

Summaries of State Pre-Kindergarten Standards

Report Prepared by WestEd

As part of its overall process to revise the State's Model Content Standards, the Colorado Department of Education asked WestEd to expand its review to include summaries of the pre-kindergarten (Pre-K) and early learning standards of innovative states or states considered leaders in the field, including California.

The importance of Colorado's task is reinforced by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education (NAECS/SDE), who take the position that early learning standards can be a valuable part of a comprehensive, high-quality system of service for young children, contributing to young children's educational experiences and to their future success (2003). However, as reported by Education Week (2003), the development of preschool standards is a "moving target...and states vary tremendously in how their standards are being used." It is hoped that the State can use the summaries of the approaches to early learning standards presented here to inform their standards revision and development process.

To guide the selection of the states to be reviewed, WestEd consulted a national study of early learning standards conducted by SERVE in partnership with Sharon Lynn Kagan and Victoria Stebbins Frelow of Columbia University, *Inside the Content: The Breadth and Depth of Early Learning Standards* (2005), to confirm its own views of which states might be considered leaders in the Pre-K field.

In the SERVE (2005) report, the early learning standards of 27 states were analyzed for breadth and depth. Breadth was defined as the extent to which the five dimensions identified by the National Education Goals Panel in *Reconsidering Children's Early Development and Learning: Toward Common Views and Vocabulary* (1995) were addressed in the state's standards. These dimensions are:

- Physical Well-Being and Motor Development
- Social and Emotional Development
- Approaches Toward Learning
- Language and Communication Development
- Cognition and General Knowledge

Depth was defined as the extent to which a set of state standards addressed each of the indicators within a specific dimension, as derived by the SERVE research team from the National Education Goals Panel (1995) document.

WestEd then calculated the percentage of indicators addressed in each dimension by state, as presented in the SERVE (2005) report. Based on this analysis, a state's Pre-K standards were selected for review if they were found to have addressed all five dimensions of breadth and 90 percent or more of the indicators within each dimension in SERVE's depth analysis. Five states met the criteria listed and their standards were

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selected to be summarized along with the *California Preschool Learning Foundations* (2008):

- Delaware – *Delaware Early Learning Foundations for School Success* (2003)
- Vermont – *Vermont Early Learning Standards* (2003)
- Wyoming – *Wyoming Early Childhood Readiness Standards* (2002)
- Idaho – *Idaho Early Learning Standards* (2004)
- Utah – *Pre-Kindergarten Guidelines* (2006)

The summary of each state’s Pre-K standards document is presented in the following five sections: Development, Structure and Content, Research Base, Use of the Standards, and Potential Additional Considerations.¹

California Preschool Learning Foundations

The *California Preschool Learning Foundations* (hereafter called the Foundations) have many elements, all designed to provide guidance in how best to provide early learning opportunities for children.

The purpose of the Foundations is “to provide the child development field with research-based competencies—knowledge and skills—that we can expect most children to exhibit in a high-quality program as they complete their first or second year of preschool” (p. xi). The Foundations define age-appropriate expectations about what children should know and be able to do at around 48 and 60 months of age. These ages are meant to describe children at the end of their first and second year of preschool.

Development

The development of the Foundations took place over a three-year period using an inclusive and deliberative process, including four statewide stakeholder meetings, 53 public input sessions held throughout the state, four public hearings, and public comment in April, May, and November of 2007, through the California Department of Education’s website. Review opportunities were considered and incorporated as appropriate.

Structure and Content

The California Preschool Learning Foundations include the following four domains:

- Social-Emotional Development
- Language and Literacy
- English-Language Development (for English learners)
- Mathematics

¹ The information included in each summary is summarized, paraphrased, or verbatim (with attribution) from the standards documents and other resources available from the respective State Department of Education websites.

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The domains “represent crucial areas of learning and development for young children,” and are divided into strands, substrands, and foundations, which “provide a thorough overview of development in that domain” (p. xii).

The California Department of Education website explains how the four foundation domains are at the core of early learning.

- Social-emotional development is essential for all learning.
- Language and literacy for all children lay the groundwork for oral and written communication, which is also fundamental to all learning.
- English-language development foundations are essential for California preschool teachers and children, given the richness of the diverse language traditions.
- Mathematics, and number sense in particular, holds the key to later learning about how quantitative and logical relationships work in the world.

Current and next steps include developing standards for visual and performing arts, physical development, and health foundations, with history/social science and science to follow (California Department of Education, 2008b).

