

Evolution of Professional Standards: Reflecting on the Past to Inform the Future

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ABSTRACT

Clearly defined professional standards result in better prepared professionals who positively impact outcomes for children and families by ensuring an effective workforce. This article describes the evolution of early intervention early/childhood special education preparation standards from the on-the-job competencies of the 1960s to the historic 2020 Initial Practice-Based Professional Standards for Early Interventionists/Early Childhood Special Educators (EI/ECSE Standards), in concert with the evolution of the profession itself. Influencing factors include (a) changes in federal legislation and policy, (b) ages and characteristics of children served, (c) growing knowledge of effective practices, (d) collaboration with other disciplines, and (e) ongoing advocacy for EI/ECSE as a profession. The article concludes with a vision for using the EI/ECSE Standards to guide the future local, state, and national agenda of the profession around preservice preparation and accreditation, professional development, state and federal policy, cross-disciplinary collaboration, and standards-informed research.

KEYWORDS

Early intervention, early childhood special education, professional standards, preservice preparation, professional development

The importance of high-quality preparation for early interventionists/early childhood special educators cannot be overstated. Positive outcomes for children and families are linked to the quality of professional preparation, which in turn is related to professional standards (National Research Council, 2015). Research indicates that preservice educators think they are better prepared, remain in the field longer, and are more likely to positively impact children's development and learning when the preservice program is based on clearly defined standards that are used to guide and evaluate student performance (Darling-Hammond, 2012). The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) and the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC) influenced the move to performance-based standards that identify what educators should know and be able to do upon completion of a preservice institution of higher education (IHE) program (Darling-Hammond, 2020).

In 2020, the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) approved the first stand-alone *Initial Practice-Based Professional Standards for Early Interventionists/Early Childhood Special Educators (EI/ECSE Standards: CEC & Division for Early Childhood [DEC], 2020)* for the preparation of personnel in early intervention/early childhood special education (EI/ECSE). This article describes the evolution of the stand-alone EI/ECSE Standards for initial entry into the profession. Numerous factors influenced this process from the 1960s to the present, including changes in federal legislation and policy, ages and characteristics of children served, growing knowledge of effective practices, collaboration with other disciplines and organizations, and DEC's continuing involvement and advocacy for EI/ECSE as a profession (Kilgo et al., 2019). The article concludes with the vision for using the EI/ECSE Standards to guide the future of the profession and the policy agenda needed to realize this vision.

TABLE 1: Key Terminology and Definitions

TERM	DEFINITIONS
Professional standards	What professionals should know and be able to do to practice effectively in the respective discipline
Initial standards	What beginning professionals should know and be able to do to practice effectively upon completion of a preservice program of study
Advanced standards	What professionals should know and be able to do to practice effectively in the respective discipline upon completion of a program of study beyond initial preparation
Specialty Set	Knowledge and skill statements for a specialization area (e.g., EI/ECSE) used to inform the CEC Standards
Competencies	Informal lists of knowledge and skills for a specialization area not formally approved by CEC
Certification	State requirements to practice as a professional in a specific discipline
Early intervention early childhood special education (EI/ECSE)	The field of professional practice for educators prepared to work with children birth through eight years with or at risk for disabilities and developmental delays and their families
Early childhood education (ECE)	The field of professional practice for educators prepared to work with children birth through eight years who are developing typically and their families

CLARIFYING THE CONTEXT Relationship Between CEC and the DEC

DEC became a division of CEC during its 1973 annual conference in response to advocacy by the national network of Handicapped Children's Early Education Program (HCEEP) projects. DEC, one of 17 special interest divisions, has an international membership of "individuals who work with or on behalf of children with special needs, birth through age eight, and their families" (DEC, 2012, p. 1), including children with or at risk for disabilities and developmental delays. DEC also works to ensure a highly effective work-

force through the initial preparation and ongoing professional development of EI/ECSE professionals, which is one of six goals in DEC's priority issues agenda (DEC, 2020).

To understand standards development within DEC, it is important to know that CEC, rather than DEC, is the professional association member of the Council for Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP), representing all areas of special education. Although IHE programs preparing EI/ECSE professionals are now evaluated through CAEP using the EI/ECSE Standards, CEC remains the ultimate gatekeeper of the EI/ECSE Standards.

Terminology

Professional standards are defined here as what professionals should know and be able to do to practice effectively. Historically, each CEC division could develop knowledge and skill statements for their respective specializations. DEC and its members often referred to knowledge and skill statements as *standards*; however, they did not meet CEC's criterion for approval as standards. In 1995, CEC began referring to knowledge and skill statements as Specialty Sets and used them for program accreditation to inform the CEC Standards for a division's specialization area. To facilitate the readability of this paper, *EI/ECSE Standards* refers to the *Initial Practice-Based Professional Standards for Early Interventionists/Early Childhood Special Educators* (CEC & DEC, 2020) for entry into the profession. *Specialty Set* refers to different iterations of knowledge and skill statements from the mid-90s to 2020 validated to inform CEC's Standards for preservice EI/ECSE programs. The word *competency*, historically used interchangeably with *standard*, refers to informal lists of knowledge and skills that were not under CEC's umbrella.

Consistent with DEC's mission to serve children birth through 8 years with or at risk for disabilities and developmental delays, the term *EI/ECSE* now refers to the field of professional practice for educators prepared to work with children and their families across the birth through eight age range. State certification or licensure documenting competence is required to practice as a professional in various disciplines, including education. Although some states may utilize the term licensure, for this paper, *certification* will be used. Table 1 provides a listing of key terminology and definitions.

