

Memo from the Commission on Professional Excellence
April 10, 2025

The *Unifying Framework for the Early Childhood Education Profession* is a consensus document that was developed through an [iterative, inclusive process](#) known as Power to the Profession (P2P). This initiative was led by a broad-based Task Force of 15 national early childhood organizations representing educators, caregivers, administrators, principals, employers, higher education faculty, and others.¹ The Task Force met regularly over 36 months, reviewing public comments and revising drafts that were organized into eight “Decision Cycles.”

The initial Decision Cycle addressed the profession’s name, identity, scope, and responsibilities. With multiple rounds of responses and engagement, the [content outlined in Decision Cycle 1](#) is based on the central concept that “members of the early childhood education profession include individuals who care for and promote the learning, development and well-being of children birth through age eight in all early childhood settings while meeting the qualifications of the profession and having mastery of its specialized knowledge, skills, and competencies” – and that “*these individuals are called early childhood educators.*”

This defining consensus has continued to inform the implementation of the Unifying Framework, the leadership of which was transferred in 2021 to the [Commission on Professional Excellence](#), a professional governance body with organizational and individual educator members.

States, communities, and individual programs have likewise continued to adopt, adapt, and align with the elements of the “early childhood education” profession, including the “[Professional Standards and Competencies of Early Childhood Educators](#)” and the designations of ECE I, II, and III.²

Examples include:

- Connecticut explicitly developing “[Wage Supports for Early Childhood Educators](#)” and an “[Early Childhood Educator Compensation Scale](#),” as directed by the state legislature.

¹ Members of the P2P Task Force: American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees • American Federation of Teachers • Associate Degree Early Childhood Teacher Educators • Child Care Aware of America • Council for Professional Recognition • Division for Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children • Early Care and Education Consortium • National Association for Family Child Care • National Association for the Education of Young Children • National Association of Early Childhood Teacher Educators • National Association of Elementary School Principals • National Education Association • National Head Start Association • Service Employees International Union • ZERO TO THREE

² The Unifying Framework lays out a structure for the ECE profession that includes three designations – Early Childhood Educator (ECE) I, II and III. Each designation has a required level of professional preparation and a scope of practice. Individuals serving in ECE I, II and III roles may work as part of teaching teams, and compensation is intended to increase at each designation level due to the level of preparation and increased responsibilities associated with the scope of practice.

- Massachusetts explicitly naming their “[Early Childhood Educators Scholarship](#)” program, in which the Department of Early Education and Care (EEC) and the Department of Higher Education (DHE) work jointly to help early childhood educators increase their qualifications through a college degree.
- Missouri explicitly developing their [career qualifications framework](#) for the early childhood field by naming Early Childhood Educator I, II, and III as the structure for the state’s ECE profession.
- Washington, DC explicitly naming the [Early Childhood Educator Pay Equity Fund](#) to advance their “first-in-the-nation program aimed at achieving pay parity between early childhood educators and their K-12 counterparts.”

Philanthropic leaders in early childhood education have also advanced aligned naming and definitional conventions, through initiatives such as [WeVision Early Ed](#), in which “early childhood education” is differentiated from “trusted caregiving,” and in which:

- “ECE programs (regardless of their setting type, specialty, or philosophy) are implemented by *intentionally prepared and competent early childhood educators* who are accountable for meeting industry-recognized standards of practice defined by their professional associations and government agencies” while
- “Trusted caregivers are individuals who work under the direct auspices of families without significant oversight from ECE professional associations and government agencies.”

Questions of identity are – and [have long been](#) – at the heart of our collective work to advance a unified, diverse, effective, and well-compensated early childhood education profession working across states and settings. The Commission on Professional Excellence is proud to include and represent individuals who, no matter where they work, consider themselves to be “early childhood educators” who care for and promote the learning, development and well-being of children – and who are committed to meeting the qualifications of the profession, having mastery of its specialized knowledge, skills, and competencies, and being held accountable to its standards.