In order to foster the learning and development of all young children in California, the Foundations include a concept known as universal design for learning, developed by the Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST). Universal design for learning promotes a number of approaches to meet the needs of diverse learners, including multiple means of representation, multiple means of engagement, and multiple means of expression.

Research Base

The Foundations reflect input from professionals, and were developed after examining the standards of other states, specifically Alaska, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Illinois, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Texas, and Washington. Research references are incorporated into the introductory text for each domain, and a reference list is provided at the end of each section.

Use of Standards

The foundations within each domain are enhanced with expert practitioners’ suggestions and examples to promote understanding of preschool children’s learning and to guide instructional practice. A glossary is included that explains technical terms for the user.

Training on how to best use the Foundations to better serve children and families is available for staff and providers through the California Preschool Instructional Network (CPIN) (an outside source) website. The CPIN is a collaboration between the California Department of Education, Child Development Division and the Center for Child and Family Studies at WestEd, and the California County Superintendents Educational Services Association (CCSESA). The purpose of the CPIN is to provide professional development and technical assistance to preschool teachers and administrators to ensure that preschool children are ready for school. CPIN is organized into 11 regions across the state that will disseminate information, training, and resources to each region (CPIN, n.d.).

Delaware Early Learning Foundations for School Success

The *Delaware Early Learning Foundations for School Success* (hereafter called the Early Learning Foundations) were created to address the issue of curriculum instruction for children prior to the start of kindergarten.

Development

The Early Learning Foundations are the culmination of several years of work by the Early Childhood Work Group, made up of many individuals representing the interests of young children. This entailed beginning with the "developmentally appropriate skills that would support a child's success" (p. 3), and then adapting, revising, and reformatting them to develop a curricular planning guide for use by early educators. The Foundations can be seen as part of Delaware's effort to establish a "logical progression of learning from early childhood to post-secondary education while reducing the need for remediation," as embodied in the Delaware P-20 Council (n.d.)

Structure and Content

The Early Learning Foundations document is organized into two parts: a statement of 11 guiding principles and the Early Learning Foundations, listed below.

- Language Development
- Mathematics
- Science
- Creative Arts
- Emotional and Social Development
- Approaches to Learning
- Physical Health and Development

The Early Learning Foundations are further divided into "Developmental Areas," and "Learning Experiences."

Research Base

The advisory work group and the individual county-level focus groups that developed the Early Learning Foundations examined other states and programs during their review process, but do not cite the specific sources reviewed.

Use of Standards

The Early Learning Foundations document is intended to be used as a guide for planning instruction or curriculum. As described in the document, the items listed in each developmental area are meant as focus points for guiding instructional planning and are not intended as specific child skill expectations. An educator can use the document as a checklist when reflecting upon the types of learning experiences being provided. Where there are gaps, the educator can then plan for activities so that children have experiences to develop those skills. Provided on the state website are two instructional planning checklists for examining either monthly or yearly planned activities.

Vermont Early Learning Standards

The *Vermont Early Learning Standards* (hereafter called the VELS) document reports that the Vermont Department of Education is committed to the goal that “all children arrive at school ready to learn” regardless of socio-economic status, home language, special health needs, disabilities or family situation (p. 1).

Development

The development of the VELS was assigned to the Standards, Monitoring and Technical Assistance Sub-Committee of the Vermont Early Childhood Work Group, which consisted of practitioners drawn from early care and education programs, Head Start, public schools, state agencies, and higher education, and of parents. Information from the following documents and organizations was incorporated into the VELS:

- National Education Goals Panel
- Head Start *Child Outcomes Framework* (2000)
- National Association for the Education of Young Children
- Vermont Frameworks of Standards and Learning Opportunities
- The Work Sampling System of Child Assessment
- Rhode Island’s Early Learning Standards

The standards documents of several other states were also used, though Rhode Island’s were “particularly useful because developers had engaged in a similar process of examining and consolidating various documents and instruments” (p. 1).

Structure and Content

The Vermont Department of Education website notes that the VELS align closely with the Vital Results and Field of Knowledge contained within *Vermont’s Framework of Standards and Learning Opportunities Pre-K–Grade 12* (2000).