TABLE 2: Timeline of Key Events Leading to Development of EI/ECSE Standards

DATE	KEY EVENT
1968	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • P.L. 90-538, The Handicapped Children's Early Education Assistance Act (HCEEP) funds projects to develop and demonstrate innovative approaches to meet the needs of young children with disabilities
1973	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Division for Early Childhood (DEC) becomes a specialization division of the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC)
1975	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • P.L. 94-142, The Education for All Handicapped Children Act – includes funding for state planning and incentive funds for preschool and early intervention (EI) services
1986	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • P.L. 99-457, The Education of the Handicapped Act Amendments – Part B Section 619 mandates free and appropriate (FAPE) public preschool education for children with disabilities be in place by 1991; Part H (now Part C) requires that states receiving federal funds plan services for children birth to 3 years with disabilities and their families and be in place in 4 years
1989	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recommendations for Certification of Early Childhood Special Educators (McCollum et al., 1989) delineates DEC's recommendations for EI/ECSE roles, content areas for preparation, and entry-level certification • A member of DEC's Personnel Preparation Committee (PPC) represents DEC on CEC's Knowledge and Skills Subcommittee (KSSC)
1990	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carolina Institute for Research on Infant Personnel Preparation, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill completes a series of survey studies on extent to which preservice and in-service personnel preparation programs address specialized EI competencies
1993	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DEC Position Statement on Personnel Preparation (DEC 1994a) defines DEC's policy on initial preparation and state certification • DEC publishes DEC Recommended Practices: Indicators of Quality in Programs for Infants and Young Children with Special Needs and Their Families (DEC Task Force on Recommended Practices, 1993)
1994	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DEC Personnel Standards for Early Education and Early Intervention: Guidelines for Licensure in ECSE (DEC, 1994b) identifies 77 performance-based statements in six content areas and recommendations for certification (i.e., DEC's first initial Specialty Set)
1995	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DEC's first initial Specialty Set approved by CEC and published in What Every Special Educator Must Know
2001	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DEC begins collaboration with CEC and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) to conduct accreditation program reviews for blended programs
2003	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Center to Inform Personnel Preparation Policy and Practice in Early Intervention and Preschool Education, funded by OSEP, to conduct research to identify gaps in EI/ECSE Personnel Preparation
2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DEC initial Specialty Set with 10 content areas and greater emphasis on EI and DEC advanced Specialty Set with six content areas revised and validated
2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DEC completes alignment of the DEC initial and advanced Specialty Sets (2007) with the initial and advanced CEC Standards (2003, 2006) and NAEYC Standards (2003) and disseminates in Chandler et al. (2012)
2012	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early Childhood Personnel Center (ECPC), funded by OSEP, to provide technical assistance in developing comprehensive systems of personnel development
2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DEC completes alignment of the DEC initial and advanced Specialty Sets (2007, 2017) with the initial and advanced CEC Standards (2012) and NAEYC Standards (2012) and disseminates in 2018
2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DEC initial and advanced Specialty Sets reviewed and validated with same content areas as the CEC initial and advanced Standards (2012) • DEC (2017) Position Statement on Personnel Preparation outlines recommendations for use of the Specialty Sets by IHE faculty, professional development providers, state policy makers for certification requirements, and to facilitate interdisciplinary collaboration
2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DEC collaborates with CEC to develop and approve EI/ECSE Standards (CEC & DEC, 2020), ECPC provides support • NAEYC develops, with representation from DEC, and approves Early Childhood Education (ECE Standards: NAEYC, 2020) • DEC collaborates with NAEYC and ECPC to develop a crosswalk of the 2020 EI/ECSE Standards and ECE Standards (ECPC, 2020) • DEC develops a crosswalk of the EI/ECSE Standards, DEC recommended practices, and the CEC high leverage practices (Berlinghoff & McLaughlin, 2022) • EI/Early Childhood Special Education (EI/ECSE) identified as a professional specialization area in Power to the Profession (PtP) Unifying Framework which provides a structure for early childhood professions
2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DEC (2022) Personnel Preparation Position Statement outlines recommendations for use of the EI/ECSE Standards by IHE faculty, professional development providers, and state policy makers, and to facilitate interdisciplinary collaboration and blended preservice preparation • Special issue of Young Exceptional Children (YEC) focuses on the EI/ECSE Standards • DEC collaborates with CEC to begin Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) program review process for EI/ECSE preservice programs
2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Special issue of Journal of Early Childhood Teacher Education focuses on the EI/ECSE Standards as a means for collaboration in teacher education

SETTING THE STAGE FOR PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS: 1960-1990 A New Profession Emerges

The 1960s marked the beginning of EI/ECSE as a profession with increased public attention on young children's development and welfare in response to the war on poverty and the civil rights movement. Preschool programs in the United States for children with disabilities looked to European models for their conceptual frameworks, theories, and practices (Bricker, 2020), as well as to early experimental programs in the United States. They demonstrated that intervention could change the developmental and learning trajectories of young children with or at risk for disabilities and developmental delays (e.g., Kirk, 1977). These practices began to define the disciplinary knowledge and skills needed by early childhood special educators. See Table 2 for a timeline of key events in the evolution of EI/ECSE Standards from the 1960s to the present.

