

NAEYC Accreditation – Re-Invented By Kathleen Hursh

NAEYC staff along with early childhood professionals from around the country worked several years on revising the accreditation process for early childhood centers that originated in the mid-1980s. The program was piloted and improved before it was presented to the general public at the NAEYC fall 2005 conference in Washington, DC. Within the first year of its existence, changes continue to be made to the process and criteria, likely as a result of users' comments.

As someone who is currently working as a consultant helping six currently accredited centers work through this new process, I write this article to help accredited centers as well as centers not accredited understand the new process.

What are the steps centers will follow in the new accreditation process?

There are four distinct steps in completing the process. In some ways they are similar to the steps in the past, but there are differences.

The **first step** is to enroll. Enrollment does not lock you into the time frame. This is an open ended time during which the director, the board of directors or management team, and staff conduct the self study. You may take as long or short as you wish. After enrolling you received the eleven book set explaining the expanded criteria in ten content areas and a CDROM containing the forms needed to complete the accreditation process. The enrollment form can be found on-line at

http://www.naeyc.org/academy/web_ready/programs/FourSteps01.asp.

For programs already accredited, it is my understanding that you will be considered enrolled by NAEYC, however, don't rely on me. Instead contact NAEYC to see whether you need to submit an enrollment form. You will likely have a limited time with which to conduct your self study, based on the expiration date of your current accreditation status. See the chart below.

The self study involves conducting classroom tours and observations, creating classroom portfolios, conducting a program tour and completing a program portfolio, conducting a teaching staff survey and a family survey, and completing the child files checklist and the staff files checklist.

I would suggest that a starting point for a program would be to review the new set of criteria and documents that need to be completed. This should give you a basic understanding of the process as well as a beginning idea of the program's compliance of the criteria. Completing initial or trial tours, observations, and surveys will provide you with a better understanding of how well the program meets the criteria. During this time, classroom teachers should begin creating their classroom portfolio. Creating a timeline for activity completions will be helpful in keeping you "on-task". Meeting with other directors who are proceeding through this process will also be helpful to keep you on-track.

The **second step** is the application phase which should be submitted to NAEYC after the program has completed the self study and made necessary improvements to meet criteria. The application is quite simple and basically, if you are a NYS licensed program that serves 10 or more children birth through kindergarten (or any combination of that age range) you meet the eligibility requirements to apply. The 17 page application asks programs to provide demographic information about the program. You will also be asked to indicate when you want

the candidacy materials sent to you, which will then determine when the assessment visit will occur. While waiting for the candidacy materials, I think it would wise to formally complete the tours, observations and surveys, as well as finishing the classroom portfolios and the center portfolio.

The application can be found on-line at http://www.naeyc.org/academy/web_ready/programs/FourSteps02.asp.

Step three occurs once NAEYC receives and processes your application. They will send you a link to their website so that you can download the candidacy form. This form is lengthy (about 45 pages long) and must be completed correctly within a short time frame (approximately 2 months). These forms may differ from program to program in regard to the criteria on which the center must report its compliance. Go to the NAEYC website for a sample of the candidacy form: http://www.naeyc.org/academy/web_ready/programs/FourSteps03.asp#footnote01.

Step four occurs after NAEYC receives and reviews the candidacy materials. If NAEYC judges your candidacy materials as an indication you are ready for a visit, they will contact the center within 6 months to schedule a visit. Centers are able to indicate several days within a period of 30 days that are not good for a visit. Once these days are given to NAEYC, they will schedule a visit. The center will be informed of the visit date the day before the assessors arrive.

Below are charts outlining the time frame for the accreditation procedure. The first is for those centers who are currently accredited under the former process and the second is for those who seek accreditation for the first time under the new procedure.

Programs Currently Accredited		
Date of Program Expiration	Step 2: Must apply by this date	Step 3: Must submit candidacy materials by this date
May 1-Sept. 30, 2007	Feb. 28, 2007	May 31, 2007

Programs Seeking Initial Accreditation			
Step 1: Enrollment	Step 2: Application Submitted	Step 3: Candidacy deadlines	Step 4: Visit time frame
Prior to November 1, 2006	November 1, 2006 to February 28, 2007	May 31, 2007	June 2007 to November 2007
		Sept. 2007	October 2007 to March 2008
		Jan. 31, 2008	February 2008 to July 2008

How much will it cost to become accredited?

There are **three fee steps** for completing the accreditation process and a fee to maintain accreditation which is submitted with annual reports on the first, second, third, and fourth anniversaries of being accredited. There is no annual report on the fifth anniversary, since the center will be submitting new candidacy materials for re-accreditation. The following chart outlines the step fees for centers with enrollment from 10 to 240 children, without counting school age children, since they are no longer counted in the new accreditation process. If centers have more than 240 children enrolled, those fees can be found on the NAEYC website listed below.

