

NAEYC Standards for Early Childhood Professional Preparation

Associate Degree Programs

Approved by NAEYC Governing Board, July 2003

Introduction

Overview

This document represents a major revision of NAEYC's standards for associate degree early childhood programs, replacing the "Guidelines for Early Childhood Professional Preparation Programs" issued in 1994. It begins with an introduction that outlines the history, purpose, and current knowledge base for NAEYC's vision for high-quality early childhood professional preparation. That vision is reflected in NAEYC's standards for associate, initial licensure (baccalaureate and five-year), and advanced (master's or doctoral) programs.

With that background, this document presents the defining characteristics of associate degree programs within a continuum of early childhood professional preparation, from community-based training through baccalaureate and graduate study. In the first section, it describes the broad context of U.S. community college programs and students; the characteristics and goals of students enrolled in early childhood associate degree programs; the ways in which high-quality programs are responding to those characteristics and goals; the challenges and opportunities created for associate degree programs by current trends in the early childhood field; and implications for this version of NAEYC's standards for high-quality associate degree programs. This document also describes the scope and purpose of these Associate Standards, distinguishing between professional preparation standards and the larger context of program accreditation.

The next section describes the processes and timeline that culminated in this Associate Standards document. In revising its 1994 Guidelines for associate degree programs, NAEYC relied on collaboration with leaders in associate degree programs, as well as extensive feedback from a wide range of stakeholders, to ensure that these new standards rest on a sound foundation.

Finally, this document presents the standards themselves, together with other related components of a strong standards and assessment system. As readers will see, the five core standards for associate degree programs are identical to those in NAEYC's Initial Licensure Standards and Advanced Standards documents. (Both are available online at www.naeyc.org.) Each of the five shared standards describes the essential knowledge, skills, and dispositions that should be present in a well-prepared early childhood professional. However, this does not mean that programs at the associate, baccalaureate, and advanced levels are or should be equivalent. The breadth and depth of mastery expected from students, the kinds of learning opportunities provided by programs, and the nature of the evidence demonstrating competence in relation to each element of the standards should differ considerably across the different levels and types of higher education programs. Strong associate degree early childhood programs are not beefed-up versions of community training workshops, nor are they watered-down or speeded-up versions of four- or five-year teacher education programs. Thus, in this and in its other standards documents NAEYC intends to affirm the connectedness of early childhood professional

preparation as well as the unique characteristics of the various settings in which early childhood educators are prepared.

NAEYC's standards for early childhood professional preparation

History

These Associate Standards are part of a larger history of standards-setting efforts by NAEYC, in early childhood professional preparation as well as in other areas.

NAEYC is one of 19 "specialty professional association" members of the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) that have issued standards. In 1980, NAEYC began developing "guidelines" for higher education programs preparing early childhood professionals. Those Guidelines, for programs preparing "candidates" (future early childhood teachers) at the baccalaureate or initial master's degree level in NCATE-affiliated institutions, were first approved in 1982. Guidelines for advanced master's/doctoral degree programs and for associate degree programs were first developed and approved in 1988. The set of Guidelines was last revised and approved in 1994 (see NAEYC 1996a). Like their successors, those Guidelines echoed consistent themes across levels and settings of professional preparation.

Most recently, in 1999 NAEYC began significant revision of the 1994 Guidelines for the initial licensure level, and later for the advanced level. The revision was prompted both by NCATE's revising of its overall standards for "professional education units" and by new research findings and trends in early education. A major goal, both for NCATE and for NAEYC, was to create more fully performance-based standards that would place less focus on courses and credit hours and more focus on "outputs"—evidence that students had mastered the competencies reflected in the standards and so could positively influence children's learning. NAEYC's new Initial Licensure Standards were approved by NCATE in 2001. By Spring 2003, all four- or five-year early childhood teacher education programs seeking NCATE accreditation must provide NAEYC with documentation to show they are in compliance with those 2001 Initial Licensure Standards. Similarly, in 2002 NCATE approved NAEYC's

new Advanced Standards. By Spring 2004, all advanced master's and doctoral early childhood professional preparation programs seeking NCATE accreditation must comply with those 2002 Advanced Standards.

Revision of the 1994 Guidelines for associate degree programs began in 2002, and NAEYC's Governing Board approved the revised standards in July 2003.

Like all NAEYC position statements, the standards for early childhood professional preparation are "living documents," and as such will be regularly updated and revised.

Purpose

As this brief description shows, NAEYC's efforts to develop and promote standards for high-quality professional preparation have a long history. NAEYC's purpose has been not only to develop standards for institutions seeking external accreditation but also to develop an evidence-based consensus that reflects a shared vision across sectors of the early childhood field. Thus, NAEYC has encouraged all higher education institutions, as well as other groups, to use its standards as a guide in planning curriculum, training experiences, assessment strategies, and other components of high-quality professional development—whatever the setting and target audience.

Current issues and challenges

In every sector of the early childhood education community, including associate degree programs, professional preparation faces new challenges. The introduction to NAEYC's 2001 Initial Licensure Standards describes some of these challenges—and related opportunities; among them is the increased diversity of children and families in early childhood programs, from infant/toddler child care through the primary grades. That increased diversity is seen in the greater numbers of children from culturally and linguistically diverse communities, as well as in the growing numbers of children with disabilities and other special learning needs who are served in early childhood programs. High-quality early childhood programs will need to respond to that diversity inclusively and effectively.

The increased attention given to children's early years by federal and state policy makers

also has implications for the development and revision of professional preparation standards. Soon, as a component of the federal No Child Left Behind legislation, all public school classrooms must be staffed by “highly qualified teachers” (as defined by states), with many paraprofessionals in public schools required to have a minimum of two years of college or the equivalent. State prekindergarten programs typically require an associate or bachelor’s degree for lead teachers, and by the end of 2003 one half of all Head Start lead teachers must possess at least an associate degree in early childhood education or a related field. Access to professional education and to professional career pathways is becoming increasingly important for the many early childhood practitioners currently working with young children. Yet those calls for greater formal education have not been matched by public investments in salaries and working conditions for early childhood staff, especially in the community child care programs that serve the vast majority of children under age 5.

Beyond classroom-level qualifications, the early childhood field is increasingly committed to identifying and supporting a more diverse group of talented leaders. The leadership gap is clear: While as many as one third of the nation’s early childhood teaching staff in child care centers and preschools are women of color, the field’s leadership currently reflects neither the diversity of the workforce nor the diversity of the children served (Center for the Child Care Workforce 1993; Kagan & Bowman 1997). High-quality associate degree programs offer a promising route toward closing that gap. Associate degree early childhood programs play a critical role in providing access to higher education—and to the positions that require such education—for many groups, especially those currently underrepresented in professional leadership roles.

Knowledge base

NAEYC’s new Associate, Initial Licensure, and Advanced Standards are grounded in a rapidly expanding knowledge base about what young children need in order to develop well and in a set of core values about young children and their education.

What research shows young children need. As reports from the National Research Council such as *Eager to Learn* (2001b) and *From Neurons to Neighborhoods* (2000) emphasize, young children are far more capable intellectually and socially than many had previously believed. Young children benefit from well-planned, intentionally implemented, culturally relevant curriculum that both supports and challenges them. Research also has shown what kinds of experiences are essential to building later competence in such critical areas as language and literacy and mathematics and in social skills and emotional understanding and self-regulation. The knowledge base also emphasizes the need for close relationships between young children and adults, including caregivers and teachers, and between teachers and children’s families. Such relationships, and the secure base that they create, are investments in children’s later social, emotional, and academic competence. These are only a few examples of the developmental and educational research base from which NAEYC’s core standards for professional preparation are derived; the resources at the end of this document and the discussion in NAEYC’s Initial Licensure Standards document expand on these ideas.

