CONSIDERATIONS AND MODELS IN PRESENTING EARLY LEARNING STANDARDS

Prepared for the Indiana Department of Education

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CONSIDERATIONS AND MODELS IN PRESENTING EARLY LEARNING STANDARDS

The Indiana Department of Education (IDOE) is preparing to undertake the work of reviewing the state early learning standards - Indiana's Early Learning Foundations (the *Foundations*). In anticipation of this work, staff at IDOE have requested support from the Region 8 Comprehensive Center in identifying approaches states have taken in sharing their early learning standards and related supports, and ensuring alignment with other, related, learning standards.[1] This brief summarizes our findings related to three primary questions:

1. How do states provide access to their early learning standards?

2. What supports do states provide for using their early learning standards?

3. How do states align their early learning standards across systems?

Fundamental to these questions is clarity in the purposes for which early learning standards are being disseminated, and what degree of support the state is able to provide in implementing the standards. In the summary that follows, several options are provided in response to each of the three primary questions and key considerations for IDOE are identified.[2]

The basic premise for learning standards is that they establish the accepted set of expectations for children of different ages or grades.

How do states provide access to their early learning standards?

The basic premise for learning standards is that they establish the accepted set of expectations for children of different ages or grades. When early learning standards were first developed, they tended to be used predominantly by those working directly in early education – program developers or administrators, teachers, curriculum developers, higher education faculty preparing teachers, etc. However, there is growing consensus that early learning standards can inform how entire communities support learning and development. As a result, once developed, these standards must then be shared widely for teachers, families, school systems, communities, businesses, and other stakeholders to understand child learning and development, and to inform their work with young children. Early learning standards evolved from a somewhat discrete, specialized bit of knowledge, to one that can have broad impact if shared appropriately.

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[1] Administration of early education programs, including development of early learning standards, resides in different agencies across states. While many states include early education within their state education agency, other states administer early education through different state agencies, typically health and human services or child and family services. This review was completed based upon state materials related to early learning standards regardless of the state agency home responsible for them.

[2] At this time (June 2020) the most comprehensive resource about early learning standards nationally is managed by the American Psychological Association (see https://www.apa.org/education/k12/states-early-learning).

How standards are shared can greatly influence how accessible and usable they are, not only by teachers and others directly tied to early education systems, but also to families and communities as well. Of course, the Internet allows for wide dissemination of information and all states seem to provide access to their learning standards via websites. However, the format and process for accessing them can vary. Several options for providing access to learning standards are shown in the box below.

Options for Disseminating Early Learning Standards

◄ **Provide a link to a downloadable file (typically as a pdf or Microsoft Word file).**
  – Static files are most efficient for users who want to print a physical copy of the standards.
  – The technological infrastructure is minimal, allowing for easier and cheaper (typically) updates to their website once documents are finalized.
  – These files may be efficient for users accessing them through a laptop or desktop computer, but they may be challenging for users working on tablets or cell phones.
  – Nearly all states provide access to their standards through one or more formats that allow printing, even when they use any of the approaches noted below. The website for the Illinois Early Learning Project (see https://illinoisearlylearning.org/ielg/) is a good example of this hybrid approach.

◄ **Provide access to early learning standards with some on-line functionality.**
  – Capitalizing on web-based functionality, on-line access allows for standards to be searchable (and possibly able to be manipulated by users).
  – On-line access requires more IT infrastructure than simply providing a link, although the complexity can range from modest (e.g., an HTML-based page) to more challenging (e.g., searchable access with customized downloads).
  – Typically, but not always, on-line presentation of standards can be provided for multiple hardware possibilities (e.g., laptop, desktop computers, tablets, cell phones).
  – States taking this approach include:
    o Colorado Department of Education (available at https://www.cde.state.co.us/apps/standards/)
    o Indiana Department of Education (available at https://www.doe.in.gov/earlylearning/framework)
    o Pennsylvania Department of Education (available at (http://www.pdesas.org/module/sas/curriculumframework/)

◄ **Provide on-line access to standards with multi-media content.**
  – Combine on-line access to standards with additional, multi-media content.
  – Video content may include specific training videos, videos of exemplary practices, or some combination.
  – Videos may be developed by the state (e.g., Georgia, New York) or by a third party (Florida). Use of video is discussed further below.
  – Videos have direct production expense and require higher levels of IT support and bandwidth.
  – Several states have explored different approaches (more below): Florida, Georgia, New York, Tennessee, and Texas.

