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Competency Frameworks for Infant and Toddler Teachers and Caregivers in Maine

Maine developed a competency framework to support infant and toddler teachers and caregivers across setting types. The competencies within the framework are grouped into seven domains: (1) infant and toddler growth and development; (2) health, safety, and nutrition; (3) relationships with children; (4) relationships with families; (5) observation and assessment; (6) curriculum and approaches to learning; and (7) professionalism. The competencies are embedded within the [Maine Infant Toddler Credential](#). Thus, this profile will focus on the credential.



Key organizations and their roles

The [Maine Roads to Quality \(MRTQ\) Professional Development Network](#), in partnership with the Maine Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Child & Family Services, the Maine Infant Toddler Initiative, and the Office of Head Start, developed the competency framework and the Maine Infant Toddler Credential. MRTQ is a partnership between the Cutler Institute at the University of Southern Maine, the University of Maine Center for Community Inclusion and Disability Studies, and the Maine Afterschool Network. It administers the Maine Infant Toddler Credential and the statewide system of early childhood professional development, including other state credentials for caregivers and educators and the state's professional development registry. The Office of Child & Family Services funds and oversees MRTQ's activities.

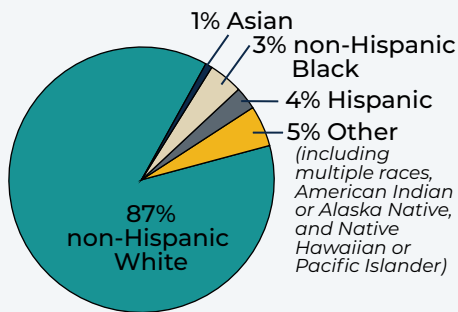
What is the ITTCC study?

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 Maine's preferred terminology. The Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation in the Administration for Children and Families funded Mathematica to conduct the ITTCC study.

MRTQ is partnering with the state's quality rating and improvement system (QRIS), Quality for Maine, to integrate the credential into the QRIS standards.² The state's institutions of higher education are also key partners. MRTQ has been negotiating with colleges and universities, including the University of Maine System, to grant students course credit for earning a credential.

About Maine

Infant and toddler population³



About 43 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 caregivers⁴

There are an estimated 1,806 lead infant and toddler teachers in Maine working in the following settings:



46
in Early Head Start programs



9
in school-sponsored programs



1,266
in other center-based programs



57
in family child care homes serving only infants and toddlers



428
in family child care homes serving mixed ages

Qualifications of infant and toddler teachers and caregivers

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

Maine State Licensing Qualification Requirements

State licensing regulations require that the lead teacher or the person with primary responsibility for a group of children in a program with 13 or more children, including teachers and caregivers of infants and toddlers, must meet *one* of the following requirements:

- / Hold a current Child Development Associate® (CDA) credential as awarded by the Council for Professional Recognition, or a state-approved credential
- / Have 12 months of direct child care experience
- / Have completed one year (30 credit hours) of college work including one early childhood education course and have six months of experience⁵

State licensing regulations require that a child care and early education staff member working without supervision must have a high school

diploma or equivalent, be attending high school, or be enrolled in a General Educational Development or the High School Equivalency Test preparation program.⁶

State licensing regulations require that family child care providers and staff have a high school diploma or equivalent, or be attending high school or an equivalent program, and that one staff member must have at least six hours of early childhood education training.⁷

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 CDA 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.⁸



How was the competency framework developed?

In 2008, the Office of Child & Family Services contracted with [MRTQ Professional Development Network](#) to develop the competency framework and the Maine Infant Toddler Credential in response to a nationwide effort to support the professional development of infant and toddler teachers and caregivers. Before this credential, coursework and training for teachers working with preschool and early elementary age children was available. However, there were few professional development opportunities specific to infant and toddler development. To address this need, the state developed the Maine Infant Toddler Credential in partnership with MRTQ, departments of the Maine State government, and representatives from higher education.

The Maine Infant Toddler Credential was modeled after the [Infant-Toddler CDA® credential](#), in terms of the required number of training hours, the observation, and the family survey.⁹ The competency domains were developed based on research and best practices for brain development from birth to age 3.

Trainings were then developed to address all the competency domains.

The credential was designed to support the professional development of infant and toddler teachers and caregivers across settings by providing the following:

- / An expanded number of trainings available throughout the state. Previously, infant and toddler trainings were limited.
- / A less expensive, more accessible option for teachers and caregivers to gain an infant and toddler credential, compared with obtaining an Infant-Toddler CDA. Previously, teachers and caregivers in remote areas of the state had trouble finding observers to complete the required verification visit for the CDA.
- / A way for infant and toddler teachers and caregivers to move up the state's career lattice (a framework for professional development) that doesn't require college credit.¹⁰

The overarching goals of the credential are to improve the quality and accessibility of care, enhance the professionalization of the field, and reduce teacher and caregiver turnover.

