



# DEC Position Statement on Personnel Preparation for Early Intervention/Early Childhood Special Education



Division for  
Early  
Childhood

of the Council for Exceptional Children



# Position Statement on Personnel Preparation for Early Intervention/Early Childhood Special Education

## 2022 Revision

The Division for Early Childhood (DEC) of the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) considers high-quality personnel preparation to be essential to positive outcomes for young children birth through age 8 who are at risk for or with developmental delays/disabilities and their families. This holds true for the full continuum of personnel preparation, which encompasses both preservice preparation and in-service professional development/learning at the initial and advanced levels.

Recognizing the centrality of quality personnel preparation, DEC has provided guidance for preparing professionals to enact the role of the early childhood special educator through the DEC position statements on personnel preparation for early intervention/early childhood special education (EI/ECSE). DEC position statements represent the official position of the organization regarding a specific topic or issue. They are developed with input from the field and reviewed by members before being approved by the DEC Executive Board. The first *DEC Position Statement on Personnel Preparation* was developed and approved in 1994 and later endorsed with minor changes in 2008. In 2017, the statement was significantly updated.

In 2020, CEC and DEC collaborated to develop the [Initial Practice-Based Professional Standards for Early Interventionists/Early Childhood Special Educators 2020](#). These historic standards represent the first set of standards to focus on the preparation of special educators who work with young children birth through age 8 who are at-risk for or with developmental delays and disabilities and their families. The standalone status of the new standards makes them equivalent to the standards for other disciplines from other organizations such as CEC, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA), and the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA).

The 2020 EI/ECSE standards define what EI/ECSE professionals need to know and be able to do at the completion of their initial educator preparation programs. Along with providing a foundation for high-quality educator preparation, the standards present important benefits for the EI/ECSE field. Specifically, they help identify the role and responsibilities of EI/ECSE professionals by detailing the necessary knowledge and skills. In addition, having a set of standards that focuses on special education preparation from birth through age 8 clarifies overlapping and distinct competencies for educators from birth through age 21, providing a continuum of standards for special educators.

The development of these standards resulted in the need to revise the [2017 DEC Position Statement on the Personnel Standards in Early Childhood Special Education](#). DEC appointed a 12-member workgroup of individuals representing a wide range of expertise pertaining to EI/ECSE personnel preparation to complete this work. This position statement is the resulting revision.

This revised position statement provides direction for individuals in a variety of professional roles who are engaged in EI/ECSE personnel preparation, including, but not limited to, faculty and staff at institutes



of higher education (IHEs); professional development (PD) and technical assistance providers at local, regional, state, and national levels; and state-level certification/licensure and policy administrators.

Specifically, this position statement

1. discusses the EI/ECSE discipline in relation to the interdisciplinary and collaborative nature of the early childhood field;
2. provides an overview of the foundations of EI/ECSE personnel preparation, including a theory of change, key concepts that have long guided the field, and the role of personnel preparation standards;
3. describes models and approaches of EI/ECSE preparation and licensure;
4. provides background related to accreditation and recognition processes;
5. discusses the application of the EI/ECSE standards to PD endeavors; and
6. provides specific recommendations for the preparation of *all* EI/ECSE professionals and use of the new 2020 EI/ECSE standards across contexts.

## The EI/ECSE Discipline and the Interdisciplinary and Collaborative Nature of the Early Childhood Field

EI/ECSE professionals work within a diverse and interdisciplinary workforce. Indeed, the array of professionals who work with, or on behalf of, young children and their families represent diverse disciplines associated with diverse titles including, but not limited to, early interventionists, early childhood special educators, early childhood educators, educators in specialty areas such as deaf and hard of hearing (DHH), service coordinators, psychologists, therapists (e.g., speech language, occupational, and physical), board certified behavior analysts (BCBAs), health care professionals, social workers, paraprofessionals, childcare professionals, and those in early childhood leadership roles.

This interdisciplinary workforce must provide service delivery that is socially just and equitable by addressing the needs of a highly diverse population of children and families representing the full continuum of ability, ethnic, racial, cultural, linguistic, socioeconomic, and other aspects of diversity. This includes children across the full range of ability, including children with intensive support needs and those who are designated as academically or intellectually gifted.

