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# Competency Frameworks for Infant and Toddler Teachers and Caregivers in Oregon

Oregon is using two competency frameworks:

(1) the state-developed Core Knowledge Categories and Standards (CKCs) and the (2) ZERO TO THREE Critical Competencies for Infant-Toddler Educators framework. The state is in the process of transitioning from the CKCs to the [Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators](#) from the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). The state will decide whether to continue using the ZERO TO THREE Critical Competencies after assessing whether the NAEYC competencies sufficiently address the needs the state has identified in terms of specialized content related to infant and toddler care.

## 1. Core Knowledge Categories and Standards.

Oregon's [CKCs](#) are the foundation for the state's early childhood system. The CKCs have been integrated into all facets of the system, including licensing, workforce development, and the quality rating and improvement system (QRIS). The CKC competency framework is designed to promote culturally responsive professional development for early educators across settings and program types to support high quality care and education for Oregon children from birth to age 8.

The CKCs are divided into the following 10 competency domains: (1) diversity; (2) families and community systems; (3) health, safety, and nutrition; (4) human growth and development; (5) learning environments and curriculum; (6) observation and assessment; (7) personal, professional, and leadership development; (8) program management; (9) special needs; and (10) understanding and guiding behavior. The framework does not include standards specific to the care and education of infants and toddlers, except for a learning objective related to understanding sudden infant death syndrome.

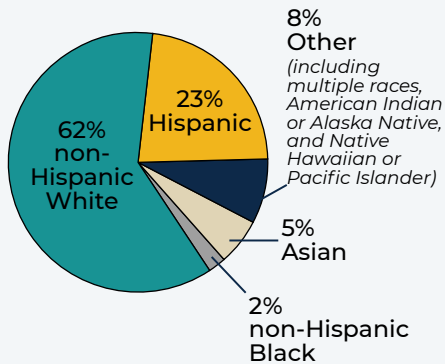
## What is the ITTCC study?

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.<sup>1</sup> 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 Oregon's preferred terminology. The Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation in the Administration for Children and Families funded Mathematica to conduct the ITTCC study.

**2. ZERO TO THREE Critical Competencies.** Oregon adopted the national [ZERO TO THREE Critical Competencies for Infant-Toddler Educators](#) in 2018 to provide more professional development opportunities specific to infant and toddler educators in all settings and program types. Oregon contracted with ZERO TO THREE to train the state's infant toddler specialists on the Critical Competencies and its corresponding Coaching Program. Training on the ZERO TO THREE Critical Competencies is available, mainly through the

## About Oregon

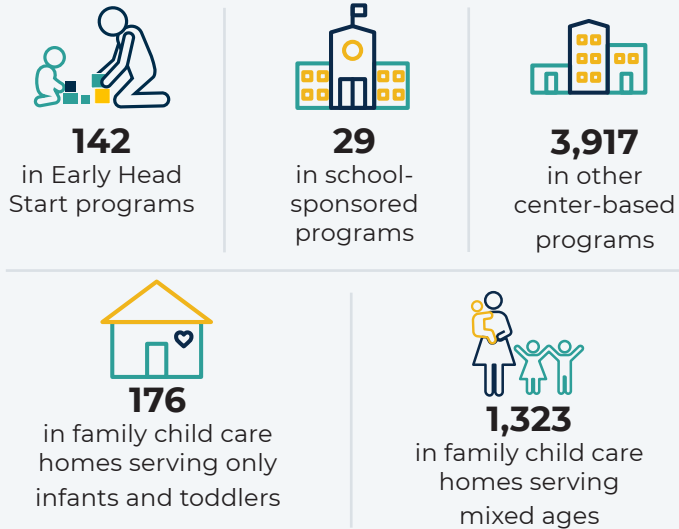
### Infant and toddler population<sup>2</sup>



About 35 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 caregivers<sup>3</sup>

There are an estimated 5,587 lead infant and toddler teachers in Oregon across the following settings:



