

Mayra Sandoval and Andrea Mraz Esposito

Competency Frameworks for Infant and Toddler Teachers and Caregivers in California

California developed the [Early Childhood Educator Competencies](#) to improve the quality of early care and education in the state and support the professional development of anyone responsible for the care and education of children ages birth to 5 years old across setting types. The framework groups competencies into competency areas and competency contexts. The competency areas are organized into 12 domains: (1) child development and learning; (2) culture, diversity, and equity; (3) relationships, interactions, and guidance; (4) family and community engagement; (5) dual-language development; (6) observation, screening, assessment, and documentation; (7) special needs and inclusion; (8) learning environments and curriculum; (9) health, safety, and nutrition; (10) leadership in early childhood education; (11) professionalism; and (12) administration and supervision. The framework includes some competencies specifically related to infant and toddler development and learning, support for breastfeeding, and infant and child cardiopulmonary resuscitation and pediatric first aid.

Within each competency area, the competencies are further organized by the early childhood education context and the responsibilities associated with working in that context. The state identified the following four contexts that focus on the knowledge, skills, and attributes needed for each role: (1) supporting early learning and development, (2) planning and guiding early learning and development, (3) creating and maintaining program policies and practices, and (4) advancing the early childhood profession. The contexts are not tied to specific positions in the early childhood workforce; an early childhood educator might demonstrate competence in multiple competency contexts. The competencies

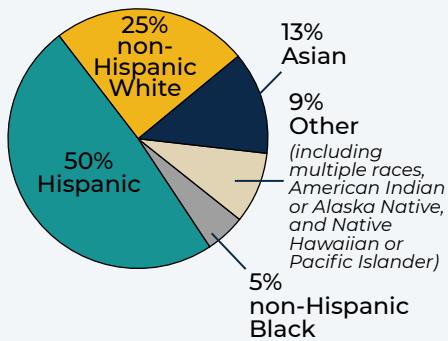
What is the ITTCC Study?

The [Infant and Toddler Teacher and Caregiver Competencies](#) (ITTCC) Study included in-depth case studies of five states that have developed and implemented competency frameworks focused on infant and toddler teachers and caregivers. This profile draws from data that the study team gathered and analyzed in fall 2021 through winter 2022, based on documents and telephone interviews with staff from state agencies, organizations, and institutions of higher education, to learn about their experiences designing and implementing the competency frameworks.¹ The five states included in the ITTCC Study each use different terms to refer to teachers and/or caregivers working across early care and education settings in their state (e.g., early educator, early learning professional, practitioners, etc.). Throughout this profile, we generally use California's preferred terminology. The Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation in the Administration for Children and Families funded Mathematica to conduct the ITTCC study.

were developed for anyone responsible for the care and education of young children, including teachers, assistant teachers, family child care providers, program directors, education coordinators, and curriculum specialists, as well as people responsible for professional development in early childhood education, such as higher education faculty and training organizations.

About California

Infant and toddler population²



About 36 percent of the infant and toddler population live in households with incomes less than twice the federal poverty line.

Number of infant and toddler lead teachers and caregivers³

In California, there are an estimated 48,936 lead teachers and caregivers of infants and toddlers working in the following settings:



1,246
in Early Head Start programs



254
in school-sponsored programs



34,308
in other center-based programs



1,541
family child care homes serving only infants and toddlers



11,587
in family child care homes serving mixed ages

Qualifications of infant and toddler teachers and caregivers

Infant and toddler teachers and caregivers in California must meet requirements for qualifications as laid out in state licensing regulations and/or Head Start Program Performance Standards.

California State Licensing Qualification Requirements

State licensing regulations require that a fully qualified infant care teacher must have both of the following:⁴

- / Twelve postsecondary semester units in early childhood education (ECE) or child development, with at least three of the units related to the care of infants or contain instruction specific to infants
- / At least six months of experience in an infant care center or comparable group child care program

State licensing regulations require that family child care providers complete at least 15 hours of health and safety training.⁵

Office of Head Start Qualification Requirements

In accordance with §1302.91 of the [Head Start Program Performance Standards](#), Early Head Start teachers must have at least a Child Development Associate® credential, or the state equivalent, and training or coursework in early childhood development with a focus on infant and toddler development. Early Head Start family child care providers must have previous early care and education experience and at least be enrolled in a Family Child Care credential or degree program before they are hired, and they must acquire the credential within 18 months of beginning to provide services.⁶



Key organizations and their roles

The California Department of Education and the California Children and Families Commission (First 5 California), in partnership with WestEd, developed the California Early Childhood Educator Competencies.

