



PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Educational Qualifications of Program Administrators and Teaching Staff

Building Better Futures for Children and the Profession



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If early childhood practitioners have higher levels of formal education and specialized training, they are much more likely in their work with young children and families to use the evidence-based practices and possess the ongoing professional commitment we know are necessary to make a positive difference in children's lives.

—*Preparing Early Childhood Professionals: NAEYC's Standards for Programs*

ONE OF THE MOST SIGNIFICANT CHANGES to the NAEYC Accreditation system for programs serving young children is the new expectation for increased education and preparation of administrators and teaching staff. The new requirements are based on a fundamental understanding held by the early childhood profession: teachers and administrators are the most important contributors to quality experiences for children.

Research findings

Researchers have spent decades evaluating the role of formal education and specialized training of early childhood educators in the quality of care that children experience (Whitebook, Howes, & Phillips 1990; Howes 1997; Whitehurst 2000; Burchinal et al. 2002; Whitebook & Sakai 2004; Hyson & Biggar 2005; Zaslow & Martinez-Beck 2005. See the literature review sections in NAEYC 2005a and 2005c.). Research makes it abundantly clear that early childhood educators with more professional preparation provide more developmentally appropriate, nurturing, and responsive care and education experiences for young children. (Professional preparation includes university and college course work as well as the pre- and inservice training and technical assistance that early childhood staff

receive.) Research also shows that in addition to specialized education and training for teachers of young children, other components of high-quality teacher preparation include experience in working with young children and support systems focused on teachers' instructional behaviors and classroom management, such as mentoring, coaching, and constructive feedback (Pianta 2007).

The literature review in the book *Teachers: A Guide to the NAEYC Early Childhood Program Standard and Accreditation Criteria*—part of the new *Self-Study Kit for Program Quality Improvement Through NAEYC Early Childhood Program Accreditation*—includes a summary of research about the benefits of education for early childhood professionals:

Two comprehensive reviews of the evidence-based literature linking effective teaching and teacher qualifications were published in 2000: *Eager to Learn: Educating Our Preschoolers* (Bowman, Donovan, & Burns 2000) and *From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development* (Shonkoff & Phillips 2000).

Eager to Learn concludes that "a college degree with specialized education in child development and the education of young children ought to be required for teachers of young children." *From Neurons to Neighborhoods* reaches a similar conclusion, with the reservations that the "staff-child ratio may be relatively more important for infants and toddlers and that the educational level of the provider



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may become more important as children move beyond the infant years into toddlerhood.” This age-related reservation was based on early findings of the NICHD Early Child Care Re-

specific to early childhood, including a CDA credential, tend to provide higher quality classrooms than those who do not (Tout, Zaslow, & Berry 2005).

There is recent research that raises questions about the level of higher education needed to see gains in children’s abilities and outcomes—for example, whether having a teacher with a bachelor’s degree leads to better outcomes for children than does having a teacher with an associate’s degree (Early et al. 2006). It may be that in terms of children’s gains, training specific to early childhood education (compared with a general education) matters more than the level of credential earned. Although there are no

definitive answers as yet, it is clear that educational qualifications in early childhood education that go beyond secondary education make a positive difference for children.

Raised expectations

The educational qualifications outlined in the Accreditation Criteria related to the NAEYC Early Childhood Program Standards on teachers (Standard #6) and leadership and management (Standard #10) (NAEYC 2005b)—as well as the Candidacy Requirements that each program seeking NAEYC Accreditation must meet at Step 3 in the new process—reflect the research findings emphasizing the importance of quality professional preparation for teachers. They also reflect the growing recognition among parents and families, policy makers, funders, and the general public that well-prepared teachers help young children get a great start in learning and in life.

Many of these stakeholders use education of teachers and administrators as a proxy for overall measurements of higher quality in programs. Educators and others who are well informed about early childhood development recognize that many factors contribute to a quality program. However, many noneducators, and some educators, see education and preparation of teaching staff as the most important step—for some, perhaps the only step—to raising the quality of programs for young children. There are other components of programs that

search Network (1996). Subsequent analysis of this data set has demonstrated that in center-based child care for all ages, caregivers with more formal education provide higher quality care (NICHD Early Child Care Research Network 2000, 2002).

(NAEYC 2005c, 40–41)

The literature review also outlines how credentials at all levels, from the Child Development Associate (CDA) credential to associate’s and bachelor’s degrees and higher—especially with specialization in child development and early childhood education—foster effective teachers who engage young children and promote their learning, and administrators who are leaders and mentors in their programs.

A large number of early childhood professionals who work directly with children do not have a CDA credential or a degree; many of these professionals are extremely effective and use their skills, experience, and personal qualities to create exactly the kind of warm, safe, and stimulating classroom environments that lead to great outcomes for children. But on the whole, professionals who have higher levels of education



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are important in influencing quality, but the extensive research about the value of teacher education suggests that it is critical.

Growing awareness of the importance of the early years means many more noneducators, including parents, care about programs for young children and have higher expectations for the quality of these programs. Meeting those expectations is an important step in helping families, policy makers, businesses, and other stakeholders recognize quality in a program. And it may be the most important step in having stakeholders recognize—and invest in—early childhood education as a profession.

