



Making the Case For Supporting NAEYC Accreditation

*As A Strategy For Improving The Success of NYC's Young Children
As They Prepare For And Enter School*

What is the role of early education programs in helping young children be ready for success in school?

Beginning with the Perry Preschool study and continuing with other rigorously evaluated early childhood education programs, evidence has mounted that these programs helped young children, especially disadvantaged children,¹ become better prepared to enter and succeed in school.²

Evidence about the long-term results from these programs is also building — results that have taken 20 or more years to observe.³ As adolescents and adults, the children who experienced high quality, comprehensive early education when they were 3 and 4 years old were more likely to be on a positive life course and less likely to be on a negative one. That is, these children were more likely to have finished high school, avoided teen pregnancy and juvenile delinquency, and to be employed than similar individuals who were not in the intervention program.

Leading economists have quantified these benefits to society as a whole — for every \$1 invested in quality preschool programs, benefits can range from \$1.26 to as much as \$17,⁴ with an estimated return on investment of 12 percent.⁵

What characterizes an early education program of high quality — that is, a program that is effective in helping young children be ready for success in school?

A recent article in *Education Week* summarizes the features of early childhood programs that promote child development and school readiness as:

- Small class sizes and low child-to-staff ratios
- Curricula and instruction that engage children as active learners
- Well-trained teachers and ongoing staff supervision and training
- Substantial outreach to parents through home visits, group meetings, and classroom participation
- A minimum threshold of program exposure (two-and-a-half hours per day, five days per week)
- At least two years of participation.

Other factors correlated with high quality programs include low staff turnover, stability in administrative leadership, and higher rates of staff compensation.⁶

As more and more becomes known about how program quality translates into results for children, greater emphasis is being given to the relationships and experiences offered to children. These include:

- Being with a responsive teacher/caregiver
- Having learning experiences and other aspects of care individualized to meet the child's development level and needs
- Being in a classroom that is rich in language, both oral and written
- Having access to developmentally appropriate materials and activities.⁷

How does NAEYC accreditation assist programs to improve and sustain quality?

Accreditation ensures that early education programs assess themselves against and make changes to meet a set of standards. Some of these standards are “structural” — such as class size, child-to-staff ratios, and teacher qualifications. Others are “relational” — how teachers interact with the children, the learning experiences the children have, and how parents are engaged.



NAEYC-accredited centers have been found to be of higher quality on many dimensions, both structural and relational:

- Employ staffs with more formal education and specialized early childhood training
- Provide a more developmentally appropriate environment with age-appropriate and child-initiated activities
- Develop a physical environment that is child-centered and designed to promote learning
- Have teaching staff that interact more sensitively and less harshly with children
- Establish better communication among staff
- Meet higher standards with regard to health, nutrition, and safety
- Have better relations with parents.⁸

In particular, accreditation was associated with improvements in teacher-child interactions and child experiences. During the process of preparing for accreditation through self-study and program improvement, staff in accredited programs became more thoughtful and respectful in their interactions with children. There were fewer teacher-directed, and more child-directed, activities. More age-appropriate activities were planned and more appropriate behavior management strategies were used. Policies and practices were changed to increase stability in teacher assignments to specific groups of children.⁹

Two key features of accreditation are the requirement that programs develop a multi-year plan for continued improvement in areas identified in the self-study process and that they reapply for accreditation at regular intervals. Experience in the field strongly suggests that this commitment to program improvements based on ongoing assessment against quality standards is critical. For example, evaluations of child care programs in North Carolina repeatedly found that classroom quality was associated with current participation in program improvement activities, but not with participation in the past.¹⁰

Are children in accredited programs more likely to be ready for success in school?

Children in early care and education programs that meet standards have more developed language skills and other indicators of school readiness and fewer behavior problems than children in lower quality programs.¹¹ This is the rationale for the development of state systems for rating early care and education settings, that go beyond the basic requirements concerned with health and safety.¹²

A recent study from Minnesota dramatically illustrates the effect of being in an accredited program for children's development. Children in accredited centers were assessed for their school readiness on six dimensions of development and compared with children statewide.¹³ The findings include:

- Children in accredited centers were almost twice as likely to be assessed as "proficient" or "school ready."
- Very few children in accredited centers were performing at the lowest level on any indicators.
- Among children in accredited centers, those from lower income families performed at the same level as those from higher income families — contrary to what is found in general.
- Low income children in the accredited centers had much higher school readiness scores than low income children in Minnesota as a whole.
- In accredited centers both children of color and white children performed equally well.
- Similarly, children of both less well and better educated parents did better than their counterparts in Minnesota statewide.

