



# NAEYC Standards for Early Childhood Professional Preparation

Position Statement Approved by the  
NAEYC Governing Board July 2009

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

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## Introduction

### The purpose of this position statement

NAEYC Standards for Early Childhood Professional Preparation Programs represents a sustained vision for the early childhood field and more specifically for the programs that prepare the professionals working in the field. This 2009 revision of the standards is responsive to new knowledge, research and conditions while holding true to core values and principles of the founders of the profession. It is designed for use in a variety of ways by different sectors of the field while also supporting specific and critical policy structures, including state and national early childhood teacher credentialing, national accreditation of professional early childhood preparation programs, state approval of early childhood teacher education programs, and articulation agreements between various levels and types of professional development programs.

## History

NAEYC has a long-standing commitment to the development and support of strong early childhood degree programs in institutions of higher education. NAEYC standard setting for degree programs in institutions of higher education began more than 25 years ago. This document is the third revision to NAEYC's Early Childhood Teacher Education Guidelines for Four- and Five-Year Programs (1982) and Guidelines for Early Childhood Education Programs in Associate Degree Granting Institutions (1985).

Development and publication of those first standards documents was made possible through the contributions of family and friends of Rose H. Alschuler, a founding member and first Secretary-Treasurer of NAEYC from 1929-1931. During the 1920s, Ms. Alschuler was an early proponent and director of the first public nursery schools in the United States. During the 1930s she directed Works Progress Administration (WPA) public nursery schools in Chicago. During World War II she chaired the National Commission for Young Children. Her life and legacy continue today as our field furthers its work to improve both programs for young children and programs that prepare early childhood professionals.

## The Revisions process

The 1985 guidelines for preparation of early childhood professionals were revised in 1996, 2001-2003, and again with this revision in 2009. Each of these sets of guidelines and standards was developed with input from hundreds of early childhood professionals who participated in conference sessions, advisory committees, and work groups. While these are position statements of NAEYC, each was developed with invited input from colleagues in related professional associations, including ACCESS—early childhood educators in associate degree granting institutions, the National Association of Early Childhood Teacher Educators (NAECTE), the Division for Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC/DEC), and the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS).

In January 2008, NAEYC's Governing Board appointed a working group to advise staff on the preparation of a revision of the current *Preparing Early Childhood Professionals: NAEYC's Standards for Programs* (2003). This work group was composed of early childhood faculty members from associate, baccalaureate, and graduate degree programs; representatives of NAEYC, ACCESS, and NAECTE; and faculty who use the standards in the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) and NAEYC Early Childhood Associate Degree Accreditation (ECADA) systems. Additional input into the standards revision process was gathered during sessions at the 2007 NAEYC Annual Conference, the 2008 NAEYC Public Policy Forum, and the 2008 NAEYC National Institute for Early Childhood Professional Development. Draft revisions were posted on the NAEYC Web site for public comment in Fall 2008. Final revisions were completed in Spring 2009.

### What is new?

From all of these perspectives, the feedback indicated that the standards remain strong. Revisions called for are primarily organizational and reflect input from those who are actively implementing the standards in the field. There are *two* significant revisions in this 2009 document.

1. Standard 4 has been separated into two standards, one focuses on early childhood methods and the other on early childhood content. This increases the total number of standards from five to six.

2. The language *all children* is revised to read either *each child* or *every child* to strengthen the integration of inclusion and diversity as threads across all standards. In some cases, the phrase "each child" has been added to a key element of a standard.

Like all NAEYC position statements, the standards for early childhood professional preparation are living documents and as such will be regularly updated and revised.

## Standards as a vision of excellence

With good reason, many educators have become wary of standards. At times, standards have constricted learning and have encouraged a one-size-fits-all mentality. But standards can also be visionary and empowering for children and professionals alike. NAEYC hopes its standards for professional preparation can provide something more valuable than a list of rules for programs to follow.

The brief standards statements in this document offer a shared vision of early childhood professional preparation. But to make the vision real, the details must be constructed uniquely and personally, within particular communities of learners. Good early childhood settings may look very different from one another. In the same way, good professional preparation programs may find many pathways to help candidates meet high standards, so that they can effectively support young children and their families. (Hyson 2003, p. 28)

### Unifying themes for the field

These standards express a national vision of excellence for early childhood professionals. They are deliberately written as statements of core knowledge, understanding, and methods used across multiple settings and in multiple professional roles. The key elements of each standard progress from a theoretical knowledge base to more complex understanding to the application of knowledge in professional practice.

These 2009 NAEYC Standards for Early Childhood Professional Preparation Programs continue to promote the unifying themes that define the early childhood profession. These standards are designed for the early childhood education profession as a whole, to be relevant across a range of roles and settings. These core NAEYC

standards are for use across degree levels, from associate to baccalaureate to graduate degree programs. They are used in higher education accreditation systems, in state policy development, and by professional development programs both inside and outside institutions of higher education. These core standards can provide a solid, commonly held foundation of unifying themes from which diverse programs may arise, incorporating the wisdom of local communities, families, and practitioners. These unifying themes include

- **Shared professional values**, including a commitment to diversity and inclusion; respect for family, community, and cultural contexts; respect for evidence as a guide to professional decisions; and reliance on guiding principles of child development and learning.
- **Inclusion of the broad range of ages and settings** encompassed in early childhood professional preparation. NAEYC defines early childhood as the years from birth through age 8. These standards are meant to support professional preparation across diverse work settings, including infants and toddlers, primary grades, family child care, early intervention, government and private agencies, higher education institutions, and organizations that advocate on behalf of young children and their families.
- **A shared set of outcomes** for early childhood professional preparation. These core standards outline a set of common expectations for professional knowledge, skills and dispositions in six core areas. They express what tomorrow's early childhood professionals should know and be able to do.
- **A multidisciplinary approach** with an emphasis on assessment of outcomes and balanced attention to knowledge, skills, and dispositions.

Over time, NAEYC has organized these standards in a variety of ways. In the 1980s, they were organized into two position statements, one for associate degree programs and the other for four- and five-year degree programs. In 1991 one document outlined standards for basic and advanced degree programs. In 1999–2003, three documents outlined standards for associate, initial licensure,

and advanced degree programs. In this new position statement, the core standards are presented in *one* NAEYC position statement that emphasizes the essentials of professional preparation for careers in early childhood education, regardless of role, setting, or degree level. This position statement will guide the preparation of supporting materials when these standards are adopted for use in the NCATE and ECADA accreditation systems.

### Connecting to accreditation

Many higher education institutions choose to seek NAEYC Early Childhood Associate Degree Accreditation (ECADA) or NAEYC recognition of baccalaureate and graduate degrees as part of the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) accreditation for programs leading to initial or advanced teacher licensure. Both accreditation systems use these standards. Note that in these core NAEYC standards, the terms *students* and *candidates* are used interchangeably to describe the adults who are prepared by early childhood teacher education programs.

