

Maine Learning Results Taskforce

Topic: Surface Shared Learning

Date: April 8, 2025

Location: Virtual (Zoom)

Time: 3:00 – 5:00 p.m.

Meeting Goals

- Identify shared learning from homework reviewing national Early Learning and Development Standards (ELDS).
- Surface key insights about how early childhood standards are designed and what they reveal about standards design more broadly.
- Discuss key questions, tensions, and gaps in understanding about ELDS and standards design.
- Engage with a panel of state leaders to test, refine, and expand Taskforce thinking about standards design.

Presenters and Facilitators

- Beth Lambert, Chief Teaching and Learning Officer, Maine Department of Education
- Beth Ratway and RaeAnne Friesenhahn, Northeast Comprehensive Center (NECC)
- Wendy Scott, Universal Pre-Kindergarten Coordinator, Vermont Agency of Education
- Pat Fitzsimmons, Vermont Agency of Education
- Maryanne Olley, Pennsylvania Department of Education
- Laura Bornfreud, Moderator, Center for Early Learning Success

In Attendance

Taskforce Members

Angela Hardy, Courtney McLellan, Craig Haims, David Dorr, Deb Macintyre, Erica Mazzeo, Erik Blacksmith, Glenn Cummings, Heidi Goodwin, Jodi Mezzanotte, Jon Doty, Julie Kimball, Kerry O'Brien, Kim Barnes, Paulette Bonneau, Peter Geiger, Renita Ward-Downer, Shanna Crofton, Stephanie Bresett, and Steve Bussiere.

DOE Staff

Beth Lambert, Cee Belolan, Lee Ann Larsen, and additional staff supporting facilitation and logistics.

Partner Organizations

Northeast Comprehensive Center (NECC), CCSSO, The Center for Early School Success, Vermont Agency of Education, and Pennsylvania Department of Education.

Discussion Summary

1. Welcome and Framing – Beth Lambert

Beth welcomed Taskforce members and reaffirmed the group's mandate under LD 1701. She provided a brief overview of where the Taskforce has been and where it is headed: Meeting 1 focused on grounding the "why" behind the work—clarifying the charge, reflecting on the purpose and impact of standards, and surfacing hopes, tensions, and questions. Meeting 2 connected the Science of Learning and Development (SoLD) to standards design, and members applied a SoLD lens to current standards through homework annotations. Meeting 3 served as a bridge between the foundational work and the design work ahead, surfacing shared learning, identifying patterns and tensions, and beginning to build the language that will guide future design criteria and recommendations. She framed today's session as an opportunity to examine what the national ELDS picture reveals about how standards could be designed differently and to learn from state leaders who have led that work.

2. Unpacking the Homework – Individual Reflection

Taskforce members were given time to individually review their ELDS homework and reflect on two guiding questions:

- What does this national ELDS picture reveal about how standards could be designed differently not just revised?
- What do you need clarity on?

3. Preparing for the Panel– Small Group Reflections

Members moved into their small groups to share observations, cluster similar ideas, and identify recurring themes across their individual reflections. Groups worked to identify key questions for the panel that will help inform the work moving forward.

4. Preparing for the Panel—Large Group Share Out

Each small group reported back to the full Taskforce on the recurring themes that emerged from their discussions. Common themes across groups included the following:

- **Whole-Child and Developmental Focus:** Groups consistently observed that ELDS are grounded in child development and take a whole-child approach, addressing social-emotional, cognitive, physical, and language development rather than narrowly focusing on academic content. Members noted that this developmental focus tends to dissipate as students move into upper grades and questioned how it could be sustained across K-12.
- **Organized Around Domains and Concepts Rather Than Discrete Content:** Members noted that ELDS are organized around broad developmental domains and concepts rather than siloed content areas, which supports interdisciplinary thinking and makes learning more meaningful and connected. Several groups observed that this structure allows educators to see how content fits within larger developmental goals.

- **Accessible Language and Broader Audience:** Groups highlighted that ELDS are written in clear, accessible language and appear designed for a broader audience than educators alone, including families, caregivers, and other professionals. Members saw this as a strength that could inform K-12 standards design.
- **Developmental Continuums and Flexibility:** Members noted that ELDS present learning as a continuum, using age bands rather than single-grade checkpoints, which allows for children to develop at different rates. Groups discussed whether this approach could reduce deficit-based labeling and better reflect the experience of multilingual learners and students with diverse learning profiles.
- **Embedded Supports and Practices:** Several groups observed that many state ELDS include supporting practices, crosswalks, examples, and planning guides alongside the standards themselves, making them more practical and usable for educators. Elements of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) were noticed throughout several states' documents.
- **Directionality of Design:** Groups raised the question of whether standards should be built from early grades upward, from later grades downward, or from both directions meeting in the middle; and noted that the design direction has significant implications for coherence and developmental appropriateness.
- **Volume and Fragmentation:** Members noted that current K-12 standards are often excessive in volume and fragmented across content areas, making them overwhelming for educators. Several groups contrasted this with the more streamlined, domain-based structure of ELDS.

The Taskforce surfaced the following questions for the panel:

- Are there examples or insights about developmental standards that extend into upper elementary and high school?
- How does a move to developmental-based standards affect implementation and program fidelity?
- How were the domains chosen, and is there a hierarchy among them?
- Was the design process built upward from early grades, downward from older students, or both?
- How does the role of families factor into the standards?
- What led to the decision to incorporate executive function into the standards?
- How were the standards rolled out to the field?
- Who were the non-negotiable experts at the table during development?
- What advice do you have for aligning early childhood principles to standards for older students?
- What process/framework was used to build out the standards?
- How have the standards made an impact on student learning, and how do you know?
- Were you able to make the standards teacher friendly?
- How do you balance a whole-child approach in a K-12 system? (academics, testing expectations)

5. Panel Discussion—Learning from Early Childhood Standards Design

The panel featured leaders from Vermont and Pennsylvania who shared insights from their experiences designing and implementing early learning standards. The discussion was organized around several key themes.

