

# Guiding Principles for the Development and Analysis of Early Childhood Public Policy

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## *A position statement of the* National Association for the Education of Young Children

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Adopted 1989  
Amended 1992

*These principles are based on sound early childhood pedagogy and practice, with the overall goal of providing high-quality early childhood services to all young children and their families.*

### ***Ensuring high-quality services***

#### **Developmental appropriateness**

- Programs must be comprehensive in nature, developmentally appropriate for children so that both age-specific and individual characteristics are addressed and designed to meet the needs of children and families served.
- Program planning and implementation must recognize the integrated nature of care and education for young children and not treat child care and early education as separate services or program functions.

#### **Professional expertise with adequate compensation**

- Staff with early childhood expertise (including specialized training and relevant work experience with the age group) must be employed throughout all stages of program design, administration, and implementation.
- Compensation must be sufficient to attract and retain qualified staff to work with young children and reduce high rates of turnover and its detrimental effect on children. Salaries and benefits should be comparable to other professionals with equivalent training and responsibilities.
- Preservice qualifications and continuing education relevant to the ages and needs of children served must be ensured for all program staff.

#### **Quality safeguards**

- It is a public responsibility to set high-quality standards to safeguard **all** children in any form of out-of-home setting. Standards should address staff qualifications, ongoing training requirements, parent role, group size and staff-child ratios, discipline, health and safety aspects, and developmentally appropriate curriculum, and should be comparable for all out-of-home settings within the state.
- Because of current variations in state regulation and the low level of quality mandated by some state regulations, many children are in programs of unacceptable quality. Unacceptable state standards must be improved.
- A system for implementing standards that includes monitoring and inspection must be ensured, including adequate licensing staff with early childhood training to monitor compliance with standards and assure technical assistance and leadership.
- Standards should require regular review and public reporting of their continued effectiveness in promoting good services for children.
- Public purchase of services should be limited to regulated settings.

#### **Continuity for children**

- Efforts must be made to ensure continuity for children receiving services. This requires attention to factors that foster ideological continuity and staff continuity **within** programs:

—requiring that attention be paid to ensuring continuity in administrative and classroom planning to keep changes in staffing or classroom to a minimum;

—addressing the problems of extraordinarily high levels of staff turnover in child care programs by improving compensation and enhancing the working conditions of program staff;

—ensuring that programs meet family needs for child care so that children are not placed in multiple programs over the course of a day;

—requiring the use of sliding-fee scale mechanisms so that children are not forced to leave a program if their family income changes.

- Efforts must also be made to address continuity *between* programs as children move from one type of program to another from year to year. If children attend multiple programs, strategies for fostering communication and collaborative planning should be stressed.

- Efforts must also be made to foster continuity between home and program by including many opportunities for parent participation and involvement in programs.

### **Parent/family involvement**

- Parents should be represented in the membership of pertinent advisory groups and must be directly involved in policy decisions affecting their own children.

- Parents should be provided with ongoing opportunities to discuss children's needs and progress with program staff.

- Parents should have unrestricted access to the facility areas to which children have access, and should be encouraged to spend time at the program site.

### ***Ensuring equity and access***

#### **Family choices regarding program options**

- All families have options to choose among developmentally appropriate programs that

—meet varying family needs, including part-day, full-workday, and nontraditional hours;

—provide choices among various delivery systems, including private and public centers, schools, or family day care;

—provide options in settings near home or the workplace.

- Mechanisms for equitably providing the information parents need to make informed choices, such as community resource and referral programs, should be readily available to all families.

### **Ethnic and socioeconomic integration**

- Programs should be designed to include children from a variety of ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds.

- A socioeconomic mix should be facilitated through sliding-fee scales and use of multiple funding sources.

- Policies that intentionally or unintentionally result in segregation on the basis of ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or special need, including “at-risk,” status must be rectified.

### **Access**

- The long-term goal of legislation should be to make services available to all children; if funds do not provide for universal service, resources should be targeted to the most needy. If targeted to the most needy or “at-risk” children, provisions must be made to avoid segregation.

- Provisions such as direct subsidy for low-income families and sliding-fee scale mechanisms must be made so that program options are not limited by family income.

### ***Ensuring high quality service delivery***

#### **Funding**

- A substantial commitment of new public funds must be made to begin to meet the compelling and immediate need for child care and early childhood education services.

- Adequate funds must be provided to ensure high-quality services for each child, including collaboration among services.

- Provision of funds must be tied to continued efforts to meet and improve standards and their enforcement.

- Increased funding that reflects the cost of living must be provided, with periodic reviews and updates of income eligibility levels for full or partial support.

### **Providing linkages and coordination**

- Collaboration among agencies whose programs affect young children and their families should be ensured through interagency committees or other mechanisms to assure coordination.
- Coordinating mechanisms must be fostered among federal, state, and local levels, as well as within each of these levels.
- There must be mechanisms for collaboration among services (including education, social, economic development, etc.) in a community and state.
- Collaboration should be encouraged among early childhood programs within the community.
- New programs should contribute to the overall provision of services for young children and avoid needless duplication of existing private or public programs.

### **State/local flexibility**

- Policies should be flexible enough to meet individual state and community needs. Providing state flexibility should not compromise the quality of service provided to children and their families.
- Strategies for conducting local assessments of need and service delivery should be required prior to and at regular intervals during program implementation.

### **Identification of service providers**

- Identification of service providers should be based on their ability to provide good service and parental choice, not whether they are for-profit or non-profit, or affiliated or not affiliated with specific institutions.

### **Separation of church and state**

- Public funds should not be used to support parochial teaching.

### **Use of evaluation instruments**

- Evaluation instruments and procedures should be used only for the purposes for which they were intended.
- Decisions regarding program entry and/or placement should be based on multiple criteria, including observations by parents and qualified professionals, never a single test score.

- Developmental assessment of children's progress and achievement should be used to plan curriculum, identify children with special needs, communicate with parents, and evaluate the program's effectiveness.
- Caution must be used so that placement into programs for "at-risk" or needy children does not result in stigmatizing labels that segregate students into tracks.
- Evaluation of the programs created by the legislation should be assessed through multiple indicators. Assessment strategies should be developmentally appropriate and congruent with the goals of the program.

### ***Musts for early childhood policies***

#### **1. Must improve program quality:**

- must improve the quality and enforcement of standards, including those regulating group size, staff-child ratio, staff qualifications, parental involvement, and health and safety
- must promote a stable, qualified early childhood workforce that meets adequate preservice and continuing education requirements and must address the insufficient compensation, low status, and inadequate working conditions that typify the field
- must foster continuity for children within and between programs, now and over time
- must foster parental involvement and informed parental choice

#### **2. Must provide equitable access to good programs:**

- must provide direct subsidy to low-income families
- must make provisions to ensure program stability for children as families move out of poverty
- must provide mechanisms such as community resource and referral to enable parents to make informed program choices
- must foster socioeconomic and ethnic diversity within programs

- must not intentionally or unintentionally foster segregation on the basis of ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or special need, including “at risk” status

**3. Must foster high quality service delivery:**

- must provide sufficient funds to ensure that high-quality services are provided
- must integrate provision of child care and educational services
- must foster collaboration among services for young children and their families at all levels of government
- must promote coordination among services for children
- must provide for collaboration among early childhood programs within a community
- must allow flexibility to meet individual family and community needs