Guide to Self-Study

Who this information is for: Programs that have enrolled in Self-Study and who wish to engage in a structured approach to program improvement that considers all of the necessary components of a high quality program.

What this information provides: Guidance for programs to complete Step 1: Enrollment/Self-Study and to prepare for Step 2: Application/Self-Assessment. Although NAEYC provides programs with guidelines, there are no requirements for Self-Study. Programs are not required to submit their Self-Study findings to NAEYC.

Specific Contents of this Guide:
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    - Evaluating results and determine next steps

All documents in this guide are available in TORCH.

Conducting Self-Study

Step 1: Enrollment/Self-Study is the first of four steps toward achieving NAEYC Accreditation. It is an essential step toward achieving NAEYC Accreditation, but programs may also enroll and engage in Self-Study even if they have no intention of seeking NAEYC Accreditation. The Self-Study process requires programs to methodically discern and document actual program practices and then determine how to improve them if necessary.

Pursuing NAEYC Accreditation and engaging in Self-Study demonstrates a commitment to best practice and continuous program quality improvement, including ongoing reflection of classroom and program practices. To make the most of the Self-Study process, NAEYC recommends six tasks:
1. Gathering information using the tools
2. Creating shared understandings of key concepts about accreditation, the standards, the criteria, and implications for the program
3. Determining strengths and weaknesses
4. Developing improvement plans as needed
5. Making improvements and document progress
6. Evaluating results and determine next step

Gathering Evidence in Self-Study

Evidence is a critical concept for NAEYC Accreditation. The process is designed to focus on evidence of a program's ability to meet the program standards and accreditation criteria consistently over time. Evidence includes *observable evidence* that can be directly seen—in classroom practices or as part of the program facility; *survey evidence* that reflects the opinions of key program stakeholders including families and teaching staff; and *portfolio evidence* that is specifically collected by program staff to document the policies, procedures, and practices for individual classrooms as well as the overall program.

NAEYC has developed specific tools to help you (a) assess your strengths and weaknesses as they relate to each standard and its associated criteria and (b) begin collecting evidence that your program is meeting the criteria and is likely to do so regularly in the future. Some of the tools are designed primarily to assist in your program improvement efforts (for example, the extended Family and Teaching Staff Survey); others tools are specific to the NAEYC Accreditation process and must be followed in Steps 2 and 3. Regardless of your program's intent to pursue NAEYC Accreditation, the information you gather will provide tangible evidence to families and others in your community of how your program meets the 10 NAEYC Early Learning Standards and Criteria.

Observable Criteria

Observable Criteria are those criteria that can actually be seen in practice in a classroom or other physical spaces in the program. Observable Criteria provide the most direct evidence of program quality and the results of program improvement efforts. During Self-Study, it is useful to provide teaching staff the opportunity to observe each other's classrooms and examine areas of the program facility and provide feedback to one another. Supervisory staff can also conduct regular observations as a way of supporting teachers' ongoing professional growth and development.

As program staff become more familiar with the criteria, it becomes easier to notice the number of ways Observable Criteria are fulfilled. Observable Criteria should be apparent to an administrator who is visiting a classroom or other program areas, to a teacher who is evaluating his or her work, or to a parent who is visiting his or her child's classroom.

The *Observable Criteria Tool* is provided in TORCH. The *Observable Criteria Tool: All Groups and Overall Program* covers the entire program facility as well as individual classrooms. The *Observable Criteria Tool* for specific age categories (i.e. Infant, Toddler/Two, Preschool, Kindergarten) is a useful tool to provide to each teaching team responsible for an individual classroom. These tools provides a checklist of criteria that may be observed as either met or not met and also includes guidance on specific materials or equipment that related to Observable Criteria. Programs that include a multi-age class's (for example, one class that includes both infants and toddler/twos), use the Infant/Toddler Observation Tool. After all observations have been conducted to help program leadership to evaluate the number of class's that are meeting or not meeting specific criteria and to help identify criteria, topic areas, or standards that are strengths or areas of potential improvement for the program.

Classroom Portfolio and Program Portfolio

Portfolios provide a systematic way of documenting policies, procedures and practices that reflect how individual classrooms and the program as a whole are meeting specific criteria. A Classroom Portfolio is maintained for each individual classroom or defined set of children and a Program Portfolio is maintained for the overall program. Each portfolio is organized around the 10 standards. Many programs find that the portfolios require a considerable time commitment from program staff. Therefore, programs are encouraged to begin collecting

evidence for use in the portfolios as an early task in the Self-Study process.

Classroom Portfolio
The *Classroom Portfolio Tools* are available in TORCH. The Classroom Portfolio is an opportunity for programs to present evidence of each group's capacity to meet the accreditation criteria over time. It is a mechanism for documenting classroom practices and recording events in order to provide current evidence of implementation of specific criteria or indicators within criteria.

