

# NAEYC Launches Criteria Review Process for Accreditation of Programs for Young Children

**O**ne of the hallmarks of NAEYC Accreditation is its focus on continuous quality improvement. Such improvement is expected of programs that bear the torch—the mark of quality in early childhood education that NAEYC Accreditation represents. Continuous improvement is also expected of the accreditation system itself. Throughout the 25-year history of NAEYC Accreditation of Programs for Young Children, NAEYC has periodically conducted formal reviews of the accreditation criteria and procedures. These reviews are essential for ensuring that the process and the criteria by which programs are evaluated reflect current research and knowledge of effective practice in early childhood education. The most recent criteria review, part of the larger effort known as *accreditation reinvention*, was completed in 2005. It is time to begin a new revision process, which is scheduled for completion in 2011.

The upcoming review will not result in the type of significant restructuring that occurred with the reinvention. Rather, it will focus on fine-tuning the current process and criteria. Using field input, expert review, and analysis of program performance in the current system, NAEYC will assess what is working well

and what can be improved. The goal is to streamline and simplify the criteria and their assessment wherever possible



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while making sure that the process continues to provide an accurate and reliable measure of program quality.

## Review components

The review of accreditation criteria will include the following components.

### Field input

As with previous criteria revisions, input from those working in the field is essential. An area for criteria feedback has been created in TORCH—The Online Resource Center Headquarters for NAEYC Accreditation. NAEYC asks early childhood professionals and other stakeholders to submit feedback on specific criteria and to identify new areas in which criteria are needed. NAEYC will host online criteria review discussions in TORCH beginning in December. A schedule for the discussions on each standard is available online. **To submit ideas or participate in these discussions, access TORCH by self-registering at [www.naeyc.org/torch](http://www.naeyc.org/torch), then go to Criteria Feedback, Submit Feedback.**

### Expert review

NAEYC is convening multiple groups of experts to inform the review process, reflecting perspectives from research and from practice. A national panel of technical reviewers led by Walter Gilliam of Yale

University is charged with reviewing the current criteria and assessment protocols for scientific validity. In addition, representatives from large systems of early childhood programs and accreditation facilitation projects, each of whom work with various types of programs seeking NAEYC Accreditation, will provide feedback and inform potential revisions. NAEYC will also invite currently accredited programs and programs engaged in the accreditation process to provide input and give feedback. The goal is to ensure that the review is guided by those with expertise in three broad areas: (1) large-scale program evaluation efforts, (2) the content areas defined by the 10 NAEYC Early Childhood Program Standards, and (3) the reality of day-to-day program operations.

### Analysis of program performance data to develop streamlined assessment measures

As part of accreditation reinvention, pilot studies led by Carollee Howes and Sharon Ritchie were conducted for NAEYC by the University of California at Los Angeles. These studies helped NAEYC identify subsets of criteria for each standard that were effective measures of a program's performance in meeting the standard as a whole. As a result, programs can be validly assessed using subsets of the more than 400 current criteria. Programs, however, must be prepared to be assessed on all 400-plus criteria, which many programs have found overly burdensome.

To address this concern, one of the goals of the revision is to identify one or more assessment rubrics, based on an analysis of program performance as measured by the criteria. The rubrics will include key measurable aspects of program quality that reliably predict effective performance in meeting the 10 NAEYC Early Childhood Program Standards. The rubrics and the results will be provided to programs so that participants know the specific measures on which their accreditation decision is based.

It is anticipated that the rubrics will include a much smaller number of measurable items than the 400-plus current criteria. Many of the current criteria would then become statements of effective practice.

The statements would provide guidance as to the performance expected of NAEYC-Accredited programs; however, they would *not* be specifically measured during the site visit.

The rubrics will be constructed based on analyses of data collected during a replication of the original field tests. At a randomly selected sample of programs scheduled for assessment visits this fall, multiple assessors are collecting data for all criteria. (The accreditation decisions for these programs, however, will be based on subsets of criteria, just as in any other visit.)

### The decision-making process for proposed revisions to the accreditation criteria

The NAEYC Council on Accreditation is charged with making recommendations to the NAEYC Governing Board regarding the accreditation criteria and program standards.

To assist the Council during this current revision process, NAEYC has asked the three Council members who retired in August 2009 to continue to work with the Council as a steering committee for the upcoming review. The Council will review the results of the various data collected—feedback from experts, literature reviews, field input, and analysis of program performance—and work with NAEYC staff to draft proposed revisions. Once drafted, the proposed revisions will be posted for public comment before the Council recommends a final set of revisions for approval by the NAEYC Governing Board.

### Assessing staff educational qualifications

One of the most controversial areas in the NAEYC Accreditation process—and most misunderstood—deals with

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staff qualifications. NAEYC Accreditation addresses staff qualifications in Standard 6, Teachers, in two ways. All programs *must* meet specific candidacy requirements that define minimum educational requirements for the teaching staff and program administrator. For teaching staff, program candidacy requirements set a lower threshold than the educational qualifications specified in the criteria (6.A.05 for teachers and 6.A.06 for assistant teachers-teacher aides). Program candidacy requirements will *not* change in 2010.

The criterion for teachers (6.A.05) is defined by a goal statement to be achieved by 2020, with incremental specifications set at five-year intervals. New specifications for meeting this criterion will go into effect in 2010 (beginning with the submission of candidacy materials in September 2010). The criteria for educational qualifications for teaching staff are always assessed but are not required. Programs can meet 80% of the criteria in Standard 6 (necessary for achieving NAEYC Accreditation) without meeting 6.A.05 and 6.A.06 (and many currently do); however, they then have little leeway for missing other criteria in the standard. The 2010 specifications in criterion 6.A.05 will not affect programs

that did not meet the 2006 specifications, as these programs will simply continue to not meet this criterion.

The level of qualifications in the program candidacy requirements and in the criteria will both be reviewed as part of the criteria review process.

### Ongoing system improvements

It will take a year or more to gather input, complete analyses, draft revisions, seek additional comments, and finally adopt the accreditation criteria revisions. At that point, existing guidance and tools will be revised, making the implementation of these improvements several years away. However, other system improvements can be implemented in a more timely manner, as NAEYC evaluates accreditation assessment protocols and learns from its analyses of program performance. Following are some of the improvements already under way.

**Safety reports.** NAEYC has begun implementing a protocol in which assessors provide to programs a specific report of potential safety issues identi-

fied during the site visit. Programs that have received this safety information report that they find this feedback very useful.

**Structured observations of transitions.** Assessors are testing the feasibility of planning observations during transitions, especially at arrival and between lunch and nap time. Such observations could allow assessors to observe groups not randomly selected for classroom observations, and provide richer evidence of key aspects of program operation.

**Guidance regarding criteria assessment.** Through its Academy for Early Childhood Program Accreditation, NAEYC releases updated guidance in TORCH twice annually. The guidance is compiled based on issues identified by assessors and also from queries to the Program Support Information Center. The latest guidance was released in October 2009. Guidance documents provide more detailed information regarding the assessment of individual criteria and are available to assessors as well as to programs engaged in the accreditation process.

### Give NAEYC your feedback on the criteria!

The process NAEYC is undertaking with this review is similar to what is asked of programs seeking NAEYC Accreditation: to periodically undergo a rigorous self-examination and to be sure that multiple stakeholders participate in the process. The greater the number of early childhood professionals involved and engaged in the process, the stronger the results will be.

Please participate by providing feedback at TORCH, in the Criteria Feedback area, and watch TORCH for periodic updates and announcements of other opportunities for sharing your knowledge and experience as we strive to keep NAEYC Accreditation as the mark of quality in early childhood education.



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