Influences on the Movement Toward Professional Standards

Legislation and Funding. The first federal funding for programs to serve eligible children and their families was P.L. 90-538 of 1968, The Handicapped Children's Early Education Assistance Act, which funded projects to develop and demonstrate innovative, experimental approaches to meet the needs of young children with disabilities, and to support other programs in adopting successful models and practices. Projects were implemented in a variety of settings by individuals from multiple disciplines and for children of varying needs. Each project built a base of knowledge and skills and developed approaches and materials for the three required components: individualized services, family involvement, and age-appropriate assessment and curriculum. This provided the

foundation for what later would become knowledge and skill areas for EI/ECSE personnel preparation. P.L. 90-538 also required the formation of a national network, First Chance, to share the projects' conceptual frameworks, practices, and results, and in 1979, became part of the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP; Bricker, 2020), thereby, aligning HCEEP with the field of special education.

P. L. 94-142, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, brought explicit attention to young children with disabilities and delays by including funding for state planning and incentive funds for both preschool programs and EI services. By the end of the 1970s, preschool mandates were in place in almost half of the states (Xie, 2020). Increased attention was placed on how to apply free appropriate education and access to least restrictive environments to preschool children. State and national planners focused on how to achieve this through mainstreaming, as demonstrated in some HCEEP projects, setting the stage for movement toward full inclusion (Guralnick, 2001). In addition, some programs demonstrated the efficacy of combining practices drawn from different theoretical approaches to meet both the developmental and instructional needs of each child (Xie, 2020). The results further expanded and clarified the EI/ECSE profession and its accompanying disciplinary knowledge and skills.

During the 1980s, P.L. 99-457 added further legitimacy and impetus to EI/ECSE as a profession. Part B Section 619 of the legislation mandated that publicly funded preschool education for children with disabilities be in place by 1991. Part H (now Part C) required that states receiving federal funds plan services for children birth to 3 years and their families, with state systems in place within 4 years (Gargiulo & Kilgo,

2020). Services expanded at a rapid rate and required researchers and program personnel to put immense effort into the development of assessments, curricula, and intervention practices. These efforts expanded and improved the quality of resources for EI/ECSE programs and enhanced disciplinary knowledge in EI/ECSE.

Growth in IHE Personnel Preparation Programs in EI/ECSE. Growth in IHE programs preparing personnel to serve young children with disabilities and their families also influenced the movement toward professional standards. A 1974 CEC survey of IHEs in special education found that only a few programs included an emphasis on the unique needs of young children with delays and disabilities (Xie, 2020). By the 1980s, this number had increased dramatically, further highlighting the need for standards. Additionally, OSEP funding in the 1970s for a small number of master's and doctoral ECSE programs facilitated growth. Both EI and ECSE personnel preparation was a priority area for funding (e.g., Rowan et al., 1993), leading to an increased need for standards to guide IHE curriculum development.

First Steps Toward Professional Standards Personnel Quality as a Priority

In the late 1970s, DEC formed a personnel preparation committee (PPC) to share information among universities, nurture the quality of IHE personnel preparation, expand the personnel preparation knowledge base, and provide leadership for establishing EI/ECSE as a profession. As EI/ECSE developed its disciplinary knowledge, efforts to articulate what was unique about EI/ECSE compared to K-12 special education and early childhood education (ECE) began. Through conversations with the National Association for the Education of Young

Children (NAEYC), the PPC explored similarities and differences between the perspectives and practices of ECE and ECSE. This collaboration began to clarify the roles and unique training needs of EI/ECSE personnel and ECE personnel to include children with disabilities (McCollum, 2000). In 1989, a PPC member was added to CEC's Knowledge and Skills Subcommittee (KSSC) to provide the perspectives of EI/ECSE personnel preparation. These activities contributed to a growing understanding of EI/ECSE as having a unique disciplinary knowledge and as a profession distinct from ECE, K-12 special education, and related service professions.

Precursors to Standards: Roles and Competency Studies

The content of EI/ECSE IHE programs in the 1970s was based primarily on areas identified as important through the HCEEP projects and other intervention programs (e.g., assessment, curriculum, families). In the few IHEs offering EI/ECSE preparation, faculty developed lists of competencies based on program descriptions and reviews of the literature across many areas of ECE, special education, and related fields (McCollum, personal communication, 2021). As more faculty participated in DEC's PPC, these lists of competencies were shared and used in developing IHE curricula and grant applications.

In 1986, P.L. 99-457 identified inadequate training as an obstacle to implementing the legislation's EI component (Silverstein, 1989). Papers describing the roles of special educators in EI increased (e.g., Thorp & McCollum, 1988). Researchers conducted state and national competency studies to define what EI personnel across disciplines should know and do (e.g., Maude, 1990). OSEP funded the Carolina

Institute for Research on Infant Personnel Preparation to identify and assist in addressing these issues in preparation. The results of its research helped focus attention on cross-disciplinary roles and training needs in EI (Bailey et al., 1990).

First Recommendations for Competencies and Certification

DEC's PPC developed a white paper, *Recommendations for Certification of Early Childhood Special Educators* (McCollum et al., 1989), representing DEC's first step toward establishing standards for the profession. The paper provided guidance to IHEs and states for achieving highly qualified EI/ECSE personnel by identifying 12 roles (e.g., plan and implement developmental interventions) that subsumed 15 overarching content areas (e.g., assessment, intervention, families) for the EI/ECSE professional, which were expanded into 90 sub-areas. It also advocated for entry-level certification for EI/ECSE, birth through 5 years, with a state option for birth through 8 years, if more compatible with the state's existing ECE certification.

