NAEYC Early Childhood Program Standards

## Relationship to the 5 Foundational Position Statements

This position statement is one of five foundational documents NAEYC has developed in collaboration with the early childhood profession. This statement complements and supports the other foundational documents that (1) define developmentally appropriate practice, (2) set professional standards and competencies for early childhood educators, (3) define the profession's code of ethics, and (4) set forth recommendations to advance equity. These foundational statements are grounded in NAEYC's core values that emphasize diversity and inclusion and that respect the dignity and worth of every individual.

Updates to the early childhood program standards align explicitly with NAEYC's core positions statements including *Developmentally Appropriate Practice* (DAP), *Advancing Equity in Early Childhood Programs*, the *Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators* and the *Code of Ethics for Early Childhood Educators*.

For example, in this revision, the program standards are clearly aligned with and mapped to the six areas of effective practice outlined in the *Developmentally Appropriate Practice* position statement, which are themselves consistent with the *Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators* with additions related to safety, the physical environment and leadership and management (See Appendix A – History of the Standards and Crosswalk for more details on the alignment).

The standards also reflect the values presented in NAEYC's *Advancing Equity in Early Childhood Education Position Statement*, which states that all children have the right to "equitable learning opportunities that enable them to achieve their full potential as engaged learners and valued members of society."

NAEYC's Foundational Documents

- Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP)
- Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators
- Code of Ethical Conduct
- Advancing Equity in Early Childhood Education
- NAEYC Early Childhood Program Standards
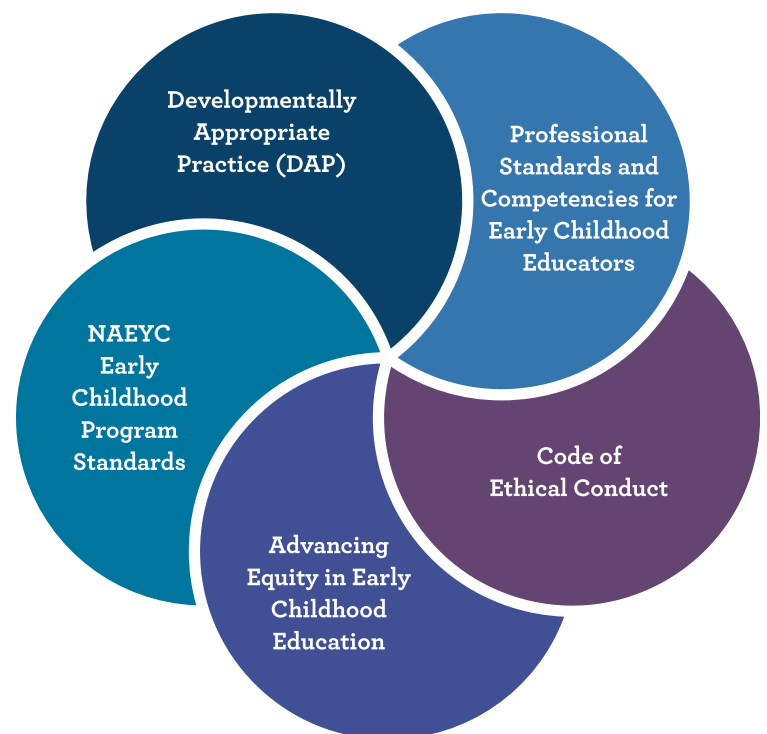
Note for Public Comment on Draft: Detailed, specific responses are most helpful. However, given that this is a draft document, please try to disregard mechanical or technical errors; all copyediting will be done by NAEYC staff after this public comment period, and prior to release of the final draft.

Purpose

Every child deserves access to high-quality, equitable, joyful early learning opportunities and experiences. The purpose of NAEYC's *Early Childhood Program Standards* position statement is to provide a framework for early learning programs, higher education programs, and early childhood education systems at local, state, and federal levels to use. It provides nine clear standards that address a range of key indicators for quality and equity, and outlines how ECE programs develop and support quality on an ongoing basis.

While these standards form the basis for NAEYC early learning program accreditation standards, they are relevant for all programs and systems, regardless of accreditation status or engagement.

The standards and key indicators of quality themselves, along with the accreditation process and quality assessment items, provide detail and support to implement these measures. They provide guidance to ensure programs are equitable, safe, well prepared, and intentional about fostering the joy, development, and learning of every child.

The Position

Early learning programs in homes, centers and schools must have essential features present to ensure access to joyful, equitable learning opportunities and experiences for each child. This statement recognizes the robust inequities in access to quality care and early learning experiences that persist and provides a clear and accessible articulation of quality that addresses these systemic shortfalls. Early childhood educators and administrators require guidelines that articulate these features and provide a framework by which programs can evaluate themselves, and by which families can evaluate programs.

