

## **National Program Accreditation and Quality Rating and Improvement Systems**

Quality rating and improvement systems (QRIS) have gained prominent attention and shined a spotlight on continuous quality improvement in the early childhood and school-age fields. They have seen major growth over the past 8 years - expanding from 3 statewide QRIS in 1999 to the current 14 statewide QRIS in Colorado, District of Columbia, Iowa, Kentucky, Maryland, Montana, New Hampshire, New Mexico, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, and Vermont. All but one of the statewide QRIS allow all licensed settings - child care centers, family child care homes, and school-age programs - to participate.

QRIS use state regulation and licensing as a foundation and build a progressive set of benchmarks, in steps or levels, toward higher program quality. Thirteen of the statewide QRIS link to national program accreditation. Optimally, the top level of a QRIS should include accreditation by the three major national program accrediting bodies - the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), the National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC), and the National AfterSchool Association (NAA).

Leaders of these organizations believe that their accreditation systems are valuable identifiers of high quality. In fact, accreditation by these national organizations is a valid measure of quality. Although each of the major national program accrediting bodies focuses on different sectors, all three share the same goals to provide high-quality care and education and positive learning experiences for children. To this end, NAEYC, NAFCC, and NAA are working together to disseminate information about their accreditation systems and promote the understanding that quality improvements are essential for all children. This collaboration is working to promote evidence- and research-based quality indicators that will build awareness and recognition of the importance of national early childhood and school-age program accreditation.

The key roles that these organizations play in the early childhood and school-age fields are clear. NAEYC is the largest organization of early childhood professionals, representing almost 100,000 early childhood professionals who work with children 0-8. NAFCC's membership is nearly 7,000, representing almost 300,000 family child care providers. NAFCC is dedicated to strengthening the profession of family child care by promoting high quality, professional early care and education and strengthening communities where providers live and work. NAA membership includes more than 9,000 practitioners, policy makers, and administrators representing all public, private, and community-based sectors of after-school and out-of-school time programs, as well as school-age and after-school programs on military bases, both domestic and international. Collectively, the major national accrediting bodies accredit almost 13,000 programs.

Following are descriptive summaries of each of the three major national early childhood and school-age program accrediting systems.

## **National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Early Childhood Program Accreditation**

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) established its voluntary, national early childhood education program accreditation system in 1985. The system, now the NAEYC Academy for Early Childhood Program Accreditation, accredits center- and school-based programs serving children birth through kindergarten. To become NAEYC-Accredited, a program must meet each of NAEYC's 10 Program Standards.

In 1999, the NAEYC Governing Board launched a 5-year initiative to reinvent its accreditation system. A National Commission on Accreditation Reinvention was established to conduct a comprehensive review of the design of NAEYC's early childhood program accreditation system and to set a course for the next 20 years. The Commission recommended an entirely new accreditation system with a strong focus on credibility, reliability and accountability.

In 2002, NAEYC's Governing Board created the Commission on NAEYC Early Childhood Program Standards and Accreditation Criteria. This Commission was comprised of a panel of national experts in early childhood education, curriculum, early childhood special education, child health, family involvement, leadership, and program administration. It was charged with developing distinct early childhood program standards and research-based accreditation criteria for each program standard as the measure of quality for this reinvented accreditation system. NAEYC also sought and received extensive input from thousands of individuals on the new accreditation criteria including: NAEYC members, current practitioners, experts in various fields of study and representatives from other professional organizations. This feedback was incorporated into the final version of the criteria.

NAEYC's reinvented accreditation system includes four distinct steps and requirements that clarify the NAEYC accreditation process and help programs prepare for each step. NAEYC views these steps and requirements as a bridge to help all early childhood programs, and the early childhood field in general, move to higher levels of program quality. The reinvented system includes:

- ❖ New program assessment tools and procedures field tested by independent researchers;
- ❖ Intensive training and monitoring of the individuals who make on-site assessment visits to ensure that assessments are conducted reliably;
- ❖ Five-year term of accreditation with random unannounced visits, strengthened annual reports; and
- ❖ New policy and procedures for verifying that NAEYC-accredited programs sustain the level of quality associated with the standards and criteria.

