

Accreditation Handbook Revisions

The Accreditation Handbook for the NAEYC Accreditation of Early Childhood Higher Education Programs system has been revised. All revisions were made to provide clarity regarding policies and procedures, streamline processes where appropriate, address previous gaps in policies and procedures, and reflect the expansion of the accreditation system to include baccalaureate and master’s degree programs. The revisions will also enable NAEYC to comply with requirements of the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), as NAEYC embarks on its own self-study process while pursuing recognition from this group.

While the table below outlines the substantive revisions and new content in the revised Accreditation Handbook, the accreditation system’s commitment to continuous improvement, advancing the early childhood profession, and providing high quality support to degree programs remains steadfast.

| What’s New? | |
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| Affirming/Reaffirming Compliance with Accreditation Eligibility Requirements (p. 13) | <p>Currently, programs must meet all eligibility requirements when they submit an application to begin the accreditation process. Moving forward, programs will need to meet some of the eligibility requirements at the time of application (the institution must be regionally accredited, the program must not be designated as “low performing” by the state, and the program must have at least 18 credit hours of early childhood coursework). Other eligibility requirements must be met by the time of Self-Study Report submission (the program meets requirements related to field experiences, the program has graduated at least one individual, the program has at least one full-time faculty member with the necessary education credentials). All programs will either affirm or reaffirm compliance with the eligibility requirements within the Self-Study Report and each Annual Report.</p> <p>This adjustment to the timeline enables NAEYC to maintain assurance that all programs meet eligibility requirements prior to hosting their first accreditation site visit (and throughout the accreditation period)—while enabling us to provide support to programs that are actively working toward meeting eligibility requirements as part of their self-study process.</p> <p>(Additional details on eligibility requirements are described under “What’s Revised?” below.)</p> |
| Self-Study Report Time Period (p. 14) | <p>Previously, programs could remain in the self-study phase for as long as they need to prepare their Self-Study Report. Given that</p> |

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| | <p>many programs use the accreditation process to support their efforts to redesign their programs, it is not unusual for programs to need more than 1-2 years to move through the self-study process. NAEYC continues to support programs taking the time they need for self-study. In the revised policy, programs that need more than five years in self-study will submit a minimal annual fee to maintain their self-study status beyond five years. Given that all programs in self-study have access to NAEYC’s online accreditation resource community and are able to participate in NAEYC’s professional development offerings, this fee will help support the revision of current resources and creation of new ones.</p> |
| <p>Evaluating a Program on Standard 7 (p. 17)</p> | <p>Previously, Standard 7 of NAEYC’s Professional Preparation Standards – Early Childhood Field Experiences – was addressed through programs’ responses to Criterion 5 of the Self-Study Report, and, as part of the eligibility requirement that all programs seeking or maintaining accreditation must have field experiences incorporated into their programs.</p> <p>While it has always been an indicator of strength for programs to require candidates to observe and practice in at least two of the three early childhood age groups (birth-age 3, 3-5, 5-8; Standard 7, key element a) and in at least two of the three main types of early education settings (early school grades, early learning and care centers and homes, Head Start programs; Standard 7 key element b), it will now be a requirement. Programs will document how they meet the key elements of this standard through first-time and renewal Self-Study Reports. Bringing this requirement to the forefront will help to ensure that graduates of NAEYC-accredited programs at all degree levels are well prepared for the various age groups and settings with which they may work during the course of a long career in early childhood education.</p> <p>Programs may meet the standard through field experiences of varying lengths prior to a capstone experience; a definition of 'field experience' is included in the glossary of the Accreditation Handbook. Programs that do not sufficiently meet the key elements will receive a condition if the Commission grants a positive accreditation decision.</p> |

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| <p>First-time accreditation programs submitting data from Key Assessments (p.17)</p> | <p>Currently, programs seeking first-time accreditation are encouraged, but not required, to submit and analyze at least two applications of data for each key assessment. The self-study phase often results in the revision or creation of key assessments, and NAEYC has found that programs benefit from implementing the key assessments prior to submitting them in the Self-Study Report. Moving forward, NAEYC will require programs seeking first-time accreditation to submit and analyze at least one application of data for each of the submitted key assessments. Programs that do not submit data with their Self-Study Report will receive a condition if the Commission grants a positive accreditation decision.</p> |
| <p>Definition of “Complete Self-Study Report” (p. 17)</p> | <p>NAEYC has formalized a definition of “complete Self-Study Report” so that programs have a clearer understanding of what is required in order for a program to achieve candidacy status. The language clarifies what was in the handbook previously around the minimum expectation for a Self-Study Report to be shared with a peer review team.</p> |
| <p>Programs Publishing Their Accreditation Status (p. 26)</p> | <p>Accredited NAEYC programs are now required to display their accreditation status and to use the specific language included in the new policy. This is a Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) requirement to enhance transparency for current and prospective candidates.</p> |
| <p>Late Fee for Annual Reports and Fees (p. 27)</p> | <p>To ensure consistency and best use of limited staff resources, this policy clarifies when an Annual Report and Annual Fee is considered late and establishes a late fee.</p> |
| <p>Reporting Program Outcome Data (p. 27)</p> | <p>This is a new section of the Self-Study Report that asks programs to report on two measures of candidate success in the program. This section was added for the following reasons: NAEYC is committed to helping prospective degree candidates in their search for high-quality degree programs; as an accrediting agency, NAEYC is also committed to advancing the higher education accreditation field’s efforts to provide greater transparency to current and prospective degree candidates about institutions’ and programs’ outcomes for degree candidates; and, NAEYC is currently pursuing recognition by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), which requires that programs accredited by a CHEA-recognized accrediting body provide publically available program and candidate outcome data. NAEYC has not set any specific</p> |