Note that these core standards are student performance standards. Meeting these standards requires evidence that programs (1) offer learning opportunities aligned with the key elements of the standards, (2) design key assessments that measure students' performance on key elements of the standards, (3) collect and aggregate data on student performance related to the standards, and (4) use that data in intentional, responsive ways to improve the quality of teaching and learning in the program.

These core standards are used across both ECADA and NCATE accreditation systems and across associate, baccalaureate, and graduate degree levels. Specific accreditation expectations related to different degree types and levels are published and updated separately for each accreditation system. Indicators of strength in program context and structure—the institutional mission, conceptual framework, field experiences, student characteristics and support services, faculty composition and qualifications, program resources and governance, support for transfer and articulation—are addressed in the guiding materials for programs seeking ECADA and NCATE accreditation.

## Defining professional preparation in early childhood education

NAEYC continues to use the child development research and evidence base to define the “early childhood” period as spanning the years from birth through age 8. As in past editions of its standards, NAEYC recognizes that within that range, early childhood professionals—and the programs that prepare them—may choose to specialize within the early childhood spectrum (infants/toddlers, preschool/prekindergarten, or early primary grades).

### Multiple professional roles and pathways

Specialization can be valuable, but NAEYC believes that all early childhood professionals should have a broad knowledge of development and learning across the birth-through-age-8 range; should be familiar with appropriate curriculum and assessment approaches across that age span; and should have in-depth knowledge and skills in at least two of the three periods: infants/toddlers, preschool/prekindergarten, and early primary grades. Without knowing about the *past* and the *future* (the precursors to children’s current development and learning and the trajectory they will follow in later years), teachers cannot design effective learning opportunities within their specific professional assignment.

In addition, today’s inclusive early childhood settings—those that include young children with developmental delays and disabilities—require knowledge of an even wider range of development and learning than was needed in many classrooms of the past. Without understanding a variety of professional settings and roles, as well as current and historical issues and trends that shape those settings and roles, individuals will find career and leadership opportunities in the field limited.

Many early childhood students enter college with a limited view of professional options. While all early childhood professionals should be well grounded in best practices in direct care and education, early childhood degree programs might also prepare students for work in the following roles and settings:

**Early childhood educator roles**, such as early childhood classroom teacher, family child care provider, Head Start teacher, or paraprofessional in the public schools;

**Home-family support roles**, such as home visitor, family advocate, child protective services worker, or parent educator; or

**Professional support roles**, such as early childhood administrator in a child care or Head Start program, staff trainer, peer/program mentor, or advocate at the community, state, or national level.

### Core values in professional preparation.

NAEYC’s standards for professional preparation are derived from the developmental and educational research base found in the resources at the end of this document and in related position statements, including, among others,

- Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth through Age 8;
- Early Learning Standards: Creating Conditions for Success;
- Early Childhood Mathematics: Promoting Good Beginnings;
- Learning to Read and Write: Developmentally Appropriate Practices for Young Children;
- Screening and Assessment of Young English-Language Learners;
- Promoting Positive Outcomes for Children with Disabilities: Recommendations for Curriculum, Assessment, and Program Evaluation;
- Responding to Linguistic and Cultural Diversity: Recommendations for Effective Early Childhood Education;
- Still Unacceptable Trends in Kindergarten Entry and Placement; and
- Early Childhood Curriculum, Assessment, and Program Evaluation. [www.naeyc.org/positionstatements](http://www.naeyc.org/positionstatements)

In addition to the common research base and emphasis on the centrality of field experiences, these NAEYC standards affirm the value of, for example: play in children’s lives; reciprocal relationships with families; child development knowl-

edge as a foundation for professional practice; practices and curricula that are culturally respectful and responsive; ethical behavior and professional advocacy; and in-depth field experiences in high-quality professional preparation.

### To be an excellent teacher: Professional preparation as meaning making

Young children benefit from well-planned, intentionally implemented, culturally relevant curriculum that both supports and challenges them. Research indicates the kinds of experiences that are essential to building later competence in such critical areas as language and literacy, mathematics, and other academic disciplines, as well as in gross motor development, social skills, emotional understanding, and self-regulation. The knowledge base also emphasizes the need for close relationships between young children and adults and between teachers and children's families. Such relationships and the secure base that they create are investments in children's later social, emotional, and academic competence.

Just as curriculum for young children is more than a list of skills to be mastered, professional preparation for early childhood teachers is more than a list of competencies to be assessed or a course list to complete. Early childhood students in well-designed programs develop professional knowledge, skills, and dispositions in a community of learners making sense of readings, observations, field experiences, and group projects through their interactions with others. They make connections between life experiences and new learning. They apply foundational concepts from general education course work to early childhood practice. They learn to self-assess and to advocate for themselves as students and as professionals. They strengthen their skills in written and verbal communication, learn to identify and use professional resources, and make connections between these "college skills" and lifelong professional practice.

Just as children learn best from teachers who use responsive and intentional strategies, adult students learn from instructors who create a caring community of learners, teach to enhance development and learning, plan curriculum aligned with important learning outcomes, assess student growth and development related to those outcomes, and build positive relationships with students and other stakeholders in the program.

## Responding to current challenges, needs, and opportunities

### Diversity, inclusion, and inequity

Every sector of the early childhood education community, including professional preparation programs, faces new challenges. Among them is the increased *diversity* of children and families in early childhood programs, from infant/toddler child care through the primary grades. This increased diversity is seen in the large numbers of children from culturally and linguistically diverse communities, as well as in the growing numbers of children with disabilities and other special learning needs who attend early childhood programs. A related challenge is the need to grow a more diverse teaching workforce and a more diverse leadership for the profession as a whole.

Another current challenge is the need to address the *inequities* and gaps in early learning that increase over time, developing into persistent achievement gaps in subgroups of American school children. Differences in academic achievement among ethnic groups, explained largely by socioeconomic differences, are central to the current "standards/accountability" movement in education—from infancy through the early primary grades and again as instructors of adults in early childhood preparation programs. To implement developmentally appropriate practices, early childhood professionals must "apply new knowledge to critical issues" facing the field (Copple & Bredekamp 2009).

One strategy to address these learning gaps and support children is the growth of publicly funded prekindergarten programs. Along with this strategy has come a new focus on preK-3 curriculum alignment; more high-quality professional development for teachers; partnerships between states, universities, community colleges, quality rating systems, and schools; and more highly qualified teachers in prekindergarten and early primary grades—teachers who have completed higher education degree programs with specialized early childhood preparation (Haynes 2009).