### Qualifications of infant and toddler teachers and caregivers<sup>4</sup>

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

#### Oregon State Licensing Qualification Requirements

State licensing regulations require that infant and toddler teachers in a center-based program meet one of the following requirements:

- / Twenty postsecondary semester credits in early childhood education (ECE) or child development
- / A one-year state or nationally recognized credential related to infant and toddler care
- / At least one year of teaching experience in a group program for infants and/or toddlers
- / Ten postsecondary semester credits and at least six months of experience in a group care program for infants and/or toddlers
- / Documentation of attaining at least Step 8 in the Oregon Registry career lattice

State licensing regulations require that family child care providers and staff meet one of the following requirements:

- / At least one year of teaching experience in a group setting
- / Twenty postsecondary semester credits in ECE or child development
- / Documentation of attaining at least Step 8 in the Oregon Registry career lattice

Family child care providers caring for more than two children younger than 24 months of age must have at least 30 clock hours of training specific to infant and toddler care.

#### 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.<sup>5</sup>

Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) system. Integration into other aspects of the state's early childhood system is currently limited.

The Critical Competencies are grouped into three competency domains: (1) supporting social-emotional development and learning, (2) supporting cognitive development, and (3) supporting language and literacy development.



### Key organizations and their roles

The Oregon Department of Education's [Early Learning Division](#) oversees the state's early learning system and contracts with university partners to manage the system, including the competency frameworks.

In partnership with the state, the [Oregon Center for Career Development in Childhood Care and Education](#) (OCCD) at Portland State University developed and revised the CKCs. OCCD administers the statewide professional development system for early childhood educators, including the Oregon Registry, which is the state's early childhood professional development registry and recognition program.

The ZERO TO THREE Critical Competencies framework was developed by [ZERO TO THREE](#), a national organization that provides research and tools for infant and toddler educators. ZERO TO THREE trained the state's infant toddler specialists to deliver the training and provide coaching on the competencies. The specialists are employed by the state's CCR&R system.



### How were the competency frameworks developed?

**Core Knowledge Categories and Standards.** The State Childhood Care and Education Coordinating Council first developed the CKCs in 2004. OCCD, under contract to the Early Learning Division, oversaw an update to the CKCs in 2018. As part of the update, OCCD more closely aligned the CKCs to the NAEYC Standards for Initial and Advanced Early Childhood Professional Preparation Programs that were in place at that time. OCCD also conducted focus groups with the field to seek feedback on the CKCs and proposed revisions. OCCD spoke with a variety of groups that provided early care and education to children,

## 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).

including family child care providers, staff from Head Start programs, and specific groups such as Black early care and education providers and those who spoke Spanish and Russian.

In 2017, the state began considering developing competencies to replace the CKCs because they were geared more toward developing trainings than providing early educators with guidance on the specific attributes and skills needed for their practice. The state decided against developing an Oregon-specific competency framework that would parallel existing ones. Instead, the state chose to adopt the NAEYC competencies, which support the national alignment of competencies and the professionalization of the field.

**ZERO TO THREE Critical Competencies.** ZERO TO THREE developed the ZERO TO THREE Critical Competencies for Infant-Toddler Educators in 2016. The ZERO TO THREE Critical Competencies were developed following an analysis of the gaps in the knowledge-to-practice cycle in the infant and toddler workforce. The competencies were designed to provide research-based guidance on the knowledge and skills that infant and toddler educators need to provide quality care. The Critical Competencies build on ZERO TO THREE's Cross-Section Core Competencies for the Prenatal to Age Five Field<sup>6</sup> but are specialized competencies that support infant and toddler development.

In 2018, Oregon adopted the Critical Competencies as one strategy to address a need for professional development focused specifically on infants and toddlers. The Early Learning Division funded the CCR&R system to hire infant toddler specialists for each region in the state who would strengthen the training and technical assistance systems to support infant and toddler educators. To help build the knowledge and skills of the infant toddler specialists, the Early Learning Division partnered with ZERO TO THREE to train them in the ZERO TO THREE Critical Competencies. The specialists then train and coach infant and toddler educators on the competencies.



