

# State and Local Quality Improvement Support Efforts

**E**nsuring the quality of children's daily experiences in early childhood programs and promoting positive child outcomes have always been at the heart of the NAEYC early childhood program accreditation system. The NAEYC Early Childhood Program Standards and Accreditation Criteria establish the framework for programs working to contribute to children's optimum development and learning. Collectively, the 10 program standards represent essential, interlocking elements of high-quality programs for all children from birth through kindergarten. NAEYC Accreditation reflects professional consensus, based on research and practice, for the level of quality that all early childhood programs should strive to achieve.



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## State child care regulations and quality improvement efforts

State child care licensing regulations lay the foundation for program quality. They typically address requirements for health and safety (of children and staff), nutrition, physical environment, teacher qualifications, teacher-child ratios, and group size—many of the same areas addressed by NAEYC Accreditation standards and criteria. Every state, as well

as the District of Columbia, has child care licensing regulations that establish the minimum level of quality to protect the children in state-licensed early care and education settings. These regulations ideally govern the full spectrum of programs, including center-based programs and family child care homes, with each state monitoring compliance. However, regulatory systems in some states have standards and/or enforcement practices that do not promote sufficiently good care.

Because licensing regulations set basic requirements for programs and NAEYC Accreditation criteria represent professional consensus on program excellence, there can be a significant difference in specifications for program

quality between the two. States have found that they need additional strategies and public policies, along with their regulatory systems, to support high-quality services for all families. Many states have addressed such disparities in their early care and education systems, ratcheting up quality requirements beyond licensing regulations by offering incentives linked to NAEYC Accreditation. In fact, the majority of states require early care and education programs to be nationally accredited in order to receive higher child care subsidy reimbursement rates.

Another key linkage receiving attention is between NAEYC Accreditation and quality rating and improvement systems (QRIS). At their core, NAEYC early

**Does your organization use the NAEYC Accreditation Program Standards and Criteria** to offer quality improvement support to early childhood programs in your community? Check to see if your project meets the criteria for an accreditation facilitation project (AFP)—go to [www.naeyc.org/academy/primary/localsupport/afp](http://www.naeyc.org/academy/primary/localsupport/afp)—and if so, register as an AFP.

childhood program accreditation and quality rating and improvement systems share the same charge—to ensure the quality of children’s daily experiences in early childhood programs and to promote positive child outcomes. Currently, 17 of the 19 statewide QRIS are linked to NAEYC Accreditation. Information on these linkages can be found on NAEYC’s Web site in Elevating the Field ([www.naeyc.org/files/naeyc/file/policy/state/NAEYCPubpolReport.pdf](http://www.naeyc.org/files/naeyc/file/policy/state/NAEYCPubpolReport.pdf)) and on the State Trends page in the Public Policy section ([www.naeyc.org/policy/state/trends](http://www.naeyc.org/policy/state/trends)). An article in the fall 2009 issue of *Accreditation Update* also highlights the role of NAEYC Accreditation in QRIS ([www.naeyc.org/files/academy/file/PrintUpdateFall2009.pdf](http://www.naeyc.org/files/academy/file/PrintUpdateFall2009.pdf)).

Tonya Russell, director of the Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education at the Arkansas Department of Human Services, says,

Arkansas developed a quality accreditation program in the 1990s incorporating the Environmental Rating Scale. We also reciprocate for programs that achieve NAEYC Accreditation. The Arkansas Head Start Association has included accreditation—either state or national—as a goal for all Arkansas Head Start programs since the 1990s, as well. Accreditation continues to push early childhood toward programs of excellence for young children. It allows us to review and assess what we are doing and work in a continuous improvement cycle to make it better. As more states begin to develop and implement quality rating improvement systems, national accreditation should be included in the model to acknowledge the established national standards.

In addition to QRIS, there are two other early care and education policies that states often link to NAEYC Accreditation—namely, state-funded prekindergarten and tax credits.

### State-funded prekindergarten

The link between NAEYC Accreditation criteria and state prekindergarten standards is shown in two ways. Some states embed NAEYC Accreditation in their pre-K program standards, and seven state prekindergarten initiatives link NAEYC Accreditation to pre-K funding in some of the following ways:

- For School Readiness Programs in **Connecticut** to receive funding, they must meet specific criteria, including current NAEYC Accreditation or completion of the NAEYC Accreditation process within three years of being awarded funds.
- The **Arkansas** state-funded pre-K program, Arkansas Better Chance (ABC) for School Success, requires participating programs to earn Arkansas State Quality Approval. If a program is NAEYC Accredited, it automatically holds quality approval.

