Competencies are a foundational element of a professional development system. *Colorado’s Early Childhood Educator and Administrator Competencies* identify what professionals providing early care and education experiences need to know and be able to do in order to facilitate child learning and development. The Competencies are designed to take place within a larger, aligned and supported system that embodies continuous improvement and opportunities for meaningful feedback through professional development.

### The 8 Competency Domains:

- **Child Growth, Development and Learning**
- **Child Observation and Assessment**
- **Family and Community Partnerships**
- **Guidance**
- **Health, Safety, & Nutrition**
- **Professional Development and Leadership**
- **Program Planning and Development**
- **Teaching Practices**

Competencies supporting social/emotional development, cultural competence and children with special needs are present in all eight domain areas.

### The 4 Levels:

The Competencies are built on a framework of four levels. They begin with the basic knowledge and skills needed to enter the field and progress, according to degree of mastery, to advanced levels of academic preparation and a wide range of experiences. The four levels are cumulative, meaning that early childhood educators at the top level have the skills and knowledge to meet all the competencies in the lower levels. The levels are as follows:

- **Level 1** – Demonstrates the basic skills and knowledge to best support quality early childhood care and education.
- **Level 2** – Demonstrates the skills and knowledge at the previous level plus: Applies skills and knowledge to implement effective early childhood environments and experiences for young children.
- **Level 3** – Demonstrates the skills and knowledge at previous levels plus: Designs, plans and analyzes policies, procedures and practices that are optimal for young children.
- **Level 4** – Demonstrates the skills and knowledge at previous levels plus: Advances the field of early childhood education through advocacy, leadership, teaching, coaching and mentoring.

Keep in mind that the 4 Levels are less about roles and more about degree of mastery. It is very likely that an early childhood professional will find that their knowledge and skills fall in a variety of levels throughout the competency framework.
A Variety of Uses:

The Competencies can be used in a variety of ways by many different people working in the early childhood profession:

- **Early Childhood Professionals can use the Competencies to:**
  - Develop self-assessments to identify strengths and areas of growth
  - Create a professional development plan and portfolio
  - Make informed decisions about a career in early childhood

- **Program Administrators can use the Competencies to:**
  - Clarify and communicate knowledge required of staff
  - Identify training and staff development needs and formulate staff development plans
  - Assess current staff to identify knowledge gaps for the purpose of recruiting additional staff with a higher level of competency
  - Link level of competency to compensation level

- **Developers and Providers of Training can use the Competencies to:**
  - Organize, identify and advertise training using Competency domains and levels
  - Assess current offerings across all content areas and levels of competency
  - Create a framework for developing comprehensive systems of training
  - Support skill development

- **Higher Education can use the Competencies to:**
  - Create and align coursework, DHS child care licensing requirements, and CDE teacher licensure requirements
  - Develop and facilitate articulation between institutions of higher learning
  - Evaluate course content and guide future course development
  - Foster dialog between students, faculty and advisors
  - Promote skill development
  - Use to create innovative options for Credit for Prior Learning

- **State and Local Agencies can use the Competencies to:**
  - Develop policy, initiatives and funding that will increase the level of competency of early childhood professionals
  - Guide the development of policies related to teacher licensure, QRIS, higher education articulation, professional development and supports for educators working in a variety of settings
  - Develop and implement a credentialing system that supports authentic evaluation of and acquisition of the Competencies

- **Early Childhood Advocates can use the Competencies to:**
  - Educate parents, policymakers and general public about the degree of knowledge and skill required for professional competency, the areas of professional practice in early childhood, and the need for competent professionals
  - Reinforce the concept of professionalism for the field of early childhood
  - Support public and private investments, incentives and initiatives that encourage and facilitate professional competency

The Work Ahead

To be sure, the development of the Competencies is only part of the work! There is plenty of work ahead related to supporting stakeholders in the implementation of the competencies. Additionally, competency frameworks for early intervention professionals, trainers and other early childhood professionals still need to be developed.