The knowledge base and the role of associate degree programs. Because of the depth of knowledge and skill required to implement the kinds of experiences that this knowledge base suggests, the *Eager to Learn* report recommends that groups of children age 3 and older be led by teachers holding at least a baccalaureate degree with specialized preparation in child development and early childhood education. High-quality associate degree programs lay a foundation for that in-depth preparation, both through their strong general education in the humanities, mathematics, science, and other areas, and by introducing students to a variety of learning opportunities in child development and early childhood curriculum and pedagogy. In addition, strong associate degree programs provide effective preparation for students who intend to work in roles that do not require teacher licensure. Later sections of this document describe those varied roles for associate programs in more detail.

Field experiences. A key component of each of NAEYC’s standards, at every level, is hands-on

field or clinical experiences, whether this is doctoral students' immersion in applied research, advanced master's students' systematic inquiry into their own classroom practices, or associate and initial licensure students' observations and direct experiences in early childhood settings or in home visits. National reports on the characteristics of high-quality professional preparation, and other national standards such as NCATE's, consistently emphasize the need for continuous interplay of theory, research, and practice, and the significance of field experiences as part of that process. The "professional development schools" movement underscores the importance of identifying high-quality sites for education professionals to develop or refine their skills with competent mentorship and supervision.

NAEYC's 1994 Guidelines included a separate "Field Experiences" standard; the new Associate, Initial Licensure, and Advanced Standards do not. But this in no way suggests that field experiences are less important now than in the past. Indeed, such experiences represent one of the primary ways in which students at every level can link knowledge, skills, and professional dispositions into a coherent whole and apply these to promoting children's learning. Thus, supervised field experiences in high-quality settings are a key part of any program's system for assessing its students' competencies in relation to the standards.

Core values in professional preparation. In addition to the common research base and common emphasis on the centrality of field experiences, these NAEYC standards for associate degree programs and its standards for initial licensure and advanced programs share a core set of values that cannot be easily quantified but are critically important. These affirm the value of, for example, play in children's lives; reciprocal relationships with families; child development knowledge as a foundation for professional practice; practices and curricula that are culturally respectful and responsive; ethical behavior and professional advocacy; and in-depth field experiences in high-quality professional preparation.

Associate degree preparation for early childhood professionals

While they may share these values, knowledge base, and core standards, all associate degree programs and institutions that offer associate degrees have characteristics, missions, opportunities, and challenges that uniquely distinguish them. As noted earlier, associate degree programs are not—and do not aspire to be—compressed versions of baccalaureate degree programs. It is neither possible nor desirable to replicate in two years what four- or even five-year programs attempt to do in preparing early childhood professionals. At the same time, it is beyond the scope of this document to describe the many possible ways in which associate programs might be organized and the many possible roles that such programs might play within a system of early childhood professional preparation.

However, the following sections describe the broad context of U.S. community college programs and students; the characteristics and goals of students enrolled in early childhood associate degree programs; the ways in which high-quality associate degree early childhood programs are responding to those characteristics and goals; the challenges and opportunities created for programs by recent trends in the early childhood field; and implications for the new NAEYC standards for high-quality associate degree programs.

The U.S. community college context

Community colleges and associate degree programs have undergone major changes even in their recent history, moving from primarily vocational goals to a far more diverse and dynamic set of aims. Community colleges' current scope, populations served, significance within the larger higher education system, and degree options all reflect those changes.

The scope. More than 10 million students are on our nation's community college campuses. Forty-four (44) percent of all U.S. undergraduates are community college students. Increasing numbers of elementary school teachers receive all of their mathematics, science and technology, and other content course work at community colleges (Moore 1997).

Student diversity. Nationally, 30 percent of all community college students are students of color. Of culturally and linguistically diverse undergraduate students in the United States, a majority are enrolled in community colleges. This includes 46 percent of all African American, 55 percent of all Hispanic, 46 percent of all Asian/Pacific Islander, and 55 percent of all Native American undergraduate students. More than half of all Hispanic and African American students who enter college following graduation from high school enter two-year institutions (Phillippe & Patton 2000).

Increasing access to higher education. Associate degree programs often have the explicit mission of increasing access to higher education programs. More than 80 percent of community college students work either full- or part-time (Phillippe & Patton 2000), and many are the first in their families to attend college. Access to postsecondary education can be impeded by cost, location, scheduling, or students' previous educational experiences. The community college system has attempted to remove these barriers by being responsive to community needs. Consequently, most community colleges offer courses in English as a second language and remedial courses in reading, writing, and mathematics for students who need that additional support.

Degree options for community college students. As part of their effort to be responsive to students' varied needs, community colleges offer a variety of educational or degree options. The American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) recommends the following terminology: The Associate of Arts (A.A.) degree generally emphasizes the arts, humanities, and social sciences; typically, three quarters of the work required is general education course work. The Associate of Sciences (A.S.) degree generally requires one half general education course work, with substantial mathematics and science. The Associate in Applied Science (A.A.S.) degree prepares the student for direct employment, with one third of the course work in general education. While many students who seek A.A.S. degrees do not intend to transfer, these degrees are not intended to create barriers to transfer. "The [A.A.S.] degree programs must be designed to recognize this dual possibility and to encourage students to recognize the long-term career

possibilities that continued academic study will create" (AACC 1998).

Early childhood associate degree programs, like other community college programs, may offer students one or more of these degrees. That variability was taken into account when developing these standards for associate degree programs.

Characteristics of programs and their students

Numbers and characteristics. The general characteristics and mission of community colleges are reflected in specialized associate degree programs. According to estimates from Early and Winton's (2001) national sample, more than 700 institutions of higher education offer associate degree programs in early childhood education. Many of the students enrolled in those programs represent cultural and linguistic minorities; as in the general community college population, early childhood students in two-year programs are proportionately more diverse than in four-year programs.

Increasing numbers of students entering early childhood associate degree programs have been working—most in child care or Head Start programs (Early & Winton 2001). Many of those students continue to work while attending college part-time. These students are taking the lead in their own education, developing long-term career goals as they improve the quality of their current work with young children and families.

Career goals and pathways. The career goals of students in associate degree early childhood programs vary. For some, the degree may enhance their current position, build on a prior Child Development Associate (CDA) credential, and perhaps lead to greater responsibilities in the setting where they work. Although these work settings vary widely, Early and Winton's (2001) data suggest that proportionately more associate degree students work, or plan to work, with infants and toddlers than do students in four-year programs, and that many entering students have been working in family child care or child care administrative positions.

Other associate degree students are entering the early childhood field from an entirely different career. Some students are planning to transfer

into a four-year college, heading either toward teacher certification or toward other work in the early childhood field. A strong general education foundation together with an introduction to early childhood professional issues and skills is often the combination these students seek. Still other students enter a community college program with a relatively limited set of objectives (e.g., to take one course that meets a child care licensing requirement or to receive college credit for work toward the CDA) but find unexpected pleasure and challenge in higher education. With support, such students often continue through the associate degree toward a baccalaureate degree and beyond.

Most early childhood associate degree programs focus on preparing students for direct work with young children in classroom settings. However, associate degree students may have other professional goals (many requiring further education immediately or later in students' careers) including but not limited to:

Early childhood educator roles such as early childhood classroom teacher, family child care provider, Head Start teacher, or paraprofessional in the public schools;

Home-family support roles such as home visitor, family advocate, child protective services worker, or parent educator; or

Professional support roles such as early childhood administrator in a child care or Head Start program, staff trainer, peer/program mentor, or advocate at the community, state, or national level.