Accreditation Fees			
	Level 1 (10 to 60 children)	Level 2 (61 to 120 children)	Level 3 (121 to 240 children)
Step 1 Enrollment	\$425	\$525	\$650
Step 2 Application	\$200	\$275	\$350
Steps 3 & 4 Candidacy / Onsite Visit	\$650	\$775	\$950
Total Cost	\$1275	\$1575	\$1950

http://www.naeyc.org/academy/web_ready/Fees.asp

NAEYC now offers **scholarship awards** to help centers pay for the accreditation fees. The following chart outlines the savings and total costs if a center receives the maximum scholarship award based on the acceptance of their application.

Maximum Accreditation Scholarship Awards			
	Level 1 (10 to 60 children)	Level 2 (61 to 120 children)	Level 3 (121 to 240 children)
Step 1 Enrollment	\$200 (your cost \$225)	\$250 (your cost \$275)	\$350 (your cost \$300)
Step 2 Application	\$100 (your cost \$100)	\$175 (your cost \$100)	\$175 (your cost \$175)
Steps 3 & 4 Candidacy / Onsite Visit	\$275 (your cost \$375)	\$325 (your cost \$450)	\$400 (your cost \$550)
Total Cost	\$700 (you save \$575)	\$825 (you save \$750)	\$1025 (you save \$925)

http://www.naeyc.org/academy/web_ready/GetHelp.asp

What criteria changes were made when re-inventing the accreditation process?

Currently there are **10 standards with a total of 423 criteria**. The standards include: relationships (37 criteria), curriculum (88 criteria), teaching (67 criteria), assessment of child progress (27 criteria), health (38 criteria), teachers (14 criteria), families (28 criteria), community relationships (18 criteria), physical environment (48 criteria), leadership and management (58 criteria). Within each standard there are some criteria which are common to all age groups and others that are specific to an age group (infants, toddlers, preschoolers, or kindergarteners).

Although there are similarities between the criteria in the former and new processes, they are now more specific and there are more than before. The new areas include specific criteria for involving families and communities as well as assessing children's progress.

The **assessment of children** appears to be a reaction to the current educational climate of testing children to monitor their progress and the success of schools in educating children, as found in the No Child Left Behind Act. Although assessment is a new focus of accreditation, NAEYC asks centers to be developmentally appropriate when conducting child assessments. No specific assessments are required.

The criteria specify that assessments must be linked with the classroom's curriculum plans for both the group of children as well as for individual children. There is also a need for programs to have a formalized curriculum, which does not need to be commercially published. The curriculum section has criteria relating to specific content areas such as early literacy, early mathematics, science, technology, the arts, and social studies. Again, NAEYC expects to see developmentally appropriate curriculum activities representing these content areas. These content areas are also found in NAEYC accreditation standards for university teacher education programs, as well as in the NYSED Preschool Planning Guide.

It appears the curriculum and assessment criteria will be most difficult for programs and teaching staff to master, since we have not been asked to formalize curriculum, which is connected to child assessments. Teachers will likely need in-service training to help them use assessment tools and to understand how to match the results with curriculum plans.

Detailed information on accreditation standards can be found at the NAEYC website:
<http://www.naeyc.org/academy/standards/>.

Are their changes in teaching staff qualifications?

Yes. NAEYC's goal is that teachers will have at least an associate degree and 75% will have a bachelor degree by the year 2020. Between 2006 and 2020 the staff qualification requirements will be gradually phased in to reach the goal of college degreed teachers in each classroom.

Although this may be alarming to current teaching staff who do not have a college degree, in my opinion, it is a good goal that is likely to result in higher quality programs for all children so that they can start elementary school ready to learn. Administratively, this new criteria is also financially concerning to programs. However, teachers and program management have 13 years to meet this goal. This gives us plenty of time to begin hiring more qualified teachers, for current teachers to begin AA and BS college programs, and for program management, local foundations, and government bodies to plan how to fund increased wages for teachers with higher education levels.

Why should my center want to pursue accreditation? It sounds too expensive and too difficult.

The answer is **for the children**, not to mention for the future of our society and our country!

Research¹ has shown that quality early childhood programs provide children with a developmentally appropriate base which results in successful school experiences, less criminal activity, success in the workplace, and more stable family situations when they marry and have children. In general model quality programs included in research projects were those with

teaching staff who had college degrees with specific education in child development and developmentally appropriate curriculum planning.

If early childhood programs rise to meet these new accreditation standards, we can work toward increased financial support at local, state, and national levels. I believe over time government and local foundations will become our partners in providing quality care and education to the nation's young children and their families. It's already happening in varying degrees here at the local, county, and state level.

I see accreditation as a duty and requirement for each early childhood program. Together we can achieve a goal of quality early childhood education for all children.

¹ Schweinhart, L. J., Montie, J., Xiang, Z., Barnett, W. S., Belfield, C. R., & Nores, M. (2005). *Lifetime effects: The High/Scope Perry Preschool study through age 40*. (Monographs of the High/Scope Educational Research Foundation, 14). Ypsilanti, MI: High/Scope Press.

For additional questions and answers go on-line at
http://www.naeyc.org/academy/web_ready/faq1.asp.