## **National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC) Accreditation**

The National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC) sponsors the only nationally recognized accreditation system designed specifically for family child care. NAFCC originally launched a family child care accreditation program in 1988 using a system that had been modified from a center-based model. However, NAFCC did not own this earlier model and could make no changes to better reflect the unique qualities of a family child care program. The organization's intent has always been to design and administer a family child care accreditation program that truly reflects the field.

Development of the current NAFCC system began in 1994 through extensive research and a four-year consensus building process involving hundreds of providers, parents, and early care and education experts. Accreditation supports NAFCC's mission of strengthening the profession of family child care by promoting high-quality, professional early care and education and strengthening communities where providers live and work.

The Quality Standards for NAFCC Accreditation address five content areas: relationships, the environment, developmental learning activities, safety and health, and professional and business practices. By meeting the quality standards for family child care, providers deliver child care that is high-quality and appropriate for young children.

The steps to attain NAFCC Accreditation include application, self study, observation, scoring and decision. During the self study step providers learn about their strengths, identify areas for improvement, design a professional development plan, and prepare for the observation visit. The self study step motivates providers to put their training and the standards into everyday practice of caring for children.

NAFCC Accreditation defines standards of quality for the field of family child care. It helps parents and policymakers recognize the components of high-quality family child care and serves as a model for state professional development systems.

## **National AfterSchool Association (NAA) Accreditation**

In 1997, the National AfterSchool Association (NAA) launched a nationally recognized system of Program Improvement and Accreditation that promotes quality and addresses the needs of children and youth, 5 to 14 years, in afterschool programs. The Accreditation system, based on NAA's Standards for Quality School-Age Care, provides an objective standard of evaluation and has been accepted by state agencies establishing tiered reimbursement for quality programs. NAA has accredited more than 1,500 programs since the system's inception.

The *NAA Standards for Quality School-Age Care* are categorized in six areas: human relationships, indoor environment, outdoor environment, activities, safety, health and nutrition and administration. The steps to become accredited include self study,

application, endorsement visit, and the accreditation decision. During the self study process, programs take an in-depth look at their program and identify strengths, areas for improvement, create an action plan, complete surveys and questionnaires and prepare for the endorsement visit.

**Matrix of the Nation's Major Early Childhood and School-Age Program Accreditation Systems:**  
**National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)**  
**National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC)**  
**National AfterSchool Association (NAA)**

	<i>NAEYC Early Childhood Program Accreditation System</i>	<i>NAFCC Accreditation System</i>	<i>NAA Accreditation System</i>
<b>Date System Began</b>	1985	1988	1997
<b>Number of Accredited Programs (As of Fall 2007)</b>	10,000	2,048	569
<b>Entities Accredited</b>	Early Childhood Programs that serve children birth through kindergarten (preschool, child care, kindergarten, public & private)	Programs that operate as family child care programs (including those called family day homes, family homes, group homes, family child care homes, and other local designations)	School-Age Care Programs serving children and youth ages 5-14
<b>Where Accredited</b>	United States and Overseas (if programs are associated with the US federal government)	United States and Overseas (if programs are associated with the US federal government)	United States and Military Installations overseas
<b>Accreditation Term</b>	5 years	3 years	4 years
<b>Evidence/Research-Based Criteria?</b>	Yes	Yes. Each standard has research-based rationales.	Yes. The <i>ASQ system, Advancing School-Age Child Care Quality</i> , is a researched-based system.