- In **Massachusetts**, the Department of Early Education and Care recognizes NAEYC Accreditation as a benchmark of quality. Its Universal Pre-Kindergarten Program, which is codified in legislation, requires recipients of classroom quality grants to be accredited by NAEYC or another accrediting body. “Incentives like this are conducive to building a system of high-quality early education and care, and Massachusetts has more NAEYC-Accredited preschools than any other state in the nation,” says Amy O’Leary, director of Strategies for Children’s statewide Early Education for All Campaign. “We are proud of our legacy of supporting high-quality early education, but we know our work is not done. We must continue to build on this foundation to ensure that all children get a strong start in life.”

### Tax credits

Rather than providing incentives to programs, **Arkansas** and **Maine** offer a tax credit to families who send their children to an NAEYC-Accredited program. In Arkansas, this credit essentially doubles the state child care tax credit. **Louisiana** has school readiness tax credits that are linked to the state’s QRIS.



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Depending on a program's star rating—as well as the number of enrolled children receiving assistance through the Child Care Assistance Program—child care teachers and directors can receive two types of refundable tax credits. In addition, Louisiana employers can receive a refundable tax credit for eligible child care expenses—also dependent on the star rating of the child care program. Lastly, Louisiana families may be eligible for an additional tax credit that builds on the existing state child care tax credit and is linked to the star rating of the child care program their children attend.

### Accreditation facilitation projects

Accreditation facilitation projects (AFPs), which encourage and assist programs in their efforts to become NAEYC Accredited, are an important support system for center-based programs in improving their quality, attaining NAEYC Accreditation, and accessing incentives.

Accreditation facilitation projects are primarily grassroots initiatives that focus on quality improvement in early childhood programs, using the framework of NAEYC Accreditation. In over 170 locations around the country, these state- or community-based projects

are supported by both public and private funds, including funding through QRIS, United Way, NAEYC Affiliates, and philanthropic foundations. Providing a vast array of supports, including technical assistance, coaching, training, and on-site consultation, these initiatives further the vision of the NAEYC Accreditation system by focusing on quality improvement, leadership, and professional development. AFPs can motivate programs reluctant to strive for NAEYC Accreditation by offering them support.

Deb Flis, director of Accreditation and Quality Initiatives for Connecticut Charts a Course, explains,

Accreditation facilitation projects provide a mechanism to support quality improvement by assisting programs along the quality continuum to NAEYC Accreditation. AFPs are natural links with efforts to meet regulatory requirements, quality rating and improvement systems, and public and private funding requirements. By offering expertise and a focus on high quality—independent from but in concert with funders' and state public policies—AFPs propel quality improvement for early childhood programs.

AFPs receive guidance and technical assistance through the Accreditation Program Support department of NAEYC.

Projects registered with NAEYC may participate in monthly conference calls and biannual meetings at NAEYC conferences, receive discounts for Self-Study materials for their staff, and are eligible for other benefits.

For the past year, a group of leaders from accreditation facilitation projects have been working to define exemplary practices in accreditation facilitation. NAEYC will publish a manual that describes how these initiatives assist programs in achieving high-quality early education practices through the NAEYC Self-Study process. The manual will be available on NAEYC's Web site in spring 2010, in the accreditation facilitation projects section ([www.naeyc.org/academy/afp/overview](http://www.naeyc.org/academy/afp/overview)).

Because NAEYC Accreditation encompasses all areas of early childhood program quality, it is a powerful lever for states in effecting positive change. NAEYC Accreditation represents the achievement of high early childhood professional standards and is used as a quality-improvement benchmark and an accountability measure by policy makers, funders, and community planners.

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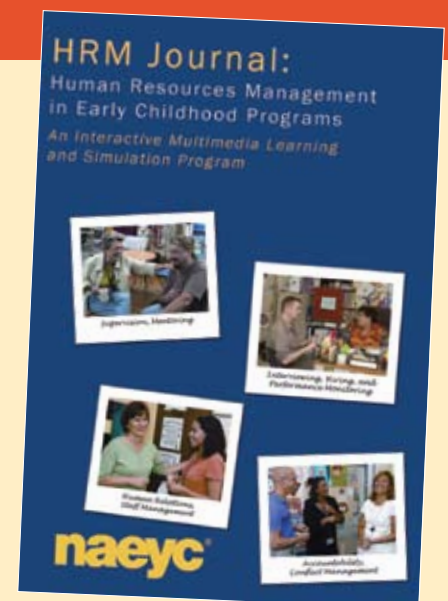
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