The options noted above are reflective of current practices. They may be combined or modified, based upon IDOE needs and resources. Importantly, states vary greatly in the degree to which they provide their standards in languages other than English, with many providing documents in Spanish, with very few states providing materials in more than two languages. The District of Columbia standards are one exception, providing standards (via pdf) is six languages in addition to English (see https://osse.dc.gov/publication/district-columbia-early-learning-standards-dc-els).

Key Considerations for IDOE in Providing Access

◄ Why are the *Foundations* being shared? How are they to be used?
◄ What is the technological infrastructure available to support different file types, web-based content, and/or video content?

What supports do states provide for using their early learning standards?

In addition to disseminating the content of early learning standards, many states have developed web-based landing pages that allow them to provide a range of additional supports in the implementation of the standards.

The most typical support states provide for early learning standards involves suggested activities for families and/or pedagogical guidance to support child learning and development. In some cases, this guidance is provided within the content of the standards themselves, in other cases they are provided separately (but linked) to the standards.

Standards Guidance Documents

Many states provide documents generally referred to as "guidance" that accompanies the early learning standards. These generally provide the same content as the standards documents or modify the language and presentation to be more engaging to non-educator audiences. Oftentimes these are geared towards families and focus on activities to support different aspects of learning and development. While these documents can vary widely in their design, they tend towards providing brief content with a non-academic format, including high quality visuals and occasional charts, diagrams, worksheets, or other materials.

Currently, Indiana provides the Early Learning Foundations (https://www.doe.in.gov/sites/default/files/earlylearning/foundations-2015-august-12.pdf), which lay out age-banded expectations for children's learning and development, as well as Early Learning Foundations Guidance (https://www.doe.in.gov/earlylearning/framework), which connects the Foundations with expectations during kindergarten. This guidance identifies powerful practices (in general and based upon children's age band), considerations for special populations, and guidance on engaging families. The current guidance is provided through a web-based, searchable interface directly reinforcing the Foundations. Both are provided as downloadable documents, as well as a searchable/sortable on-line format for the *Guidance*.

Many states have developed this type of guide, but some of the most notable include:

◄ Colorado Department of Human Services provides an accessible standards guide appropriate for families (available at https://earlylearningco.org/pdf/FINAL-ELDG-Guidelines-2020.pdf) that is available as a searchable on-line or downloadable pdf resource.

◄ Massachusetts Department of Education provides grade-based guidance to families (available at http://www.doe.mass.edu/highstandards/).

◄ Washington State Department of Early Learning provides a detailed guide for families (available at https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/sites/default/files/pubs/EL_0015.pdf)

Pedagogical Guidance Documents

States also develop guidance targeted more directly at instruction through pedagogical guides for teachers. As with more general guidance developed for families and communities, these documents frequently outline activities to support learning and development. However, these guides typically provide more research background and context for the activities. In the best documents they also connect standards and activities to approaches towards assessment, as well as specific policies and practices in the state. Unlike more general guidance documents as described above, these tend towards a more academic tone and content. While many include useful visuals, they would be generally less engaging than the documents described above.

States take a range of approaches in providing pedagogical guides – some are focused on specific ages while others span several, for example. These states provide illustrative examples:

◄ Colorado Department of Education has detailed individual guides for each prekindergarten standard domain (available at https://www.cde.state.co.us/early/preschoolstandardsresources).