Responding to student and community needs

Associate degree programs have great opportunities to meet the diverse needs of their students in ways that are responsive, flexible, and innovative.

Providing a foundation for multiple roles and pathways. Associate degree early childhood programs focus on providing solid foundational knowledge, field experiences, and common skills and strategies that prepare students for multiple roles within the early childhood field. In combination with this program-specific foundation, general education courses strengthen students' conceptual knowledge in multiple areas that are

important for all educated individuals, including those responsible for young children's learning. Some programs are focused more on transfer and others more on immediate entry into the career. Whatever the balance, in all cases high-quality associate degree programs promote both general and professional education in an integrated fashion.

Meeting immediate needs while keeping doors open. Early childhood students who are already working in the field need high-quality professional course work offered concurrently with strong general education. Students who need time to succeed in developmental reading, writing, and mathematics courses also need time to develop confidence, skills, and career goals before deciding whether to seek transfer into a four-year institution. Early tracking of students into nontransfer or "terminal" programs can perpetuate the idea that little education is needed to teach our youngest children. In addition, premature tracking may create unnecessary barriers to students' future options—a serious concern given the opportunities for these students to become part of a more diverse leadership pool for the early childhood field. Many associate degree programs are attempting to keep these doors open through "career programs" (programs that are primarily aimed at enhancing one's current career) that still maintain transfer options.

Meeting the challenge of transfer and articulation. Historically, associate degree graduates, even those who have not been counseled into "nontransfer" options, have faced serious obstacles in attempting to transfer credits to a four-year program. In recent years, however, a growing number of associate degree programs and baccalaureate programs have attempted to develop links that support students' movement from one educational program to another. This process is generally referred to as *articulation*. The connections are intended to serve as one component of a relatively seamless system of professional development. Despite some institutional barriers on both sides, there has been progress in a number of states to create smoother articulation—and some state legislatures are requiring institutions to craft "articulation agreements" between all two- and four-year programs. If successful, these connections promote more

continuity across the professional development system and allow greater numbers of associate degree students to have the option of moving forward in higher education without losing credits or repeating content already mastered.

Serving today's students with creative solutions. The diversity of degrees, career goals, and transfer options within associate degree programs creates challenges for faculty and administrators, but it also creates opportunities for programs to be responsive, creative, and flexible. Greater numbers of associate degree programs are offering distance learning, noncredit to credit course work, courses offered at worksites, and specialized courses that focus on particular settings and roles such as family child care.

Implications for NAEYC's Associate Standards

Support for flexibility, innovation, and articulation is increasingly necessary as early childhood associate degree programs work to meet the needs of students and the profession today. At the same time, the current national attention to early childhood education is likely to produce significant changes over the next decade—including new roles for associate degree programs as states and others reset teacher qualifications and redesign systems of early education. Collaboratively developed and aligned, early childhood education standards can provide a solid and common foundation to support both articulation and innovation, meeting the needs and incorporating the wisdom of local communities, families, and practitioners. Standards for this diverse array of associate degree programs must promote innovation and flexibility while ensuring equivalent standards of quality for all students.

As it does for initial licensure programs, NAEYC cautions associate programs against the superficial “mile wide and inch deep” model of professional preparation. The challenges are especially daunting in associate degree programs, which vary so greatly (both between and within programs) in degree options, the relative focus on general education, transfer and articulation or current career enhancement, and the constraints on the number and type of courses they may offer.

Looking at the standards in this document, associate degree program faculty will be challenged to weigh breadth versus depth (standard by standard and element by element) within the context of their own program, student needs (including the need to acquire concepts and skills in general education), and the realities of a two-year time frame. Again, the answer is not replicating or compressing the approach used in four- and five-year licensure programs. An associate degree program that specializes in early childhood education has a responsibility to address all of the standards, just not in the same way or at the same depth as baccalaureate programs would. In some cases, the decision may be simply to expose students to a particular issue in a general or introductory way; in other cases, the primary focus for associate students may be on developing some specific skills, with in-depth theory and research linkages left for possible study in a four-year institution. Certain aspects of a standard may appear especially important for students in an associate program, with other aspects requiring less focused attention. Like houses that start out with the same foundation and framework but look entirely different as rooms are added, combined, altered, and personalized, each associate program may implement these standards in distinctive ways—as long as what is implemented is of uniformly high quality.

In developing the Associate Standards in this document, NAEYC and its colleagues in community college and other professional settings have attempted to respect and reflect the unique characteristics of associate degree programs, while also connecting the standards to the entire continuum of early childhood professional preparation.

Standards and program accreditation

The standards that follow describe what well-prepared graduates of associate degree early childhood programs should know and be able to do within the framework of NAEYC's five core standards: child development and learning; family and community relationships; observation, documentation, and assessment; teaching and learning; and professionalism.

That limited scope means that several important issues are not addressed. For example, these

Associate Standards do not detail a number of features from NAEYC's 1994 Guidelines that had been adapted from the former NCATE standards for accreditation of professional education units. Those features included expectations for the design of professional education (including the conceptual framework, general studies, field experiences, and so on); the characteristics, qualifications, and assessment of students; faculty characteristics, qualifications, and professional development; and the administration of the early childhood program (including governance and resource issues).

In the new accreditation system for baccalaureate, master's, and doctoral programs at NCATE-affiliated institutions, NAEYC does not review those broader aspects (except for the early childhood conceptual framework). Rather, those aspects are addressed by NCATE in its review of the institution's overall "professional education unit," using unit-level standards that NCATE revised in 2000. Because community colleges and associate degree programs currently are not eligible for NCATE accreditation, no review process for them exists that might include such broader kinds of criteria. A future early childhood program accreditation process at the associate level would need to develop such criteria as part of a more comprehensive set of accreditation standards and criteria—including but not limited to the standards in this document.

Processes and timelines for revision

This new NAEYC standards document, like the 1994 Guidelines for associate degree programs it replaces, has been the product of a close collaboration with ACCESS, the national organization of American Associate Degree Early Childhood Educators. ACCESS leaders have been key participants in the work group that drafted these standards. That collaboration, as well as continuing feedback and critiques from associate degree faculty, has been essential to ensure credibility, vision, and linkage with community colleges' distinctive missions and contexts.

Revision of the 1994 Guidelines began with the assumption that the five core standards NAEYC had developed for its new Initial Licensure and Advanced Standards were both appropriate and

significant for associate degree programs too. By building each set of standards from a common core, NAEYC wished to affirm the continuity and connectedness of early childhood professional preparation. Discussions of that proposed approach at conference sessions and other forums confirmed that it would receive widespread support from teacher educators and others, so long as distinctions were made in how programs addressed and assessed the common standards.

Before beginning this revision, NAEYC and ACCESS sought comments from stakeholders regarding the 1994 Guidelines, focusing on elements that should be retained and those that might be altered or enhanced. Faculty felt strongly that programs needed a balance between standards that were overly prescriptive or restrictive, and those that would be so vague as to offer no guidance. As with the Initial Licensure and Advanced Standards revisions, there was general support for retaining the five key categories of child development, family relationships, assessment, curriculum and teaching practices, and professionalism. The critical importance of high-quality field experiences was also affirmed. The work group and others in the field also believed that the document needed to highlight the distinctive and often complex nature of preparation at the associate level (for example, the mix of programs primarily preparing students for transfer and programs primarily preparing students for immediate employment or enhancing their current credentials).

Earlier versions were shared at sessions at NAEYC's 2002 National Institute for Early Childhood Professional Development and at NAEYC's 2002 Annual Conference. Written and verbal comments at those sessions influenced further revisions leading to this current document, which was posted with an electronic feedback form on NAEYC's and ACCESS's Websites. In addition, comments were sought from a wide range of individuals and groups with particular expertise and with various kinds of interest in associate degree standards, including those involved in four- and five-year teacher education programs.

