

THE CONTEXT FOR NAECTE'S POSITION STATEMENT ON EARLY CHILDHOOD CERTIFICATION

The intent of the National Association of Early Childhood Teacher Educators' (NAECTE) Position Statement on Early Childhood Certification is to support those advocating for greater presence of early childhood certified teachers in pre-kindergarten through third grade in their own states. It is not intended to recommend a national certification. Nor is it intended to require new certification; some form of early childhood certification already exists in almost every state.

This statement addresses only one part of a set of interrelated issues connected to early childhood teacher education and certification. NAECTE is particularly concerned with this aspect of this complex set of issues because many of our members prepare students for early childhood positions in public school settings. We anticipate that, in conjunction with other professional associations, additional position statements will be developed focusing on certification of teachers who work with children from birth to five-years-of-age in private settings, on appropriate content for teacher education programs that lead to early childhood certification, and on the qualifications of faculty teaching early childhood courses. These issues are important and need to be addressed, but they are not within the scope of the current position statement.

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

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

The position:

Early childhood certification (also called licensure) should be a requirement for teachers who work with children 8 years-of-age and under. This requirement will ensure that teachers of young children can provide learning opportunities appropriate to children's developmental levels.

NAECTE's position is that states and school districts adopt the following policies.

- Mandate early childhood certification for teachers in all public school classrooms for children five-years- old and younger (pre-kindergarten and kindergarten programs).
- Give priority in hiring and placement to teachers with early childhood certification when hiring for public school classrooms for six, seven, and eight-year-olds (1st, 2nd and 3rd grades).
- Require programs that lead to early childhood certification or an early childhood endorsement to meet National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) professional preparation standards in order to ensure that teachers have adequate preparation for teaching pre-kindergarten through third grade.

Early childhood certification varies from state to state: it may cover ages 0-8, or ages 3-8, or kindergarten-3rd grade. Elementary certification in most states allows teachers to work in kindergarten-through 6th or 8th grade. Certification/licensure guidelines in many states allow teachers placed in pre-kindergarten through 3rd grade classrooms to be certified in elementary education, with no specialized training in early childhood education.

The developmental needs of young children in pre-kindergarten through third grade can best be met by teachers who have completed specialized teacher preparation programs in early childhood education. An appropriate teacher education program can lead either to initial certification in early childhood education or an early childhood endorsement added to initial certification in elementary or special education.

Background

This position statement, developed by the National Association of Early Childhood Teacher Educators (NAECTE), addresses the importance of placing teachers with early childhood certification in pre-kindergarten, kindergarten and primary grades in public school programs.

The position and rationale are meant to inform all concerned constituents (e.g. state boards of education, state teacher standards boards, principals, superintendents, institutions of higher education, policymakers, and parents) that the distinct developmental and learning needs of children eight years of age and younger can best be met by teachers with specialized preparation in early childhood education. A recent survey revealed that although most states have some form of early childhood certification, very few require it for teachers working in early childhood classrooms (Fields & Mitchell, 2007).

Rationale

Elementary school administrators may choose to have the flexibility to place teachers in any grade level pre-kindergarten - 6th. However the benefits of this administrative ease are outweighed by the benefits of having specially prepared teachers getting young children off to a solid start in school. Teachers prepared in early childhood education understand that young children are transitioning from sensory learning to more abstract learning and that they think differently than elementary age children (Kamii & Ewing, 1996). Early childhood teachers are prepared to effectively scaffold children's learning and help them be successful in meeting state and federal standards (Bogard & Takanishi, 2005; NAEYC & NAECS/SDE, 2002; Sadowski, 2006). Early childhood teachers with a core body of developmental knowledge are also able to meet the social/emotional needs of young children, and can more effectively prevent and modify behavior problems.

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. Research has documented the unique needs of young learners and the necessity for teachers who know how to meet those needs. A robust and growing body of research shows strong relationships between teachers with early childhood education preparation and positive development and learning outcomes in young children (e.g., Ackerman, 2005; Barnett, 2004; Bowman, Donovan & Burns, 2000; Horm-Wingerd & Hyson, 2000; Hyson, 2003). Early childhood educators are grounded in child development theory; their specialized teacher education preparation guides them in providing the essential foundation experiences for children's success in school.

“Highly qualified” teachers for young children are well informed about how young children learn and develop and how that differs from how older children learn. Early childhood teachers are prepared to apply knowledge of child development and teaching strategies that match young children's ways of learning (Isenberg, 2000; Sadowski, 2006). Early childhood best practice ensures that the continuum of development and

learning from birth through age eight is understood and used in development of curriculum and instruction for young children (e.g., Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; Maeroff, 2006; NAEYC & NAECS/SDE, 2003).

The rationale for our position includes the following:

- Increased achievement and success of children who have been taught by teachers with strong backgrounds in early childhood development and education is well documented (e.g., AACTE, 2004; ACEI, 1991; Ackerman, 2005; ATE & NAEYC, 1991; Foundation for Child Development, 2005; Horm-Wingerd et al., 2000; Hyson, 2003; Isenberg, 2000; Kagan & Cohen, 1997; NAECS/SDE & NAECTE, 1993; Reynolds, Magnuson & Ou, 2006).
- Specific certification in early childhood education has long been recommended nationally as essential to ensure that all young children are served by professionals who recognize their unique developmental needs (ACEI, 1998; ATE & NAEYC, 1991; Bowman, Donovan, & Burns, 2001; Hyson, 2003; Isenberg, 2000; Kagan & Cohen, 1997; NAECS/SDE & NAECTE, 1993).
- The specific and unique body of knowledge, practice, and attitudes in early childhood education constitutes a distinct pedagogy from other education disciplines (e.g., AACTE, 2004; Bogard & Takanishi, 2005; Michigan Early Childhood Education Consortium & MAECTE, 2004; NAEYC & NAECS/SDE, 2003).

Endorsements

As of November 2007, this position statement has been endorsed by The Association for Childhood Education International (ACEI) and the Southern Early Childhood Association (SECA). The American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education (AACTE) has written a letter of support.

Endorsement discussions are in process with the following associations:

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), The National Child Care Coalition (NCCC), The National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education (NAECS/SDE), The National Education Association (NEA) ECE Caucus, The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS), Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD), Society for Research in Child Development (SRCDD), and The American Associate Degree Early Childhood Educators (ACCESS).

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