NAEYC-NAECS/SDE Position Statement on Early Learning Standards
Self-Assessment and Planning Tool

The Position Statement on Early Learning Standards (ELS), developed by NAEYC and NAECS/SDE[1], addresses the significant educational, ethical, developmental, programmatic, assessment, and policy issues related to early learning standards. The position statement outlines four *features* that are essential if early learning standards are to be developmentally effective; these features are further delineated by three to five *recommendations* that help ensure that the feature is in place. The recommendations in this position statement are most relevant to young children of preschool or prekindergarten age, with and without disabilities, in group settings including prekindergarten programs, community child care, family child care, and Head Start. The recommendations also can guide the development and implementation of standards for younger and older children as well.

The Self-Assessment and Planning Tool is a guide for states' and others' use during an ELS development process, to help determine if the process undertaken is aligned with the features and recommendations outlined in the position statement. The position statement features are noted in the chart below. The features are followed by recommendations from the position statement for ELS development activities or content. In addition to the recommendations from the position statement, suggested steps regarding the development process and a framework for organizing the ELS document are included. *Guidance* is provided regarding how each recommendation, suggested step, or framework item can be addressed. Indicate in the center column the extent to which the recommendation/suggested steps/framework item is addressed in the process of developing your ELS or in a draft document. If the recommendation/ suggested steps/framework item is addressed, indicate *how* in the center column. If the recommendation/suggested steps/framework item is under consideration, or not fully addressed at this time, note in the column on the right the actions that your planning group will take to ensure that it will be addressed. Also note in this column resources that have been or will be developed to supplement the early learning standards.

Definitions of terms used in the Self-Assessment and Planning Tool are provided in the appendix. Many of the references cited in the position statement will also be helpful in planning and developing your ELS document.

Guidance to Assist ELS Development so that The Recommendation Is Addressed	Extent to Which the Recommendation Is Addressed in the Process or Standards Document	Actions to Take so that the Recommendation Will Be Addressed; Supplementary Resources to Be Developed
Getting Started: A framework for ELS initial development activities		
Steps should include: • Identify an ELS development workgroup • Become familiar with the ELS position statement and other resources • Make preliminary decisions regarding scope, format, etc. • Review materials from other states and organizations • Refine decisions and draft standards/guidelines	The steps are addressed: ├────────┼────────┼────────┤ Not Not Somewhat Fully* Under Yet Consideration *If fully addressed, describe how:	

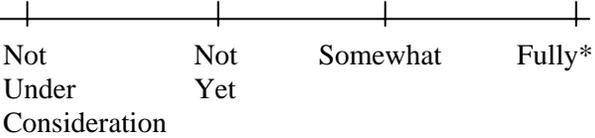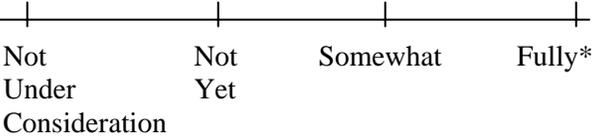[1] www.naeyc.org/about/positions/pdf/position_statement.pdf

Guidance to Assist ELS Development so that The Recommendation Is Addressed	Extent to Which the Recommendation Is Addressed in the Process or Standards Document	Actions to Take so that the Recommendation Will Be Addressed; Supplementary Resources to Be Developed
Feature: Effective early learning standards are developed and reviewed through informed, inclusive processes.		
Recommendation: The process of developing and reviewing early learning standards relies on relevant, valid sources of expertise.		
The process should use scientifically valid, relevant evidence to create and review expectations about content and desired outcomes. Review publications from national organizations, such as the National Research Council, National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, International Reading Association, National Council for the Social Studies, and National Science Teachers Association. Over time, there should be a plan for rigorous validation of the standards through studies demonstrating that the expectations in the standards predict positive developmental and learning outcomes.	The recommendation is addressed: Not Under Consideration Not Yet Somewhat Fully* *If fully addressed, describe how:	
Recommendation: The process of developing and reviewing early learning standards involves multiple stakeholders. Stakeholders may include community members, families, early childhood educators and special educators, and other professional groups. In all cases, those with specific expertise in early development and learning must be involved.		
The process for developing/revising ELS should involve many participants who represent the wide range of cultures, communities, settings, and life experiences within which young children are educated. Families should be represented among ELS developers. The process should include opportunities for dialogue between the public school community (kindergarten and beyond) and others responsible for children's early learning (infant/toddler and preschool programs).	The recommendation is addressed: Not Under Consideration Not Yet Somewhat Fully* *If fully addressed, describe how:	

