



Early Childhood Commission Glossary

General Early Childhood Education Terms

Early childhood: The period from birth through age 8 during which children grow, learn and develop more rapidly than at any other time in their lives.³

Early care and education (ECE): All forms of organized and sustained activities, often center- or school-based, designed to foster learning and emotional and social development in children such as preschools, kindergartens and child-care centers.⁶

Early intervention: A range of services designed to enhance the development of children with disabilities or those at risk of developmental delay. Early intervention services under public supervision generally must be given by qualified personnel and require the development of an individualized family service plan.⁷

Types of Early Care and Programs

Center-based child care: Programs that are licensed or otherwise authorized to provide child care services in a nonresidential setting.⁷

Home-visiting programs: An intervention conducted in the home with the child, parents, guardians and other family members. The intervention includes engagement, assessment of family and child needs, development of family care plans, care coordination and case management. For a center-based program, a home visit occurs when the child's teacher or center staff meet with the family in its home environment.⁶

Informal (family, friend and neighbor) child care: Child care programs provided by relatives, friends and neighbors in the child's own home or in another home, often in unregulated settings.⁷

Licensed child care: Child care programs operated in homes or in facilities that fall within the regulatory system of a state or community and comply with those regulations. Many states have different levels of regulatory requirements and use different terms to refer to these levels (for example, licensing, certification, registration).⁷

Licensed family child care: Child care programs provided by relatives, friends and neighbors operated in homes or in facilities that fall within the regulatory system of a state or community and comply with those regulations. Many states have different levels of regulatory requirements and use different terms to refer to these levels (for example, licensing, certification, registration).⁷

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Private preschool: Programs that provide care and educational activities for children ages 3 to 5. They receive funding from private sources, generally tuition and operate for three to four hours per day, from two to five days a week.⁷

Private prekindergarten (pre-K): Programs generally designed to provide children who are ages 3 to 5 with early education experiences that prepare them for school.⁷ Programs receive funding from private sources, generally tuition.

Public preschool: Publicly funded programs that provide care and educational activities for children ages 3 to 5. Normally, these programs operate for three to four hours per day, two to five days a week.⁷

Public prekindergarten (pre-K): Programs that are funded through state budget appropriations to a state agency (usually the state education department) to administer a defined program to be operated by school districts directly or by other entities in communities.¹ These programs are designed for children who are ages 3 to 5, generally to provide them with early education experiences that prepare them for school.⁷

Aspects of Quality

Child development: The process by which a child acquires skills in social, emotional, intellectual, speech and language, and physical development, including fine and gross motor skills. Developmental stages refer to the expected, sequential order of acquiring skills that children typically progress through from birth through adolescence. For example, most children crawl before they walk and use their fingers to feed themselves before they use utensils.⁷ Early child development is dependent on many factors, including the child's nutrition, environment and health care services. It begins before birth through the provision of prenatal care, and it extends through age 8.

Developmentally appropriate practice (DAP): A concept of classroom practice that reflects knowledge of child development and an understanding of the unique personality, learning style and family background of each child. These practices are defined by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC).⁷

Developmental domains: Areas of a child's development, including: *gross motor development* (large muscle movement and control); *fine motor development* (hand and finger skills, and hand-eye coordination); *speech and language/communication*; *the child's relationship to objects* (for example, toys), *people* and *the larger world*; and *emotions and feeling states* (such as coping behavior and self-help skills).⁷

Social-emotional development: The process of gaining interpersonal skills — including identifying and managing one's emotions — and competencies with effective interactions between adults and children and peers.⁶

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Process quality: An aspect of program quality that is assessed primarily through observation and has been found to be more predictive of child outcomes than structural indicators.⁴ Process quality can be assessed with measures of interactions and teaching, including staff–child interactions, discipline, supervision, encouraging children to communicate and using language to develop reasoning. It also assesses provisions for learning, including classroom furnishings, room arrangement, gross motor equipment, art, blocks, dramatic play and nature or science. Other measures include emotional climate, such as teacher sensitivity and behavior management, and instructional climate, such as concept development and quality of feedback.