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).



What education and training on the competencies is available?

Training and technical assistance

Teachers and caregivers access trainings on the competencies required for the credential through MRTQ. Trainings are offered in a variety of modalities, including in-person, virtual, and on demand (self-paced and virtual). The six required trainings range from 9 to 30 hours each and cover all the competency domains. Some trainings apply to teachers and caregivers of children of all ages, and others focus on infant and toddler care. Teachers and caregivers can use the [MRTQ professional development registry](#) to track their progress toward meeting the training requirements. MRTQ's training committee updates the trainings periodically based on feedback from participants and trainers to ensure the trainings are meeting participants' needs and reflect the latest research.

Higher education

The Maine Infant Toddler Credential is integrated into the higher education system through articulation and planned exemption agreements. MRTQ has articulation agreements with many of Maine's institutions of higher education specifying that a Maine Infant Toddler Credential can count as six to nine credits. (The number of credits varies by college.) Each institution determines its own articulation requirements and negotiates an agreement with MRTQ. For example, the University of Southern Maine counts the credential as a "prior learning credit," granting teachers or caregivers with the credential six nongraded hours of elective credit. MRTQ sought these articulation agreements so the credential could serve as a stepping stone to college.

The exemption agreements, currently in development, would allow an individual with a bachelor's degree in early childhood education or a related field to count a college course or series of courses as equivalent to the [Infant/Toddler Maine Early Learning and Development Standards \(MELDS\)](#) training. (This training is required for the Maine Infant Toddler Credential.) College coursework exemptions exist for the preschool MELDS. However, until

recently, there has not been enough coursework specific to infant and toddler care to meet the training's exemption requirements. MRTQ is collaborating with institutions of higher education to determine which courses at each institution are intensive enough to count as equivalent to the Infant/Toddler MELDS.



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

Licensing decisions and requirements

Teachers and caregivers are not required to have the credential for a program to become licensed. However, program staff are required to have specific qualifications, such as a credential or a certain level of training, and the Maine Infant Toddler Credential or the required training to earn the credential could be used to meet a program's staff training requirement for licensing.

Workforce development initiatives

Credential

The Maine Infant Toddler Credential includes the competency framework. There are no prerequisites for the credential. The credentialing process is the same regardless of the setting in which the teacher or caregiver works or volunteers. Initial credentials must be renewed after three years; subsequent renewals are required every five years. To earn the credential, teachers and caregivers must have a high school diploma or equivalent and complete the following steps:¹¹

1. Enroll in the MRTQ Registry.
2. Complete the required six trainings within five years.
3. Document at least 480 hours of experience in the past five years working or volunteering with infants or toddlers.
4. Create a portfolio demonstrating integration into daily practice the information learned through the trainings.
5. Ask all the families with whom they work to complete a survey that assesses the teacher's or caregiver's care. (The credential assessment team requires a survey return rate of at least 75 percent.)
6. Demonstrate mastery in each competency domain during an on-site observation.

After completing the trainings, teachers and caregivers are invited to work with a cohort of their peers to prepare their

portfolio. MRTQ offers teachers and caregivers a monetary incentive for joining a cohort to cover the cost of trainings, the credential fee, and substitute coverage for cohort meetings. (Teachers and caregivers can earn a credential without participating in a cohort.)

The Maine Infant Toddler Credential does not currently have proficiency levels. It was originally developed with two levels: the Infant Toddler Credential I and Infant Toddler Credential II. However, the Infant Toddler Credential II required a bachelor's degree and was dropped because of low interest from the field.

Career lattice

All teachers and caregivers in Maine are required to register with the MRTQ Registry, and are assigned a level on the MRTQ career lattice, which outlines how teachers and caregivers can progress in their career by participating in professional development activities. The career lattice has eight levels based on a teacher's or caregiver's education, experience, and completed trainings. Obtaining the Maine Infant Toddler Credential places a teacher or caregiver at Level 3.

QRIS standards and ratings

As of December 2021, programs can achieve a higher rating in [Quality for Maine](#) by having higher percentages of staff with the Maine Infant Toddler Credential or with the Infant/Toddler MELDS training, which is required for the Maine Infant Toddler Credential. Maine plans to revise its QRIS, and one goal is to align the QRIS system more closely with the Maine Infant Toddler Credential to improve the quality of infant and toddler care.



How do programs use the competency framework?

Study participants coordinating the credential's integration into the state's early childhood system said they believe the Maine Infant Toddler Credential generally is earned equally by family child care providers and teachers and caregivers working in community-based child care and early education centers and Early Head Start programs. However, as discussed further in the following sections, incentives to earn a credential can vary by the type of child care and early education setting.