### Preparation across the birth-through-8 age range

Professional preparation program leaders must make difficult decisions as they work with limited

resources to design curriculum, field experiences, and assessment systems to prepare teachers for work across the full spectrum of the early childhood age range. Teacher licensure complicates the picture, since states' definitions of the early childhood age span and its subdivisions vary greatly and are changed frequently. Even programs that emphasize the upper end of the age range may not adequately prepare candidates in the critical content or subject matter areas needed to build children's academic success. Literacy is only one example: National reports (e.g., National Institute of Child Health and Human Development 2000) repeatedly fault teacher education for failing to provide candidates with research-based knowledge about reading and in-depth practical experience. An equally important concern is the tendency for teacher education programs to give inadequate attention to children's critical early years, especially the birth-to-age-3 period. Teachers who take positions in infant/toddler care but whose preparation has slighted that period may fail to support children's learning and development because the curriculum and teaching strategies they were taught to use are more effective with older children.

Programs also make difficult decisions related to *inclusion, diversity, and inequities* in adult education and in the early childhood field. Calls for greater formal education have not been matched by public investments in salaries and working conditions for early childhood staff, especially in early childhood programs in community-based settings that serve the vast majority of children under age 5.

Across all degree levels, NAEYC cautions programs against the superficial "mile wide and inch deep" model of professional preparation. Looking at the standards in this document, program faculty will be challenged to weigh breadth versus depth (standard by standard and element by element) within the context of their own program, student needs (including the need to acquire concepts and skills in general education), and the realities of a degree completion time frame. Every degree program that specializes in early childhood education has a responsibility to address all of the standards, each in its own way and with its own best decisions on breadth and depth. Like houses that start out with the same foundation and framework but look entirely different as rooms are added, combined, altered, and personalized, each professional preparation program may implement these

standards in distinctive ways—as long as what is implemented is of uniformly high quality.

### Field experiences

A key component of each of NAEYC's standards is hands-on field or clinical experiences, whether this is immersion in applied research for the doctoral student, systematic inquiry into their own classroom practices for the student already working in the field, or field observations for the student considering an early childhood career. Excellence in teaching requires a continuous interplay of theory, research, and practice. Supervised, reflective field experiences are critical to high-quality professional preparation. Rather than a separate standard on field experiences, programs should note that each standard includes a key element focused on application or use of knowledge and skills related to the standard. These key elements are best learned, practiced and assessed in field experiences.

The Professional Development School movement underscores the challenge of identifying and partnering with high-quality sites for education professionals to develop or refine their skills with competent mentorship and supervision. Finding a high-quality field site is a challenge across all early childhood settings—whether primary school, private preschool, child care center, or family child care home.

Many programs are working with states, communities, or local school districts to raise the qualifications of teachers already in the field—students who need to complete degree programs while maintaining current staff positions. These students may be already working in child care, Head Start, or as aides in primary grade classrooms. Other programs are deliberately providing field experiences in high-need/low-resource schools. In any of these cases, the quality of the site may not be high but the field placement may be selected for other reasons. The strongest indicator of quality is the quality of the student's opportunities to learn and practice, not the quality of the site itself.

Field experiences consistent with outcomes emphasized in NAEYC standards are

- **Well planned and sequenced**, and allow students to integrate theory, research, and practice.
- **Supported by faculty and other supervisors** who help students to make meaning of their

experiences in early childhood settings and to evaluate those experiences against standards of quality.

- **Selected to expose students to a variety** of cultural, linguistic, and ethnic settings for early childhood care and education.
- **When the settings used for field experiences** do not reflect standards of quality, students are provided with other models and/or experiences to ensure that they are learning to work with young children and families in ways consistent with the NAEYC standards.

### Faculty development

Strong professional preparation programs ensure that faculty members demonstrate the qualifications and characteristics needed to promote students' learning in relation to the NAEYC standards. Both full- and part-time faculty should have the academic and practical expertise to guide students toward mastery of the competencies reflected in NAEYC standards. In many programs, current faculty are aging and do not reflect the diversity of children or of adult college students served.

In 2008, NAEYC and the Society for Research in Child Development (SRCD) convened a meeting to develop recommendations that would advance the field of early childhood and improve outcomes for young children, especially those living in the most vulnerable circumstances. Final recommendations included,

“Create and evaluate a sustainable system of faculty professional development that incorporates adult learning principles and evidence-based practices for improving outcomes for the most vulnerable children” and

“Convene teacher preparation associations (e.g., the American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education [AACTE]) to brainstorm strategies that will increase the total number of future teacher educators, faculty, and researchers, especially from ethnically diverse backgrounds” (NAEYC & SRCD 2008, p. 593).

While strong programs put together a team of full- and part-time faculty members who each make an individual contribution, programs will be best prepared to meet the NAEYC standards when—

- All faculty are academically qualified for their specific professional roles; have had direct, substantial, professional experience; and con-

tinue to enhance their expertise in the early childhood profession.

- Faculty hold graduate degrees in early childhood education/child development or substantive early childhood course work at the graduate level and have demonstrated competence in each field of specialization they teach.
- Faculty know about and implement the principles in the position statements, NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct and Statement of Commitment, in addition to its Supplement for Early Childhood Adult Educators.
- The program uses a variety of strategies to recruit, hire, mentor, and retain a diverse faculty.

### The growing role of community colleges in teacher education

The early childhood field is increasingly committed to identifying and supporting a more diverse group of talented leaders. High-quality community college degree programs offer a promising route toward closing that gap. These programs play a critical role in providing access to higher education—and to the positions that require such education—for many groups, especially those currently underrepresented in professional leadership roles.

Cost, location, scheduling, or students' previous educational experiences can impede access to postsecondary education. Community colleges have the explicit mission of increasing access to higher education programs. Consequently, most community colleges offer courses in English as a second language and developmental courses in reading, writing, and mathematics for students who need that additional support.

Almost half of all higher education students in the United States—including 43 percent of African American and the majority of Native American and Hispanic undergraduates—are enrolled in community colleges. Two-thirds of community college students attend part-time. More than 80 percent of community college students work either full- or part-time, and 39 percent are the first in their families to attend college (AACC 2009).

As part of their effort to be responsive to students' varied needs, community colleges offer a variety of educational or degree options. The American Association of Community Colleges

(AACC) recommends the following terminology: The Associate of Arts (A.A) degree generally emphasizes the arts, humanities, and social sciences; typically, three-quarters of the work required is general education course work. The Associate of Sciences (AS) degree generally requires one-half of the course work in general education, with substantial mathematics and science. The Associate in Applied Science (A.A.S) degree prepares the student for direct employment, with one third of the course work in general education. While many students who seek A.A.S degrees do not intend to transfer, these degrees are not intended to create barriers to transfer. “The [A.A.S] degree programs must be designed to recognize this dual possibility and to encourage students to recognize the long-term career possibilities that continued academic study will create” (AACC 1998).