Transition to the 1990s

By 1990, the foundation was laid for a new profession, EI/ECSE. Federal legislation provided the impetus and mandates for EI/ECSE services and led to personnel issues in EI/ECSE being a primary focus. An increasing number of IHEs offered preparation in EI/ECSE. DEC's PPC was engaged in learning about and delineating what EI/ECSE professionals needed to know and do. Faculty and policymakers were integrating this information into IHE programs and state efforts. The body of knowledge in EI/ECSE was growing through research and practice. The stage was set for an escalation in work toward standards.

MOVEMENT TOWARD EI/ECSE STANDARDS: 1990-2000: DEC's First Specialty Set

The 1990s were replete with factors affecting the growing recognition of EI/ECSE as a profession (Ryan, 2020) and the evolution toward EI/ECSE Standards. EI/ECSE's body of disciplinary knowledge continued to expand, and DEC published its first iteration of Recommended Practices (DEC Task Force on Recommended Practices, 1993), providing guidance for evidence-based practices in key areas of service delivery. Collaboration between DEC and other organizations was further solidified and expanded as professions continued to address the intent and reality of legislation and policy. During this decade, DEC developed its first EI/ECSE Initial Specialty Set under the auspices of CEC and drafted advanced knowledge and skill statements.

Influences on DEC's Initial Specialty Set

Legislation and Funding. Although P.L. 99-457 was passed in 1986, its implementation remained the primary driver of activity during the 1990s. Preschool mandates were in place in all states, and EI/ECSE services at the preschool level were provided in many settings (e.g., public schools, Head Start, and childcare), increasing the focus on inclusion (Guralnick, 2001). Natural environments and inclusion also were of concern at the infant-toddler level, with many children receiving services in their homes or in childcare. Educators and researchers continued to debate and explore how to combine differing theoretical perspectives and strategies to meet the needs of all children birth through 8 years and families within and across these settings (Ryan, 2020).

P.L. 99-457 also brought changes

in perspectives toward families with a shift toward a family-centered model (Dunst et al., 1991), leading to consideration of professional knowledge and skills to support teams and families working together on program components such as instruction (Buysse & Wesley, 1993). Another key construct of family-centered practices was the provision of culturally responsive home- and center-based services (Lynch & Hanson, 1992).

The legislation also heightened the emphasis on interdisciplinary collaboration. Services for infants, toddlers, and preschool children historically were implemented in segregated, center-based settings by multidisciplinary teams of professionals who did not always collaborate. With P.L. 99-457, services required more specialized knowledge within each discipline and a systems perspective encompassing all disciplines. All professionals providing EI services were required to integrate knowledge from multiple disciplines, consider systems of service in their interdisciplinary and interagency work, and assume roles as team members and consultants. The 1990s continued to focus on interdisciplinary relationships, with a shift toward how to prepare personnel to function as competent team members and partner with families. OSEP continued to fund IHE programs in which disciplines were trained together (e.g., Rowan et al., 1993). The focus on family-centered practices led to strategies for including families in preservice preparation and professional development (Whitehead et al., 1998).

Collaboration Among Professional Associations. The 1990s saw important collaborative activities between DEC and other associations. An issue for DEC and NAEYC was whether and how a key concept in ECE, developmentally appropriate practices (DAPs), applied to children with disabilities

(Bredekamp, 1993). Some interpreted DAPs as broad guidelines encompassing the individualized instructional methods needed by children with disabilities (Fox et al., 1994); others considered the DAP guidelines as not specific enough to guide services for children with disabilities (Carta, 1994). Such discussions influenced and strengthened the content of EI/ECSE knowledge and skills and ECE Standards, as practices from each perspective were incorporated. DEC continued to participate in CEC's KSSC, advocating for improved representation of EI/ECSE in CEC's Standards.

Development and Validation of DEC's First Initial Specialty Set

In the 1990s, DEC moved away from identifying competencies and toward delineating knowledge and skill statements describing what entry-level EI/ECSE educators would be expected to know and do, and which also would be used to inform the CEC Standards when accrediting IHE programs. In 1993, a DEC workgroup was established with representation from NAEYC and the Association of Teacher Educators (ATE), charged with developing a position statement (DEC, 1994), defining DEC's policy for initial EI/ECSE personnel preparation and certification.

In contrast to the 1989 DEC white paper, these new guidelines incorporated birth through 8 years, consistent with DEC's mission, and focused on six content areas: child development and learning, curriculum and implementation, family and community relationships, assessment and evaluation, professionalism, and field experience. These areas were elaborated further into 77 performance-based statements. As in the white paper, state policies requiring stand-alone EI/ECSE certification were recommended. In 1996,

DEC and NAEYC collaborated to reorganize DEC's 77 statements for initial preparation under the content areas in NAEYC's Standards as a resource for IHEs that were designing blended programs in ECE and EI/ECSE (NAEYC, 1996).

In 1995, CEC approved the first DEC Initial Specialty Set, as identified in the 1994 concept paper. Soon to follow was the first edition of *What Every Special Educator Must Know* (CEC, 1995), which contained CEC's Standards and Initial Specialty Sets from DEC and other divisions. This Initial Specialty Set contained the same 77 knowledge and skill statements as those approved in 1994 by DEC and endorsed by NAEYC and ATE, grouped differently to fit the content areas of CEC's 10 Standards.