1. What K–12 standards designers can learn from early childhood standards

Panelists emphasized that early childhood standards are grounded in how children actually learn, holistically, relationally, and through integrated experiences, rather than through siloed content areas. K-12 systems can learn from the early childhood focus on the whole child, developmental science, learner agency, and interdisciplinary learning. Designing standards around authentic learning processes (e.g., play, inquiry, collaboration) was seen as more aligned with real-world demands and workforce expectations than rigid subject boundaries.

2. Advantages and challenges of organizing standards around developmental domains

Advantages include:

- Reflecting holistic development (social, emotional, cognitive, physical, language).
- Supporting interdisciplinary and project-based learning.
- Allowing flexibility for children to progress at different rates.
- Making learning more meaningful and connected.

Challenges include:

- Less perceived precision or clarity for educators accustomed to content-specific benchmarks.
- Greater need for professional learning in developmental theory.
- Tension with existing K–12 accountability systems that favor discrete, easily testable skills.

One panelist noted that age-banded standards (rather than single-grade checkpoints) can balance rigor with flexibility and reduce deficit-based labeling.

3. Developmental progressions vs. grade-level checkpoints

Panelists described how early childhood standards represent learning as a continuum of development, not a checklist of grade-level outcomes. Indicators show where a child is developing and how to support next steps. This model suggests that rigor can build across K–12 through:

- Progressively deeper thinking rather than faster content coverage.
- Prioritizing endurance, readiness, and leverage (what lasts, what prepares students for what's next, and what transfers across contexts).
- Focusing on executive functioning, ethical reasoning, collaboration, and evaluation, especially in an AI-rich world where information is readily available.

4. How domains were prioritized

Panelists shared that domains in Vermont were chosen based on developmental science and long-term life relevance, with a strong emphasis on:

- Executive functioning and approaches to learning (self-regulation, persistence, and collaboration).
- Social and emotional development as foundational across the lifespan.
- Broad domains such as communication and expression, and learning about the world, which embed content areas within meaningful contexts.

In Pennsylvania, executive functioning skills were elevated as a central priority and eventually extended through grade 12 as “career ready skills,” reflecting their lifelong importance.

5. Impact of the absence of high-stakes assessment in early childhood

Panelists noted that without high-stakes testing pressure, early childhood standards can:

- Be broader, more flexible, and developmentally appropriate.
- Emphasize formative assessment, observation, and professional judgment.
- Value skills that are harder to quantify (e.g., self-regulation, curiosity).

Panelists cautioned that writing standards primarily to be measurable or testable risks narrowing learning, encouraging teaching to the test, and undervaluing complex but essential competencies.

6. Risks of standards written mainly to be testable

Panelists warned that overemphasis on testability can:

- Distort instruction toward what is easiest to score.
- Undermine play, inquiry, and deeper learning.
- Reduce attention to social-emotional and executive functioning skills.
- Push educators away from challenging or developmentally rich practices.

7. Lessons from early childhood assessment for K-12

Panelists shared that early childhood assessment practices offer several lessons for K-12 systems:

- Greater use of performance-based assessments, portfolios, and collaborative problem-solving.
- Reliance on multiple measures (teacher observation, work samples, family input, other professionals).
- Assessment as part of learning, not just accountability.
- Professional learning communities where teachers analyze student work together.

Panelists envisioned K-12 systems that measure learning in more holistic, culturally responsive, and integrated ways.

8. Designing standards for multiple audiences

Early learning standards are intentionally written for educators, families, caregivers, and other professionals. This is achieved through:

- Clear, accessible language.

- Supporting practices alongside standards.
- Family-friendly resources showing how learning happens in everyday settings.
- Explicit recognition that children learn across contexts, not just classrooms.

Underlying this design is a set of shared guiding principles about what children need and deserve.

9. Most consequential design decisions and tradeoffs

The most significant design choices that panelists noted were:

- Centering the whole child and integrating development across domains.
- Choosing broad, flexible standards over highly specific ones.
- Prioritizing usability and coherence over exhaustive coverage.

Tradeoffs included less precision for accountability systems and a greater need for educator training, but panelists overwhelmingly felt these were worthwhile.

10. Final thoughts and advice

Key recommendations from panelists included:

- Keep standards broad enough to allow multiple pathways to mastery.
- Be explicit about non-negotiables—what every child deserves.
- Include diverse stakeholders, especially educators, in development.
- Invest heavily in professional learning to support implementation.
- Focus on integrity of implementation rather than rigid fidelity.
- Partner with higher education so new educators are prepared to use the standards well.

The session closed with a strong affirmation of play, inquiry, STEM, and experiential learning as essential bridges from early childhood into K–12, and a reminder that the ultimate goal is helping children develop “wonderful ideas” and see themselves as capable, curious learners.

Action Items

- Next Taskforce Meeting: June 17, 2026, 3:00–5:00 p.m. via Zoom.
- Interim Work Assignment: Complete the Design Considerations and Patterns Feedback Survey

Looking Ahead

The June 17, 2026, meeting will focus on reviewing and refining the draft design criteria and principles developed through the interim work. The next phase of work will focus on representation, access, and inclusion. This includes examining who is reflected in the standards, and who is missing, and considering how the design of the standards can better support all learners. As part of this phase, the Taskforce will review a brief survey and provide feedback on key design considerations ahead of the next meeting.