



Cradle to Career Statement – Introduction & History

The early years are pivotal ones for children. During these years, they experience a wide variety of learning opportunities including entering a more formalized school experience beginning in the Kindergarten year. As part of this process, children begin to develop critical academic, practical skills and social emotional skills, dispositions, and attitudes during the early years and continue to refine and build on those skills, dispositions, and attitudes through the career and workforce years. The skills identified in college and career readiness documents and standards have their foundational roots in early childhood. For instance, self-regulation is known to “develop(s) over an extended period from birth through young adulthood”¹ with critical intervention points in early childhood and youth.

The [National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education \(NAECS-SDE\)](#) membership has major responsibility in the field of early childhood education. This responsibility spans from infancy through the primary grades—with a focus on high-quality services to all young children and their families through, in part, the administration of programs. As component this focus, the NAECS-SDE membership has developed a set of statements on Cradle to Career Readiness, one that emphasizes the continuity of learning and skill development from birth, through elementary and secondary education, and on into the workforce years. The foundation for these statements is the belief that all children benefit from age appropriate support from appropriately trained and highly-skilled educators. It is critical to support development in the early years and continue to support that development as children move through the continuum from early childhood to adulthood.

The following four statements support fostering the development and continual strengthening of skills critical for success for all children, from birth through their adulthood and workforce years.

1. Children who enter kindergarten with stronger social emotional skills and traditional academic skills seem to be more prepared for success in school. Early school success can be a strong indicator of later educational and career success
 2. The early years and the experiences children have during those years matter. These are the years in which children develop the foundational skills necessary for later 'employability' skills. The opportunities and supports offered and accessed during the early years are critical to optimum success.
 3. The skills needed for success in both school and work develop in a continuum--looking different at the different ages. The early years provide the fundamental frame for how an individual develops the capabilities of self-regulation and develop the foundational capability of executive function.
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4. Foundations of executive function and self-regulation are built in early childhood, but the full range of skills and the wide-spread neural network that connects them, continues to develop into the adolescent and early adult years. Time and opportune experiences allow for development of neural connections in various regions of the brain that are devoted to specific mental functions. These connections allow regions to communicate with each other; those connections become more efficient later in childhood and adolescence.

History

In 2012, the [12 Career Ready Practices](#) identified by the National Association of CTE State Directors were used to begin discussion around the connection between school readiness skills and career readiness/employability skills. After a comparison review, it appeared that employability skills identified as supporting success in a career and in life closely align with skills that are typically described as 'school readiness skills'. As the review progressed, it became clear that there are a range of skills that begin developing during the early childhood years and continue to develop through the K-12 schooling continuum and into career and later life. The skills are both cognitive and non-cognitive, with an emphasis on social-emotional learning that supports success in all environments and at all age levels, with a focus on the whole child/student/adult.

The focus of the Cradle to Career Readiness workgroup, a committee formed with members of NAECS-SDE, has been to develop documents to assist a wide range of audiences in understanding the linkages between skill development in the early years and the continued development and enhancement of those skills in later years, leading to success for each child at each and every stage and age of life. The companion documents are adaptable to a wide range of audiences and are customizable for each state's unique context. These documents include a:

- Resource list that provides links to useful documents and tools on school readiness and college and career readiness. These documents informed the development of the Cradle to Career statements.
- Glossary of common terms that includes vocabulary used in early learning and in youth development with definitions from different sectors. This can be used in a state to identify the terms different stakeholders use to better facilitate understanding.
- Stakeholder document includes a draft letter and set of discussion questions that can be used to connect with stakeholders in your state.
- Comparison Document that provides an example crosswalk of employability skills and where related skills appear in state early learning standards and the Head Start Child Outcomes Framework. This can be adapted and used to emphasize linkages when talking with stakeholders outside of early learning.