



**naeyc**<sup>®</sup>

## Early Childhood Higher Education Accreditation

# It's our Accreditation System's 20th Anniversary!

2026 is a big year for NAEYC! We are celebrating the organization's centennial AND the 20th anniversary of our higher education accreditation system. 20 years ago, in partnership with ACCESS and with funding from philanthropic partners, NAEYC launched what was then called the Early Childhood Associate Degree Accreditation (ECADA) system to recognize ECE associate degree programs for meeting standards for quality ECE professional preparation. Over the last twenty years, with invaluable contributions from hundreds of volunteers serving as peer reviewers and

Commissioners, from many state agencies and affiliates serving as accreditation partners, from NAEYC staff, and from ECE faculty in accredited programs, the system has grown and strengthened over the years.

In 2016, we expanded to accredit ECE baccalaureate and initial master's degree programs and adopted our current name—NAEYC Accreditation of Early Childhood Higher Education Programs. And, over two decades the accreditation standards have continued to evolve to reflect expectations of quality based on current research and practice.

Accreditation of ECE degree programs is one of the ways that the ECE profession holds itself accountable for ensuring that educators are truly prepared in the competencies (the *Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators*) required for effective practice. It provides quality assurance across almost 200 degree programs located across the majority of states, while respecting the particular context of each program.

As 2026 continues, we look forward to celebrating the programs, people, and milestones in our accreditation system. Thank you for the many ways that you contribute to this system!

## Ask Me Anything Session Registration

Submitting an accreditation report this spring or just have questions on anything related to higher ed accreditation? You may be interested in joining us for our upcoming "Ask Me Anything" session. This session is designed for programs preparing to submit a new or renewal Self-Study Report, a Response to Conditions Report or a Year 4 Interim Report and is an opportunity to pose questions to accreditation staff and members of the Higher Education Accreditation Commission. The Ask Me Anything session will be held on **February 3 from 2:00 PM - 4:00 PM EST**. You can register and submit questions in advance [here](#). We hope to see you there!

**Register Now and Submit Your Questions**

# Accreditation Report and Annual Fee Due Date Reminders

Programs preparing to submit reports during the spring cycle, please note that the submission deadline is **March 31** for first-time Self-Study Reports, Year 4 Interim Reports, and Response to Conditions Reports, and **May 31** for renewal Self-Study Reports. Programs are encouraged to schedule a completeness review call with our Director of Accreditation Services, Pamela Ehrenberg, as early as the report is ready to review and at least two weeks prior to their submission deadline. To schedule a call, please email [highered@naeyc.org](mailto:highered@naeyc.org) with your top 3 preferences for a date/time, and we will reach out to confirm your scheduled time. Please note that the purpose of this call is to ensure all required components are included and the report is ready to be submitted, as well as to review program questions and past Commission feedback if applicable; however, staff are unable to review Key Assessments for alignment to standards or other assessment quality indicators.

Annual Fee invoices will be sent out to program coordinators in early February and be due on **March 31st, 2026**. Programs will be able to pay by ACH or credit card. Further instructions will be included on the invoice. If you are a new program that has recently submitted a Self-Study Report for review, your program's Self-Study Report review fee will supersede the annual fee.

## Maintaining Accreditation Throughout the Cycle: What You Should Know

As the higher education accreditation system has continued to evolve over the past 20 years, many changes have taken place regarding requirements for maintaining accreditation throughout a program's seven-year cycle. What used to be an annual reporting requirement later shifted to Interim Reports in years 2 and 4 and has since been streamlined even further to one Interim Report due in year 4 of the accreditation cycle.

The accreditation system has always striven to provide opportunities for meaningful evaluation while also ensuring that the rigor of accreditation does not become burdensome. The Interim Report in Year 4 is one way the system attempts to strike that balance. In Year 4, programs have the unique opportunity to submit Key Assessments and a Learning Opportunities Chart aligned to one of the *Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators* to be reviewed by the Commission. The goal of this report is two-fold: while it provides a touchpoint between the original self-study period and that of renewal to affirm the program's continued compliance with accreditation requirements, it also provides programs the often-requested opportunity to get direct Commission feedback prior to preparing a renewal Self-Study Report. Programs are encouraged to consider selecting a standard for this report for which they feel they could most benefit from feedback prior to renewal, rather than choosing to showcase their strongest work.

