Research shows that when early childhood professionals are well prepared, children are likely to experience warm, safe, and stimulating environments that lead to healthy development and constructive learning. Based on this research as well as professional values, NAEYC developed and promotes standards for the preparation of early childhood professionals. These standards present a shared vision of excellence for all early childhood professionals across education and training settings. They act as a signpost toward desired outcomes at colleges and universities and in community-based and other professional development settings.

At colleges and universities the standards apply to associate, baccalaureate, and graduate degree programs. Students at each level of professional preparation are expected to demonstrate varying degrees of knowledge and skills, as appropriate to the program level. For example, an advanced degree student is expected to go beyond a foundational level, achieving proficiency in a specialized professional role such as teacher educator or researcher.

One of the ways NAEYC puts the five core standards to work is through a process of accreditation, a rigorous review of educational outcomes that determines academic quality. Higher education institutions aiming for accreditation voluntarily undergo this review process, which includes self-study, external peer review, and an accreditation or national recognition decision. The goal of accreditation is not only to recognize high-quality programs but also to provide programs with constructive feedback so they may continuously improve.

Preparing Early Childhood Professionals: NAEYC’s Standards for Programs, the complete book of associate, baccalaureate, and advanced level standards, rationales, references, and other resources, is available online at www.naeyc.org/shoppingcart/Itemdetail.aspx?Stock_No=256.
understand content areas and academic subjects; and use their knowledge to give all children the experiences that promote comprehensive development and learning. Teaching and learning are at the heart of teacher preparation, and the elements of this standard reflect the highly interconnected nature of early development and learning.

5. Becoming a professional

Well-prepared early childhood professionals identify themselves with the early childhood profession; use ethical, professional standards; demonstrate self-motivated, ongoing learning; collaborate; think reflectively and critically; and advocate for children, families, and the profession. Early childhood professionals provide one of the most important services to society; they must understand and cultivate their role as professionals doing critical work.

Research and Resources

Why do the standards matter? For more information on what the research says about connections between standards, program quality, teacher quality, and child outcomes, see the following resources:


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