Helping professionals—and the profession—move forward

While research, experience, and stakeholders call for higher educational qualifications for teachers and administrators, everyone in the early childhood profession understands that there are hurdles involved in helping more educators without a certificate or degree earn those qualifications, including:

- the current poor compensation for early childhood educators, which means that many qualified teachers and administrators cannot afford to enter or remain in the field (Lamb 1998; Bowman, Donovan, & Burns 2000).
- the growing number of early childhood educators, including women of color with low incomes, for whom access to education, particularly at the bachelor's level, is problematic, even if compensation levels for their work were raised to a sustainable level (McDonough 1997).
- the need for more and better teacher preparation programs at two- and four-year colleges in the United States (Early & Winton 2001).

Recognizing these challenges, the NAEYC Accreditation system includes several elements designed to help programs and their staff meet the educational qualifications outlined in the new NAEYC Early Childhood Program Standards and Accreditation Criteria. One element is a **time line** for phasing in the qualifications by setting lower requirements in the first years and raising them incrementally over a 14-year period. In

Meeting the Educational Qualifications: Examples

The new Candidacy Requirements for Educational Qualifications for administrators, teachers, and staff—and the related Accreditation Criteria—are designed to recognize and value both the experience of early childhood educators who have contributed years of effort to young children and programs and who have significant skills to offer, and the knowledge and skills that are gained through education.

For Teachers

Here are examples of different ways in which programs can meet the Candidacy Requirements for Educational Qualifications for teachers:

- In a program with 10 teachers, if the program does not already meet Criterion 6.A.05, the program can satisfy the Candidacy Requirement if it has a professional development plan in place *and* at least 8 of the teachers (75 percent) have a minimum of a CDA credential or equivalent or are working on an associate's degree or higher. The other 2 teachers do not need to meet the minimum of a CDA credential or equivalent.
- Teachers can demonstrate that they have earned the equivalent of a CDA credential with a minimum of 12 college credits (semester hours) in early childhood education or a related field. Experienced teachers may already have these credits or may be able to earn them by the time the program reaches Step 3 in the NAEYC Accreditation process (Becoming a Candidate.)
- Experienced teachers who have not yet earned a CDA credential may be able to do so relatively quickly. Teachers are eligible to apply for a CDA credential if they
 - are 18 years or age or older,
 - have a high school degree or GED,
 - have 480 hours of experience working with children within the past five years, and
 - have 120 clock hours of formal child care education within the past five years.

For more information on obtaining a CDA credential, visit www.cdacouncil.org/CDA_OBT.htm.

For Administrators

For a program administrator, the Candidacy Requirements for Educational Qualifications are the same as those stated in Criterion 10.A.02 (at least a bachelor's degree, with a certain number of college credit hours in administration and early childhood education). Programs can also meet this requirement by

- documenting that a plan is in place for the administrator to meet the educational requirement within five years, or
- documenting that the administrator has achieved a combination of relevant formal education and experience

addition, the Accreditation Criteria—and the Candidacy Requirements—allow for **equivalents** to each of the degree requirements. For example, for a teacher, 12 college credits in early education-related subjects is considered equivalent to a CDA credential (see “Meeting the Educational Qualifications: Examples,” p. 3).

NAEYC and the early childhood profession must also continue to collaborate with colleges and universities, other education and training institutions, and networks of programs to develop new, better, and more accessible opportunities for professional preparation of new and current early childhood educators. Individual early childhood professionals can help by mentoring colleagues about the importance of their own professional

development, and by encouraging them to continue that development and perform at even higher levels. Helping educators and programs achieve higher educational qualifications is an essential role of the profession. (See “Options for Financial Assistance.”)

Another essential role of the profession is advocating for requirements around higher educational qualifications. Research has shown that well-prepared early childhood educators are more likely to provide warm, safe, and stimulating environments that lead to children’s healthy development and constructive learning. Experience has shown that well-prepared early childhood educators are the key to the future of the profession. Experience has also

shown that previous standards—set by NAEYC, states, Head Start, Department of Defense, and other systems of early childhood programs—have been crucial drivers for the profession and have led many early childhood teachers and administrators to earn a certificate or degree in early childhood education.

The new educational requirements are essential not only because they are supported by research, but also because they will encourage more early childhood educators to continue their professional development, which will bring many benefits—to the educators, to the children in their programs, and to the profession as a whole.

Options for Financial Assistance

There are a number of sources to explore for financial aid for early childhood teachers and administrators working on their degrees. At the state and local levels, educators and programs should check with

Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) agencies. The local licensing agency may also have information on scholarships in the state and community.

T.E.A.C.H. (Teacher Education and Compensation Helps) Early Childhood Project. Scholarships are now available in a number of states.

There are also a variety of federal grants and loans available for early childhood educators:

Pell Grant. Typically awarded to undergraduate students, but in some limited cases, a student can receive this grant if enrolled in a post-baccalaureate teacher certificate program.

Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant. Grant for undergraduates with exceptional financial need—students with the lowest Expected Family Contribution (EFC). Priority is given to students who receive federal Pell Grants.

Federal Perkins Loan. Low-interest (5 percent) loan for both undergraduate and graduate students with financial need. This loan can be forgiven (up to 100 percent) for full-time teachers in designated elementary or secondary schools serving students from families with low incomes, for Head Start education component staff, and for those in some other categories.

Stafford Loan. A variable interest rate loan for both undergraduate and graduate students. Students must be attending school at least half time to be eligible for a Stafford Loan. Half-time enrollment is not a requirement for the other federal grant and loan programs.

For more information on financial assistance for early childhood educators, visit the National Child Care Information Center Web site:

<http://nccic.acf.hhs.gov/poptopics/financialassist.html>.

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