



National Association for the Education of Young Children Early Childhood Associate Degree Accreditation



Accreditation Handbook

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Table of Contents

Table of Contents	2
Acknowledgements	5
Background and Development.....	6
Overview	7
Purpose	7
Scope	7
Mission	7
Guiding Principles.....	8
Potential Benefits of Accreditation for Institutions, for Degree Programs, and for the Field	9
Steps in the Accreditation Process	10
Accreditation Process Steps Chart	13
10 Suggested Ways to Get Started.....	14
Finances, Governance and Operations	15
Finances	15
The NAEYC Governing Board	15
The Commission on Early Childhood Associate Degree Accreditation.....	15
The Early Childhood Associate Degree Accreditation Staff.....	16
The Peer Reviewers.....	16
Application and Eligibility	17
The application form	17
The eligibility requirements and evidence of compliance.....	18
The staff review	18
Self-Study	20
Goals and objectives of self-study.....	20
Important features of self-study	20
Successful Accreditation: The Big Picture	21
Engaging in Self-Study Work	22
Guiding questions for self-study	23

NAEYC Accreditation Criteria	27
Demonstrating program strengths	27
The Key = Intentional, Responsive Programs	27
The Accreditation Criteria at a Glance.....	28
NAEYC Accreditation Standards and Supportive Skills.....	37
Meeting the Standards	37
The Six Standards = A Vision of Quality	38
The Key = Candidate Performance in Relation to the Standards.....	38
The Standards & Key Elements at a Glance.....	39
The Supportive Skills at a Glance.....	40
Indicators & Evidence Used in the Accreditation Review	43
Submitting the Self-Study Report.....	44
Candidacy.....	44
Program responsibilities	44
Standards & Criteria in the Self-Study Report	45
Are we ready to submit our report?	47
Staff review	47
The Site Visit	49
The purpose of the site visit.....	49
Selection and Training of Peer Reviewers	50
Scheduling the visit	50
Planning Ahead: What Needs to Happen Before the Team Arrives?	51
Special conditions affecting a site visit	52
Arrangements for the visit	52
The activities of the Peer Review Team.....	54
Emergencies affecting a site visit.....	55
The Peer Review Report and Written Response	56
The Accreditation Decision.....	58
The NAEYC Commission on Early Childhood Associate Degree Accreditation.....	58
Accreditation decisions are made by the Commission	58
Accreditation decisions are evidence-based	59
The Role of Standards and Criteria in the Decision	59
Possible decisions.....	60
Effective date and public announcement of decisions	62

Maintaining Accreditation.....	63
Annual Reports	63
Loss, revocation or withdrawal of Accreditation	63
Appeal Procedures.....	65
Which Decisions Can Be Appealed	65
Filing an Appeal.....	65
The Appeals Panel	66
The Scope and Conduct of the Appeal Review	66
The Appeal Panel Decision and Report.....	67
Complaint Procedures	68
Complaints about the operations of an accredited program.....	68
Complaints about the actions of the Peer Reviewers who conduct the site visit	69
Deferral Requests	71
Withdrawal Procedures.....	72
Withdrawing an Application for Accreditation Eligibility	72
Withdrawing a Self-Study Report.....	72
Withdrawing an Appeal.....	73
Glossary	74
More Help Along the Way.....	84

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Background and Development

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Early Childhood Associate Degree Accreditation system sets a standard of excellence for early childhood programs that prepare teachers at the associate degree level.

Associate degree programs are crucial to the development of more diverse and highly qualified early childhood teachers in child care, Head Start, preschool/Pre-K and primary grade settings. The NAEYC associate degree standards are based on recent research in early childhood development and learning and describe what well-prepared graduates of associate degree programs should know and be able to do. The accreditation standards are performance based and aligned with NAEYC's national standards for baccalaureate and graduate programs in early childhood teacher education.

NAEYC is also involved in the accreditation of baccalaureate, master's and doctoral teacher education programs in early childhood education through its affiliation with the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE). NCATE supports NAEYC's development of the associate degree accreditation system.

ACCESS, the national association for early childhood faculty at associate degree granting institutions, supported the system through start up funding and encourages its members to participate through application for program accreditation and as Peer Reviewers. ACCESS leaders served on the initial feasibility study group, the Advisory Council, and currently serve as members of the Commission.

The accreditation process includes extensive self-study, submission of a Self-Study Report, a site visit conducted by a Peer Review Team, and an accreditation decision made by a national Commission of early childhood professionals. Sixty associate degree programs in six states - Arkansas, Illinois (the City Colleges of Chicago), Maryland, Massachusetts, North Carolina, and South Carolina - field tested the system's procedures and materials in 2005. Field testing of procedures concluded with the first Peer Review site visits and Commission decisions during spring 2006.

Funding for the development phase of the associate degree accreditation was provided by NAEYC, with contributions from ACCESS and from states involved in the start-up phase as well as grants from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the A.L. Mailman Family Foundation, the Joyce Foundation, the Mary Black Foundation, the Rockefeller Brothers Fund and the W. Clement & Jessie V. Stone Foundation. The fully operational system is self-sustaining, with core operations supported through accreditation fees.

Overview

This chapter describes the mission, guiding principles, benefits, purpose and scope of NAEYC Early Childhood Associate Degree Accreditation.

Purpose

The purpose of NAEYC Early Childhood Associate Degree Accreditation (ECADA) is to promote excellence in early childhood teacher education; to provide a valid and objective external evaluation of these programs as a service to the public, to prospective students and to the profession.

Scope

The scope of NAEYC Early Childhood Associate Degree Accreditation is educational programs at the associate degree level that prepare students to work in the field of early childhood.

Mission

The mission of the NAEYC Early Childhood Associate Degree Program Accreditation system is to set a standard of excellence for associate degree early childhood programs and to recognize programs that have demonstrated to a peer review board that they meet this standard, thereby benefiting the early childhood profession, young children, families, and communities.

Guiding Principles

The NAEYC early childhood associate degree accreditation system will be one that:

- Is rigorous yet not unduly burdensome for programs and institutions—supporting excellence rather than taking time away from excellence
- Improves diverse and nontraditional students' access to professional preparation programs
- Aligns with nationally recognized content standards
- Promotes articulation between 2 and 4-year institutions
- Links with state efforts in setting standards for programs and licensure of early childhood professionals
- Links with national and state efforts to support and reward early childhood educators for achieving higher levels of education
- Includes or links with training and technical assistance that gives programs information needed to conduct self-study and prepare for accreditation review
- Includes an evaluation and research component in the development and implementation of the system
- Results in benefits for programs and students regardless of the outcome of the accreditation decision
- Seeks input from ACCESS (American Associate Degree Early Childhood Educators) as the most credible and influential organization representing associate degree early childhood professional preparation
- Functions and is governed in a way that preserves the independence of the accreditation process and protects its founding organization from even the appearance of conflict of interest.

Approved by NAEYC Early Childhood Associate Degree Accreditation Advisory Council, 2004

Potential Benefits of Accreditation for Institutions, for Degree Programs, and for the Field

- A national accreditation system for early childhood associate degree programs sends a message about the critical importance of the early childhood associate degree within a comprehensive professional development system.
- Accreditation can support and enhance state-level efforts to create higher quality early childhood professional development systems that are responsive to unique state and local needs within a framework of national standards of excellence.
- Early childhood associate degree program accreditation fills a quality assurance gap, since the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) accredits teacher education units at the baccalaureate and graduate levels but does not accredit associate degree programs.
- By using the NAEYC standards, supportive skills, and criteria as guides to program improvement, programs can enhance program quality, community relationships, commitment to access and equity, and other desirable elements of early childhood associate degree programs.
- Accreditation is an external assessment, demonstrating that the program is aligned with shared national, professional standards.
- Accredited associate degree programs may find it easier to develop articulation agreements with 4-year institutions.
- Accredited associate degree programs have the potential to attract more students and will produce candidates who may be especially attractive to employers because of the quality of their preparation.
- Associate degree program accreditation can provide an effective tool for program assessment within higher education institutions.
- The NAEYC associate degree accreditation system can support institutional efforts related to student centered practices, learning communities, appreciative inquiry, data-driven decision making, and use of candidate assessment data and outcomes-measures as part of ongoing program evaluation.

Steps in the Accreditation Process

Step 1: Inquiry

Explore the possibility of accreditation.

Step 2: Application & Eligibility

Initial Application

NAEYC invites eligible associate degree programs to submit an Application for Accreditation Eligibility. Current application forms and fees are posted on the NAEYC website. The eligibility requirements are listed on the form, along with guidance regarding documents and signatures required as evidence of compliance with eligibility requirements. Eligible programs receive a letter confirming eligibility or noting the eligibility requirements not met.

Step 3: Enrollment & Self-Study

Self-Study

Eligible programs begin the self-study process. Primary program contacts, as designated on the application, are given access to the online community website with additional self-study resources. They also receive e-mail notices and e-newsletters from the national office. The national office will communicate about the program's progress only with the designated primary contact, who is responsible for sharing information with other staff as deemed appropriate by the institution.

There is no required timetable for self-study and no Annual Fee during this process step. Colleges are encouraged to build their own timelines to include analysis and reflection, stakeholder involvement, data gathering, implementation of program improvements, collecting evidence of strengths related to accreditation criteria and compliance with accreditation standards, and writing the program Self-Study Report—a process that will take at least one year.

Additional technical assistance is available from NAEYC. National office staff are happy to respond to questions. Full-day workshops are offered in conjunction with NAEYC's fall Annual Conference and summer National Institute for Early Childhood Professional Development. The online community website hosts archived FAQs, newsletters, and occasional discussions and webinars. In some cases, early childhood programs from multiple institutions in the same state will want to work together. NAEYC encourages this "state cohort" approach.

Step 4: Candidacy & Peer Review

Candidacy

Once a program completes the self-study process, it submits a standard Self-Study Report with the Accreditation Review Fee. At this point the program is recognized as in Candidacy and begins to pay an Annual Fee.

The report must be submitted using the blank report form, or template, on the online community website. Instructions for submitting electronic reports are also on the website. Programs requesting a

site visit the following semester must submit reports by the deadlines posted on the online community site. NAEYC staff review the report for completeness and to confirm that the program is ready for a site visit. When the report is approved as ready, the program's primary contact works with NAEYC staff to schedule the site visit.

Site Visit

The three-member Peer Review Team, led by a team chair, spends two-and-a-half days on campus reviewing documents, conducting interviews, and observing campus facilities. The team completes their evaluation by the end of the visit, identifying the standards that are met and any significant concerns related to standards, supportive skills or criteria. The report also makes comments on strengths, challenges and areas for consideration based on their observations during the visit and the team members' analysis of the Self-Study Report.

The Peer Review Report

The team will give a brief oral presentation of their findings during the exit session on the final morning of the site visit. The team chair will submit a written report to the NAEYC office within two weeks following the visit, using the Peer Review Report template found on the online community website. NAEYC staff will review the report for completeness, clarity, and content appropriate to accreditation policy and procedures.

The Program's Written Response

Programs will receive the team's report and have an opportunity to submit a written response before the Commission meeting. No new evidence can be introduced after the site visit, but programs may want to correct factual inaccuracies in the Peer Review Report, or highlight information in the Self-Study Report that may have been overlooked.

Step 5: Commission Decision

The Accreditation Decision Report

The program's Self-Study Report, Peer Review Report and any written response from the program are forwarded to the NAEYC Commission for review and deliberation. The Commission makes one of three decisions: Accredited, Accredited with Conditions, or Not Accredited. Accredited programs substantially meet NAEYC standards and are publicly listed on the NAEYC website.

Programs that are Accredited with Conditions are publicly listed as accredited for two years. All conditions must be met and documented in the second Annual Report in order to maintain accreditation status. Programs that are Not Accredited may choose to return to self-study work, to appeal if there is evidence that accreditation policy or procedure was violated, or to withdraw from the accreditation process.

**Step 6:
Accreditation &
Renewal**

The Annual Report

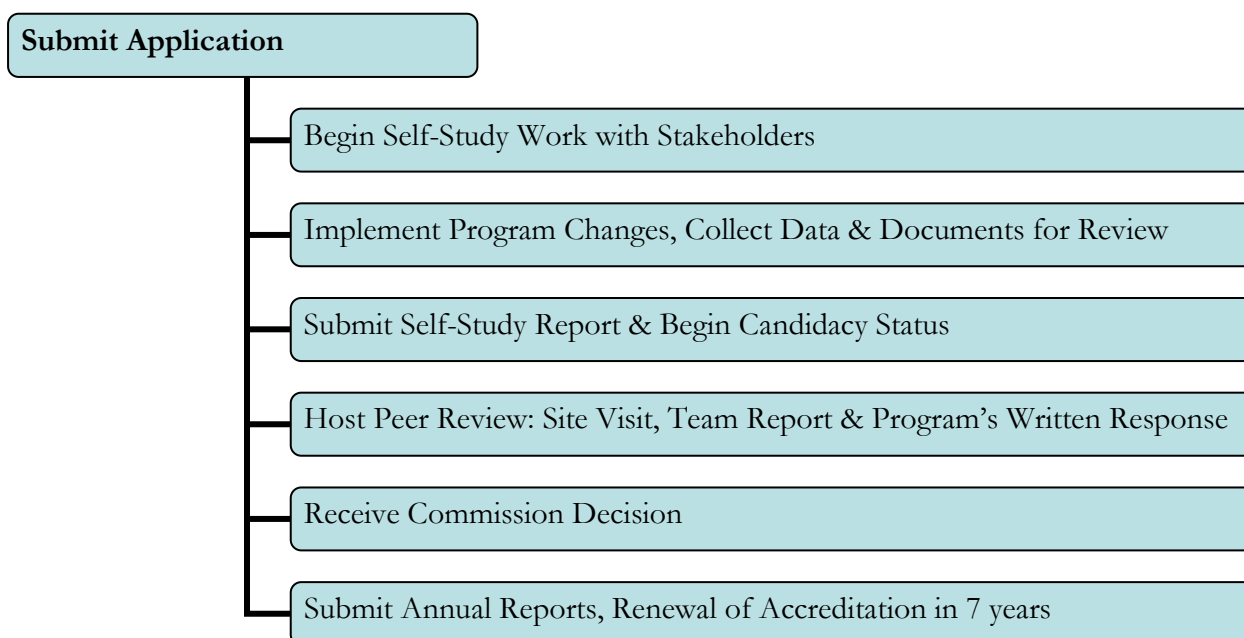
If accredited, the program becomes a member in good standing of the NAEYC Early Childhood Associate Degree Accreditation system, reporting annually on major developments, ongoing program improvements, and any conditions or the recommendations in the Accreditation Decision Report.

Renewal of Accreditation

Renewal of accreditation, which includes an updated Self-Study Report and site visit, takes place every 7 years. Renewal requires evidence of continued implementation of key assessments aligned with NAEYC standards. Programs submit student performance data from at least two applications of each assessment, and descriptions of use of that data to inform teaching and learning in relation to one or more accreditation standard or criterion. Programs are encouraged to report on quality improvement projects, innovative approaches to challenges, participation in an institution initiative or partnership, telling a "then and now" 5 year story.

Accreditation Process Steps Chart

Expect at least 2 years between application and decision.
 There is no time limit on self-study work.



10 Suggested Ways to Get Started

- Download the Application for Accreditation Eligibility form and read it carefully. How many associate degrees are offered in your unit? Does each degree program meet the eligibility requirements? Remember that the accreditation process will take at least 2 years from application to decision.
- Review the accreditation criteria. What do you already know about your program's history, faculty, candidates, and community demographics? With others, review and articulate your program's unique mission and special strengths.
- Identify who on your campus and in the community will need to be involved in preparing for accreditation, finding budget resources, providing demographic information, etc.
- Become familiar with NAEYC's standards and supportive skills for candidates in associate degree programs (download from NAEYC's website *2010 NAEYC Initial & Advanced Accreditation Standards for use by Associate, Baccalaureate, and Graduate Degree Programs*).
- Involve your college's faculty and candidates in discussing these standards—what do they mean to you and your program? Compare your state and college's identified outcomes or candidate competencies with NAEYC's standards and supportive skills. How do they fit together?
- With other faculty, start looking at your program's "learning opportunities" (course outcomes, field experiences, learning activities commonly used in specific courses, etc.). How well do these learning experiences help candidates gain the competencies reflected in NAEYC's standards and supportive skills? How well do they address the unique and specific needs of your candidates? How well do they fit your state, community and institutional context?
- What do you think all graduates of your degree program should know and be able to do? What assignments do you want to be sure all of your graduates have completed? How do these assignments reflect your desired program outcomes? Which of the NAEYC standards are addressed? How satisfied are you and what might be improved?
- Select five "key assessments" that serve as indicators of what your candidates are expected to know and be able to do in relation to the Accreditation Standards and Supportive Skills. Are these assessment tools currently used in required courses? Do all faculty implement these five key assessments consistently in all course sections?
- Consider attending the full-day technical assistance workshop for associate degree program accreditation at NAEYC's fall Annual Conference or summer National Institute for Early Childhood Professional Development.
- Regularly check NAEYC's website for updates and information about associate degree accreditation. Call or e-mail accreditation office staff with your questions along the way.

