

Presentation of Content Areas and Levels

Virginia's *Competencies for Early Childhood Professionals* are presented in specific core areas of competency that correspond to traditional curricular areas in early childhood education. Further, the core competencies address best practices for a safe and optimal learning environment for young children, effective relationships and interactions with children and their families, and strong program management for early childhood administrators. Each area describes the knowledge and skills professionals need in order to support optimal growth and learning of children from birth to kindergarten.

The eight core areas of competency used to organize Virginia's *Competencies for Early Childhood Professionals* are:

- Health, Safety, and Nutritional Practices;
- Understanding Child Growth and Development;
- Appropriate Classroom Observation and Assessment;
- Partnering with Families and Communities;
- Learning Environment;
- Effective Interactions;
- Program Management; and
- Teacher Qualifications and Professional Development.

Importantly, all early childhood professionals working with children from birth to kindergarten, regardless of role or setting, need to master a core body of knowledge. However, professionals may apply the knowledge differently depending on their roles and settings. For example, infant-toddler professionals need to develop competency in supporting beginning language development, and preschool professionals need to develop competency in supporting specific language skills such as speaking in more complex sentences and following multi-step directions. Program directors, school administrators and supervisors need skills in supervision to ensure that staff demonstrate competency in supporting developmentally appropriate language acquisition. These variations require different applications of knowledge. For this reason, the content area of Program Management applies to directors and administrators as well as to family care providers who have responsibility for program management.

Within each content area, four competency levels are presented to establish a continuum from preliminary skills to an advanced level of academic preparation and varied experience. Professionals progress from one level to another through **various paths** including formal study, training, mentoring and coaching, and reflection on practice. Importantly, levels are defined for early childhood professionals serving varying roles. Advancement does not imply administrative promotion resulting in little or no direct interaction with children. Rather, as all professionals develop, they participate in continuous quality improvement by acquiring new skills, refining previously developed skills, promoting skill development among others, adding to the knowledge base of the field of early childhood education through research and reflective inquiry, and working with others to advocate policies and quality programs that nurture the development of all children. Early childhood professionals are encouraged to advance their knowledge and skill sets across content areas.