	<i>NAEYC Early Childhood Program Accreditation System</i>	<i>NAFCC Accreditation System</i>	<i>NAA Accreditation System</i>
<b>Are There Eligibility and/or Candidacy Requirements?</b>	<p>Yes.</p> <p>Eligibility requirements (Step 2):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Licensed/regulated</li> <li>• In operation for at least one year at time of candidacy</li> <li>• At least 10 children enrolled</li> <li>• Located in the United States or its territories (unless affiliated with U.S. government schools and child development centers or programs)</li> <li>• Willing to meet each of NAEYC's 10 Early Childhood Program Standards</li> </ul> <p>Candidacy requirements (Step 3):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Specific qualifications for the program administrator, teachers and assistant teachers</li> <li>• Licensed/regulated, with no serious issues of noncompliance</li> <li>• Collaborative process of self-assessment</li> <li>• Belief that program can meet each of NAEYC's 10 Early Childhood Program Standards and document satisfactory performance on at least 80% of the NAEYC Accreditation Criteria for each standard</li> </ul>	<p>Yes. Family child care providers must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• have a high school diploma or GED</li> <li>• be at least 21 years of age</li> <li>• provide care to children for a minimum of 15 hours per week</li> <li>• provide care to a minimum of 3 children in a home environment (at least one child must live outside the provider's home).</li> <li>• be the primary caregiver, spending at least 80% of the operating hours actively involved with the children.</li> <li>• have 90 clock hours of training when the observation visit is requested.</li> <li>• have at least 18 months experience as a family child care provider before the observation visit or 12 months experience if home visits are conducted monthly and intensive training is received.</li> <li>• meet the highest level of regulation available in their state to operate a family child care program.</li> </ul>	<p>Yes</p>

	<i>NAEYC Early Childhood Program Accreditation System</i>	<i>NAFCC Accreditation System</i>	<i>NAA Accreditation System</i>
<b>Date of Most Recent Revision to Standards/Criteria</b>	2005	2005	1996
<b>Stakeholders Involved in Revision of Standards/Criteria</b>	Commission on NAEYC Early Childhood Program Standards and Accreditation Criteria, NAEYC Governing Board, Council for NAEYC Accreditation, NAEYC Affiliate leaders, NAEYC members, Accreditation Facilitation Projects, experts and practitioners from the field (NAEYC had an open process for soliciting feedback on draft criteria)	NAFCC Accreditation staff, the NAFCC Accreditation Council, NAFCC Accreditation Commissioners, experts in the field, providers, observers, and accreditation project staff	N/A

	<i>NAEYC Early Childhood Program Accreditation System</i>	<i>NAFCC Accreditation System</i>	<i>NAA Accreditation System</i>
<b>Steps in Accreditation Process</b>	<p>Four:</p> <p><b>Step 1: Enrollment</b> - Self-study process. No requirements.</p> <p><b>Step 2: Application</b> - Program must meet eligibility requirements. Complete self-assessment, choose Candidacy date.</p> <p><b>Step 3: Candidacy</b> - Submission of Candidacy materials. Candidacy requirements must be met to receive a site visit.</p> <p><b>Step 4: Site Visit</b> - Site visit conducted.</p> <p>Accreditation Decision - Programs that meet each of the 10 standards and all required criteria become NAEYC-Accredited.</p> <p>Maintaining Accreditation - Submission of Annual Reports, possibility of unannounced visit.</p>	<p>Four:</p> <p><b>Step 1: Application</b> phase</p> <p><b>Step 2: Self-study</b> phase during which quality improvements relative to the standards are made</p> <p><b>Step 3: Observation</b> phase during which a peer review is completed</p> <p><b>Step 4: Decision</b> phase when the provider receives the accreditation decision</p>	<p>Seven:</p> <p><b>Steps 1–3:</b> Purchase Standards and Program Improvement and Accreditation materials</p> <p><b>Step 4:</b> Submit Letter of Intent</p> <p><b>Step 5:</b> Submit Application</p> <p><b>Step 6:</b> Receive Endorsement Visit and NAA decision</p> <p><b>Step 7:</b> Submit Annual Continuous Improvement and Interim Reports</p>