The various disciplines involved in this collaborative context require guidance for both their discipline-specific preparation as well as preparation for working collaboratively. The context for delivering EI/ECSE services is highly variable and includes any setting serving one or more children from birth through age 8 who are at risk for or with developmental delays or disabilities. Additional professionals also practice in these settings and support the same children and families alongside EI/ECSE professionals. The preparation these individuals receive is specific to their discipline and guided by their respective professional organizations that may not include preparation for working with young children and their families. While this position statement pertains specifically to the EI/ECSE discipline, DEC recognizes, values, and supports the relevance and use of the guidance provided here for personnel preparation within and across related disciplines who work collaboratively with EI/ECSE educators.

While DEC recognizes and supports interdisciplinary and collaborative work with young children and their families, this position statement provides guidance specifically for preparation pertaining to the discipline of early intervention/early childhood special education. In particular, the statement provides guidance for professionals who provide

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- special instruction to children birth to 36 months and their families through IDEA Part C Early Intervention (EI) programs;
  - special education for children 3 to 5 years old under IDEA Part B, section 619; and/or
  - special education for children 6 to 8 years old in early childhood special education.

Throughout this position statement, the term *EI/ECSE* will refer to both EI and ECSE educators who possess a state special education license/certificate in one or more of the above age categories or state equivalent qualifications for their role.

It should be noted that requirements to practice as a professional in this discipline vary greatly across the country, particularly for Part C service delivery. Several states do not require or offer early childhood or early intervention specific licensure and/or have other forms of eligibility criteria. Further, some Part C early interventionists may not identify as an educator or teacher despite their role in providing special instruction. Titles for professionals filling the EI/ECSE role also vary greatly. For example, Part C early interventionists may use titles such as special instructor, developmental specialist, or early childhood special educator. In other states, there is no differentiation between an early childhood educator (ECE), traditionally considered to be a *general* educator, and an early childhood *special* educator. Some states license special educators for the full age range from birth or preschool to age 22, while in others special education licensure begins at kindergarten.

Regardless, this position statement applies to professionals who, by nature of their role and the services they provide, fall into the discipline and role of early childhood special educator. Because of the distinct differences in service delivery approaches and contexts between Part C early intervention and other service delivery systems in early childhood special education, additional guidance has been developed for Part C special instructors. Please see the DEC position statement [The Role of Special Instruction in Early Intervention](#) for more information.

In addition to the development of the 2020 EI/ECSE standards, there has been significant work related to the broader early childhood profession, namely the Power to the Profession Initiative (P2P), facilitated by NAEYC, which assembled a task force with representation from 15 different national professional organizations to define the early childhood education profession. The task force recognized the need for all educators to have the knowledge and skills necessary to build on “strengths of family and child diversity – defined by characteristics and identities, including race, ethnicity, language, culture, geography, social class, immigrant status, family structure, special needs, and learner characteristics” (NAEYC, 2020, p. 10).

The culminating result of the initiative was the launch of the [Unifying Framework for the Early Childhood Education Profession](#). This framework outlines career pathways, knowledge and competencies, qualifications, standards, accountability supports, and compensation to guide the early childhood education profession. For more information about this collaboration, please visit [The Power to the Profession](#).

In response to P2P, the 2009 NAEYC Professional Preparation Standards were significantly revised. The resulting standards are now known as the [Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators \(PSCECE\)](#), or ECE standards (NAEYC, 2020). Another key outcome of P2P was the recommendation for areas of specialization within the ECE field, with EI/ECSE identified as one of those specialization areas. This was a significant impetus for the development of the 2020 EI/ECSE standards.



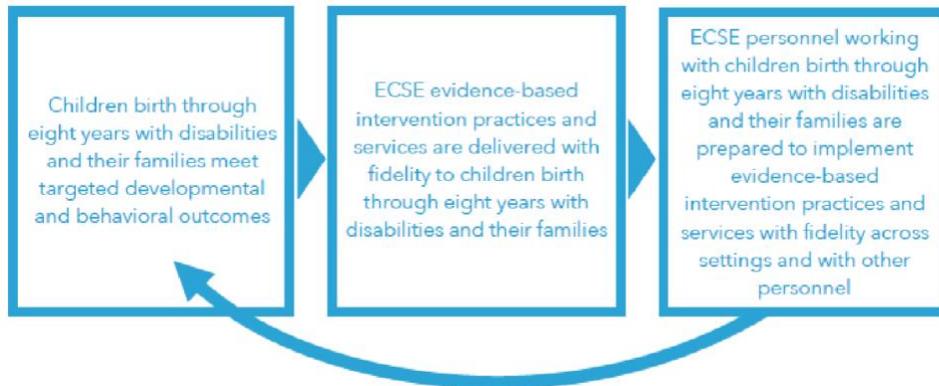
Therefore, the early childhood field is now equipped with two new sets of standards: the 2020 ECE standards and the 2020 EI/ECSE standards. Regardless of specific role, it is recommended that all early childhood professionals apply both sets of standards to their work. To further support the interdisciplinary work of ECE and EI/ECSE professionals, a [crosswalk](#) of the two sets of standards was completed (Early Childhood Personnel Center, 2020). This crosswalk identifies commonalities between the two sets of standards as well as aspects unique to each discipline.