According to estimates from Early and Winton’s (2001) national sample, more than 700 institutions of higher education offer associate degree programs in early childhood education. The majority of these are in community colleges. The general community college population is more culturally and linguistically diverse than the student populations in other institutions of higher learning. Early childhood students in two-year programs represent greater diversity than do early childhood students in four-year programs.

Increasing numbers of students entering early childhood associate degree programs have been working—most in child care or Head Start programs (Early & Winton 2001). Many of those students continue to work while attending college part-time. These students are taking the lead in their own education, developing long-term career goals as they improve the quality of their current work with young children and families.

The career goals of students in these programs vary. For some, the degree may enhance their current position, build on a prior Child Development Associate (CDA) credential, and perhaps lead to greater responsibilities in the setting where they work. Although these work settings vary widely, Early and Winton’s (2001) data suggest that proportionately more associate degree students work or plan to work with infants and toddlers than do students in four-year programs and many entering students have been working in family child care or child care administrative positions.

### **Transfer and articulation: meeting immediate needs while keeping doors open**

Most early childhood associate degree programs focus on preparing students for direct work with young children in settings outside of primary school classrooms—positions that generally do not require baccalaureate degrees or early childhood teacher certification. However, many community college students are planning to transfer into a four-year college, heading toward teacher certification or other work in the early childhood field. A strong general education foundation together with an introduction to early childhood professional issues and skills is often the combination these students seek.

Still other students enter a community college program with a relatively limited set of objectives (e.g., to take one course that meets a child care licensing requirement or to receive college credit for work toward the CDA) but find unexpected pleasure and challenge in higher education. With support, such students often continue through the associate degree toward a baccalaureate degree and beyond.

Students who need time to succeed in developmental reading, writing, and mathematics courses also need time to develop confidence, skills, and career goals before deciding whether to seek transfer into a four-year institution. Early tracking of students into nontransfer or terminal programs can perpetuate the idea that little education is needed to teach our youngest children. In addition, premature tracking may create unnecessary barriers to students’ future options—a serious concern given the higher proportions of students of color in community college programs. Tracking students into nontransfer programs deprives the field of opportunities for these students to become part of a more diverse leadership.

The strongest associate and baccalaureate degree programs serving students already in the field are attempting to keep transfer doors open through high-quality professional course work offered concurrently with strong general education and also by designing programs that simultaneously enhance one’s current practice while still maintain transfer options from associate to baccalaureate to graduate degree programs. Increasing numbers of associate degree programs are offering distance learning, noncredit to credit course work, courses offered at worksites, and specialized



courses that support particular settings and roles such as family child care or infant/toddler teacher.

### **Institutional and policy supports**

Two recent surveys indicate some of the challenges facing early childhood degree programs as they strive to deliver high quality birth-through-age-8 preparation. A 2006 study found that only one-third (266) of accredited early childhood baccalaureate degree programs were designed as four-year programs, were housed in regionally accredited institutions of higher education, and offered both preschool and K–3 preparation. The study examines explicit and embedded preparation for diverse, multicultural, or inclusive classrooms and recommends a more comprehensive developmental theory and pedagogy, “transformation” of faculty, and attention to developing new leaders. The capacity of institutions and faculty to undertake these deep quality improvements is unclear, as are the market constraints posed by competition from alternative certification programs and from teacher specializations that are in more demand in the job market (Ray, Bowman, & Robbins 2006).

Hyson et al. (2009) surveyed 231 of an estimated 1,200 higher education institutions offering a degree in early childhood education. A large majority of programs at all degree levels (72 to 77 percent) relied heavily on NAEYC standards to guide program quality and improvement work. Most frequently, improvement efforts were focused on developing new student assessments, improving field experiences, and redesigning course work. Across degree levels, programs were focused on improvements related to preparation for linguistic and cultural diversity and to appropriate assessment of young children. The study makes a number of recommendations, including (1) invest in more full-time faculty with early childhood backgrounds, (2) expand faculty knowledge about research and evidence-based practices, (3) promote and support accreditation for higher education programs, and (4) strengthen connections between associate, baccalaureate, and graduate programs.

NAEYC’s *Workforce Designs: A Public Policy Blueprint for State Early Childhood Professional Development Systems* offers guiding principles for states as they develop policy related to professional standards, career pathways, articulation, advisory structures, data, and financing. These guiding principles promote stronger integration

across early childhood systems (teacher licensing, Head Start, prekindergarten, child care); quality improvement beyond minimum requirements; attention to diversity, inclusion and access issues; and building in compensation parity with rising qualifications (LeMoine 2008).

High-quality early childhood programs develop intentional responses to these current challenges. While a number of programs are engaged in quality improvements and innovative initiatives, there is a pressing need for faculty leadership from both current and new faculty as well as for institutional and policy support for efforts to improve early childhood professional preparation (e.g., Bowman 2000; Zaslow 2005; Washington 2008; Lutton 2009).

## **Components and organization of the standards**

The standards that follow include a number of interconnected components. Those components, and their organization, are outlined below.

### **Core standards**

There are six core standards, each of which describes in a few sentences what well-prepared students should know and be able to do. It is important to note, then, that the standard is not just that students know something about child development and learning—the expectations are more specific and complex than that.

### **Supporting explanations**

Each standard includes a rationale or “supporting explanation,” which offers a general description of why that standard is important.

### **Key elements**

Three to five “key elements” within each standard clarify its most important features. These key elements break out components of each standard, highlighting what students should know, understand, and be able to do.

### **Examples of opportunities to learn and practice and of learning assessments**

Guidance for programs seeking ECADA and NCATE accreditation will include examples of how early childhood degree programs might help students

learn and practice the knowledge, skills, and professional dispositions within that aspect of the standard.

Accreditation materials will also include examples of opportunities to learn and practice—examples of ways that faculty might assess or document student growth and development.

## Terminology

**Assessment.** In these standards the term *assessment* refers primarily to the methods through which early childhood professionals gain understanding of children’s development and learning. Systematic observations and other informal and formal assessments enable candidates to appreciate children’s unique qualities, to develop appropriate goals, and to plan, implement, and evaluate effective curriculum (see Standard 3). Secondly, *assessment*, here, refers to the formal and informal assessments of adult students as required for degree completion. In higher education accreditation systems, these are referred to as “key assessments” and provide evidence that the degree program and its graduates meet the NAEYC standards.

**Candidates/students.** Refers to college students who are candidates for completion of an early childhood professional preparation program. In some cases, these students are also candidates for professional licensure or certification.

**Children.** This term is used throughout the standards rather than *students* to refer to the young children in early childhood classrooms, child care homes, and other early childhood settings. In this document, child/children refers to young children in the period of early childhood development, from birth through age 8.

