



100 Years of NAEYC, 20 Years of Higher Education Accreditation

Celebrating NAEYC's Centennial

In 2026, NAEYC celebrates 100 years of championing young children, the educators who care for them, and the higher education programs that prepare and support the ECE workforce. For the ECE higher education community, 2026 includes another important milestone: **the 20th anniversary of NAEYC's higher education accreditation system**—two decades of recognizing and elevating high quality ECE educator preparation.

Who We Are

NAEYC is the nation's largest early childhood education association, with 50 affiliates in nearly every state, more than 6,500 accredited early learning programs, and nearly 180 accredited higher education programs in 35 states. Our reach extends to hundreds of thousands of educators, advocates, researchers and faculty through publications, professional development, accreditation and the largest early childhood conference in the world.

What We've Built

Since 1926, NAEYC has created the field's foundations: the first professional standards (1929), the first voluntary national accreditation system (1985), the first developmentally appropriate practice guidelines (1987), and the first professional code of ethics (1989). Our flagship journal—now *Young Children*—has been in continuous publication since 1945. We helped establish the CDA credential, now awarded to over a million educators. In 2006, we began accrediting ECE higher education programs. And through Power to the Profession (2017–2020), we convened a national collaboration of 15 organizations and 11,000+ educators to develop the *Unifying Framework*—defining shared career pathways, qualifications, and compensation recommendations for the early childhood education profession.

Why This Matters for Higher Education

You prepare the early childhood education workforce. NAEYC supports your work with research-based resources, publication opportunities, and a scholarly community that has shaped this field for a century. Our higher education accreditation system ensures quality in ECE educator preparation nationwide—and your programs are where that quality begins.

NAEYC Milestones

- 1926** NAEYC founded as National Association for Nursery Education (NANE)
- 1929** Publishes first professional child care standards “Minimum Essentials for Nursery School Education”
- 1945** Launches flagship journal (originally *Bulletin of the National Association for Nursery Education; Young Children* since 1964) — providing a continuous forum for research, practice, and policy
- 1970s** Joins National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), gaining authority to shape baccalaureate ECE degree programs
- 1970s** Helps develop the Child Development Associate (CDA), the first national credential for early childhood professionals
- 1982** Publishes teacher education guidelines developed for ECE four- and five-year programs
- 1985** Launches early learning program accreditation; Publishes ECE associate degree guidelines
- 1987** Publishes “Developmentally Appropriate Practice” (DAP), defining how children learn best
- 1989** Adopts “Code of Ethical Conduct, the field’s first ethics guidelines
- 2006** Launches higher education accreditation for ECE associate degree programs
- 2016** Expands higher education accreditation to ECE baccalaureate and master’s degree programs
- 2017** Launches Power to the Profession — multi-year, profession-led initiative with 15 national organizations and 11,000+ educators
- 2019** Adopts “Advancing Equity in Early Childhood Education” position statement
- 2020** Power to the Profession releases *Unifying Framework for the Early Childhood Education Profession*
- 2021** Higher education accreditation achieves CHEA recognition

How We’re Celebrating

We’re marking the centennial—and the 20th anniversary of higher education accreditation—with a number of activities throughout the year. Through our **Year of Reflections** storytelling initiative, faculty and students can share their stories at [NAEYC.org/centennial/year-of-reflections](https://naeyc.org/centennial/year-of-reflections). Stay tuned for more ways to participate.

Key Dates for 2026

- JANUARY** Centennial begins, Year of Reflections public launch
- FEBRUARY** NAEYC’s 100th anniversary month
- MARCH** *Young Children* special centennial-themed issue publishes
- APRIL** Week of the Young Child (55th year)
- FALL** Digital timeline launch
- DECEMBER** Annual Conference; centennial culmination

Sources: Median child care worker wage (\$15.41/hour): U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics, May 2024. Average annual child care cost (\$13,128): Child Care Aware of America, Child Care in America: 2024 Price & Supply (May 2025).