## Foundations of EI/ECSE Personnel Preparation

### *A Theory of Change Guiding EI/ECSE Personnel Preparation*

Guskey (2003) asserted that educators are more invested in their profession when their practices positively impact student outcomes. Subsequently, Winton and McCollum (2008) proposed a Theory of Change, where improving child and family outcomes serves as the central focus and a backward mapping approach is the vehicle for developing evidence-based personnel preparation programs. The Theory of Change recognizes that the quality of services for young children and their families depends on the qualifications of the personnel who work in EI/ECSE programs. Ever since, this Theory of Change has been adopted and described within the ECE, EI, and ECSE literature (see Figure 1) and has guided the development of personnel preparation for faculty and professional development providers. As we learn more about how young children learn and develop, we revise and improve preparation practices in collaboration with families and other professionals.

**Figure 1**  
*EI/ECSE Personnel Preparation Reverse Model of Change*



*Note.* Adapted from Bruder, M. B. (2016). Personnel development practices in early childhood intervention. In B. Reichow, B. A. Boyd, E. E. Barton, & S. L. Odom (Eds.), *Handbook of early childhood special education* (pp. 289–333). Springer.

### *Key Concepts Underlying EI/ECSE Personnel Preparation*

The field of EI/ECSE, and therefore of EI/ECSE personnel preparation, evolves with the identification of evidence-based practices, the influence of societal trends as indicated in the [DEC Priority Issues Agenda](#), and the passage and reauthorization of relevant legislation. These ongoing changes inform key concepts that guide the development and application of professional standards and EI/ECSE personnel preparation. The concepts are grounded in contemporary theoretical constructs that form the foundation of the field of early childhood development and learning, as well as diverse, equitable, and



inclusive evidence-based practices associated with early childhood and special education. EI/ECSE personnel preparation programs should prepare educators who

- build from each child’s unique individual, developmental, and family strengths, cultural backgrounds, language(s), abilities, and experiences, recognizing they are integrally linked to a broader social ecology;
- offer services and supports that enhance each child’s and each family’s informal and formal support networks and address their concerns, priorities, and resources;
- partner with and support families and other caregivers to ensure that they become key decision-makers regarding their child’s development and educational services;
- acknowledge, reflect on, and address bias, whether explicit and/or implicit, to achieve inclusive and equitable practices, relationships, and settings;
- advocate for and use diverse, equitable, and inclusive interactions and practices;
- recognize the uniqueness of early childhood as a developmental phase;
- affirm the right and opportunity for each child to receive a continuum of services and supports, with peers in natural and inclusive environments, based on each child’s unique developmental and cultural variations;
- maintain ethical conduct in all professional activities, including serving as change agents in advocating for young children and their families through individual and collective ongoing reflective practice and professional growth; and
- collaborate with other interdisciplinary early childhood professionals, paraprofessionals, families, and community agency personnel.

## The Role of Standards and Recommended Practices in Personnel Preparation

Personnel preparation standards have long been considered critical in defining the special education profession (CEC, 2015). The CEC’s professional preparation standards define competencies for special educators by identifying the specialized expertise special educators must master for effective practice. These standards also help regulate qualifications by providing guidance for preparation programs, accreditation organizations, and credentialing agencies (CEC, 2015).

The CEC has developed and disseminated standards for initial and advanced preparation. Initial standards guide preparation for entry-level positions in the field, while advanced standards inform programs that prepare individuals for leadership roles or as specialists. Advanced standards also help identify and evaluate qualifications for early childhood faculty and in-service or professional development providers (NAEYC, 2012; Winton & McCollum, 2008; Winton et al., 2008).

In addition to the core CEC standards that apply to all special educators, specialty sets have been developed by many CEC divisions. Specialty sets are intended to inform or supplement the CEC standards with additional knowledge and skills statements specific for work with particular populations. Before the development of the 2020 EI/ECSE standards, the DEC initial and advanced specialty sets informed the CEC standards for use in early childhood contexts.