NAEYC defines a class as a set of children assigned to a specific teacher or teaching team for most of the day and who occupy an individual classroom or well-defined space that prevents intermingling of children from different classes within a larger room or area. In most instances, it is expected that the Classroom Portfolio will be developed for a specific class by the teaching team responsible for that class. However, when the responsibility for planning and implementing classroom activities is shared among several teaching teams for multiple classes of children, a single portfolio may be used to document the evidence for each of the classes included in the shared planning and implementation. Programs may contact Program Support (800 424-2460, option 3 or accreditation.information@naeyc.org) for guidance pertaining to the specific number of Classroom Portfolios that the program should complete.

Classroom Portfolios are used by NAEYC Assessors as part of the site visit to supplement information gathered during the classroom observations (only a sample of classrooms is observed and has portfolios reviewed during the site visit).

Program Portfolio
The *Program Portfolio Instructions* is available in TORCH. The Program Portfolio is an opportunity for programs to present evidence of the program's capacity to meet the NAEYC Early Learning Standards and Criteria over time. It is a mechanism for tracking policies and recording events that provides current evidence of implementation of the standards and criteria.

Many programs have reported that it is helpful to begin working on the Program Portfolio early in the Self-Study process. Simply making sure that your program has policies and procedures documented can be an important first step. Then, consider whether the policies and procedures specifically address what is stated in the criteria. It is up to each individual program to decide where specific program policies or procedures are made available to program staff and families (i.e. in the staff handbook, family handbook or program Web site). Most programs have found that they need to give careful attention to this part of the process to ensure that policies and procedures are in place and align with the standards and criteria.

The Program Portfolio is used by NAEYC Assessors as part of the site visit to gather information used to determine the NAEYC Accreditation decision.

Instructions for Collecting Surveys in Self-Study
Opinions and thoughts from teaching staff and family members will inform program efforts to develop and improve child outcomes and program quality. Programs may choose to use either the expanded surveys for Self-Study, which provide open-ended questions to elicit extended feedback from teaching staff and family members or the two-page, abbreviated surveys during Self-Study. Programs are not required to report the findings of the surveys

conducted during Self-Study to NAEYC. However, programs that plan to seek NAEYC Accreditation will be required to conduct the two-page, abbreviated surveys for Self-Assessment to document the program's performance on criteria for which the Family and Teaching Staff Surveys are a source of evidence.

The Teaching Staff Survey can help you collect information about the program from the staff perspective, and the Family Survey can help you collect information about how families perceive program practices. The surveys are designed to provide you with information from several anonymous viewpoints. Sometimes staff and family members are not comfortable openly offering suggestions or ideas for fear of retaliation against them or their child; consequently, programs seeking the full range of ideas and concerns that truly represents family members and staff need to offer the opportunity for privacy by asking a trusted intermediary to collect the information or by taking other steps to ensure anonymity. (Steps to ensure anonymity are required during Self-Assessment.)

Specific instructions for Family Surveys
Family Surveys are designed to gather family perspectives on specific criteria. During Self-Study, you may choose to ask families to complete different sections at different times or to complete the entire survey. You may also adapt the survey questions and use them as a springboard for discussion with parents and family members. The results of your findings during Self-Study are strictly for the use of your program. The *Expanded Family Survey for Self-Study* is available in TORCH. A survey without criteria relevant to infants is available for programs that do not serve infants. A Spanish Family Survey is also available.

Specific instructions for Teaching Staff Surveys
Teaching Staff Surveys may be used to survey teaching staff and gain their perspectives with respect to the program's strengths and weaknesses. You may choose to ask staff members to complete different sections at different times or to complete the entire survey at once. You may decide to use one or more of the statements as a springboard for discussion among groups of teaching staff. Results of these discussions or surveys completed during Self-Study are strictly for the use of your program. Providing an envelope with each survey and a box to which they are returned in a common staff area (and not the administrator's office) is one strategy that can help to ensure anonymity. *The Expanded Teaching Staff Survey for Self-Study* is available in TORCH. A survey without criteria relevant to infants is available for programs that do not serve infants.

Survey Summary Forms
Once the surveys are completed and collected by the staff and families, programs will use the *Expanded Family Survey Summary for Self-Study* and the *Expanded Teaching Staff Survey Summary for Self-Study* in TORCH Self-Study folder, to help them summarize the data gathered to determine which criteria are met. The summary forms can be used to record information about the number of families and teaching staff surveyed and the percentage of those returning surveys. The more families and teaching staff that return the surveys, the more representative the information will be. The summary forms can be used to help you identify key findings from the Teaching Staff and Family Surveys. Make any notes concerning areas of strength and improvement after compiling and reviewing the feedback from the staff and family members. It can be especially helpful to review the findings of both surveys in conjunction with one another to identify common issues, concerns, and areas where perceptions of strengths or weaknesses vary.

