

Early Childhood Education Session Notes

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Segmental leaders began the conversation by expressing that the Department of Higher Education has developed a new initiative that sought to enhance alignment across the state system. The discussion then turned to how Early Childhood Education programs were currently being offered. Community Colleges traditionally have two tracks, one for students who transition to a four-year institution and another for those who enter into the workforce. Most four-year institutions have licensure programs and Early Education and Care (EEC) pathways. The latter were built for individuals who do not want to be licensed by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, but work in EEC programs. This initiative could serve as an opportunity to legitimize and maximize the two systems.

Most Community Colleges are accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and that legitimizes the programs. The new piece is the “workforce” alignment

component for EEC individuals who now need a Bachelor's. Additionally, the Quality Rating and Improvement System requires a Bachelor's for early education and care qualified providers.

It was noted that there were systemic issues, including the fact that NAEYC has the same requirements for both Associate's and Bachelor's degrees. This does not allow for differentiation of what should be required at each level, so duplication exists. While this was outside of the MassTransfer Pathways scope, it was important to keep it in mind.

It was agreed that there was a loose definition of early childhood within the field. Courses must either be designed to cover birth to grade two with a high level of intention or be specify what age groups are covered (infants, toddlers, preschool kindergarten and grade 1 & 2).

The group also discussed the process of the initiative, which asked that participants identify foundational courses for the major by the end of the conference and reconvene in the spring to align content. It was also important to keep in mind that there are several other initiatives related to EEC, including the development of the Birth to Eight license. Additionally, campuses wanted to ensure that Pre-K teachers in publics are trained for ECE and not elementary.

There was discussion on the course nomenclature and numbering. However, the MassTransfer Pathways initiative does not require courses to have the same titles. In order for a course to be part of the statewide equivalency, 70-90% of the course content needs to be aligned so that each institution is covering similar topics. This led to an agreement that an *Introductory/Foundations* course and a *Child Development* course should be required. Attendees brought up the fact that sometimes a *Child Development* course is offered by the Psychology Department and other times it is cross listed. Both of these courses should have components that speak to birth to age eight.

Several participants believe that a special needs course should also be considered foundational and that it was just as important as a *Child Development* course. There was then conversation regarding adding a *Families* course. While many institutions required a *Families* course, others did not. However, they did embed those elements into other ECE course. It was decided this would not be a foundational course.

Subsequently, it was decided that field experience should be required, as well as a course on curriculum. This conversation was continued in the afternoon session.

During the afternoon session, segmental leaders reiterated that the goal for the day was to identify foundational courses for the major that everyone can agree upon and that in the Spring, faculty would reconvene in order to align content in those courses. This process would include identifying items within the courses and come to consensus about what needs to be included in each course. The group discussed how this work may result in requiring institutions to change how things are handled on their campus in order to support students.

Next it was decided that a *Practicum* should also be a foundational course. Currently, there is a range of credits required for the *Practicum* from one to six credits. Furthermore, there is a discrepancy between the number of hours from 150 to 300. The group decided they needed advice from the Department of Early Education and Care, DESE, and DHE. Additionally, the work occurring in the field also needs to be aligned in order to avoid duplication and any conflicting efforts.

The group also talked about how high school/vocational technical school courses would transfer. Generally, if a community college awards credit and the course is deemed equivalent, the four-year institution should also accept the course the same way. This also depends on how the course is transcribed. Another topic arose around whether or not students who were transfer bound were being advised to begin taking courses towards their second major in order to maximize their academic potential.

Ultimately, there was consensus that the following courses would be reviewed in the Spring:

- Introduction/Foundations to Early Childhood
- Child Growth and Development
- Special Needs
- Curriculum
- Internship 1/Practicum (minimum first 150 hours)