Recognizing children’s first eight years as a unique developmental period in their lives, the CEC and DEC partnered in 2020 to establish the EI/ECSE standards that define the unique knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to guide the preparation of EI/ECSE personnel in initial educator preparation programs (DEC, 2020). These standards build on the history of EI/ECSE as an integrative but unique field



of study, policy, research, and practice and emphasize the unique skills and knowledge required for specialization in working with young children and their families. For more information about the development of these standards, see DEC, 2020.

The EI/ECSE standards are applicable to personnel preparation activities at the initial level. Advanced EI/ECSE standards are not currently available. Therefore, advanced EI/ECSE personnel preparation is guided by the 2012 CEC advanced standards in conjunction with the 2017 DEC advanced specialty set.

The EI/ECSE initial standards represent specific content areas that are critical to ensure competency for EI/ECSE professionals: (a) child development and learning; (b) partnering with families; (c) collaboration and teaming; (d) assessment processes; (e) application of curriculum frameworks in the planning and facilitation of meaningful learning experiences; (f) responsive and reciprocal interaction, interventions, and instruction; and (g) professional and ethical practices. Additionally, EI/ECSE Standard 8 provides guidance for EI/ECSE field and clinical experiences.

The DEC Recommended Practices, first published in 1993 and most recently revised in 2014, also offer guidance for EI/ECSE personnel preparation. The purpose of the DEC Recommended Practices is “to help bridge the gap between research and practice by highlighting those practices that have been shown to result in better outcomes for young children with disabilities, their families, and the personnel who serve them” (DEC, 2014, p. 2).

Thus, personnel preparation and professional development in EI/ECSE must be well-grounded in the recommended practices to ensure such preparation focuses on preparing and supporting educators in the implementation of evidence-based practices with children and their families. The eight topical areas in the 2014 DEC Recommended Practices provide a strong set of research-based practices that serve as a linchpin between the desired outcomes for children and families and the in-service and preservice professional development activities focused on teaching EI/ECSE educators to implement those practices with fidelity. While the recommended practices were designed to address the birth to age 5 span, they should be used alongside the [CEC’s High-Leverage Practices](#) (HLP) to encompass the full birth to age 8 span.

## EI/ECSE Preparation Program Models and Licensure

Guidance for programs providing EI/ECSE personnel preparation is derived from state and national professional standards as well as state-level certification/licensure requirements. Requirements and options related to degree, education, and licensure for EI/ECSE educators have historically varied widely and great dissimilarity continues to be observed (Chen & Mickelson, 2015; Geiger et al., 2014; Mickelson et al., 2021; Stayton et al., 2009, 2012).

The various models of preservice early childhood preparation differ in relation to their scope and characteristics such as the age range, roles, and responsibilities for which they prepare educators. For example, the age range associated with licensure is highly variable. Indeed, 23 different age ranges have been identified across jurisdictions for ECE and EI/ECSE (Chen & Mickelson, 2015). Further, state certification requirements vary widely and in some states are not required for particular EI/ECSE roles. Postbaccalaureate programs specific to EI/ECSE also exist, offering advanced degrees with or without initial or advanced certification/licensure.

As previously stated, EI/ECSE personnel preparation exists in multiple forms, including traditional stand-alone EI/ECSE preparation programs and collaborative models that attempt to “blend” preparation for



both ECE and EI/ECSE. While several terms are used to describe collaborative programs (e.g., *blended*, *unified*, *integrated*, *interdisciplinary*, *inclusive*), *blended* is the most commonly used term. Blended programs represent a wide range of approaches, and the field lacks common, agreed-upon definitions, terminology, or evidence-based guidance (Mickelson et al., 2021). However, to align with the original conception of blended preparation, programs should consist of an interdisciplinary curriculum that is designed specifically for a single degree program regardless of the state certification(s) structure, be derived from professional unification of philosophy and knowledge, and be based on the belief that EC and EI/ECSE are both integral (Stayton & Miller, 1993).

Most contemporary programs that consider themselves to be “blended” work to address preparation for both ECE and EI/ECSE to some extent, whether or not they fully align with the original conception and definition of blended preparation. Some blended preparation programs remain aligned to one distinct state certification in either ECE or EI/ECSE, such as a traditional stand-alone preparation program including content from the other discipline to some degree. In others, often referred to as dual-certification programs, graduates become eligible for two distinct state certifications (e.g., one in ECE and one in EI/ECSE). Dual-certification programs vary widely in how ECE and EI/ECSE aspects relate to each other and in how faculty collaborate to prepare early childhood special educators. Finally, some programs operate in states that offer a single, blended state certification designed to combine both disciplines and, therefore, prepare individuals accordingly. In blended models, candidates earn a degree and certification/licensure to work with young children with and without disabilities (Mickelson et al., 2021; Stayton et al., 2009; Stayton & McCollum, 2002). Because of the assortment of paths into the EI/ECSE profession, guidance in the use of the EI/ECSE standards is warranted to provide a uniform framework.