Finances, Governance and Operations

Finances

The costs of accreditation are met by program fees and by contributions from NAEYC and other professional associations. Programs cover the cost of site visits directly. Reasonable surplus may be accumulated for future contingent needs. Fees are raised in response to analyses of income, expenses, predicted growth and capacity needs. Current fee schedules are available from the national office and on the NAEYC website.

The NAEYC Governing Board

National standards for preparation of early childhood professionals are developed and published by NAEYC. The key elements of each standard, with examples of learning opportunities and evidence of candidate growth, are described in the publication, *2010 NAEYC Initial & Advanced Accreditation Standards for use by Associate, Baccalaureate, and Graduate Degree Programs*. This publication is available for download on the NAEYC website.

The Commission on Early Childhood Associate Degree Accreditation

The principal *function* of the Accreditation Commission is to exercise professional judgment in making accreditation decisions. The Commission works with staff to develop guidance documents and data gathering instruments necessary to carry out this function. The Commission Chair may appoint *ad hoc committees* as needed to facilitate work between meetings.

The Commission consists of not fewer than eight *members*, serving staggered three-year terms. One member is elected as Chairperson. Membership includes *public members* who are not members of the early childhood profession. Members of the profession who serve on committees or work for agencies that recommend the award of funds to programs that have or may seek accreditation may not accept concurrent membership on the Commission.

When a Commission member withdraws from the portion of a meeting to avoid conflicts of interest, that position is not counted in determining a quorum. The vote of a majority of the Commission members at which a quorum is present is required to make a program decision.

Commission members will avoid potential *conflicts of interest* by voluntarily withdrawing from the discussion and decision on the program. The Commission may determine that a member is in possible conflict of interest and ask a member to withdraw from discussion of, and decision on, a

particular program. The Commission is required to exercise a high degree of professional judgment as it applies the accreditation standards, supportive skills and criteria in its review of program Self-Study Reports, Peer Review Reports, and Program Written Responses. The accreditation decision is not based on a numerical score. Professional judgment must be used to evaluate the extent to which a program has submitted evidence that it meets each accreditation standard.

The Early Childhood Associate Degree Accreditation Staff

The national staff is responsible for the daily operations of the accreditation office. The Director is responsible for overseeing the development of the program, including standards, policies and procedures; serving as spokesperson for the accrediting organization; serving as ex-officio and non-voting member of the Commission; and implementing the strategic recommendations of the Commission and of the NAEYC Governing Board as appropriate to their roles.

The Peer Reviewers

The Peer Review Team's role is to prepare for and conduct the site visit, producing a Peer Review Report for the program and Commission. Peer Reviewers submit an application that documents their educational background and professional experience in early childhood teacher education. Qualified reviewers are invited to attend training.

All team members are responsible for following accreditation policy and procedure when evaluating the Self-Study Report and conducting the site visit. The oral and written team report represents the consensus of the team, based on their application of the Peer Reviewer Worksheet and Rubric. The team chair leads team meetings during the site visit, sends the final written report to the national office, and serves as the team's primary contact for communication with the national office and host institution.

- Confidentiality: Commission members, Peer Reviewers and office staff shall keep all information used in making accreditation decisions confidential except:
 - Public listings of accredited programs
 - Legally required disclosures

Application and Eligibility

This chapter explains the first step in the accreditation process: Confirming each associate degree program's eligibility for accreditation.

The first step for all institutions is to determine how many associate degree programs are eligible for NAEYC Early Childhood Associate Degree Accreditation. After determining eligibility, the institution will need to consider how many programs it wants to move forward for self-study, peer review and commission decision. Each associate degree program should be described on a separate application form. Multiple associate degree programs may be submitted in one application with one Application & Eligibility Review Fee.

The application form

The Application for Accreditation Eligibility is available on the NAEYC website. Programs must submit the form that is current at the time of submission. Instructions for submission are on the form. Payment of the *Application & Eligibility Review Fee* should be attached to the application form. A current schedule of accreditation fees is available from the national office and on the NAEYC website.

The application must include the *signature of the chief executive officer* to demonstrate institutional support for the accreditation endeavor.

The *primary contact* must be an early childhood program faculty member. This person will be the primary contact for staff communication related to the early childhood accreditation criteria, standards and self-study report. Staff or Peer Reviewers may request a resume or curriculum vitae for this faculty member.

The *secondary contact* may be either another full-time program faculty member or an administrator who will provide support to the program's accreditation work.

The eligibility requirements and evidence of compliance

Each degree program submitted for review must meet five eligibility requirements.

1. The institution offering the associate degree programs must be currently accredited by a regional institutional accrediting agency that is recognized by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) or the US Department of Education.
2. Each associate degree program is a specialized degree in early childhood or child development with at least 18 credit hours of early childhood coursework. This may include courses from other departments, such as Child Psychology, Sociology of the Family, or Children's Literature if these courses are aligned with NAEYC accreditation standards and faculty are willing to participate in site visit interviews.
3. Each associate degree program consists of a cohesive set of courses, field placements, and related educational experiences.
4. Each associate degree program has graduated at least one class prior to application.
5. The faculty for each associate degree program includes a) at least one full time faculty member whose primary responsibilities are in the early childhood programs submitted for review and b) who holds a graduate degree in early childhood education, child development, child and family studies or a related discipline with at least 18 graduate credits in early childhood/family studies. This faculty member must act as either the primary or secondary contact. One person may serve this role in multiple associate degree programs.

The staff review

Staff members review each application for completeness. Applications will not be considered until the Application & Eligibility Review Fee is received and each item is complete. The eligibility review may include staff investigation into the program website and the website of the regional accrediting body identified by the program. Staff may also contact the primary contact listed on the application to clarify information or to document compliance with eligibility requirements.

Because the accreditation process is initiated by the program that submits itself for review, the burden of proof of meeting the eligibility requirements rests with the program. The program is responsible for preparing the application using the current form provided by the national office and with a degree of thoroughness and clarity that will satisfy a detailed review by staff. Questions about

interpreting the eligibility requirements or how to submit multiple degree programs should be directed to national office staff.

When the application is complete and any questions about the program are clarified, each associate degree program receives a separate eligibility decision letter. Each degree program must meet the accreditation eligibility requirements. Each eligible degree program must meet the accreditation standards and will receive a separate accreditation decision. The primary contact from eligible programs is given access to *the online community website of resources* for self-study and peer review.

It is sometimes possible to combine *more than one eligible program* into one Self-Study Report and one Peer Review Team site visit. Institutions with multiple eligible programs are strongly encouraged to communicate with the national office during the self-study process to determine whether or not multiple degree programs should be submitted together in one Self-Study Report.

Similarly, eligible programs offered on *more than one campus* should communicate with the national office staff to determine how many campuses can effectively be submitted in one Self-Study Report and visited in one site visit. Eligible programs that offer both on campus and *online courses*, should communicate with the national office to determine how to effectively present evidence related to criteria and standards across both on campus and online course sections.

Self-Study

This chapter describes the process of self-study that follows program application and culminates in submission of a Self-Study Report.

Goals and objectives of self-study

Why do a self-study of your program? The early childhood profession is constantly evolving. All programs, no matter how strong, need to continually evaluate whether they are providing candidates with a high-quality education. The best way to know this and to keep pace with change is through a self-study process.

Programs undertake self-study to:

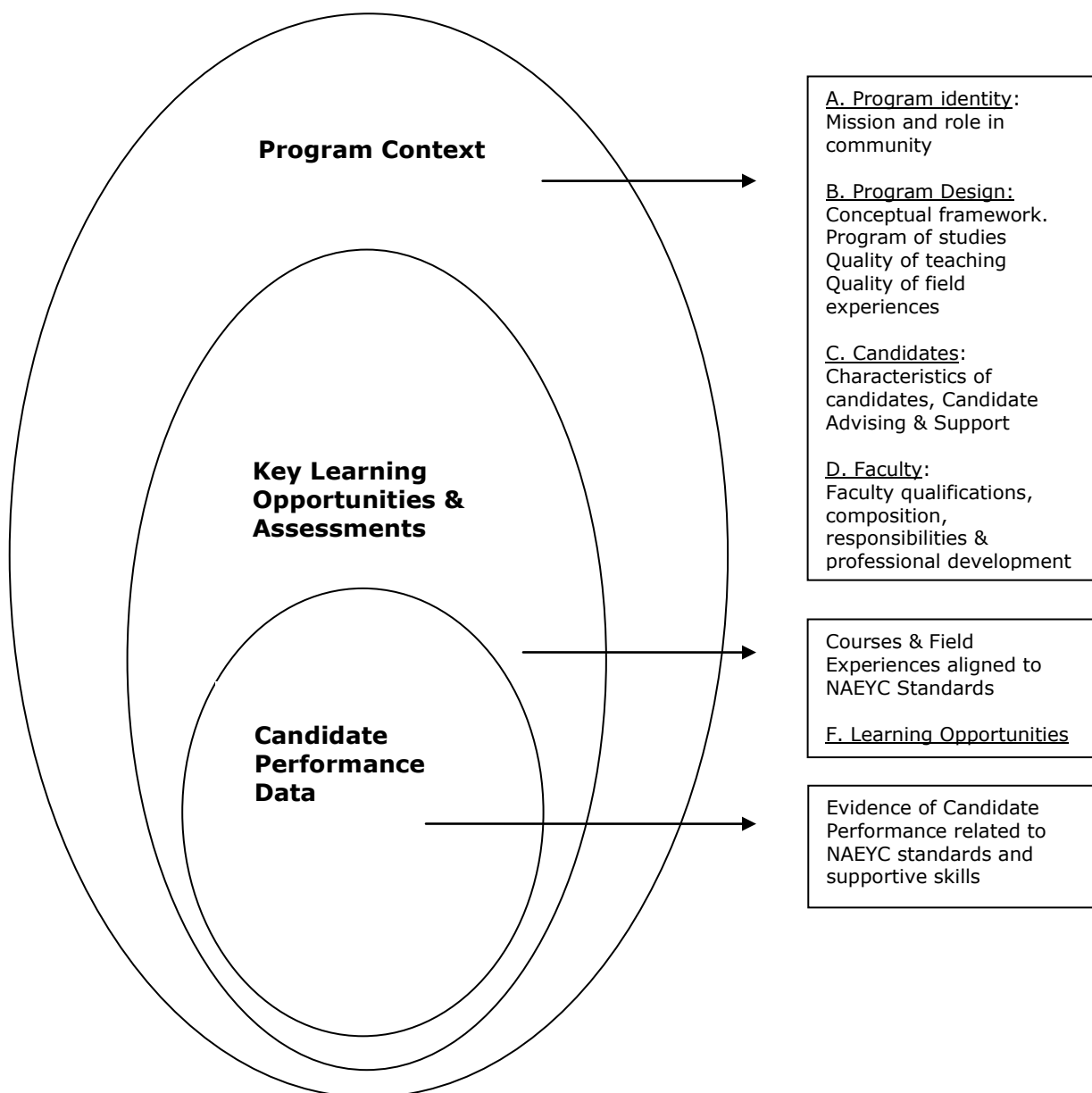
- Work together toward continuous improvement that benefits candidates and the early childhood profession,
- Prepare to submit a report to NAEYC, and
- Get ready for an on-site peer review.

Important features of self-study

The self-study process for associate degree programs in early childhood education has four important features. NAEYC intended that these features would make self-study a formative and fulfilling experience for the people involved.

- It is *comprehensive*. In self-study, you'll be examining all aspects of your program's activities, always focused on the standards, and using both qualitative and quantitative information.
- It is *inclusive*. In self-study, you'll bring together a broad range of individuals and groups to reflect on your work, gather data, provide feedback, and consider program improvements.
- It is *contextual*. As you do your self-study, you'll think about your program's unique context--its particular identity, demographics, mission, and services.
- It is *strengths-based*. Your self-study—and the whole accreditation process— will be organized around your program's assets, capacities, and outcomes. What are those strengths, and how might they be even further enhanced?

Successful Accreditation: The Big Picture



Engaging in Self-Study Work

The primary contact for the early childhood unit is identified in the Application for Accreditation Eligibility or most recent Annual Update form. This person is given access to the online community website of resources for NAEYC Early Childhood Associate Degree Accreditation. You will find report templates, forms and more support for self-study work on the online community website.

The self-study work includes, but is not limited to, the following steps.

- Be sure that you have a current copy of publication *2010 NAEYC Initial & Advanced Accreditation Standards for use by Associate, Baccalaureate, and Graduate Degree Programs*.
- Learn how to log into the online community website. Open and read through the Self-Study Report template to become familiar with the way that accreditation criteria, standards, supportive skills and criteria are presented for accreditation review. The national office provides access only to the person officially designated by the institution as the primary contact. The primary contact may share information with other faculty or administrators as appropriate for your context.
- It is sometimes possible to combine *more than one eligible program* into one Self-Study Report and one Peer Review Team site visit. Institutions with multiple eligible programs are strongly encouraged to communicate with the national office during the self-study process to determine whether or not multiple degree programs should be submitted together in one Self-Study Report.
- Invite a team of stakeholders to form the self-study workgroup. Stakeholders include faculty, administrators, candidates, employers of graduates, cooperating staff in field sites, and other members of the community who have a stake in the program's outcomes.
- Reflect on current strengths, challenges and plans for improvement in relation to each accreditation criteria. Collect data, engage relevant stakeholders, collect documents to be available during the site visit, and take notes for use in the final Self-Study Report.
- Review current learning opportunities and candidate assessments to determine how well they are aligned with the key elements of each accreditation standard. Collect data, engage relevant stakeholders, and consider improvements.
- Select or design five key candidate assessments that collectively address all six Accreditation Standards and Supportive Skills and are used consistently across the program.
- Implement the key assessments: the performance task as given to candidates, the rubric or scoring guide used by faculty, and a trial collection of data on candidate performance. Consider revisions to assessment tools based on this initial implementation.
- Reflect on the candidate performance data and its possible uses in ongoing program improvement. What does it indicate about current strengths? Did the candidates do

particularly well on some key elements of specific standards? Did others seem more challenging? Do the faculty expectations seem too low or too high for these candidates at this point in the degree program? Should learning opportunities be strengthened to improve candidate's knowledge or application of specific standards?

- Draft sections of the Self-Study Report as you collect data, develop ideas in stakeholder meetings, review existing documents, and refine your program. The report template will help you determine what belongs in the written report and what should be set aside for review during the site visit. Remember that each associate degree program must meet eligibility requirements and accreditation standards. Each will receive an independent accreditation decision. Evidence of strengths for criteria must be valid for all degree programs included in the report. Each campus must be included in your report and during the site visit. Each reference to "faculty" includes both full-time and part-time faculty. Courses offered online, off-campus or through other distance learning methods must meet the same standards as other courses. They must be addressed in the report and will be reviewed during the site visit.

Guiding questions for self-study

These questions can be valuable reflective exercise to conduct with your stakeholders. You will not address all of the following questions in your Self-Study Report. However, if you (faculty and other stakeholders) have considered these questions, you will be better prepared for report writing and for the site visit interviews.

What are the characteristics of our associate degree program?

- In what kind of institution is our program located? Are we a community college? Technical college? State college or university? Is our college publicly or privately owned?
- What early childhood degree options and other credentials do we offer? How do other credentials relate to the early childhood associate degree we plan to submit for associate degree accreditation?
- What is our basic scope and sequence of studies, including general education and courses/field experiences in child development, early childhood education, and related areas?
- Do we offer our courses at multiple campuses? At off-campus locations? Online? What percentage of the associate degree can be completed online? What percentage can be completed on branch campuses? At off-campus locations?
- How many candidates are enrolled, what are their academic goals, and how many candidates complete their academic goals each year?
- Who are our faculty (numbers, qualifications, responsibilities)? *Note that throughout the accreditation documents and process the word faculty refers to both full- and part-time faculty.*
- How does this information help us to assess our strengths, our challenges, and to strive for continuous improvement?

What is the context within which our program operates?

- Who are our candidates?

