I. OVERVIEW

This model provides a common system for all Colorado early childhood professionals to document and quantify their professional growth and accomplishments, and to define and advance the profession. It uses Colorado’s Competencies for Early Childhood Educators and Administrators framework (approved by Colorado’s Early Childhood Leadership Commission in May 2013) to integrate the pathways of formal education, training, experience, and specialized credentials and certifications. Individuals accumulate points along each of four pathways – formal education, ongoing professional development, experience and demonstrated competencies. Total points assign one of six professional designations.

The model is guided by Colorado’s Early Learning Professional Development System Plan (endorsed by Colorado’s Early Childhood Leadership Commission in 2010). Goal One of the plan addresses the credential:

Improve the effectiveness of early learning professionals by establishing and adopting an aligned, research-based, tiered set of competencies as the basis for credentialing early learning professionals at all levels and approving professional development program (including teacher preparation programs).

The following guiding principles serve as the underlying foundation for the implementation of the Early Learning Professional Development System Plan

An accountable professional development system collects and evaluates data to demonstrate effectiveness, tracks child progress, plan improvements and assures quality through a continuous improvement process.

An innovative professional development system is flexible, incorporates relevant research and research-based practices and experiments with new approaches for preparing, credentialing and rewarding early learning professionals.

An accessible professional development system offers affordable and convenient options for education, training and coaching, acknowledging multiple avenues towards teacher effectiveness including college courses, prior experience and alternative classroom-and field-based training.

An inclusive professional development system promotes culturally-sensitive practices, engages diverse stakeholders, embraces individuals of all abilities and actively seek to diversify the early learning profession.

An aligned professional development system provides a coherent, easily navigable and coordinated system for guiding early learning professionals’ college preparation, recruitment and ongoing professional development activities across all early learning settings.

A well-financed professional development system provides equitable opportunities for early learning professionals to achieve higher levels of competency through college education and ongoing professional development that is tied to increased compensation and benefits.

A collaborative professional development system is developed by and built upon authentic partnerships among the Department of Education, higher education, Department of Human Services, Head Start, local Early Childhood Councils, resource and referral, the Early Childhood Professional Development Team and recipients of professional development services.

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II. Pathways

A. FORMAL EDUCATION

RATIONALE: Being an early childhood professional means having an understanding of the specialized knowledge required to be effective in the field of early childhood education. This section of the Early Childhood professional credential recognizes and honors formalized education as a path for attaining this specialized knowledge. While a degree in any field demonstrates increased professional knowledge, degrees and coursework that are directly related to the field of early childhood and aligned to Colorado’s Competencies for Early Childhood Educators and Administrators demonstrate the specialized knowledge required to most effectively support young children’s growth and learning. To more accurately reflect a current understanding of the science of early childhood, points for ECE Coursework and Aligned Coursework are time limited. A maximum of 50 points can be earned for Formal Education.

1. Degrees

Points are awarded for the highest degree attained, regardless of major course of study. Points are only awarded for the highest degree and not each degree earned.

- Associates degree = 5 points;
- Bachelor’s degree = 10 points;
- Master’s degree = 15 points;
- Education Specialist = 18 points
- Doctorate = 20 points.

2. Area of Study

Points are awarded to a professional who has completed a degree in Early Childhood Education, Early Childhood Special Education, or Child Development (related degrees such as Family Studies, Human Development can qualify when a minimum number of early childhood credits are included). Four points are awarded for each degree earned in these specific areas of study.

3. Early Childhood Coursework

One point is awarded for each ECE 3 credit hours completed at an accredited institution with a passing grade of “C” or better in the last 15 years. These points do not require the completion of a degree and are awarded in addition to Degree and Area of Study points. Coursework points are awarded for either Early Childhood Coursework or Coursework Aligned to Competencies, not both.

4. Coursework Aligned to Competencies

Points will be awarded for college coursework from an accredited institution that has specific application to the care and education of young children and is aligned with Colorado’s Competencies for Early Childhood Educators and Administrators. Professionals will receive two points for each aligned ECE three credit hours for which a passing grade of “C” or better was received. To be considered for points, coursework must be demonstrated to be aligned to the Competencies for Early Childhood Educators and Administrators through the Professional Development Information System. These points do not require the completion of a degree and are awarded in addition to Degree and Area of Study points.

B. ONGOING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

RATIONALE: Ongoing professional development reflects the importance of continuous quality improvement. This section of the Early Childhood Professional Credential recognizes and honors the role of training in providing ongoing professional development that supports professionals’ continued growth throughout a career in early childhood education. Research demonstrates that training series that take place over time and include ‘job-embedded’ components such as Professional Learning Communities or Coaching more effectively increase professionals’ knowledge and skills. This section awards points for training hours and/or CEUs earned in the last three years. Additionally, two points are earned for each training that focuses on children with high needs, is a series, includes a ‘job-embedded’ component or for maintaining a qualifying certificate, credential or endorsement. A maximum of 30 points can be earned for Ongoing Professional Development.
C. EXPERIENCE

RATIONALE: With experience, early childhood professionals have the opportunity to apply the knowledge gained through formal education and training to increase their skills as professionals. Experience awards one point for every year worked in the field up to a maximum of 20 points. “Experience” for purposes of this model includes:

1) Direct work* with young children (birth - 8) and families, includes field experiences;
2) Supervision, leadership, or management of programs;
3) Program coordination, development, or regulation;
4) Training, instruction, or technical assistance of programs;
5) Evaluation or research in the field.

* Must be 16 years of age or have senior standing in Career Tech or JVS program.

D. DEMONSTRATION OF COMPETENCIES

RATIONALE: It is this area that allows a professional to demonstrate what he/she genuinely knows about early childhood and is truly able to do to support children’s growth and development. The goal of Formal Education, Training and Professional Experience is to increase competence. Ultimately, it is professionals’ competence that most accurately measures expertise. The goal of this area is to incorporate current research-based measures of competencies and best practices for EC professionals. Through this component, an individual can earn up to 10 points for Demonstrated Competencies. However, the total points for the credential remains 100 points and the maximum points for Formal Education, Ongoing Professional Development and Experience also remain the same. The Demonstrated Competency points can be earned as ‘extra’ points.

III. Early Childhood Professional Designations

“Points” are totaled across Formal Education, Ongoing Professional Development, Experience. Points for Demonstrated Competencies are added as ‘extra points’ and do not count toward minimum areas required for each credential level. The total points place a professional within one of the following designations:

- Early Childhood Professional I (10 - 20 points)*must have points from at least 2 areas
- Early Childhood Professional II (21-35 points) *must have points from at least 2 areas
- Early Childhood Professional III (36-50 points) *must have points from at least 2 areas
- Early Childhood Professional IV (51-60 points) *must have points from all 3 areas
- Early Childhood Professional V (61-70 points) *must have points from all 3 areas
- Early Childhood Professional VI (71+ points) *must have points from all 3 areas

IV. Advancement

Early childhood professionals will advance to higher levels as they obtain more education, ongoing professional development, and experience.

V. Renewal Requirements

All Levels must be renewed every 3 years.