As part of the initial launch of the competency framework, the California Department of Education partnered with WestEd, which, in collaboration with the California Department of Social Services (CDSS), administers the [Program for Infant/Toddler Care](#) (PITC) and the [Family Child Care at Its Best program](#), to train early care and education professionals, such as family child care and center-based providers, on the competencies. Another key partner was the [Curriculum Alignment Project](#), a group of early care and education faculty from two- and four-year colleges that sought to create streamlined pathways to early childhood education degrees across California. The faculty created a set of foundational early childhood course outlines to enhance consistency across colleges and simplify the transfer of these courses between colleges and universities. The Curriculum Alignment Project

adopted the California Early Childhood Educator Competencies as part of its efforts to align coursework across colleges and universities.

As of 2021, the oversight of the California Early Childhood Educator Competencies moved from the California Department of Education to CDSS. This change was part of a broader alignment shift to streamline state early childhood initiatives, including state-subsidized child care, quality improvement, and professional development, to CDSS under direction of the governor.



How was the competency framework developed?

The California Department of Education and First 5 California commissioned development of the California Early Childhood Educator Competencies in 2008. The state contracted with WestEd to coordinate and lead the process to develop the California Early Childhood Educator Competencies. To guide the two-year process, WestEd convened a panel of expert advisers that included institutions of higher education, the California Commission on Teaching Credentialing, ZERO TO THREE, and the Curriculum Alignment

Key definitions

The ITTCC study defines competency, competency framework, competency domain, and proficiency levels in the following way:

Competency: A piece of knowledge (K), a skill (S), or an attribute (A) essential to the practice of teaching and caring for infants and toddlers

/ **Knowledge** is information that may be applied to practice.

/ **Skills** are strategies or abilities that may be applied to practice.

/ **Attributes** are attitudes, beliefs, or other characteristics that may influence the application of knowledge and skills to practice.

Competency framework: A compilation of competencies intended to convey the range of knowledge, skills, and attributes essential to a particular area of practice, job, or profession.

Competency domain: Competency frameworks often group competencies (that is, KSAs) by domain. That is, individual KSAs focused on a similar topic may be clustered within a framework by competency domain. Examples of a competency domains include “support for language and literacy,” “support for social-emotional development,” “health and safety,” “working with families,” or “arts and creativity.”

Proficiency levels: Some competency frameworks identify competencies (that is, KSAs) that are essential for practice at various career stages (for example, entry, mid-career, advanced).

Project. In addition, panel members gathered and applied feedback from the early childhood field and the public through meetings, focus groups, and a public website to request comments.

The California Early Childhood Educator Competencies were based on a study that the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment at the University of California, Berkeley, conducted.⁷ The study described best practices across states for defining early childhood competencies and summarized input collected from the field in California on the potential structure and content of competencies for California. WestEd and its partners also used the competency domains defined by other states as the basis to define the California framework's competency domains.

The panel members sought to uplift the entire early childhood profession by developing the framework to include competencies relevant for all early childhood educators of children birth to 5 years old, rather than creating separate frameworks for educators of infants, toddlers, and preschoolers. There was a concern that infant and toddler educators would be left behind if they were not viewed as part of the same field as teachers working with preschool-age children.

The panel members also determined that the framework should describe what the competencies would look like in different contexts within the early childhood education field. Given the diverse set of roles and responsibilities that early childhood educators have within the field, from providing direct care to influencing policy, the panel refrained from creating hierarchical proficiency levels and instead identified competency contexts to delineate competencies within competency areas based on an educator's range of responsibilities within the field.