◄ Maryland has a comprehensive guide Birth to Age 8 (available at https://earlychildhood.marylandpublicschools.org/system/files/filedepot/3/pedagogyguide-learningstandards_042015_1.pdf)

◄ New Jersey has several guides for Birth through 3rd grade (available as download at https://www.state.nj.us/education/ece/guide/)

◄ New York has grade-based guides for prekindergarten to 2nd grade (available at http://www.p12.nysed.gov/earlylearning/standards/home.html).

◄ North Carolina has a guide for Birth to age 5 (available at https://ncchildcare.ncdhhs.gov/Portals/0/documents/pdf/N/NC_Foundations.pdf)

◄ Ohio provide a set of "ELDS Implementation Guides" (available at http://www.earlychildhoodohio.org/elds/implementation.stm).

Video-based Instructional Supports

In addition to providing documents targeted to teachers or with broader appeal, some states have leveraged their web-based capacities and harnessed the power to "show" rather than "tell" through video. For example,

◄ New York (http://www.p12.nysed.gov/earlylearning/video-series/home.html) has a set of videos highlighting high quality learning environments and instruction in early grades' classrooms.

◄ Illinois has a collection of videos indexed by topics (see

https://illinoisearlylearning.org/resources/videos/ielg-moments/) that speak to many of the early learning guidelines for the state.

◄ In Texas, early educators can access videos linked to each of the broad domains in the standards (https://cliengage.org/public/tools/online-learning/prek-guidelines/).

◄ In Tennessee educators can access training videos linked to the state early learning standards (https://www.tnelds-training.com/).

◄ California (https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/re/psfoundations.asp) developed a DVD series to support its preschool foundations standards (available for purchase)

The two most advanced systems providing videos linked to early learning content are (currently) in Florida and Georgia. In each of these states, videos are organized and searchable/sortable by specific standard or indicator (not all indicators have accompanying videos, however).

◄ Florida Office of Early Learning, State Department of Education (http://flbt5.floridaearlylearning.com/index.html)

In Florida, users can access a range of downloadable and interactive features to support the state Birth to Kindergarten Standards (see Figure 1):

Figure 1. Landing page for the Florida Early Learning and Development Standards.

From this page, users can access standards by content strand or age/grade of the child. There are also crosswalk documents and activity packages to accompany the standards. Through this portal, users can explore the content of the standards by domain and age, read indicators, and as shown the screen shot below, click on video links showing the identified indicators (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Detailed view of example Florida standards.

◄ Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (http://gelds.decal.ga.gov/Search.aspx)

In Georgia, users can access the Georgia Early Learning and Development Standards (GELDS – http://gelds.decal.ga.gov/Default.aspx) using an easily understood landing page that allows users to select specific standards to access (see Figure 3 for a screen shot of the GELDS page).

Figure 3. Georgia Early Learning and Development Standards (GELDS) landing page.

From this page, the user can access the complete set of learning standards by strand. On this page, selecting a specific standard opens a window with more details about the indicator and examples of how it can be demonstrated. For many standards the state has developed videos to show both how the indicator is shown in classrooms as well as what teachers can do to support it (see Figure 4).

Figure 4. Sample page from the GELDS home page.

Both Florida and Georgia provide possible models for integrating videos in support of standards dissemination and implementation. It must be noted that video production is time and labor intensive for states, and maintaining videos on-line requires deeper IT infrastructure than most websites.

Key Considerations for IDOE in Providing Supports for Implementing the *Foundations*

◄ In addition to the *Foundations*, what supporting content does IDOE want to develop or support (documents, websites, video for training or learning, etc.)?
◄ What is the technological infrastructure available to support different file types, web-based content, and/or video content?
◄ How will additional support be provided (e.g., free, for a fee)?

How do states align their early learning standards across systems?

State early learning standards do not exist within a vacuum. By capturing expectations for young children, learning standards typically align with the expectations articulated in the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework (HSELOF), as well as state-developed standards for children when they enter school. Indeed, *The State of Preschool 2019* annual report noted that nearly all states provide comprehensive, aligned early childhood standards (see http://nieer.org/state-preschool-yearbooks/2019-2). Although alignment has become best practices in early education, how this alignment is shared and the depth at which it is provided does vary across states.

