



Standards of Quality

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Standards are a way to measure whether we are providing quality services to people. In a service system, standards give us a common way to talk about what we mean by quality and how we know when we reach it.

When we provide care and education to children and their families, we are providing a service. There are three basic parts to any service system:
the **program** that delivers the services;
the **people who receive** the services; and
the **people who provide** the services.

So, the standards of quality relate to these three parts. Like gears, these different standards need to connect in order to work.

The organization or entity that delivers the services is guided by **program standards**. Who decides what the early childhood program standards are? There are program standards set by national organizations like the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the National Association of Family Child Care and the Center on Accreditation (for afterschool standards). In Vermont we also use child care licensing standards, and the Step Ahead Recognition System (STARS) which is Vermont's program quality and improvement system for regulated programs including afterschool, licensed and registered childcare. These different program standards are used to rate and recognize programs of quality. Programs themselves use these standards to assess themselves and improve their quality.



Program Standards include:

- Child care licensing standards
- STARS (Step Ahead Recognition System)
- NAEYC Academy of Accreditation
- National Association of Family Child Care
- Center on Accreditation (for afterschool standards)

The people who receive the services are the consumers. In the world of early childhood and afterschool, we talk about **learning standards**. They measure how the children and their families are doing and how responsive we are to meeting their needs. For example, learning standards measure: are children engaged in play that is helping them develop their skills and knowledge; are children using a variety of ways to express their own ideas; are children engaging with others? Learning standards are used to guide curriculum,

guide learning plans for individual children, and inform families and others about children's development.

What are the early childhood and afterschool learning standards? In Vermont there are Vermont Early Learning Standards (VELS) for children ages three to five. Vermont is developing learning guidelines for infants and toddlers. Public Schools have learning standards for their students.

Learning Standards or Guidelines include:

- Vermont Early Learning Standards
- First Steps (Infant Toddler Learning Guidelines – in process)
- Department of Education Common Core and Grade Level Expectations (for public school children)



Finally, we consider the **people who provide the services**. We call the standards that guide them, **professional standards or competencies**. Whether you call yourself a teacher, childcare provider, day care provider, assistant, director, staff, manager, coordinator or consultant you are important in the lives of young children and have a major influence on their development and growth. You are the professionals. Professional standards help us consider such questions as: do the teachers know what to expect of children; do they know community resources and share them with families; do they know how to set up engaging activities for the children in their care; do they know how to work in a team with other adults? Professional standards define the knowledge, skills and attitudes professionals in our fields should develop. They are used to guide professional development planning, for self- assessment, instruction, coursework, credentials, and as the foundation of career pathways.

What are the professional standards in early childhood and afterschool fields? Core competencies include the Northern Lights Early Childhood and Afterschool Core Competencies, and the Vermont Department of Education professional standards for licensed teachers. There are also Competencies that branch from the Core Competencies: Program Director and Early Childhood Family Mental Health Competencies. Competencies for staff working specifically with Infants and Toddlers will be developed in Vermont.

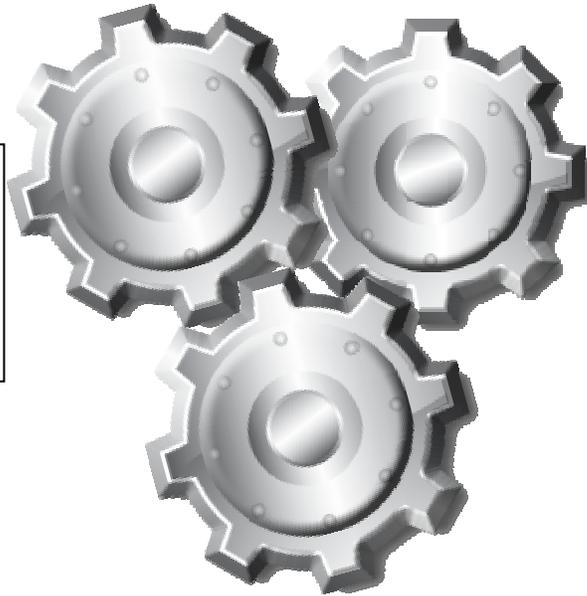


Professional Standards or Competencies include:

- Northern Lights Early Childhood Core competencies
- Northern Lights Afterschool Core Competencies
- Vermont Department of Education professional standards for licensed teachers
- Program Director Competencies (early childhood and afterschool)
- Early Childhood Family Mental Health Competencies.
- Infant and Toddler Competencies (to be developed)

These three types of standards work together.

Program Standards, Learning Standards or Guidelines and Professional Standards and Competencies interconnect and integrate



Like gears, they are inter-dependent. I may use the core competencies to plan the course I am teaching college students, but I also need to know the Vermont Early Learning Standards and program standards – since I plan to teach about these to my students. I need to use program standards to make my program become a high quality, but I also use professional standards to help my staff grow, and learning standards to plan the curriculum. These three types of standards connect to help us define our goals, work toward achieving quality and measure how well we are doing.