Design and Structure

This statement begins with the broad guidelines known as "NAEYC Early Childhood Program Standards." These standards will continue to be updated to respond to new developments in the early childhood field, new research, and changing contexts. These standards and key indicators of quality are informed by research, extensive review from the field, and practice. They are designed to advance our understanding of the criteria that early childhood educators and programs need to implement to ensure effective programs and practice. These standards are reflective of the six guidelines for effective practice from *Developmentally Appropriate Practice*, with the addition of three standards specific to programs themselves. For those interested in exploring the body of research that supports the position, a full review of the research evidence is available to accompany the position statement.

This revision of the Early Childhood Program Standards were guided by the following three principles:

Comprehensive, not exhaustive: These standards and key indicators of quality represent the core domains of early learning program quality. They are not meant to represent an exhaustive list of what constitutes quality practice in early learning programs. For early learning program accreditation, licensure bodies, and such, the indicators may be expanded and more specific, as needed, to address specific contexts and to include more discrete competencies.

Aligned with NAEYC's Early Learning Program Quality Assessment and Accreditation System: Each standard and the key indicators of quality therein were revised in tandem with NAEYC's Early Learning Program Quality Assessment and Accreditation System revision. As a result, items used in this system to recognize and accredit programs are directly tied to each indicator so that fidelity to a holistic conception of program quality is embedded consistently throughout.

Simplified structure: Each standard describes in a few sentences the essential features of early learning programs that must be present to ensure access to joyful, equitable learning opportunities and experiences for each and every child, including children who have been historically marginalized. Each standard comprises two to five key indicators of quality to clarify its most important features. These key indicators break out components of each standard, highlighting what early learning programs need to be able to demonstrate. The complementary review of the research evidence provides the rationale behind each of the standards and key indicators.[1] In addition, NAEYC's Early Learning Program Quality Assessment and Accreditation System provides detailed and specific guidance to demonstrate elements of quality that align with the key indicators.

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1. The review of the research evidence as well as a glossary of terms will be included along with the final draft of the position statement; in this draft, NAEYC is seeking comments from the field that are focused on the core content of the Early Learning Program standards.

PROGRAM STANDARD 1

Creating a Caring and Equitable Community of Learners

Young children experience their world through an environment of relationships and these relationships affect virtually all aspects of their development. All people learn through social relationships; this is particularly true for the youngest children who are most dependent on adults and who are experiencing rapid brain development that is shaped by their interaction with both the environment and the caregivers in it. Culturally responsive relationships play a central role in rich adult- child interactions and serve as the foundation to all learning and development, including positive identity development, problem solving, capacity for self-regulation, peer relationships, and for academic growth. Warm, sensitive, and responsive interactions help children develop a secure, positive sense of self and encourage them to respect and cooperate with others. Positive relationships also help children reap the benefits of instructional experiences and resources. Children who see themselves as highly valued are more likely to feel secure, get along with others, feel part of a community, and experience greater leaps in learning.

KEY INDICATORS OF QUALITY

› The program promotes positive relationships with each child and family in ways that promote individual children's self-worth.

› The program encourages belonging as part of a caring community of learners.

› The program centers children and families' cultural values, integrating their home languages/dialects/communication needs.

› The program identifies and addresses potential biases that exist within the staff and program structures.

PROGRAM STANDARD 2

Engaging in Reciprocal Partnerships with Families and Fostering Community Connections

Families are children's first, most important, and longest lasting teachers. Young children's learning and development are not separate from but are integrally connected to their families and communities. Consequently, to support and promote children's optimal learning and development, programs need to recognize the primacy of children's families and establish relationships with families based on mutual trust and respect. This must include engaging with families as leaders in culturally and linguistically responsive ways, ensuring shared decision-making power with respect to their child's learning experiences in the program, embracing families as co-educators, working together to support children's educational growth, and creating the conditions where families feel welcomed to fully participate in the program. This must also include dedicating resources to support family well-being. By helping to connect families with needed resources, the program furthers children's healthy development and learning.

KEY INDICATORS OF QUALITY

› The program establishes and maintains reciprocal partnerships and relationships with each child's family.

› The program engages children's families as essential members of the learning community.

› The program establishes and maintains reciprocal partnerships and relationships with the local community.

› The program draws upon community resources (including both funds of knowledge and financial resources) to support the achievement of program goals.

PROGRAM STANDARD 3

Planning and Implementing an Engaging Curriculum to meet Meaningful Goals

Child-centered and evidence-based curricula and learning approaches are designed to promote children's play, curiosity, naturalistic learning, peer and adult interactions, and critical thinking. When child-centered curricula are included in children's learning experiences, educators serve as facilitators to their learning and co-developers of knowledge, and children's interests are followed to optimize their engagement and learning. Inquiry and project-based approaches are examples commonly found in programs with a focus on child directed learning. While these may be described as a learning approach rather than a curriculum, high quality programs contain similar characteristics outlined in this standard. Educators working within these approaches scaffold children's learning with more explicit instructional strategies for discrete skills such as alphabet knowledge, phonological awareness, and numeracy. It is important to note that evidence-based curriculum is not always created based on culturally sustaining pedagogies and educators must intentionally focus on ensuring that children's culture is considered and incorporated into the planning experience.