Showing alignment of early learning standards with other standards

◄ State standards and Head Start Early Learning Framework

- Idaho (see https://www.healthandwelfare.idaho.gov/Portals/0/Children/Crosswalk_final_formattingedits1.pdf), Wisconsin (see https://whsaonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Head-Start-Early-Learning-Outcomes-Framework.pdf), and Pennsylvania (see https://www.pakeys.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/2016-HS-ELOF-alignment-PreK-crosswalk.pdf) each provide documents mapping state early learning standards against the HSELOF.
- In Arkansas, the crosswalk is provided by the state Head Start Association, both as an html and down-loadable document (see https://www.arheadstart.org/index.php/uams-hs-ehs/50-news/state-news/190-alignment-of-the-head-start-child-development-and-early-learning-framework-with-the-arkansas-early-childhood-education-framework-benchmarks).

◄ Crosswalk documents for multiple sets of standards

- New York provides a document showing the alignment across the NY early learning standards, Head Start Outcomes Framework, and the Prekindergarten Foundation for the Common Core, which ultimately links to the state K-12 standards (https://www.ccf.ny.gov/files/6514/7914/1456/NEW_2016_NYS_Early_Learning_Alignment_Crosswalk.pdf).
- Minnesota developed a crosswalk for multiple standards (although it was developed in the early 2000's and recently updated for accessibility – see https://education.mn.gov/mdeprod/groups/educ/documents/basic/mdaw/mda1/~edisp/005279.pdf).
- Connecticut provides crosswalks into English Language Arts and Math separately (see https://www.ct.gov/oec/lib/oec/earlycare/elds/sections/appendixa.pdf and https://www.ct.gov/oec/lib/oec/earlycare/elds/sections/appendixb.pdf).
- Idaho provides crosswalks for early learning standards and the Common Core State Standards (see https://www.healthandwelfare.idaho.gov/Portals/0/Children/InfantToddlerProgram/CommonCore_ELeG_10-10-12_final.pdf)
- Arizona provides a complete crosswalk within the overview of each standard strand (see Figure 5). This crosswalk denotes different elements across standards-sets as well.

Example

STRAND 1: LANGUAGE			
INFANT & TODDLER GUIDELINES	AZ EARLY LEARNING STANDARD	HEAD START EARLY LEARNING OUTCOMES FRAMWORK	AZ KINDERGARTEN STANDARD
Listening and Understanding (LDC)	Receptive Language Understanding	Receptive Language Attending and Understanding	Literature
Shows interest in listening to sounds. (LDC)	a. Demonstrates understanding a variety of finger-plays, rhymes, chants and songs, poems, conversations, and stories.	Attends to language during conversations, songs, stories, or other learning experiences.	With prompting and support, retell familiar stories, including key details. (RL)

Figure 5. Example of Arizona crosswalk of early learning standards.

- Finally, as noted above, Washington Department of Early Learning developed a *Guidelines* document for families and teachers (available at https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/sites/default/files/pubs/EL_0015.pdf). This document introduces "Area of Development" in place of more academic sounding domain titles (e.g., uses "Building relationships" to map onto standards for "Social-Emotional" development), and maps these areas onto relevant Early Learning Domains, Head Start Framework and Washington State Learning Standards (see Figure 6).

How the Guidelines Relate to Early Learning Domains, Head Start Framework and Washington State Learning Standards

Guidelines Area of Development	Early Learning Domains	Head Start Framework[2]	Washington State Learning Standards
1. About me and my family and culture	Social-Emotional; Approaches to Learning	Social & Emotional Development; Social Studies Knowledge & Skills; Approaches to Learning	Washington State K-12 Health and Fitness Learning Standards
2. Building relationships	Social-Emotional	Social & Emotional Development	Washington State K-12 Health and Fitness Learning Standards
3. Touching, seeing, hearing and moving around	Physical Well-Being, Health and Motor Development	Physical Development & Health	Washington State K-12 Health and Fitness Learning Standards

Figure 6. Washington state mapping of guideline areas of development, learning standards domain, Head Start Framework, and state Early Learning Standards.

