NAEYC Early Learning Program Accreditation

Policy Handbook

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Accreditation
Early Learning Programs

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National Association for the Education of Young Children

Through its work, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) provides a forum for discussion of major issues and ideas in the early childhood field, with the hope of provoking thought and promoting professional growth.

Notice: This Accreditation Policy Handbook and the accreditation requirements are subject to change. Accredited early learning programs are subject to the NAEYC Accreditation Eligibility Requirements and NAEYC Early Learning Standards and Assessment items in effect at the time of accreditation. It is the responsibility of the accredited program to maintain compliance with the standards and assessment items throughout the period of accreditation. The accreditation process is an independent appraisal of an early learning program by NAEYC. Being accredited means that, based on the information reviewed by NAEYC, the program has been found to meet the NAEYC Accreditation eligibility requirements and the standards and assessment items at the time of accreditation; however, it does not guarantee the efficacy of services offered by the accredited program. Neither NAEYC nor its officers, directors, employees, assessors, individuals serving on the Council for Accreditation, or others involved in NAEYC Accreditation of Early Learning Programs will be liable for loss, damage, or injury by reason of or in connection with any decision, action or omission related to the accreditation application, denied accreditation, or the Accreditation Eligibility Requirements, Accreditation Standards and Assessment items. for Accreditation, or others involved in NAEYC Accreditation of Early Learning Programs will be liable for loss, damage, or injury by reason of or in connection with any decision, action or omission related to the accreditation application, denied accreditation, or the Accreditation Eligibility Requirements, Accreditation Standards and Assessment items. for Accreditation, or others involved in NAEYC Accreditation of Early Learning Programs will be liable for loss, damage, or injury by reason of or in connection with any decision, action or omission related to the accreditation application, denied accreditation, or the Accreditation Eligibility Requirements, Accreditation Standards and Assessment items. for Accreditation, or others involved in NAEYC Accreditation of Early Learning Programs will be liable for loss, damage, or injury by reason of or in connection with any decision, action or omission related to the accreditation application, denied accreditation, or the Accreditation Eligibility Requirements, Accreditation Standards and Assessment items.

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NAEYC Early Learning Program (ELP) Accreditation

is guided by recommended practices in early childhood education, including those in NAEYC's seminal publication, *Developmentally Appropriate Practice* (DAP), as well as practices recommended by trusted partner organizations such as the American Academy of Pediatrics and the Children's Environmental Health Network.

Eligibility Requirements

Programs eligible to obtain or retain NAEYC Accreditation of Early Learning Programs must be:

› Serving children between the ages of 0-8 (infants, toddler/twos, preschoolers, kindergartners and/or before and after school care).

› Located in the United States or its territories, unless affiliated with United States Department of Defense schools and child development centers/programs.

› Willing to meet and demonstrate they consistently meet each of the NAEYC ELP Accreditation Standards.

› Regulated by the appropriate licensing or regulatory body, unless legally prohibited from doing so. Appropriate licensing bodies are generally state licensing agencies. Appropriate regulatory bodies refer to other public agencies such as a board of education or the U.S. military.

- Programs that are not regulated by a public agency and are not legally prohibited from obtaining a state license must document that they have taken the steps to obtain a state license. It is not necessary for the licensing process to be completed by the state before the program is eligible to apply for NAEYC Accreditation.

- Programs that are not regulated by a public agency and are legally prohibited from obtaining a state license must voluntarily comply with their state licensing requirements. The program must verify the following to demonstrate that they voluntarily comply with their state licensing requirements:

  ◦ The program administrator has reviewed the state's licensing requirements.

  ◦ The board chair, president, or owner of the program has reviewed the state's licensing requirements.

◦ The program is voluntarily in compliance with the state's licensing requirements.

◦ Upon registration of children in the program, families are provided with a copy of the state's licensing requirements and are informed that the program is voluntarily in compliance with the state's licensing requirements.

◦ The program has documentation of fire and health inspections.

◦ The program has completed a criminal background check on all staff and has complied with state and federal law concerning background checks.

◦ The program employs no individual convicted of a crime involving sexual abuse, child abuse, or neglect.

Governance and Operations

The NAEYC Governing Board has delegated authority to the Council on Accreditation of Early Learning Programs to create the standards and develop and uphold the policies and procedures associated with the accreditation system.

The Council on Accreditation of Early Learning Programs

Principal Functions

The principal functions of the Council are to exercise professional judgment in making decisions pertaining to accreditation and to set standards. The Council works with staff to develop guidance documents and data gathering instruments necessary to carry out these functions.

Composition

The Council consists of nine (9) members, who serve staggered four-year terms. It is comprised of a diverse membership, including but not limited to program and/or organizational auspices, professional experience, gender, ethnicity, and geographic variation. Council members bring a demonstrated commitment to the aims of early childhood education; an understanding of the nature of early learning programs, policy and procedures; and respect for the confidential, fair, and impartial nature of accreditation decisions. A chairperson and chair-elect are designated yearly.