KEY INDICATORS OF QUALITY

> The program plans and implements a curriculum or learning approach that is child-centered, play-based, and holistic.

> The curriculum or learning approach provides educators with clear and comprehensive guidelines on when to introduce and build upon learning in each of the following domains: social and emotional development, physical development, language and communication development, cognitive development, and creative arts.

> The curriculum or learning approach is adapted to ensure responsiveness to children's home language(s), dialects, ability, and cultures.

PROGRAM STANDARD 4

Teaching to Enhance Each Child's Development and Learning

Educators who purposefully use multiple instructional approaches optimize children's opportunities for learning. These approaches include strategies that range from structured to unstructured and from adult directed to child directed. Children bring to learning environments different backgrounds, interests, experiences, learning styles, needs, and capacities. Research reveals that educator's biases and beliefs can impact how they treat children, and particularly children of color and those with disabilities, which can include centering the experiences of White individuals. Therefore, educators need to be actively anti-biased and embed children's cultures and identities in the learning environment and instruction. This is important because it promotes children's belonging, safety, and positive self-identities. Educator's consideration of these differences when selecting and implementing instructional approaches helps all children succeed. Instructional approaches also differ in their effectiveness for teaching different elements of curriculum and learning. For a program to address the complexity inherent in any teaching- learning situation, educators must use a variety of effective instructional approaches. In classrooms and groups that include teacher assistants or teacher aides and specialized teaching and support staff, the expectation is that these teaching staff work as a team. Whether one educator or a team works together, the instructional approach creates a teaching environment that supports each child's positive learning and development across all areas.

KEY INDICATORS OF QUALITY

> The program uses teaching practices that are nurturing and inclusive.

> The program's educators are equipped to support each and every child's development and learning through individualized and intentional practices.

> The program's teaching practices are culturally affirming and linguistically responsive to the children being served.

PROGRAM STANDARD 5

Observing, Documenting and Assessing Children's Development and Learning

Educators' knowledge of each child helps them to plan appropriate and enriching instruction that responds to each and every child's strengths, interests, and needs. Further, systematic assessment is essential for identifying children who may benefit from more intensive instruction or intervention or who may need additional developmental evaluation. This information ensures that the program meets its goals for children's learning and developmental progress and informs educator professional development and program improvement efforts. The potential of bias during assessments can be reduced when educators and administrators consider children's cultures, language(s), dialects, ability, and prior experiences, and when multiple types of assessments, including families' reports, are used to identify children's strengths and areas for growth.

KEY INDICATORS OF QUALITY

> The program's educators use ongoing systematic, formal, and informal assessment approaches to provide information on children's development and learning to inform instruction.

> The program uses assessment data within and across classrooms to inform programmatic planning, resourcing, and professional development to ensure all children are making progress in their development and learning.

> The program's assessments occur within the context of reciprocal communication and collaboration with families.

PROGRAM STANDARD 6

Promoting Health and Well-Being in Early Childhood Programs

To benefit from education and maintain quality of life, children need to be as healthy and well as possible. Children depend on adults (who also are as healthy and well as possible) to make healthy choices for them and to teach them to make healthy choices for themselves. Although some degree of risk taking is desirable for learning, a quality program prevents hazardous practices and environments that are likely to result in adverse consequences for children, staff, families, or communities.

KEY INDICATORS OF QUALITY

> The program promotes the nutrition and health of children and staff and protects them from illness.

> The program promotes the physical safety of children and staff and protects them from injury.

> The program nurtures infants, children, and staff's emotional, mental, and behavioral well-being.

PROGRAM STANDARD 7

Designing Physical Environments that are Safe, Engaging, and Accessible

The program's design and maintenance of its physical environment supports high-quality program activities and services and allows for optimal use and operation. Child safety in the physical environment-including well-maintained buildings, lead-free equipment, and clean water and air-are essential to promoting children's healthy development and well-being. Well-organized, equipped, and maintained environments support program quality by fostering the learning, engagement, comfort, health, and safety of those who use the program. Program quality is enhanced by also creating a welcoming and accessible setting for children, families, and staff and is achieved by implementing principles of universal design in the classroom environment or making adaptations to ensure all spaces are accessible, safe, sensory-friendly, and that encourage exploration, independence and interactions for all children. When the physical environment is reflective of families' communities, cultures, languages, and family structures, this results in higher engagement and a sense of belonging.

KEY INDICATORS OF QUALITY

> The program provides appropriate and well-maintained indoor and outdoor physical environments.

