CORE KNOWLEDGE

As discussed in Section 2 of this toolkit, professional development systems have several interconnected components. These components fall under five broad elements: (1) core knowledge; (2) access and outreach; (3) qualifications, credentials, and pathways; (4) funding; and (5) quality assurance. As seen in the following table, this section will focus on the core knowledge element, which provides the central foundation of a professional development system.

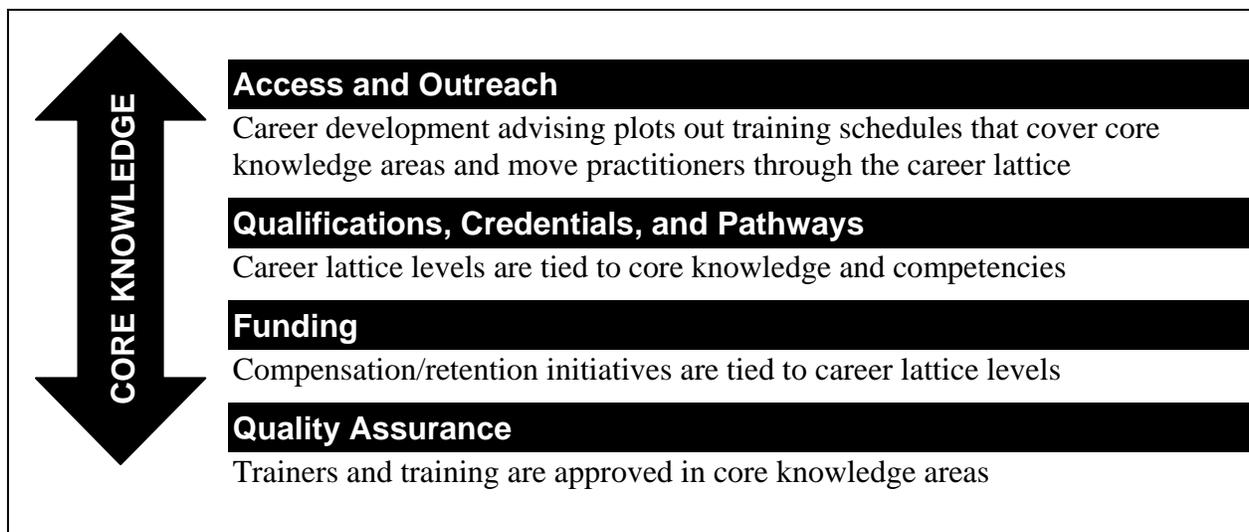| *System Question*	*System Element*
What is it?	**Core knowledge**
Why does it matter and what is available?	Access and outreach
How can we work toward it?	Qualifications, credentials, and pathways
How can we afford it?	Funding
How do we ensure and measure achievement?	Quality assurance

This section provides an overview of core knowledge and its components, key points from policy and provider perspectives, a State Story about its core knowledge efforts, brief State examples, and related resources. Appendixes D and E also include core knowledge related planning tools.

Element Overview

Professional development systems include core knowledge areas and essential competencies that all adults who work with young children need to know, understand, and be able to do to promote young children's healthy development. Core knowledge areas and competencies define the *what* of professional development by providing a broad categorization of knowledge and skills that apply across *all* roles in the early/school-age care and education field. Using these categories as a framework, additional requirements can be developed for adults who work with specific age groups, children with special needs, English language learners, in family child care settings, or who administer programs.

Core knowledge and competencies can create a foundation for a professional development system. They can provide a road map for curriculum development and organization of professional development activities. In doing so, core knowledge and competencies become the basis for organizing, approving, and offering training and coursework as well as the basis for levels on a career lattice. By offering a common language for establishing early childhood student outcomes and a mechanism to document competencies throughout a practitioner's learning experience, core knowledge and competencies can be an important tool for articulation of community training to college credit and from one level of college coursework to another. Core knowledge and competencies can be used as a tool to foster cross-sector collaborations and systems integration by providing an agreed set of expectations of adult knowledge and skills that apply across all settings. Additional examples of how this element serves as a foundation in each of the four additional elements of the professional development system simplified framework are outlined in the following chart.