In July 2003, NAEYC's Governing Board reviewed and approved this Associate Standards document, as it reviews and approves all Asso-

ciation position statements. In August 2003, ACCESS endorsed the standards.

Components and organization

The standards that follow include a number of interconnected components. Those components, and their organization, are outlined below:

Core standards

As described earlier, NAEYC's core Associate Standards are identical to those in its Initial Licensure and Advanced Standards documents. There are five core standards, each of which describes in a few sentences what well-prepared students should know and be able to do. For example, Standard 1 is:

Promoting Child Development and Learning—Students prepared in associate degree programs use their understanding of young children's characteristics and needs, and of multiple interacting influences on children's development and learning, to create environments that are healthy, respectful, supportive, and challenging for all children.

It is important to note, then, that the standard is not just that students know something "about" child development and learning—the expectations are more specific and complex than that.

Supporting explanations

Like the Initial Licensure and Advanced Standards documents, this Associate Standards document includes rationales, or "supporting explanations," for each core standard. For associate degree programs, each supporting explanation offers a general description of why that standard is important, but also emphasizes the specific aspects that may be appropriate to emphasize in associate programs—linked to but not identical with how the standard might be addressed in baccalaureate or advanced programs. The discussion in the supporting explanations is supplemented by the references and resources at the end of this document.

Key elements

To help readers understand what the expectations are for each standard, this document identifies three to five "key elements" within

each standard. In effect, the key elements unpack the meaning of that standard to clarify its most important features. Again, these key elements are identical in NAEYC's Initial Licensure, Advanced, and Associate Standards documents, yet would be implemented and assessed quite differently at each level. To continue with the example above, for Standard 1, Promoting Child Development and Learning, its key elements are:

- 1a: Knowing and understanding young children's characteristics and needs
- 1b: Knowing and understanding the multiple influences on development and learning
- 1c: Using developmental knowledge to create healthy, respectful, supportive, and challenging learning environments

Examples of opportunities to learn and practice

NAEYC wants this Associate Standards document to be as useful as possible to faculty and others concerned with developing the competencies of associate degree students. For this reason, under each key element are listed examples of how associate degree programs might help students learn and practice the knowledge, skills, and professional dispositions within that aspect of that standard. Such opportunities may be found both in general education and in the early childhood program—and ideally, would be integrated throughout. Again, the extent of these opportunities will appropriately vary depending on the extent of early childhood and related course work and field experiences within the associate degree program.

For example, under Key Element 1a: Knowing and understanding young children's characteristics and needs, this document suggests:

Opportunities to learn this content would typically include course work in child development, emphasizing current research and its applications. This builds a foundation for practice and for further study. When connected with in-class support, high-quality field experiences can also serve as rich opportunities for students to observe and describe children's characteristics and needs, as members of cultures and communities, as part of an age group and as individuals. Case study assignments are powerful teaching tools.

Examples of evidence and assessments of students' growth

Immediately following the examples of opportunities to learn and practice are examples of ways that faculty might assess or document student growth and development—both quantitatively and qualitatively. Continuing with Key Element 1a: Knowing and understanding young children's characteristics and needs, the suggestion is:

Students might demonstrate competence in this key element by, for example, successfully completing a child development course, receiving positive ratings of knowledge and understanding in a case study project or child observation assignment, developing and using an informal checklist, or developing lesson plans that take into account children's cultural and developmental characteristics and needs.

As always, the examples (of opportunities and of evidence) are intended to be suggestions, not prescriptions. Associate degree program faculty are invited to use, adapt, and expand the examples to fit their own context and the scope and nature of their program.

Supportive skills

In order to support the effective use of the knowledge, skills, and dispositions described in Standards 1–5, well-prepared graduates of associate degree programs also need a set of skills that cut across those five domains. The section of this document that follows the standards describes five such skills: (1) skills in self-assessment and self-advocacy; (2) skills in mastering and applying foundational skills from general education; (3) written and verbal communication skills; (4) skills in making connections between prior knowledge/experience and new learning; and (5) skills in identifying and using professional resources.

Again, examples are given of how associate degree faculty might offer students opportunities to learn and practice these skills and examples of what evidence might demonstrate students' competence in each skill area—both to enhance their current work and, in many cases, to lay the foundation for successful completion of a baccalaureate degree and beyond.

References and resources

The final section of this document provides key references and resources. These are intended to highlight critical issues in professional preparation, to identify the research base for each standard, and to suggest resources for faculty to explore further as they review and enhance their own programs.

Some notes on the terminology used in this document

“Students prepared in associate degree programs” refers to those who are preparing for professional positions serving young children and their families.

“Use” refers to application in practice, always soundly based on professional knowledge.

“Know” refers to possession of key information.

“Understand” includes analysis and reflection.

“All children” means *all*: children with developmental delays or disabilities, children who are gifted and talented, children whose families are culturally and linguistically diverse, children from diverse socioeconomic groups, and other children with individual learning styles, strengths, and needs. Note that NAEYC uses the term *children*, rather than *students*, to reflect the focus on all aspects of development and learning and to remind ourselves that children have identities outside of their classroom roles.

The term **“field experiences”** includes observations, field work, practica, and student teaching or other “clinical” experiences such as home visiting.

The term **“culture”** includes ethnicity, racial identity, economic class, family structure, language, and religious and political beliefs, which profoundly influence each child's development and relationship to the world.

Standards Summary

These core standards are identical to NAEYC's Initial Licensure core standards; however, associate programs distinguish themselves from initial licensure programs in the scope and depth of preparation. In addition, the term *students prepared in associate degree programs* is used rather than the term *candidates* that NCATE uses in accrediting initial licensure and advanced programs.

Standard 1. Promoting Child Development and Learning

Students prepared in associate degree programs use their understanding of young children's characteristics and needs, and of multiple interacting influences on children's development and learning, to create environments that are healthy, respectful, supportive, and challenging for all children.

Standard 2. Building Family and Community Relationships

Students prepared in associate degree programs know about, understand, and value the importance and complex characteristics of children's families and communities. They use this understanding to create respectful, reciprocal relationships that support and empower families, and to involve all families in their children's development and learning.

Standard 3. Observing, Documenting, and Assessing to Support Young Children and Families

Students prepared in associate degree programs know about and understand the goals, benefits, and uses of assessment. They know about and use systematic observations, documentation, and other effective assessment strategies in a responsible way, in partnership with families and other professionals, to positively influence children's development.

Standard 4. Teaching and Learning

Students prepared in associate degree programs integrate their understanding of and relationship with children and families; their understanding

of developmentally effective approaches to teaching and learning; and their knowledge of academic disciplines to design, implement, and evaluate experiences that promote positive development and learning for all young children.

Sub-Standard 4a. Connecting with children and families

Students know, understand, and use positive relationships and supportive interactions as the foundation for their work with young children.

Sub-Standard 4b. Using developmentally effective approaches

Students know, understand, and use a wide array of effective approaches, strategies, and tools to positively influence children's development and learning.

Sub-Standard 4c. Understanding content knowledge in early education

Students understand the importance of each content area in young children's learning. They know the essential concepts, inquiry tools, and structure of content areas, including academic subjects, and can identify resources to deepen their understanding.

Sub-Standard 4d. Building meaningful curriculum

Students use their own knowledge and other resources to design, implement, and evaluate meaningful, challenging curriculum that promotes comprehensive developmental and learning outcomes for all young children.