## What education and training on the competencies is available?

### Training and technical assistance

**Core Knowledge Categories and Standards.** Early educators can find trainings on the CKCs through the Oregon Registry. The registry records all completed professional development related to the early care and education field, including training hours, college coursework, and degrees earned. Trainers must indicate (and the registry verifies) what CKCs the training covers. Trainings must also identify the target age group for the training. The registry reviews the proposed trainings for infant and toddler educators to confirm that the trainings appropriately apply the relevant CKCs to infants and toddlers. The registry also reviews all trainings to ensure that they meet the registry's quality requirements. For example, trainings must include an activity that helps participants think about how they will implement what they have learned from the training. Trainings must also include an evaluation form for participants to complete. Training on the CKCs is categorized into three proficiency levels, which represent increasing depth of content: (1) introductory, which involves understanding the what, why, and how of the CKC; (2) intermediate, which addresses the application of the content in practice; and (3) advanced, which includes evaluation and synthesis of knowledge.<sup>7</sup> The Early Learning Division and OCCD offer some trainings on the CKCs, but most trainings are offered by CCR&Rs or independent trainers.

**ZERO TO THREE Critical Competencies.** The state's infant toddler specialists provide the 44-hour ZERO TO THREE Critical Competencies training to cohorts of infant and toddler educators over about 18 months. The specialists began offering the trainings in 2020. At that time, half of the cohort slots were offered to educators in the general community and the other half were for participants in the Focused Child Care Networks, which provides a two-year opportunity for early childhood educators across settings and program types to meet as a group and individually with an infant toddler specialist to foster their professional development. The organization that oversees the

state's professional development system estimates that about 60 percent of participants in the networks are family child care providers and around 40 percent are center-based teachers. Some infant toddler specialists have also provided the training to Early Head Start staff. Infant and toddler educators can also access training on the ZERO TO THREE Critical Competencies from community-based trainers or online through ZERO TO THREE.

ZERO TO THREE led the state's infant toddler specialists through the Critical Competencies Coaching Program to support their ability to coach infant and toddler educators on the competencies. After completing the program, the specialists provide group and individual coaching to infant and toddler educators in the Focused Child Care Networks to support implementation of the competencies. The state hopes to expand its technical assistance supports so that all infant and toddler educators who complete trainings on the ZERO TO THREE Critical Competencies and eventually the NAEYC competencies participate in a technical assistance cohort to support putting the competencies into practice.

### Higher education

Oregon institutions of higher education have not designed courses around the CKCs. However, many college courses address them. Courses must meet the registry's training and education criteria and link to the CKCs to count as professional development within the system. The Oregon Registry's website lists the relevant courses available by community colleges and the CKCs that each course covers.<sup>8</sup> Course credit can be used to move up the career lattice. Some community colleges will award 9 to 15 prior learning credits for achieving a Step 7 on the career lattice.

The ZERO TO THREE Critical Competencies have not been formally integrated into higher education. However, several higher education faculty have completed the ZERO TO THREE Critical Competencies training for trainers and have embedded the Critical Competencies into their courses.

The Early Learning Division anticipates that institutions of higher education will incorporate the NAEYC competencies into their courses. In anticipation of the NAEYC competencies' adoption, some higher education entities have already started to align their courses with them.



## How are the competency frameworks integrated into the state early childhood system?

The CKCs have been integrated into all facets of the early childhood system, including licensing decisions and requirements, workforce development initiatives, and QRIS. The state plans to replace the CKCs with the NAEYC competencies in all these systems. The ZERO TO THREE Critical Competencies have not yet been fully integrated into the state's early childhood system.

### Licensing decisions and requirements

All early educators are exposed to the CKCs through Oregon's child care licensing requirements. The Office of Child Care Licensing requires that staff who work in licensed programs have at least 8 hours of training in child development per year in any of eight CKCs.<sup>9</sup> Completion of all the ZERO TO THREE Critical Competencies training modules counts for 44 hours of intermediate-level training across four of the CKCs, so the Critical Competencies training can be used to satisfy some of the required infant and toddler training requirements.