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CORE KNOWLEDGE	**Access and Outreach** Career development advising plots out training schedules that cover core knowledge areas and move practitioners through the career lattice
	Qualifications, Credentials, and Pathways Career lattice levels are tied to core knowledge and competencies
	Funding Compensation/retention initiatives are tied to career lattice levels
	Quality Assurance Trainers and training are approved in core knowledge areas

Core knowledge components

✸ *Core Knowledge*
   Core knowledge is the range of knowledge that adults working with young children need to facilitate children's learning and development, and is linked to early learning guidelines (i.e., what young children need to know, understand, and be able to do). A practitioner's grasp of core knowledge is often gauged through completion of training, assessments, and coursework. It also includes the understanding theory and best practices.

✸ *Core Competencies*
   Core competencies are the range of observable skills that adults working with young children need to facilitate children's learning and development, and are linked to early learning guidelines. Competency—the demonstration of skills—represents the knowledge base and is played out in the classroom through working with parents and colleagues and administering programs.

   At least 80 percent of States have created core knowledge and/or core competency documents for the early childhood workforce. In these documents, core knowledge areas and competencies are often defined or categorized by the age/developmental range of children (e.g., all adults working with children birth through age 8, or all adults working with children birth through age 13, ages 3–5, etc.) and by levels of knowledge and skill demonstration. Levels can be delineated as part of a progression toward increased professional development, based on hierarchy of knowledge from awareness to analysis.[1] Each level represents greater depth and breadth of knowledge and application of that knowledge. For example, Level 1 might require describing or demonstrating basic knowledge. Succeeding levels might require more complex application of knowledge and then advancement to the ability to plan and implement programs or procedures and even analysis, synthesis, and eventually evaluation.

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[1] Bloom, B.S. (Ed.). (1956). *Taxonomy of educational objectives: The classification of educational goals* (pp. 201–207). Susan Fauer Company, Inc.

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Core knowledge documents also typically include a rationale section that explains why the area or domain is important for practicing professionals and the children being served; a research base for why it matters; and/or evidence that knowledge and skills in an area are linked to positive child outcomes and improved program quality.

Many State core knowledge documents also contain sections that specify dispositions—characteristics of practitioners that are separate from learned knowledge and acquired skills. These include attitudes toward working with children and families, interest and enthusiasm for learning and exploration, and understanding and appreciation of children's development. Overall, people's values, commitments, and professional ethics influence their behaviors toward children, families, colleagues, and communities; affect children's learning, motivation, and development; and impact their professional growth.

Perspectives on Core Knowledge

Professional development systems impact people in different roles in unique ways. The following provides some key points about the importance of the core knowledge element of the professional development system from both the provider and policy perspectives.

Provider perspective

✳ Core knowledge and competencies give providers a framework to develop and implement a plan of professional growth and recognition.

✳ Training efforts and investments aligned with the core areas and linked to a career lattice can result in individual professional achievements and financial rewards.

✳ Core knowledge and skills applied in the classroom and in interactions with families can result in higher quality programs, better outcomes for children, and greater job satisfaction.

✳ Core knowledge can provide a framework for providers to inform parents and families about what is important to children.

✳ Core knowledge can provide a framework for providers to share with parents and families the value of training and ongoing professional development.

Policy perspective

✳ States use core knowledge as the basis for approving, developing, offering, evaluating, and/or investing in training and coursework.

✳ Based on research and the collective knowledge of the field, core knowledge helps policy-makers focus efforts and funding on content that has the greatest potential to improve program quality, classroom practice, and child outcomes.

✱ Core knowledge can help stabilize the workforce when it is used as the basis for credentials, professional milestones, or levels on a career lattice, which allows practitioners easy entry, steady movement, and smooth transitions into other roles. With the ability to achieve professional milestones and ongoing development, practitioners are more likely to remain in the field, garnering long-term returns on investment in training.

✱ Core knowledge serves as the foundation for articulation efforts. Community-based training can articulate or be converted to college credit, and community college courses can transfer to bachelor's degree–granting institutions. Eliminating repetition of courses and training or coursework that does not count toward a degree, credential, or level on a career lattice helps States, Territories, and practitioners save financial resources.

✱ Core knowledge serves as the foundation for cross-sector efforts—establishing a common language and agreed expectations to seek both public and private support to build comprehensive professional development systems.

State Story: Ohio

The following describes how Ohio developed its State core knowledge and competencies document. A brief overview of the State's professional development system provides some context for Ohio's core knowledge–related efforts. Also included is a description of how its specific core knowledge work began, connections to the larger professional development system, challenges, and future plans.

The National Child Care Information and Technical Assistance Center (NCCIC) would like to thank Terrie Hare, bureau chief of Child Care and Development at the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services, for her contributions to the following State Story.