- What communities do we serve?
- What external factors, including state or other significant priorities, influence our program's mission, goals, and design?
- What relationships do we have with other stakeholders (e.g., current or pending articulation agreements with 4-year institutions; program advisory council; field placement administrators; future employers)
- What challenges do we see? What opportunities do we have to use these assets in our continuous improvement efforts?

How is our program guided and governed?

- Who has oversight of the program's operations? How is our unit (department, program, division, etc.) organized and governed? Who among the faculty has primary responsibility for the early childhood program? Who among our administrators has primarily responsibility for the early childhood program?
- How do we ensure that an inclusive set of stakeholders have opportunities to influence the form and operation of the program? Do we have an advisory committee? Conduct employer surveys? Candidate surveys? Use other approaches?
- How might we improve our program's guidance and governance to better meet the needs of all stakeholders?

What is the program mission and conceptual framework?

- What is the mission or purpose of our program?
- What is the guiding philosophy or conceptual framework for our program?
- How are these seen in the program?
- How do these help influence strategic decisions about program focus, courses, field experiences, assessments of candidates' competence, and other key program features?
- How will we want to change the mission or conceptual framework in the future?

What are the desired outcomes of our program?

- What do we want our graduates to know and be able to do when they leave our program (in light of NAEYC's standards and supportive skills, and in light of the program's specific context, mission, and goals)?
- How might those desired outcomes be enhanced across all aspects of our program?

What candidate learning and practice opportunities do we provide?

- How are learning activities and practice opportunities aligned with the NAEYC standards and supportive skills, so that our candidates are able to function as well-prepared practitioners and/or be prepared to transfer to four-year programs to meet their professional goals? ("Learning opportunities" are specific experiences within courses and field work. They may be linked to assessments, but are not necessarily assessed directly or immediately.)
- How are the components of the program connected to make a coherent program of studies linked to candidate outcomes that are related to NAEYC standards?

- How might we enhance these opportunities to better align with our mission and conceptual framework?

How do we support our candidates?

- What supports do we provide candidates in gaining the competencies needed to meet the NAEYC standards and our program's specific goals?
- What academic and career advising, skill development, and other supports are available to increase access and success?
- What might further strengthen these assets?

How do we document and use evidence of candidate learning outcomes? (This question will be central to successful accreditation.)

- What evidence do we gather on the performance of our candidates (including their knowledge, skills, and attitudes or dispositions) in relation to the NAEYC standards and supportive skills?
- Using the evidence we have gathered, what does it tell us about our program's success in helping candidates meet standards and gain valued competencies?
- What might we do to expand our methods for documenting candidate learning outcomes?

How do we document and use evidence of candidate outcomes and other indicators of program performance? (This question will be central to successful accreditation.)

- What evidence do we gather on effectiveness of program policies and procedures?
- How can we better use evidence of candidate learning outcomes to guide program policies and procedures?
- What procedures and tools do we have to ensure that candidates have access to similar levels of quality across settings, sites, courses, and instructors? What do we do if we find that quality is uneven or inconsistent?
- Using the evidence we have gathered, what does it tell us about the effectiveness of our program's policies and procedures?
- What aspects of program performance would we like to see change and improve?

What are the assets of our faculty and other staff?

- How do we evaluate the effectiveness of our faculty and other staff?
- How do we support faculty and staff so that they have the professional knowledge and skills to enhance candidates' positive outcomes?
- How do we link faculty and other staff to professional development resources and networks related to NAEYC standards for early childhood professional preparation?
- How has professional development for faculty and other staff contributed to program improvement and improved candidate outcomes?
- Using the evidence we have gathered, what does it tell us about the effectiveness of our faculty and support staff, particularly as it relates to candidate outcomes?
- What are some special strengths of our faculty? What might be done to further enhance our assets in this area?

What other program resources contribute to our effectiveness?

- What other resources do we have as a program and institution to support continuous improvement of our program? These might include financial support, technological support, data management systems to track candidate progress and other indicators of program effectiveness.
- How can we enhance these resources for even greater improvement?
- How do we use evidence of program performance for continuous improvement?
- What other dimensions of quality does our program exhibit, in relation to the NAEYC standards? What unique features of our program help us create high-quality experiences for our candidates?

Can we make some initial summary statements about our program context?

- What are some of our challenges and some of our strengths in relation to our program design?
- What are some of our challenges and some of our strengths in relation to our candidates?
- What are some of our challenges and some of our strengths in relation to our faculty?
- What are some of our challenges and some of our strengths in relation to our program organization and resources?
- How do these challenges and strengths influence the way that we assess our candidates?

Are we ready to dive into the six accreditation standards?

- Which candidate assessments are central to our program design?
- Do we know that all of our candidates experience these key assessments?
- Do these key assessments collectively address all six accreditation standards? Do they incorporate the supporting skills?
- Do we know that our entire faculty shares the same expectations of candidate performance on these key assessments?
- Do we have data on candidate performance on any of these key assessments? Do we have other data on candidate performance related to the accreditation standards?
- Do we use this data to improve teaching and learning in our program?

NAEYC Accreditation Criteria

In the Self-Study Report, programs address both Accreditation Criteria (Part One: Program Context) and Accreditation Standards (Part Two: Program Content and Outcomes). Accreditation Criteria identify elements of the program context with corresponding indicators of strength. These criteria are used to better understand the program's unique state and community context, institution and program mission and goals, the program's conceptual framework and design, characteristics of candidates and faculty, and institutional structure.

Demonstrating program strengths

Accreditation Criteria are used to demonstrate the program's ability to explain how it has designed its program in response to its own unique context. Each criterion includes a rationale and a list of indicators of strength. In this section of the report, programs are asked first to describe current conditions, then to reflect on strengths, challenges and plans for improvement. The Peer Review Report will comment on these in relation to each criteria cluster, A through E.

The Self-Study Report template walks through each criterion, with spaces for a narrative description, charts to complete, and sometimes documents to insert. Each criterion includes a statement, indicators of strength and the sources of evidence used by Peer Reviewers and Commissioners in the program review and decision. Sources of evidence come from both the Self-Study Report and the site visit activities. Site visit interviews, document reviews, and observations should support and enhance the content of the Self-Study Report.

The Key = Intentional, Responsive Programs

The accreditation framework is not a one-size-fits-all proposition. This accreditation system promotes standards, rather than standardization. The strongest programs demonstrate that the learning opportunities and assessments presented in Part 2 of the report are designed to build on the strengths and address the challenges described in Part 1. For example, Criterion 5: Quality of Field Experiences recognizes that candidates will sometimes be placed in field settings that are not high quality. Strong programs will demonstrate indicators of strength. Note indicator language carefully. "Field *experiences* are consistent with outcomes emphasized in NAEYC's standards... When the *settings* used for field experiences do not reflect standards of quality, candidates are provided with other models and/or experiences to ensure that they are learning to work with young children and families in ways consistent with the NAEYC standards."

Strong programs know, understand, care about and are responsive to their unique community of teachers and learners. Program design is intentional, responsive, and reflective.

The Accreditation Criteria at a Glance

A. PROGRAM IDENTITY AND ROLE IN COMMUNITY

CRITERION 1: MISSION AND ROLE IN COMMUNITY

The early childhood associate degree program has established a clear identity and role in its community and is responsive to community stakeholders.

Rationale: Historically, community and technical colleges see meeting the needs of their local constituents as part of their mission. The growth of distance learning and of early childhood associate degrees in other kinds of colleges and universities requires reflection on the community that is engaged in and served by the degree program. Strong early childhood associate degree programs are closely connected with their communities. Strong programs respond to the growing need to prepare a workforce to serve the young children and families in their unique community. Stakeholders in the community see the program as providing an important service.

Indicators of strength:

- The program has a clear sense of its history, its current mission, and its identity and role in meeting its community's needs.
- Others in the community recognize and value the program's role.

Sources of evidence:

Report: The mission statement, description of program history and change over time, accompanied by reflection and plans.

Site Visit: Interviews with community stakeholders who are representative of description, reflection and plans as identified by the program in the Self-Study Report. Document review of published mission statements for the institution and the early childhood unit. Documented evidence of input from stakeholders as described in the Self-Study Report.

B. PROGRAM DESIGN

CRITERION 2: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The early childhood associate degree program is based on a conceptual framework that is linked to the program's mission and values.

Rationale: Strong early childhood associate degree programs are more than a collection of courses. Strong programs gain coherence by developing, sharing, and implementing a clear, overarching mission and set of values.

Indicators of strength:

- The conceptual framework is linked to the associate degree program's unique mission and goals (Criterion 1) and to the NAEYC standards.

B. PROGRAM DESIGN (continued)

- The conceptual framework is a living document: developed collaboratively; clearly written and presented; and recognized and used by program faculty, candidates, field placement supervisors, and other stakeholders.
- The conceptual framework supports the program's commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion and to preparing candidates to work in diverse, inclusive settings.

Sources of evidence:

Report: The text of the conceptual framework and summary of how it has been developed and used. A description of plans to address challenges and build on current strengths in this area.

Site Visit: Interviews with faculty, candidates, and other stakeholders. Document reviews of published conceptual framework. Observations of classrooms, field sites and practices consistent with conceptual framework.

CRITERION 3: PROGRAM OF STUDIES

The program of studies is a coherent series of courses and field experiences that promote candidate learning in relation to the NAEYC standards and supportive skills.

Rationale: Strong early childhood programs are more than a collection of courses. The program of studies has a logical, developmental progression and has sufficient depth and breadth of content to prepare candidates adequately to enter the field.

Indicators of strength:

- The program has a combination of courses and field experiences that prepares candidates to have a positive impact on the lives of young children and families.
- Program requirements and the sequence of courses reflect the program's conceptual framework and the mission of the institution.

Sources of evidence:

Report: The degree program description with course list and any entry or graduation requirements as published in the current college catalog (photocopy, scanned electronic copy, or website screen shot) for each degree included for review in the report. Chart of program of studies, including concentrations or other options for each associate degree included for review in this report and which courses require the key assessments submitted in Part 2 of the report. Description of plans to address challenges and build on current strengths in this area.

Site Visit: Interviews with administrators and faculty as needed and as suggested by the program.

B. PROGRAM DESIGN (continued)

CRITERION 4: QUALITY OF TEACHING

The teaching strategies used by program faculty reflect the characteristics, instructional methods, and evaluation strategies that are likely to promote candidate learning in relation to the NAEYC standards and supportive skills. They reflect the current professional knowledge base and are responsive to the characteristics of the program's candidates.

Rationale: Today, we know a great deal about how to promote the learning of candidates in associate degree programs. Teaching-learning experiences in strong programs reflect that knowledge base and are responsive to the characteristics of the program's candidates.

Indicators of strength:

NOTE: Indicators should be evident whether faculty are full-time or adjunct, and whether courses are offered in day or evening, in distance or other formats, on- or off-campus.

- The teaching-learning experiences offered in the associate degree program are consistent with the program's conceptual framework and the NAEYC standards and supportive skills.
- The content of the program's teaching-learning processes reflects the early childhood field's current knowledge base derived from research on early development and education and other professional sources.
- Teaching reflects current research about the role of faculty in associate degree programs as facilitators of candidate learning and about learner-centered education that uses a variety of methods and strategies.
- Teaching reflects knowledge about and experiences with diverse populations of adults and is based on knowledge of cultural and individual adult approaches to learning.
- The program continuously evaluates the quality of its teaching-learning processes and uses the results, including candidate performance data, to improve the program and to promote all candidates' learning in relation to the NAEYC standards and supportive skills.

Sources of evidence:

Report: Summary of the program's teaching-learning processes with description of plans to address challenges and build on current strengths in this area.

Site Visit: Interviews with faculty and candidates; visits to representative classes. Campus tour of classrooms and materials. Observations of a sampling of classes in session during the site visit. A sampling of teaching in distance courses must also be observed via websites or other appropriate methods.

**B. PROGRAM
DESIGN
(continued)**

CRITERION 5: QUALITY OF FIELD EXPERIENCES

The program's field experiences support candidates' learning in relation to the NAEYC standards.

Rationale: Candidates will understand and apply the competencies reflected in the NAEYC standards when they are able to observe, implement, and receive constructive feedback in real-life settings.

Indicators of strength:

- Field experiences are consistent with outcomes emphasized in NAEYC's standards, are well planned and sequenced, and allow candidates to integrate theory, research, and practice.
- When the settings used for field experiences do not reflect standards of quality, candidates are provided with other models and/or experiences to ensure that they are learning to work with young children and families in ways consistent with the NAEYC standards.
- Faculty and other supervisors help candidates to make meaning of their experiences in early childhood settings and to evaluate those experiences against standards of quality.
- Adults who mentor and supervise candidates provide positive models of early childhood practice consistent with NAEYC's standards.
- Field experiences expose candidates to a variety of cultural, linguistic, and ethnic settings for early childhood care and education.
- Field experiences provide opportunities for candidates to observe and practice in at least two of the three early childhood groups (birth-age 3, 3-5, 5-8) and in at least two of the three main types of early education settings (early school grades, child care centers and homes, Head Start programs).

Sources of evidence:

Report: A description of program's approach to using field experiences and plans to address challenges and build on current strengths in this area.

Site Visit: Interviews with faculty, candidates, cooperating teachers, and other supervisors. Visits to a sampling of representative field sites. Document review: Candidate handbooks, guidance provided to candidates, faculty, supervisors, and other field placement staff.

C. CANDIDATES

CRITERION 6: QUALIFICATIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS OF CANDIDATES

The program encourages enrollment of a diverse group of candidates who have potential to succeed as early childhood educators.

Rationale: Strong associate degree programs actively seek out and encourage candidates who will contribute to a future work force of diverse, well-prepared early childhood professionals, as well as welcome candidates with many kinds of prior experiences.

Indicators of strength:

- The program actively encourages enrollment of candidates who demonstrate potential for success in the early childhood field as defined by faculty.
- The program actively encourages attention to recruitment, retention, and graduation of a diverse candidate population.
- The program engages in efforts to ensure that candidates graduating are well-qualified and prepared in the roles and settings described in Criterion 1.

Sources of evidence:

Report: Narrative summary of candidate characteristics, recruitment and enrollment strategies; Description of challenges, strengths and plans, including strategies for building or sustaining diversity.

Site Visit: Interview with faculty and administrators as necessary.

CRITERION 7: ADVISING AND SUPPORTING CANDIDATES

The program ensures that candidates are adequately advised and supported.

Rationale: Candidates need many kinds of assistance if they are to gain the competencies reflected in the NAEYC standards and supportive skills. Strong programs ensure that comprehensive services are available to all candidates, and that candidates' career goals are being met.

Indicators of strength:

- Advisement is used as a tool to assist candidates in clarifying their goals and career plans.
- The program ensures that all candidates have equitable access to a comprehensive support system including appropriate academic advisement, career counseling, financial aid information, academic support services, and other resources from admission to the completion of their education.
- On a regular basis, program faculty review the performance of candidates in relation to learning outcomes (including NAEYC standards and supportive skills) and provide candidates with advice and counseling regarding their progress and potential in the program and early childhood profession.

C. CANDIDATES (continued)

- The program makes every effort to ensure that candidates complete their course of study in a timely fashion.

Sources of evidence:

Report: Summary of how candidate progress is assessed and how advisement and support services are provided to candidates. (It is fine to copy college information into report.) Narrative description of strategies to monitor candidate progress and to provide appropriate advisement. Narrative description of challenges, strengths and plans, including strategies for building or sustaining diversity.

Site Visit: Interviews with candidates, faculty and administrators. Campus tour of candidate support services. Document review: recruiting brochures, college handbooks or other policy documents, relevant pages from college catalog.

D. FACULTY

CRITERION 8: QUALIFICATIONS AND COMPOSITION OF FACULTY

The program ensures that faculty members demonstrate the qualifications and characteristics needed to promote candidates' learning in relation to the NAEYC standards and supportive skills.

Rationale: Strong programs ensure that both full- and part-time faculty have the academic and practical expertise to guide candidates toward mastery of the competencies reflected in NAEYC's standards and supportive skills, and to serve as models and mentors for associate degree candidates.

Indicators of strength

Note: Indicators apply to all faculty, whether hired on a temporary, part-time, or full-time basis.

- Faculty have experience and a graduate degree in early childhood education or a closely related field.
- Faculty have academic qualifications appropriate to the courses they are assigned to teach.
- Faculty know about and implement the principles in NAEYC's Code of Ethical Conduct, including its Supplement for Teacher Educators.
- The program uses a variety of strategies to recruit, hire, mentor, and retain a diverse faculty.