Structural quality: An aspect of program quality that is assessed by measures such as teachers' years of education, length of the program in hours per day, group size, cost of care and a teacher-child ratio.²

Key Early Childhood Organizations

Center on Enhancing Early Learning Outcomes (CEELO): Funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, the Center strengthens the capacity of state education agencies (SEAs) to lead sustained improvements in early learning opportunities and outcomes. CEELO works in partnership with SEAs, state and local early childhood leaders, and other federal and national technical assistance providers to promote innovation and accountability.¹¹

National Accreditation Commission for Early Care and Education Programs (NAC): Organization that offers early childhood leaders the opportunity to demonstrate and document quality performance using research-based criteria and evidence-based practices. NAC provides a comprehensive, ongoing quality improvement system that recognizes the diversity among programs through the self-study and award process.¹¹

National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC): Organization that promotes high-quality learning for children, birth through age 8, by connecting practice, policy and research. It is also the largest national accrediting organization for preschool programs.¹¹

National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER): Organization that conducts and communicates research to support high-quality, effective early childhood education for all young children. It offers independent, research-based advice and technical assistance to policymakers, journalists, researchers and educators.¹¹

Accountability and Assessment

Child Assessment Scoring System (CLASS): A time-based measure for which data collectors observe four 20-minute cycles of classroom activities focused on

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teacher-child interactions, each followed by a 10-minute scoring period. Observations are grouped into three domains: emotional support, classroom organization and instructional support.⁶

Comprehensive assessment system: A coordinated and comprehensive system of multiple assessments — each of which is valid and reliable for its specified purpose and for the population with which it will be used — that organizes information about the process and context of young children's learning and development in order to help early childhood educators make informed instructional and programmatic decisions. A comprehensive assessment system includes, at a minimum:

- a. screening measures
- b. formative assessments
- c. measures of environmental quality, and
- d. measures of the quality of adult-child interactions.⁸

Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale – Revised (ECERS): An instrument designed to assess group programs for preschool to kindergarten children, from ages 2 through 5. Thoroughly revised from a previous version, the total scale consists of 43 items.⁴

Family Child Care Environment Rating Scale – Revised (FCCERS): An instrument designed to assess family child care programs conducted in a child care provider's home. Thoroughly revised from a previous version, the total scale consists of 38 items.⁴

Infant-Toddler Environment Rating Scale – Revised (ITERS): An instrument designed to assess group programs for children from birth to age 2 ½. Thoroughly revised from a previous version, the total scale consists of 39 items.⁴

Kindergarten entry assessment (KEA): A common, state-wide assessment that is aligned with the states' early learning and development standards and informs instruction and services in the early elementary grades that:

- a. covers all of the essential domains of school readiness
- b. is valid, reliable and appropriate for the target population and for the purpose for which it will be used
- c. is administered to all children who are entering a public school kindergarten statewide, and
- d. is appropriate for all children, including English learners and children with disabilities⁶

KEAs are sometimes referred to as kindergarten readiness assessments (KRAs).

Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS): A method to assess, improve and communicate the level of quality in early care and educational settings. A comprehensive QRIS includes the following components: (1) quality standards for programs and practitioners, (2) supports and an infrastructure to meet such standards,

(3) monitoring and accountability systems to ensure compliance with quality standards, (4) ongoing financial assistance linked to meeting quality standards, and (5) engagement and outreach strategies.⁶

Screening measures: Age- and developmentally appropriate, valid and reliable instruments that are used to identify children who may need follow-up services to address developmental, learning or health needs in, at a minimum, the areas of physical health, behavioral health, oral health, child development, vision and hearing.⁸

Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System (TQRIS): System through which the state uses a set of progressively higher program standards to evaluate the quality of an early learning and development program and to support program improvement. A Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System consists of four components: (1) tiered program standards with multiple rating categories that clearly and meaningfully differentiate program quality levels; (2) monitoring to evaluate program quality based on the program standards; (3) supports to help programs meet progressively higher standards (for example, through training, technical assistance, financial support); and (4) public availability of program quality ratings — and includes a process for validating the system.⁸

Statewide Alignment Efforts

Early Childhood Advisory Councils (ECAC): These councils were called for in the Improving Head Start Act of 2007 to improve the quality, availability and coordination of programs and services for children from birth to age 5. The councils are charged with developing recommendations to increase access to high-quality early care and education programs; conducting periodic needs assessments of the quality and availability of programs; and advising state policymakers on the development of a comprehensive early childhood data system, a statewide professional development system, and research-based early learning standards.¹

Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems (ECCS): Process that brings together primary care providers, teachers, families and caregivers to develop seamless systems of care for children in the critical formative years from birth to age 3. Working with health care providers, social services, and child care and early childhood education programs, early childhood comprehensive systems help children grow up healthy and ready to learn by addressing their physical, emotional and social health in a broad-based and coordinated way. A grant program known as Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems: Building Health Through Integration awards grants to states and organizations with significant experience developing and implementing statewide strategies to build systems that improve the health of young children. Grantees partner with other providers and programs to better integrate and improve services for young children. The resulting systems:

- a. increase access to health care

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- b. identify and manage social, emotional and behavioral risks
- c. improve early care and promote early learning
- d. educate parents and caregivers about healthy child development, and
- e. provide support for families and caregivers.⁹

Federal Early Childhood Programs and Funding Sources

Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF): A federal fund that integrates multiple funding sources for child care activities across the country, including funding from the Department of Health and Human Services, the Administration for Children and Families and the Office of Child Care (OCC). CCDF programs provide services to children and help eligible families obtain child care in order to work or attend training or school. In addition, services may be provided to children in need of protective services. CCDF makes funds available through block grants (known as CCDBG) to states. Subsidized child care services are available to eligible families through child care certificates or vouchers or contracts with providers. States determine eligibility for CCDF services within federal limits and also set payment rates for providers and sliding fee scales that determine parent fees. States must ensure that parents have equal access to providers and the same selection of providers as nonsubsidized parents.¹

Early Head Start: A federal program that provides educational and home visitation services to children from birth to age 3 and their mothers. In 1995, Congress approved an extension of Head Start known as Early Head Start, which is designed to serve impoverished mothers and their children from birth to age 3. Some grantees are home-visitations programs in which social workers visit mothers at home to provide support for breastfeeding, nutritional advice and resources to promote children's healthy development. Others are center-based child care programs; some are a hybrid of the two.³

Even Start: The U.S. Department of Education's Even Start Family Literacy Program provides parents with instruction in a variety of literacy skills and assists them in promoting their children's educational development. Its projects must provide participating families with an integrated program of early childhood education, adult basic education and parenting education.⁷

Financing strategies: There are several strategies for integrating various funding streams to enhance services to children and families, including blending, braiding or layering. Early education funds must be integrated since the funding is coming from various agencies and programs. Even when funding is braided, the managing program continues to track each individual funding stream and adheres to each funder's specific requirements.¹

Head Start (HS): A federal program that provides comprehensive developmental services for low-income, preschool children ages 3 through 5 and social services for

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their families. It began in 1965 and is administered by the Administration for Children and Families of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Head Start provides services in four areas: education, health, parent involvement and social services. Grants are awarded to local public or private nonprofit agencies.⁷

Head Start-State Collaboration Grants: The Office of Head Start grants awards to each state, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico to create partnerships at the state level to support multi-agency and public-private partnerships. Head Start State Collaboration Offices assist in developing collaborative initiatives, structures and mechanisms and creating linkages between Head Start and other state initiatives, service systems and priorities.¹

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Part B (Part B-Section 619 of IDEA): A federal program that provides formula grants to states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico to make available special education and related services for children ages 3 through 5 with disabilities. To be eligible for these grants, states must serve all eligible children with disabilities ages 3 through 5 and have an approved application under Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).⁸

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Part C (Part C of IDEA): A federal program that awards formula grants to states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the Secretary of the Interior and outlying areas to assist them in implementing statewide systems of coordinated, comprehensive, multidisciplinary, interagency programs and making early intervention services available to children with disabilities, from birth through age 2, and their families.⁸

Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting program (MIECHV): A federal program that supports pregnant women and families and helps parents of children from birth to age 5 tap the resources and develop the skills they need to raise children who are physically, socially and emotionally healthy and ready to learn. It funds states to develop and implement voluntary, evidence-based home-visiting programs, using models that are proven to improve child health and are cost effective. These programs help prevent child abuse and neglect, encourage positive parenting, and promote child development and school readiness.⁹

Preschool Development and Expansion Grants: A federal grant competition that supports states to (1) build or enhance a preschool program infrastructure that would enable the delivery of high-quality preschool services to children, and (2) expand high-quality preschool programs in targeted communities that would serve as models for expanding preschool to all 4-year-olds from low- and moderate-income families.⁸

Race to the Top - District Grants (RTT-D): A federal grant competition that supports bold, locally directed improvements in learning and teaching that will directly improve student achievement. It is aimed at classrooms and the relationship between educators

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and students. The competition invited applicants to demonstrate how they can personalize education for all students in their schools.⁸

Race to the Top - Early Learning Challenge Grants (RTT-ELC): A federal grant competition open to states. It has focused on improving early learning and development programs for young children by supporting states' efforts to: (1) increase the number and percentage of low-income and disadvantaged children in each age group of infants, toddlers and preschoolers who are enrolled in high-quality early learning programs; (2) design and implement an integrated system of high-quality early learning programs and services; and (3) ensure that any use of assessments conforms with the recommendations of the National Research Council's reports on early childhood.⁸

Teacher Quality

Child Development Associate credential (CDA): A credential earned by an early childhood educator who has demonstrated skills in working with young children and their families, by successfully completing an established credentialing process. The CDA credentialing process is administered by the Council of Early Childhood Professional Recognition.⁷