The Ohio Professional Development Network (OPDN) is a collaborative partnership and the coordinating body for the State's early childhood professional development system. The network is a collaboration of early childhood and after-school professionals, partner agencies, and organizations at the State and local levels. Members work together to support creation of a comprehensive professional development system and advance the professional status of those working in early care and education, after-school care, child development, and in related other services for young children and their families.

OPDN serves as the Professional Development Work Group of Build Ohio. Terrie Hare, bureau chief of Child Care and Development at the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services; and James Scott, director of the Head Start Collaboration Project, serve as cochairs. Three committees research and design specific components of the system:

1. The Core Knowledge and Articulation committee is developing the next steps in distribution and implementation of Ohio's Early Childhood Core Knowledge and Competencies;

2. The Compensation and Retention committee is researching State and local compensation and retention strategies; and

3. The Registry committee is advising on the ongoing development and design of the registry and will draft criteria for training and trainer approval.

The Ohio Child Care Resource and Referral Association (OCCRRA) provides staff support to the network and its committees, hosts the OPDN Web site, and manages the registry and T.E.A.C.H. (Teacher Education and Compensation Helps) Early Childhood® Ohio. Funding for specific activities is provided through State agencies, private grants, and Build Ohio.

How it began

In November 2004, Build Ohio sponsored a 2-day retreat of the statewide OPDN. The event was facilitated by NCCIC and was the impetus for development of Ohio's Core Knowledge and Competencies for Early Care and Education Professionals (the Core). Supported by the Ohio Bureau of Child Development, the volunteer committee determined that development of the Core was the necessary foundation for connecting all the current individual workforce initiatives.

At that time, the Head Start Collaboration director, the Bureau of Child Care chief, and the OCCRRA executive director acted as cochairs. Following the network's Professional Development Action Plan, a 2-day kickoff event was held in February 2006. Groups of early childhood professionals from a broad range of disciplines were organized into writing teams. The teams were formed around six knowledge and competency domains:

1. Child growth and development;

2. Child observation and assessment;

3. Family and community relations;

4. Learning experiences and environment;

5. Professional development; and

6. Health, safety, and nutrition.

Each team consisted of 10 members with expertise in the age range of birth to 3 years, 3–5 years, and 5–8 years, with representation from 2- and 4-year institutions of higher education. Teams met for 5 full-day meetings between February and July 2006. Tools were developed to collect the information from the writing teams and provide consistency across domains. Edited by an independent consultant, the final document—*The Ohio Core Body of Knowledge and Competency for Early Childhood Professionals*—compiled the results of each writing team.

System connections

There are a number of factors driving the need for core knowledge and competencies in Ohio:

✸ The Ohio Department of Education (ODE) Early Learning Program Guidelines require staff in its funded programs to be working toward an associate's degree and complete 20 hours of specialized training per year.

✸ Ohio's School Readiness Solutions Group recommendations include college degrees for early care and education professionals as well as cross-sector access to T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood scholarships for those pursuing college degrees.

✸ The increase in Head Start staff requirements, including movement toward bachelors' degrees, is increasing the demand for training and coursework.

✸ Ohio's voluntary quality rating system (QRS), Step Up to Quality, requires an increase in staff education and annual in-service hours to increase the level of program quality.[2]

✸ Plans to develop core knowledge and competencies for administrators and a credential for school-age care providers have been discussed.

Modeled on Ohio's Infant and Toddler Guidelines, the Core aligns with, supports, or complements Ohio's Early Learning Content Standards, Standards for the Teaching Profession, and Early Learning Program Guidelines. The Core also aligns with national standards, such as the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Standards for Early Childhood Professional Preparation, the NAEYC Early Childhood Program Standards and Accreditation Criteria, and the Recommended Practices in Early Intervention/Early Childhood Special Education by the Division of Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children. Together, the core knowledge document and other existing Ohio standards and guidelines create a common framework and language for caregivers and teachers to support and enhance the development of all young children.

The Core is built on the six knowledge and competency domains at three levels. The three levels align with the six levels of Ohio's Career Pathways Model for Early Childhood Professionals, which places individuals along a professional continuum based on formal education, in-service training, experience, and credentials. The Core framework includes a rationale for each domain, the knowledge base, and expected competencies.