Standard 5. Becoming a Professional

Students prepared in associate degree programs identify and conduct themselves as members of the early childhood profession. They know and use ethical guidelines and other professional standards related to early childhood practice. They are continuous, collaborative learners who demonstrate knowledgeable, reflective and critical perspectives on their work, making informed decisions that integrate knowledge from a variety of sources. They are informed advocates for sound educational practices and policies.

Standards

The following standards are identical to NAEYC's Initial Licensure core standards. In its position statements and publications about the continuum of early childhood professional preparation, and in the core competencies outlined in many state early childhood career development systems, NAEYC affirms the value of having a common set of outcomes shared by all in the profession, whatever their preparation or professional role.

As described earlier in this document, however, associate programs distinguish themselves from initial licensure programs in the scope and depth of preparation. In addition, in the standards below, the term *students* or *graduates* of associate programs is used rather than the term *candidates* that NCATE uses in accrediting initial licensure and advanced programs.

Standard 1. Promoting Child Development and Learning

Students prepared in associate degree programs use their understanding of young children's characteristics and needs, and of multiple interacting influences on children's development and learning, to create environments that are healthy, respectful, supportive, and challenging for all children.

Supporting explanation

All early childhood professionals base their practice on a sound foundation of child development knowledge. Many students enter associate degree programs with years of experience in child care, Head Start, or other settings in which they observe children's development on a daily basis. Associate degree programs build on this experience by connecting experience with relevant theoretical and research knowledge. Programs provide those working in teaching or paraprofessional roles with current, research-based, culturally informed knowledge that students draw upon in their daily interactions with young children. Programs ensure that students know what the children in their programs are like, what the reasons may be for similarities and differences among children of the same and different ages, and what the major

cognitive, language, physical/motor, social, and emotional needs are among the children with whom students will be working.

Independently or as part of a team, associate degree graduates show that they can communicate with young children in healthy, developmentally appropriate ways and that they can help create environments that promote children's development by building on cultural, individual, and developmental characteristics. This foundation can enrich graduates' ability to create engaging, play-oriented learning environments that reflect current knowledge, incorporating developmentally and culturally appropriate practices for all children, including those with disabilities. (Standard 4, Teaching and Learning, describes these skills and knowledge in more detail.) To broaden students' abilities to use child development knowledge in varied professional roles, associate degree programs also help students become more articulate about the nature and importance of the child development foundations of early childhood education, and become better able to communicate these foundations to families and other adults. In addition, this foundation prepares those transferring to baccalaureate programs for later, more in-depth study of child development and learning.

Key elements of Standard 1

1a. Knowing and understanding young children's characteristics and needs

Opportunities to learn. Opportunities to learn this content would typically include course work in child development, emphasizing current research and its applications. This builds a foundation for practice and for further study. When connected with in-class support, high-quality field experiences can also serve as rich opportunities for students to observe and describe children's characteristics and needs, as members of cultures and communities, as part of an age group, and as individuals. Case study assignments are powerful teaching tools.

Evidence of growth. Students might demonstrate competence in this key element by, for example, successfully completing a child development course, receiving positive ratings of knowledge and understanding in a case study project or child observation assignment, developing and using an informal checklist, or

developing lesson plans that take into account children’s cultural and developmental characteristics and needs.

1b. Knowing and understanding the multiple influences on development and learning

Opportunities to learn. Associate degree programs create a foundation for this complex area by helping students observe and discuss the many examples they see in their work and field experience settings, perhaps with a child case study focus. Students’ reflections on their own development provide additional insight.

Evidence of growth. Students’ growing understanding may be seen in their responses to vignettes or actual classroom events, when students begin to offer more complex, culturally informed explanations for children’s characteristics and behavior. Portfolio entries that focus on individual children’s strengths and needs may also reveal students’ levels of understanding.

1c. Using developmental knowledge to create healthy, respectful, supportive, and challenging learning environments

Opportunities to learn. Opportunities to learn and practice these skills arise in almost every course and field experience in an associate degree program, whether these courses and experiences are extensive or limited by the nature of the program. Faculty can routinely include “what does this mean for my work with young children?” assignments in child development courses, helping students link theoretical and research knowledge to practice. A program might alert students to the key features of positive learning environments by asking them to explain how their activity/lesson plans attend to the *healthy, respectful, supportive, and challenging* dimensions.

Evidence of growth. These activity/lesson plans—and their implementation—can be assessed to see how well students incorporate knowledge of children’s development within cultures and communities, and how effectively they demonstrate a focus on health, respect, support, and challenge. Faculty might also use these dimensions as part of field experience evaluations.

Standard 2. Building Family and Community Relationships

Students prepared in associate degree programs know about, understand, and value the importance and complex characteristics of children’s families and communities. They use this understanding to create respectful, reciprocal relationships that support and empower families and to involve all families in their children’s development and learning.

Supporting explanation

Family and community contexts must be well understood and valued by all early childhood professionals, whatever their degree or role. Before, during, and after graduation, associate degree students may have frequent opportunities to interact with families and members of their communities. Associate degree programs help students better understand the families with whom they work, adding research-based knowledge of family dynamics, family development, and culturally responsive practices. This knowledge creates a foundation for further study and also improves graduates’ ability to work successfully with families in a variety of roles. Programs also develop students’ skills, even at a beginning level, in creating supportive individual relationships with families, communicating with and supporting all families, including those from diverse cultures and those whose children have disabilities or other special needs. Finally, associate degree programs ensure that graduates know how to find help and support from colleagues and from community agencies in addressing difficult family situations.

Associate degree programs help students move beyond stereotyped perceptions of families to a respectful appreciation of challenges facing families of young children. With this foundation, associate program graduates are prepared either for further study of these issues in baccalaureate programs or for roles as effective practitioners who can assist families of young children in promoting their development and learning.

Well-prepared associate degree students will demonstrate that they know, understand, and

can use information about family characteristics and needs to better support and communicate with the families of children they serve. At a foundational level, associate degree programs help students learn to work independently or as part of an education team to build respectful relationships, communicate helpfully with families about their children's development and learning, and use varied strategies to support family involvement.

Key elements of Standard 2

2a. Knowing about and understanding family and community characteristics

Opportunities to learn. Associate degree programs can use students' work and field experience settings to explore and discuss these characteristics and their implications for building relationships and communicating with families. Guided readings, panels of diverse family and community members, and visits to a variety of communities can broaden students' horizons.

Evidence of growth. Students' growth in knowledge and understanding may be seen, for example, in their portfolio or journal descriptions of the families and communities in which children live. Assessment of this work needs to include attention to growth in understanding of and respect for diversity, as well as assessment of students' foundational understanding of how children's development and learning may be influenced by family and community contexts. It is important for students to demonstrate understanding that young children's racial identities are a significant aspect of their development and that the concept of "race" has a socially constructed, rather than a biological, basis.

2b. Supporting and empowering families and communities through respectful, reciprocal relationships

Opportunities to learn. Faculty can introduce students to the importance of staff-family relationships through readings and course assignments. Field experiences and students' work sites offer many opportunities to observe and construct relationships, independently or as part of a team. Role plays and other simulations can broaden students' knowledge of and

responsiveness to family diversity. Students can learn more about how to support families by creating resource guides to local community agencies.

Evidence of growth. Logs, portfolio entries, and supervisors' evaluations allow faculty to see students' progress in this area, tracking students' growing ability to see families' and communities' strengths and contributions to the teaching-learning process.

2c. Involving families and communities in their children's development and learning

Opportunities to learn. Even if time in the associate degree program is limited, well-designed assignments may prompt students to design and implement family involvement activities, following research-based best practices. In other cases, role plays or other simulations may be effective, or students may read about or observe exemplary family involvement programs. Field experiences can build in family involvement assignments that foster flexible responses to families' and children's diversity—in culture, language, and economic circumstances.