- 1 In announcing a review of the benefits of early childhood interventions such as these, the following estimate was given of the extent to which young children in the United States are at risk (RAND, January 12, 2006 www.rand.org/news/press.06/01.12.html): "Nearly half of all young children in the U.S. face at least one of four risk factors in early childhood associated with poor developmental outcomes and a lack of school readiness: living in poverty; residing in a single-parent household or with a mother who has less than a high school education; and having parents who do not speak English at home. About 16 percent of children face two or more of these risk factors."
- 2 An influential summary of research findings on early childhood development and interventions, *From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development* (J. Shonkoff and D. Phillips, eds., National Academy Press www.nap.edu/books/0309069882/html), was published in 2000, based on reviews conducted by a panel of experts convened by the National Research Council and the Institute of Medicine.
- 3 RAND researchers Karoly, Kilburn and Cannon have just published a detailed cost-benefit analysis of long-term results from the most comprehensive and rigorous evaluated interventions, *Early Childhood Interventions: Proven Results, Future Promise* (2006). See www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG341/.
- 4 See footnote 3.
- 5 "This research shows that by investing in early childhood education, governments - in partnership with private firms and nonprofit foundations — can reap extraordinarily high economic returns, benefits that are low-risk and long-lived," Art Rolnick and Rob Grunewald wrote in an article called "Early Childhood Development on a Large Scale" that appeared in the June 2005 issue of *The Region* (minneapolisfed.org/pubs/region/05-06/), a monthly magazine published by the Minneapolis Federal Reserve Bank.
- 6 "Cost, Quality, and Child Outcomes in Child Care Centers" (public report, 2nd edition), 1995 (not available on-line).
- 7 "Quality in Child Care Centers," Early Childhood Research and Policy Brief, Vol. 1, No. 1, Summer 1997, National Center for Early Development and Learning (<http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~ncedl/PDFs/brief1.pdf>).
- 8 Research summarized in "What Research Tells Us about NAEYC Accreditation" (www.naeyc.org). See also "Smart Start and Preschool Child Care Quality in North Carolina: Change over Time and Relation to Children's Readiness," Frank Graham Porter Center – University of North Carolina Smart Start Evaluation Team, March 2003.
- 9 These findings come from an intensive study of military child care centers that became accredited, as described in "Examining the Implementation and Outcomes of the Military Child Care Act of 1989," G. L. Zellman and A. Johansen, RAND, 1998.
- 10 "Smart Start and Preschool Child Care Quality in North Carolina: Change over Time and Relation to Children's Readiness," Frank Graham Porter Center – University of North Carolina Smart Start Evaluation Team, March 2003 (www.ecs.org/html/Document_noID.asp?CHouseID=4283).
- 11 "Child Outcomes When Child Care Center Classes Meet Recommended Standards for Quality," NICHD Early Child Care Network, *American Journal of Public Health*, 1999, Vol. 89, Issue 7, pages 1072-1077 (http://mbb.harvard.edu/forumseries/Regulables_paper.html).
- 12 As of the summer of 2005, ten states had put in place a quality rating system with multiple levels (see "Quality Rating Systems and the Impact on Quality in Early Care and Education Settings," National Child Care Information Center, June 2005 (www.nccic.org/poptopics/qrs-impactqualitycc.html)). At least 30 states have a statewide tiered reimbursement system with higher reimbursement/subsidy rates paid to programs that meet standards higher than licensing regulations. All but five of these systems include accreditation by a national organization in determining a program's tier, with such programs receiving between 10 and 15 percent higher state reimbursement rates (see "Stepping Up to Quality: An Overview of Childcare Tiered Reimbursement Systems," C. A. Johnson and S. G. Tragesser, Planning Council for Health and Human Services, Inc., Milwaukee WI, December 2003 (www.planning-council.org/docs/reports/tiered/)).
- 13 "School Readiness in Child Care Settings: A Developmental Assessment of Children in 22 Accredited Child Care Centers," Minnesota Department of Human Services, February 2005

*Prepared by S. A. Stephens, Ph.D. Center for Assessment and Policy Development, www.capd.org
for Quality New York NYC's Accreditation Facilitation Project, May 2006*

Quality New York Partners

Supporting Accreditation for the Early Care and Education Community

Bank Street College of Education
(212) 961-3413

Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies
(212) 801-1319

Child Care, Inc.
(212) 929-7604 x3012

www.QualityNewYork.org