In Maine, all Early Head Start staff working with infants and toddlers can use the Maine Infant Toddler Credential to meet the education requirements outlined in the Head Start Program Performance Standards.

Human resources (hiring, compensation, and promotions)

Study participants were not aware of programs making hiring, compensation, or promotion decisions based on specific competencies within the competency framework. However, study participants reported that some community-based centers make decisions about hiring, compensation, and promotions based on the Maine Infant Toddler Credential. Some centers list the credential as a job requirement, and others expect new staff to begin working toward the credential after they are hired. Teachers and caregivers in these centers might receive promotions or increased compensation after earning the credential. The requirement or expectation to earn a credential might be driven by centers' interest in achieving a high rating in the state's QRIS. Having a credential advances teachers and caregivers to a higher level on the career lattice, and having a certain number of staff at these higher levels can help centers earn a higher QRIS rating.¹² Centers might also prefer to hire staff willing to pursue the credential, investing their time to complete all the components shows a commitment to the field.

Individuals considering teacher positions in Early Head Start programs have an incentive to earn the credential, because these programs require teachers working with infants and toddlers to have the Maine Infant Toddler Credential or a CDA.

Study participants said that family child care providers are less likely to hire additional staff and are therefore also less likely to look for the credential when recruiting and hiring. However, some family child care providers pursue the credential to improve the quality of their services and add a level of professionalism to their programs.

Professional development

Current or prospective teachers and caregivers use the framework to plan their professional development. Study participants noted that quarterly trainings required for the credential fill up before other trainings and have the longest waiting lists. The Maine Infant Toddler Credential is also a significant part of professional development plans for Early Head Start staff. When Early Head Start programs onboard staff, they use the infant and toddler trainings associated with the credential informally to determine whether the infant and toddler age group is a good fit for staff. They also use the competencies in the framework to assess staff's training and technical assistance needs. Study participants said the credential and the associated trainings provide state-specific training and technical assistance options beyond Head Start's regionally-required materials.

Curriculum selection and implementation

According to study participants, the competency framework informs service delivery because staff who pursue the credential return to their programs or homes with ideas of how to improve their care based on the credentials. Obtaining the credential informs staff about best practices and boosts their confidence.



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

Teachers and caregivers interested in earning the Maine Infant Toddler Credential must complete an assessment to determine whether they have integrated the knowledge and skills gained through the required trainings into their daily practice. There is no fee for the assessment. In creating it, MRTQ and its partners considered how an observer would see the competency expressed in real life through the process of caring for an infant or toddler. Each year, MRTQ updates the assessment based on its review of what worked well and what needs improvement.

The assessment has three components:

1. A **portfolio** comprising artifacts demonstrating competence in each domain, a resume, a personal

statement on the teacher's or caregiver's approach to infant and toddler group care, and a professional development profile documenting the education and trainings completed. For each competency domain, the teacher or caregiver must produce artifacts, referred to as "points of evidence," such as child observations, photos, and written exercises including policy statements and family communications.¹³ Teachers and caregivers are invited to participate in credential cohorts led by MRTQ staff who host cohort meetings and provide one-on-one support. The cohorts offer a peer support group and enable teachers and caregivers to collaborate on their individual portfolios.

2. An **observation** (virtual or in person) of the teacher or caregiver in their workplace by a member of the MRTQ assessment team. For each competency, the observer rates whether the teacher's or caregiver's practice demonstrates the competency "now," "not yet," or "needs support."
3. **Family surveys** that assess the teacher's or caregiver's practice, completed by parents of the children they cared for.¹⁴

A two- to three-person team assesses each of the components. The team typically includes an MRTQ staff member and external individuals with knowledge relevant to the credential, such as staff from local education or child care programs, content experts, or professional development providers. New members of the team shadow a returning assessor to learn about the process before conducting their own assessments.



How is use of the competency framework monitored?

The MRTQ Registry collects and tracks data, such as who attends trainings and who has applied for or received the credential. It uses the training data, for example, to inform teachers and caregivers when they have completed trainings required for the credential and encourage them to apply those trainings toward the credential.

MRTQ also uses participant surveys to evaluate its trainings and the credential cohorts. The training

data include assessments of the trainers and feedback on elements of the training that need improvement and those that participants found helpful. The cohort data include participants' assessments of their gains in knowledge and use of new skills in the workplace. The assessment teams also evaluate aspects of portfolio development that teachers and caregivers struggled with or found confusing. MRTQ aggregates this feedback annually to refine the trainings, cohort facilitation, and portfolio requirements.



What are the key lessons related to implementing competency frameworks?