The VELS are written using a four-tier structure:

- Domain – general areas of learning
- Learning Goals and Definitions – categories of skills and knowledge within each Domain
- Examples – examples of behaviors that demonstrate competence in relation to each Learning Goal
- Support for Learning – description of ways adults can interact with children and design environments conducive to children’s development and learning

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The VELS are organized into eight domains. Each domain contains between three and six learning goals and definitions, for which examples are provided. Additionally, the document includes ways in which adults and the environment can support each domain.

The eight VELS domains are:

- Approaches to Learning
- Social and Emotional Development
- Language, Literacy and Communication
- Mathematics
- Science
- Social Studies
- Creative Expression
- Physical Health and Development

Relevant standards from Vermont's Framework of Standards and Learning Opportunities and the Head Start *Child Outcomes Framework* (2000) are cross-referenced and cited next to corresponding standards in the VELS.

Research Base

The VELS state that they “are based upon current scientific child development research and best practice” (p. 1). The document's “Reference and Resources” section is organized by domain, with additional sections for “Assessment” and “Standards and Outcomes.”

Use of Standards

The VELS are intended for use by families, teachers and administrators in guiding the development of curriculum. The purposes of the VELS as listed in the document are to:

- Inform families about the development and capabilities of children who are about to enter kindergarten
- Inform educators in the development of curriculum and educational strategies
- Guide the selection of assessment tools that are appropriate for learners from a variety of backgrounds with differing abilities
- Support referrals of children to qualified specialists when concerns about development become apparent
- Provide a framework for administrators to oversee curricular practices and advocate for resources
- Focus a conversation among families, community members, and legislators about the education of young children
- Link the development and learning of young children to the future curriculum goals and learning outcomes of public schools (p. 1–2)

Additionally, the VELS document states that the VELS should *not* be used for the following purposes: to assess the competence of young children; to diagnose and “label” children; to mandate specific teaching practices or materials; to determine rewards or penalties for educational personnel or programs; to prohibit any child from entering kindergarten; or to exclude any child from participating in early childhood programs (p. 2).

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Wyoming Early Childhood Readiness Standards

The *Wyoming Early Childhood Readiness Standards* were developed to provide a consistent definition of school readiness. For early childhood educators, the goal was to provide a framework for use while planning quality curriculum by identifying the skills (indicators) needed to maximize the potential for school success and promote a smooth transition to kindergarten.

Development

The Wyoming Department of Education, in collaboration with the Wyoming Education Childhood Development Council worked together to develop the readiness standards. The committee used the Head Start *Child Outcomes Framework* (2000) linking the developmental domains to the content areas. Minnesota, Rhode Island, and Colorado were the states that Wyoming used as references and guides throughout their development process.

Structure and Content

The Wyoming Early Childhood Readiness Standards include the following eight domains:

- Language
- Literacy
- Social and Emotional Development
- Approaches to Learning
- Mathematics
- Science
- Physical Health and Development
- Creative Arts

Research Base

Wyoming's Early Childhood Readiness Standards contain a "Resources" section listing sources from which the Standards document "incorporates information and perspectives." This list includes standards from other states, with specific mention of Colorado, Connecticut, Minnesota, Missouri, and Rhode Island. Current research on the important role of early brain development, early literacy, and social-emotional competencies was used to set the indicators at a level needed to promote optimum readiness for school success.

Use of Standards

As is the case with all of the state Pre-Kindergarten standards discussed in this report, the Wyoming Early Childhood Readiness Standards have been aligned to the Creative Curriculum, a Teaching Strategies, Inc. publication that assists teachers on developing classroom structure, how to work with children at different developmental levels, and how to involve families in the learning of their child(ren). Definitions of standards are included to help the reader understand the logic behind each section.

Idaho Early Learning Standards

The *Idaho Early Learning Standards*, as described in *Idaho Early Learning Standards: A Resource Guide*, available on the Idaho State Department of Education website, communicate a common set of standards for developing appropriate expectations for young children.

Development

Idaho took an interesting first step in developing a precursor to the early learning standards, which was to look at the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requirements first. The primary task for a 2002 Idaho workgroup was to develop early childhood standards that would meet the IDEA standards. As described by the Idaho State Department of Education website, the Task Force for the Early Learning Standards included, but was not limited to, special education professionals, Head Start, early childhood professionals, college educators and staff of the Idaho State Department of Education.