Sources of evidence:

Report: Chart listing program faculty with brief description of qualifications. Narrative description of challenges, strengths and plans, including strategies for building or sustaining diversity.

Site Visit: Review of documents related to faculty qualifications as needed. Interviews with administrators as needed.

D. FACULTY (continued)

CRITERION 9: PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES

Faculty responsibilities allow them to promote candidates' learning in relation to the NAEYC standards and supportive skills.

Rationale: Teaching in associate degree programs is both demanding and critically important. Strong programs make sure that faculty assignments balance teaching, institutional and community service in order to fulfill their responsibility to candidates.

Indicators of strength:

Note: Indicators apply to all faculty, whether hired on a temporary, part-time, or full-time basis.

- Work assignments accommodate faculty involvement in activities appropriate to their role in the program and important to their ability to support candidate learning. These may include curriculum development and evaluation, advising and mentoring, collaboration with families and other professionals, scholarly activities, and service to the institution, profession, and community.
- Faculty teaching responsibilities, including overloads and off-campus teaching, are mutually agreed upon and designed to allow faculty to engage effectively in activities appropriate to their role in the program and to their ability to promote candidate learning.

Sources of evidence:

Report: Summary of policies related to faculty responsibilities. Data on current faculty teaching and advising loads, full-time:part-time faculty ratios, and faculty:candidate ratios with comparisons to similar programs or institution-wide averages. Description of plans to address challenges and build on current strengths in this area.

Site Visit: Interviews with faculty and administrators as needed. Document review: relevant college policies and procedures, current and recent schedules of courses with faculty assignments.

CRITERION 10: PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Faculty are provided with professional development that strengthens their ability to promote candidates' learning in relation to NAEYC standards and supportive skills.

Rationale: Early childhood education is a rapidly developing and changing field. Strong programs help faculty keep current and engaged in their profession, and they continuously assess faculty effectiveness, so that ultimately candidates may benefit.

Indicators of strength:

NOTE: Indicators apply to all faculty, whether hired on a temporary, part-time, or full-time basis.

- Faculty members stay current and engaged in the field. Depending on their role in the program, this may occur through active participation in professional organizations, conferences, scholarly activity, or service to the profession.
- Faculty members have opportunities to develop knowledge and collaborative relationships with professionals in other disciplines, such as health, speech and language, or special education.

D. FACULTY (continued)

- Opportunities are provided for faculty development, such as travel support, leave, in-service training, education visits, exchanges, and fellowships.
- Faculty members' performance is periodically reviewed and evaluated; the review uses multiple methods of evaluation, such as self-assessment and reflection, candidate evaluations, professional early childhood peer evaluations, and assessment by other individuals.

Sources of evidence:

Report: Summary of how program provides professional development and how it conducts and uses faculty evaluations. Description of plans to address challenges and build on current strengths in this area.

Site Visit: Interviews with administrators and faculty. Document review: Samples of recent professional development activities, samples of faculty evaluations (identification removed) or guidelines for evaluations.

E. SUPPORTIVE INFRASTRUCTURE AND ORGANIZATION OF PROGRAM

CRITERION 11: PROGRAM ORGANIZATION AND GUIDANCE

The program's organization and guidance are mission-driven and participatory, placing the needs of candidates as its first priority.

Rationale: Strong programs function out of a clear sense of mission, seek the involvement of all stakeholders, and place the needs of candidates at the center of their operations.

Indicators of strength:

- The program sets goals and plans in conjunction with the college and program mission and in response to stakeholder and community needs.
- Faculty, including part-time faculty, are informed about and regularly participate in program decision-making.
- As appropriate to their role, faculty have opportunities to participate in college-wide decision-making.
- Candidates participate in evaluation of courses, faculty, field experiences, and the program.
- With advisory council, faculty, and other stakeholder involvement, the program establishes strategic objectives to address candidate and stakeholder needs; incorporate new knowledge about the education of children and families, and enhance its performance.

Sources of evidence:

Report: Narrative description of program organization and governance; strategies used to engage faculty in program and institution wide decision-making; and strategies to engage faculty, candidates and other stakeholders in program development. Narrative description of challenges, strengths and plans in this area.

Site Visit: Interviews with community stakeholders, candidates, and faculty. Document Review: summary of current strategic objectives and how they were developed.

**E. SUPPORTIVE
INFRASTRUCTURE
AND
ORGANIZATION
OF PROGRAM
(continued)**

CRITERION 12: PROGRAM RESOURCES

The program has sufficient resources to support its efforts to promote candidates' learning in relation to NAEYC standards and supportive skills.

Rationale: Appropriate learning materials, support staff, and budget resources are essential if strong programs are to meet candidates' learning needs.

Indicators of strength:

- Faculty and candidates have access to and use of appropriate instructional materials and technology to support candidates' success in relation to NAEYC standards, such as early childhood classroom materials, consumable supplies, video and other media equipment, and computers.
- The institution's library/information technology center reflects a commitment to child development and early childhood education as reflected in the NAEYC standards. A sufficient number of current books, journals, periodicals, media, and other materials that reflect the diversity of philosophy in the field are available. Adequate library/information technology center resources may include study space for candidates; instructional and curriculum laboratories; media and data processing and technological equipment; and cooperative educational and research relationships with early childhood settings and practitioners.
- The program's budget reflects a level of support comparable to other programs at the institution or to similar early childhood programs elsewhere, and is adequate to allow the program to support candidates' learning in relation to the standards.
- Faculty have access to adequate support staff to allow them to meet their responsibilities in the program.

Sources of evidence:

Report: Narrative description of the program's budget and other resources. The program should include a chart comparing the support for the ECE program with support for comparable programs at the college. Narrative description of challenges, strengths and plans in this area.

Site Visit: Discussions with faculty and administrators. Review of additional materials related to program resources. Tours of relevant sites such as media center or curriculum lab, as needed and as suggested by the program.

NAEYC Accreditation Standards and Supportive Skills

The Accreditation Standards and Supportive Skills are the heart of the process. The entire accreditation system is built around NAEYC's six core standards, which describe what well-prepared associate degree program graduates - tomorrow's early childhood teachers - should know and be able to do. Successful accreditation depends upon providing evidence in the Self-Study Report and during your site visit that the program substantially meets these accreditation standards.

Meeting the Standards

Part Two of the Self-Study Report contains the documents that provide evidence that the program meets the *Accreditation Standards*. This evidence is closely examined in the process of making the accreditation decision. Each standard is evaluated separately using four indicators:

- 1) Learning opportunities aligned with the standard,
- 2) Key assessments aligned with the standard,
- 3) Aggregate data on candidate performance gathered from the key assessments, and
- 4) Use of that data in ongoing program improvement planning.

The accreditation framework is not a one-size-fits-all proposition. This accreditation system promotes standards, rather than standardization. Each program must demonstrate that its learning opportunities and key assessments are aligned with key elements of the Accreditation Standards and Supportive Skills. The strongest programs demonstrate that their learning opportunities and key assessments are designed to use the strengths and address the challenges described in responses to the Accreditation Criteria.

Programs whose design is not responsive to its real context do not substantially meet the standards. An example of ways that criteria and standards fit together is that learning opportunities and key assessments of candidate teaching practice should fit with Criterion 5: Quality of Field Experiences. For example, if the field placements for candidate teaching practice are not high quality, an assignment that assumes the cooperating teacher is modeling best practices does not make sense.

Excellent programs are innovators and standard-bearers. They demonstrate throughout the Self-Study Report that they know, understand, care about and are responsive to both their profession and their unique community of teachers and learners.

The Six Standards = A Vision of Quality

NAEYC's six core standards describe what well-prepared early childhood professionals should know and be able to do. Developed by and for the early childhood profession, the standards represent a research-based vision of quality. These standards are not meant to be a constricting, one-size-fits-all framework. They are meant to provide a shared vision for early childhood professional preparation that is developed and implemented in unique programs that are responsive to particular candidates, faculty and communities.

Good early childhood associate degree programs should look very different from one another, with shared professional standards visible in the unique learning opportunities and key assessments in each program.

The Key = Candidate Performance in Relation to the Standards

During your self-study work and in your Self-Study Report, you will reflect on and describe your program's unique context. Because NAEYC's accreditation system is outcomes-based or performance-based, the key to the accreditation decision is based upon your ability to demonstrate that successful graduates of your program are assessed and meet your expectations in relation to these standards.

The publication *2010 NAEYC Initial & Advanced Accreditation Standards for use by Associate, Baccalaureate, and Graduate Degree Programs*, gives specific examples of how candidates in associate degree programs might be given opportunities to develop these competencies, and how their growth might be assessed. Reflection on your unique context helps to develop the particular learning opportunities and assessments that best meet the needs of - and use the strengths of - your candidates, faculty and community.

As you do your self-study, you'll be looking at what you provide for candidates to help them gain the standards-related competencies. But the bottom line is not what goes into the candidates (courses, field experiences), but what comes out—how you know that graduates of your program are able to perform in relation to the accreditation standards at the level you expect.

The Standards & Key Elements at a Glance

STANDARD 1:

PROMOTING CHILD DEVELOPMENT AND LEARNING

- 1a: Knowing and understanding young children's characteristics and needs
- 1b: Knowing and understanding the multiple influences on development and learning
- 1c: Using developmental knowledge to create healthy, respectful, supportive, and challenging learning environments

STANDARD 2:

BUILDING FAMILY AND COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS

- 2a: Knowing about and understanding diverse family and community characteristics
- 2b: Supporting and empowering families and communities through respectful, reciprocal relationships
- 2c: Involving families and communities in their children's development and learning

STANDARD 3:

OBSERVING, DOCUMENTING, AND ASSESSING TO SUPPORT YOUNG CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

- 3a: Understanding the goals, benefits, and uses of assessment
- 3b: Knowing about and using observation, documentation, and other appropriate assessment tools and approaches
- 3c: Understanding and practicing responsible assessment to promote positive outcomes for each child
- 3d: Knowing about assessment partnerships with families and with other professionals

STANDARD 4:

USING DEVELOPMENTALLY EFFECTIVE APPROACHES TO CONNECT WITH CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

- 4a: Understanding positive relationships and supportive interactions as the foundation of their work with children
- 4b: Knowing and understanding effective strategies and tools for early education
- 4c: Using a broad repertoire of developmentally appropriate teaching/learning practices
- 4d: Reflecting on their own practice to promote positive outcomes for each child.

STANDARD 5:

USING CONTENT KNOWLEDGE TO BUILD MEANINGFUL CURRICULUM

- 5a: Understanding content knowledge and resources in academic disciplines
- 5b: Knowing and using the central concepts, inquiry tools, and structures of content areas or academic disciplines
- 5c: Using their own knowledge, appropriate early learning standards, and other resources to design, implement, and evaluate meaningful, challenging curricula for each child.

STANDARD 6:

BECOMING A PROFESSIONAL

- 6a: Identifying and involving oneself with the early childhood field
- 6b: Knowing about and upholding ethical standards and other professional guidelines
- 6c: Engaging in continuous, collaborative learning to inform practice
- 6d: Integrating knowledgeable, reflective, and critical perspectives on early education
- 6e: Engaging in informed advocacy for children and the profession

The Supportive Skills at a Glance

NAEYC has identified five skills that support associate degree students' ability to gain competence in relation to the core standards. With these skills, students are better able to make use of learning opportunities provided by the program and progress in a career as an early childhood professional.

SUPPORTIVE SKILL 1:	Self-assessment and self-advocacy
SUPPORTIVE SKILL 2:	Mastering and applying foundational concepts from general education
SUPPORTIVE SKILL 3:	Written and verbal skills
SUPPORTIVE SKILL 4:	Making connections between prior knowledge/ experience and new learning
SUPPORTIVE SKILL 5:	Identifying and using professional resources

Supportive Skill #1

SELF-ASSESSMENT AND SELF-ADVOCACY

Associate degree students are often at a key decision point in their professional lives, entering or re-entering higher education after extended work experiences or making decisions about further education beyond the associate degree. Therefore, skills in assessing one's own goals, strengths, and needs are critical, as is learning how to advocate for one's own professional needs.

Evidence of growth: Students' growth in these skills may be seen in assessments of changes over time and in the actual professional decisions made by students as they move through the program and beyond.

Indicators of strength:

- Students assess their own goals, strengths, and needs.
- Students know how to advocate for their own professional needs.

Supportive Skill #2

MASTERING AND APPLYING FOUNDATIONAL CONCEPTS FROM GENERAL EDUCATION

General education has value for its own sake—as part of the background of an educated person—and for the value added to practitioners' ability to implement a conceptually rich curriculum. Both in immediate employment as an early childhood professional and in preparing for further baccalaureate study, associate degree graduates are enriched by understanding foundational concepts from areas including science, mathematics, literature, and the behavioral and social sciences.

Evidence of growth: Students' acquisition of these skills may be seen, for example, in their successful mastery of general education objectives, in their written and oral rationales for activities, and in ratings of the conceptual accuracy and richness of their curriculum plans.

Indicators of strength:

- Students understand foundational concepts from areas such as science, mathematics, literature, and the behavioral and social sciences.
- Students can apply these concepts in their work as early childhood professionals.

Supportive Skill #3

WRITTEN AND VERBAL COMMUNICATIONS SKILLS

Well-prepared associate degree graduates have strong skills in written and verbal communication. These skills allow them to provide positive language and literacy experiences for children, and they also support professional communications with families and colleagues. Students going on to baccalaureate study need skills sufficient to ensure success in upper-division academic work. In addition, technological literacy is an essential component of this set of skills.

Evidence of growth: Students' mastery of these skills may be seen, for example, in successful completion of relevant courses, performance on communication and technological aspects of assignments, and competent use of communication skills in field experiences.

Supportive Skill #3 (continued)

Indicators of strength:

- Students have effective skills in written and verbal communication.
- Students are technologically literate.

Supportive Skill #4

MAKING CONNECTIONS BETWEEN PRIOR KNOWLEDGE/EXPERIENCE AND NEW LEARNING

All professionals need these skills, but they are especially important in supporting the learning of associate degree students who have worked for years in early care and education. Well prepared associate degree graduates are able to respect and draw upon their past or current work experience and also reflect critically upon it, enriching and altering prior knowledge with new insights. These skills will, over time, enable graduates to respond to the evolving mandates and priorities of the early childhood field.

Evidence of growth: Progress in making productive connections may be seen in students' growing ability to articulate relevant theory and research that either affirms or calls into question their experience—often seen in journals and portfolios, but also in interviews and presentations.

Indicators of strength:

- Students respect and draw upon their past or current work experience.
- Students are able to reflect critically upon their experience.

Supportive Skill #5

IDENTIFYING AND USING PROFESSIONAL RESOURCES

Even the best associate program cannot provide in-depth knowledge and skills in all areas. Therefore, well-prepared graduates should know how to identify and use credible professional resources from multiple sources, allowing them to better serve children and families with a wide range of cultures, languages, needs, and abilities.

Evidence of growth: Students' growth in this area may be evidenced, for example, by portfolio artifacts, resources used in lesson plans or other field assignments, or in class presentations.

Indicators of strength:

- Students know how to identify and use credible professional resources from multiple sources.
- Students use these resources to better serve children and families with a wide range of cultures, languages, needs, and abilities.

Indicators & Evidence Used in the Accreditation Review

Indicators of Strength

Candidate learning opportunities are aligned with the Accreditation Standards and Supportive Skills. Candidate assessments are aligned with the Accreditation Standards and Supportive Skills. Learning opportunities and assessments are responsive to the unique context of the program. Data is gathered on candidate performance in relation to the Accreditation Standards and Supportive Skills. Candidate performance data is used to reflect on program strengths and challenges in the program's ongoing planning and improvement process -- OR a specific, meaningful, written data collection plan is in place. All accredited programs will submit samples of ongoing data collection and use in Annual Reports in order to maintain accreditation.

Sources of Evidence

Self-Study Report: Sample learning opportunities described in Section F. Key assessments submitted in Section G. Data on candidate performance collected from key assessments. Summary of reflective analysis on strengths, challenges and any improvement plans.

Site Visit: Document review provides evidence of implementation of learning opportunities, key assessments, data collection and ongoing strategic planning process (sample course outlines or syllabi demonstrate that the learning opportunities and key assessments are being implemented in the courses identified in the report, samples of graded candidate work on key assessments demonstrate that the assessments are being implemented and all faculty members are using consistent candidate instructions and scoring guides). Interviews with faculty and candidates provide evidence that learning opportunities, key assessments and planning process are being implemented.

