

# NAEYC ACCREDITATION IN GEORGIA

A Position Statement of the  
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*GAYC...Rising to meet Georgia's challenges in early care and education.  
GAYC is the Georgia State Affiliate of the  
National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC).*

Adopted October 2006

Updated May 2008

## INTRODUCTION

William A. Foster once said, *"Quality is never an accident; it is always the result of high intention, sincere effort, intelligent direction and skillful execution; it represents the wise choice of many alternatives."*

NAEYC Accreditation is a perfect example of the existence of such quality. Accreditation takes a steadfast commitment, remarkable effort and hard work, and a belief that quality child care is necessary and crucial to the successful development of young children.

NAEYC Accreditation is a voluntary system by which programs measure themselves against a national set of standards. The number of programs pursuing NAEYC Accreditation has grown rapidly since its inception in 1985; there are currently about 8950 programs that have achieved NAEYC Accreditation. According to the Wall Street Journal (March 24, 2006), NAEYC Accreditation "is regarded as the gold standard by parents, educators, and facilities," and it is endorsed by early childhood experts such as T. Berry Brazelton, M.D. (as cited in <http://www.naeyc.org/academy>).

## GAYC SUPPORTS NAEYC ACCREDITATION

As an association of early childhood professionals, the mission of the Georgia Association on Young Children is to encourage and support healthy development in young children by working with others (1) to increase public awareness of the importance of early childhood education, and (2) to improve the quality of programs for young children through learning opportunities for early childhood educators. Given this, GAYC is committed to increasing the overall standards for quality early care and education in Georgia. GAYC views NAEYC Accreditation as one means to achieve quality, and endeavors to:

- Collaborate with NAEYC to remain a visible, leading resource on NAEYC accreditation
- Assist programs in understanding NAEYC's accreditation system in this next era

- Promote confidence in, and enthusiasm for, the new accreditation system and the benefits of earning NAEYC Accreditation
- Provide information on financial resources to assist in applying for and/or maintaining accreditation
- Assist programs in identifying existing resources in their communities to help with implementing NAEYC program standards
- Arrange training and educational opportunities on why accreditation is important
- Encourage corporate support for accreditation

Quality early care and education is essential for the future success of Georgia's children, and GAYC recognizes NAEYC Accreditation as an outstanding, leading measurement of quality for early childhood programs that can assist Georgia in improving the quality of early care and education.

## **RATIONALE**

The Georgia Association on Young Children (GAYC) has developed this position statement, and invited other organizations to embrace the recommendations contained herein, in an effort to:

- Promote broad based dialogue about the need for quality improvement in Georgia
- Serve as a resource for those considering NAEYC Accreditation
- Influence public policy regarding early learning standards in Georgia
- Encourage programs to provide learning environments that will foster better educational and developmental outcomes for Georgia's children
- Increase the number of programs in Georgia seeking NAEYC Accreditation

Currently, there are approximately 3,100 child care learning centers in Georgia, and only 307 of those are NAEYC Accredited. However, Georgia is currently experiencing more support for early childhood issues than ever before with the creation of a state department in 2004 dedicated to early care and education, Bright from the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning. The sole vision of Bright from the Start is "High quality early learning experiences are accessible to all children in Georgia." With a state department dedicated to early care and education, Georgia has a unique opportunity that most other states do not have available-- government support of early care and education issues to improve the quality of child care in Georgia.

Improvement is necessary. The first five years of life are the most important in determining a child's later success in school and life. With Georgia routinely falling within the lowest 8% in rankings nationally for education, Georgia must make changes now in how children are prepared for school, long before children arrive in school settings.

Several studies have found that quality early care and education provided in the first 5 years of life provides positive short and long term benefits in health, academic success, and general well

being. Four key studies of programs have also shown that many of the long term benefits last well into adulthood (as cited in Heckman, Grunewald, & Reynolds, 2006). These four programs include The High Scope/Perry Preschool (Schweinhart, et al.), Abecedarian Project (Campbell, Ramey, Pungello, Sparling, & Miller-Johnson), Chicago Child-Parent Centers (Reynolds, Temple, Robertson, & Mann), and The Nurse Family Partnership (NFP; Olds et al.).