According to study participants, the following factors have motivated teachers and caregivers to pursue the credential across the state:

- / The credential's acceptance as equivalent to the Infant-Toddler CDA
- / The credential's integration into the career lattice
- / The accessibility, low cost, and flexibility of the training modalities and assessment process
- / A focus on infant and toddler teachers or caregivers, unlike most early childhood education trainings and degrees in the state
- / Support from state administrative leaders for early care and education by establishing a Children's Cabinet that focuses on implementing early childhood policy and programming to help deliver public and private services and education to children in the state from birth to 3rd grade¹⁵



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

Broadly, the state and its partners hope that the proportion of the workforce with a Maine Infant Toddler Credential continues to grow. MRTQ wants to launch an information campaign for managerial staff, such as supervisors and coaches, to educate them on the credentialing process. Informed supervisors and coaches could encourage their staff to pursue the credential and support them through the process.

Other goals that study participants identified include (1) increasing incentives for earning the credential (for example, by further linking the credential to movement on the career lattice); (2) extending alignment with higher education by identifying how college courses can be deemed equivalent to required credential trainings or vice versa; (3) sharing information and serving as a resource to other states (particularly other northeastern states) that are interested in a similar statewide credential; and (4) exploring how other states in the region could accept the credential.

Endnotes

¹ In Maine, the study team spoke with the district early childhood and youth coordinator at MRTQ, the registry manager at MRTQ, the director of the Maine Head Start Collaboration, and the child care services program manager at the Office of Child & Family Services.

² At the time of this writing, Maine had plans to update the guidelines and name for the QRIS system to Rising Stars for Maine.

³ These data came from ZERO TO THREE's State of Babies Yearbook: 2022 (<https://stateofbabies.org/states/>). Data were collected from the Census Bureau's American Community Survey and the National Survey of Children's Health.

⁴ Authors' calculations. Data come from Child Trends' Early Childhood Workforce Qualifications Calculator (<https://www.childtrends.org/publications/early-childhood-workforce-qualifications-calculator>). Data were collected from (1) the number of teachers serving infant and toddler children in the 2012 National Survey of Early Care and Education, and (2) state proportional data for numbers of "child care 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.

⁵ State of Maine. "Child Care Facility Licensing Rule. Child Care Centers, Nursery Schools, Small Child Care Facilities, Other Programs. 10-148 Code of Maine Rules, Chapter 32." Maine Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Child & Family Services, 2021. https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/sites/maine.gov.dhhs/files/inline-files/10-148%20Ch.%2032%20Child%20Care%20Facility%20Licensing%20Rule%20Effective%209-27-21_jpf%20edits.pdf.

⁶ State of Maine. "Child Care Facility Licensing Rule. Child Care Centers, Nursery Schools, Small Child Care Facilities, Other Programs. 10-148 Code of Maine Rules, Chapter 32." Maine Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Child & Family Services, 2021. https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/sites/maine.gov.dhhs/files/inline-files/10-148%20Ch.%2032%20Child%20Care%20Facility%20Licensing%20Rule%20Effective%209-27-21_jpf%20edits.pdf.

⁷ State of Maine. "Family Child Care Provider Licensing Rule. 10-148 Code of Main Rules, Chapter 33." Maine Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Child & Family Services, 2021. https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/sites/maine.gov.dhhs/files/inline-files/10-148%20Ch.%2033%20Family%20Child%20Care%20Rule%20PDF%205-27-21_o.pdf.

⁸ 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>.

⁹ "Crosswalk: Maine's Infant Toddler Credential and the Infant Toddler Child Development Associate Credential." Personal communication from study participant.

¹⁰ The state's career lattice describes how teachers and caregivers can progress in their career by participating in professional development activities and attaining work experience. Maine's career lattice is available at https://mrtq.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/MRTQ_Lattices.pdf.

¹¹ Maine Roads to Quality Professional Development Network. "Maine Infant Toddler Credential Information Packet." Maine Roads to Quality Professional Development Network, 2021. <https://mrtq.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/FINAL-Maine-Infant-Toddler-Credential-Information-Packet-2021.pdf>.

¹² <https://childcarechoices.me/index.php/quality-rating-and-improvement-system/>

¹³ Maine Roads to Quality Professional Development Network. "Maine Infant Toddler Credential Information Packet." Maine Roads to Quality Professional Development Network, 2021. <https://mrtq.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/FINAL-Maine-Infant-Toddler-Credential-Information-Packet-2021.pdf>

¹⁴ Family surveys moved to an online platform as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. MRTQ plans to use online family surveys going forward, regardless of in-person versus remote classroom observations.

¹⁵ State of Maine, Governor's Office of Policy Innovation and the Future. "Children's Cabinet." <https://www.maine.gov/future/initiatives/childrens-cabinet>.

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