Submitting the Self-Study Report

Candidacy

Candidacy status begins with the submission of a Self-Study Report. Candidacy status indicates that the program is progressing toward accreditation in a formal way. Programs in Candidacy have met eligibility requirements, maintained eligibility while completing self study work, and submitted a Self Study Report. The Self Study Report Template prompts programs to submit evidence to be used by a Peer Review Team and Commission in determining whether or not the program meets accreditation standards, accompanied by an analysis of program strengths, challenges and plans organized by contextual criteria, student learning opportunities, and student achievement. Candidacy may be extended for no more than two years, including any requests for Commission deferral of an accreditation decision.

Program responsibilities

Because the program that submits itself for review initiates the accreditation process, the burden of proof of meeting the standards rests with the program. The program is responsible for preparing reports and documents following the required report template and with a degree of thoroughness and clarity that will satisfy a detailed review by staff, the Peer Review Team, and the Commission.

Your report will have two major sections: Part One: Program Context, and Part Two: Program Content and Outcomes. The template includes detailed descriptions and instructions. It tells you what should be written or presented for each section. The structure of the template will help you to clearly tell the story of your program's characteristics, strengths, and challenges. The Peer Review Team will read your report before the site visit, trying to understand your program. During their two-and-a-half day visit, the team will meet faculty, candidates, and others, visit classes and field sites, and look at other documentation that will supplement what you provide in the report.

It is the responsibility of the program to clearly identify the name of each associate degree program submitted for review, the number and name of all campuses that offer coursework in the degrees submitted, and any distance courses offered by the degrees submitted. The primary contact should communicate with national office staff in advance of submitting the report to determine how to most effectively submit evidence related to multiple programs, multiple campuses, and distance course sections.

It is the responsibility of the program to read e-mail, e-newsletters and other communications from the national office and to follow current instructions and templates. These are available on the online community website. National staff members lead two Self-Study Workshops each year, as pre-conference days before the NAEYC's fall Annual Conference and summer National Institute for Early Childhood Professional Development. Staff members will respond to e-mail and telephone

requests. *Questions about accessing the website, conducting the self-study work and submitting the Self-Study Report should be directed to national office staff.*

The submission of the Self-Study Report, Cover Letter with required signatures, and Accreditation Review Fee serves as the program request for a site visit. National office staff review each report and may request additional information if the documents appear to be incomplete in response to one or more standards or criteria. Current deadlines for submission of completed Self-Study reports for programs wishing to be considered for a site visit the following semester are posted on the online community website. Current fee schedules are available on the NAEYC website and the online community website.

Standards & Criteria in the Self-Study Report

As you review the template for the report, you will see the standards mentioned over and over again. Part One explains your program context. Part Two presents evidence that your program meets the accreditation standards.

Part One: Program Context (Criteria)

In Part One, you are asked to describe your program's context using the framework of twelve criteria. Within each criterion you are asked to reflect on how this context affects candidates' performance in relation to the standards. You will describe what you see as your program strengths and areas for improvement. You will receive commendations on strengths and recommendations for consideration with your accreditation decision.

In this first section you will describe the essential foundations or inputs of your program using five categories as your framework. Taken together, these indicate your program's strengths - your capacity to promote candidate learning in relation to the NAEYC standards.

There are five categories in this section: Program Identity; Program Design; Candidates; Faculty; and Supportive Infrastructure and Organization. Within each category are criteria—12 in all. The rationales explain why each criterion is important. You will write a 1-2 page narrative in response to each criterion, submit a list of courses in your program with brief descriptions, and a chart of your full- and part-time faculty with qualifications.

Note that one or more indicators are listed under each criterion. You do not need to write specifically about each and every indicator, but you should keep these in mind when organizing your narratives.

Note that the report template asks you to summarize your plans to address challenges and build on strengths in each area. Remember that the Peer Reviewers and Commission members are your peers – busy faculty members just like you. It is generally not in your interest to exceed page limits. Try to synthesize key points for your readers.

Remember that your readers will be from another state to avoid conflicts of interest. Edit your language to emphasize the national standards and de-emphasize or explain references to state and local standards, competencies or initiatives.

**Part Two: Program
Content and
Outcomes
(Standards and
Supportive Skills)**

In Part Two, you will describe how you assess candidates, how you gather information about their growth in relation to the standards, and how you use that information to plan improvements in your program that respond to candidate needs. You will select no more than five candidate assessments that you consider to be key assessments. You will chart these assessments to demonstrate relationships to Accreditation Standards and Supportive Skills. You will attach a chart summarizing each assessment, the candidate instructions for the assessment, the rubric or other scoring guide used by faculty to describe expected levels of candidate performance, data on candidate performance (or a plan to collect data on candidate performance), and a description of ways that you use data on candidate performance to improve your program.

Part Two is the most important part of the report. This is where the Peer Review Team and Commission will look for evidence that your program meets the NAEYC Accreditation Standards and Supportive Skills.

First you will provide a chart outlining the major learning opportunities and candidate assessments in relation to each standard (and each key element within the standard) and each supportive skill. You will write a summary that synthesizes your plans to address challenges and build on strengths in your candidate learning opportunities and assessments.

Next you will select and present five key assessments that were included in your chart. These provide evidence that you are tracking candidate progress in relation to the standards and skills.

Of course you have more than five assessments. Of course some of these are unique to particular faculty members and so only experienced by candidates in a particular course or a particular section of a course. During the site visit you will have the opportunity to share additional samples with the peer review team. But for the report select only five assignments that are used across your program and that address the key elements of one to three standards with depth or breadth. An example might be a child assessment portfolio, a family case study, or a practicum evaluation.

You will submit:

- a chart that summarizes the five key assessments
- the directions given to candidates and faculty for these five assessments
- the rubrics or other scoring guides that faculty use to evaluate the assignment
- data from each assessment, 2 applications over time, disaggregated by Standard and by program
- a one-to-two page narrative describing how candidate performance data is used for program planning and improvement.

Part Two of your report supplies the primary evidence that your program meets the accreditation standards.

Are we ready to submit our report?

If your report has any incomplete sections, it is not ready.

Every section in the Self-Study Report template prompts the program to insert or describe an important piece of evidence. Every section of the Self-Study Report must be completed. Do not skip items. Respond concisely and thoughtfully to every question. It is important that staff, reviewers and Commissioners can quickly find evidence that they need to review, in the appropriate section of the report. The report template is designed to organize and present essential pieces of evidence that demonstrate how well the program meets accreditation standards. Additional documents and explanation should not be attached to the Self-Study Report, but should be collected and organized for the document review period during the site visit.

If the report does not include a self-assessment of program strengths, challenges and strategic plans where requested, it is not ready for submission.

If you cannot submit five key assessments with rubrics that provide evidence that you evaluate candidate performance in relation to the key elements of the six accreditation standards, then you are not ready to submit your report. If your report includes fewer or more than five key assessments, it is not ready. A key assessment includes: 1 set of candidate instructions, exactly as provided to candidates; 1 scoring guide or rubric, used by all faculty who implement this assessment; a presentation of aggregate candidate performance data; and a description of how that data is being interpreted and used.

If the chart of key assessments does not indicate that key assessments are designed to evaluate candidate performance on all six accreditation standards, the report is not ready.

If you are in the early stages of building a program assessment system, you may provide a detailed description of your plans to collect and use candidate performance data. However, if the report does not include either aggregate data from candidate performance on key assessments or a written, specific and meaningful plan to collect data, the report is not ready.

If the course of study, field experiences, learning opportunities or key assessments described in the report are not yet being implemented or if major changes are planned in the coming year, the program is not ready for review. Ongoing adjustments are expected, but the site visit should confirm that the program is being implemented as described in the Self-Study Report.

Staff review

National office staff review program reports for completeness, confirming that the report follows required templates, providing reviewers with evidence needed to conduct a site visit and Commissioners with evidence needed to make an accreditation decision. However, programs are responsible for the completeness, validity and quality of their reports. Programs are advised to download current report templates, use external proofreaders, and use the peer reviewer worksheets in the online community as quality control tools before submitting reports to the national office.

Only complete reports will be considered for site visits. The Commission reserves the right to postpone site visits due to incomplete program reports, failure to submit reports or fees by desired site visit deadlines, unusually large numbers of reports from a particular state or in a particular cycle, or other conditions that may have negative impact on the integrity and reliability of the visit or of the accreditation system. See the online community for spring and fall reporting and site visit timelines.

The Site Visit

This chapter describes the purpose of and procedures related to the site visit

The purpose of the site visit

In any professional field, accreditation relies on the professional judgments of well-trained peers—those who understand the context of associate degree programs as well as the standards that NAEYC has developed to make accreditation decisions.

Peer review is an important element in evaluating whether an early childhood associate degree program meets NAEYC's standards. However Peer Review Teams do not make accreditation decisions.

The team writes a report to the accreditation Commission, using its analysis of the program's self-study report and its experiences during the site visit to make observations, commendations on strengths, and recommendations for improvements.

The actual accreditation decision is the function of the Commission, using your program's Self-Study Report and the Peer Review Report as resources in the decision-making process.

The site visit is an essential step in the accreditation of higher education programs. It provides for collegial interaction between the visiting Peer Review Team and the professionals associated with the program, along with appropriate administrators of the host institution. The team members supplement the information in the program's Self-Study Report through interviews with faculty, candidates, administrators and community stakeholders. They will review supporting documents as well as tours of campus facilities and field sites. The Peer Review Report is expected to provide additional information to the Commission and to benefit the program in its quest for excellence.

Peer review has three steps:

- **Step 1** occurs before the visit: the three Peer Reviewers individually read the Self-Study Report and make a preliminary assessment of the program's strengths and challenges based on the program's narrative and evidence provided. However, this is only a first assessment, and the views of the team members may change when they do the site visit.
- **Step 2** is the actual site visit, when the Peer Review Team sees your program first-hand. The team has multiple opportunities to meet with program faculty, candidates, and other stakeholders. The team may want to review additional evidence provided by your program and may request new information. This phase provides opportunities for the team to gain knowledge from sources other than the written report and allows the team to have a broader perspective on the program's strengths and possible challenges in each area.

- **Step 3** is for the team to synthesize their evaluation of the program in a summary report to the NAEYC Commission. This report is orally summarized in a meeting at the end of the visit. Together with the program's Self-Study Report, the Peer Review Report makes it possible for the Commission to make a credible, fair accreditation decision.

Selection and Training of Peer Reviewers

Who will be on the 3-person team that visits and reviews your program? Potential Peer Reviewers make formal application, including a vita/resume and references. NAEYC Staff select members of the reviewer pool from these applicants. Most Peer Reviewers will hold current faculty appointments in associate degree programs; some may be retired but professionally active. NAEYC actively seeks Peer Reviewers who can bring ethnic, cultural, geographic, and gender diversity to bear on the accreditation process. Details about qualifications and the application process for peer reviewers may be found at www.naeyc.org.

All individuals selected as Peer Reviewers agree to serve for a minimum of four years (term is renewable) and to participate in initial training and regular training updates. Reviewers typically serve on 1-2 Peer Review Teams each year.

Reviewers agree to abide by ethical standards of personal conduct that help the team conduct a well-informed and competent review. They do this by thoroughly preparing for site visits, reviewing all Self-Study Report materials, assessing information critically and fairly, and conducting themselves in a professional, objective, fair manner at all times.

During the peer review term of service and thereafter, reviewers maintain absolute confidentiality; for example, they are not allowed to discuss with their colleagues anything about the programs they have visited.

They also adhere to NAEYC's conflict of interest guidelines. For example, reviewers agree to disclose to NAEYC staff, in advance of serving on a team, any actual or potential conflicts of interest that could arise—for example, as a former employee of the program being reviewed or as someone who has a personal relationship with faculty in that program. Reviewers also avoid conflict of interest by refraining from participating in the review of programs for which they have served as consultants.

Scheduling the visit

Site visits are conducted only during the spring and fall semesters. When the program Self-Study Report is complete (see Submitting the Self-Study Report), national office staff will determine whether the report was completed in time to be considered for a site visit the following semester.

Current submission deadlines are posted on the online community website. Site visit dates and Peer Review Teams are assigned during the fall or spring semester prior to the site visit.

National office staff will contact programs and Peer Reviewers for available dates. Programs should select possible dates with these factors in mind: the college must be in session, fewer possible dates mean fewer available reviewers, and local weather patterns may cause cancellations or increased costs. In general, there are more winter weather challenges during spring semesters and fewer during fall semesters. (See *Emergencies Affecting a Site Visit* below.)

The national office staff and the program mutually agree upon the visit date. The national office assigns the Peer Review Team, considering dates of availability, potential conflicts of interest, geography, time zones and areas of expertise. Peer Reviewers sign a Conflict of Interest form before the visit. The program should raise concerns about potential conflicts of interest with the national office immediately after receiving the names of the assigned team.

When the Peer Review Team comes to your college, they will focus on the standards and on candidates' performance related to each standard – Part Two of your report.

Planning Ahead: What Needs to Happen Before the Team Arrives?

What your program will do

- Work with NAEYC staff to identify best weeks for your visit.
- Work with your Peer Review Team Chair to organize visit logistics – travel, lodging, meals, schedule of visit activities.
- Make sure that the team will have a private place to meet and a work space to review additional materials.
- Set up meetings and visits as agreed upon with your team chair and consistent with the schedule recommended by NAEYC. You may move required activities to times that better suit your program realities, but you may not eliminate any activities.
- Prepare stakeholders about the purpose of the visit and their role during the visit.

What NAEYC will do

- NAEYC staff will support the team chair and your program's administration and faculty to be sure that the logistics of the visit run smoothly. The dates for the visit will be mutually agreed upon. The institution is responsible for making travel and lodging arrangements for the visiting team.
- Answer questions and provide support both to the program and the team, as they prepare for the visit.
- Be available by phone or email to answer questions or trouble-shoot during the visit, if unexpected things come up.

Special conditions affecting a site visit

It is sometimes possible to combine *more than one eligible program* into one Self-Study Report and one Peer Review Team site visit. Institutions with multiple eligible programs are strongly encouraged to communicate with the national office during the self-study process to determine whether or not multiple degree programs should be submitted together in one Self-Study Report.

Similarly, eligible programs offered on *more than one campus* should communicate with the national office staff to determine how many campuses can effectively be addressed in one site visit.

Eligible programs that offer both on-campus and *online or other forms of distance courses*, should communicate with the national office to determine how to effectively present evidence related to criteria and standards across both on-campus and distance course sections in the Self-Study Report and during the site visit.

Any of these special conditions - multiple degree programs, multiple campuses or distance learning courses - may require a modified site visit schedule and may increase site visit costs to the program. Any modifications will be made with mutual agreement of the national office staff, the peer review team chair, and the program's primary contact person.

Arrangements for the visit

Programs pay all expenses of the peer review team site visit. Peer reviewers are volunteers, typically faculty from early childhood programs in other states. Host institutions are expected to make every effort to minimize reviewer out-of-pocket expenses by providing prepaid airline tickets (Coach fare) and making hotel arrangements that are billed directly by the hotel to the institution.

Remaining expenses, such as ground transportation and meals not taken at the hotel or on campus should be reimbursed as soon as possible by the program. Reviewers are volunteers, not paid by either the Commission or by the host institution. Reimbursement must follow IRS volunteer reimbursement policies, not staff reimbursement policy or consultant/vendor reimbursement policy.

The institution should make the following arrangements for the site visit team

- Prepaid airline tickets
- Hotel arrangements, billed directly to the institution
- Local ground travel arrangements between the airport, hotel and campus.
- A private team conference room on campus for the duration of the visit. The room should include a work table and Internet access.
- A light breakfast and lunch provided in the team conference room.
- Prepaid credit card, petty cash, or dinner arrangements in a restaurant that can direct bill the institution.

Host institutions are not expected to pay for

- Airfare above coach rates
- Mileage or car rentals that would exceed the cost of airfare
- Alcoholic beverages
- Movies, snacks, laundry or other discretionary hotel services

Failure to make site visit arrangements in a timely manner and in accordance with Commission policy may result in postponement of the visit. Failure to reimburse any site visit expenses not directly paid in a timely manner and in accordance with Commission policy may delay receipt of Commission decision reports.

See the online community of practice discussion "Hosting a site visit" to learn more about ways that other colleges and universities minimize reviewers' out of pocket expenses. Contact office staff early with questions and concerns.

A few weeks before the visit, the primary program contact and team chair will want to confirm plans for the required site visit activities. A current *Site Visit Schedule* is posted on the online community website. The program will need to invite the appropriate people to site visit interviews, make plans for the team to tour the main campus and visit all campuses that offer the degree under review, make arrangements to visit representative field sites, and plan for observations of representative courses (including online sections).

