



**POSITION STATEMENT  
ON EARLY CHILDHOOD CERTIFICATION  
FOR TEACHERS OF CHILDREN 8 YEARS OLD AND YOUNGER  
IN PUBLIC SCHOOL SETTINGS (REV. 6/11/2018)**

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

### **The position**

The teacher certification/endorsement required in state/federally 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/federally 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 (1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup> 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, 2009) preferably through NAEYC accreditation or national recognition of the preparation program.

### **Background**

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. Teachers should be assigned with preparation that is focused on the developmental and educational needs of the age group taught; a teacher of children in a PreK – 3<sup>rd</sup> grade classroom (ages 4-8yrs) must have specialized early childhood preparation (Shore, 2010; Takanishi, 2016) in order to teach effectively.

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 Pre-K-3<sup>rd</sup> classrooms. More specifically many states support hiring teachers with broad K-6<sup>th</sup> certification who lack specialized early childhood preparation (Bornfreund, 2011; Fields & Mitchell, 2007). Early childhood certification was created by states in order to ensure that teachers are adequately prepared to understand young children's development and relevant age-appropriate content, and to implement research-based teacher child interactions, effective for young children's success (Hamre, et. al, 2012).

NAECTE, and the associations (pending approval of revisions)\* supporting this position statement, call for states to prioritize the hiring of PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> grade teachers who hold specific (Birth to Age 8) early childhood teacher certification/endorsement. Longitudinal research provides a strong rationale for this specialized preparation.

### **Rationale**

A growing body of research, including studies on brain development (Fox, Levitt, & Nelson, 2010; Luby, et.al., 2013; Manuck & McCaffery, 2014) 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. (See also National Institutes of Health's BRAIN Initiative <http://www.nih.gov/science/brain/index.htm>). This includes:

- Attention to social and emotional development is essential in young children's early 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.

- Cognitive development; such skills as creative and critical thinking are dependent upon children's strong social, emotional, and physical development.
- Conceptual development in young children is based on a foundation of experiential learning that enables them to later understand abstract concepts.
- Young children's literacy skills are best supported when integrated into the broader goals for literacy, including the development of positive dispositions toward reading and writing. Children need support for oral language development, which is the foundation for literacy, and developmentally appropriate instruction to build conceptual knowledge and competence with literacy skills. (Paciga, Hoffman & Teale, 2011; Kirkland and Patterson, 2005).

The Institute of Medicine (IOM) & National Research Council (NRC) report titled *Transforming the workforce for children birth through age 8: A unifying foundation*, (2015) calls for “highly qualified, early childhood teachers” as a key factor to meet the needs of diverse learners in these foundational years of development. 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 (Hyson, Horm, Winton, 2012; National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, 2010).
- Attend to equity through strength-based partnerships with families; respecting families' funds of knowledge (cultural resources & networks) to support children's development and learning since young children's lives are so embedded in their families and communities and the success of early childhood education depends on these partnerships. (González, Moll, and Amanti, 2005)
- Respect and attend to children's culture, values, and language as inseparable from their learning and development, considering the many influences from their community as well as family to develop a culturally responsive curriculum (Reid, Kagan, Scott-Little, 2017).
- 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. (Takanishi, 2016).
- Know how to effectively scaffold children's learning in order to help them be successful in meeting school expectations (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2016).
- Understand the language and literacy development of young children and how best to support it (Dickinson & Neuman, 2006; Routman, 2003).
- Know how to implement developmentally appropriate assessment approaches with young children, including a strong emphasis on child observation and documentation.
- Early childhood preparation is also important for leaders in schools and community settings who oversee children's long term successes in school and life (National Association of Elementary School Principals, 2014).

## Summary

Early Childhood Educators who have the appropriate preparation 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 cost effective way to potentially ensure academic success for all young children, including those from low-income homes and those who do not speak English as a first language. The early years are the foundation of productive schooling and life; teachers with



specialized preparation in early childhood education who know how to build this strong foundation should be hired in public early childhood classrooms (Wiltz, 2008).

**\*Professional Associations Endorsing & Adopting this Position Statement (Additional Endorsements Pending): Associate Degree Early Childhood Teacher Educators (ACCESS), National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP), Ohio Association for the Education of Young Children (OAEYC),**

#### 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)

#### Toolkit & Acknowledgments

**Toolkit** of additional supporting resources and **NAECTE Advocacy Committee members** involved in the original and revised versions of the Position Statement.

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