Appointment of Council Members

Only NAEYC members can apply for Council appointments. The Council includes a Nominating committee to oversee the appointment process each year. NAEYC publicly solicits members to apply for Council positions, and asks current Council members to help seek and/or nominate prospective members. Interested applicants supply resumes, which are reviewed by the Nominating committee with the Senior Director of ELP Accreditation. Selections are made to achieve continued diversity and balance of Council membership.

Conduct and Confidentiality

Council members abide by standards of personal conduct that help the Council function effectively by thoroughly preparing for each Council meeting; reviewing all program information provided; assessing information critically and fairly; and conducting themselves in a professional, objective, fair manner. This includes maintaining confidentiality and refraining from conflicts of interest.

Early Learning Program Accreditation Staff

ELP Accreditation is managed by a team of individuals led by the Senior Director, ELP Accreditation. The department includes three teams that each have a specific function in ensuring that the accreditation system (1) operates efficiently, (2) assesses quality in valid and reliable ways, and (3) offers support for programs. ELP staff analyze trends in both accreditation data and early childhood research to make recommendations for updates and improvements to the Council.

Communicating with ELP Accreditation Council and Staff

Programs and the public can contact the accreditation system and the Council on Accreditation of Early Learning Programs by emailing **qualityassurance@naeyc.org** or by mailing correspondence to:

The Council on the Accreditation of Early Learning Programs
The National Association for the Education of Young Children
1401 H St. NW, Suite 600
Washington, D.C. 20005

The Four Stages of NAEYC ELP Accreditation

Stage One: Enrollment

Enroll and Conduct Self-Study

Programs submit an initial enrollment and fee to access NAEYC's self-study materials in the NAEYC Accreditation Portal, which can be accessed through the NAEYC website once a program has completed their **registration**. Enrollment is open to any program interested in using the self-study materials for program improvement; programs do not need to meet NAEYC eligibility requirements for accreditation in order to enroll.

Enrollments will not be considered complete until the enrollment and review fee are received. Upon enrollment completion, programs will be notified they are successfully enrolled in the accreditation process and will be provided access to the self-study materials.

The enrollment process is designed to create a shared understanding of the NAEYC ELP Accreditation content and system. Self-study—a key part of enrollment—is an ongoing practice for programs to use to strengthen quality. Intended to engage all stakeholders in the program, self-study is a collaborative process that strives to conduct a thorough self-evaluation that is meaningful to all stakeholders. Programs are encouraged to build their own timelines to include analysis and reflection, stakeholder involvement, data gathering, implementation of program improvements and collection of evidence of strengths related to accreditation recommended practices and assessment items.

A program's initial enrollment fee entitles them to stay in the enrollment stage for up to twelve (12) months. Programs wishing to remain in enrollment after the twelve (12) month period must submit an additional enrollment fee.

Stage Two: Application for Accreditation Eligibility

Apply and Conduct Self-Assessment

Programs must submit an application and fee for accreditation eligibility. Applicants must meet the accreditation eligibility requirements (see above) to move forward in the process. Accreditation eligibility requirements are mandatory conditions of accreditation throughout the period of accreditation. A program may be subject to potential withdrawal of accreditation at the discretion of Council if it no longer meets an accreditation eligibility requirement.

Applications will not be considered complete until the application fee is received. Upon completion of the application and successfully meeting NAEYC eligibility requirements the program is recognized as being an Applicant.

Once the application for accreditation eligibility is approved, building on the reflective work of self-study, the program will begin an improvement-focused self-assessment that involves compiling specific sources of evidence to demonstrate how it meets each of the program standards. Programs have access to online resources, which include additional self-assessment tools. Evidence includes portfolio evidence, observable evidence, and document evidence supporting the educational qualifications of teaching staff and administrators. Staff qualifications are compiled in the portal, in the program's *Staff Profiles* section. Programs are

expected to provide evidence that is authentic and representative of the policies, procedures, and practices employed by the program.

Programs may stay in the application stage for up to twelve (12) months. Programs in the Application stage must complete their Candidacy materials at some point within those twelve (12) months. Failure to submit Candidacy materials within twelve (12) months will result in the withdrawal of the program's application. Withdrawn programs will move back to the Enrollment Stage.

Stage Three: Candidacy

Once a program completes the self-assessment process and is ready for a site visit, they must complete candidacy materials in the Portal dashboard and pay a review fee. Candidacy materials are reviewed for completeness and to determine a program's readiness for a site visit. Candidacy will not be considered complete until the candidacy materials and review fee are received. Programs are notified that their candidacy is approved, recognized as a Candidate, and assigned to a NAEYC assessor to schedule a site visit. Programs will receive a site visit within six (6) months of their Candidacy approval date.

Once a program reaches the Candidacy stage they must move forward within 6 months unless the site visit is delayed by NAEYC, if a program does not proceed they will be withdrawn from Candidacy and moved back to Enrollment.

Stage Four: Meeting and Maintaining the NAEYC Program Standards

During this stage, a site visit is conducted by a NAEYC assessor. The site visit protocol is available publicly on **TORCH**, within the accreditation portal. At the completion of the site visit, the assessor submits completed assessment tools to NAEYC staff. NAEYC generally scores the data and issues an Accreditation Decision Report within 90 days of the site visit.