The primary program contact will also want to *prepare a workroom for the team* on campus. This room should be a private meeting space, with a collection of supporting documents for team review. Suggested *documents for review* include: the college catalog, course outlines, course syllabi, program candidate and faculty manuals, and samples of candidate work on key assessments with instructor feedback.

Nuts and Bolts of the Visit

Typically, the site visit will begin with the team arriving at your institution on Sunday afternoon and leaving Wednesday morning. The visit starts with a dinner Sunday evening (team members only) and continues with two days of interviews, meetings, class and field visits, and review of documents. By Wednesday morning the team has drafted the outline of its report and is ready to share the essentials of its findings with your program.

Team members engage in multiple activities during the two-and-a-half day visit, some as a group and some as individuals. Following are the primary activities that will happen; these are typical of other accreditation visits in higher education institutions. Keep in mind that team members will already be familiar with your program through reading the Self-Study Report. While on site, their goal is to gain better understanding through discussion, examples, observations and review of additional documentation.

Key Activities

- Interviewing and meeting with faculty, administrators, candidates, advisory committees, and other key stakeholders
- Observing representative classes (including on-line courses) and field experience or practicum sites
- Reviewing documents that help the team to understand your program and help you to provide evidence that you meet the accreditation standards – consider items like the candidate handbook; examples of candidate work; course syllabi; or additional assessment instruments
- Meeting regularly, in private, as a Peer Review Team, to discuss the visit and the drafting of the team report
- Meeting at least once a day with the program head, to touch base on the progress of the visit and to resolve any issues or questions

Since your program is unique, use scheduled activities to include people, places, and materials that will help round out the team's perspective on the program. For example, you may have a special relationship with the local Head Start program and might want a meeting with their staff. Or you might wish to highlight the program's use of videotapes as a candidate evaluation tool. Or perhaps you have tried innovative ways to advise immigrant candidates.

Work with your team chair to find ways to best include these people and places in your visit schedule.

The activities of the Peer Review Team

In conducting a site visit, Peer Reviewers will give respectful attention to the unique context of your program, implementing the strengths-based perspective that is a foundation of NAEYC's approach to accreditation.

The team's main emphasis will be on NAEYC's core standards and supportive skills for associate degree programs. In relation to the NAEYC standards and supportive skills, they will be looking at (a) your program's provision of learning opportunities for candidates; (b) your program's development of, or plans for, assessments that are of high quality and linked to the standards; (c) your program's evidence, or plans for collecting evidence, of candidates' growth and performance in relation to the standards and supportive skills; and (d) your program's use of, or plans to use, assessment data to improve the program and candidate outcomes. The site visit is conducted in a spirit of inquiry. The Peer Reviewers will ask questions during interviews, will ask to see additional documents, and will give serious attention to evidence that your program is actively engaged in teaching, learning and assessment in relation to the standards.

The Peer Review Team conducts the site visit following the current *Site Visit Schedule* posted on the online community website. The site visit must include all activities listed on the posted schedule.

The visit typically begins with a private team dinner meeting on Sunday night. During this meeting, the team has an opportunity to get to know each other, to compare initial notes from their reading

of the Self-Study Report, identify major themes for inquiry, and plan their questions for Monday activities.

Interviews, observations and document reviews are conducted on Monday and Tuesday. Times for these activities may be adjusted with mutual agreement between the primary program contact and team chair.

The Monday and Tuesday schedule must begin with a meeting between the primary contact for the program and the team chair. During this meeting, the team chair shares the team's central questions or concerns with the program representative. This provides an opportunity for the primary contact to answer questions, ask questions, or add documents to the team's workroom. This is also a time to confirm details for the day's activities. This morning check-in is very important and should not be canceled or cut short.

The visit ends with an oral presentation of the team's findings during the Wednesday morning exit session. You will know whether or not the team was able to find evidence that each of the six standards are substantially met through your program's learning opportunities, assessment systems, data collection and program improvement plan. The team chair will submit the written report to the national office within two weeks. The program will receive the written report by the end of the semester.

Emergencies affecting a site visit

Emergencies occur when a Peer Reviewer can no longer commit to a site visit due to a personal emergency or the host college needs to cancel the visit due to weather or other emergencies.

If an assigned Peer Review Team member must withdraw from the team and can give 6 to 8 weeks notice, national staff will attempt to find a replacement. The program will be notified of the change and given the opportunity to identify any potential conflict of interest.

If the assigned Peer Review Team member was not able to give 6 to 8 weeks notice or if a replacement cannot be found, decisions will be made on a case-by-case basis. Options include but are not limited to proceeding with a two-person team, sending staff support for a two-person team, arranging for the third team member to be available for consultation by telephone, extending the visit if team member arrivals are delayed, and canceling the visit. The team chair and the site primary contact have the right to cancel a visit on the basis of their consultation and mutual agreement.

If the visit must be cancelled due to an emergency, the program representatives and accreditation staff will reschedule at a time that is mutually agreed upon. Costs already committed to the site visit cannot be refunded. All site visit costs are paid by the host college.

The Peer Review Report and Written Response

At the end of the site visit, the team will have drafted their report. The report provides feedback to the program and information to the Commission about how the program has addressed the NAEYC criteria, standards, and supportive skills. Both areas of strength and recommendations for consideration will be noted. The essential findings in the report will be shared orally with the program at an “exit conference” on Wednesday of the visit.

The Exit Conference

Your program and institution will decide who will attend the exit conference. Usually attendees include the program faculty and representatives of the senior administrative staff of the college. All Peer Review Team members participate, and the team chair will take the lead. At the meeting, the team will summarize the findings, note commendations and recommendations that will appear in the report, and generally describe the overall thrust of the report, which the program will receive at a later date.

Additionally, the review team will remind those at the exit conference about the next steps in the accreditation process and the possible accreditation decisions. Finally, the review team will emphasize that they do not make the accreditation decision, and they cannot speak for the Commission, which will use the Peer Review Report and the program’s Self-Study Report to come to a conclusion about accreditation.

Feedback Loops for Continuous Improvement

NAEYC believes that a quality system needs continuous feedback. As part of this process, your program will be asked to complete a survey about your experiences with the planning and implementation of the site visit, including the team’s preparation and conduct.

Once the Peer Review Report Is Completed

The team’s completed report will go to the Commission, along with your program’s Self-Study Report. These will provide essential information for the Commission to make its accreditation decision.

The team chair submits the Peer Review Report to the national office within two weeks of the site visit. This report develops the basic findings of the team as reported orally in the exit session. The report summarizes the evidence that the team found in relation to the Accreditation Standards, evaluating the learning opportunities, key assessments, candidate performance data and program improvement work in relation to each standard.

The team does not make a recommendation on accreditation, but does use a rubric to assess the evidence submitted by the program for each standard as meeting expectations, exceeding expectations, or as an area of significant concern. The team also identifies strengths, challenges and areas for improvement related to each criteria cluster.

The Peer Review Report is sent to the program. The program may choose to submit a *Written Response* within 30 days. The Written Response may correct factual inaccuracies in the Peer Review Report but may not submit new evidence for review. The program may request to withdraw from the agenda of the next Commission meeting and return to self-study work. (See Withdrawal Procedures)

The program's Self-Study Report, Peer Review Report and Written Response are sent to the Commission and serve as the documented evidence on which the Commission makes an accreditation decision.

The main focus of the Peer Review Report is your programs' attention to the NAEYC standards and supportive skills, and especially on how the program has assessed (or plans to assess) candidates' outcomes related to those standards.

The report will also pay attention to the program's learning opportunities for candidates - again in relation to the standards - and also will emphasize how the program uses, or plans to use, candidate performance evidence in improving the program.

The team uses both your Self-Study Report and the additional insights it has gained from its visit to the program. As you will see in the template, the format of the team's report closely follows that of the self-study report. The team will come to a consensus decision about whether each of the six accreditation standards are "substantially met" or "significant concerns" for Commission deliberation.

Additionally, the team will comment on strengths and areas for consideration in each of the 12 criteria in Part One: Program Context and in the NAEYC supportive skills.

Teams are asked to write their report considering the specific context of the program: what is the program's mission and identity? What needs is the program trying to meet within its community? Teams are also trained to look for program strengths and to commend these in their report. Innovation and risk-taking are to be commended; programs can and should tackle realistic challenges.

However, review teams are also asked to address areas for improvement and to make recommendations in the spirit of continuous quality improvement.

Again, the overarching questions have to do with the NAEYC core standards and the program's capacity to help candidates gain essential competencies related to those standards.

The Accreditation Decision

The NAEYC Commission on Early Childhood Associate Degree Accreditation

The Commission on Early Childhood Associate Degree Accreditation is the body that makes all accreditation decisions.

Commission members include nationally recognized experts in the early childhood field. Their selection is based on their documented contributions to the early childhood field and their commitment to high-quality professional preparation. While Commission members are predominantly early childhood education faculty in institutions of higher education, others may be considered for service, including administrators, practitioners in the early childhood field, and members of the public.

The Commission meets to review programs that have received a site visit during the preceding spring or fall, and to review Annual Reports from programs that are accredited with conditions. Accreditation decisions are made by a body that is highly knowledgeable, fair, and impartial. In addition to rendering accreditation decisions, the Commission is also develops and approves policies for the accreditation system.

Commission members abide by standards of personal conduct that help the Commission function effectively. They do this by thoroughly preparing for each Commission meeting, reviewing all Self-Study Reports, Peer Review Reports and Written Responses, assessing information critically and fairly, and conducting themselves in a professional, objective, fair manner.

During their term of service and thereafter, Commission members maintain absolute confidentiality. They also adhere to the conflict of interest guidelines. For example, Commission members agree to disclose to the Commission Chair any actual or potential conflict of interest with any program under review.

Commission members participate in training and orientation, including parts of Peer Reviewer training. A current list of Commissioners is posted on the NAEYC website.

Accreditation decisions are made by the Commission

Before each meeting, Commissioners receive copies of the Self-Study Report, Peer Review Report, and Written Responses for programs being reviewed in that cycle. Commission members use a Discussion and Decision Guide to complete a preliminary assessment of each program and make a preliminary accreditation recommendation.

During the Commission meeting, each program receives discussion from the full Commission. The Commission Chair facilitates discussion, keeping attention on the accreditation standards and the Discussion and Decision Guide. Reaching consensus is the goal, but if Commission members disagree, a vote will be taken and the accreditation decision will reflect the views of the majority. Commission members abstain from participation in discussions of programs with which they have a conflict of interest.

The Commission also reviews the Annual Report from programs that are currently accredited with Conditions. The Commission provides feedback after the first Annual Report. The second Annual Report results in a new decision of either Accredited or Not Accredited.

The Commission decision is recorded in meeting minutes and transmitted to the chief executive officer of the institution housing the program, along with a Decision Report. In the case of an adverse decision, the Decision Report will identify the accreditation standards that the program did not meet. The Decision Report will separate statements that are the basis for an adverse decision from statements that identify recommended areas for improvement to the program.

Accreditation decisions are evidence-based

All accreditation decisions are based on documented evidence that the associate degree program meets the published NAEYC standards for preparing early childhood professionals at the associate level. Evidence is documented in the program's Self-Study Report, the Peer Review Report, the program's Written Response to the Peer Review Report, and the Annual Report.

In making its accreditation decision, the Commission will review the evidence that your program meets the six NAEYC candidate performance standards. Because the program that submits itself for review initiates the accreditation process, the burden of proof of meeting the standards rests with the program. The program is responsible for preparing reports and documents following the templates provided by the national office (current at the time of report submission) and with a degree of thoroughness and clarity that will satisfy a detailed review by staff, the site visiting team, and the Commission.

The Role of Standards and Criteria in the Decision

In the Self-Study Report, programs address both Accreditation Criteria (Part One) and Accreditation Standards (Part Two). Accreditation Criteria identify elements of the program context with corresponding indicators of strength. These criteria are used to better understand the program's unique state and community context, institution and program mission and goals, the program's conceptual framework and design, characteristics of candidates and faculty, and institutional structure. Each criterion includes indicators of strength that are used as a guide for writing the Self-Study Report and may prompt themes of inquiry during the Peer Review Team site visit.

The accreditation decision is based on evidence that the program meets the Accreditation Standards through documented learning opportunities, key assessments, data on candidate performance on key

assessments, and use of that data to improve the program in relation to the accreditation standards. Program descriptions in Part One of the report help the Peer Reviewers and Commission to understand how your program approaches the standards, why your program is designed in a particular way. The Commission looks here to see that your program is reflective and responsive, in relation to its unique community base, candidates, faculty, conceptual framework, institutional mission and goals, program resources, capacity, strengths and challenges.

To become accredited, your program must provide evidence that it meets each of the six standards through learning opportunities, key assessments, candidate performance data and quality improvements that respond to candidate needs in relation to the six standards and supporting skills. The Commission decision will be based on how your graduates perform in these critical areas that reflect our shared national vision for early childhood teacher preparation. The Accreditation Standards, Supportive Skills, and Criteria may all be used to identify program strengths and recommended areas for improvement.

Possible decisions

The Commission may choose between the following initial accreditation decisions:

- Accredited
- Accredited with Conditions
- Not Accredited
- Accredited with Probation
- Revocation of Accreditation
- Deferral of decision

Accredited

The program substantially meets the six accreditation standards.

It provides adequate opportunities for candidates to learn and practice the competencies reflected in the standards and supportive skills.

Assessments or assessment plans, together with rubrics or other scoring guides, appear adequate to provide an accurate picture of candidates' growth and competence in relation to the accreditation standards.

The program is collecting data that provides evidence of candidate performance in relation to the accreditation standards, or has a plan and clear potential to collect data.

The program uses this evidence to improve the program in response to candidate needs, or has specific plans to use this evidence.

It has addressed each of the accreditation criteria and supportive skills to at least an acceptable level.

The program holds accreditation for a period of seven years. The program reports annually to NAEYC on substantial program changes and on progress with respect to major recommendations that were identified in the decision report.

Accredited with Conditions

Accreditation with Conditions may be awarded for a two-year term. Significant areas for improvement are identified with respect to the six accreditation standards. Other notable strengths in the program indicate that improvement in these areas is possible within two years and can be effectively documented in Annual Reports. The program is publicly listed as Accredited during the two-year term.

The program must submit evidence that identified conditions have been addressed in the first and second Annual Reports. If the Commission determines that the program has sufficiently addressed conditions in the first Annual Report, the program receives accreditation for the next six years. If the Commission determines that the program has sufficiently addressed conditions in the second Annual Report, the program receives accreditation for the next five years. If the Commission determines that conditions have not been sufficiently addressed by the second Annual Report, the two-year term of accreditation status expires and the program receives notice that it is no longer accredited. Accreditation with Conditions cannot be extended for more than two years.

Accredited with Probation

An accredited program is notified of Probation status when a Commission review of evidence indicates that the program may no longer meet accreditation standards, eligibility requirements, or other accreditation expectations. The term of Probation may be extended for no more than two years.

Not Accredited

The program does not substantially meet all six accreditation standards. Multiple concerns exist across key components, including but not limited to capacity and plans for assessment of candidate performance.

The program has the right to appeal a Not Accredited decision. The program may choose to return to self-study work and repeat the Self-Study Report and site visit process.

Revocation of Accreditation

The Commission may revoke accreditation when a program fails to maintain accreditation eligibility requirements, standards or other expectations including submission of Annual Reports and fees.

Deferral of decision

The Commission may choose to defer an accreditation decision to its next meeting when there is insufficient evidence presented to support a decision. In this case, the Commission must request new documentation that would clarify whether or not the program meets a standard. Deferrals cannot extend the twenty-four month candidacy limit.

Deferrals may be requested by programs, accompanied by evidence of extenuating circumstances or substantive changes that justify a need for more time to respond to a peer review report. Deferrals are not used for the purpose of making program improvements, but to supply missing information, to clarify information, or address extenuating circumstances.

Renewal

Accredited Programs must renew accreditation before the expiration of each seven year term. Renewal requires evidence of continued implementation of key assessments aligned with NAEYC standards, student performance data from at least two applications of each assessment, and use of that data to inform teaching and learning in relation to one or more accreditation Criterion. Programs are encouraged to report on quality improvement projects, innovative approaches to challenges, participation in an institution initiative or partnership, telling a "then and now" 5 year story.

Effective date and public announcement of decisions

The effective date of the decision is the date the commission makes its decision. Subsequent Annual Report due dates are set according to the effective date of the accreditation decision. Renewal accreditation reports and site visits are also set according to the effective date of the most recent accreditation decision.

