



Report on Early Childhood Curriculum Alignment Grants for Institutes of Higher Education

Report to the Legislature

As required by Laws of Minnesota 2023, Chapter 54, Section 20, Subdivision 24

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For more information:

Kelly Kazeck
Early Learning Services
Department of Children, Youth, and Families
444 Lafayette Road N
Saint Paul, MN 55155
O: 651-539-7724
kelly.kazeck@state.mn.us

As requested by Minnesota Statutes, section 3.197: This report cost approximately \$1,437.90 to prepare, including staff time, printing and mailing expenses.

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Legislative Charge

[Laws of Minnesota 2023, chapter 54, section 20, subdivision 24\(b\)](#), requires the commissioner to report on the Early Childhood Curriculum Alignment Grants for Institutes of Higher Education by December 1, 2024, and again by December 1, 2025. The report must include the number of grant applications received, the criteria applied by the commissioner for evaluating applications, the number of grants awarded, grant recipients, and amounts awarded, early childhood education curricular reforms proposed by each recipient institution, grant outcomes for each recipient institution, and other information identified by the commissioner as outcome indicators.

Note: This grant is funded through the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) but supported through an interagency agreement by the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF).

Introduction

The Early Childhood Curriculum Alignment Grants are intended to support Minnesota's postsecondary institutions improve curricula within their early childhood education programs by incorporating or conforming to the Minnesota Knowledge and Competency Framework (KCF) for early childhood professionals. The KCF articulates the skills, knowledge and abilities required of people working with young children. Over the years work has been done to create alignment between early childhood education programs in institutes of higher education (IHE) with the goal of building a streamlined pathway for people interested in entering and advancing in the early childhood workforce. The [Transforming Minnesota's Early Childhood Workforce group](#) has named this as a priority area in the group's [work plan](#): *"Priority Area One: Develop and Enhance programs in higher education for care and education professionals so that Minnesota has a unified, statewide early childhood education system."*

Several barriers to alignment continue to exist including, but not limited to:

- The Minnesota Transfer Pathway program for Early Childhood exists between some state colleges and universities but not all.
- According to data collected in 2022, there were in total 108 different early childhood programs for the prospective workforce to sort through. Within the 108 different programs, there were 28 variations of early childhood programs.
- According to data collected in 2022, amongst the varying early childhood programs offered across the state there are 15 different credentials offered at institutes of higher education at eight different credential levels.
- Credit for prior learning (CPL) is inconsistent between programs, including the way the Child Development Associate Credential, a nationally recognized credential, is accepted or not accepted at various institutes of higher education.
- Some early childhood education programs have recently done alignment work to parts of the Knowledge and Competency Framework for Early Childhood Professionals through funding provided by the Preschool Development Grant. Not all IHE have had the time or support to do this work.

- New Standards of Effective Practice (SEP) have been approved by the Professional Educator Licensing Board adding to the list of standards programs are needing to develop alignment around adding to the workload of already taxed professors and staff.
- Minnesota’s early childhood educator standards are due for revision and recommendations have been made to adopt the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators of which the Knowledge and Competency Framework is aligned with as well, this will create alignment with the Early Childhood Specials Education teacher education standards. Again, creating additional work for IHE to account for these standards.

The shortage of early childhood educators has made it imperative that Minnesota have a system for early childhood teacher education that is easy to understand, supportive, and allows people the ability to move through the pathway without having to repeat courses or lose time and/or money as they transfer between programs.

Application Process

Two opportunities for proposal submissions were provided. The fiscal year (FY) 2024 grant competition originally posted closed in March 2024. The grant competition was reposted and closed in May 2024. During the first opportunity grantees were required to submit applications in partnership with other institutes of higher education. This resulted in two grant recipients between eight institute of higher education. During the second-round opportunity, the requirement for applicants to name specific partners was removed and replaced with required collaboration with the other grantees to broaden the application pool. This resulted in one additional grant application.

Grant Awards

The grant applications were evaluated based on the need for funding, populations that would benefit, primary project goals and activities aligned to the purpose of the grant and expected outcomes. Other criteria that were evaluated included the capacity of the organization, equity and diversity efforts, evaluation plans, and budget. The chart below identifies each grantee, their partners if applicable and the total award amount.

