States have varied in how they have approached the age range addressed, with most

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states outlining relatively broad expectations over the period of 3 to 5 years of age. Relatively few specifics have been provided on how children from various cultures, children who speak languages other than English, and children with disabilities are to be accommodated when standards are implemented.

The development process in most states seems to reflect the recommendations of the joint position statement. Typically, states have included numerous stakeholders in the development process, have relied on a variety of resource materials and experts in the field, and have provided multiple opportunities for discussion and feedback among stakeholders. Furthermore, a number of states are in the process of reviewing/revising their standards, although these review processes seem to be more a reaction to specific developments within the state than the result of a systematic plan for regular review and updating of the standards.

Concerns regarding the ethical and beneficial use of standards and assessments seem to have been addressed. No respondent indicated that his or her state plans to use standards or standards-related assessments to make decisions about individual children. Further work appears to be needed to examine the degree to which assessments being used are aligned or related to the standards. Ideally, standards articulate what children should learn; curriculum dictates how they will learn what is called for in the standards; and assessments collect data related to how well the standards and curriculum have been implemented. However, at this point, the relationship among standards, curricula, and assessments in many states appears to be left to happenstance, and the relationship among these three elements is, for all practical purposes, not addressed in most states.

Finally, additional supports will be needed for the early learning standards to be implemented effectively. As the position statement points out, significant investments in the quality of programs and professional development for staff will be necessary to fully implement the standards. Data from this study indicate that efforts to develop the standards have outpaced support for implementation, and much work needs to be done in this area.

Based on this analysis using the NAEYC-NAECS/SDE position statement as a framework, we provide the following recommendations:

- States consider the importance of including all developmental domains in their early learning standards and work toward including domains that may not currently be addressed, particularly social-emotional and approaches toward learning.
- States devote significant resources to studying the relationship between universal standards and unique needs of limited numbers of young children. A national task force or other group should be convened to address the content and application of standards for children with disabilities and English-language learners, in particular, with the goal of advancing the expectations and learning outcomes for all children.
- States continue the practice of using a broad-based and inclusive process for developing standards and give continued attention to the research base used to develop the standards. States should also develop a systematic approach to reviewing and revising standards that are currently in place to ensure that they reflect the most up-to-date research and practice in early care and education.
- States provide a forum and funds for more systematic evaluation of the implementation and use of standards across the nation, with a specific focus on linkages among standards, assessments, and curriculum. Funding is needed for empirical studies that examine the use of standards and the nature of changes in child outcomes.
- States provide ongoing and substantial support to frontline staff as they implement standards in the form of mentoring, workshops, and preservice and inservice training to ensure that the standards are clearly understood and can be implemented effectively and to ensure that standards are linked appropriately to assessment and curriculum. This support should include the importance of effective communication of standards to parents.

Finally, we need to carefully examine our purposes for developing early learning standards and the opportunities they bring for promoting dialogue across settings and strengthening the early care and education system. Careful articulation of early learning standards can provide a common vision and a common nomenclature to unite various types of early care and education programs. However,

implementation of standards in some programs but not others could potentially even further divide our already fragmented "nonsystem," with some programs being held responsible for child outcomes and others not. Given that we want success for all children, unevenness of standards across programs is not helpful. Likewise, the development of early learning standards provides an opportunity to further the dialogue with representatives from the K-12 system and establish more clearly the important role of early care and education in children's success later in school. We see the development of early learning standards as an opportunity to work toward a more integrated education system, both within early care and education providers and between early care and education and the K-12 system. Careful consideration and open dialogues, along with massive support for implementation of the standards, will be necessary for the field to realize the potential benefits of early learning standards and minimize the potential negative consequences.

Notes

*The authors have used the 2002 joint position statement on early learning standards developed by the National Association for the Education of Young Children and the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education as a framework for analyzing data and discussing findings from a national study on early learning standards. The use of the position statement in no way reflects endorsement or involvement of either of the two organizations in the study. The findings reported and the corresponding recommendations are those of the researchers who conducted the study and have not been reviewed or endorsed by the National Association for the Education of Young Children nor the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education.

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