Transition to 2000

By the end of the decade, DEC had strong collaborative relationships with NAEYC and CEC. The DEC Initial Specialty Set delineated entry-level requirements for EI/ECSE, providing IHEs guidance for curriculum development and accreditation and offering guidance to states for professional development and certification policies. The age range was extended to birth through 8 years with increased emphasis on early development, family partnerships, and interdisciplinary teams. Collaborative efforts led to a new focus on blended programs for ECE and ECSE (Stayton & McCollum, 2002) and innovative models for cross-disciplinary preparation.

2000-2010: REVISION AND EXPANSION OF DEC'S SPECIALTY SETS

In this new decade, substantial work occurred to update and validate DEC's Initial Specialty Set with additional work on an Advanced Specialty Set.

New guidance documents were also developed.

Influences on Revisions in the Specialty Sets

Legislation and Funding

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act was reauthorized in 2004, reiterating that professionals from each discipline should be highly qualified for their work in EI/ECSE. The role of the states was to determine what this meant with respect to entry-level certification. For some disciplines (e.g., occupational therapy, physical therapy), qualifications were determined at the national level. In other disciplines, including EI/ECSE, certification was determined based on state-level requirements, which varied widely (Geiger et al., 2003). Further, certification requirements inclusive of birth through 8 years continued to be problematic because existing entry-level requirements did not ensure experience with or content knowledge specific to young children with disabilities or delays and their families (Bailey et al., 1990). Both issues had to be addressed by IHE faculty preparing entry-level professionals and by professional organizations across disciplines. Continuing updates of the DEC Specialty Sets were required as part of CEC's revision process for special education and were needed for guidance by state planners and IHEs.

A strong push toward continued revisions to DEC's Specialty Sets also came from the work of the personnel institutes and centers funded by OSEP. The Carolina personnel institute continued. The Center to Inform Personnel Preparation Policy and Practice in Early Intervention and Preschool Education, which was funded in 2003 at the University of Connecticut, was followed in 2012 by the Early Childhood Personnel Center (ECPC). A primary activity of the centers was to examine competencies for EI and ECSE personnel within

and across disciplines, with ongoing participation by representatives from multiple disciplines, as well as from states and other technical assistance centers (Bailey et al., 1990; Bruder & Dunst, 2005). Each center contributed information that influenced the understanding of roles and the knowledge and skills needed to serve young children and their families. The centers also provided guidance to IHEs and states on preparing highly qualified personnel. OSEP continued to support interdisciplinary preparation that included partnerships with EI/ECSE and related service disciplines and blended ECE and EI/ECSE programs.

Collaborative Efforts Influencing Revisions

DEC's work on the Specialty Sets during this decade continued to be influenced by collaboration with CEC and other professional organizations. The close partnership between DEC and NAEYC continued, with NAEYC participating in the revision and validation of DEC's Specialty Sets. In 2001, CEC and NAEYC, in collaboration with DEC, began conducting accreditation program reviews for blended programs. The majority of DEC's collaborative work with CEC was directed toward revising and validating the Initial Specialty Set in collaboration with CEC's KSSC (Lifter et al., 2011). Advocacy by DEC's KSSC representative influenced changes in terminology that better integrated EI/ECSE into CEC's Standards (CEC, 2009). *Professionals* replaced *teachers* to acknowledge the variety of EI/ECSE roles, and the term *early intervention* was formally added to acknowledge EI. The title of the Initial Specialty Set was revised to *Initial Special Education Professionals in Early Childhood Special Education/Early Intervention (Birth to Eight)*.

Revision, Validation, and Alignment of the DEC Specialty Sets

In 2004, DEC charged the PPC with revising and validating both Initial and Advanced Specialty Sets and identifying a literature base supporting each one. A task force was appointed, and workgroups were formed to revise the Specialty Sets and develop a database of supporting literature for each (Cochran et al., 2012). Both the initial and advanced workgroups followed a similar process (Lifter et al., 2011). Validation studies for each Specialty Set were conducted with a group of constituents that included DEC members, NAEYC's IHE members, and Parts C and B619 coordinators, with subsequent revisions completed in 2007.

The Initial Specialty Set contained 10 content areas, matching the 10 CEC Standards: foundations, development and characteristics of learners, individual learning differences, instructional strategies, learning environments and social interaction, language, instructional planning, assessment, professional and ethical practice, and collaboration. It placed greater emphasis on infants and toddlers and on emerging practices in the field, both through terminology and content emphases (e.g., child development, inclusion, interdisciplinary teaming). As a resource, DEC's Initial Specialty Set and CEC's and NAEYC's initial Standards were aligned (Chandler et al., 2012). The Advanced Specialty Set, now validated by CEC, encompassed six content areas: leadership and policy, program development and organization, research and inquiry, evaluation, professional development and ethical practice, and collaboration.

Transition to 2010

The work of this decade resulted in revised, validated Initial and Advanced Specialty Sets, representing changing emphases in EI/ECSE as a profession.

Further, a new substantive research base was available to be used in IHE curriculum planning and accreditation.

2010-2020: NEW EI/ECSE PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS

The culmination of work toward standards in this new decade was the development of DEC's first stand-alone EI/ECSE Standards for the profession, an historic achievement. However, before that could be accomplished, DEC once again updated its Initial and Advanced Specialty Sets and engaged in alignment of the revised Initial Specialty Set with newly revised CEC and NAEYC Standards (Mickelson et al., 2023).