Once the competencies were drafted, WestEd reviewed the following state and national early childhood education standards to ensure the framework was aligned: the California K–12 professional teaching standards, the California Infant–Family and Early Childhood Mental Health Training Guidelines, the National Association

for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) accreditation standards, and the Early Start Personnel Project materials.

The competencies were designed to do the following:

1. Describe the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that early childhood educators need to support young children's learning and development across program types
2. Guide professional development for the early childhood education workforce
3. Inform and align the coursework that early childhood educators follow in institutions of higher education
4. Provide guidance to define credentials and certifications for early childhood education

In 2019, the California Department of Education and First 5 California added two competency domains: (1) adult learning and (2) coaching. These additional competency domains focused on how to support early childhood professionals rather than on the direct care and education of young children.⁸

Currently, CDSS, the agency responsible for overseeing the competencies, does not have ongoing funding dedicated to implementing or refining the framework. The department is reviewing all its initiatives to determine what options will best support the child care and development field.



What education and training on the competencies is available?

Training and technical assistance

To support use of the competencies, the California Department of Education commissioned development of the Competencies-based Self-Assessment Toolkit (CompSAT) that educators could use to assess their professional development needs based on the California Early Childhood Educator Competencies. CompSAT provided multimedia tools through its online website that helped users explore each competency. For example, it included self-assessment and portfolio-building tools for educators to assess the extent to which they had achieved

each of the competencies. As of March 2022, the CompSAT website was no longer available because the framework transitioned from the California Department of Education to CDSS. However, CDSS is currently working to relaunch the website.

When the framework was first introduced, the state required that trainings funded through the Child Care Development Block Grant identify the competencies each training would address. The [Early Childhood Educator Competencies Mapping Tool](#) was a resource that professional development providers could use to assess the extent to which their trainings aligned with the California Early Childhood Educator Competencies. Although no longer required to access funding, some training and technical assistance providers still align trainings with the California Early Childhood Educator Competencies. For example, the Family Child Care at Its Best program, funded by CDSS, has used the competencies to develop workshops for training family child care providers. It offers 21 workshops that cover all the competency domains. The PITC program, also funded by CDSS, uses the framework as a resource when developing training for educators of infants and toddlers. PITC does not provide training on the competencies, but it tries to generally align its content to the competencies. When CompSAT was available, PITC would refer educators of infants and toddlers to the site and use the videos when coaching them to help guide their development.

CDSS continues to use the California Early Childhood Educator Competencies as a resource while developing new trainings for early childhood educators. CDSS reviews the content of trainings to ensure the topics align with the competencies. The specific competencies addressed in trainings depend on the topic of the training session. For example, if a training is on partnering with families, CDSS will ensure the training aligns with the competency areas of culture, diversity, and equity and family and community engagement.

Higher education

The California Early Childhood Educator Competencies are woven throughout the coursework that students take to complete college degrees in

early childhood education. When the California Early Childhood Educator Competencies were published, the Curriculum Alignment Project used the Early Childhood Educator Competencies Mapping Tool and other analyses to ensure the original course outlines it had developed through the project aligned to the competencies. From those analyses, it determined that the original course outlines insufficiently covered competencies related to infant and toddler development, care, and education; program administration; and caring for and educating children with special needs. Thus, the project developed seven more course outlines that focused on those additional competencies. Currently, 95 institutions of higher education in California have aligned their existing courses to the Curriculum Alignment Project's course outlines and thus offer courses that align with the competencies.⁹



How is the competency framework integrated into the state's early childhood system?

Licensing decisions and requirements

The California Early Childhood Educator Competencies are not tied to any licensing requirements nor used to make licensing decisions.

Workforce development initiatives

The California Early Childhood Educator Competencies framework is one component of the state's early learning and development system that also includes the California Infant/Toddler and Preschool Learning Foundations, which describe the knowledge and skills children should have before entering kindergarten; the California Infant/Toddler and Preschool Curriculum frameworks; and the Desired Results Developmental Profile system that state-funded programs must use to measure children's progress toward a set of state-identified outcomes. The California Early Childhood Educator Competencies framework aligns with and is considered a companion document to the foundations, curriculum frameworks, and developmental profile system and is shared with programs as a resource to support the learning foundations.