Challenges

As with many States, Ohio's most difficult issues in developing a common core of knowledge were brought on by the complexity of the early childhood system and differences in program structure, governance, and financing among child care, Head Start, and the other early childhood sectors. These structural differences typically result in differences in preservice requirements,

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[2] A QRS is a systemic approach to assess, improve, and communicate the level of quality in early care and education programs. Similar to rating systems for restaurants and hotels, QRS award quality ratings to early care and education programs that meet a set of defined program standards.

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in-service training, qualifications, and practices. In addition, they often mean significant differences in wages and salaries for teaching, administrative, and support staff.

While much has been accomplished and there are clear plans for implementation, there are also some obstacles OPDN continues to address. Currently, those responsible for implementation have other positions, primarily at OCCRRA. There are no additional funded staff positions specific to implement the Core, which has implications for individual workloads, responsibilities, and priorities as well as for the ease with which the Core can be implemented. In addition, one of the partnering State agencies is outside the Ohio Department of Health and Human Services and is governed by an independent board rather than reporting directly to the governor. The differences in reporting, priorities, and authority can complicate professional development partnerships and collaborations.

Future plans

Implementation plans include activities that address the underlying system needs, incorporate current initiatives, and support efforts such as articulation. OCCRRA will conduct training for providers about understanding the big picture for professional development in Ohio, including the Core, the registry, and T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood Ohio. Training that is offered by the OCCRRA system and tracked through the registry is now based on the Core. The 45-hour training required in the first 3 years of employment as part of the State's licensing regulations will also be based on the Core. The annual Ohio Association for the Education of Young Children and ODE Early Childhood Conference will plan and list session offerings based on the Core. In addition, a trainer guide will be developed on how to use the Core.

The Ohio Board of Regents offered mini-grants to 2- and 4-year educational institutions to incorporate the Core into coursework and degree requirements. A letter was sent from the OPDN to all college deans with a complimentary copy of the Core to be shared as a resource for faculty. The Core's alignment with other Ohio standards makes it both a tool and a foundation for articulation of training, coursework, and degrees.

Sources

NCCIC gathered information included in Ohio's story via an interview with Terrie Hare on July 16, 2007. Information also comes from several additional sources, including the following:

✴ *From Vision to Reality: Crafting a Professional Development System for Early Care and Education in Ohio* (October 2006), by Kathy Reschke, published by OCCRRA on behalf of the Ohio Early Care and Education Professional Development Network;

✴ *Ohio Core Body of Knowledge and Competencies for Early Childhood Professionals*, available on the Web at www.occrra.org/core_knowledge/CoreKnowledge.pdf;

✴ Various materials from the Ohio Professional Development Network Web site at www.ohpdnetwork.org; and

✴ Various materials from the OCCRRA Web site at www.occrra.org.

State Examples

The following are some examples of States that have core knowledge and/or competency documents. They do not include all States that have such documents, but are meant to represent a range of approaches States have taken to develop this system element.

Illinois

Core Professional Knowledge: Early Care and Education Content Areas (2005) and the associated Performance Area and Content Area statements, published by Gateways to Opportunity: The Illinois Early Care and Education Professional Development Network, are directly aligned with the following standards: the Illinois Early Childhood Education Content-Area Standards, Illinois Professional Teaching Standards, NAEYC's Standards for Early Childhood Professional Preparation, Illinois Director Credential competencies, Illinois Birth to Three Standards, Early Intervention Developmental Specialist requirements, and Child Development Associate (CDA) credential requirements.

The core knowledge areas are as follows:

1. Child growth and development
2. Child observation and assessment
3. Curriculum and instructional methods
4. Family and community relationships
5. Health, safety, and nutrition
6. Teaching/Learning interactions and environments
7. Personal and professional development

This resource is available on the Web at www.ilgateways.com/credentials/CPK.aspx.

Kansas and Missouri

Core Competencies for Early Care and Education Professionals: Second Edition (Summer 2000), by Opportunities in a Professional Education Network Initiative (OPEN) in Missouri, Kansas Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies, and Mid-America Regional Council Metropolitan Council on Child Care, includes five levels of competencies in each core knowledge area. The core knowledge and competencies are used for curriculum development, definition of credentials, and organization of training into coherent and progressive sequences.

The core knowledge areas are as follows:

1. Child growth and development
2. Learning environment and curriculum
3. Child observation and assessment
4. Families and communities
5. Health, safety, and nutrition
6. Interactions with children
7. Program planning and development
8. Professional development and leadership

This resource is available on the Web at www.kaccrra.org/story_files/203/203_ss_file1.pdf.