Cost-benefit ratios have also been analyzed to determine whether investing in quality early childhood programs makes economic sense. It has been determined that investing in quality early childhood programs often provides more return for the economy than traditional economic development initiatives, such as new buildings and tourist attractions. In fact, investing in early education programs can provide substantial benefits relative to costs. In just the four studies mentioned above, economic benefits were determined to range from \$3.78-\$17.07 per every investment dollar spent in the programs.

Given the substantial amount of research asserting the importance of the first five years of life in health, overall development, well-being, and academic success, Georgia needs to use this information to proactively and vigorously improve the early education opportunities provided to children in this state.

## **WHAT CAN GEORGIA DO?**

To increase the quality of early care and education in Georgia, GAYC recommends agencies, organizations, and companies throughout Georgia work together to:

- Educate others...the general public, parents, and legislators about the importance of quality early childhood programs and the short and long term benefits to be gained.
- Design and implement a quality rating system that is easy to use to help families, as well as others, identify quality child care.
- Increase overall standards for early education programs in Georgia.
- Educate early education programs on the importance of providing high quality programming and the difference they can make in the lives of children and families.
- Encourage early education programs to pursue higher quality designations beyond state licensing, such as NAEYC Accreditation.

## **HOW NAEYC ACCREDITATION SUPPORTS QUALITY EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION**

NAEYC provides 10 Early Childhood Program Standards and Accreditation Criteria which promote quality early care and education. Those standards are:

1. *Relationships*: The program promotes positive relationships among all children and adults to encourage each child's sense of individual worth and belonging as

part of a community and to foster each child's ability to contribute as a responsible community member.

2. *Curriculum:* The program implements a curriculum that is consistent with its goals for children and promotes learning and development in each of the following areas: social, emotional, physical, language, and cognitive.
3. *Teaching:* The program uses developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate and effective teaching approaches that enhance each child's learning and development in the context of the programs' curriculum goals.
4. *Assessment of Child Progress:* The program is informed by ongoing systematic, formal, and informal assessment approaches to provide information on children's learning and development. These assessments occur within the context of reciprocal communications with families and with sensitivity to the cultural contexts in which children develop. Assessment results are used to benefit children by informing sound decisions about children, teaching, and program improvement.
5. *Health:* The program promotes the nutrition and health of children and protects children and staff from illness and injury.
6. *Teachers:* The program employs and supports a teaching staff that has the educational qualifications, knowledge, and professional commitment necessary to promote children's learning and development and to support families' diverse needs and interests.
7. *Families:* The program establishes and maintains collaborative relationships with each child's family to foster children's development in all settings. These relationships are sensitive to family composition, language, and culture.
8. *Community Relationships:* The program establishes relationships with and uses the resources of the children's communities to support the achievement of program goals.
9. *Physical Environment:* The program has a safe and healthful environment that provides appropriate and well-maintained indoor and outdoor physical environments. The environment includes facilities, equipment, and materials to facilitate child and staff learning and development.
10. *Leadership and Management:* The program effectively implements policies, procedures, and systems that support stable staff and strong personnel, fiscal, and program management so all children, families, and staff have high-quality experiences.

## CONCLUSION

As The Southern Early Childhood Association (SECA) once said, “Everyone concerned with children’s development shares the responsibility for quality child care. This responsibility even extends beyond parents, educators, and human service professionals to our policy makers and the leaders in neighborhoods and business communities.”

This too is GAYC’s stance. The Georgia Association on Young Children supports efforts to increase the quality of early care and education in Georgia and nationally, and NAEYC Accreditation is the most nationally recognized means of reaching high quality standards.

**Position Statement Developers:** GAYC Accreditation and Quality Improvement Committee with significant contributions by Jerri Kropp, Ph.D., Chair, and Jennifer L. Waters, M.Ed., Committee Member.

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