The competencies are not tied to any career lattices or pathways, though. The state had initially envisioned linking the California Early Childhood Educator Competencies to a state credential, but that was not realized. The state Commission on Teacher Credentialing also considered the competencies when it was reviewing requirements for the state's Child Development Permits, which are required for staff to work in ECE settings in California. However, the commission determined that the competency framework was too complex and comprehensive to link to the permits given the number of competencies (185 across 12 domains) and the broad audience for which it was developed, including early childhood educators and people responsible for their professional development such as higher education faculty and training organizations.

QRIS standards and ratings

[Quality Counts California](#), California's consortium of quality rating and improvement systems (QRIS), used the competencies when developing the rating matrix to inform what programs should exhibit to reach certain quality tiers. However, local QRIS are not required to use the California Early Childhood Educator Competencies to rate or assess programs.



How do programs use the competency framework?

Study participants shared their perceptions of how programs use the competency framework but noted that the extent to which programs use the framework and how they use it is unclear because programs are not required to use the California Early Childhood Educator Competencies and state-level implementation support is not available.

Human resources (hiring, compensation, and promotions)

One study participant noted that some programs have used the competencies when recruiting and hiring staff. For example, programs might reference the competencies in job descriptions or when developing interview questions to understand the extent to which a job candidate's professional development and attitudes align to the framework.

Professional development

The PITC Regional Support Network has encouraged program directors to use the competencies to reflect on their staff's professional development needs and strengths, and one study participant reported hearing that programs have used the competencies during reflective supervision. These programs used the framework to assess teachers' areas of strength and development needs and to guide professional development planning for individual staff and to build center-wide capacity. Another study participant reported that one program used the competency area on culture, diversity, and equity for staff training.

Early Head Start programs that receive state funding must meet state training requirements. CDSS shares information about its resources with Early Head Start programs that receive state funding. The Early Head Start programs may use the competency framework resources to meet their staff's training needs and may have participated in the PITC trainings or used CompSAT. Early Head Start programs that do not receive state funding do not need to follow state requirements, but they might have used the framework's resources to enhance their professional development offerings.

Curriculum selection and implementation

The study participants were uncertain about whether programs use the California Early Childhood Educator Competencies to inform decisions about service delivery. However, the PITC Regional Support Network has used videos on the competencies to encourage programs to reflect on their caregiving practices, such as ways to interact with children around play.



How are teachers' and caregivers' competencies, as articulated in the framework, assessed?

The California Early Childhood Educator Competencies are not tied to any assessments. However, as noted earlier, CompSAT was designed to support educators in self-assessing their knowledge and professional development needs based on the California Early Childhood Educator Competencies.



How is use of the competency framework monitored?

The California Early Childhood Educator Competencies were developed as a one-time quality project to support the early care and education field, and CDSS does not track or monitor their use. There are no known studies related to implementing or using the California Early Childhood Educator Competencies.



What are the key lessons related to implementing competency frameworks?

Study participants suggested that the following factors supported the initial implementation and use of the framework:

/ **Alignment to policies and standards.** The framework's alignment to the state's policies and standards supported the initial use of the competencies across the early childhood education system. Study participants noted that the competencies align with other existing tools for early childhood professionals, such as the Desired Results Developmental Profile. However, one study participant noted that ongoing support for the framework would be needed to help the field understand how the competencies connect to the broader early childhood education system and how early childhood educators could use them in their respective roles.

/ **Accessibility.** Study participants highlighted the value and accessibility of the support materials that were available through CompSAT. The CompSAT website enabled educators to explore each competency, view videos, self-assess their competencies, and use portfolio-building tools to support their professional development.

Other factors limited the ongoing use of the framework:

/ **Format.** Study participants reported that the format of the California Early Childhood Educator Competencies document itself is not very user friendly. Some study participants noted that the length and organizational structure of the document make it difficult for readers to apply

the content in their work. One study participant noted that the level of detail can be overwhelming for educators, and thus, suggested making the information more digestible by presenting the content in "chunks" or "bite-sized pieces."