Create Shared Understandings
Creating shared understandings of key concepts about NAEYC Accreditation, the standards, the

criteria, and implications for the program is an important component of a successful Self-Study process. Program staff and leadership should understand the steps and requirements of the NAEYC Accreditation process. At a minimum, this includes the program administrator, teachers and other teaching staff, and representatives of the program's governance structure. Teaching staff and program leadership should thoughtfully consider how their program policies and procedures demonstrate the NAEYC Early Learning Standards and Criteria. The criteria are statements of best practice for children and families.

Determine Strengths and Weaknesses
The purpose of this task is to identify your program's areas of strengths and areas of weaknesses. Using the NAEYC Early Learning Standards and Criteria as your measure of quality, consider the evidence you gathered using the tools to help identify areas that need to be addressed. Is there a theme across the standards that you are not meeting? Is one standard particularly difficult for your program? For example, you may notice that your program is not meeting many criteria in Standard 2: Curriculum but your program is meeting many criteria in Standard 1: Relationships. You may identify broad areas where improvement is needed during this step. You will also want to take this time to celebrate your strengths with others in your program.

Taking an honest and careful look at your current practices is essential for an effective Self-Study. It is easy to look at the criteria and say, of course we do that. But do you really? What did your families say? What did the teaching staff say? What did you not see that you expected to when observing each group? Are fully meeting each criterion, including all indicators? Do you have the capacity to meet the criteria over time?

During Self-Study, challenge your program to provide evidence of your program's policies and practices using the accreditation criteria as your measure of quality. You will need to be open to thinking seriously about all aspects of your program practices as well as many of your personal and professional beliefs and behaviors. Being open to the possibility of needing to change is a critical factor in quality improvement.

Develop Program Improvement Plans
This is the time to thoughtfully consider how you can use the NAEYC Early Learning Standards and Criteria to truly inform practices in your program and create structures that will support quality over time. It may require some creative brainstorming and true collaboration from the program staff, but will result in higher quality programming for the children and families you serve.

Using the results from your Self-Study, create a plan for program improvement. You will need to identify resources to address the challenges for your program. To help you get started, use the ideas identified in sections three and six of this volume. Brainstorm with staff and families about additional resources available in your local community and state. Be creative. Link up with other early childhood programs to share training resources.

Be sure to keep track of your resources as part of your program improvement and development efforts. Describe who will be involved, how you will gather further information and evidence, and how you will use the results. Your improvement plan should also include time to implement changes and to assess your progress as you move forward.

Make Improvements and Document Your Efforts
Put your plans into action. Depending on the plans and the area of improvement, start making the identified changes. This is where you will begin to see the results of your improvement efforts, which can be an exciting time for your program. Be sure to encourage program staff in their efforts and

celebrate their accomplishments one step at a time.

Evaluate Results and Determine Next Steps
Program improvement efforts are ongoing. Staff, families, program administrators, and other stakeholders need to evaluate the effect of the changes after sufficient time has passed for the changes to be fully implemented and thoroughly tested. Discuss the effect of the changes on the children, teachers, and family members. Examine the effect of the changes for both positive and potentially negative effects. If necessary, make modifications.

Document your evaluation efforts and the modifications that you make. Your next steps depend on the context of your efforts and the nature of your findings. If you are exploring only the standards one by one, this might be a time to begin reviewing the next standard. If you are enrolled in Self-Study and your findings suggest further improvement is needed to meet the standards and their criteria, then you can repeat the cycle to plan improvements, make improvements, document your efforts, and evaluate your results.

When the program staff and families are confident that the program can document that it meets each of the 10 NAEYC Early Learning Standards and Criteria, then it is ready to proceed to become an Applicant for NAEYC Accreditation (Step 2 in seeking NAEYC Accreditation). In the application, the program will select a Candidacy due date, three to 12 months from the date of application. Programs are not required to submit documentation of their Self-Study process to NAEYC in their application. However, the program that applies for NAEYC Accreditation is making the commitment to complete a formal Self-Assessment and to report these results to NAEYC by the Candidacy due date chosen in the application. Programs that are accepted as a Candidate for NAEYC Accreditation will receive a site visit within 6 months of the selected Candidacy due date.

Programs that are currently NAEYC-Accredited should refer to the timeline for currently accredited programs to determine what due dates they must meet in order to maintain their NAEYC accreditation status with no lapse while pursuing re-accreditation. Currently accredited programs may choose to allow their NAEYC Accreditation to lapse if they believe that they need more time to conduct a thorough and meaningful Self-Study of their program and to be successful during the next steps of the accreditation process. Programs that choose to allow their accreditation to lapse are not penalized for doing so, but their accreditation expires after their current accreditation expiration date has passed.