Evidence of growth. Depending on a program's characteristics and context, students might demonstrate their competence by documenting and displaying actual examples of family involvement activities in a class project; creating a portfolio or resource guide that others could use; or analyzing and responding to a written scenario in which families of diverse cultures or families whose children have disabilities seem reluctant to become involved with the program.

Standard 3. Observing, Documenting, and Assessing to Support Young Children and Families

Students prepared in associate degree programs know about and understand the goals, benefits, and uses of assessment. They know about and use systematic observations, documentation, and other effective assessment strategies in a responsible way, in partnership with families and other professionals, to positively influence children's development and learning.

Supporting explanation

In order to construct early childhood environments that are responsive to the learning needs of young children, early childhood professionals—whatever their roles—must engage in an ongoing cycle of inquiry within their classrooms and work settings. Information gained from this process is used for curriculum development, tracking children’s progress, communicating with families and other professionals, and documenting the impact of programs on children’s lives.

As future participants in this process, associate degree students must have a foundational understanding of the goals, benefits, and uses of assessment. Even at a beginning level, they should know that responsible assessment is done in an ethically grounded manner and is based on sound professional standards. In addition, programs ensure that students pay close attention to issues of confidentiality in gathering and reporting information about children and families.

As part of this foundational understanding, associate degree students are introduced to the value of careful observation, documentation, and other appropriate assessment strategies. This would include a solid awareness of the connection between the assessment process and planning for meaningful curriculum. Curriculum that engages young children in the process of learning is based on the documented interests and abilities of the children. Likewise, early childhood professionals must develop the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed to work in partnership with families and other professionals in order to gather data that documents the developmental progression, individual needs, and progress toward learning within the classroom (DEC 2001). Associate degree programs can help students begin to develop these competencies.

Associate degree students who have direct contact with children need skills for engaging in deliberate, planful observation. They need to understand the various strategies for observing and assessing, how to choose appropriate strategies, and how to record and analyze what they observe, looking for the interest, curiosity, and uniqueness of each child. They should be aware of commonly adopted standardized assessments that are used for accountability and identification of special needs, and they should know what responsibilities they may have in contributing

information to these assessments. Students should also understand the need to communicate valid, reliable information to families and other professionals who support children’s learning and development.

Early childhood professionals may also work with children, families, and other agencies in nonclassroom settings. The need to gather information and report it to families, agencies, and other professionals requires skills such as clear and concise oral and written communication; understanding of family structures and family development; participating as part of an educational team; contributing to program evaluation; and understanding local, state, and national standards as these standards apply to their own work settings and roles.

Within a two-year program that also provides strong general education, associate degree students cannot fully develop all these competencies in family and community relationships. However, they should gain a basic understanding, positive dispositions, and foundational skills.

Key elements of Standard 3

3a. Understanding the goals, benefits, and uses of assessment

Opportunities to learn. The foundations of this understanding may be developed in a number of courses including child development, curriculum, and teaching strategies. Students can observe capable teachers using assessment to guide their planning and to communicate with families and specialists. Associate degree students can engage in guided practice with a particular focus on classroom observation.

Evidence of growth. Students’ progress may be seen, for example, in role plays in which they explain assessment’s goals and benefits to colleagues or families. Students might create group projects in which they pool and document their knowledge of assessment’s varied uses.

3b. Knowing about and using observation, documentation, and other appropriate assessment tools and approaches

Opportunities to learn. In associate degree programs, the emphasis should be on the

practical uses of assessment to inform daily planning for children. Many opportunities to learn and practice may be embedded in field experiences or may extend students' current assessment practices at their work site. Assignments in multiple courses (e.g., child development, curriculum, nutrition) can emphasize careful observation using a variety of tools. Structured observation projects or case studies hone students' skills and increase their awareness of and responses to all forms of diversity, including family structure, ethnicity, racial identity, and religious beliefs. Class "assessment displays" can expand students' acquaintance with a broader array of assessment approaches, especially if students teach one another.

Evidence of growth. Faculty and field experience supervisors have multiple ways to evaluate student progress in this area. Observations can be rated for their objectivity and in-depth description; lesson plans and other assignments can be examined to see how well assessments are incorporated; written responses to hypothetical situations may show students' knowledge of appropriate assessment strategies.

3c. Understanding and practicing responsible assessment

Opportunities to learn. Associate degree faculty introduce ethical issues in assessment through readings (including NAEYC's Code of Ethical Conduct and other position statements); interviews and discussions with master teachers may also shed light on current challenges and assessment trends.

Evidence of growth. Although associate degree students do not have the training to administer many standardized or complex assessment measures, faculty can gauge students' progress through noting the degree of objectivity, fairness, and absence of bias in child observations, and in students' adherence to confidentiality as they share assessment results.

3d. Knowing about assessment partnerships with families and other professionals

Opportunities to learn. Associate program faculty can introduce students to this concept through, for example, panel discussions or

videos in which families or specialists share their efforts to work closely with teachers in collecting and using assessment information. Students may seek families' insights into their child's development and behavior.

Evidence of growth. Progress in understanding this key aspect of assessment may be seen, for example, in students' journals based on field experiences or work settings, as well as in their responses to hypothetical scenarios.

Standard 4. Teaching and Learning

Students prepared in associate degree programs integrate their understanding of and relationships with children and families; their understanding of developmentally effective approaches to teaching and learning; and their knowledge of academic disciplines to design, implement, and evaluate experiences that promote positive development and learning for all young children.

Supporting explanation

Associate degree graduates work as professionals in diverse settings that require foundational knowledge of the ways young children learn, as well as competencies to support that learning. Research has shown a direct relationship between the level of teacher knowledge and quality of work with children, especially in the impact on children's language development, social skills, and learning. Recent studies of early literacy and brain development clearly indicate the key role of the early childhood professional in providing appropriate learning experiences for young children. The complex nature of this standard requires the ability to use reflective practices that incorporate knowledge of individual and family development with meaningful curriculum. The students will demonstrate competence in a variety of strategies that respect diverse learners and reflect best practices.

Students at the associate degree level have opportunities to implement and support the implementation of meaningful teaching and learning for young children in settings that include, but are not limited to, child care centers, preschool settings, home-based or family child care and as paraprofessionals in kindergarten-primary classrooms. These students frequently create the first relationships and the first learning

environments for young children and their families outside the home. It is important for them to demonstrate competencies in applying principles of child development and current research on early learning to effective curriculum planning and implementation. Their knowledge of best practices in the classroom is translated into supporting, planning, and evaluating learning that promotes development of the whole child.

Although further education will add greater depth, associate degree students demonstrate their knowledge of teaching and learning through individualized approaches to children and families, supporting a curriculum that takes into account culturally valued content and that adapts content for children who are diverse in ability, temperament, and learning style. Students need to demonstrate beginning competencies in using a variety of strategies to positively impact young children's development and learning.

Sub-Standard 4a: Connecting with children and families

Students know, understand, and use positive relationships and supportive interactions as the foundation for their work with young children.

Associate degree graduates are most often found in settings with children from birth through age 5. Knowledge of theories and practices that recognize the critical importance of supportive relationships is essential for these early years. Programs help students use their understanding of children's individual and cultural characteristics (including abilities, learning styles, temperaments, and developmental profiles) to facilitate positive adult-child relationships.

Sub-Standard 4b: Using developmentally effective approaches

Students know, understand, and use a wide array of effective approaches, strategies, and tools to positively influence children's development and learning.

Current research emphasizes the need to use a continuum of strategies to meet children's varied learning needs. Associate degree programs introduce and provide opportunities for students

to explore a number of curriculum models that address the development of the whole child, including understanding the role of guidance and problem solving to support children's growth. Associate degree students also gain a foundational understanding of the differences between best practices for different age groups and developmental levels.