While many states develop crosswalks for standards, there is no clear purpose beyond identifying linkages or overlap. In addition, these crosswalks map specific standards that are comparable across strands for specific ages – they do not explicitly show linkages across domains.

State Standards Mapped Against Early Education Curricula

Some states have identified one or more commercially available curricula for use in their publicly funded early education programs. In some instances, the publishers have developed crosswalks between state early learning standards and these curricula.

◄ Washington and West Virginia have recognized Creative Curriculum for its early learning programs, and Teaching Strategies (publisher of Creative Curriculum) has developed a direct cross-walk (e.g., https://teachingstrategies.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/WA-State-Early-Learn-Guidelines-to-CC_Standards-report_2015.pdf).

◄ North Carolina recognizes the High Scope COR curriculum and has developed an appropriate cross-walk with it for their standards (see https://nceln.fpg.unc.edu/sites/nceln.fpg.unc.edu/files/resources/NCFoundationsforELD2013toCORAdvantage1_5.pdf).

States have established aligned standards across early childhood

Standards crosswalks typically reconcile different sets of standards developed for children of the same ages. When standards are aligned, they provide a consistent set of standards across ages. At the most basic level, standards for children birth to age 5, for example, represent alignment across the years from birth to school entry. Some states have taken the more challenging step of aligning standards across early childhood and into early elementary school by establishing an integrated set of standards that crosses the early years (e.g., birth-3rd grade, pre-kindergarten – 3rd grade, or some alternative range). By design, this approach leads to alignment across ages within a single document to chart learning and development across a time period that would otherwise be charted using multiple standards sets (typically the state early learning standards and the state's K-12 standards). This alignment is especially powerful when the state supports training and licensing of teachers across early childhood and into early elementary school and/or when the state supports schools focused on these transitionary years.

Several states have made this commitment:

◄ Alabama – Pre-K – 3rd grade framework (available at http://children.alabama.gov/pre-k-3rd-grade-early-learning-continuum/)

◄ Colorado - Birth - 3rd grade (available at https://earlylearningco.org/)

◄ Idaho – Birth-3rd grade available at (https://healthandwelfare.idaho.gov/Portals/0/Children/InfantToddlerProgram/ELeG/ELeG_050918.pdf)

◄ Maryland – Birth to Age 8: (available at https://earlychildhood.marylandpublicschools.org/system/files/filedepot/4/msde-pedagogy-report-_appendix_2016.pdf)

Typically, standards aligned across the early years (e.g., Birth – 3rd grade, or Pre-kindergarten - 3rd grade) are developed to reflect an internally consistent set of expectations, using consistent language and structure for the standards. By design this connects standards that would otherwise exist in different sets more closely together. However, it is possible to present aligned standards that are otherwise developed as separate sets (e.g., pre-kindergarten standards and K-12 standards), without explicitly developing an aligned set.

Key Considerations for IDOE in Developing Crosswalks and Alignment

◄ What standards crosswalks be developed across systems (e.g., Head Start Framework, *Foundations*, K-12)?

◄ How will these be developed (stand-alone documents, embedded into standards documents)?

◄ Will IDOE develop alignment documents linking *Foundations* with early K-12 standards?

Conclusions

States invest considerable resources (time, personnel, effort, etc.) in developing and periodically revising early learning standards. They provide a set of agreed-upon expectations for child development and learning across the early years. Together they shape curriculum choices, approaches to assessment, and instructional practices in early education programs across the state. They also inform other community stakeholders and provide guidance to families about child development. States may disseminate their standards on the Internet using one or more formats, including those that allow for interactivity between user and the standards, as well as guidance documents and tools to show alignment of standards across early childhood systems, and, in some instances, into K-12 education. Some states have begun to use video-based resources, as well, in their efforts to share and support use of the standards. How states do so rely upon strategic choices, access to resources, and technological infrastructure available to the state. This brief has outlined broad options for IDOE and laid out some key considerations or questions to guide decisions within these options.