Influences on Emerging Professional Standards *National Agenda for Young Children*

There were no significant legislative changes during this decade. Nonetheless, several national efforts and status reports influenced the movement toward EI/ECSE professional standards. In 2014, President Obama convened a White House Summit on Early Education for early childhood constituents (e.g., state and national policymakers, school administrators, community leaders) that resulted in increased investment in services. One particularly important outcome was increased support for public preschool for all children across many states and communities, adding impetus to the need for qualified personnel.

In 2015, the Institute of Medicine (IOM) and National Research Council published *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation*, the result of an extensive study on the climate of the ECE profession. The report summarized the state of ECE and encompassed a "Blueprint for Action." Recommendations for IHEs included supporting preservice educators in acquiring the knowledge and skills to meet the diverse and changing needs of children and families.

Lagging Rates of Inclusion

A further influence on the movement toward professional standards came from data suggesting that rates of inclusion had not increased since P.L. 99-457 mandated public education for preschoolers with disabilities (Barton & Smith, 2015). In response, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (USDHHS) and the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE) released a joint policy statement outlining the research supporting inclusion, re-emphasizing the need for well-prepared professionals, and highlighting the importance of preservice and in-service professional development. The policy statement also included clear recommendations for states for increasing the number of children with disabilities in high-quality, inclusive ECE programs (USDHHS & USDOE, 2015). The policy statement, coupled with the growth in public preschool programs, created increased inclusive education opportunities for all children and collaboration among early childhood agencies in states (e.g., Part B 619, Head Start, public schools).

Power to the Profession

Another national influence, Power to the Profession (PtP), was facilitated by NAEYC and resulted, in part, from the IOM report noted above. A 15-member task force, including DEC, was charged with establishing a framework for ECE services and defining the ECE profession. DEC partnered in developing a unifying framework with recommendations for career pathways, professional standards, qualifications, accountability supports, and compensation for the ECE profession (PtP Task Force, 2020). A key recommendation of PtP was for areas of specialization, with EI/ECSE identified as one of these areas. The PtP collaboration further enhanced the professional relationship between DEC and NAEYC, leading to NAEYC's support for the

development of the 2020 EI/ECSE Standards.

Initial Specialty Set Yields to Stand-Alone EI/ECSE Standards

This decade included two major initiatives. The first was the revision of DEC's Initial and Advanced Specialty Sets. The second and more far-reaching was DEC's work toward and approval of a distinct set of stand-alone EI/ECSE Standards to replace the Initial Specialty Set.

Revision, Validation, and Alignment of Specialty Sets

In 2012, CEC made significant revisions to its initial standards. In addition, with representation from NAEYC, work groups within DEC's PPC were established to review and revise DEC's Initial and Advanced Specialty Sets, employing the same process as in the previous decade (Lifter et al., 2011). The revised Specialty Sets were approved in 2017 by both DEC and CEC. The 2012 revision of CEC's initial and advanced standards, revision of DEC's Specialty Sets, and new NAEYC Standards in 2010 required a new collaborative alignment of DEC's Specialty Sets and the CEC and NAEYC Standards with support from ECPC (Mickelson et al., 2023). Revision of the Specialty Sets also created a need to revise DEC's personnel preparation position statement (DEC, 2017).

Stand-Alone Initial EI/ECSE Standards Accomplished

In 2018, DEC requested approval from CEC to develop a stand-alone set of standards for initial entry into the EI/ECSE profession to replace the Initial Specialty Set. With NAEYC support, the request was approved, initiating the historic development of the first stand-alone professional standards for EI/ECSE.

DEC collaborated with CEC, NAEYC, and ECPC to appoint and

support a 15-member Standards Development Task Force (ECPC, 2020). This group met regularly for 2 years to draft EI/ECSE Standards, components, and supporting documents in accordance with CAEP's requirements for standards development. An iterative process was used, and input from the field was solicited through surveys, webinars, and listening sessions at professional conferences to ensure the validity of the new EI/ECSE Standards as they were being developed. The EI/ECSE Standards (CEC & DEC, 2020) were approved by CEC and disseminated in 2020.

Given new EI/ECSE Standards and NAEYC's new ECE Standards, a new standards alignment was needed. DEC, NAEYC, and CEC collaborated with ECPC to develop a 2020 crosswalk between the ECE and EI/ECSE Standards. The crosswalk identifies the specific knowledge and skills that are similar across these two sets of standards (ECPC, 2020). The new crosswalk has substantial potential to support blended models of preparation since both DEC and NAEYC now have standards that address the same age range (Mickelson et al., 2023). In addition, a crosswalk of the EI/ECSE Standards, the DEC recommended practices, and the CEC high leverage practices was developed (Berlinghoff & McLaughlin, 2022).

Transition to the Future

The EI/ECSE profession is solidly grounded in a history that demonstrates development from its beginning to full recognition as a profession. History and challenging work over many years laid a solid foundation for the 2020 EI/ECSE Standards.

EI/ECSE STANDARDS: THE VISION FOR THE FUTURE

The EI/ECSE Standards represent full recognition of EI/ECSE as a profession. Now is the time for EI/ECSE to be rep-

resented in interdisciplinary efforts and apply the EI/ECSE Standards to a new vision in which these standards guide the preparation of highly qualified EI/ECSE professionals who develop and implement evidence-based practices that lead to positive outcomes for young children and families.