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Feature (cont.): Effective early learning standards are developed and reviewed through informed, inclusive processes.		
Recommendation: Once early learning standards have been developed, standards developers and relevant professional associations ensure that standards are shared with all stakeholders, creating multiple opportunities for discussion and exchange.		
Standards should be communicated in clear language that is understood by multiple sectors of the early childhood community (community child care, early intervention, family child care) as well as the K-3 community, families, and others committed to positive outcomes for young children. The process (following ELS development) should include ongoing dialogue about early learning standards and their implications. Seek input from initial group of stakeholders and expand to input from others, where possible.	The recommendation is addressed: Not Under Consideration Not Yet Somewhat Fully* *If fully addressed, describe how:	
Recommendation: Early learning standards remain relevant and research based by using a systematic, interactive process for regular review and revision.		
Early learning standards should be regularly re-examined with processes like those used in the standards' initial development: • Based on scientifically valid, relevant evidence • Involving multiple stakeholders • Shared with all stakeholders, creating multiple opportunities for discussion and exchange. As K-12 standards are revised, ELS should be revised and revisited as part of the process so that expectations align meaningfully across the age and grade spectrum.	The recommendation is addressed: Not Under Consideration Not Yet Somewhat Fully* *If fully addressed, describe how:	

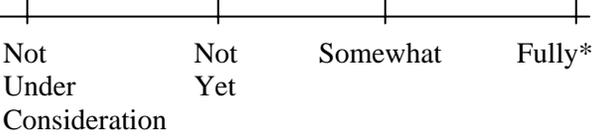| Guidance to Assist ELS Development so that The Recommendation Is Addressed	Extent to Which the Recommendation Is Addressed in the Process or Standards Document	Actions to Take so that the Recommendation Will Be Addressed; Supplementary Resources to Be Developed
Getting Started: A framework for organizing the ELS document		
Early learning standards documents vary in their organization. The following components may be helpful to those using the document: • Guiding principles—what you believe about young children and about their development and learning • Overview of and rationale for each content area • Expectations for young children's learning (learning standard) or descriptions of what children should know or do within a discipline (content standard) Specificity: General → Specific • Description of knowledge or level of skill that children should acquire (benchmarks, performance standards)—also noted as a recommendation on page 6 of the Self-Assessment and Planning Tool Specificity: General → Specific • Examples of children's behaviors • Expectations for the program—agency, teachers' support for children's learning, etc. (program standards)	Identify which components are under consideration or included in the ELS document. Indicate the level of specificity of the learning/content standards. If benchmarks or performance standards are under consideration or included, indicate their level of specificity. Although vagueness can be a problem, highly specific standards/benchmarks have both advantages and potential risks if overly prescriptive.	

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Feature: Effective early learning standards emphasize significant, developmentally appropriate content and outcomes.		
Recommendation: Effective early learning standards give emphasis to *all* domains of development and learning.		
Domains should include cognitive, social, emotional, physical, and language development, as well as motivation and approaches to learning. Whether included in the above or discussed separately, standards should also address discipline-specific areas (*e.g.,* arts, literacy, mathematics, science). There are a variety of ways to organize domains.	The recommendation is addressed: ├──────────┼──────────┼──────────┤ Not Not Somewhat Fully* Under Yet Consideration *If fully addressed, describe how:	
Recommendation: The content and desired outcomes of early learning standards are meaningful and important to children's current well being and later learning.		
Standards should focus on the "big ideas" within domains or academic disciplines that are significant for young children. Significance should be assessed through an exploration of research to determine if the content makes a difference in children's current well being or later outcomes. Reviews of other jurisdictions' and/or professional associations' ELS can assist developers in identifying meaningful content.	The recommendation is addressed: ├──────────┼──────────┼──────────┤ Not Not Somewhat Fully* Under Yet Consideration *If fully addressed, describe how:	