**Culture.** Includes ethnicity, racial identity, economic class, family structure, language, and religious and political beliefs, which profoundly influence each child’s development and relationship to the world.

**Developmentally Appropriate Practice.** Refers to the NAEYC position statement first developed in 1985 and most recently revised in 2009. The term *developmentally appropriate practice*, or DAP for short, refers to a framework of principles and guidelines for practice that promotes young children’s optimal learning and development.

**Field experiences.** Includes field observations, fieldwork, practica, and student teaching or other clinical experiences such as home visiting.

**Inclusion and diversity.** Is not a separate standard, but is integrated into each standard. The phrase “each child” or “all children” is used to emphasize that every standard is meant to include all children: children with developmental delays or disabilities, children who are gifted and talented, children whose families are culturally and linguistically diverse, children from diverse socioeconomic groups, and other children with individual learning styles, strengths, and needs.

**Technology.** Is not a separate standard, but is woven throughout the standards. Early childhood teachers understand technology and media as important influences on children’s development. They use technology as one way of communicating with families and sharing children’s work, while recognizing the importance of using other communication methods for families with limited internet access. Similarly, they use technology in child assessment and as a professional resource with colleagues and for their own professional development.

**Young children.** Refers to children in the developmental period known as early childhood. Although developmental periods do not rigidly correspond to chronological age, early childhood is generally defined as including all children from birth through age 8.

# Standards Summary

## Standard 1. Promoting Child Development and Learning

Students prepared in early childhood degree programs are grounded in a child development knowledge base. They use their understanding of young children's characteristics and needs and of the multiple interacting influences on children's development and learning to create environments that are healthy, respectful, supportive, and challenging for each child.

### Key elements of Standard 1

**1a:** Knowing and understanding young children's characteristics and needs

**1b:** Knowing and understanding the multiple influences on development and learning

**1c:** Using developmental knowledge to create healthy, respectful, supportive, and challenging learning environments

### Supporting explanation

The early childhood field has historically been grounded in a child development knowledge base, and early childhood programs have aimed to support a broad range of positive developmental outcomes for all young children. Although the scope and emphasis of that knowledge base have changed over the years and while early childhood professionals recognize that other sources of knowledge are also important influences on curriculum and programs for young children, early childhood practice continues to be deeply linked with a "sympathetic understanding of the young child" (Elkind 1994).

Well-prepared early childhood degree candidates base their practice on sound **knowledge and understanding of young children's characteristics and needs**. This foundation encompasses multiple, interrelated areas of children's development and learning—including physical, cognitive, social, emotional, language, and aesthetic domains; play, activity, and learning processes; and motivation to learn—and is supported by coherent theoretical perspectives and by current research.

Candidates also understand and apply their understanding of the **multiple influences on young children's development and learning** and

of how those influences may interact to affect development in both positive and negative ways. Those influences include the cultural and linguistic contexts for development, children's close relationships with adults and peers, economic conditions of children and families, children's health status and disabilities individual developmental variations and learning styles, opportunities to play and learn, technology and the media, and family and community characteristics. Candidates also understand the potential influence of early childhood programs, including early intervention, on short- and long-term outcomes for children.

Candidates' competence is demonstrated in their ability to **use developmental knowledge to create healthy, respectful, supportive, and challenging learning environments** for all young children (including curriculum, interactions, teaching practices, and learning materials). Such environments reflect *four critical features*.

- First, the environments are *healthy*—that is, candidates possess the knowledge and skills needed to promote young children's physical and psychological health, safety, and sense of security.
- Second, the environments reflect *respect* for each child as a feeling, thinking individual and then for each child's culture, home language, individual abilities or disabilities, family context, and community. In respectful environments, candidates model and affirm antibias perspectives on development and learning.
- Third, the learning environments created by early childhood teacher candidates are supportive. Candidates demonstrate their belief in young children's ability to learn, and they show that they can use their understanding of early childhood development to help each child understand and make meaning from her or his experiences through play, spontaneous activity, and guided investigations.
- Finally, the learning environments that early childhood candidates create are appropriately *challenging*. In other words, candidates apply their knowledge of contemporary theory and research to construct learning environments that provide achievable and stretching experiences for all children—including children with special abilities and children with disabilities or developmental delays.

## Standard 2. Building Family and Community Relationships

Students prepared in early childhood degree programs understand that successful early childhood education depends upon partnerships with children's families and communities. They know about, understand, and value the importance and complex characteristics of children's families and communities. They use this understanding to create respectful, reciprocal relationships that support and empower families and to involve all families in their children's development and learning.

### Key elements of Standard 2

**2a:** Knowing about and understanding diverse family and community characteristics

**2b:** Supporting and engaging families and communities through respectful, reciprocal relationships

**2c:** Involving families and communities in their children's development and learning

### Supporting explanation

Because young children's lives are so embedded in their families and communities and research indicates that successful early childhood education depends upon partnerships with families and communities, early childhood professionals need to thoroughly understand and apply their knowledge in this area.

First, well-prepared candidates possess **knowledge and understanding of diverse family and community characteristics** and of the many influences on families and communities. Family theory and research provide a knowledge base. Socioeconomic conditions; family structures, relationships, stresses, and supports (including the impact of having a child with special needs); home language; cultural values; ethnicity; community resources, cohesiveness, and organization—knowledge of these and other factors creates a deeper understanding of young children's lives. This knowledge is critical to the candidates' ability to help children learn and develop well.

Second, candidates possess the knowledge and skills needed to **support and engage diverse families through respectful, reciprocal relationships**. Candidates understand how to build posi-

tive relationships, taking families' preferences and goals into account and incorporating knowledge of families' languages and cultures. Candidates demonstrate respect for variations across cultures in family strengths, expectations, values, and childrearing practices. Candidates consider family members to be resources for insight into their children, as well as resources for curriculum and program development. Candidates know about and demonstrate a variety of communication skills to foster such relationships, emphasizing informal conversations while also including appropriate uses of conferencing and technology to share children's work and to communicate with families.

In their work, early childhood teacher candidates develop cultural competence as they build relationships with diverse families, including those whose children have disabilities or special characteristics or learning needs; families who are facing multiple challenges in their lives; and families whose languages and cultures may differ from those of the early childhood professional. Candidates also understand that their relationships with families include assisting families in finding needed resources, such as mental health services, health care, adult education, English language instruction, and economic assistance that may contribute directly or indirectly to their children's positive development and learning. Well-prepared early childhood candidates are able to identify such resources and know how to connect families with appropriate services, including help with planning transitions from one educational or service system to another.