Grantee	Partner	Award Amount
South Central College	Minnesota State College Southeast, Minnesota State Moorehead, and Northwest Technical College	\$105,728
Metropolitan State University,	Minneapolis Community and Technical College, Dakota County Technical College, and Ridgewater College	\$189,917.23
St. Cloud Technical College	N/A	\$30,000

Curricular Reforms Proposed by Grantees

South Central College (SCC) seeks to collaborate on the alignment of MDE’s Knowledge and Competency Framework (KCF) with current early childhood education curriculum. Up to this point, SCC has not integrated

KCF into their curriculum as their focus has been on Standards of Effective Practice (SEP) requirements, National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) standards and Minnesota’s Early Childhood Indicators of Progress benchmarks. This work will add an element of quality to the current curriculum and future early childhood educators.

Metropolitan State University will map coursework between Early Childhood Studies and Urban Early Childhood Education according to state and local standards: Knowledge and Competency Framework for Early Childhood Professionals (KCF), Standards of Effective Practice (SEP), Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board (PELSB), National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), and the Child Development Associate Credential (CDA). They will continue to embed original KCF content areas with a focus on the following content: Child Development and Learning, Assessment, Evaluation and Individualization, Professionalism, and Clinical Practice. Embedding work will include course revision of assignments, activities, and rubrics. The work will align the new SEPs in ECE courses to meet the PELSB licensing requirements to allow a seamless integration of the KCF in Urban ECE and ECS. They will participate on the development of a tool from the Minnesota Knowledge and Competency Framework for “traditional” assessment of knowledge and competency content and level that can be utilized throughout the state by IHE and general field. Lastly, Metro State will act as the regional co-lead representation for planning of the statewide efforts and evaluation.

St. Cloud Technical & Community College (SCTCC) will emphasize the importance of assessments and maintaining high academic standards. The grant opportunity will enable them to highlight a systematic approach to curriculum alignment using various frameworks like the Minnesota Knowledge and Competency Framework, PELSB, SEP, CDA, and NAEYC. This alignment is key to ensuring that the curriculum meets high academic standards, which is a central goal of SCTCC and Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). The work will focus on developing and enhancing educational programs based on rigorous standards and frameworks, ensuring that practices are grounded in evidence and increase consistency across the state. In addition, quantitative data on the number of faculty participating in workshops, the number of curricular revisions made, and the alignment of courses with the KCF and other standards will be collected.

Curricular Reforms Proposed by Partners

Minneapolis Community and Technical College (MCTC) is working on alignment of the SEPs using a crosswalk and assign KCF competencies to specific courses in the MinnState System. In collaboration with other grantees MCTC will work toward consistency through all campuses that offer ECE courses. Work will be done to update Learner Outcomes for ECED courses at Minneapolis College. They will create assignments and assessments for ECED courses. They will lead the work on the creation of a Desire to Learn (D2L) site for the Community of Practice to be utilized throughout MinnState ECE programs.

Dakota County Technical College (DCTC) participated in regional and statewide collaboration of 2- and 4-year Minnesota State IHE early childhood teacher education program faculty. This funding effectively expands the current collaboration of 2-year IHE early childhood teacher education programs to include colleagues in the 4-year IHEs and allows the participating collaborators to carry out the alignment activities. In collaboration with interested colleagues from other 2- and 4-year IHE early childhood teacher education programs, DCTC will create recommendations for alignment of KCFs from content areas 4, 5, and 8 with early childhood courses

including suggestions for knowledge and skill building activities (lesson plans), assessments, and rubrics. In collaboration with interested colleagues from other 2- and 4-year IHE early childhood teacher education programs, DCTC will create a report detailing the outcomes of the work sessions and overall collaboration including information the extent of curricula reforms proposed and implemented at participating IHEs.

Ridgewater College is working to align EDUC course learning outcomes to the Standards of Effective Practice and the Minnesota Knowledge and Competency Framework (KCF). They are also working to ensure the EDUC course learning outcomes are written in comparable language to the SEP's and KCF's.