Scoring and Administrative Review of Decisions

Site visits are computer-scored according to computational algorithms that assure consistency in the evaluation process. However, the integrity of a score can also depend upon the accurate execution of the site visit protocols. Therefore, all site visit decisions go through a process of administrative review prior to finalization of the scoring decision. Administrative review is conducted to ensure that the integrity of the data is accurate and no technical glitches occurred upon receipt of the data. This review includes the following elements:

› Verifying the correct number of tools have been received and the age categories of classes assessed are consistent with the visit schedule;

› Verifying the assessment version for all tools is consistent;

› Verifying that no significant data loss has occurred that would jeopardize the validity of the scoring;

› Verifying if any Required Assessment items are listed as not met that there is a detailed description of evidence for the failed item;

› Reviewing assessor and administrator evaluations of the visit to assure no unexpected circumstances affected the quality of the visit.

More in-depth administrative reviews may be conducted when there is reason to believe the integrity of the collected data or execution of the relevant site visit protocols may adversely affect the accreditation decision. In such circumstances, the follow elements are reviewed more closely:

› Verifying the random sampling of classrooms for assessment is consistent with written protocol;

› Ensuring the assessor allotted the prescribed time for each class observation and portfolio assessment;

› Confirming that assessor rating notes support the item ratings;

If an administrative review reveals a substantial failure to follow protocol or some other circumstance which may have affected the program's decision outcome, the Director of Quality Assessment may order a revisit at NAEYC's expense.

Accreditation Decision Definitions

Accreditation decisions are not always issued as the result of a site visit assessment. They can also be issued for operational reasons, or following a quality assurance process. The following decisions can be given to programs:

Accredited. A decision of "Accredited" indicates that the program has demonstrated through a formal assessment that they:

› Met 80% of the assessment items measured across all standards together, and

› Met 60% of the assessment items measured in each single standard, and

› Met 100% of required assessment items, and

› Each class selected to be assessed met 70% of the assessment items measured.

A decision of "Accredited" is valid for a period of five years, provided the program remains compliant with other terms and conditions of accreditation, including eligibility requirements.

Deferred. A "Deferred" decision indicates that a program's formal assessment indicated they:

› Met less than 80% of the assessment items measured across all standards together, and/or

› Met less than 60% of the assessment items measured in each single standard, and/or

› Did not meet 100% of required assessment items, and/or

› One or more class(es) selected to be assessed did not meet 70% of the assessment items measured.

Programs have a right to appeal a Deferred decision (see the Appeals Policy).

Notification of Accreditation Decisions

Typically within 90 days of a program's site visit, the Accreditation Decision Report (ADR) is generated by NAEYC. Program access to the ADR is dependent on the type of visit:

› Candidacy, verification, and random visits: An electronic copy of the ADR is made available to the program as soon as it is ready (either by email or through the portal).

› Renewal visits: An electronic copy of the ADR is made available to the program (either by email or through the portal) following NAEYC's receipt of payment of the 5th year fee.

Decision Effective Dates

The effective date of an "Accredited" decision is located on the program's Accreditation Decision Report. Due dates for program submission of Annual Reports and annual fees are set according to the effective date of the most recent Accreditation Decision.

The effective date of a "Deferred" decision is 30 days after the program receives notification of the accreditation decision unless the program appeals the decision within that 30-day period. (See **Appeals Information Resource**)

The effective date of an "Accreditation Expired" decision is the last day of the program's current accreditation term.

Maintaining Accreditation

Once a program has achieved accredited status there are policies and procedures a program must follow in order to maintain its accreditation status. These requirements provide NAEYC with up-to-date program information and increase the accountability of the accreditation system. Requirements are:

1. **Annual Reports** are due on the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th anniversaries of a program's accreditation. They are completed by the program through the portal or as otherwise directed by NAEYC.

2. **Annual Fees** are due in each of the 5 years of accreditation, on the program's decision anniversary date. Annual fees should be submitted through the portal at the following times when the program files its annual report in years 1 – 4 , and either in the 5th year when the ADR is ready (for programs pursuing renewal) or prior to the accreditation expiration date (for programs not pursuing renewal). The 5th year fee is due regardless of whether or not a program intends to renew their accreditation.

3. **Updating NAEYC regarding program information.** An accredited program is required to inform NAEYC on all substantive programmatic changes throughout all 5 years of their accreditation term. Changes in contacts, disruptions of operation, and notifications of withdrawal must be reported within 30 days using forms found on the NAEYC **website**. NAEYC understands and appreciates that programmatic changes are routine and a healthy part of the continuous improvement process. Most of these changes will not impact the accreditation of the program.

- Substantive changes include, but are not limited to:
  ◦ Changes in the management, oversight, and/or administrative ownership home of the program.
  ◦ Changes in geographic setting, including moving the program to a new location or establishing a satellite location.
  ◦ Changes in the number of children and/or classrooms served.
  ◦ Changes that affect compliance with Accreditation Eligibility Requirements.