This vision is consistent with long-term DEC advocacy efforts and policy as represented in personnel preparation position statements over time (e.g., DEC 1994a, 2017, 2022). DEC, in collaboration with the EI/ECSE field, has the primary role in achieving this vision. DEC developed a comprehensive action plan aligned with this vision that delineates advocacy, dissemination, and support strategies to ensure that the EI/ECSE Standards are used by multiple stakeholders targeted to each specific stakeholder role. This action plan is designed to facilitate comprehensive systems of personnel development (CSPD) at the local, state, and national levels. A CSPD contains multiple integrated and coordinated elements that can draw upon the EI/ECSE Standards for guidance in developing systems that can lead to the consistent quality of services and a strong common foundation for preparation and support of the workforce.

EI/ECSE professionals, in alliance with DEC and CEC's Teacher Education Division (TED), will work with policymakers to ensure that they are aware of the EI/ECSE Standards and understand the value of adopting them for multiple purposes, including the foundation of preservice programs of study, the framework for the state's professional development system, IHE accreditation, and certification policies.

Several dissemination activities have occurred to both raise awareness and provide guidance. Several manuscripts have been published in refereed journals. For example, a 2022 special issue of *Young Exceptional Children* included

manuscripts focused on using the EI/ECSE Standards in a preservice program, in a state EI professional development system, and by families to ensure their children receive services from qualified practitioners. DEC leaders have made presentations at professional conferences focused on resources to facilitate alignment of preservice curriculum with the EI/ECSE Standards and support the development of CAEP accreditation program review documents (e.g., DEC, TED). Further, multiple resources designed to support IHE faculty and professional development providers in their use of the EI/ECSE Standards are housed on both the DEC and ECPC websites (DEC, n.d.; ECPC, n.d.).

Additional advocacy and technical assistance efforts will ensure that all groups responsible for different elements of a CSPD have guidance for the application of the EI/ECSE Standards to achieve comprehensive systems at the local, state, and national levels. What follows is a discussion of specific steps that the EI/ECSE field can pursue toward accomplishing the vision of a CSPD: (a) aligning preservice preparation and accreditation with the EI/ECSE Standards, (b) guiding professional development systems and content around the EI/ECSE Standards, (c) using these standards to influence state and national policy, (d) applying the standards to achieve visibility as a profession, including more formal cross-disciplinary collaboration with CEC, NAEYC, and other professional organizations (e.g., AOTA, ASHA), and (e) encouraging research utilization and generation informed by the EI/ECSE Standards.

Supporting Higher Education Program Planning and Accreditation

Preservice preparation is an essential component of CSPDs. For over 3 decades, the early childhood field has advocated for IHE programs to be based

on rigorous and measurable standards (e.g., DEC, 1994a, 2017; McCollum et al., 1989). Yet, Part B 619 and Part C providers have reported that their preservice preparation did not adequately prepare them to work with children with delays and disabilities (Bruder et al., 2013). Clearly, there is a gap between what professionals receive during their initial preparation and what they need for their jobs.

The EI/ECSE Standards provide a powerful opportunity to improve the quality of *all* EI/ECSE preservice programs, as the expectation is that *all* IHE programs align their curricula with the EI/ECSE Standards. Moving forward, IHE preservice programs leading to initial EI/ECSE certification that seek CAEP accreditation will be evaluated based on the new EI/ECSE Standards. These standards provide clear guidance for rigorous program-wide curriculum and assessment benchmarks, as well as for developing courses and field experiences and for assessing attainment of the standards by graduates. The supporting explanations (Berlinghoff & McLaughlin, 2022p) for each *practice-based* EI/ECSE Standard provide multiple examples of their application in settings with children and families.

DEC has committed to the ongoing development of resources to support IHE faculty in aligning their preservice curriculum with the EI/ECSE Standards and to support them in preparing for program review. These resources are housed in the personnel preparation section of the DEC website. Also, as previously noted, the ECPC (n.d.) website has multiple resources to facilitate aligning IHE curricula with the EI/ECSE Standards.

Guiding Professional Development Content and Processes

Another essential component of a CSPD is ongoing professional development. The EI/ECSE Standards support

this element by providing a framework for designing content that responds to and addresses the significant variability in participants' prior preparation and professional experience. Professional development content should be based on needs assessments aligned with the EI/ECSE Standards so that appropriate content can be designed to address the assessed needs of individuals or subgroups of providers. The required content could be used to fill gaps in initial preparation in some or all of the EI/ECSE Standards to supplement initial preparation.

At the school or program level, employers could use the EI/ECSE Standards to facilitate EI/ECSE professionals' self-assessment of their professional growth needs and to align their staff evaluation system with the standards to determine the skills staff demonstrate. Employers could use the results to support staff in developing and implementing professional growth plans that include individual and/or group professional development activities (Lifter et al., 2011).

Strengthening State and Federal Policy

One vital role of EI/ECSE professionals and professional associations (e.g., CEC, DEC, TED) is to engage in advocacy to promote new policies and changes in policies that impact outcomes for children and families. The existence of national professional standards strengthens the position of the early childhood field to advocate for policies that support workforce development and services for children and families (PtP Task Force, 2020), as well as enhance reciprocity across state lines in recruiting and retaining personnel.