Coaching: A relationship-based process designed to build capacity for specific professional dispositions, skill and behaviors and is focused on goal-setting and achievement. The process is led by an expert with specialized knowledge and skills who often serves in a different professional role than the recipient(s). In a child care setting, the recipient is typically a lead or an assistant teacher.⁵

Early childhood credentials: Academic degrees, licenses or certificates awarded to individuals who successfully complete state or national requirements to enter specialized roles in the early childhood profession.⁵

Professional certification: The process used by a nongovernmental state or national agency to grant professional recognition to individuals who meet the requirements of the agency. The Council for Professional Recognition and the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards offer national early childhood credentials.⁵

State teacher licensure: The process used by a state governmental agency to grant professional recognition to individuals who meet state requirements to teach in a specialized discipline such as early childhood or special education. State credentials may be called certificates or licenses.⁵

Pre-service training: Education and training programs offered to child care staff prior to their formal work in a child care program.⁷

Professional learning (PL): Opportunities for child care providers to get ongoing training to increase their preparation and skill to care for children. These opportunities include mentoring programs, credentialing programs, in-service training and degree programs.⁷

Family Engagement Strategies

Attachment: A psychological bond between adult and child. It is believed that secure bonding leads to psychological well-being and resistance to ordinary as well as extreme stress experienced throughout a lifetime.⁷

Dual-generation strategies: An approach to stimulating young children's healthy development that includes promoting the capabilities and resources of parents or caregivers. Often these strategies link the provision of services for children (such as quality childcare) with the provision of services for their parents (such as employment counseling or housing assistance) through programs aimed at the entire family.¹⁰

Dual-generation strategies are sometimes referred to as two-generation strategies.

Family and community engagement: A process to build relationships with families and community stakeholders that support family well-being, strong relationships between parents and their children, families' partnership with and participation in their children's educational settings, building parent networks to facilitate peer learning, and nurturing ongoing learning and development for families and their children.⁶

Family literacy: Literacy programs that incorporate adult literacy for adult family members through preschool and school-age education and parenting education.⁷

Parent education: Instruction or information directed toward parents on effective parenting.⁷

Other Important Early Childhood Terms

Essential domains of school readiness: The domains necessary to prepare children for school entry, including language and literacy development, cognition and general knowledge (including early mathematics and early scientific development), approaches toward learning, physical well-being, motor development, and social and emotional development.⁸

High-need (at-risk) children: Children from birth until kindergarten entry who are from low-income families or otherwise in need of special assistance and support, including children who have disabilities or developmental delays, who are English learners, who reside on "Indian lands" (as that term is defined by Section 8013(6) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965), who are migrant, homeless, or in foster care; and other children as identified by the state.⁸

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School readiness: The state of early development that enables an individual child to engage in and benefit from first-grade learning experiences. Researchers, policymakers and advocates have described school readiness in different ways, but generally they refer to children's development in five arenas: health and physical development; social and emotional development; approaches toward learning; language development and communication; and, cognition and general knowledge. Some policymakers and researchers also use the term school readiness to describe a school's capacity to educate children.⁷

Targeted access: Program serves only children with particular characteristics or risk factors associated with school failure. States differ on what constitutes a risk factor.²

Universal access: Program provides classroom experiences, regardless of income or background.²

Resources

¹ Administration for Children and Families, Office of Child Care and Office of Head Start, https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/quilt_glossaryforpartnerships.pdf

² Dotterer, A.M., Burchinal, M., Bryant, D., Early, D., & Pianta, R.C. "Comparing Universal and Targeted Pre-Kindergarten Programs," University of Virginia, Curry School of Education, <http://curry.virginia.edu>

³ Edcentral, <http://www.edcentral.org/edcyclopedia/early-childhood/>

⁴ Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, <http://ers.fpg.unc.edu/>

⁵ NAEYC, <http://www.naeyc.org/files/naeyc/Adult%20Education%20Glossary.pdf>

⁶ Ounce of Prevention, <http://www.theounce.org/btctoolkit/resources/glossary>

⁷ Research Connections, <http://www.researchconnections.org/childcare/childcare-glossary>

⁸ U.S. Department of Education, <http://www.ed.gov/early-learning/elc-draft-summary/definitions> and <http://www.ed.gov/early-learning>

⁹ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration, Maternal and Child Health, <http://mchb.hrsa.gov/AZ/index.html>

¹⁰ The Center for High Impact Philanthropy, The University of Pennsylvania, <http://www.impact.upenn.edu/us-domestic-issues/two-generation-models>

¹¹ Information can be found on the organizations' websites.