4. **Administrative Ownership Verificaton Policy.** If a program transfers ownership during the five-year accreditation term, the program can maintain its accreditation. The new owners must contact NAEYC using a **Self Report** Form. NAEYC staff will schedule a consultation with the new owner/management to review the requirements for accreditation, ensure that the program has access to its accreditation portal, and review the program's accreditation timeline.
Quality Assurance staff review program changes to determine whether they impact the accreditation status of the program.

5. **72-Hour Notifications are required** to maintain compliance with NAEYC's few, but important *required practices* such as lapses in supervision, child abuse or injury, or license suspensions. Within 72 hours of occurrence, the program must report any occurrences through the portal by selecting the "72 Hour Notification" tab. NAEYC Quality Assurance staff will contact the program to follow up. More information about 72 Hour Notifications can be found in this handbook.

6. **Respond to complaints.** NAEYC staff may ask the program to respond to credible complaints received about the program.

7. **Respond to verification requests** that NAEYC staff may make in relation to 72-hour notifications, credible complaints, and major

self-reported program changes. To verify continued practices, NAEYC may request documentation, or may require an additional verification site visit during the term of the program's accreditation.

8. **Submit to a random visit.** Unannounced observation visits to a subset of randomly selected programs are crucial to ensuring the credibility of the accreditation system. If a program is selected for a random visit, it must allow the visit to occur and meet visit scoring standards in order to remain accredited.

If a program transfers ownership during the five year accreditation term, the program can maintain their accreditation. The new owners must contact NAEYC using a **Self Report** Form. NAEYC staff will schedule a consultation with the new owner/management to review the requirements for accreditation, ensure that the program has access to their accreditation portal and review the program's accreditation timeline.

Renewal of Accreditation

A program seeking to renew its accreditation will submit its intent to renew with its fourth (4th) year annual report and **annual fee**. The fourth year annual report fee is due for all programs whether or not the program intends to renew. Once the Annual Report is deemed complete and is accompanied by the **annual fee**, the program will host a site visit and an accreditation decision will be rendered.

An Annual Report or **annual fee** is considered late at 11:59 pm EST on the due date. A program with a late Annual Report and/or **annual fee** will be assessed a **late fee**. A program will have 90 days from its original due date to submit the report and/or **annual fee**, including the late fee. If a program does not comply within 90 days, its accreditation status will be considered withdrawn.

Withdrawal and Expiration

An accredited program or a program seeking accreditation may voluntarily withdraw from the

accreditation system at any time. A program can withdraw by completing the Withdrawal Form on NAEYC's website. An accredited program that voluntarily withdraws will be removed from the public list of accredited programs. The program remains registered in NAEYC's portal, with a status of enrolled. The program may reapply for accreditation at a later time without prejudice by submitting a new Application for Accreditation Eligibility and an application fee. Withdrawals are final and cannot be reversed except with authorization from the ELP Senior Director or her designee.

NAEYC may also involuntarily withdraw a program from if the program fails to submit materials or fees by the established deadlines. This decision is final and cannot be appealed or reversed except with authorization from the ELP Senior Director or her designee.

Accreditation expires when a program's 5-year term of accreditation ends. Program status changes to Expired if they

› have a renewal site visit assessment and receive a decision of Defer; or

› choose not to pursue another term of NAEYC accreditation.

In either case, the program remains accredited until its 5-year term expires.

Accreditation Policies

Verification of Continued Program Compliance (Quality Assurance) Policy

NAEYC's Early Learning Program (ELP) accreditation system strives to be a standard bearer for high quality early care and education programs. NAEYC has established procedures to ensure that its accredited programs maintain substantial compliance with current NAEYC early childhood program accreditation standards and critical practices during a program's 5-year term of accreditation.

"Critical practices" are those related to the wellbeing and safety of children or the regulation of the program. They coincide with NAEYC's "required" assessment items relating to adequate child supervision, appropriate guidance practices, safe infant sleep, and licensing status.

Maintaining *"substantial compliance"* means a program does not experience adverse incidents related to critical practices which are of a scope and severity that calls into question their ability to ensure program quality on an ongoing basis.

NAEYC procedures for verification of continued compliance include:

› Program's requirement to periodically confirm licensing/regulatory status;

› A public feedback process for receiving reports of possible program non-compliance;

› Program's requirement to promptly report critical incidents (72-Hour Notification Policy);

› NAEYC's formal Program Review process, in which a "Scope and Screen" is applied to evaluate the extent of a possible program non-compliance and if so, determine consequences.

Confirmation of Required Licensing/ Regulatory Status. All NAEYC accredited programs must maintain licensing or regulatory status as approved during the program's eligibility application for accreditation. A program must regularly provide NAEYC with information regarding its licensing or regulatory status at the following intervals: application, candidacy, site visit, annual report, renewal—as well as upon request.

If NAEYC determines that a program's licensing or regulatory status may not meet the eligibility requirement for accreditation, a Program Review Process will be initiated.

Public Feedback See the Feedback Policy below.

72-hour Notification. NAEYC Accredited Programs are required to notify NAEYC within 72 hours of the occurrence of any of the following critical incidents:

› The death of any child;

› Any suspected physical or psychological abuse of a child by Program staff or any adult connected to the program.