	<i>NAEYC Early Childhood Program Accreditation System</i>	<i>NAFCC Accreditation System</i>	<i>NAA Accreditation System</i>
<b>Reliably Trained Site Visitors?</b>	Yes	Yes	NAA Endorsers, all of whom are volunteers, receive a 20-hour training over two days. Endorsers are required to attend a 4 hour “refresher” training every 2 years.
<b>Accreditation Process Includes Comprehensive Self-Evaluation for Entities?</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>From What Sources Does the Accreditation System Obtain Information about How the Program Meets the Standards/Criteria?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Observation</li> <li>• Documentation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Classroom Portfolios</li> <li>✓ Program Portfolios</li> <li>✓ Staff Files</li> <li>✓ Child Files</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Survey of Teaching Staff</li> <li>• Survey of Families</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Observation</li> <li>• Documentation</li> <li>• Parent surveys</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Observations</li> <li>• Questionnaires to the staff, families, children/youth and the host</li> <li>• Staff survey</li> </ul>

	<i>NAEYC Early Childhood Program Accreditation System</i>	<i>NAFCC Accreditation System</i>	<i>NAA Accreditation System</i>
<b>Licensing/Regulatory Requirement</b>	Yes - required to be an eligible Applicant. For Candidacy, programs must have no serious issues of noncompliance within the last year or since its last inspection.	Yes. To be eligible provider must be licensed at the highest level of regulation available and in compliance with all licensing requirements.	Yes. Program must be legally operating under laws of their state. If licensing is required by the governing state, proof of licensure must be provided.
<b>Stakeholders Included in the Accreditation Process (within the program)</b>	Families, teachers, staff, administration	Parents, providers, children, accreditation facilitation projects, businesses, communities, quality rating systems, licensing agencies, public and private partnerships - anyone with an interest in high quality care	Host agency, parents, staff, children
<b>Site Visitor Type (staff, volunteer, combination)</b>	Regional Assessors (under contract, compensated) and Local Assessors (reimbursed for expenses)	Observers are currently paid a stipend to defray the expenses of conducting an observation visit. NAFCC is exploring implementing a paid observer system or a combination of paid/volunteer observers.	NAA Endorsers are volunteers.

	<i>NAEYC Early Childhood Program Accreditation System</i>	<i>NAFCC Accreditation System</i>	<i>NAA Accreditation System</i>
<b>Required Annual Reporting</b>	Yes	No. This is currently being considered. Accredited providers are required to be in compliance with licensing regulations and to maintain their regulated status.	Yes. Program must submit a continual compliance statement along with an interim report.
<b>Unannounced Visits to Accredited Entities</b>	Yes	No	No
<b>Independent Ongoing Verification of Program Compliance?</b>	Yes	No	Yes
<b>Failure to Maintain Program Compliance with Accreditation Standards Results in...?</b>	Revocation	Revocation	Revocation
<b>Failure to Maintain Program Compliance with Local Licensing Requirements Results in...?</b>	Revocation	Revocation	Revocation

	<i>NAEYC Early Childhood Program Accreditation System</i>	<i>NAFCC Accreditation System</i>	<i>NAA Accreditation System</i>
<b>Does the Accreditation System Have a Decision Appeals Process?</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>Is the Renewal/Reaccreditation Process Comprehensive?</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>How Does Renewal/Reaccreditation Process Compare to the Initial Accreditation Process?</b>	The process is the same.	The process itself is exactly the same. The primary difference is that in order for the accreditation status to be uninterrupted, accredited programs that are renewing typically spend a shorter time in self-study than programs that are becoming accredited for the first time. NAFCC sends renewal notices approximately 9 months before the expiration date of accreditation to allow sufficient time for the process.	The process is the same.
<b>What are the Possible Outcomes of the Accreditation Process?</b>	Accredited Deferred Denied	Accredited Deferred Denied	Accredited Deferred

If you have additional questions, please email:  
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