Regardless of the parameters and requirements, or lack thereof, of a particular program or state certification/licensure structure, professional standards should be used as guidance to develop and implement both preservice preparation and in-service professional development for individuals working with young children ages birth through age 8 who have or are at-risk for developmental delays and disabilities and their families across home, classroom, and community settings. The new EI/ECSE professional standards provide a foundation on which to build high-quality personnel preparation, which is essential to ensuring positive outcomes for young children and their families. By identifying specific knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary for EI/ECSE professionals to provide effective, quality services, the standards provide curricular insight for preparation and professional development programs.

### *Alignment of ECE and EI/ECSE Standards*

DEC has produced alignments and crosswalks to support initial and advanced programs that wish to align to both the ECE standards and the CEC standards. These resources are intended to support all programs, including those that aspire to a blended model in program design, implementation, and the accreditation/recognition processes.

All initial personnel preparation programs are to begin using the 2020 EI/ECSE and ECE standards as soon as possible. However, initial programs are permitted to use the previous standards through the 2022 calendar year. Advanced programs are directed to use this alignment for the foreseeable future until new or revised advanced standards are available. Blended initial and advanced preparation and professional development programs using the 2012 CEC Standards coupled with the 2017 DEC specialty sets are directed to use the [2014 Standards Alignment](#). These crosswalks include:

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- [Crosswalk](#) of the 2020 ECE and 2020 EI/ECSE standards for initial programs using or planning to adopt the 2020 ECE and EI/ECSE standards.
  - [Crosswalk of the 2020 EI/ECSE standards and the DEC Recommended Practices](#).

## Program Accreditation and Recognition of Preparation Programs

Professional standards also direct the review, recognition, and accreditation of IHE programs in special education. Regardless of accreditation status or goals, all teacher preparation programs should use and promote the 2020 EI/ECSE standards and DEC Recommended Practices in program and state-level endeavors such as program development, implementation, and state licensing requirements. Additionally, many state approval, certification, and/or recognition processes can be informed and guided by the standards. Further, for programs seeking national recognition from CEC as part of the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) accreditation process, alignment to the professional standards is required.

### *Council for the Accreditation for Educator Preparation (CAEP)*

With the approval of the 2020 initial EI/ECSE standards, revised guidance for initial preparation programs pursuing CAEP accreditation was developed. Initial EI/ECSE programs can continue to use the 2012 initial CEC standards in conjunction with the 2017 DEC Initial Specialty Set for accreditation purposes through the 2022 calendar year. After that time, initial EI/ECSE programs will be required to use the 2020 EI/ECSE standards.

Since advanced EI/ECSE standards have not yet been developed, advanced EI/ECSE preparation programs, such as education specialist and doctoral degree programs, should continue to use the 2012 advanced CEC standards and the 2017 DEC Advanced Specialty Set for the foreseeable future or until advanced standards are available.

Blended programs have had the option of pursuing CEC recognition and CAEP accreditation as a blended program since 2001. Programs wishing to complete the CAEP process as a blended program have historically submitted documentation in relation to both NAEYC and CEC standards along with the DEC specialty sets.

However, the process for blended program accreditation is under revision because of the new 2020 ECE and EI/ECSE standards and NAEYC's decision to pursue accreditation separate from CAEP. Therefore, blended programs seeking CAEP accreditation should do so as an EI/ECSE preparation program.

## Professional Development

Ongoing professional development is considered indispensable to building the capacity of EI/ECSE educators to increase proficiency and sustain expertise (Guskey, 2014). Research supports the effectiveness of multiple frameworks for in-service professional development (Browder et al., 2012; Desimone, 2009; Dunst & Trivette, 2009; Guskey, 2014). Common among these frameworks are key features such as demonstrating practices to teachers; providing authentic opportunities for learning, reflection, and coaching; mentoring or feedback during training; and follow-up to support mastery and



continued use of recommended practices (Dunst et al., 2015). Practitioners who receive comprehensive PD that combines such features are more likely to use recommended practices (Dunst et al., 2019).