Professional associations and leaders in personnel preparation have emphasized the critical role of state certification offices, in collaboration with other partners, in developing certification poli-

cies based on national standards (Darling-Hammond, 2020; PtP Task Force, 2020). Unfortunately, alignment of state standards with national standards is limited (Stayton et al., 2012). Certification requirements related to young children vary widely across states with respect to the age ranges represented (Chen & Mickelson, 2015; Sindelar et al., 2019), required content, and depth of content. Some states require educators providing EI Part C services to have certification addressing infants and toddlers; however, many states do not have this requirement. In states that do, information often is not available on training content (Center to Inform Personnel Preparation Policy & Practice in Early Intervention & Preschool Education, 2007).

DEC has long advocated that state certification policies be based on national standards (DEC, 1994, 2017; McCollum et al., 1989). By adopting the EI/ECSE Standards for certification purposes, states can facilitate the alignment of IHE preservice programs and professional development content with the EI/ECSE Standards, thus addressing those CSPD components. For example, Minnesota's Department of Education and Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board, with support from ECPC, recently collaborated to adopt the EI/ECSE Standards as the state's EI/ECSE certification standards.

At the national level, advocacy for legislation and policies that support a systems approach with the EI/ECSE Standards as the guiding force in achieving a coordinated infrastructure for personnel preparation is critical. Another key area of advocacy is to support the coordination of policies affecting personnel initiatives across federal agencies responsible for supporting young children and their families. Elements of the CSPD, with a grounding in the EI/ECSE Standards, could support such an effort.

OSEP has played a key role in enhanc-

ing the quality of preparation and the quantity of EI/ECSE professionals, as well as supporting research and technical assistance in personnel preparation. Since the 1980s, OSEP has funded IHE personnel preparation grants focused on EI/ECSE with the requirement that the curriculum for those projects be aligned with national standards and recommended practices. Therefore, curricula for future funded projects will be based on the EI/ECSE Standards. Historically, OSEP has funded centers to conduct research and/or provide technical assistance focused on personnel preparation. These projects have provided key technical assistance and resources to IHEs and states. Continued support and leadership from OSEP are critical to facilitating the national application of the EI/ECSE Standards.

Enhancing Cross-Disciplinary Collaboration

For several decades, early childhood professionals have advocated for cross-disciplinary preparation to ensure that professionals representing multiple disciplines are qualified to work collaboratively on behalf of young children and their families (Kilgo et al., 2019). Historically, CEC Standards were used in conjunction with the DEC Specialty Sets and emerging literature to provide guidance for cross-disciplinary preparation. This has been cumbersome and confusing when applied in collaborative efforts with disciplines that have national professional standards.

The EI/ECSE Standards place the EI/ECSE profession in a similar position with other disciplines, supporting continued collaboration among disciplines and their respective professional organizations. For example, as blended models of preservice preparation increased, CEC and NAEYC, in collaboration with DEC, began jointly conducting CAEP program reviews for blended programs



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in ECE and EI/ECSE. Although CEC, NAEYC, and DEC have collaborated to develop alignments of the Standards and Specialty Sets that would facilitate the development of blended curricula (Chandler et al., 2012; Mickelson et al., 2023), program development and review have been complicated by having no stand-alone EI/ECSE Standards. The EI/ECSE Standards, coupled with the 2020 ECE Standards, allows DEC to provide increased support for planning and accrediting programs seeking to implement a blended approach. However, since NAEYC is no longer a member of CAEP and now has its own IHE accreditation process, the previous process for reviewing and accrediting blended programs is no longer viable. Therefore, a collaborative initiative among DEC, NAEYC, and CEC will be required to develop a review and accreditation process based on the ECE and EI/ECSE Standards.

Using and Generating Research Informed by the EI/ECSE Standards

DEC will update the EI/ECSE Standards on a regular basis in response to current and future research. Ensuring continued efficacy of the EI/ECSE Standards depends on research to support

ongoing revisions that will then impact the content and process of preservice and professional development as well as other elements of a CSPD. It will be critical for the EI/ECSE field and professional associations (e.g., CEC, TED, DEC) to use the EI/ECSE Standards to advocate for research that generates and contributes to new bodies of knowledge, including research on different models and approaches in IHE preservice programs and professional development. It also will be the responsibility of EI/ECSE professionals to disseminate those research findings through journal articles (e.g., *Journal of Early Intervention, Teacher Education and Special Education*), conferences, and other venues. A research agenda based on the above factors will provide empirical evidence to support advocacy and policy decisions that promote systems efficacy in all elements of the CSPD.

CONCLUSION

The evolution of the EI/ECSE Standards and the recognition of EI/ECSE as a profession developed in tandem over many years. These efforts involved many individuals and required extraordinary commitment to the vision that underlies the EI/ECSE Standards, as well as to their foundation in ongoing research, practice, policy, and advocacy. These standards validate EI/ECSE as a profession dedicated to enhancing outcomes for young children and their families.

With the development of EI/ECSE Standards, the EI/ECSE profession is at an exciting point in its journey to enhance the quality of personnel who provide services to young children and their families. Opportunities for IHEs to collaborate more closely with policymakers afford increased possibilities for enhanced consistency in services and provide families with assurance that services are provided by professionals

with specific knowledge and skills. CSPDs based on the EI/ECSE Standards will facilitate increased collaboration and coordination within states, while revised certification requirements will facilitate reciprocity for qualified EI/ECSE professionals across states. At the national level, the research-based EI/ECSE Standards will strengthen efforts to increase recognition and support of personnel who provide services to young children and their families.

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