> The physical environment (including all indoor and outdoor spaces) is adequately sized and accessible to all children, including children with disabilities and those who need individual accommodation.

> The program's physical environment is representative of children and families' language(s) and cultural backgrounds.

PROGRAM STANDARD 8

Demonstrating Professionalism as Early Childhood Educators

As articulated in the *Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators*, children benefit most when their educators have formal training (including early childhood degrees and credentials), ongoing coaching, and specialized early childhood professional preparation that is anti-bias and equity centered. Educators who have specific preparation, knowledge, and skills in child development and early childhood education are more likely to engage in warm, positive interactions with children, offer richer language experiences, and create more high-quality learning environments. Opportunities for teaching staff to receive supportive supervision and to participate in sequential, ongoing professional development ensures that their knowledge and skills reflect the profession's ever-changing knowledge base.

KEY INDICATORS OF QUALITY

> The program employs a staff that has the education and knowledge, skills, values, and dispositions to effectively promote the development, learning, and well-being of all young children.

> The program ensures fair and equitable access to robust professional development that reflects a commitment to delivering high-quality early learning experiences and environments.

PROGRAM STANDARD 9

Supporting Staff, Children, and Families through Effective Leadership and Management

As articulated in the *Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators*, excellent programming requires effective governance structures, competent and knowledgeable leadership, as well as comprehensive and well-functioning administrative policies, procedures, and systems. To facilitate and support strong, continuous relationships between teaching staff and children, programs should strive to offer working conditions and compensation (wages and benefits) that attract and retain a diverse and qualified staff. Policies should ensure continuity of care for children, with groups and child-to-staff ratios that meet the profession's guidelines. Across all levels of seniority, staff should reflect the diversity (including race and ethnicity, language, and gender) of the community and children served.

KEY INDICATORS OF QUALITY

> The program implements policies, procedures, and systems that support strong staff and program personnel.

> The program implements policies, procedures, and systems that support strong fiscal health.

> The program implements policies, procedures, and systems that support strong program management.

Appendix A: History of the Standards and Crosswalk

In the 2005 version of the *Early Learning Program Standards,* there were 10 standards (shown in the leftmost column below). To align the standards with NAEYC's four additional foundational position statements, with a particular emphasis on alignment to the guidelines embedded in the *Developmentally Appropriate Practice* (DAP), position statement, it was determined that six of the former 10 standards (shown in bold below) mapped directly to DAP guidelines. For example, the former standard "Curriculum", maps directly to the DAP Guideline "Planning and Implementing an Engaging Curriculum to meet Meaningful Goals." The former Standard 7 (Families) and Standard 8 (Community Relationships) were combined to align with the DAP guideline, "Engaging in Reciprocal Partnerships with Families and Fostering Community Connections." Historically, in the NAEYC accreditation system, standards 7 and 8 have been scored collectively for many years, so this merging of standards seemed quite appropriate. Former standards 5 (Health), 9 (Physical Environment) and 10 (Leadership and Management) did not map directly to DAP guidelines, so the standards were renamed such that their new naming would have parallel structure to that of the DAP guidelines. From there, it was decided to reorder the standards so that child focused standards come first followed by educator/program focused standards. The crosswalk below demonstrates the evolution in naming and ordering the standards from the 2005 version of the position statement to this revised edition.

2005 Early Learning Position Statement Standards	New Titles of Standards	New Ordering and Naming of Standards
1. Relationships	**Creating a Caring and Equitable Community of Learners**	1. Creating a Caring and Equitable Community of Learners
2. Curriculum	**Planning and Implementing an Engaging Curriculum to meet Meaningful Goals**	2. Engaging in Reciprocal Partnerships with Families and Fostering Community Connections
3. Teaching	**Teaching to Enhance Each Child's Development and Learning**	3. Planning and Implementing an Engaging Curriculum to meet Meaningful Goals
4. Assessment of Child Progress	**Observing Documenting and Assessing Children's Development and Learning**	4. Teaching to Enhance Each Child's Development and Learning
5. Health	Promoting Health and Wellness in Early Childhood Programs	5. Observing, Documenting, and Assessing Children's Development and Learning
6. Teachers	**Demonstrating Professionalism as an Early Childhood Educator**	6. Promoting Health and Well-Being in Early Childhood Programs
7. Families	**Engaging in Reciprocal partnerships with Families and Fostering Community Connections**	7. Designing Physical Environments that are Safe, Engaging, and Accessible
8. Community Relationships		8. Demonstrating Professionalism as an Early Childhood Educator
9. Physical Environment	Designing Physical Environments to Meet the Needs of Early Learning Communities	9. Supporting Staff, Children, and Families through Effective Leadership and Management
10. Leadership and Management	Supporting Staff, Children, and Families through Effective Leadership and Management	