› Revocation or suspension of the program's license to operate as outlined in the eligibility requirements.

› Lapse in supervision of an **infant, toddler, or young two year old:**

  • In an **unsafe environment,** child cannot be easily heard and seen at all times by at least one member of the teaching staff.

  • In a **safe environment,** child is out of the direct sight **or** sound supervision of all teaching staff for more than five minutes.

› Lapse in supervision of a **preschooler:**

- In an **unsafe environment,** child is out of the direct sight **and** sound supervision of all teaching staff for more than 1 minute.

- In a **safe environment,** child is out of direct sight **or** sound supervision of all teaching staff for more than ten minutes.

› Lapse in supervision of a **kindergarten or school-age child:** Child is out of sight **and** sound supervision for more than 10 minutes, in an unsafe environment.

72-Hour Notifications are initiated by programs through their NAEYC portal or as otherwise indicated by NAEYC. NAEYC will acknowledge receipt of all such notifications within 3 business days. NAEYC Quality Assurance staff review submissions and may contact the program to clarify information or to request additional information before submitting 72-Hour Notifications to the Program Review Process.

If NAEYC learns that a program did not provide a 72-hour Notification in the timeframe required, NAEYC has the right to initiate a Program Review for the underlying issues as well as the failure to timely report.

Program Review: Assessment of the Scope and Severity of Program Non-Compliance

Scope and Severity Committee. The Scope and Severity Committee is comprised of three early childhood education experts whose focus is quality assurance and assessment and who are appointed by the Council for NAEYC Accreditation of Early Learning Programs.

Scope and Severity Evaluation Process. Within 60 days of receiving all necessary information from NAEYC Early Learning Program's Quality Assurance staff, the Scope and Severity Committee will apply the Scope and Severity Screen, which considers the following:

› the specific **nature** and frequency of other such incidents that may indicate a pattern of failure to meet the required assessment item;

› the **details** pertaining to the incident, including the age of child(ren) involved, the duration of the incident, the program's relevant written policies and procedures and their actual implementation at the time of the incident(s);

› the program's **response** to the incident(s), including its analysis of the root causes of the incident(s) and subsequent actions (such as personnel actions or implementation of new policies or procedures), and its ongoing plan for follow-up and prevention;

› the status and results of any **investigations** by licensing, regulatory, medical examiner, police or other authorities regarding the incident(s);

› the process and timeframe by which the **notification** of the incident(s) was received by NAEYC; and

› whether the incident is **reasonably attributable** to the program; that is, whether, in light of all the specific facts and circumstances surrounding the incident, it is fair and reasonable to hold the program itself responsible for the violation (as opposed to some circumstance beyond the program's control).

In the event that NAEYC is notified of or learns of an incident that is being investigated by a government authority(ies), but investigations by such government authorities are not complete, the Scope and Severity Committee will decide whether it can render a decision without the completion of the investigation. This determination will be made depending on the severity of the violation(s).

Program Review Decision Outcomes. After conducting this review, the Scope and Severity Committee will make one of the following decisions:

72 Hour Review Closed. This decision will be rendered if the Committee determines that:

> the incident did not result in a violation of a critical practice;

> the program demonstrates the capacity to maintain substantial compliance with current NAEYC early childhood program accreditation standards and critical practices;

> the incident is not reasonably attributable to the program.

Additional Verification is Required. This decision will be rendered if the Committee determines that some question remains as to the program's demonstrated capacity to maintain substantial compliance with current NAEYC early childhood program accreditation standards and critical practices. A Verification Visit will be undertaken at the program's expense.

Accreditation is Deferred. This decision will be rendered if the Committee determines that:

> the severity of the violation warrants deferral; and/or

> over a period of one year, the program has repeatedly and consistently had cases previously reviewed by NAEYC or the Scope and Severity Committee and therefore has not demonstrated capacity to maintain substantial compliance with current NAEYC early childhood program accreditation standards and/or critical practices.

Decisions are made by majority vote of the Committee. The Committee generally makes its decisions within three months of receiving all documentation from NAEYC.

Feedback Policy

There is a formal process for NAEYC ELP Accreditation to review feedback on all aspects of accreditation filed in writing through the online feedback form. This includes feedback on:

Accreditation process, including accreditation policies, accreditation process and tools, assessors, customer service, and the NAEYC standards and assessment items;

Currently accredited programs including:

> the program's failure to meet NAEYC recommended standards and practices;

> false or misleading advertisement of NAEYC accreditation;

> misuse of NAEYC's intellectual property including NAEYC Accreditation logo and falsely claiming alignment or adherence to NAEYC Accreditation Standards

> Feedback regarding programs who are not currently accredited is not reviewed, even if the program is in the process of accreditation.

Feedback is to be submitted in writing, and the correspondent must provide his/her name and contact information. All feedback will be responded to in writing and may require a follow up phone call. If proper contact information or requested additional information are not provided, the submission will be considered incomplete. Incomplete submissions will not be reviewed.