The field's understanding of what constitutes effective professional development is evolving, and a distinction has been made between professional development and professional learning. Professional development has often been delivered through one-time workshops, seminars, or lectures. Whereas, professional learning provides opportunities for needs-based content that is ongoing and interactive. Research suggests that effective professional learning is job-embedded, collaborative, sustained, continuous, and incorporates coaching and active learning (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

While no longer a mandate for Part B, a comprehensive system of personnel development (CSPD) is still a statutory requirement for Part C systems under IDEA (Early Childhood Personnel Center [ECPC], n.d.). Access, types, and quality of training vary, and budget constraints frequently drive each state's ability to provide robust PD opportunities. Nonetheless, the new EI/ECSE standards can effectively provide guidance for PD specialists who design, implement, and evaluate professional learning. For both the initial and advanced levels, the various standards, the DEC Recommended Practices, and CEC High-Leverage Practices can support intentional planning for objectives and outcomes to enhance knowledge and skills of practitioners. Many resources also have been developed that are aligned with the standards to support providers of preservice and in-service preparation. The intention is that these resources are applicable to both contexts. (Please see resources at the end of this statement.)

## DEC Personnel Preparation Recommendations

EI/ECSE personnel preparation encompasses a continuum of preparation from initial preservice preparation to in-service professional development. The preparation of EI/ECSE personnel, as well as certification/licensure requirements, should reflect the spirit and the letter of state and federal legislation related to young children with disabilities and their families as well as the EI/ECSE and ECE standards, DEC Recommended Practices, and the previously articulated key concepts. Importantly, EI/ECSE personnel preparation should reflect the interdisciplinary and collaborative nature of the EI/ECSE field across the full spectrum of diverse professional roles, children and families, and environments that EI/ECSE professionals work with and in. Given the multiple aspects of EI/ECSE personnel preparation, DEC recommends the following.

### *General Recommendations for the Content and Structure of Initial and Advanced Preparation*

- **Recognize and acknowledge issues of explicit/implicit bias, inclusion, equity, and social justice for professionals, families, and children across EI/ECSE.**
  - EI/ECSE programs should adhere to the [DEC Priority Issues Agenda](#) when preparing professionals to work with children and families from various cultures, family structures, languages, racial identities, gender and gender identities, abilities and disabilities, religious beliefs, and/or socioeconomic classes.
  - Programs should integrate opportunities for intentional partnerships and engagement with families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds using evidence-based strategies that encourage and support families.
  - EI/ECSE programs should aim to increase community representation within the workforce and leadership by supporting and recruiting candidates that represent the diversity of the children and families that are reflective of the fabric of the country.



- **Recognize the differences between initial and advanced personnel preparation programs.**
  - Keep in mind that the guidelines in the 2020 EI/ECSE standards and the DEC specialty set for advanced training are specific to EI/ECSE personnel preparation programs and certification/licensure requirements.
  - Understand that initial programs may include a bachelor's degree or a master's of arts in teaching (MAT) degree while advanced programs may include a master's, education specialist, doctoral degree, and/or continuing education via universities, conferences, or state-supported PD programs.
  
- **Align initial and advanced EI/ECSE personnel preparation programs and professional development with relevant professional association standards to ensure consistency.**
  - All programs, regardless of accreditation status/goals, should use and align to the 2020 standards.
  - All EI/ECSE preparation programs and PD should incorporate both the EI/ECSE and ECE standards regardless of whether the program identifies as a blended program.
  - Initial EI/ECSE programs will be required to adopt the 2020 EI/ECSE standards by the end of the 2022 calendar year. Until then, programs can continue to use the 2012 initial CEC standards in conjunction with the 2017 DEC Initial Specialty Set.
  - Advanced programs should keep using the 2012 advanced CEC standards in conjunction with the 2017 advanced DEC specialty set.
  
- **Address the dispositions of EI/ECSE professionals in the expectations of both initial and advanced preparation.**
  - Attitudes, beliefs, and [professional ethics](#) are critical to the success of individuals who are trained to work with young children and their families from diverse populations. Personnel preparation programs should address these qualities in EI/ECSE educators and establish an ongoing evaluation process that is incorporated into the program's curricula and field experiences. In addition, personnel preparation programs should provide opportunities for engagement in professional organizations.
  