Structure and Content

The Idaho Early Learning Standards reports that the pedagogy of early care and education is built upon recognizing the interconnectedness of emotional, social, cognitive, and physical development and learning—the whole child. The Idaho Early Learning Standards state that the “quality curriculum for young children is based on consideration of child development, and a fundamental understanding of the conditions and supports that enhance learning in young children.” The standards are used as a framework, with a format consistent with the K–12 standards, and have six domains:

- Health
- Humanities
- Language Arts and Communication
- Mathematics
- Science
- Social Studies

Each domain is then divided into strands. The Idaho Early Learning Standards are provided as a “flexible” guide for the individual progress of a child.

Research Base

In the “Introduction” to the Early Learning Standards, the Task Force cites a growing body of research supporting the critical relationship between early childhood experiences and successful lifelong outcomes. In the “Resource” section at the end of the document, early child research and researchers are listed as part of the development of the Idaho Early Learning Standards. Additionally, the Idaho Early Learning Standards Task Force researched the approach to early learning standards used in Minnesota, Colorado and Rhode Island.

Use of Standards

As stated in the standards, combined efforts among families, early childhood care and education programs, communities, and policy makers are vital in the process of growing healthy, well-functioning children. To that end, the Idaho Early Learning Standards are described on the website as a tool for:

- Family members: to build awareness to support their children's development
- Teachers/caregivers: to guide planning, provide direction for authentic assessment, help programs define effectiveness
- Community members: to help families identify a range of supports (formally and informally) and to help organize supports for early care and education efforts
- Policy makers: to assess the impact on public policies on young children and families and to improve understanding of appropriate expectations, accountability and responsibility.

Utah Pre-Kindergarten Guidelines

The *Utah Pre-Kindergarten Guidelines* (hereafter called the Guidelines) state that the purpose of the Guidelines is to help families, educators and communities make informed decisions about curriculum for pre-kindergarten children.

Development

The development was a collaborative effort between the Utah Office of Child Care and the Utah State Office of Education. A statewide steering committee was comprised of teachers and administrators from special education and general education, the Office of Child Care, the State Office of Education, and parent and family consultants. A sub-committee was formed for drafting the Guidelines, consisting of teachers, specialists, directors and administrators from child care centers, regular and special education preschools, public schools, Head Start, Utah PTA/Family Center, Centro de la Familia, and the Utah State Office of Education. In order to hear the voices of the entire state, Utah gathered public input through focus groups and public hearings across the state. As a final step, Utah incorporated an independent review by district administrators, early childhood teachers, and administrators, university professors, health and human services administrators and State Office of Education specialists.

Structure and Content

The Guidelines include the following five content areas:

- Approaches to Learning
- Social/Emotional
- Language and Literacy
- Mathematics
- Physical/Health & Safety

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The Guidelines assert that their implementation in the home and in early childhood programs will improve kindergarten transition and reduce readiness and achievement gaps.

Additionally, the Guidelines are based on the following guiding principles:

- Parents as the child's first teacher
- Developmentally appropriate practices
- Growth in the preschool years
- Children as individuals
- Children learning through enjoyable interaction

Research Base

Throughout the Guidelines, specific research-based objectives for pre-kindergarten children are described. Also cited is research showing that children with positive attitudes and behaviors toward learning are more successful in school. The opposite is also true: children who see themselves as incapable or helpless are at risk for failure. The way children view themselves as learners will affect the way they learn.

Use of Standards

The intent of the Guidelines is to ensure that all four-year-old children have the opportunity in their early childhood experiences to achieve the objectives included in the five basic content areas. As stated by the Utah State Office of Education, the intended learning outcomes are to provide a direction for general learning experiences, management, culture, environment and inclusion.

Summary

As is evident from the summaries above, there is overlap among the domains included in each state’s standards or foundations, although the names states use to label the domains may vary slightly across states. The table below summarizes the overlap of domains across the six states. An “X” indicates that the state includes the domain in its Pre-K Standards. Only domains that appear in more than one state appear in the table.

Table 1. Summary of Domains in the Pre-K Standards Across the Six States

DOMAINS	CA*	DE	VT	WY	ID[†]	UT
Social and Emotional Development	X	X	X	X		X
Language and Literacy	X	X	X	X	X	X
Mathematics	X	X	X	X	X	X
Science		X	X	X	X	
Creative Arts		X	X	X		
Approaches to Learning		X	X	X		X
Physical Health and Development		X	X	X	X	X
Social Studies			X		X	

* In addition to the domains listed, California’s Foundations include the domain “English-Language Development (for English learners).”

† In addition to the domains listed, Idaho’s Standards include the domain “Humanities.”

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Resources

State Standards Documents

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