

Overview of the Conversation:

Most valuable aspects of the accreditation project:

- Learning about program improvement; engaging in the associated strategic planning and implementing of new strategies
- Highlighting the strengths and needs of EC programs to college administrations; in some cases, spurring system-wide changes
- Strengthening relationships with community partners
- Pulling faculty together (in some instances, across campuses) to pursue a common purpose
- Gaining deeper understanding of the EC programs and greater appreciation for their past evolution Focusing on accountability (e.g., gathering evidence, validating assessments)
- Engaging state-level partners in the project
- Gaining access to high quality professional development opportunities and technical assistance provided by Clayton Early Learning
- Applying the lens of a national quality perspective – the NAEYC standards framework – to program development and identifying best practices
- Rejuvenating intellectual stimulation

Aspects of the accreditation project that were challenging:

- Overlaps and busy work in some of the areas of the self-study
- Some negative peer reviews
- Lack of technical assistance from NAEYC related to the development of key assessments and the associated rubrics used to collect data
- Rigidity of the 5 key assessments framework seemed inconsistent with the value placed on recognizing the individuality of programs in other aspects of the process
- Site visits were extremely time intensive and stressful
- Since voluntary accreditation is not expected to drive enrollment increases, the long-term benefits (especially in relation to the effort involved) are as yet unclear