### Workforce development initiatives

#### Credential

The CKCs are integrated into the requirements for the Oregon Registry Infant-Toddler Professional Credential.<sup>10</sup> Early educators must complete training or education in the CKCs and submit reflection statements on their competence in specific CKCs as part of the credential application. The credential is not a requirement for any component of the early childhood system and there are no financial incentives connected to it.



### Career lattice

The CKCs are linked to the [Oregon Registry Steps](#), which is the state's career lattice. There are 12 steps. Each step requires a certain number of hours at a certain proficiency level (1 = introduction, 2 = intermediate, or 3 = advanced) across the CKCs, which can be obtained through three pathways: (1) degree, credential, or certificate; (2) college course credit; or (3) community-based training. Higher levels on the career lattice require training at Level 2 or 3. For example, to attain Step 6, an educator must complete at least (1) 9 college course quarter credits in two CKCs, including 3 quarter credits in the human growth and development or understanding and guiding behavior categories; or (2) 90 hours of training or education, including 8 hours in human growth and development, 8 hours in understanding and guiding behavior, and 8 hours in six other CKCs. To move to Step 7, an educator must obtain (1) a CDA; (2) 12 quarter credits in two CKCs, including 3 quarter credits in the human growth and development or understanding and guiding behavior categories; or (3) 120 hours of training, including 10 hours in each CKC. Step 8 requires that 60 percent of training hours be Level 2 or 3 trainings. There are no specific career lattice requirements for infant and toddler educators. The registry's professional development scholarships are provided to support progress on the career lattice. Progress on the career lattice is also integrated in the QRIS standards (as described further below).

### QRIS standards and ratings

A program seeking a rating in [Spark](#), Oregon's QRIS, must have a program leader who has achieved a Step 8 or above on the career lattice and at least half of its teachers must have achieved a Step 7 or above.<sup>11</sup> Movement up the career lattice is dependent upon training or education in the CKCs. For example, to go from a Level 3 to a Level 4 in the QRIS, the program leader must progress from a Step 8 to a Step 9 and complete 30 clock hours of training or college credit in the program management CKC and, for center-based programs, half of its teachers must have achieved a Step 8 or above. There are no specific QRIS standards for infant and toddler educators.



### How do programs use the competency frameworks?

Study participants said that programs use the CKCs via the career lattice. Programs seek staff who have achieved a step on the career lattice, and training or education on the CKCs is required to achieve a step. However, the study participants were unaware of programs requiring staff to have achieved a step on the career lattice and thus education or training on the CKCs. At the time of our interviews, the first cohorts of infant and toddler educators to participate in the ZERO TO THREE Critical Competencies training offered by the infant toddler specialists were either in the process of or had recently finished their training. Thus, the study participants did not think centers or family child care programs had begun using the ZERO TO THREE Critical Competencies either for recruitment and hiring of staff or for curriculum selection and implementation. Some Early Head Start programs in the state have participated in the training on the ZERO TO THREE Critical Competencies by the state's infant toddler specialists, but it is not yet a statewide effort. Study participants noted that some centers and family child care programs had started to use the ZERO TO THREE Critical Competencies for staff training and professional development.



### How is teachers' and caregivers' achievement of the competencies in the frameworks assessed?

Early educators are not required to demonstrate achievement of the competencies in the CKC framework. Clock hours are assigned based on completing trainings or courses (that is, "time in seat"). The Infant-Toddler Professional Credential, which is aligned to the CKCs, is based on a portfolio process that includes written statements in which early educators must describe their competence in 5 of the 10 CKCs related to the care and education of infants and toddlers. Early educators must also be observed by a mentor, supervisor, or college faculty and receive written feedback. They must then complete a reflection statement based on the observation feedback and develop a professional action plan. However, the credential is not widely used.

