

**Invest in Kids Working Group Meeting Summary**  
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National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)  
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At the June 19, 2006 Invest in Kids Working Group meeting, Mark Ginsberg and Adele Robinson of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), discussed accreditation of childcare programs with a specific focus on the NAEYC early childhood program accreditation system.

NAEYC accreditation is used as a lever for early childhood education quality improvement processes in public and private childcare centers. NAEYC early childhood program accreditation, first established in 1985, recently underwent a major revision of its standards, criteria, and processes. New early childhood program standards were developed with a national commission of researchers and noted experts, technical resources teams with experts in various fields, the UCLA Center for Improving Child Care Quality, and input and feedback from more than 1,000 stakeholders.

The reinvented accreditation system includes 10 program standards which may be demonstrated through more than 400 criteria, a clear four-step process for meeting the standards, new assessment instruments and assessor training so as not to rely on volunteers, and an improved evaluation system with more data collection. As part of the new process, providers must first enroll in a self study to benchmark their program's performance and improve their own practices. Once a program is a candidate for accreditation, onsite visits are conducted with one business day notice (accredited programs also receive visits) and focus on the criteria within each program standard. Some criteria are always assessed, some are randomly assessed, and a third group of "emerging criteria" are also assessed, but do not prohibit programs from receiving accreditation. For example, the emerging criteria include having a certified playground inspector and all teachers holding bachelor's degrees.

Mark described how NAEYC keeps their accreditation program affordable and accessible by spreading the costs over several years and by providing scholarships funded through the NAEYC and philanthropic groups. Furthermore, Adele showed NAEYC's newly developed materials and tools that allow all early child care centers to improve their programs, whether or not they participate in the accreditation process.

Many states use NAEYC accreditation as a benchmark that may be equated to higher reimbursement rates, tax credits, state prekindergarten dollars, and other quality-related incentives. The military child care system requires accreditation by NAEYC for center-based programs as do programs serving the families of federal employees.

After the formal presentation, the Invest in Kids Working Group discussed the following topics:

Lack of Ratings System—Why does a program receive only a yes/no result, why cannot the centers be rated with stars or levels? NAEYC is currently working to appropriately address this situation as well as whether or not states should set interim steps.

**Progress of Children**—How good are progress standard tools? While NAEYC judges the program standards (the conditions of learning), the states judge the early learning standards. There remains a need for people trained in child progress to evaluate early learning progress.

**Cost of NAEYC Accreditation**—How much does it cost a center to participate in the accreditation process? The fees depend on the center size and are around \$425 to receive the material; around \$200 to apply for accreditation; and \$650-\$1175 for the site visit. The real costs experienced by the center are the improvement costs required to reach a high level of quality.

**Drop-out Rate**—How many centers stay with the accreditation process? About 75% of programs entering the process pass and about 10-15% of centers that didn't pass originally, make it through. With the self-study at the beginning of the process, many programs do not apply for accreditation until they are sure they have the requirements.

**Popular Web-Site**—The web-site [www.rightchoiceforkids.org](http://www.rightchoiceforkids.org) is NAEYC's most popular web site as it allows users to search for accredited early childcare centers close to their zip code.

**Quality Concerns**—How does the NAEYC make sure accredited programs maintain quality standards? NAEYC has a complaint hotline, reserves the right to suspend accreditation, and a large program change (such as a new director) will spark another review.

**Centers Served**—NAEYC accredits programs that serve both high- and low-income children. Site visits are currently only in English, but they conduct visits in bilingual centers. Except for military bases, the NAEYC only accredits early childcare centers in America.