Accredited programs are publicly listed on the NAEYC website and updated twice a year, after programs have received Decision Reports from the most recent Commission meeting.

Programs whose most recent decision is Accredited with Conditions are listed with Accredited programs. When the Commission rules that conditions have been met, the program receives notice that its status is changed to Accredited. If the Commission rules that conditions are not met in the Second Annual Report, the program receives notice that the two-year term of accreditation has expired and the program is no longer accredited.

Maintaining Accreditation

Annual Reports

Each accredited program maintains accreditation through submission of an Annual Report and Annual Accreditation Fee. If a program fails to submit the Annual Report or the Annual Fee, accreditation status may be revoked. Current fee schedules are available from the national office and on the NAEYC website.

Annual Reports must follow the template provided on the online community website. If the report is complete, demonstrates continued compliance with accreditation standards and criteria, and does not indicate substantive change, accreditation is reaffirmed for the following year. If the report indicates substantive change, the Commission may request additional information or request a focused site visit, with the reason that such a visit is necessary.

Programs that receive an Accredited with Conditions decision must also submit evidence of addressing the conditions named in the Annual Report in order to maintain accreditation. When the Commission determines that conditions are met, they are removed and the program receives notice that its status is changed to full Accreditation. If the Commission determines that conditions have not been met in the second Annual Report, the program receives notice that its status is changed to Not Accredited and it is removed from the list of accredited programs.

Loss, revocation or withdrawal of Accreditation

Accreditation status may be lost through revocation or voluntary withdrawal. Accreditation status can be revoked by the Commission as a result of

- Failure to meet conditions by the second Annual Report
- Failure to submit the Annual Report and/or Annual Fee. Current fee schedules are available from the national office and on the NAEYC website.
- Evidence that the program is no longer a functional entity
- Evidence that the program is no longer in compliance with accreditation standards, criteria or eligibility requirements
- Evidence that the program has undergone substantive change and has not complied with requests for additional information



The chief executive officer of the institution in which a program is located may request removal of a program from the published list of accredited programs. The Commission will comply with that request and delete the program. At a subsequent time, the program may reapply for accreditation without prejudice.

Appeal Procedures

This chapter outlines the procedures for appealing a Not Accredited decision. The appeal process is the only method to review Early Childhood Associate Degree Accreditation decisions made by NAEYC.

NAEYC is committed to providing a mechanism whereby appeals can be raised and dealt with promptly, impartially, and confidentially.

Which Decisions Can Be Appealed

A program that is denied NAEYC Early Childhood Associate Degree Accreditation may appeal a Not Accredited decision within 30 days of receipt of the Accreditation Commission decision. Only Not Accredited decisions may be appealed. During the appeal process, there is no change in the public accreditation status. Initial accreditation decisions remain unannounced.

Filing an Appeal

The appeal process is initiated by submitting a Letter of Appeal. The Letter of Appeal must:

- Be submitted in writing within 30 days of receipt of the Accreditation Decision Report. Unless appealed within 30 days, the decision to deny accreditation will become final;
- Be addressed to the Director of the NAEYC Early Childhood Associate Degree Accreditation;
- Be signed by an executive employee of the host institution (the “Appellant”);
- State whether the appeal is based on a procedural violation (e.g., the Commission failed to follow proper procedure in reviewing the Appellant’s program) or substantive error (e.g., the Commission misapplied accreditation criteria) by the Commission;
- Specify the grounds on which the appeal is made, including the specific facts and circumstances supporting the appeal;
- Include complete and accurate copies of all supporting documents; and
- Include payment of the Appeal Fee. Contact the national office for more information. The Appeal Fee is refundable only if the appeal is successful.

Once the Appeal Letter is received, the Director verifies the documents for completeness and may ask for additional documentary support if necessary. Once the documents are complete, the Director acknowledges the receipt of the appeal and forwards the same to the Commission Chair. The Commission Chair has the right to disallow the appeal if he or she determines that the appeal does not address any meritorious issues, or to form an Appeals Panel based on the merit of the contents of the appeal.

The Appeals Panel

The Commission Chair will initiate the appeal process by appointing a three-member Appeals Panel within 30 days of receipt of the completed Appeal Letter.

Members of the Appeals Panel must be early childhood professionals, knowledgeable about the accreditation standards and process, with no conflicts of interest or affiliation with the Appellant, the members of current Commission, or with the Peer Review Team that conducted the site visit of the Appellant's program.

The Scope and Conduct of the Appeal Review

The Appeals Panel will conduct its review as follows:

The members of the Appeals Panel shall judge in all fairness. The burden of persuading the appeals body rests with the Appellant program.

The members are bound by the rules in this procedure and terms of NAEYC's confidentiality policy.

The issues addressed by the Appeals Panel are limited to those identified in the Appeal Letter.

The role of the Appeals Panel is to determine whether or not there is evidence that procedures were violated or errors made by the Commission that would affect the decision outcome, and to either affirm the decision being appealed or direct the Commission to reconsider the original decision. The Appeals Panel reviews the Commission's actions, not the Appellant program.

In addition to information submitted by the Appellant, the Appeals Panel will consider as evidence only the record that was before the Commission at the time of its decision, as documented in the Self-Study Report, the Peer Review Report, and factual corrections made in the Appellant's Written Response to the Peer Review Report. The Appeals Panel will not consider new revisions to the reports, additions to the reports, or subsequent changes made by the Appellant program.

When assessing the evidence substantiating the appeal, the Appeals Panel may request additional information and hear from the Appellant. The decision to hear from the Appellant, whether in

person or by telephone conference, or only in writing, shall be at sole discretion of the Appeals Panel. No formal rules of evidence, judicial procedure, or other trial type proceedings shall apply.

The Appeals Panel will report its evaluation and final decision to the Commission no later than 90 days after the Appeals Panel has been appointed. The Appeals Panel may vote to grant an extension of time for any deadline under these policies, but such extension of time shall be no longer than 60 days. The Director shall inform the Appellant accordingly.

The Appeals Panel's decision is final, unless directing the Commission to reconsider the matter.

The Appeal Panel Decision and Report

The Appeals Panel will submit a decision report within 30 days of its completed review, addressed to the Director of NAEYC Early Childhood Associate Degree Accreditation. Copies are forwarded to the Appellant program, the chief executive director of NAEYC, and to the Commission Chair.

If the Appeals Panel upholds the Commission decision, the original decision stands. In the event that the decision of the Commission is not upheld, the case will be remanded to the Commission for reconsideration at the next scheduled Commission meeting in a manner not inconsistent with the findings of the Appeals Panel.

Complaint Procedures

This chapter outlines the two kinds of complaints that may be filed with the national office: complaints about the operations of an accredited program, and complaints about the actions of the Peer Reviewers who conduct the site visit.

Complaints about the operations of an accredited program

Any member of the public can file a complaint about the operations of an accredited program. To be considered by the Commission, the complaint must:

- Be written and signed
- Identify the individual, group or legal entity represented by the complainant
- Present substantial evidence that the program is not in compliance with one or more of the Accreditation Standards or Criteria in use at the time referred to by the complainant
- Demonstrate, when reasonably possible, that serious effort has been made to pursue complaint procedures provided within the institution in which the program is located
- Grant permission to send the complaint, in its entirety, to the institution.

Complaints must be submitted to the national office. The complaint will be sent to the program for comment. Staff will contact the Commission Chair, who will appoint an ad hoc committee from current or past commissioners. The committee will review both the complaint and the program comment. The Commission may:

- Reach a decision and inform both the program and complainant.
- Vote to pursue the matter, requesting more information through correspondence and/or a special site visit. In this case, the program will have the opportunity to comment on any additional information gathered.

The Commission will inform both the program and complainant of the final disposition of the complaint in writing.

Complaints about the actions of the Peer Reviewers who conduct the site visit

The chief executive officer of the host institution may file a complaint regarding the actions of the peer reviewers who conducted the site visit. That official must notify the national office of the intent to file a complaint within 30 days of completion of the site visit. The complaint should subsequently be submitted in writing, addressed to the director of the national office, and must

- Be written and signed
- Be sent before the host institution has received the Peer Review Report and within 30 days after the completion of the site visit
- Provide a clear description of the critical incident(s) in question
- Grant permission to send the complaint, in its entirety, to the Peer Review Team

The national office will acknowledge receipt of the complaint and hold it until the Peer Review Report is received. Staff will contact the Commission Chair, who will appoint an ad hoc committee from current or past commissioners. The complaint will be sent to all members of the Peer Review Team with request for comment within 30 days. During this same period, the Peer Review Report will be sent to the program for comment.

On receipt of 1) the comments by Peer Reviewers on the complaint and 2) written response from the program to the Peer Review Report, both sets of papers are provided to the committee.

Committee members are asked to 1) review the complaint and Peer Reviewer comments, 2) review the Peer Review Report and the program's Written Response, and 3) form an opinion as to whether the action(s) of the Peer Reviewers were such as to void the Peer Review Report.

Based on this review, the Commission may reach one of the following decisions by a majority vote:

- Deny the complaint, thereby sustaining the conduct of the Peer Review Team
- Sustain the complaint, thereby requiring a reprimand of the Peer Reviewer(s), which may include deletion from the list of potential Peer Reviewers maintained by the national office
- Vote to pursue the matter further, either through correspondence or through a special fact-finding group, to provide the additional information necessary to reach a decision

If the committee votes to sustain the complaint, it must then determine whether the critical incident(s) influenced the content of the Peer Review Report. If the incident is determined to have influenced the Peer Review Report, the committee voids the site visit and determines whether or not

another site visit is necessary. If so, it is conducted at the expense of the NAEYC Associate Degree Accreditation system. If not, the Commission proceeds with its decision on program compliance with accreditation standards as described in Commission Decisions on Accreditation.

The Commission may not move to an accreditation decision until it has reached a disposition on the complaint. The disposition of the complaint is communicated in writing to the chief executive officer of the host institution and to all members of the Peer Review Team that conducted the site visit.

Deferral Requests

This chapter describes how to request a Deferral after submitting a Self-Study Report but before a Commission decision.

The Commission may choose to defer an accreditation decision to its next meeting when there is insufficient evidence presented to support a decision. In this case, the Commission will request new documentation that would clarify whether or not the program meets a standard. Deferrals may be requested by programs, accompanied by evidence of extenuating circumstances or substantive changes that justify a need for more time to respond to a peer review report. Deferrals are not used for the purpose of making program improvements, but to supply missing information, to clarify information, or address extenuating circumstances.

Programs seeking a Deferral must contact the office and include the request as part of the Written Response to the Peer Review Report. Deferrals cannot extend the twenty-four month candidacy limit. During the Candidacy period the program will be invoiced for an Annual Fee, due on the anniversary of the initial Accreditation & Eligibility Review Fee.

Withdrawal Procedures

This chapter explains how to voluntarily withdraw from the next step in the accreditation process.

Withdrawing an Application for Accreditation Eligibility

Programs may request to withdraw their Application for Accreditation Eligibility or to withdraw their Self-Study Report at any time before the Commission takes final action on an accreditation decision, without prejudice. The request to withdraw must be submitted in writing, with the signature of the institution's chief executive officer.

Programs that withdraw *the Application for Accreditation Eligibility* must re-apply for eligibility before submitting a Self-Study Report. The Application & Eligibility Review Fee will not be refunded.

Withdrawing a Self-Study Report

Programs may choose to withdraw the Self-Study Report before the site visit. Programs that withdraw *the Self-Study Report* must re-submit the report in order to be considered for a site visit.

Programs may also choose to withdraw the Self-Study Report after a site visit but before a Commission decision. Programs that withdraw the Self-Study Report after the site visit will need to resubmit the Self-Study Report. Another site visit may be required before Commission review.

The primary and secondary program contacts and/or chief executive officer of the institution are encouraged to call or e-mail the national office staff to discuss the implications of withdrawals. Withdrawals will not prejudice the accreditation decision, but may affect the program's costs and timeline.

Programs will pay the *costs* of withdrawal. Fees paid for the eligibility or accreditation review will not be refunded. Funds already committed for site visit costs will not be refunded. Programs will pay the cost of a second site visit if required.

Programs that want to withdraw the report in order to continue self-study work, but want to remain active Candidates for accreditation must request a Continuance at the time of withdrawal.

Withdrawing an Appeal

A program or institution may withdraw its appeal of an accreditation decision in writing at any time up until the decision of the ad hoc Appeals Panel is rendered. The appellant institution or program foregoes the right to reassert the appeal at a later date. The Commission decision becomes final upon receipt of the written request to withdraw the appeal. The appellant program or institution remains responsible for any appeal costs incurred, including those necessary to terminate the process.

Glossary

Accreditation terms used throughout the NAEYC Early Childhood Associate Degree system and additional terms commonly used in higher education accreditation.

AACTE	The American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education is a national voluntary association of higher education institutions and other organizations and is dedicated to ensuring the highest quality preparation and continuing professional development for teachers and school leaders in order to enhance PK-12 candidate learning. http://www.aacte.org/
AACC	American Association of Community Colleges, founded in 1920 and representing the approximately 1200 community colleges in the United States. http://www.aacc.nche.edu/
ACCESS	American Associate Degree Early Childhood Educators, founded in the early 1980s and representing the faculty in early childhood associate degree programs in the United States. “ACCESS is a national, non-profit 501(c) (3) membership association. Our purpose is supporting and advocating for associate degree programs that provide professional development to those who teach and care for young children from birth through age 8 across a variety of settings - public elementary schools, Head Start programs, child care centers and homes, and other community early childhood programs.” http://www.accesscece.org/
Accreditation	A voluntary, non-governmental system of evaluation used to protect the public interest and to verify the quality of service provided by academic programs and institutions.
Accreditation Actions	Any decision made by an accreditation agency affecting the accreditation status of a program. In this accreditation system possible actions include: 1) approve eligibility after program application, 2) grant candidacy after submission of Self-Study Report, 3) grant a Continuance if requested after a site visit or after a Not Accredited decision, 4) grant Accreditation, 5) grant Accreditation with Conditions, 6) withdraw accreditation from a previously accredited program, or 7) deny initial accreditation through a Not Accredited decision.
Accreditation Decisions	Accreditation decisions are made by the Commission, following the submission of the program Self-Study Report, the submission of the Peer Review Report, and the submission of any written response to the team report from the program. There are three possible decisions: Accredited (the standards are substantially met), Accredited with Conditions (the standards are substantially met but there are significant improvements that must be made related to standards, supportive skills, or criteria and documented in the second Annual Report), or Not Accredited (the standards are not substantially met).

Accreditation Decision Report	The official document sent to the primary contact and chief officer as identified in writing by the institution, conveying the accreditation-agency's accreditation decision following a comprehensive or focused review. This report from the accreditation Commission describes the accreditation decision, based on a review of the program Self-Study Report and the Peer Review Report followed by deliberation. It may include Conditions (improvements required to maintain accreditation) and Recommendations (suggestions that confirm or add to the program's ongoing improvement plans).
Action and Recommendation Report	See Accreditation Actions, Accreditation Decision Report, Decision Document and Recommendations.
Adverse Action	Withdrawal or denial of accreditation or pre-accreditation by an accreditation agency. Adverse action may result from an initial decision of "Not Accredited," failure to meet conditions of the initial accreditation within the time period specified by the accreditation agency, failure to submit annual reports, or failure to maintain financial responsibilities.
Annual Report	A report submitted every year to an accreditation agency by the already accredited program for the purpose of sharing major developments and illustrating ongoing program improvements. If the initial decision was Accreditation with Conditions, then this report must address any conditions in the timeframe specified in the initial Accreditation Decision Report in order to maintain accreditation.
Annual Update Form	A form submitted annually during the self-study and candidacy periods (after submitting an Application and before submitting Annual Reports). Its purpose is to update the national office on any changes in program characteristics or contact information. Substantive changes may result in a request for more information to confirm that eligibility requirements are maintained.
Appeal	The right and process available to a program after an adverse accreditation decision.
Articulation	Efforts to design associate and baccalaureate degree programs so that they fit together, or articulate, to facilitate candidate transfer with minimal loss of credits. This is increasingly critical as more early childhood teachers will be expected to have bachelor degrees, higher percentages of all teachers begin their college work in community colleges, and the minority candidate enrollment grows in community colleges.
Assessment	In these standards the term "assessment" refers primarily to the methods through which early childhood professionals gain understanding of children's development and learning. Systematic observations and other informal and formal assessments enable candidates to appreciate children's unique qualities, to develop appropriate goals, and to plan, implement, and evaluate effective curriculum. (See Standard 3) Secondly, assessment here refers to the formal and informal assessments of adult candidates required for degree completion. In higher education accreditation systems these are referred to as "key assessments" and provide evidence that the degree program and its graduates meet the NAEYC standards.