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| | requirements with regard to how programs must perform on each measure. Rather, the purpose is to make the data available to prospective and current candidates and to the public. |
| Extension policy for Annual Fees (p. 35) | The new policy outlines how the accrediting body will manage programs' requests for annual fee extensions. |
| Consultant Policy (p. 36) | NAEYC's higher education accreditation system offers many technical assistance resources to programs seeking and maintaining accreditation such as webinars, workshops, and the online resource community. NAEYC does not offer individual consulting services. Programs can choose on their own, though, to hire a consultant to support their efforts to achieve or maintain accreditation. This policy outlines NAEYC's guidelines regarding the use of a consultant. |
| What's Revised? | |
| Eligibility Requirements (p. 13) | <p>With the expansion of the accreditation system to the baccalaureate and master's degree level, and thus to licensure programs, early childhood programs at the baccalaureate and master's degree levels that are designated "low performing" by the state (as part of required reporting through Title II of the Higher Education Act) are ineligible to pursue NAEYC early childhood higher education accreditation until the "low performing" status is resolved.</p> <p>Given the expansion of the accreditation system to the baccalaureate and master's degree levels, the faculty qualifications eligibility requirement has been expanded to address faculty teaching at these degree levels.</p> |
| Multiple Programs/Sites (p. 14) | Provides guidance to institutions about whether they ought to submit one program or submit multiple programs in the Self-Study Report. |
| Written Response (p. 21) | Clarifies what programs can include in their Written Response to the Peer Review Report. While programs cannot submit new evidence, they can provide narrative related to how their capacity to address the criteria and standards has strengthened since submitting the Self-Study Report. |
| Accreditation Decision Definitions (p. 21) | The revisions provide clearer definitions of each accreditation decision. The definition for "accredited with probation" has been |

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| | clarified to better identify under what conditions a program would receive a probation decision, describe how the program will address the concerns that led to the probation decision, and distinguish between administrative probation and probation due to substantive issues. |
| NAEYC Publishing Accreditation Decisions (p. 26) | The revisions clarify when and how NAEYC will publish and share accreditation decisions with the public. As a CHEA requirement to provide greater transparency to candidates and the public, under the new policy NAEYC will share positive and adverse decisions with the public. Currently, NAEYC only shares positive decisions. |
| Deferral of Decision (p. 25) | The revised policy clarifies when the Commission may defer an accreditation decision and notes that if an accredited program receives a “deferral of decision,” its accreditation status is extended until the final decision is made. |
| Definition of Substantive Change (p. 28) | While programs currently (and will still) report on substantive changes through the Annual Report, the revised policy includes a specific definition for “substantive change.” The intent is to clarify to programs which changes they are required to report to the accrediting body and how the Commission will consider substantive change notifications. |
| Appeals Process (p. 29) | This policy is revised to clarify the process a program uses to appeal an adverse accreditation decision. The revisions address the timeline and costs associated with the appeals process. |
| Complaints Process (p. 32) | This policy is revised to clarify the process that programs and individuals use to lodge complaints about a program, peer reviewer, Commissioner, or staff member. |
| Adding a Program After Accreditation (p. 35) | The revised policy clarifies how an institution can seek accreditation for an additional program when it has an already accredited program. |
| The Criteria Section (p. 49) | Appendix C of the Accreditation Handbook lists the criteria that programs address in the Self-Study Report. Most criteria have had minor revisions to the indicators of strength and/or sources of evidence to clarify the information sought that will provide the necessary descriptions about the context and capacities of the program to peer reviewers and the Commission. |

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| | <p>One of the undergirding principles of NAEYC’s higher education accreditation system is that it supports transfer and articulation. A new criterion has been added to the Self-Study Report -- Supporting the Education Career Pathway. This criterion asks programs at all degree levels to address how they support pathways for transfer and articulation across programs and across K-12 and postsecondary institutions.</p> |
| <h3>What’s Been Removed</h3> | |
| <p>Supportive Skills Are No Longer Directly Assessed in the Accreditation System</p> | <p>After reviewing the supportive skills in the initial standards and the "essential professional tools" from the 2002 advanced standards NAEYC determined that the majority of these foundational skills and knowledge are embedded within the NAEYC Professional Preparation standards. Given that the accreditation decision is based on programs’ alignment to the standards, the separate assessment of supportive skills has been removed. Building candidates’ foundational skills and knowledge remains a valued part of the assessment of the quality of an early childhood degree program, and programs are encouraged to evaluate their efforts in this area in whatever ways are most helpful to them. For some programs, this may include continuing to assess supportive skills in the learning opportunities and key assessments presented for NAEYC early childhood higher accreditation.</p> |