

**POSITION STATEMENT
ON EARLY CHILDHOOD CERTIFICATION
FOR TEACHERS OF CHILDREN 8 YEARS OLD AND YOUNGER
IN PUBLIC SCHOOL SETTINGS**

*A position statement of the National Association of Early Childhood Teacher Educators
(NAECTE)*

The position

The teacher certification/endorsement required in state funded pre-kindergarten programs, kindergartens, and primary grade classrooms should be specific to early childhood education.

Teachers qualified to meet the unique developmental and educational needs of children between the ages of 3 and 8 are knowledgeable about the developmental and learning characteristics of these children and use this knowledge to inform appropriate teaching techniques and assessments. Since teacher preparation and certification should be relevant to the teacher's position, NAECTE recommends that state certification agencies and school districts adopt the following policies:

- Require an early childhood certificate and/or endorsement for those teaching in classrooms for children five years old and younger in state funded pre-kindergarten and in kindergarten programs.
- Give priority in hiring and placement to teachers with an early childhood certificate and/or endorsement for public school classrooms for six, seven, and eight-year-olds (1st, 2nd, and 3rd grades).
- Require that early childhood certification and/or endorsement be based on completion of teacher preparation programs that meet professional preparation standards consistent with those established by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC).

Background and Rationale

The goal of teacher certification/endorsement requirements must be to assure that children receive instruction from teachers with the best possible teacher preparation rather than using certification to accomplish the most flexible placement of teachers. This means assigning teachers with preparation focused on the developmental and educational needs of the age group taught. A teacher of children eight years old or younger cannot be considered highly qualified without specialized early childhood preparation.

A recent survey revealed that although most states have some form of early childhood certification/endorsement, very few states require schools to employ and assign teachers with this preparation for work in early childhood classrooms (Fields & Mitchell, 2007). Early childhood certification was created by states in order to ensure that teachers are adequately prepared to teach young children. NAECTE, and the associations supporting this position

statement, believe that states should more fully require utilization of existing early childhood teacher certification/endorsement.

A growing body of research, including studies on brain development, (Friederici, 2006; Knudsen, 2004; Zimmerman, Christakis, & Meltzoff 2007) demonstrates that the experiences of the first years of life have a decisive and long-lasting impact on all areas of children's later development and learning. This research shows that young learners have unique needs and learn in different ways than older children.

- Attention to social and emotional development is essential in young children's school experience. Children need support to develop the capacity to form and sustain positive relationships with other children, teachers and other adults and to develop the social and emotional skills essential for living and working cooperatively with others.
- Conceptual development in young children is based on a foundation of direct experience that enables them to later understand abstract concepts.
- In order for young children to master literacy skills, they need to learn how to communicate, to acquire and understand vocabulary and linguistic concepts, and to develop the ability to recognize and decode print and to understand words in context.

If children are to thrive in school and meet current expectations for achievement they need teachers who have specialized knowledge of child development and best practices in early childhood education. Teachers with a sound preparation in early childhood education:

- Are prepared to apply knowledge of child development and teaching strategies that match young children's ways of learning (Isenberg, 2000; Sadowski, 2006).
- Are able to meet the social/emotional needs of young children, to support their development of key social skills and to more effectively prevent and modify behavior problems.
- Understand that young children's thinking is qualitatively different from that of older children and that young children are making the transition from sensory learning to more abstract learning. (Kamii & Ewing, 1996, Bogard & Takanishi, 2005)
- Know how to effectively scaffold children's learning in order to help them be successful in meeting school expectations (NAEYC & NAECS/SDE, 2006; Sadowski, 2006).
- Understand the language and literacy development of young children and how best to support it (Dickinson & Neuman, 2006; Routman, 2003).

Current federal legislation (No Child Left Behind, NCLB) calls for "highly qualified teachers." In order to meet this requirement, teachers of young children need to understand the continuum of development and learning from birth through age eight and use this knowledge in developing effective curriculum and instruction for young children (Bredenkamp & Copple, 1997; Maeroff, 2006; NAEYC & NAECS/SDE, 2003).

Summary

Personnel who have the appropriate training and specialized skills to support children's development and learning during the critical early years are graduating from many institutions of higher learning across the country. Requiring public schools to employ and assign teachers with early childhood certification/endorsement to early childhood classrooms would be a positive and low cost way to help close the achievement gap and ensuring academic success for all young children, including those from low- income homes and those who do not speak English as a first language.

