

on curriculum, assessment, and program evaluation

What should children be taught in the years from birth through age eight? How would we know if they are developing well and learning what we want them to learn? And how could we decide whether programs for children from infancy through the primary grades are doing a good job?

Answers to these questions—questions about *early childhood curriculum, child assessment, and program evaluation*—are the foundation of a joint position statement from the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education (NAECS/SDE).

The position statement's recommendations

Curriculum

Implement curriculum that is thoughtfully planned, challenging, engaging, developmentally appropriate, culturally and linguistically responsive, comprehensive, and likely to promote positive outcomes for all young children.

Indicators of effective curriculum

- Children are active and engaged.
- Goals are clear and shared by all.
- Curriculum is evidence-based.
- Valued content is learned through investigation and focused, intentional teaching.
- Curriculum builds on prior learning and experiences.
- Curriculum is comprehensive.
- Professional standards validate the curriculum's subject-matter content.
- The curriculum is likely to benefit children.

Assessment

Make ethical, appropriate, valid and reliable assessment a central part of all early childhood programs. To assess young children's strengths, progress, and needs, use assessment methods that are developmentally

Beyond Curriculum, Assessment, and Program Evaluation: What Else Matters?

Without other essential components of high-quality early childhood education, these recommendations will be of limited value. Learn more about

- early learning standards, as described in NAEYC and NAECS/SDE's 2002 position statement, online at www.naeyc.org/resources/position_statements/positions_intro.asp.
- teaching strategies and other elements of developmentally appropriate practice. See S. Bredekamp & C. Copple, eds., *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs*, rev. ed., Washington, DC: NAEYC, 1997. Position statement online at www.naeyc.org/resources/position_statements/psdap98.pdf.
- standards for early childhood programs and accreditation performance criteria, online at www.naeyc.org/accreditation/nextera.asp.
- standards for professional preparation of early childhood educators. See M. Hyson, ed., *Early Childhood Professional Preparation: NAEYC's Standards for Programs*, Washington, DC: NAEYC, 2003. Document also online at www.naeyc.org/profdev/prev_review/preprev_2001.asp.

appropriate, culturally and linguistically responsive, tied to children's daily activities, supported by professional development, inclusive of families, and connected to specific, beneficial purposes: (1) making sound decisions about teaching and learning, (2) identifying significant concerns that may require focused intervention for individual children, and (3) helping programs improve their educational and developmental interventions.

Indicators of effective assessment practices

- Ethical principles guide assessment practices.
- Assessment instruments are used for their intended purposes.
- Assessments are appropriate for ages and other characteristics of children being assessed.
- Assessment instruments are in compliance with professional criteria for quality.
- What is assessed is developmentally and educationally significant.
- Assessment evidence is used to understand and improve learning.
- Assessment evidence is gathered from realistic settings and situations that reflect children's actual performance.
- Assessments use multiple sources of evidence gathered over time.
- Screening is always linked to follow-up.
- Use of individually administered, norm-referenced tests is limited.
- Staff and families are knowledgeable about assessment.

Program evaluation and accountability

Regularly evaluate early childhood programs in light of program goals, using varied, appropriate, conceptually and technically sound evidence to determine the extent to which programs meet the expected standards of quality and to examine intended as well as unintended results.

Indicators of effective program evaluation and accountability

- Evaluation is used for continuous improvement.
- Goals become guides for evaluation.
- Comprehensive goals are used.
- Evaluations use valid designs.
- Multiple sources of data are available.
- Sampling is used when assessing individual children as part of large-scale program evaluation.

- Safeguards are in place if standardized tests are used as part of evaluations.
- Children's gains over time are emphasized.
- Well-trained individuals conduct evaluations.
- Evaluation results are publicly shared.

Creating change through support for programs

Implementing the preceding recommendations for curriculum, child assessment, and program evaluation requires a solid foundation. Calls for better results and greater accountability from programs for children in preschool, kindergarten, and the primary grades have not been backed up by essential supports for teacher recruitment and compensation, professional preparation and ongoing professional development, and other ingredients of quality early education.

The overarching need is to create an *integrated, well-financed system of early care and education* that has the capacity to support learning and development in all children, including children living in poverty, children whose home language is not English, and children with disabilities. Unlike many other countries, the United States continues to have a fragmented system for educating children from birth through age eight, under multiple auspices, with greatly varying levels of support, and with inadequate communication and collaboration.

Many challenges face efforts to provide all young children with high-quality curriculum, assessment, and evaluation of their programs. *Public commitment*, along with *investments* in a well-financed system of early childhood education and in other components of services for young children and their families, will make it possible to implement these recommendations fully and effectively.

The full NAEYC and NAECs/SDE 2003 position statement "Early Childhood Curriculum, Assessment, and Program Evaluation—Building an Effective, Accountable System in Programs for Children Birth Through Age 8" is available online at www.naeyc.org/resources/position_statements/pscape.pdf.

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