In addition, there are no assessments used to measure educators' achievement of the ZERO TO THREE Critical Competencies. Credit for meeting the competencies is based on completing the training rather than demonstrating mastery of the competencies. The framework does include a self-reflection tool that educators can use to consider how often they demonstrate the competencies and skills.



### How is use of the competency frameworks monitored?

The registry's data system can provide information on early educators' progression on the career lattice based on the trainings and courses they are taking. In the future, OCCD would like to gather qualitative data on early educators' satisfaction with the trainings.

The ZERO TO THREE organization collects data on the number of and some demographics on the individuals who have enrolled in the ZERO TO THREE Critical Competencies training program. Within Oregon, the OCCD has data on who enrolled in the training program and how many hours of the training program they completed. OCCD also has some limited demographic data, including where the participants live and their positions in the field.

ZERO TO THREE has aligned its competencies with classroom observation tools, but states are not required to share information from those tools with the organization.



### What are the key lessons learned related to the implementation of competency frameworks?

The state will draw upon the lessons learned from implementing the CKCs and ZERO TO THREE Critical Competencies frameworks as it transitions to the NAEYC competencies.

/ **Integration.** The CKCs are a foundational framework that is fully integrated into Oregon's early childhood systems, including its licensing, workforce development, and QRIS.

This incorporation throughout the system is fundamental to the use of the CKCs and has helped to ensure the CKCs are not, as one study participant put it, "just a document that sits on a shelf." The study participants involved in implementing the CKCs cite this integration as a key to achievement of the framework's goals. Thus, the state plans to replicate this implementation infrastructure with the NAEYC competencies. In the past, educators were awarded small monetary incentives for progressing through the steps on the career lattice, which helped support continual training and education in the CKCs. The state is currently working to identify funding to continue offering the incentives.

/ **Assessment.** An important limitation of the CKCs is that they do not identify the specific skills and knowledge that early educators need to provide quality care to children and families. Therefore, it is difficult to know if the training results in improved practice. This limitation prompted the state's decision to adopt the NAEYC competencies, which will identify the knowledge, skills, and attributes that an early educator needs to demonstrate mastery of a competency. One study participant noted that one of the biggest challenges in moving from the CKCs to the NAEYC competencies will be learning how to gauge skills and abilities rather than just counting training hours.

/ **Accessibility.** A major facilitator of the use of the ZERO TO THREE Critical Competencies in Oregon is that the resources and trainings are offered to early educators for free by the state.

/ **User engagement.** The state, through its partners, is undertaking a thorough user engagement process. For example, as part of its contract with the state, Oregon State University plans to engage in conversation with racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse groups of early care and education community leaders and early educators as well as with families and educators who work with children with disabilities and developmental delays. Oregon State will solicit information on needs and experiences related to early care and education

in an effort to address systemic barriers and build a competency framework that is relevant and meaningful for the entire early care and education community.



### What are the state's future plans for the competency frameworks?

Oregon is in the process of adopting the NAEYC competencies, which will eventually replace the CKCs throughout the early childhood system. The NAEYC competencies are designed for early childhood educators who serve children from birth through age 8. They are composed of six standards, with three to five competencies within each standard: (1) child development and learning in context; (2) family-teacher partnerships and community connections; (3) child observation, documentation, and assessment; (4) developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate teaching practices; (5) knowledge, application, and integration of academic content in the early childhood curriculum; and (6) professionalism as an early childhood educator. Each standard and its associated competencies indicate how the content applies to different age groups, including infants and toddlers. The framework has three level designations that are based on an early educator's scope of practice: ECE I, ECE II, and ECE III. Mastery expectations vary at each designation based on the level of knowledge and skills. Early educators would need to provide quality early care and education within their specific scope of practice. With each subsequent designation, the expectations for mastery increase to reflect the depth and breadth of the standards and competencies.