- **Align preparation to DEC Recommended Practices and position statements and other relative/salient resources.**
  - The DEC Recommended Practices (2014), EI/ECSE standards, and resources such as research evidence should be infused into EI/ECSE professional development curricula and higher education programs of study/curricula, both in instruction of pedagogy and through supervised field experiences.
  - DEC has developed resources that are designed to provide guidance to professionals and families to support the development and outcomes for young children. These should be woven into all preservice and in-service PD programs. See below for related resources.
  - CEC High-Level Practices should be aligned and integrated alongside the DEC Recommended Practices to support the full age range of birth to age 8 to address particular practices and strategies to the developmental needs of young children.
  - Incorporate the other resources that have been aligned with the standards to support providers of preservice and in-service preparation, including, but not limited to, the DEC position statement on [The Role of Special Instruction in Early Intervention](#), the DEC Position Statement on [Ethical Practice](#), and the DEC/NAEYC position statement on [Early Childhood Inclusion](#).

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- **Recognize the importance of assessment and evaluation throughout preparation programs to ensure the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and dispositions when working with children and families from various cultures, family structures, languages, racial identities, gender and gender identities, abilities and disabilities, religious beliefs, and/or socioeconomic classes.**
    - Preparation should incorporate performance- and outcome-based measures of knowledge and skills to evaluate knowledge and skills through field experiences in homes, community-based programs, childcare centers, and public and private programs to ensure that EI/ECSE professionals are highly qualified to meet the needs of young children and their families. Demonstration of positive child and family progress facilitates improved quality of life for individual family members as well as the family as a whole.
    - Preparation should incorporate field experiences that require performance- and outcome-based measures of knowledge, skills, and dispositions. Placements in homes, community-based programs, childcare centers, and public and private programs provide opportunities to evaluate the knowledge and skills of EI/ECSE educators, ensuring that they are highly qualified to meet the needs of a diverse population of children and families representing the full continuum of ethnic, racial, cultural, linguistic, socioeconomic, ability, and other aspects of diversity.
    - Field experiences should be aligned with courses and require performance- and outcome-based measures in both initial and advanced programs. Development and learning depends on what happens in educational settings (Ball & Forzani, 2011; McDonald et al., 2013); thus, personnel preparation programs should align field experiences in high-quality settings with coursework to prepare preservice and in-service educators to ensure transfer of research and theory to practice in classrooms and other community settings (Macy et al., 2009). High-quality settings are those that are consistent with the underlying philosophy and practices represented by the EI/ECSE standards and the DEC Recommended Practices. Field experiences should occur early in the personnel preparation program with a focus on observation of and reflection on practices and systematically progressing to implementation of practices with supervision (Grossman et al., 2009).
  
  - **Recognize the relationship between the preparation and roles of EI/ECSE and related service professionals (e.g., speech-language, occupational therapy, physical therapy).**
    - Multiple individuals with credentials in disciplines other than education work with young children with disabilities and their families. EI/ECSE personnel preparation programs should facilitate professional cooperation and collaboration by recognizing variations in personnel preparation and professional roles and by encouraging cross-disciplinary training whenever possible.
    - Both preservice and in-service personnel preparation programs should equip EI/ECSE educators with an understanding of the unique expertise and responsibilities of educators as well as related service professionals and how their expertise relates to one another when serving young children with disabilities and their families.

### *Specific Recommendations for Programs Aspiring to Enact Blended Preparation*

DEC and the EI/ECSE field continue to value blended programs, and the work of the P2P supports the core philosophy of blended preparation by highlighting the importance of collaborative and



interdisciplinary preparation and work. As noted above, blended programs have traditionally attempted to incorporate knowledge and skills from both EI/ECSE and ECE.

Blended models are recommended for preparing professionals to work with young children who have or are at risk for developmental delays and disabilities and their families. Because the field lacks common terms, definitions, or empirical evidence in support of blended programs at this time, additional research should be conducted to provide the field with up-to-date guidance (Mickelson et al., 2021).

The 2014 alignment of the CEC and NAEYC standards and the DEC specialty sets and the 2020 crosswalk of the EI/ECSE and ECE standards can support programs in effectively addressing all sets of standards.

Programs wishing to enact a blended model should

- look to the historical literature when designing and implementing blended programs;
- approach preparation collaboratively with the goal of improving the base preparation of all educators while also ensuring specialized preparation meets the needs of marginalized children, including those with disabilities (Mickelson et al., 2021; Pugach et al., 2020); and
- examine program philosophy, identity, mission, and curricula from the perspective of both ECE and EI/ECSE and how inclusion is conceptualized from a shared equity agenda (Mickelson et al., 2021; Pugach et al., 2020).

