

Choosing Accreditation

A guide to recognizing quality in early childhood education, Fall/Winter 2007-2008



Is your child's early education setting accredited? Does it make any difference?

According to the U.S. Department of Education, one in three children enter kindergarten without the skills they need to succeed in school. Unfortunately, when children start behind they often stay behind. Early childhood education is one proven way to prepare children for success in school and in life.

Parents choosing an early childhood education program need meaningful, consistent standards to evaluate a program's quality. Accreditation can provide valuable insights into how a pre-school, kindergarten, or child care program emphasizes learning, along with good health and safety. However, accrediting bodies utilize different standards of varying detail and depth. As a result, parents must look out for a quality gap that is emerging in accreditation.

The following quality comparison provides basic information on national accrediting bodies. The systems in this comparison are national in scope and open to child care, preschool and kindergarten programs regardless of curricular approach or affiliation with a particular religious organization or broader social service agency. This research is based on information that was available to the general public, such as parents or legislators, in December 2007.

NAEYC Accreditation is the nation's leading system for ensuring high-quality settings for all children from birth to kindergarten. To achieve NAEYC Accreditation, programs must meet 80 percent of the criteria they are assessed on in each of the ten standards. Even to be a candidate for accreditation, programs must meet a threshold of strict requirements on qualifications for administrators and teachers. Families of more than one million children nationwide rely upon NAEYC Accreditation as the mark of a quality education.



NAEYC thanks the following individuals for their research and contributions to this report: Dorea Kleker, Doctoral Student, Language Reading and Culture of the University of Arizona, College of Education, Arizona AEYC, Jonathan Mack, Student, Winston-Salem State University and Blue Engine Message & Media.

This quality comparison is based on information available on public web sites as of December 2007. U/A denotes that no information was available to the public. For media inquiries, please contact Don Owens, (202) 350-8857, dowens@naeyc.org. For accreditation inquiries, please contact Katrina Corcoran, (202) 232-8777, kcorcoran@naeyc.org

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STANDARDS AND PRACTICES FOR ACCREDITATION

Educator, Classroom and Curriculum	NAEYC¹	NAC²	APPLE³	NECPA⁴
1. Preschool teacher staff to student ratio is 1:10 or smaller for a maximum group of 20 children	YES	NO	U/A	U/A
2. Every group of children must be accompanied by a person trained in health and safety	YES	NO	U/A	U/A
3. Curriculum criteria track age-appropriate development, and must include science, math, social studies & literacy components	YES	NO	U/A	U/A
Standards and Criteria	NAEYC¹	NAC²	APPLE³	NECPA⁴
4. Programs must meet at least 80 percent of criteria for accreditation	YES	NO	U/A	U/A
5. All criteria reviewed and updated within a five year period	YES	NO	U/A	NO
6. Accreditation criteria are based on research and evidence	YES	U/A	U/A	YES
Ensuring Reliability in Accreditation	NAEYC¹	NAC²	APPLE³	NECPA⁴
7. Unannounced site visits occur throughout accreditation term	YES	YES	U/A	U/A
8. Requires five days of training for site visitors	YES	NO	NO	NO
9. Site visitors are tested to ensure reliability and consistency	YES	U/A	U/A	U/A
10. Number of accredited programs nationally	9,009	1000	U/A	180
Pre-Visit Requirements	NAEYC¹	NAC²	APPLE³	NECPA⁴
Program administrators and teachers must meet 100 percent of qualification requirements to pursue accreditation	YES	U/A	U/A	U/A

U/A denotes information was not available to the public

¹ National Association for the Education of Young Children

² National Accreditation Commission, a program of the

National Association of Child Care Professionals

³ Accredited Professional Preschool Learning Environment,

a program of the Florida Association for Child Care Management

⁴ National Early Childhood Program Accreditation

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Since NAEYC first began accrediting early childhood education programs in the 1980s, research and experience has contributed to our understanding of how children learn. NAEYC continues to respond to findings from research and evidence, new trends in the early childhood education workforce and evolving needs for young children to ensure that its accreditation is the nation's highest standard. Following is a more detailed explanation of the basic information, standards and procedures used in this comparison.