The state has contracted with the Early Learning System Initiative at Oregon State University to develop recommendations for how to adopt the NAEYC competency framework within the Oregon context and identify what adaptations will be needed to address the state's specific needs. For example, Oregon State will examine the extent to which NAEYC competencies adequately address racial identity development and infant and toddler care and education and whether any modifications

would be needed to adequately cover those content areas. There are more CKC standards than NAEYC competencies. Oregon State is engaging with system partners, families, and early care and education providers to identify their needs as well as the challenges they may encounter in the existing system. Once the state officially adopts the NAEYC competencies, Oregon State will analyze the existing professional development opportunities for early educators to determine whether there is any content in the NAEYC competencies not covered by existing trainings and will develop new trainings to address those gaps as needed. In turn, OCCD will begin considering how to implement and integrate the new competencies within the state's professional development registry and training program.

In the meantime, the state is debating how to assess competencies following completion of training on the ZERO TO THREE Critical Competencies and eventually the NAEYC competencies. They are considering adding observations but that would require establishing the necessary infrastructure, such as identifying observers and funding for the observations. The state also plans to enhance formative assessment efforts by, for example, training coaches on how to use coaching cycles to gauge the competence of the early educators they work with and encourage them to reflect on and set goals for achievement of competencies.



## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> In Oregon, the study team spoke with the following individuals: the community systems team manager at the Early Learning Division, the director and the Oregon Registry coordinator of the Oregon Center for Career Development in Childhood Care and Education, a co-principal investigator and the outreach coordinator of the Early Learning System Initiative's grant from the Early Learning Division, and the senior director of the Professional Innovations Division at ZERO TO THREE.

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

<sup>3</sup> Authors' calculations. Data came from the Child Trends' Early Childhood Workforce Qualifications Calculator (<https://www.childtrends.org/publications/early-childhood-workforce-qualifications-calculator>). Data were collected from (1) the 2012 National Survey of Early Care and Education on the number of teachers serving infants and toddlers and (2) state proportional data for numbers of "childcare workers," "teacher assistants," and "preschool teachers" from the U.S. Department of Labor. These estimates were for lead teachers only. 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.

<sup>4</sup> Oregon Department of Education Early Learning Division. "Rules for Certified Child Care Centers." 2022. Available at <https://oregonearlylearning.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/OCC-0084-Rules-for-Certified-Child-Care-Centers-EN.pdf>. Accessed July 6, 2022; Oregon Department of Education Early Learning Division. "Rules for Certified Family Child Care." 2022. Available at <https://oregonearlylearning.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/OCC-0085-Rules-for-Certified-Family-Child-Care-Homes-EN.pdf>. Accessed July 6, 2022.

<sup>5</sup> 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.

<sup>6</sup> ZERO TO THREE. "Cross-Sector Core Competencies for the Prenatal to Age Five Field." 2017. Available at <https://www.zerotothree.org/resource/about-the-p-5-competencies/>. Accessed July 22, 2022.

<sup>7</sup> Oregon Center for Career Development. "The Oregon Registry Trainer Program Guidebook." n.d. Available at <https://sites.google.com/pdx.edu/oregon-trainer-guidebook/developing-a-training-session/sets>. Accessed August 9, 2022.

<sup>8</sup> Oregon Center for Care Development in Childhood Care and Education. "Oregon Registry and Community Colleges." 2022. Available at <https://www.pdx.edu/education-career-development/steps-credentials-oro#Steps>. Accessed on August 11, 2022.

<sup>9</sup> Oregon Department of Education Early Learning Division. "Rules for Certified Child Care Centers." 2022. Available at <https://oregonearlylearning.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/OCC-0084-Rules-for-Certified-Child-Care-Centers-EN.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup> Oregon Center for Care Development in Childhood Care and Education. "Oregon Registry Infant-Toddler Professional Credential." 2015. Available at <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1mkAeslNoxD-ZqAoYw5-NDW9uJNze2h4g/view>. Accessed July 22, 2022.

<sup>11</sup> Center on Early Learning and Youth Development of the Research Institute at Western Oregon University. "Spark Domains & Standards." 2022. Available at <https://oregonspark.org/domains-and-standards/>. Accessed August 11, 2022.

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