Any concerns reviewed in this process will only result in a review of the program's adherence to the NAEYC Early Learning Program Accreditation Standards and Assessment Items. Incidents related to the wellbeing and safety of children or the regulation of the program should first be reported to the proper local licensing or regulatory authorities.

Feedback involving allegations related to NAEYC required assessment items may be reviewed in conjunction with the 72-hour Notification Policy, including a review according to the Scope and Severity Decisions Policy.

If the program refuses to comply with this policy, or is deemed to be non-responsive to the NAEYC

Accreditation of Early Learning Programs review, accreditation may be withdrawn.

Confidentiality of Feedback

NAEYC will try to maintain the anonymity of the correspondent when reasonable under the circumstances and when such action does not interfere with or limit a program's ability to respond to the feedback. Sharing the correspondent's identity will only be done with consent from the correspondent, and as required by law.

NAEYC reserves the right to contact local authorities with respect to any feedback inquiry or other information that reveals or suggests any potentially illegal or improper conduct in or related to an accredited program. NAEYC disclaims all liability for such actions.

Decision Appeals Policy

The Council for NAEYC Accreditation of Early Learning Programs provides a formal appeal process for programs that receive an accreditation deferred decision. The program must submit its appeal within thirty (30) days of the receipt of the deferred decision. During the appeal process, there is no change in the program's public accreditation status.

Appeals are made to the Quality Assurance Committee of the Council for NAEYC Accreditation of Early Learning Programs. The Quality Assurance Committee reviews appeals that meet the established procedures. The appeal must show that NAEYC or the NAEYC assessor;

› did not follow its established policies and/or procedures; and/or

› made a substantive error, such as a factual error or mistake related to the execution of the site visit protocols; and

› that NAEYC's error or NAEYC's failure to follow its established policies and/or procedures affected the outcome of the program's accreditation decision.

Appeals that do not meet these minimum requirements will not be forwarded to the Quality Assurance Committee for review. Resources have been developed to assist programs in understanding the appeals process.

Additionally:

The appeal letter must consist of a detailed description of the policy/procedural error(s) and/or substantive error(s) that affected the outcome of the program's accreditation decision.

› The appeal letter can be no more than five pages in length, except to append relevant licensing, regulatory or legal documents. Otherwise, information beyond that fifth page will not be considered.

› The appeal letter may not include new information related to unmet assessment items.

› The appeal letter, along with relevant information from NAEYC, will be provided to the Quality Assurance Committee for review

› The appeal decision will be provided within 60 days from the appeal due date deadline.

› The appeal decision rendered by the Quality Assurance Committee of the Council for NAEYC Accreditation of Early Learning Programs is final.

› If the original accreditation decision of deferred is upheld, the program may pursue NAEYC Accreditation by submitting a new application and applicable fees.

Once the formal appeal is received, NAEYC will verify the documents for completeness and may ask for additional documentation, if necessary. When the documents are complete NAEYC will acknowledge receipt of the appeal.

Site Visit Disruption Policy

NAEYC realizes that there are factors that may prevent a program from hosting a site visit. If a program is awaiting a site visit, and service to children is suspended due to weather emergencies, public health emergencies, other natural

disasters, or for any other reason, it is a program's responsibility to complete a "Site Visit Disruption" form. Classes must be in session and children must be physically present for a standard accreditation site visit to take place.

If a program reports a Site Visit Disruption to NAEYC, the program must also notify NAEYC once the program has resumed serving children. A new 6-month window will be given, and the site visit planning will resume.

However, if a currently accredited program does not resume serving children before 6 months prior to its valid-until date, the program will not receive a site visit and its accreditation will expire on the valid until date. If a program that is not currently accredited does not resume serving children within 12 months of their candidacy submission date, the program will be withdrawn from the accreditation process. All programs will have 12 months to move forward with Stage 2: Application.

In the event of an extenuating circumstance, NAEYC staff along with the Council will determine if a program can remain accredited after its valid until date. Extenuating circumstances include but are not limited to public health emergencies, natural disasters, or civil unrest.

Procedures in the Accreditation Process

Accreditation Fees

NAEYC's ELP Accreditation system is supported by the program fees charged at major steps in the process, annually during a program's 5-year term of accreditation, and for other special purposes. Fees may be increased in NAEYC's sole discretion, in response to analyses of income, expenses, predicted growth, and capacity needs of the accreditation system. The current fee schedule is available on the NAEYC website (www.naeyc.org). Failure to pay any of these fees may result in a program's loss of NAEYC accreditation.

Fees for Pursuing Accreditation

The following fees are applicable to all programs in the system. The fees vary by program size. These fees are non-refundable.

› **Enrollment fee:** This fee accompanies the submission of the program's enrollment in the accreditation process, and allows a program access to NAEYC's portal and resources.

› **Application fee:** This fee accompanies the submission of the Application for Accreditation Eligibility, and it covers the administrative review of the application.

› **Candidacy/ Site Visit fee:** This fee accompanies the submission of the Candidacy Materials for a program seeking accreditation for the first time. It covers the administrative review of the Candidacy materials.

Fees for Maintaining Accreditation

An **Annual Accreditation fee** is due for each year of the 5-year term of accreditation, which should be paid when a program makes its Annual Report in the portal. These fees spread out the cost of live site visit assessments, and are a requirement for maintaining a program's accreditation status.