Sub-Standard 4c: Understanding content knowledge in early education

Students understand the importance of each content area in young children's learning. They know the essential concepts, inquiry tools, and structure of content areas, including academic subjects, and can identify resources to deepen their understanding.

Teachers of young children approach any content knowledge area with an understanding of the young child's emerging skills. However, the associate degree graduate addresses this content knowledge in the context of the whole child, and also with a well-grounded understanding of the foundations of language, literacy, mathematics, and other key content areas. Teachers of young children understand that learning occurs through a relationship-based, meaningful curriculum that emphasizes play, integration, and active learning and that incorporates experiences in creative arts, music/movement, motor development, and health/safety/nutrition. Although further education will add greater depth, programs prepare students to recognize core foundational concepts that build toward later learning, attending to the very different learning and developmental characteristics of infants, toddlers and twos, preschoolers, and school-agers.

Sub-Standard 4d: Building meaningful curriculum

Students use their own knowledge and other resources to design, implement, and evaluate meaningful, challenging curriculum that promotes comprehensive developmental and learning outcomes for all young children.

Associate degree graduates are aware of the breadth of these outcomes, including positive outcomes in language development, literacy, mathematics, science, social/emotional compe-

tence, approaches to learning, physical health, and the creative arts. At an introductory level, students demonstrate that they can implement curriculum that uses the conceptual knowledge they are acquiring through general education, that appropriately reflects the importance of play as the tool of learning in the early years, and that is likely to promote positive developmental outcomes. They demonstrate the ability to be flexible, individually and as part of a team, in adapting curriculum to meet the interests and needs of culturally diverse children and of children with exceptionalities. They demonstrate skills in modifying curriculum in light of evaluation and feedback from supervisors.

Key elements of Standard 4

4a. Knowing, understanding, and using positive relationships and supportive interactions

Opportunities to learn. Opportunities to learn and practice begin with an introduction, generally in a child development course, to the critical importance of relationships and to the relevant research base. Students' reflections on their own personal and work experience help make this point. Journals, field experience notes, and well-designed assignments can prompt students to reflect on and plan how to develop and maintain positive relationships with young children, including those with diverse backgrounds and abilities.

Evidence of growth. Direct observations and evaluation of students' interactions with young children will help document their ability to create and sustain relationships. Because all students can improve in this critical area, evidence of growth in skills at relationship building is essential.

4b. Knowing, understanding, and using effective approaches, strategies, and tools for early education

Opportunities to learn. Associate degree programs offer students multiple opportunities to begin to learn and practice a variety of teaching techniques—through observations, simulated teaching, and applications in field experiences and work settings. Faculty introduce students to the professional knowledge base that supports the use of a “continuum of

teaching strategies” adapted to development, individual, and cultural characteristics.

Evidence of growth. Students' growth can be documented through student learning logs, supervisors' observations, analysis of lesson or activity plans, and many other ongoing assessments.

4c. Knowing and understanding the importance, central concepts, inquiry tools, and structures of content areas or academic disciplines

Opportunities to learn. Associate program faculty connect early childhood courses to what students are learning in general education, helping students identify which aspects of, for example, mathematics or science may be most engaging and important for young children. Programs create many opportunities to strengthen content knowledge on language and literacy-readings with discussion, reports on position statements on literacy and mathematics as well as national or state content standards, Internet exploration, guided classroom observations, etc.

Evidence of growth. The foundations of content knowledge may be assessed not only by performance in general education courses but also by students' explanation and application of that knowledge (at least at a beginning level) in designing activities.

4d. Using own knowledge and other resources to design, implement, and evaluate meaningful, challenging curriculum to promote positive outcomes

Opportunities to learn. Faculty offer opportunities for students to see multiple models of excellent curriculum through direct observation or videos. Program expectations for students' activity plans or project plans call for discussion of meaningfulness and challenge.

Evidence of growth. Performance in field experiences offers the most valid assessment, taking into account growth over time and the opportunities that may be available for students within the associate degree program. In this as in other areas, those opportunities, and therefore the depth of skill expected, will vary depending on the focus and scope of the program.

Standard 5. Becoming a Professional

Students prepared in associate degree programs identify and conduct themselves as members of the early childhood profession. They know and use ethical guidelines and other professional standards related to early childhood practice. They are continuous, collaborative learners who demonstrate knowledgeable, reflective, and critical perspectives on their work, making informed decisions that integrate knowledge from a variety of sources. They are informed advocates for sound educational practices and policies.

Supporting explanation

The variety of professional roles played by associate degree graduates requires an array of skills for interacting competently, capably, and collaboratively with culturally, linguistically, and ability diverse children, adults, and partners in diverse home and community settings. Most early childhood professionals will have daily opportunities to apply current knowledge and demonstrate ethical decision making. Skills in the areas of communication, collaboration with family and professional partners, and providing/accepting consultation are essential to the coordination of each child's learning experiences and opportunities, and associate degree students can begin to develop these skills. Whatever their position, associate degree graduates must function in a manner that demonstrates positive regard for the roles and responsibilities of team members, who may include support staff, peers, and supervisory personnel. Students at the associate, baccalaureate, and advanced program levels are at different points in their growth as professionals; nevertheless, the commitment of all students to becoming lifelong learners will enhance the quality of teaching available to each young child and support the vitality of the early childhood field. And, at each level and point in professional growth, a commitment to and knowledge of advocacy is essential—though the form that advocacy takes, and the background gained in the professional preparation program, will vary considerably.

Typically, associate degree graduates maintain daily contact with children, families, and collaborating partners in home and community settings. They will be expected to enter the lives of fami-

lies at the individual level and to gather and share information in a manner that is helpful, knowledgeable, and discreet. They will need to know how to balance the program/curriculum with knowledge of policies and guidelines for ethical decision making and appropriate linkages/referrals.

Skills for time and priority management will be essential to ensure opportunities for ongoing self-reflection and improvement. Because associate degree graduates often play essential roles in community settings that serve children of diverse cultures and abilities (e.g., early intervention, Head Start/Early Head Start), they will need to know about and be prepared to collaborate with diverse partners (e.g., speech-language pathologists, bilingual education specialists). Additionally, graduates who eventually function in professional support roles (e.g., administrators, mentors, trainers, advocates) must acquire a range of skills for supporting the development of staff, colleagues, and families. Some but not all of these skills may be incorporated into associate degree programs; others will await further study.

Key elements of Standard 5

5a. Identifying and involving oneself with the early childhood field

Opportunities to learn. Associate degree programs tailor opportunities to learn and practice to students' individual work histories and goals, providing resources that expand students' current knowledge of the field. Student organizations and involvement in NAEYC Affiliates are other examples of such opportunities.

Evidence of growth. Evaluation of progress may be based, for example, on evidence of professional activities, as well as on personal mission statements, reflective essays, or group presentations.

5b. Knowing about and upholding ethical standards and other professional guidelines

Opportunities to learn. Associate degree faculty can introduce students to the key principles of NAEYC's Code of Ethical Conduct. Students can share with one another the standards or other guidelines relevant to their work role (e.g., Head Start Performance Standards).

Evidence of growth. Faculty can assess ethical understanding through student responses to real or hypothetical ethical dilemmas. Presentations and reports on other professional guidelines are other sources of information on student progress.

5c. Engaging in continuous, collaborative learning to inform practice

Opportunities to learn. Group projects and other collaborative assignments will hone students' skills. Faculty can also identify and recommend resources for further study for students whose basic skills are in place. Students who are working or involved in field experiences can describe challenging classroom situations and seek out resources that can help them address the situation successfully.

