

Advancing the Early Childhood Profession: Next Steps



The recent release of *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation*, provides an important catalyst for advancing the early childhood profession—a goal that is central to NAEYC’s mission.

The report by the prestigious Institute of Medicine and National Research Council of the National Academy of Sciences sets forth 13 rigorously developed recommendations to tackle the highly fragmented early care and education workforce and improve outcomes for young children. The recommendations address the breadth of policy change that needs to occur and present a number of thoughtful scenarios on how to move essential policies forward.

The IOM/NRC recommendations are largely consistent with NAEYC’s recently adopted strategic direction that focuses on high-quality early learning, the profession, and building the organizational structure and capacity needed to advance our mission at the local, state, and national levels. NAEYC’s four desired results related to the profession are all echoed in the IOM/NRC report:

- Professional preparation and development for birth through age 8 educators is aligned and grounded in NAEYC’s standards and delivered in innovative ways.
- Skills, knowledge, competencies and qualifications are agreed upon and used to define the early care and education profession.
- Early childhood professionals are diverse, effective educators and leaders working within a compensation and recognition system that supports their excellence.
- Professional development and preparation systems support seamless progression for early care and education professionals to advance their education, professional learning and careers.

Previous efforts to establish professional definitions through a common nomenclature and a conceptual framework for the early childhood profession have failed to gain traction. Having the stature of the IOM/

NRC report will certainly help to advance the work. But, ensuring that this synthesis of science is translated into policy and practice will require strong collaborative leadership across major early care and education groups. This is a community with a history of limited resources and many divisions—pitting access versus quality and differences by setting, sector, and age group. A concerted effort is needed to unify the field around a set of shared definitions as a profession serving children birth through age 8. Then the definitions must be implemented in policy and practice through a comprehensive national, state, and local advocacy strategy.

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Successful implementation will require multiple initiatives by many organizations. These efforts must be coordinated and approached like a political campaign—convincing elected officials and administrative leaders of a mandate.

Purpose

This initiative will establish a unified, defined set of skills and competencies for early childhood educators, serving children birth through age 8, and develop a comprehensive strategy for their systemic adoption (nationally and in each state) and implementation in policy and practice.

National Taskforce and Grass-Roots Involvement

Throughout the next three years, NAEYC will work collaboratively with a clearly defined leadership group, embedding stakeholder input and feedback at various points along the way.

NAEYC will convene and project manage a national taskforce comprised of chief executives of the membership organizations or networks whose members work with or on behalf of young children birth through age 8, including K-3 focused organizations. Through facilitated discussions, this group will take responsibility for:

- developing guiding principles.
- engaging their national networks for feedback and consensus building.
- adopting and promoting nationally agreed upon skills, competencies, and qualifications (including recommendations for licensing and certifications) for the profession.

Key Target Groups

For definitions to be owned by the profession, they must be embraced by the millions of individuals who care for, educate, and work on behalf of young children birth through age 8. This work cannot be imposed through a top-down approach, although national leadership will be critical. Individual caregivers, teachers, administrators, principals, faculty in communities across the nation must see themselves reflected in and own the work.

NAEYC's affiliates with the greatest capacity will be strongly engaged for feedback, and a subset will be tasked with providing state and local leadership to build the groundswell of support necessary to successfully move a political agenda.

In addition there are a variety of systems leaders who must be engaged. These system leaders include policy/advocacy organizations, institutions of higher education, state chief school officers, federal agency teams, state executive and legislative staff, business groups and parents and families. Focus groups, key informant interviews, and individual surveys will assist in checking the pulse of these important constituents who will need to embrace the final recommendations.

The end result will be consensus on national definitions and qualification requirements for the early childhood

profession—serving children birth through age 8, positioning the profession to lead a national, state, and local advocacy strategy for their systemic implementation in professional preparation, financing, and wages and compensation.

Building Public Will and Support

This vision will require significant direct government affairs efforts to successfully influence federal legislation and the adoption of model legislation in states across the country. The success of strong government affairs efforts require an understanding of messages and messengers that move the sentiments of likely voters.

Efforts are already underway to build a national early childhood recruitment and retention campaign, or an effective brand for a career in early care and education. With generous support from the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, and the Richard W. Goldman Family Foundation, NAEYC has embarked on significant behavioral and market research (polling) targeted at early childhood educators and likely voters with findings released this fall. Building from the research, we will create a career-branding campaign focused on career awareness, recruitment, influencing the brand of early educators among likely voters.

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NAEYC views building public will and support as an iterative process. With strong and effective partnerships in place through the consensus-building on defining the profession, we will continue efforts to build public will, with a focus on polling to understand the sentiments of likely voters. We also anticipate heavy use of social media, including bloggers reaching

families and others, direct outreach to influential media outlets, the development of research briefs, and targeted messages to likely voters.

The Time is Now

NAEYC believes we must bring the science and technology of preparing for a political campaign to the early childhood field. To create a shared definition of the profession that can be effectively implemented, we must gain a deeper understanding of the issues and perspectives of the various fragments that exist, create space and opportunities for individuals across the fragmented sections to listen to each other, gain understanding, and build trust in order to develop an agenda that resonate across a unified profession.

Achieving consensus on professional definitions and professional qualification requirements sets the

foundation for a comprehensive national, state, and local advocacy strategy designed to result in a dynamic, diverse early childhood profession; teaching excellence; **and** a wage and compensation structure that attracts and retains the best and the brightest—regardless of the age of the child or the setting of the early learning experience. This initiative aims to deliver on the promise of early learning by making sure that our nation’s policies and practices catch up with the significant body of research and science about the benefits to children, families, and our society when children have access to high-quality early learning settings with skilled, knowledgeable teachers.

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