Currently accredited programs that have maintained their accreditation throughout their 5-year term are not assessed separate renewal fees in addition to the annual accreditation fee.

Additional Fees

Additional fees are charged only to some programs, under certain stated conditions.

› **Late fee:** Charged to programs at any step of their accreditation process if the required fees are submitted late.

› **Verification fee:** Required when NAEYC determines additional verification (usually an additional on-site visit) is needed to assure the program's ability to meet and/or maintain NAEYC accreditation standards during the 5-year term of accreditation.

› **Overseas visit fee:** Required of all programs receiving an NAEYC site visit outside of the United States and its territories.

› **Multiple site fee** – Required when a program includes satellite locations.

› **System-Wide Program Portfolio assessment fees:** These fees are applied to "large system users" (those with more than 10 programs in the accreditation process) who elect to participate in NAEYC's system-wide program portfolio assessment process. There is an initial assessment fee, and annual review fees.

Failure to Pay Fees

If a program fails to pay any fees as detailed above, NAEYC may withdraw their accreditation. It is the responsibility of the program to closely monitor their information in the portal to ensure that fees are up to date and paid in a timely manner.

For a detailed list of fees, see the NAEYC website: **https://www.naeyc.org/accreditation/early-learning/fees.**

Site Visits

Scheduling of Visits

Site visits for ELP Accreditation are conducted twelve (12) months a year. NAEYC does not conduct ELP accreditation visits on Saturdays, Sundays or federal government holidays. NAEYC does not conduct accreditation visits on days a program is not operational (i.e., serving children), or on exclusion dates chosen by the program.

Protocols assuring a consistent site visit process

When a site visit is required, NAEYC assigns a trained, reliable assessor to contact each program administrator, conduct a pre-visit scheduling process, conduct the site visit assessment, and submit specific documentation of the visit. Assessors follows a written protocol for the pre-visit and visit processes which is **publicly available** to programs.

Site Visit Assessment Tools

Assessors employ 4 rating tools to conduct site visit assessments: Program Portfolio tool, Class Portfolio tool, Program Observation tool, and Class Observation tool. Instructions for use of these tools is included in the site visit protocol. The tools are **publicly available** on NAEYC's website and in the NAEYC program portal. These documents are subject to periodic revision depending upon changes in the content of the assessment tools, technology changes, and other operational changes in the accreditation system.

Other Site Visit Types

See the public *Site Visit Protocol* for a description of variations on the standard site visit: Random Visit, Verification Visit, and Reliability Visit.

Assessors

NAEYC Assessor Selection

The reliability of NAEYC's Assessor system is critical to the success of NAEYC Accreditation. NAEYC develops and maintain procedures regarding required qualifications, selection, conflict of interest, confidentiality, evaluation, termination and retention of assessors. These procedures support the integrity and reliability of NAEYC Accreditation. The assessor system includes procedures that ensure that the assessors are highly skilled professionals representing diverse groups and the field's multiple sectors.

Conflict of Interest

In all cases assessors must consider whether there is a potential conflict of interest. Assessors may have a conflict of interest that prevents them from accepting a particular visit assignment if they:

› have conducted a visit at the program within the past year;

› have previously worked for or consulted with the program, or with a parent organization of the program;

› have a fiduciary connection to the program;

› have a direct personal relationship with the program administrator or with other principals of the program or the program's parent organization; or

› know the program and have concerns about their ability to conduct an impartial assessment.

This list is not exhaustive. If assessors have any doubt about whether there is a conflict of interest, they must contact NAEYC to discuss concerns and reach a resolution.

Restrictions on Gifts and Compensation for Assessors

Assessors will not request or accept any compensation or any gifts of substance from the program being reviewed, or anyone affiliated with the program. (Gifts of substance would include briefcases, tickets to athletic or entertainment events, etc.) If unsure as to whether something constitutes a "gift of substance," assessors are advised to err on the side of declining gifts of any kind. Similarly, assessors will not expect elaborate hospitality during site visits. It is appropriate for institutions to provide snacks and non-alcoholic beverages for assessors as they conduct their work at their program. Programs must ensure that the assessor's work space is comfortable and conducive to their work.

Satellite Locations

NAEYC accredited programs have the ability to have additional "satellite locations" included in their accreditation. A satellite location is defined as an additional geographic location that houses one or more of a program's class(es) of children.

For programs with **two to three locations,** the requirements for satellite locations are:

› Primary program site can have no more than 2 satellite locations included as part of a single program accreditation.

› The satellite locations must be within a 5-mile radius of the primary site.

› Each satellite location must serve fewer than 60 children.

› Each satellite location must have the same program administration, budget, and license as the primary site.

For programs with **four to ten locations,** the requirements for satellite locations are:

› Primary program site can have no more than 9 satellite locations included as part of a single program accreditation.

› Program has no more than twenty (20) groups served among the ten locations.

› Each satellite location serves fewer than sixty (60) children.

› Every site must be within forty (40) miles of the primary site.