As a reminder, the Interim Report review is meant to serve as feedback based on current policies and expectations and is not a guarantee of a specific accreditation decision at the time of renewal. It is the responsibility of the program to ensure future reports meet the policies and expectations in place at the time of future submissions.

In addition to the Interim Report requirement, accredited programs should also remember to regularly (at minimum annually) update their websites throughout the accreditation term with current program outcomes and candidate learning outcomes data to maintain adherence to accreditation standard C6.

## Commission Updates

NAEYC's **Commission on the Accreditation of Early Childhood Higher Education Programs** is powered by a dynamic group of volunteers who dedicate countless hours to reviewing accreditation cases and overseeing the standards and policies that guide the accreditation system. As we begin a new year, we want to acknowledge and share our appreciation for the service of Dr. Paige Bray (University of Hartford) as her term on the Commission concluded in December, and Dr. Tiffany Hunter (Metropolitan Community College (MO)) as she concludes her tenure as Commission Chair (while remaining on the Commission in the role of past Chair). We're also pleased to welcome a new Commissioner, Dr. Raynice Jean-Sigur (Kennesaw State

University), and look forward to Dr. Wei Qiu's (Weber State University) continued service as she steps into the role of Commission Chair.

[Read More About the Commission](#)

## Meet A Higher Education Accreditation Commissioner

**Dr. Cindy Shackelford,  
Jefferson State  
Community College**



Dr. Shackelford is from Birmingham, Alabama and serves as the head of the CHD/ECE program at Jefferson State Community College. She is also a Dissertation Chair of ECE/ELE Research, Professor for Curriculum and Instruction, Board of Directors for the Alabama School Readiness Alliance Board, Alabama Department of Education CTE Advisory Council, Board of Directors for I-3 Academy, Parker High School ECE Advisory Board, Alabama Department of Education Family Consumer Science Advisory Board, and was one of the writers for the Alabama Department of Education Courses of Study with a focus on Career and Technical Education in ECE. Dr. Shackelford holds two doctorates in education and has served in all levels of education from preschool to post-secondary education, from teaching to administration. This marks her 29th year in the field of education. She is married with four girls and is a foster mom. In her free time, when she has it, she enjoys walking, reading, and journaling.

We asked Dr. Shackelford what advice she would give to programs pursuing NAEYC higher education accreditation for the first time. Her response: "Congratulations! You have chosen to be intentional in ensuring that your higher education program meets the standard of high quality. This is a huge

step and will require time, but embrace it with a growth mindset. The goal is always improvement, even when achieved. Ask questions and know that your program's successful outcome is the goal of NAEYC.”

## Apply to Serve as a Peer Reviewer

Applications to serve as a peer reviewer are currently open through the end of February. Becoming a higher education peer reviewer is an excellent way to learn more about this quality assurance system, as well as to give back to the early childhood field. Current or former full- or part-time early childhood faculty members who meet the qualifications are encouraged to apply! Qualified applicants will be invited to participate in a recently revised online training program within NAEYC's Learning Lab and will be eligible to earn CEUs!

[Read More and Apply](#)

## Accreditation Resources

We are excited to share that a new comprehensive accreditation resource has just been released to support programs in our higher education accreditation community. No matter the stage of the accreditation process-- from just beginning, to waist deep in self-study, to maintaining accreditation or even working towards renewal-- this resource provides helpful guidance and navigation to other applicable accreditation resources. The Compass is a great companion to the Higher Education Accreditation Standards and the Accreditation Policies and Procedures Handbook to help guide the way. Check it out [here](#) or via the [Online Accreditation Resource library](#).

In November 2025, one of our most popular resources, "Creating Key Assessments: Practical Guidance for Designing Key Assessments that Align with NAEYC Standards" was revised to better align with updated higher education accreditation standards, templates, and policies. Visit the

resource library to download the [revised copy of this resource](#). (Note: you must be logged into the resource library to access the resource and the one below).

Our accreditation resources continue to grow to support programs throughout your accreditation journey. The new “[Resource Index](#)” document found in the resource library can help you match existing resources to particular stages or areas of accreditation that may be most pertinent to you at any given moment. With resources arranged under various topics, it can help you more quickly identify specific items within the resource library that may be most helpful.

Want more frequent updates that are relevant to early childhood higher education faculty engaged in accreditation? Bookmark our blog-like feed of updates we call [The Latest](#).

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