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Feature (cont.): Effective early learning standards emphasize significant, developmentally appropriate content and outcomes.		
Recommendation: Rather than relying on simplifications of standards for older children, the content and desired outcomes of effective early learning standards are based on research about the processes, sequences, and long-term consequences of early learning and development.		
Early learning standards should be built *forward*, from their earliest beginnings, rather than being simplified versions of standards for older children • Standards should be based on appropriate expectations for the age group(s) selected for the ELS' focus. Early learning standards should align with knowledge/skills that children will develop later in life, with connections that are meaningful, rather than mechanical or superficial.	The recommendation is addressed: ├────────┼────────┼────────┤ Not Not Somewhat Fully* Under Yet Consideration *If fully addressed, describe how:	
Recommendation: Effective early learning standards create appropriate expectations by linking content and desired outcomes to specific ages or developmental periods.		
If content standards cover several years (*e.g.,* 3-6), the document should also include specific "benchmarks" to describe the growth over time of knowledge and skills related to particular standards. To address the wide developmental variability of young children, ELS should include flexible descriptions of research-based learning trajectories, or "developmental continua."	The recommendation is addressed: ├────────┼────────┼────────┤ Not Not Somewhat Fully* Under Yet Consideration *If fully addressed, describe how:	

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Feature (cont.): Effective early learning standards emphasize significant, developmentally appropriate content and outcomes.		
Recommendation: The content of effective early learning standards, and expectations for children's mastery of the standards, must accommodate the variations—community, cultural, linguistic, and individual—that best support positive outcomes. To do so, early learning standards must encompass the widest possible range of children's life situations and experiences, including disabilities.		
Early learning standards should be flexible enough to encourage teachers and other professionals to embed culturally and individually relevant experiences in the curriculum, creating adaptations that promote success for all children • Diverse stakeholder representation on the ELS development workgroup, as well as the use of scientifically valid and relevant evidence to develop ELS content, will help to ensure that this recommendation is addressed.	The recommendation is addressed: ├────────┼────────┼────────┤ Not Not Somewhat Fully* Under Yet Consideration *If fully addressed, describe how:	
Feature: Early learning standards gain their effectiveness through implementation and assessment practices that support all children's development in ethical, appropriate ways.		
Recommendation: Effective early learning standards require equally effective curriculum, classroom practices, and teaching strategies that connect with young children's interests and abilities, and that promote positive development and learning.		
Early learning standards should be developed so that child knowledge and skills are achievable through: • Language-rich interactions and relationships with adults and peers • Challenging, well-planned curriculum offering depth, choice, and exploration • Teachers' active promotion of concept and skill development in meaningful contexts • Adaptations for children with disabilities and other special needs • An integrated approach to teaching and learning.	The recommendation is addressed: ├────────┼────────┼────────┤ Not Not Somewhat Fully* Under Yet Consideration *If fully addressed, describe how:	