Minnesota State College Southeast seeks to collaborate on the integration of early childhood education standards across the state and will serve as the project's "lead." Focus includes aiming to revitalize the Knowledge and Competency Framework Observation Tool (developed in 2017), ensuring it reflects the latest KCF updates and exploring how IHE faculty can utilize it. They plan to research and help develop presentation materials that demystify state and national standards for early childhood education students. These resources will bridge theoretical knowledge with practical application, enabling students to explicitly see the integration of these standards in their coursework and future teaching practices. They will also support the development of a Community of Practice site.

Minnesota State University Moorhead (MSU Moorhead) will engage in the collaborative work planned to include the furthering the alignment of KCF, SEP, and NAEYC standards into Minnesota Teacher Preparation programs to directly impact the early care and education workforce.

Northwest Technical College has previously collaborated with Bemidji State University and Leech Lake Tribal College to embed the newer KCFs and align coursework between the two-year institutions and the four-year institutions. This successful collaboration has fostered the desire for more collaboration and alignment. Being in a rural area, NTC can impact the workforce more directly. They are currently working on aligning Credit for Prior Learning with students bringing in a Child Development Associate certification and incorporating a "CDA on the Way" pathway to a two-year degree. This is the most opportune time to also work on aligning KCF, SEP, NAEYC, and PELSB standards to all courses offered. A comprehensive evaluation will be conducted at the initiative's end (May-June 2025) to assess effectiveness and inform future initiatives.

Analysis

This grant opportunity was not able to be published until late spring of 2024. These grants were not able to be executed until July and later. The work on these grants is in the beginning stages. Since July 2024, the following grant outcomes have been met by the Early Childhood Curriculum grant recipients.

- All grantees are working on embedding competency standards from the Knowledge and Competency Framework into their early childhood coursework. This work will include revision of assignments, activities, and rubrics. These revisions will also consider the Standards of Effective Practice, where applicable. Each institution will submit details on course modifications in a final grant report due July 15, 2025.

- The grantees, led by Metropolitan State University, will collaborate on the development of a tool for conducting “traditional” assessments of the competencies outlined in the Knowledge and Competency Framework that can be utilized by institutes of higher education and the general field.
- All grantees will contribute to the Desire to Learn (D2L) Community of Practice (COP) site created by Minneapolis Community and Technical College, that will house a collection of resources including assignments, activities, and assessments developed by the grantees for embedding the Knowledge and Competency Framework into early childhood curriculum content. All institutes of higher education will have access to the D2L COP site.
- Minnesota State College Southeast will lead the work of revising the Knowledge and Competency Framework Observation Tool created in 2017. The completed tool will be available for use within the field for coaching, self-assessment, and program evaluation.

All three grantees have made significant progress in enhancing collaboration among early childhood faculty, aligning curricula with KCF and other standards, and developing tools and resources to support ongoing professional development and evaluation. Full Analysis will be done once grantees have completed their work.

Some barriers and challenges have been identified by the grantees including, delays in the completion of some tools, particularly the KCF Observation Tool, and ongoing coordination between multiple stakeholders and agencies. The lessons they have identified include the importance of clear communication, collaboration, and structured check-ins to ensure alignment and achieve desired outcomes. Their future work will continue to focus on collaboration, curriculum refinement, and tool development to support long-term alignment with KCF and related standards.

Conclusion

The three grantees are in the beginning stages of the grant work after some delays. It is premature to draw conclusion about outcomes of these investments. The grantees are adjusting to delays and barriers and will continue the work toward the identified activity implementation and goals. Extensive collaboration and alignment work is taking place between grantees and within individual institutions.

From early information provided by grantees key activities that support the grant purpose and outcomes include:

- Review of Curriculum review and course work alignment
- Mapping of Coursework and content alignment. Faculty began the process of aligning courses with multiple standards (KCF, PELSB, NAEYC, CDA, and CLASS). Workshops and collaborative events are planned to continue through 2025.
- Launch of a Statewide Kick-Off Workshop to facilitate faculty collaboration, allowing attendees to share past work, discuss new ideas, and develop plans for the year ahead.
- Development of a Community of Practice (CoP) to engage 29 early childhood faculty members.

Bibliography

Minnesota Department of Education. (2022). Current Institutes of Higher Education Early Childhood Workforce Program Offerings.