/ **Lack of dedicated funding and oversight.** After the initial development and promotion phase, the state no longer allocated resources to support, monitor, or evaluate the California Early Childhood Educator Competencies. Study participants suggested that the lack of resources limits the opportunities for programs to learn about the competencies and precludes the state from understanding how the competencies are used and how implementation could be improved.

/ **Competing frameworks.** Subsequent to the California Early Childhood Educator Competencies, the Commission on Teacher Credentialing adopted the [Early Childhood Education Teacher Performance Expectations](#) (ECE-TPE), which were described as a more streamlined version of the California Early Childhood Educator Competencies that also incorporate the [NAEYC Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators](#). Although the ECE-TPEs were developed based on the California Early Childhood Educator Competencies, study participants noted that the existence of two sets of standards for educators undermines consistency for preparing early childhood educators.



What are the state's plans for the competency framework?

CDSS is hoping to relaunch the CompSAT website, but the state's plans for the competency framework are unclear. However, at the time of the interviews, study participants shared their visions for the framework. To enhance the implementation of the competencies, the state would like to update the competencies, increase their accessibility, and monitor their use more systemically. Other study participants hoped the California Early Childhood Educator Competencies would be more directly tied to job certifications, such as permits and credentials. The study participants also noted a need for a more user-friendly and engaging competencies document, that, for example, used an app or other method to support educators' application of the content in their everyday care with children.

Endnotes

¹ In California, the study team spoke with child development consultants at CDSS, a co-director of the Curriculum Alignment Project at the Commission for Teacher Credentialing, the senior director of Early Childhood Strategic Initiatives and the director of the Program for Infant/Toddler Care Regional Support Network at WestEd, and the director of the Head Start State Collaboration Office.

² ZERO TO THREE. "State of Babies Yearbook: 2022." 2022. Available at <https://stateofbabies.org/states/>. Accessed June 10, 2022.

³ Authors' calculations. Data come from [Child Trends' Early Childhood Workforce Qualifications Calculator](#). Data were collected from (1) the number of teachers serving infants and toddlers in the 2012 National Survey of Early Care and Education (NSECE) and (2) state proportional data for numbers of "childcare workers," "teacher assistants," and "preschool teachers" in data from the U.S. Department of Labor. These estimates are only for lead teachers. Early Head Start programs may include Migrant and Seasonal Head Start. School-sponsored centers are those that are funded by a public school district and/or are under administrative oversight and are subject to reporting requirements for a public school district.

⁴ California Department of Social Services. "Child Care Center General Licensing Requirements: Subchapter 2-Infant Care Centers." 2020. Available at <https://www.cdss.ca.gov/Portals/9/Regs/7ccman.pdf>. Accessed June 24, 2022.

⁵ California Department of Social Services. "Manual of Policies and Procedures: Family Child Care Homes." 2022. Available at <https://www.cdss.ca.gov/Portals/9/Regs/fccman/fccman.docx?ver=2022-05-03-123527-540>. Accessed June 24, 2022.

⁶ Early Childhood Learning & Knowledge Center. "1302.91 Staff Qualifications and Competency Requirements." n.d. Available at <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/policy/45-cfr-chap-xiii/1302-91-staff-qualifications-competency-requirements>. Accessed June 10, 2022.

⁷ Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, Institute for Research on Labor and Employment, University of California at Berkeley. "Early Childhood Educator Competencies: A Literature Review of Current Best Practices, and a Public Input Process on Next Steps for California." 2008. Available at https://cscce.berkeley.edu/wp-content/uploads/publications/competencies_report08.pdf. Accessed March 9, 2022.

⁸ California Department of Education and First 5 California. "California Early Childhood Educator Competencies: Second Edition. Supplemental—Performance Area: Adult Learning and Coaching." 2019. Available at <https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/re/documents/ececompetenciesaddon.pdf>. Accessed March 9, 2022.

⁹ Child Development Training Consortium. "Curriculum Alignment Project (CAP)." n.d. Available at <https://www.childdevelopment.org/higher-ed-faculty/curriculum-alignment-project>. Accessed September 14, 2022.

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Pia Caronongan, Project Director
Mathematica
1100 1st Street, NE, 12th Floor
Washington, DC 20002-4221

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