Evidence of growth. Faculty know students are progressing if they are rated by peers or coworkers as good team members, if they document their efforts to seek new information even when not required, and when their classroom performance is enhanced by their own learning efforts.

5d. Integrating knowledgeable, reflective, and critical perspectives on early education

Opportunities to learn. Associate degree programs build a foundation for reflective practice while also grounding students in essential skills. Continuous modeling and prompting of students to ask "why?" will create multiple opportunities to learn and practice. Attendance at professional meetings, as well as viewing and discussing dialogues about professional issues, will expose associate degree students to complex perspectives that may differ from their own.

Evidence of growth. Student logs, journals, and portfolios, developed over time, are promising tools with which to assess students' increasing levels of knowledge, critical thinking, and reflection.

5e. Engaging in informed advocacy for children and the profession

Opportunities to learn. Because so many associate degree students are working in the field, some opportunities to learn and practice can be created on site—i.e., students can talk with families and colleagues about children's

or the profession's needs, using approaches learned in courses or from reading. Role plays and other simulations can present students with hypothetical situations in which advocacy skills are needed. Class speakers, interactions with community partners and programs that can help support culturally, linguistically, and ability diverse children and families, trips to professional meetings, Web investigations, and more, can broaden students' knowledge of effective advocacy.

Evidence of growth. Students' growth in advocacy skills can be assessed in a variety of ways, including evaluations of their ability to apply principles of effective advocacy in assignments or projects. Students' ability to identify situations that call for advocacy, in their own workplace or community, is another sign of competence in this area.

Supportive Skills

In order to support the effective use of the knowledge, skills, and dispositions described in Standards 1–5, well-prepared graduates of associate degree programs also need a set of skills that cut across these five domains. These skills are outlined below, along with examples of opportunities to learn and practice these skills. In some cases, these opportunities may be incorporated into general education courses, and in other cases they might be provided as part of the early childhood program or through collaborative efforts across units of the institution. Finally, examples show how students might demonstrate competence in each of these areas.

Skills in Self-Assessment and Self-Advocacy

Associate degree students are often at a key decision point in their professional lives, entering or re-entering higher education after extended work experiences or making decisions about further education beyond the associate degree. Therefore, skills in assessing one's own goals, strengths, and needs are critical, as is learning how to advocate for one's own professional needs.

Opportunities to learn. Opportunities to practice and learn these skills may occur, for example, in career counseling and advisement upon entry into the program and at key decision points thereafter. Student organizations and professional development events may also make a contribution. Courses may include role plays to strengthen self-advocacy skills. Student portfolios may include personal mission statements and self-assessments of growth over time.

Evidence of growth. Students' growth in these skills may be seen in assessments of changes over time and in the actual professional decisions made by students as they move through the program and beyond.

Skills in Mastering and Applying Foundational Concepts from General Education

General education has value for its own sake—as part of the background of an educated person—and for the value added to practitioners' ability to implement a conceptually rich curriculum. Both in immediate employment as an early childhood professional and in preparing for further baccalaureate study, associate degree graduates are enriched by understanding foundational concepts from areas including science, mathematics, literature, and the behavioral and social sciences.

Opportunities to learn. Opportunities to learn and practice are provided in high-quality general education courses selected to support students' goals and in intentional linkages between the general education and professional curriculum—for example, in team-taught courses and in assignments that call on students to apply general education concepts as they plan activities for young children.

Evidence of growth. Students' acquisition of these skills may be seen, for example, in their successful mastery of general education objectives, in their written and oral rationales for activities, and in ratings of the conceptual accuracy and richness of their curriculum plans.

Written and Verbal Communication Skills

Well-prepared associate degree graduates have strong skills in written and verbal communication. These skills allow them to provide positive language and literacy experiences for children, and they also support professional communications with families and colleagues. Students going on to baccalaureate study need skills sufficient to ensure success in upper-division academic work. In addition, technological literacy is an essential component of this set of skills.

Opportunities to learn. Opportunities to learn and practice are based on the program's assessment of individual students' strengths and needs. Some students will need more intensive support because of linguistic diversity or inadequate secondary preparation. Course work, labs, and assignments in both general and professional education courses should offer developmentally sequenced opportunities to gain communicative competence and build technological literacy.

Evidence of growth. Students' mastery of these skills may be seen, for example, in successful completion of relevant courses, performance on communication and technological aspects of assignments, and competent use of communication skills in field experiences.

Skills in Making Connections between Prior Knowledge/Experience and New Learning

All professionals need these skills, but they are especially important in supporting the learning of associate degree students who have worked for years in early care and education. Well-prepared associate degree graduates are able to respect and draw upon their past or current work experience and also reflect critically upon it, enriching and altering prior knowledge with new insights. These skills will, over time, enable graduates to respond to the evolving mandates and priorities of the early childhood field.

Opportunities to learn. Opportunities to learn and practice these skills are numerous; almost every assignment can prompt students to use and reflect on their experiences. Class discussions of work situations, logs, and portfolios can be used to encourage students to make connections. Student presentations related to their current work allow students to share and validate that experience.

Evidence of growth. Progress in making productive connections may be seen in students' growing ability to articulate relevant theory and research that either affirms or calls into question their experience—often seen in journals and portfolios, but also in interviews and presentations.

Skills in Identifying and Using Professional Resources

Even the best associate program cannot provide in-depth knowledge and skills in all areas. Therefore, well-prepared graduates should know how to identify and use credible professional resources from multiple sources, allowing them to better serve children and families with a wide range of cultures, languages, needs, and abilities.

Opportunities to learn. Opportunities to learn and practice these skills may occur within many courses and field experiences—for example, through Internet assignments, library research, discussions with other members of teaching teams who have other specializations, and so on.

Evidence of growth. Students' growth in this area may be evidenced, for example, by portfolio artifacts, resources used in lesson plans or other field assignments, or in class presentations.

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[Numbers in brackets denote items pertinent to one or more of the five standards; "G" denotes items of *General* usefulness.]

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- Center for Community College Policy, www.communitycollegepolicy.org
- Center for Evidence-Based Practices, www.evidencebasedpractices.org/projects.php
- Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement, www.ciera.org
- Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning, <http://csefel.uiuc.edu>
- CEO Forum on Education and Technology, Self-Assessment for Teacher Preparation, www.ceoforum.org
- Children and Computers, www.childrenandcomputers.com
- Community College Research Center, Teachers College/Columbia University, www.tc.columbia.edu/ccrc/
- Council for Exceptional Children, www.cec.sped.org
- Division for Early Childhood, www.dec-sped.org
- ERIC Clearinghouse on Assessment and Evaluation, <http://ericae.net>
- ERIC Clearinghouse for Community Colleges, www.gseis.ucla.edu/ERIC/eric.html
- International Reading Association, www.reading.org
- League for Innovation in the Community College, www.league.org
- MENC: National Association for Music Education, www.menc.org
- MuSICA: Music and Science Information Computer Archive, www.musica.uci.edu
- National Association for Bilingual Education, www.nabe.org
- National Association for Early Childhood Teacher Educators, www.naecte.org
- National Association of Community College Teacher Education Programs, www.nacctep.org/index.html
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- National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, www.nctm.org
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- National Institute for Early Education Research, <http://nieer.org/>
- Program for Infant/Toddler Caregivers, www.pitc.org
- Technology & Young Children (NAEYC Technology & Young Children Interest Forum), <http://techandyoungchildren.org/index.shtml>
- ZERO TO THREE, www.zerotothree.org

Appendix A

Associate Standards Work Group

NAEYC gratefully acknowledges the expertise and commitment of the members of the Associate Standards Work Group:

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