Associate Degree Program

The associate degree is widely recognized college diploma. It consists of a coherent and sequenced set of courses, defined outcomes, and evaluations of candidate performance on assignments related to the degree outcomes. It includes foundation general education courses in the arts, humanities, mathematics, sciences and social sciences. If designed for specialized career/workforce entry, it will also include courses in a specialized discipline.

Guidance in the *AACC Board Statement on the Associate Degree* suggests that an associate in arts (AA) be $\frac{3}{4}$ general education; an Associate in Science (AS) be $\frac{1}{2}$ general education; and associate in applied science (AAS) include $\frac{1}{3}$ general education coursework. Although the AAS is designed to lead directly to employment in a specific career, it should be “designed to recognize the dual possibility” of career entry and continued higher education. In many states these titles are used differently and new titles are being developed.

In this accreditation system, the phrase associate degree program refers to a specific associate degree plan, program or course of study with a specific title, course list and other graduation requirements.

ASPA

Association of Specialized and Professional Accreditors. A national, non-profit organization providing a collaborative forum and a collective voice for U.S. accreditation agencies that assess the quality of specialized and professional higher education programs and schools. ASPA represents its members on issues of educational quality facing institutions of higher education, governments, candidates, and the public. ASPA also advances the knowledge, skills, good practices, and ethical commitments of accreditors, and communicates the value of accreditation as a means of enhancing educational quality. <http://www.aspa-usa.org/>

Candidacy (Program)

The status granted to programs that have been approved as eligible for accreditation and have submitted an initial Self-Study Report. Programs in Candidacy may move forward to a site visit or may need to submit missing components or make revisions to comply with the current Self-Study Report template before being approved for a site visit.

Candidate (Student)

Refers to college students who are candidates for completion in an early childhood professional preparation programs. In some cases, these candidates are also candidates for professional licensure or certification. Although NAEYC supports early childhood licensure for all teachers of young children, birth through age 8, early childhood licensure is not required in every state or in every early learning setting.

CAO

The chief academic officer at an academic program or institution.

COBA

Experimentation with new models for articulation between associate and bachelor degrees includes the Community College Baccalaureate Association, which “strives to promote better access to the baccalaureate degree on community college campuses, and to serve as a resource for information on various models for accomplishing this purpose.” <http://www.accbd.org/>

CEO

The chief executive officer at an academic program or institution.

CFO

The chief financial officer at an academic program or institution.

CHEA	Council for Higher Education Accreditation, a private, nonprofit national organization that coordinates accreditation activity and recognizes regional, institutional, and professional accrediting agencies in the United States. http://www.chea.org/
Children	Used throughout the standards rather than “candidates” to refer to the young children in early childhood classrooms, child care homes, and other early childhood settings. In this document, child/children refers to young children in the period of early childhood development, from birth through approximately age 8.
CITA	The Commission on International & Trans-Regional Accreditation grew out of collaboration between the U.S. regional accreditors. (See “regional accreditor”). CITA provides an accreditation system for schools that are located outside of the United States or that operate across regions. http://www.citaschools.org/
Community College	Part of the postsecondary education system, offering certificate and undergraduate degree programs, preparation for career entry and college transfer. Community colleges also offer non-credit programs including workforce training, English as a second language, GED, and community enrichment programs. Most are open access and offer comprehensive candidate support services. They are public schools with tuition generally providing approximately 20% of revenue. (See AACC American Association of Community Colleges)
Compliance	The extent to which a program or institution conforms and adheres to accreditation standards.
Comprehensive Review	Periodic review of a program by an accreditation agency, in which the agency's decision-making body or its representatives evaluate a program's compliance with standards. The process typically includes the program submitting a self-study, undergoing an on-site evaluation, and receiving an accreditation decision.
Conditional Accreditation	Accreditation status that is granted for a shorter-than-normal period of time, pending significant and immediate improvement to maintain compliance with the Standards. (Also Provisional Accreditation, or Accreditation with Conditions)
Conflict of Interest	Any personal, financial, or professional interest that might create a conflict with an external evaluator, reviewer, or member of a decision-making body's ability to fairly and objectively carry out accreditation responsibilities.
Continuance	Continued Candidacy status that permits programs to continue self-study work, make program improvements, and revise the Self-Study Report in order to demonstrate evidence of compliance with the Standards. Continuances may be requested as part of the program's written response to a Peer Review Report.
Continued Accreditation	Accreditation status granted to programs and institutions that continuously demonstrate evidence of their conformity to the Standards. Continued accreditation is based on evidence submitted in Annual Reports, Interim Reports, Focused Reports, or on re-accreditation after initial accreditation has expired.

Criteria	The accreditation criteria are expectations related to program mission, role, design, faculty, candidates, governance and resources. Criteria indicate the program's strengths, challenges and its capacity to support the learning of specific candidates in a specific in a specific community, institution and program. Each criterion has "indicators of strength" and "sources of evidence" that are used by peer reviewers and commission members in the program review. Criteria are related to the program's context, while Standards are related to the program's outcomes. (Also see "Standards.")
Culture	Includes ethnicity, racial identity, economic class, family structure, language, and religious and political beliefs, which profoundly influence each child's development and relationship to the world.
Decision Document	See "Accreditation Decision Report" and "Action and Recommendation Report."
Department	See "unit."
Developmentally Appropriate Practice	Refers to the NAEYC Position Statement first developed in 1985 and most recently revised in 2009. The term developmentally appropriate practice, or DAP for short, refers to a framework of principles and guidelines for practice that promotes young children's optimal learning and development. DAP is a way of framing a teacher's intentional decision making. It begins with three Core Considerations: 1) what is known about age-related characteristics of child development and learning, 2) what is known about the child as an individual, and 3) what is known about the social and cultural contexts in which the child lives. DAP is a way of framing "differentiation" for teachers of young children from birth through age 8.
Early Childhood	The period in human development that begins at birth and ends at approximately 8 years old.
Evaluation-Team Report	A report written by external reviewers during or following the on-site evaluation visit to validate the program self-study and document the level of compliance with standards and performance with respect to program and institutional outcomes. (See "Peer Review Report" and "Site Visit Report")
Evaluation Team	See "External Reviewers" and "Peer Reviewers"
Evidence	Documents submitted with program or peer review reports, notes from site visit interviews, examples that substantiate a claim. Both the program and the peer review team should be able to substantiate narratives with evidence.
Evidence-based practice	A decision making process that integrates the best available research evidence with family and professional wisdom and values. (Buyse & Wesley, 2006, p. xiv)
External Reviewers	A group of individuals appointed by the accreditation agency with the task of visiting a program or institution for the purpose of verify information in Self-Study Report. (also Evaluation Team, External Review Panel, Peer Reviewers)

External Review Panel

See "External Reviewers."

Faculty

Each reference to "faculty" includes full-time, part-time, or adjunct faculty.

Field Experiences and clinical practice

Includes field observations, field work, practica, candidate teaching and other "clinical" practice experiences such as home visiting. A planned sequence of these experiences supports candidate development of understanding, competence and dispositions in a specialized area of practice.

Focused Report

A report submitted by a program or institution to the accreditation agency to address specific areas of concern as outlined in a decision document. (See "Special Report")

Full Accreditation

Programs or institutions which demonstrate that they comply with accreditation standards and will continue to do so receive full Accreditation in the form of Initial Accreditation for programs or institutions being accredited for the first time or Continued Accreditation for those who have already been accredited.

Full Review

See "Comprehensive Review."

HEA

Higher Education Act. Like the ESEA (Elementary and Secondary Education Act, currently known as No Child Left Behind), this federal legislation outlines requirements for institutions of higher education and higher education accrediting agencies.

<http://www.ed.gov/admins/finaid/accred/index.html>

Inclusion and diversity

Not a separate standard, but is integrated into each standard. The phrase "each child" or "all children" is used to emphasize that every standard is meant to include all children: children with developmental delays or disabilities, children who are gifted and talented, children whose families are culturally and linguistically diverse, children from diverse socioeconomic groups, and other children with individual learning styles, strengths and needs. *Family and child diversity* includes race, ethnicity, language, culture, social class, immigrant status, special needs, and learner characteristics. These are highlighted in NAEYC's core considerations for making decisions about *Developmentally Appropriate Practice*.

For example, in Standard 1b "multiple influences" on development and learning includes family and child diversity. Standard 3 requires candidates to use assessment to develop appropriate goals and strategies and promote positive outcomes for each child, and to know about effective assessment partnerships with families. In Standard 4 candidates are expected to develop a repertoire of teaching strategies appropriate for diverse children and to "promote positive outcomes for each child." In Standard 5c diversity must be considered in the development of "meaningful and challenging curriculum for each child." Finally in Standard 6, current issues related to inclusion and diversity are essential aspects of ethical conduct, collaborative learning to inform practice, reflective perspectives on early education, and informed advocacy for young children.

Initial Accreditation

Accreditation that has been granted to a program or institution being accredited for the first time.

Institutional Accreditation	The evaluation and accreditation of an institution as a whole (e.g., a school, college or university), usually by a regional accreditor.
Interim Reports	Narrative or statistical reports sent by the program or institution between Comprehensive Reviews for the purpose of updating the accreditation agency on progress towards meeting Standards. (See “Annual Report.”)
Know, understand and use	Key elements of each standard identify critical components of the standard emphasizing the importance of a sound knowledge base in the content of each standard and application of knowledge in teaching practice. “ <i>Know</i> ” refers to candidates’ possession of key information; “ <i>understand</i> ” includes analysis and reflection; “ <i>use</i> ” refers to application in practice, always soundly based on professional knowledge.
NACCTEP	National Association of Community College Teacher Education Programs “NACCTEP is dedicated to supporting the community college role in recruiting, preparing and retaining Pre K-12 teachers. Studies have shown that over 50% of current teachers attended a community college for part of their education. For this reason, it is essential that the role of the community college is promoted, and that teacher education programs offered are of the highest quality.” http://www.nacctep.org/
NCATE	National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education. Accrediting body that accredits a unit (school, college or department of education) that offers baccalaureate or graduate degree programs leading to initial or advanced teacher licensure. http://www.ncate.org/ NAEYC partners with NCATE to review and recognize early childhood education programs in NCATE accredited schools of education. NAEYC’s core standards are used in NAEYC’s associate degree accreditation system and in NAEYC review of early childhood programs seeking NCATE accreditation.
On-Site Evaluation	Part of the comprehensive review. Members of the External Review Panel travel to the program’s location to validate and learn more about the information contained in the Self-Study Report. Also known as On-Site Review, On-Site Visit, Evaluation Visit, Peer Review Team Visit, or Site Visit.
Peer Review	A process for external evaluation of the quality of a program or institution using one’s equals from other programs or institutions to ensure that it meets accreditation Standards. The team conducting the review is called the Peer Review Team.
Plan for the Program Presentation	Site visit schedules and other documents submitted by the program or institution to the accreditation agency before the on-site evaluation to ensure that the preparation for the review is done in a timely and effective manner. These are developed in collaboration with the Peer Review Team chair and national office staff.
Precandidate Status	Status granted by an accreditation agency to a program prior to enrolling or graduating candidates. Granting precandidate status indicates that a program or institution’s planning has taken into account accreditation standards, criteria and guidelines and suggests reasonable assurances of moving to the Candidate status. Granting precandidate status brings no rights or privileges of accreditation.

Probation	Status granted by an accreditation agency to an accredited program or institution that is determined to be in non-compliance with one or more standards. Probation is not an adverse accreditation action; however, adverse accreditation action (withdrawal or denial of accreditation status) will be taken if a program or institution fails to come into compliance within the period specified by the agency and the U.S. Department of Education.
Program	Distinct Programs of study with distinct graduation requirements such as admission requirements, required and elective course lists, or GPA requirements. Options, concentrations or tracks may be separate Programs using this definition. (Also see “unit.”)
Program Presentation	Presentation of evidence that the program meets accreditation standards. Presentation includes the evidence submitted in the written Self-Study Report, the documents prepared for review during the site visit, the facilities and course websites observed during the site visit, and people interviewed during the site visit.
Provisional Accreditation	See "Conditional Accreditation."
Public Member	A member of an accreditation agency who is appointed from the public at large to represent the public interest.
Recommendations	Suggested improvements included in the Accreditation Decision Report to be considered in the program’s ongoing improvement plans.
Regional Accreditor	An agency that accredits institutions of higher education. In the United States, the regional agencies (Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools, New England Association of Schools and Colleges, North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities, Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, and Western Association of Schools and College) generally accredit institutions that are only within specific geographic areas.
Retroactive Period of Initial Accreditation	A period of time where candidates are considered to have graduated from an accredited program or institution, even though initial accreditation was granted after candidates actually graduated.
Schedule of Evaluation Reviews	The calendar of scheduled on-site evaluations maintained by the accrediting agency.
School	An administrative unit (e.g., school, college, division or department) in an institution of higher education offering one or more programs that lead to a degree.
Self-Study Report	A document prepared by the program or institution as part of the comprehensive review process. This document describes the program or institution, how it meets the Standards, analyzes its strengths, weaknesses, and challenges, and sets forth the program’s plans and goals for future development and continued compliance with the Standards. (also Self-Study; Program Presentation)

Special Report	See "Focused Report."
Specialized Accreditor	An agency that accredits post-secondary professional and occupational-education programs or schools, such as medical schools, engineering schools, teacher-education programs and health-profession programs.
Standards	Accreditation standards establish minimum levels of quality around which evaluations and accreditation decisions must be based. Standards are created through a consensus process that calls for input from educators, candidates, practitioners, regulators and the general public. (also see "Criteria")
Statistical Report	Statistical information submitted to an accreditation agency. The data may include information about faculty, candidates, curriculum, and income and expenditures and may be collected on a regular basis as a part of routine monitoring.
Substantially met	Accreditation Standards must be substantially met, based on evidence submitted in the Self-Study Report and supported during the site visit, in order to receive a decision of Accreditation.
Substantive Change	Significant modification, expansion or contraction in the nature or scope of an accredited program or institution including, but not limited to mission, organization, curricular delivery, enrollment, leadership, etc.
Technology	Not a separate standard, but is woven throughout the standards. Early childhood teachers understand technology and media as important influences on children's development. They use technology as one way of communicating with families and sharing children's work, while recognizing the importance of using other communication methods for families with limited internet access. Similarly, they use technology in child assessment and as a professional resource with colleagues and for their own professional development.
Transparency	The concept of making accreditation processes easier to understand, including opening them to public scrutiny and making them subject to clear methods of challenge or change.
Unit	An administrative unit (e.g., school, college, division or department) in an institution of higher education offering one or more programs that lead to a degree.
Withdrawn Accreditation	An accreditation status indicating a program is no longer accredited by an agency effective as of a specific date. Accreditation may be withdrawn by either 1) a program or institution voluntarily withdrawing from the accreditation process, or 2) the accreditation agency withdrawing accreditation for serious lack of conformity to the Standards, for failure to participate in the process, or for not meeting financial obligations to the accreditation agency.
Young Children	Refers to children in the developmental period known as early childhood. Although developmental periods do not rigidly correspond to chronological age, early childhood is generally defined as including all children from birth through age 8.

Note: Many of the original terms on this page were adapted with permission from the American Library Association.

References

AACC Statement on Community Colleges and Baccalaureate Attainment.
<http://www.aacc.nche.edu/About/Positions/Pages/ps10192009.aspx>

Buyse, Virginia, Wesley, Patricia (Eds.) 2006. *Evidence-based Practice in the Early Childhood Field*.
Washington, DC: Zero to Three.

More Help Along the Way

At times you may feel overwhelmed with information. As you move forward with your self-study, remember that you are encouraged to take advantage of other sources of help from NAEYC.

Staff Contacts

Contact NAEYC Staff with questions via email at assoc_accred@naeyc.org

NAEYC Website (www.naeyc.org)

Click on Accreditation/Associate Degree Program to reach resources on associate degree accreditation. This site is updated periodically as resources are revised and new resources made available.

Online Community for Programs in Self-Study

The instructions for accessing this community are sent via email to the Primary Contact designated by the institution. The Primary Contact may choose to share log in information with appropriate colleagues within the institution. This site contains additional resources for programs that are enrolled in the accreditation system through formal application.

NAEYC Conference Workshops

Full-day self-study workshops on the accreditation process are offered twice a year, as pre-conference sessions attached to the NAEYC Annual Conference (generally held in November) and the NAEYC Institute for Early Childhood Professional Development (generally held in June). Registration information will be available on the NAEYC website.