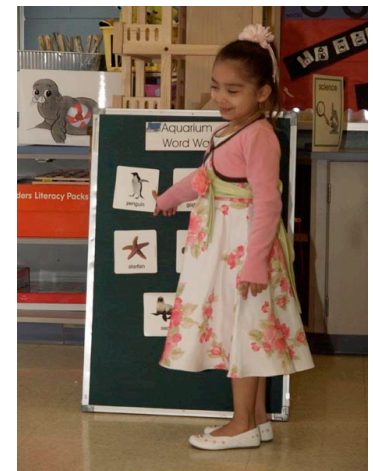
1. Preschool teacher staff to student ratio is 1:10 or smaller for a maximum group of 20 children: NAEYC accreditation criteria for groups of 4-year-olds directs the ratio of teachers to students to be 1:10 in a maximum class of 20, 1:9 in a group of 18, and 1:8 in a group of 16 children. Fewer children per teacher and smaller groups of children are required to meet the criteria for younger age groups. NAC's teacher to student ratio for four year olds is 1:10 to 1:12, for groups of between 20-24 students. APPLE and NECPA do not make group sizes or student to staff ratio requirements available to the public.

2. Every group of children must be accompanied by a person trained in health and safety. In addition to meeting 80 percent of the safety criteria on which a program is assessed, NAEYC accreditation requires every group of students to be accompanied by staff trained in pediatric first aid. NAC only requires first aid and CPR, and does not stipulate that each group must be accompanied by a trained staff member. APPLE and NECPA do not make criteria on safety available to the public.

3. Curriculum criteria track age-appropriate development, and must contain science, math, social studies and literacy components: A curriculum that draws on research and a teacher's knowledge of individual children will foster growth across developmental and content areas. NAEYC criteria for curriculum vary by age and challenge programs to offer age-appropriate lessons in math, science, and literacy skills, as well as creative expression, self-initiated learning and group activities. NAC curriculum are not age specific. APPLE and NECPA do not make curriculum requirements available to the public.

4. Programs must meet at least 80 percent of criteria for accreditation. To attain NAEYC Accreditation, programs must meet 80 percent of the criteria on which they are assessed in each of the ten standards, ranging from health and safety to curriculum, to program management. NAC considers "overall compliance" to award accreditation. APPLE and NECPA do not make available to the public what is necessary to achieve accreditation.

5. All criteria reviewed and updated within a five year period: NAEYC standards were most recently updated in 2005. NAC gradually revises criteria and standards and does not have an official date of revision. APPLE does not make the date of its most recent revision to criteria and standards available to the public. NECPA released its most recent revision of standards and criteria in 2000.



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6. Accreditation criteria are based on research and evidence: Thousands of educators, administrators, researchers and individuals from around the country provided feedback on NAEYC's accreditation criteria. A research team from the University of California Los Angeles conducted field tests to develop valid and reliable measurement tools. NAC and APPLE do not make sources for accreditation criteria public. NECPA developed its criteria in conjunction with Pennsylvania State University.

7. Unannounced site visits occur throughout accreditation term: NAEYC conducts random unannounced visits to accredited programs. NAEYC Accredited programs are eligible for an unannounced site visit at any point during their five year term of accreditation. Results from unannounced visits do impact accreditation status. NAC requires site visits for accreditation, and accredited centers may be visited without notice to verify continued adherence to NAC Standards. APPLE utilizes unannounced site visits for accreditation and states that visits are also possible for renewal, but does not indicate if unannounced site visits continue throughout the accreditation term. NECPA does not inform the public if it makes unannounced visits during the accreditation term.

8. Requires five days of training for site visitors: NAEYC requires that its assessors have a minimum of a baccalaureate degree with credit bearing hours associated with both child development and learning from birth through kindergarten. NAEYC also requires its assessors to attend a five day training on tools and assessor reliability. NAC does not make its assessor/verifier training requirements available to the public. APPLE requires two days of training for its verifiers. NECPA verifiers are trained by conducting one joint assessment with an experienced verifier.

9. Site visitors are tested to ensure reliability and consistency: NAEYC requires that site visitors (assessors) have five days of training and must demonstrate reliable use of tools. NAEYC continually monitors for assessor reliability through spot joint visits with NAEYC staff and through tracking of assessor performance and accreditation decisions. NAC, APPLE and NECPA do not publicly present assessor reliability testing methods.

10. Number of accredited programs nationally: NAEYC has accredited more than 9,000 programs in all 50 United States and overseas. NAC has accredited approximately 1000 programs in all 50 United States. APPLE does not make the number of its accredited facilities available to the public. NECPA has accredited approximately 180 programs.

PRE-VISIT REQUIREMENTS

Program administrators and teachers must meet 100 percent of qualification requirements to pursue accreditation. Even to become a candidate for NAEYC accreditation, programs must meet 100 percent of administrator and teacher qualification requirements identified for this step. NAC, APPLE and NECPA do not make candidacy requirements available to the public.

NAEYC Accreditation criteria are divided into ten standards