• Program will be required to pay a site visit fee at the submission of candidacy as listed on the NAEYC Early Learning Program Accreditation website. At least one class from each location is observed and evaluated during a site visit. The accreditation decision outcome applies equally to all program sites.

Once accredited, all locations are included on the NAEYC Accredited Program Search. Each location receives an accreditation certificate. For programs with more than 4 satellite sites, an extra fee site will be added to the program's annual accreditation fee as stated on the NAEYC Early Learning Program Accreditation website.

When a program is no longer meeting the satellite requirements and/or the sites no longer want to remain together for purposes of NAEYC accreditation, the sites may be de-clustered.

When a program is de-clustered the site(s) that no longer met the requirements or no longer want to remain with the primary site, will receive a stand-alone program id and be required to start the accreditation process by completing the enrollment checklist.

Multiple Programs within the Same Facility

NAEYC ELP Accreditation is granted to the overall center and will not be granted to individual classes within a center. Throughout the NAEYC Accreditation process, all eligible classes a center serves must be reported and may be observed during a site visit. This includes classes within the center that operate during the summer and school-age programs. A class can only be excluded from a program's NAEYC Accreditation if it is part

of a separate entity. A program pursuing NAEYC Accreditation must notify NAEYC of all separate entities that operate classrooms within its facility. If a program wants to exclude a classroom, they must be able to demonstrate a separate budget, administration and license.

Determining Factors. The following factors will be used to determine if a class or program within the same location can be excluded from NAEYC Accreditation. **Budget:** Does the program/class have a single budget?

1. **Administration:** Does the program/class have the same administration? Does the program/class have the same management or is from the same organization?

2. **Licensing:** Does the program/class have the same license? Or is the program regulated by the same agency?

If the program or class meets (answers "Yes" to) two of these three conditions, then the program/class is part of the center. If 2 of 3 questions are unmet (answered "No"), then the program/class is a different center.

Definitions.

Budget: A plan for conducting business operations based on itemized allotment of funds. A budget may reflect multiple income sources and distinct allocations that roll up into a single fund.

Administration: The management or running of an organization, this could include the director, owner, principal or governing body.

Agency: An organization or company with its own tax ID number that operates programming but could collaborate with other entities in the early learning space.

Program Merger. A merger is designated when two or more programs begin to operate as one program. This applies to programs that are operating in the same physical space, intermingle

children and teachers and/ or are meeting the satellite requirements. Programs are required to update the accreditation portal to reflect the program's new operations. If in the case where the program is merging into another program's physical space a withdrawal form must be completed for the program that will no longer be in existence.

System Wide Program Portfolio process

The purpose of the System-wide Program Portfolio (SWPP) is to enable NAEYC to allow system users to undergo a streamlined evaluation of system-wide document evidence for the purposes of NAEYC Program Accreditation. This process is reserved for NAEYC's "Large System Users" - individual organizations/companies that have 5 or more sites in the accreditation process. The evaluation ratings are referenced for all of the system's individual programs undergoing accreditation, reducing program preparation time for NAEYC site visits. Determinations of compliance with NAEYC program assessment items are honored for one year, with annual reviews thereafter, subject to the continuation of the System Wide Program Portfolio program. Individual programs in participating systems will be responsible for maintaining program-specific document evidence to be made available to NAEYC assessors for on-site review.

The System-wide Program Portfolio Evidence Review includes these steps:

First Review. After receipt of an application and payment, and approval of the application, system users initially submit to NAEYC all evidence supporting system-wide NAEYC assessment items in the Program Portfolio.

Initial Rating. Two NAEYC assessors independently review and rate the system-wide document evidence submitted, then the assessors conduct a reliability discussion to reach final consensus ratings for each item. An Initial Report

is sent to the system, documenting ratings for each NAEYC item. Any items rated as NO will have assessor notes indicating why they were determined to be unmet.

System Response & Second Review. The system user has 30 days to submit revised or additional evidence supporting the items not fully met. Assessors review and rate the second evidence submission in the same manner as the initial ratings.

A Final Report of the system's ratings for system-wide PP items is produced.

Program Use of NAEYC Accreditation

Program Display of Accreditation Status

Wherever a program's accreditation status is provided to the public (website, brochure, etc.) the accreditation status must be accurate and complete.

Use of Accreditation Logo by Programs

The NAEYC ELP Accreditation logo is the exclusive property of NAEYC. However, NAEYC allows an accredited program to use the logo in publications and displays – electronic or print – to highlight its current accreditation status. The use of the logo is governed by the following guidelines:

› A program may not use NAEYC's name or logo or other intellectual property in any way without prior written consent from NAEYC.

› The logo may NOT be used by a program that has not yet been notified that it is accredited.

› When permitted, the current NAEYC early learning programs accreditation logo must be used. It can be found in the program portal in Torch.

› Use of the logo shall be subject at all times to withdrawal or deferral by NAEYC when, in its sole judgment, NAEYC determines that continued use of the logo would not serve the best interests of NAEYC or the public.

Accredited programs receive further guidance on logo usage in relation to size, color, and other technical specifications, as well as press release information. It can be found in the program portal in Torch.