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Missouri's Guide for Conference Planners: Integrating the Core Competencies for Early Care and Education Professionals in Kansas and Missouri and Missouri's Early Childhood Standards (December 2003), by OPEN, is available on the Web at https://www.openinitiative.org/content/pdfs/CoreCompetencies/EC-ConferencePlannersGuide.pdf.

New Mexico

Common Core Content and Areas of Specialization for Personnel Preparation in Early Care, Education and Family Support in New Mexico: Entry Through Master's Level (May 2002), prepared by the Higher Education Early Childhood Task Force for the New Mexico Child Development Board, delineates three mastery levels. The core content links to statewide training and articulation.

The core knowledge areas are as follows:

1. Child growth, development, and learning
2. Health, safety, and nutrition
3. Family and community collaboration
4. Developmentally appropriate content
5. Learning environment and curriculum implementation
6. Assessment of children and programs
7. Professionalism

This resource is available on the Web at http://www.newmexicokids.org/Resource/Library/LaRistraPDF/ccc%20indicator.pdf.

New York

The New York State Early Care and Education Core Body of Knowledge Framework: Essential Areas of Knowledge Needed In Working Effectively with Young Children, Birth through Age 8 (Second Edition 2001), developed and published by the Career Development Initiative of New York State, includes three levels of competencies for each knowledge area. The core knowledge areas and competencies align with the State's early childhood credentials.

The core knowledge areas are as follows:

1. Child growth and development
2. Environment, curriculum, and content
3. Families in society
4. Child assessment
5. Communication
6. Professionalism and leadership

This resource is available on the Web at www.earlychildhood.org/pdfs/CoreBody.pdf.

Selected Resources

The following is a sample of resources covering topics related to core knowledge listed in alphabetical order by title. Additional resources are available via NCCIC's Online Library, which can be accessed at http://oll.nccic.acf.hhs.gov/nccic-OLL/searchnccic.cgi.

Title:	*Building the Foundation for Bright Futures, Final Report of the NGA Task Force on School Readiness*
Author:	National Governors Association (NGA)
Publisher:	NGA
Date:	2005
URL:	www.nga.org/cda/files/0501TaskForceReadiness.pdf

This report identifies actions that governors and States can take to ensure children's success in school. The report includes the recommendation to "implement unified data collection requirements, training opportunities, and professional standards across prekindergarten, child care, and Head Start programs."

Title:	*Core Knowledge for PK-3 Teaching: Ten Components of Effective Instruction*
Author:	Michael Sadowski
Publisher:	Foundation for Child Development
Date:	October 2006
URL:	www.fcd-us.org/usr_doc/Core_Knowledge.pdf

This brief outlines what experts in the field identify as core knowledge for high-quality prekindergarten through third grade teaching. These elements point to an aligned set of standards, curriculum, instruction, and assessment both within and across developmental levels.

Title:	*Leading the Way to Quality Early Care and Education*
Author:	Child Care Bureau, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Publisher:	Child Care Bureau
Date:	2005
URL:	An order form for this free resource is available on the Web at www.ccb-cmc.org/cdrom2005

This State Child Care Administrator's 2004 Meeting CD-ROM includes the section "Linking Content to Standards." This section provides video and other resources on three States' (Delaware, Ohio, and Rhode Island) alignment efforts.

Title:	*Preparing Early Childhood Teachers to Successfully Educate All Children: The Contribution of State Boards of Higher Education and National Professional Accreditation Organizations, A Report to the Foundation for Child Development*
Author:	Aisha Ray, Barbara T. Bowman, and Jean Ray Robbins
Publisher:	Erikson Institute
Date:	October 2006
URL:	www.fcd-us.org/usr_doc/ContributionsofStateBoards.pdf

This report analyzes diversity-related content in 30 States' (Alaska, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, New Jersey, New Mexico, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Texas, Vermont, Virginia, and Wisconsin) boards of higher education and professional accreditation organizations' teacher standards.

Title:	*Where We Stand on Standards for Programs to Prepare Early Childhood Professionals*
Author:	NAEYC
Publisher:	NAEYC
Date:	2005
URL:	www.naeyc.org/about/positions/pdf/programStandards.pdf

This position statement outlines five areas that NAEYC believes adults who work with children should know and be able to do: (1) promote child development and learning; (2) build family and community relationships; (3) observe, document, and assess; (4) teach and learn; and (5) become a professional.