### *Additional Recommendations for In-Service Professional Development*

- **Use the various resources that have been created to support alignment with DEC standards and recommended practices.**
  - PD providers should consider using the various resources that have been created to support alignment with DEC standards and recommended practices. These resources will support activities such as mentoring/coaching, supervision, self-reflection, evaluations, etc. See below for related resources.
- **Provide mentoring/coaching that promotes increased understanding, skills, and implementation of practices through self-reflection.**
  - Strategic and systematic supervision of preservice and in-service EI/ECSE educators promotes increased knowledge and skills as well as self-reflection on the interactions and practices used with children, families, and other providers. Opportunities for shared reflection of practices and documentation of the knowledge and skills learned, or yet to be demonstrated, are a priority within EI/ECSE personnel preparation programs.

### *Recommendations for National Recognition and Accreditation Activities*

- **State departments of education and other lead agencies should adopt the EI/ECSE standards when developing criteria for initial state certification and teacher licensure.**
  - Aligning criteria for initial EI/ECSE preparation programs with the 2020 EI/ECSE standards ensures that preparation programs reflect current, research-based, and specialized expertise required for effective practice.
  - Aligning initial state certification/licensure requirements to the 2020 EI/ECSE standards ensures consistency and reciprocity across the United States.



- Aligning advanced EI/ECSE personnel preparation programs and state licensure/certification with relevant professional association standards also ensures consistency and reciprocity across the United States.
  - As a division of the CEC, the expectation is that the 2017 DEC Advanced Specialty Set will be used in conjunction with the 2012 Advanced CEC Special Educator Professional Preparation Initial and Advanced Standards to inform and expand on the CEC standards with specialization content for EI/ECSE.
  - For advanced blended/dual programs, the 2020 Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators should also be addressed.
- Higher education programs in states that require CAEP accreditation, or those programs that voluntarily seek CAEP accreditation, must use the standards as identified above for EI/ECSE or dual/blended programs.

### *Recommendations for State and National Advocacy and Policy*

- **Promote certification/licensure requirements specific to EI/ECSE.**
  - States develop freestanding EI/ECSE certification/licensure guidelines for educators working with young children with disabilities in ECSE, Part C special instruction, and/or blended/dual programs. Further, state and national requirements address and adhere to legislative initiatives, the 2020 EI/ECSE standards, the DEC Advanced Specialty Set, and the DEC Recommended Practices.
- **Acknowledge the variation in the age range of licensure/certification programs.**
  - While DEC supports services for children birth through age 8, it can be difficult to ensure that all EI/ECSE educators obtain the required knowledge and skills to be proficient in that entire age span. Thus, the subspecialization of the age ranges of birth–3, 3–5, and 5–8 require a concentrated and comprehensive focus on the differences among these age categories of young children and their families. The impact and influence of one developmental level upon another is critical to recognize. Personnel preparation programs should ensure that EI/ECSE educators are competent in at least two of these three subspecialization age ranges at the completion of their initial preparation.
- **Recognize and support a potential career ladder for paraprofessionals and professionals working in EI/ECSE programs.**
  - A career ladder system is essential to ensure a qualified workforce for the variety of paraprofessional and professional roles in EI/ECSE programs and to support the continued professional development of those individuals. This occurs through articulation agreements within and across local education agencies, two- and four-year IHEs, and state agencies. For example, a typical scenario may be an individual who has an associate’s degree in early childhood and then has the opportunity to earn a bachelor’s degree through the articulation of courses and collaboration between IHEs. Alternatively, a person may attend a continuing education program and receive credits for their participation that can be applied to an initial or advanced degree program dependent on the individual’s prior formal education.

### **Related Resources**

Links to access the resources identified throughout this statement can be found below.



## *Professional Standards*

[DEC Advanced Specialty Set](#)

[Initial Practice-Based Professional Preparation Standards for Early Interventionists/Early Childhood Special Educators 2020](#) (DEC)

[Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators](#) (NAEYC)

## *Position Statements*

[Service Coordination in Early Intervention](#) (DEC-ITCA)

[Early Childhood Inclusion](#) (DEC/NAEYC)

[The Role of Special Instruction in Early Intervention](#) (DEC)

[Advancing Equity in Early Childhood Education](#) (NAEYC)

## *Evidence-Based Practices*

[DEC Priority Issues Agenda](#)

[DEC Recommended Practices](#)

[CEC High-Leverage Practices](#)

[OSEP's IDEAs That Work](#)

[AFIRM](#)

## *Training and Technical Assistance Centers*

[Early Childhood Personnel Center](#)

[Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center](#)

[IRIS Center](#)

## *Additional Resources*

[Power to the Profession](#)

[Unifying Framework](#)

[ECPC Crosswalk of EI/ECSE Standards and ECE Standards](#)

[ACCESS Center](#)

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