Finally, well-prepared candidates possess essential skills to **involve families and communities in many aspects of children's development and learning**. They understand and value the role of parents and other important family members as children's primary teachers. Candidates understand how to go beyond parent conferences to engage families in curriculum planning, assessing children's learning, and planning for children's transitions to new programs. When their approaches to family involvement are not effective, candidates evaluate and modify those approaches rather than assuming that families "are just not interested."

### Standard 3. Observing, Documenting, and Assessing to Support Young Children and Families

Students prepared in early childhood degree programs understand that child observation, documentation, and other forms of assessment are central to the practice of all early childhood professionals. They know about and understand the goals, benefits, and uses of assessment. They know about and use systematic observations, documentation, and other effective assessment strategies in a responsible way, in partnership with families and other professionals, to positively influence the development of every child.

#### Key elements of Standard 3

**3a:** Understanding the goals, benefits, and uses of assessment

**3b:** Knowing about and using observation, documentation, and other appropriate assessment tools and approaches

**3c:** Understanding and practicing responsible assessment to promote positive outcomes for each child

**3d:** Knowing about assessment partnerships with families and with professional colleagues

#### Supporting explanation

Although definitions vary, in these standards the term *assessment* includes all methods through which early childhood professionals gain understanding of children's development and learning. Ongoing, systematic observations and other informal and formal assessments are essential for candidates to appreciate children's unique qualities, to develop appropriate goals, and to plan, implement, and evaluate effective curriculum. Although assessment may take many forms, early childhood candidates demonstrate its central role by embedding assessment-related activities in curriculum and daily routines so that assessment becomes a habitual part of professional life.

Well-prepared early childhood candidates can explain the central **goals, benefits, and uses of assessment**. In considering the goals of assessment, candidates articulate and apply the concept of *alignment*—good assessment is consistent with and connected to appropriate goals, curriculum,

and teaching strategies for young children. The candidates know how to use assessment as a positive tool that supports children's development and learning and improves outcomes for young children and families. Candidates are able to explain positive uses of assessment and exemplify these in their own work, while also showing an awareness of the potentially negative uses of assessment in early childhood programs and policies.

Many aspects of effective assessment require collaboration with families and with other professionals. Through **partnerships with families and with professional colleagues**, candidates use positive assessment to identify the strengths of families and children. Through appropriate screening and referral, assessment may also result in identifying children who may benefit from special services. Both family members and, as appropriate, members of interprofessional teams may be involved in assessing children's development, strengths, and needs. As new practitioners, candidates may have had limited opportunities to experience such partnerships, but they demonstrate essential knowledge and core skills in team building and in communicating with families and colleagues from other disciplines.

Early childhood assessment includes **observation and documentation and other appropriate assessment strategies**. Effective teaching of young children begins with thoughtful, appreciative, systematic observation and documentation of each child's unique qualities, strengths, and needs. Observation gives insight into how young children develop and how they respond to opportunities and obstacles in their lives. Observing young children in classrooms, homes, and communities helps candidates develop a broad sense of who children are—as individuals, as group members, as family members, as members of cultural and linguistic communities. Candidates demonstrate skills in conducting systematic observations, interpreting those observations, and reflecting on their significance. Because spontaneous *play* is such a powerful window on all aspects of children's development, well-prepared candidates create opportunities to observe children in playful situations as well as in more formal learning contexts.

Many *young children with disabilities* are included in early childhood programs, and early identification of children with developmental delays or disabilities is very important. All begin-

ning professionals, therefore, need essential knowledge about how to collect relevant information, including appropriate uses of screening tools and play-based assessments, not only for their own planning but also to share with families and with other professionals. Well-prepared candidates are able to choose valid tools that are developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate; use the tools correctly; adapt tools as needed, using assistive technology as a resource; make appropriate referrals; and interpret assessment results, with the goal of obtaining valid, useful information to inform practice and decision making.

Although assessment can be a positive tool for early childhood professionals, it has also been used in inappropriate and harmful ways. Well-prepared candidates understand and practice **responsible assessment**. Candidates understand that responsible assessment is ethically grounded and guided by sound professional standards. It is collaborative and open. Responsible assessment supports children, rather than being used to exclude them or deny them services. Candidates demonstrate understanding of appropriate, responsible assessment practices for culturally and linguistically diverse children and for children with developmental delays, disabilities, or other special characteristics. Finally, candidates demonstrate knowledge of legal and ethical issues, current educational concerns and controversies, and appropriate practices in the assessment of diverse young children.

## Standard 4. Using Developmentally Effective Approaches to Connect with Children and Families

Students prepared in early childhood degree programs understand that teaching and learning with young children is a complex enterprise, and its details vary depending on children's ages, characteristics, and the settings within which teaching and learning occur. They understand and use positive relationships and supportive interactions as the foundation for their work with young children and families. Students know, understand, and use a wide array of developmentally appropriate approaches, instructional strategies, and tools to connect with children and families and positively influence each child's development and learning.

### Key elements of Standard 4

- 4a:** Understanding positive relationships and supportive interactions as the foundation of their work with children
- 4b:** Knowing and understanding effective strategies and tools for early education
- 4c:** Using a broad repertoire of developmentally appropriate teaching/learning approaches
- 4d:** Reflecting on their own practice to promote positive outcomes for each child

### Supporting explanation

Early childhood candidates demonstrate that they understand the theories and research that support **the importance of relationships and high-quality interactions in early education**. In their practice, they display warm, nurturing interactions with each child, communicating genuine liking for and interest in young children's activities and characteristics. Throughout the years that children spend in early childhood settings, their successful learning is dependent not just on instruction but also on personal connections with important adults. Through these connections children develop not only academic skills but also positive learning dispositions and confidence in themselves as learners. Responsive teaching creates the conditions within which very young children can explore and learn about their world. The close attachments children develop with their teachers/caregivers, the expectations and beliefs that adults have about young children's capacities, and the warmth and responsiveness of adult-child interactions are powerful influences on positive developmental and educational outcomes. How children expect to be treated and how they treat others are significantly shaped in the early childhood setting. Candidates in early childhood programs develop the capacity to build a caring community of learners in the early childhood setting.

Early childhood professionals need a **broad repertoire of effective strategies and tools** to help young children learn and develop well. Candidates must ground their curriculum in a set of core approaches to teaching that are supported by research and are closely linked to the processes of early development and learning. In a sense, those approaches *are* the curriculum for infants and toddlers, although academic content can certainly be embedded in each of them. With preschool and

early primary grade children, the relative weight and explicitness of subject matter or academic content become more evident in the curriculum, yet the core approaches or strategies remain as a consistent framework. Engaging conversations, thought-provoking questions, provision of materials, and spontaneous activities are all evident in the candidate's repertoire of teaching skills.