Professional Associations Endorsing and Supporting this Position Statement

This position statement has been endorsed by: The American Associate Degree Early Childhood Educators (ACCESS), the Association for Childhood Education International (ACEI), the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), the Southern Early Childhood Association (SECA), the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education (NAECS/SCE), and the National Coalition for Campus Children's Centers (NCCCC). This statement is also supported by the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE). See naeyc.org for a related position statement on early childhood teacher certification.

Glossary of terms:

Early childhood - Early childhood is the period between birth and eight years of age, a definition based on documented intellectual and emotional development milestones. This definition is grounded in an extensive body of research that documents that young children's ways of knowing differ considerably from those of older children and adults regardless of culture.

Teacher certification (in some states called licensure) - gives a teacher official permission (usually awarded by the state) to carry out a particular role. How states define early childhood preparation for teachers varies both by the age range covered (e.g., birth through grade three, age three through grade three, birth through kindergarten) and by the range of child characteristics (e.g., early childhood generalist, early childhood special education, early childhood inclusive).

Teaching Certificate/License – A document issued by a state which authorizes the holder to teach or work with students at a specified grade or age level, or to serve in a specific role, such as a teacher or a counselor. In some states a certificate is issued for a specific level (e.g. early childhood, elementary, secondary). In others, endorsements are used (see below) to add to or delimit the coverage of a more general certificate.

Endorsement - A descriptor placed on a certificate/license which adds to or limits the subject, student group, or area of responsibility for which that certificate is valid. For example, an early childhood endorsement on an elementary certificate authorizes the holder to teach in a classroom enrolling children in the age range covered by the endorsement (e.g., birth through grade three, age three through grade three, birth through K) and to teach in the elementary grades often creating an overlap. Some states use endorsements to delimit the coverage of more general teaching certificates. Typically a certificate can carry more than one endorsement. Some states have more than one early childhood endorsement (e.g., PreK-3, EC SPED, K-3)

Acknowledgments

NAECTE Advocacy Committee members were involved in work on this position paper, most notably Mira Berkley, Sherry Cleary, Donna Couchenour, Kent Chrisman, Rebekah Fassler, Stephanie Feeney, Marjorie Fields, Grace Friedman, Nancy Freeman, Lynn Hartle, Mary Jensen and Frances Rust. A sub committee of the NAEYC Governing Board also assisted in the development of this statement: Harriet Egertson, Gera Jacobs, and Jason Sachs. Special thanks to Daonese Johnson-Colón, the NYC Early Childhood Professional Development Institute.

References

- Bogard, K. & Takanishi, R. (2005). PK-3: An aligned and coordinated approach to education for children 3 to 8 years old. *Social Policy Report*. Volume XIX, Number III. Available: www.srce.org/documents/publications/SPR/spr19-3.pdf
- Bredenkamp, S. & Copple, C. (Eds.) (1997). *Developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood programs (revised edition)*. Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children.
- Dickinson, D.K. & Neuman, S.E. (Eds.) (2006). *Handbook of early literacy research*. New York: Guilford.
- Fields, M. & Mitchell, A. (2007). *Early Childhood and Elementary Teacher Certification Survey*. Presented at the NAECTE conference June 2007, Pittsburg PA
- Friederici, A.D. (2006). The neural basis of language development and its impairment. *Neuron*, 52, 941-952.
- Isenberg, J. P. (2000). The state of the art in early childhood professional preparation. In National Institute on Early Childhood Development and Education. (2000). *New teachers for a new century: The future of early childhood professional preparation*. Jessup, MD: U.S. Department of Education, ED Publishing.
- Kamii, C. & Ewing, J.K. (1996) Basing teaching on Piaget's constructivism. *Childhood Education*, 72, 260-264.
- Knudsen, E.I. (2004). Sensitive periods in the development of the brain and behavior. *Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience*, 16, 1412-1425.
- Maeroff, G. I. (2006). *Building blocks: Making children successful in the early years of school*. New York : Palgrave Macmillan.
- National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) & National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education (NAECS/SDE) (2004). Where we stand on curriculum, assessment, and program evaluation. Available: <http://www.naeyc.org/about/positions/pdf/standlcurrass.pdf>.
- Routman, R. (2003). *Reading essentials: The specifics you need to teach reading well*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Sadowski, M. (2006) The school readiness gap. Harvard Family Research Project. *Harvard Education Letter*, 22.
- Zimmerman, F.J., Christakis, D.A., & Meltzoff, A.N. (2007). Associations between media viewing and language development in children under age 2 years. *Journal of Pediatrics*, 151, 364-368.