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Feature (cont.): Early learning standards gain their effectiveness through implementation and assessment practices that support all children's development in ethical, appropriate ways.		
Recommendation: Tools for assessing young children's progress must be clearly connected to important learning represented in the standards; must be technically, developmentally, and culturally valid; and must yield comprehensive, useful information.		
Assessments that are developed or adopted to use with ELS should have technical adequacy (reliability and validity) and also be developmentally valid, including observations by knowledgeable adults in real-life early childhood contexts. The needs of culturally diverse children and children with disabilities should be included in the development of standards-related assessments. The information yielded by assessments should be useful to practitioners and families.	The recommendation is addressed: ┼——————┼——————┼——————┼ Not · · · · · · Not · · · · · Somewhat · · · · · Fully* Under · · · · · Yet Consideration *If fully addressed, describe how:	
Recommendation: Information gained from assessments of young children's progress with respect to standards must be used to benefit children. Assessment and accountability systems should be used to improve practices and services and should not be used to rank, sort, or penalize young children.		
Assessments that are developed or adopted to use with ELS should be part of a system in which assessment results in improvements in curriculum and teaching practices, better developmental outcomes, greater engagement in learning, and access to special interventions and supports for those children who are having difficulty. The system should ensure that assessment does not result in children being denied services or excluded from beneficial learning opportunities. The system should ensure that single test scores are not used to categorize children.	The recommendation is addressed: ┼——————┼——————┼——————┼ Not · · · · · · Not · · · · · Somewhat · · · · · Fully* Under · · · · · Yet Consideration *If fully addressed, describe how:	

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Feature: Effective early learning standards require a foundation of support for early childhood programs, professionals, and families.		
Recommendation: Research-based standards for early childhood programs, and adequate resources to support high-quality programs, build environments where early learning standards can be implemented effectively.		
Clear expectations and supports for program quality should be a preliminary step for creating ELS. Often-cited components of program quality include: • Appropriate group size and child-staff ratios for the age(s) of the children served • Use of a curriculum that is goal oriented, comprehensive, and developmentally and culturally appropriate • Assessment of young children through systems that use ethically grounded, high-quality, and varied methods • Alignment of the curriculum, assessment system, and program evaluation activities.	The recommendation is addressed: Not Under Consideration Not Yet Somewhat Fully* *If fully addressed, describe how:	
Recommendation: Significant expansion of professional development is essential if all early childhood teachers and administrators are to gain the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed to implement early learning standards.		
Efforts to create ELS should be accompanied by in-depth professional development, coaching, and mentoring for teachers, administrators, and teacher educators. Professional development experiences should address ELS as well as appropriate curriculum, teaching strategies, relationships, and assessment tools.	The recommendation is addressed: Not Under Consideration Not Yet Somewhat Fully* *If fully addressed, describe how:	

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Feature (cont.): Effective early learning standards require a foundation of support for early childhood programs, professionals, and families.		
Recommendation: Early learning standards will have the most positive effects if families—key partners in young children's learning—are provided with respectful communication and support.		
The ELS development/implementation process should be supplemented with activities and resources for families and other community members. These activities/resources should support the experiences and relationships families and other community members engage in with young children.	The recommendation is addressed: Not Under Consideration Not Yet Somewhat Fully* *If fully addressed, describe how:	

Appendix

Definitions of Terms Used in the Self-Assessment and Planning Tool

Benchmarks   Specific description of knowledge or skill that students should acquire by a particular point in their schooling (source: Mid-continent Regional Lab [McREL])—usually tied to a grade or age level.

Content standards   Summary descriptions of what it is that students should know and/or be able to do within a particular discipline (source: McREL).

Early learning standards Expectations for the learning and development of young children.

Performance standards   Levels of student performance in respect to the knowledge or skill described in a single benchmark or a set of closely related benchmarks (source: McREL).

Program standards   Expectations for the characteristics or quality of schools, child care centers, and other educational settings. (Note: Head Start uses the term "Performance Standards" in a way that is closer to the definition of "program standards"—describing expectations for the functioning of a Head Start program and not the accomplishments of children in the program.)

Standards   The broadest of a family of terms referring to expectations for student learning (source: The National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing).

A working group of representatives from NAEYC, CCSSO, ERIC, and other groups has developed a more complete glossary of terms related to standards, assessment, and accountability:

www.ccsso.org/projects/SCASS/projects/early_childhood_education_assessment_consortium/publications_and_products/2840.cfm