Candidates demonstrate the essential *dispositions* to develop positive, respectful relationships with children whose cultures and languages may differ from their own, as well as with children who may have developmental delays, disabilities, or other learning challenges. In making the transition from family to a group context, very young children need continuity between the practices of family members and those used by professionals in the early childhood setting. Their feelings of safety and confidence depend on that continuity. Candidates know the cultural practices and contexts of the young children they teach, and they adapt practices as they continue to develop *cultural competence*—culturally relevant knowledge and skills.

Well-prepared early childhood professionals make purposeful use of various learning formats based on their understanding of children as individuals and as part of a group, and on alignment with important educational and developmental goals. A flexible, research-based **repertoire of teaching/learning approaches to promote young children's development** includes

- Fostering oral language and communication
- Drawing from a continuum of teaching strategies
- Making the most of the environment, schedule, and routines
- Setting up all aspects of the indoor and outdoor environment
- Focusing on children's individual characteristics, needs, and interests
- Linking children's language and culture to the early childhood program
- Teaching through social interactions
- Creating support for play
- Addressing children's challenging behaviors
- Supporting learning through technology.
- Using integrative approaches to curriculum

All of these teaching approaches are effective across the early childhood age span. From the infant/toddler room to the early grades, young children are developing not only early language and reading skills but also the *desire* to communicate, read, and write. They are developing not only early math and science skills and concepts but also the *motivation* to solve problems. They are developing empathy, sociability, friendships, self-concept and self-esteem. Concept acquisition, reasoning, self-regulation, planning and organization, emotional understanding and empathy, sociability—development of all of these is deeply entwined with early experiences in mathematics, language, literacy, science, and social studies in the early education program.

Early childhood professionals make decisions about their practice based on expertise. They make professional judgments through each day based on knowledge of child development and learning, individual children, and the social and cultural contexts in which children live. From this knowledge base, effective teachers design activities, routines, interactions and curriculum for specific children and groups of children. They consider both what to teach and how to teach, developing the habit of **reflective, responsive and intentional practice** to promote positive outcomes for each child.

## Standard 5. Using Content Knowledge to Build Meaningful Curriculum

Students prepared in early childhood degree programs use their knowledge of academic disciplines to design, implement, and evaluate experiences that promote positive development and learning for each and every young child. Students understand the importance of developmental domains and academic (or content) disciplines in an early childhood curriculum. They know the essential concepts, inquiry tools, and structure of content areas, including academic subjects, and can identify resources to deepen their understanding. Students use their own knowledge and other resources to design, implement, and evaluate meaningful, challenging curricula that promote comprehensive developmental and learning outcomes for every young child.

## Key elements of Standard 5

**5a:** Understanding content knowledge and resources in academic disciplines

**5b:** Knowing and using the central concepts, inquiry tools, and structures of content areas or academic disciplines

**5c:** Using their own knowledge, appropriate early learning standards, and other resources to design, implement, and evaluate meaningful, challenging curricula for each child.

### Supporting explanation

Strong, effective early childhood curricula do not come out of a box or a teacher-proof manual. Early childhood professionals have an especially challenging task in developing effective curricula. As suggested in Standard 1, well-prepared candidates ground their practice in a thorough, research-based understanding of young children’s development and learning processes. In developing curriculum, they recognize that every child constructs knowledge in personally and culturally familiar ways. In addition, in order to make curriculum powerful and accessible to all, well-prepared candidates develop curriculum that is free of biases related to ethnicity, religion, gender, or ability status—and, in fact, the curriculum actively counters such biases.

The teacher of children from birth through age 8 must be well versed in **the essential content knowledge and resources in many academic disciplines**. Because children are encountering those content areas for the first time, early childhood professionals set the foundations for later understanding and success. Going beyond conveying isolated facts, well-prepared early childhood candidates possess the kind of content knowledge that focuses on the “big ideas,” methods of investigation and expression, and organization of the major academic disciplines. Thus, the early childhood professional knows not only *what* is important in each content area but also *why* it is important—how it links with earlier and later understandings both within and across areas. Because of its central place in later academic competence, the domain of language and literacy requires in-depth, research-based understanding and skill. Mathematics too is increasingly recognized as an essential foundation.

Teachers of young children demonstrate the understanding of **central concepts, inquiry tools, and structure of content areas** needed to provide appropriate environments that support learning in each content area for all children, beginning in infancy (through foundational developmental experiences) and extending through the primary grades. Candidates demonstrate basic knowledge of the research base underlying each content area and of the core concepts and standards of professional organizations in each content area. They rely on sound resources for that knowledge. Finally, candidates demonstrate that they can analyze and critique early childhood curriculum experiences in terms of the relationship of the experiences to the research base and to professional standards.

Well-prepared candidates choose their approaches to the task depending on the ages and developmental levels of the children they teach. They use their own **knowledge, appropriate early learning standards, and other resources to design, implement, and evaluate meaningful, challenging curriculum for each child**. With the youngest children, early childhood candidates emphasize the key experiences that will support later academic skills and understandings—with reliance on the core approaches and strategies described in standard 4 and with emphasis on oral language and the development of children’s background knowledge. Working with somewhat older or more skilled children, candidates also identify those aspects of each subject area that are critical to children’s later academic competence. With all children, early childhood professionals support later success by modeling engagement in challenging subject matter and by building children’s faith in themselves as young learners—young mathematicians, scientists, artists, readers, writers, historians, economists, and geographers (although children may not think of themselves in such categories).

Early Childhood curriculum content/discipline areas include learning goals, experiences, and assessment in the following academic disciplines or content areas:

- Language and literacy
- The arts—music, creative movement, dance, drama, and visual arts
- Mathematics



- Science
- Physical activity, physical education, health and safety
- Social studies

Designing, implementing, and evaluating meaningful, challenging curriculum requires alignment with appropriate early learning standards and knowledgeable use of the discipline's resources to focus on key experiences for each age group and each individual child.

Early childhood teacher candidates, just like experienced teachers, go beyond their own basic knowledge to identify and use high-quality resources, including books, standards documents, Web resources, and individuals who have specialized content expertise in developing early childhood curriculum. In addition to national or state standards (NAEYC & NAECS/SDE 2002), or several larger goals are also held by all early childhood teachers:

- **Security and self-regulation.** Appropriate, effective curriculum creates a secure base from which young children can explore and tackle challenging problems. Well-implemented curriculum also helps children become better able to manage or regulate their expressions of emotion and, over time, to cope with frustration and manage impulses effectively rather than creating high levels of frustration and anxiety.
- **Problem-solving and thinking skills.** Candidates who have skills in developing and implementing meaningful, challenging curricula will also support young children's ability—and motivation—to solve problems and think well.
- **Academic and social competence.** Because good early childhood curriculum is aligned with young children's developmental and learning styles, it supports the growth of academic and social skills.

