Creating Guidelines and Recommendations to Inform Development of Massachusetts Unified Early Learning Standards

Key Issues

As Massachusetts embarks on the creation of unified early learning standards, the Depts. of Early Education and Care (EEC) and Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) are looking for guidance in key areas that will shape the new standards. Following is an overview of these key issues. These issues will be the focus of the discussion during the March 5 full-day session. Participants will be divided into small groups to respond to the framing questions and to develop recommendations on how the state should address these key issues as it drafts the new unified early learning standards for Birth through K.

### Key Issue

#### Issue 1: BALANCE

The parameter of “Balance” examines standards in terms of their distribution across the five dimensions of early learning (i.e., Physical Well-Being/Motor Development; Social/Emotional Development; Physical/Gross Motor; Cognition/General Knowledge; etc.). This allows us to compare the relative degree of emphasis that the standards place on each of these dimensions of readiness.

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| **Issue 1:** BALANCE | The parameter of “Balance” examines standards in terms of their distribution across the five dimensions of early learning (i.e., Physical Well-Being/Motor Development; Social/Emotional Development; Physical/Gross Motor; Cognition/General Knowledge; etc.). This allows us to compare the relative degree of emphasis that the standards place on each of these dimensions of readiness. | • What should the balance of indicators be for each age group?  
• How should the balance percentages change with different age groups (e.g., more on physical for younger children; more on cognitive for older children)?  
• Is there a minimum percentage that should adhere across all age groups? |

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**Five Dimensions of School Readiness**

1. Physical Well-Being and Motor Development
2. Social and Emotional Development
3. Approaches Toward Learning
4. Language Development
5. Cognition and General Knowledge


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| ISSUE 2: LEARNING TRAJECTORIES | Learning trajectories are “typical, predictable sequences of thinking that emerge as students develop understanding of an idea.” Also known as “learning progressions,” these trajectories are “empirically supported hypotheses about the levels or waypoints of thinking, knowledge, and skill in using that knowledge that students are likely to go through as they learn…. They are hypotheses about the paths that children follow as they learn a topic, building their knowledge or skill in a subject. Learning trajectories are premised on the recognition that “learning takes place and builds over time, and that instruction has to take account of what has gone before and what will come next.” A comparison of the development of learning trajectories to other approaches to curriculum development: “Learning Trajectories begin by defining a starting point based on children’s entering understanding and skills and then working forward.” They are hypotheses rooted in actual empirical study of how students’ thinking grows in response to specific instructional experience. In contrast, traditional “scope and sequence” approaches are premised on the disciplinary logic of the subject itself and on conventional practice. A third approach, Common Core standards, begins with the goal (college and career-ready standards) and work back downwards through the grades. “This mapping is based on a logical rendering of the set of desired outcomes needed to define pathways or benchmarks to the standard.” The Consortium for Policy Research in Education argues that “learning trajectories are too complex and too conditional to serve as standards. Still, learning trajectories point to the way to optimal learning sequences and warn against the hazards that could lead to sequence errors.” (Source: Daro, P.; Mosher, F.A., and Corcoran, T., Consortium for Policy Research in Education [CPRE], “Learning Trajectories in Mathematics,” Research Report, Jan. 2011.) | - Do we need them?  
- In all domains?  
- How would we go about developing them?  
- How would such learning trajectories comport with Common Core? |
### Key Issue

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<th>ISSUE 3: DIVERGENT STANDARDS APPROACHES -- (SOLOMON’S DILEMMA)</th>
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<td>Our two national documents, the Head Start Child Development Early Learning Framework (HSCDELF) and Common Core, are not closely aligned. This poses a challenge for Massachusetts, as well as for the entire early childhood field, because both documents are important and valuable to children and the field of early education.</td>
<td>• How do we resolve the dichotomy between the HSCDELF and the Common Core?</td>
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| ISSUE 4: VARIATION ACROSS THE STATES | States have moved towards national K-12 standards, with 45 of 50 states adopting the Common Core Standards to date. However, early learning standards still vary widely from state to state. Because Massachusetts is in the first cohort of states to draft unified early learning standards, the rest of the nation will watch to see how we resolve the complexities inherent in this task. For this reason, the relationship between the standards we create and those of other states is quite germane. The approach Massachusetts adopts for our unified early learning standards will be very influential on other states’ direction. | • How much variation in standards should there be?  
• Is it time to consider a common basic set of early childhood standards?  
• How could this be done? |

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**Five Dimensions of School Readiness**

I. Physical Well-Being and Motor Development

II. Social and Emotional Development

III. Approaches Toward Learning

IV. Language Development

V. Cognition and General Knowledge

For the MA Early Learning Standards, “Executive Function” will be woven into these dimensions.

## Key Issue

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<th>ISSUE 5: SERVING DIVERSE POPULATIONS</th>
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<td>The standards we adopt must work equally well for diverse populations.</td>
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## Framing Questions

- How do we best go about creating standards for children with disabilities?
- For children from families where English is not the home language?
- For immigrant children?
- For youngsters in foster care?
- For children who are not in conventional “classroom” early education and care settings (e.g., part-time, intermittent, care)?

### Five Dimensions of School Readiness*

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**Key Issue** | **Issue Definition** | **Framing Questions**
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**ISSUE 6:** USING STANDARDS EFFECTIVELY | We aim to create standards that can be used effectively in many settings and by different kinds of educators, to ensure quality education for all of Massachusetts’s children. | • What uses (beyond assessment) of standards should be considered?  
• What must be considered if standards are to be used for professional development, certification?  
• What must be considered if standards are to be used for parenting education and support?  
• What must be considered if standards are to be used for curriculum development? |