With these goals in mind, candidates develop curriculum to include both planned and spontaneous experiences that are developmentally appropriate, meaningful, and challenging for all young children, including those with developmental delays or disabilities; address cultural and linguistic diversities; lead to positive learning outcomes; and, as children become older, develop positive dispositions

toward learning within each content area.

## Standard 6. Becoming a Professional

Students prepared in early childhood degree programs identify and conduct themselves as members of the early childhood profession. They know and use ethical guidelines and other professional standards related to early childhood practice. They are continuous, collaborative learners who demonstrate knowledgeable, reflective, and critical perspectives on their work, making informed decisions that integrate knowledge from a variety of sources. They are informed advocates for sound educational practices and policies.

### Key elements of Standard 6

**6a:** Identifying and involving oneself with the early childhood field

**6b:** Knowing about and upholding ethical standards and other professional guidelines

**6c:** Engaging in continuous, collaborative learning to inform practice

**6d:** Integrating knowledgeable, reflective, and critical perspectives on early education

**6e:** Engaging in informed advocacy for children and the profession

The early childhood field has a distinctive history, values, knowledge base, and mission. Early childhood professionals, including beginning teachers, have a strong **identification and involvement with the early childhood field** to better serve young children and their families. Well-prepared candidates understand the nature of a profession. They know about the many connections between the early childhood field and other related disciplines and professions with which they may collaborate while serving diverse young children and families. Candidates are also aware of the broader contexts and challenges within which early childhood professionals work. They consider current issues and trends that might affect their work in the future.

Because young children are at such a critical point in their development and learning, and because they are vulnerable and cannot articulate their own rights and needs, early childhood professionals have compelling responsibilities to **know about and uphold ethical guidelines and other**

**professional standards.** The profession's code of ethical conduct guides the practice of responsible early childhood educators. Well-prepared candidates are very familiar with NAEYC's Code of Ethical Conduct and are guided by its ideals and principles. This means honoring their responsibilities to uphold high standards of confidentiality, sensitivity, and respect for children, families, and colleagues. Candidates know how to use the Code to analyze and resolve professional ethical dilemmas and are able to give defensible justifications for their resolutions of those dilemmas. Well-prepared candidates also know and obey relevant laws, such as those pertaining to child abuse, the rights of children with disabilities, and school attendance. Finally, candidates are familiar with relevant professional guidelines, such as national, state, or local standards for content and child outcomes; position statements about, for example, early learning standards, linguistic and cultural diversity, early childhood mathematics, technology in early childhood, prevention of child abuse, child care licensing requirements, and other professional standards affecting early childhood practice.

**Continuous, collaborative learning to inform practice** is a hallmark of a professional in any field. An attitude of inquiry is evident in well-prepared candidates' writing, discussion, and actions. Whether engaging in classroom-based research, investigating ways to improve their own practices, participating in conferences, or finding resources in libraries and on Internet sites, candidates demonstrate self-motivated, purposeful learning that directly influences the quality of their work with young children. Candidates—and professional preparation programs—view graduation or licensure not as the final demonstration of competence but as one milestone among many, including professional development experiences before and beyond successful degree completion.

At its most powerful, learning is socially constructed in interaction with others. Even as beginning teachers, early childhood candidates demonstrate involvement in collaborative learning communities with other candidates, higher education faculty, and experienced early childhood practitioners. By working together on common challenges, with lively exchanges of ideas, members of such communities benefit from one another's perspectives. Candidates also demonstrate understanding of and essential skills in interdisciplinary

collaboration. Because many children with disabilities and other special needs are included in early childhood programs, every practitioner needs to understand the role of the other professionals who may be involved in young children's care and education (e.g., special educators, reading specialists, speech and hearing specialists, physical and occupational therapists, school psychologists). Candidates demonstrate that they have the essential communication skills and knowledge base to engage in interdisciplinary team meetings as informed partners and to fulfill their roles as part of Individualized Family Service Plan and Individualized Education Program (IFSP/IEP) teams for children with developmental delays or disabilities. They use technology effectively with children, with peers, and as a professional resource.

Well-prepared candidates' practice is influenced by **knowledgeable, reflective, and critical perspectives**. As professionals, early childhood candidates' decisions and advocacy efforts are grounded in multiple sources of knowledge and multiple perspectives. Even routine decisions about what materials to use for an activity, whether to intervene in a dispute between two children, how to organize nap time, what to say about curriculum in a newsletter, or what to tell families about new video games are informed by a professional context, research-based knowledge, and values. In their work with young children, candidates show that they make and justify decisions on the basis of their *knowledge* of the central issues, professional values and standards, and research findings in their field. They also show evidence of *reflective approaches* to their work, analyzing their own practices in a broader context, and using reflections to modify and improve their work with young children. Finally, well-prepared candidates display a *critical stance*, examining their own work, sources of professional knowledge, and the early childhood field with a questioning attitude. Their work demonstrates that they do not just accept a simplistic source of truth; instead, they recognize that while early childhood educators share the same core professional values, they do not agree on all of the field's central questions. Candidates demonstrate an understanding that through dialogue and attention to differences, early childhood professionals will continue to reach new levels of shared knowledge.

Finally, early childhood candidates demonstrate that they can engage in **informed advocacy for children and families and the profession**. They know about the central policy issues in the field, including professional compensation, financing of the early education system, and standards setting and assessment. They are aware of and engaged in examining ethical issues and societal concerns about program quality and provision of early childhood services and the implications of those issues for advocacy and policy change. Candidates have a basic understanding of how public policies are developed, and they demonstrate essential advocacy skills, including verbal and written communication and collaboration with others around common issues.

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### The 2008–2009 Standards Work Group

#### **Becky Brinks**

Child Development Program Director, Grand Rapids Community College, Michigan  
Chair, Commission on NAEYC Early Childhood Associate Degree Accreditation

#### **Julie Bullard**

Director, Early Childhood Education, University of Montana–Western, Dillon, Montana  
NAEYC Reviewer and Audit Team member, NCATE

#### **Josué Cruz Jr.**

President and CEO, Council for Professional Recognition, Washington, D.C.

#### **Sharon Fredericks**

Education Division Director/Instructor, College of Menominee Nation, Green Bay, Wisconsin  
Community College faculty in ECADA Self Study, Head Start Higher Education Grantee

#### **John Johnston**

Professor and Director of Assessment, College of Education, University of Memphis, Tennessee  
NAEYC Reviewer, Audit Team, and Specialty Areas Standards Board member, NCATE

#### **Frances O’Connell Rust**

Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs, Dean of Faculty, Erikson Institute, Chicago, Illinois

#### **Ursula Thomas-Fair**

Assistant Professor, University of West Georgia, Carrollton, Georgia