INITIAL STANDARDS SUMMARY

STANDARD 1. PROMOTING CHILD DEVELOPMENT AND LEARNING

Candidates prepared in early childhood degree programs are grounded in a child development knowledge base. They 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 each child.

Key elements of Standard 1

1a: Knowing and understanding young children's characteristics and needs, from birth through age 8.

1b: Knowing and understanding the multiple influences on early development and learning

1c: Using developmental knowledge to create healthy, respectful, supportive, and challenging learning environments for young children

Supporting explanation

The early childhood field has historically been grounded in a child development knowledge base, and early childhood programs have aimed to support a broad range of positive developmental outcomes for all young children. Although the scope and emphasis of that knowledge base have changed over the years, and although early childhood professionals recognize that other sources of knowledge are also important influences on curriculum and programs for young children, early childhood practice continues to be deeply linked with a "sympathetic understanding of the young child" (Elkind 1994).

Well-prepared early childhood degree candidates base their practice on sound **knowledge and understanding of young children's characteristics and needs. This foundation** encompasses multiple, interrelated areas of children's development and learning—including physical, cognitive, social, emotional, language, and aesthetic domains; play, activity, and learning processes; and motivation to learn—and is supported by coherent theoretical perspectives and by current research.

Candidates also understand and apply their understanding of the **multiple influences on young children's development and learning**, and of how those influences may interact to affect development in both positive and negative ways. Those influences include *diverse cultural and linguistic contexts for development*, children's close relationships with adults and peers, economic conditions of children and families, health status and disabilities, children's individual developmental variations and learning styles, opportunities to play and learn, *technology* and the media, and family and community characteristics. Candidates also understand the potential influence of early childhood programs, including early intervention, on short- and long-term outcomes for children.

Candidates' competence is demonstrated in their ability to **use developmental knowledge to create healthy, respectful, supportive, and challenging learning environments** for each child (including curriculum, interactions, teaching practices, and learning materials). Such environments reflect *four critical features*.

- First, the environments are *healthy* – that is, candidates possess the knowledge and skills needed to promote young children's physical and psychological health, safety, and sense of security.

- Second, the environments reflect *respect* — for each child as a feeling, thinking individual and then for each child's culture, home language, individual abilities or disabilities, family context, and community. In respectful environments, candidates model and affirm anti-bias perspectives on development and learning.

- Third, the learning environments created by early childhood teacher candidates are *supportive* – candidates demonstrate their belief in young children's ability to learn, and they show that they can use their understanding of early childhood development to help each child understand and make meaning from her or his experiences through play, spontaneous activity, and guided investigations.

- Finally, the learning environments that early childhood candidates create are appropriately *challenging* — in other words, candidates apply their knowledge of contemporary theory and research to construct learning environments that provide achievable and "stretching" experiences for each child — including children with special abilities and children with disabilities or developmental delays.

This Initial Standard provides a general description of the importance of understanding and applying sound theoretical foundations in early child development. See the NAEYC publication **Developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood programs serving children birth through age 8** *(2009) for a fully developed description of expectations for this standard.*

STANDARD 2. BUILDING FAMILY AND COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS

Candidates prepared in early childhood degree programs understand that successful early childhood education depends upon partnerships with children's families and communities. They 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.

Key elements of Standard 2

2a: Knowing about and understanding diverse family and community characteristics

2b: Supporting and engaging families and communities through respectful, reciprocal relationships

2c: Involving families and communities in young children's development and learning

Supporting explanation

Because young children's lives are so embedded in their families and communities, and because research indicates that successful early childhood education depends upon partnerships with families and communities, early childhood professionals need to thoroughly understand and apply their knowledge in this area.

First, well-prepared candidates possess **knowledge and understanding of diverse family and community characteristics,** and of the many influences on families and communities. Family theory and research provide a knowledge base. Socioeconomic conditions; family structures, relationships, stresses, and supports (including the impact of having a child with special needs); home language; cultural values; ethnicity; community resources, cohesiveness, and organization—knowledge of these and other factors creates a deeper understanding of young children's lives. This knowledge is critical to candidates' ability to help children learn and develop well.

Second, candidates possess the knowledge and skills needed to **support and engage diverse families through respectful, reciprocal relationships.** Candidates understand how to build positive relationships, taking families' preferences and goals into account and incorporating knowledge of families' languages and cultures. Candidates demonstrate respect for variations across cultures in family strengths, expectations, values, and childrearing practices. Candidates consider family members to be resources for insight into their children, as well as resources for curriculum and program development. Candidates know about and demonstrate a variety of communication skills to foster such relationships, emphasizing informal conversations while also including appropriate uses of conferencing and *technology* to share children's work and to communicate with families.

In their work, early childhood teacher candidates develop *cultural competence* as they build relationships with diverse families, including those whose children have disabilities or special characteristics or learning needs; families who are facing multiple challenges in their lives; and families whose languages and cultures may differ from those of the early childhood professional. Candidates also understand that their relationships with families include assisting families in finding needed resources, such as mental health services, health care, adult education, English language instruction, and economic assistance that may contribute directly or indirectly to their children's positive development and learning. Well-prepared early childhood candidates are able to identify such resources and know how to connect families with appropriate services, including help with planning transitions from one educational or service system to another.

Finally, well-prepared candidates possess essential skills to **involve families and communities in many aspects of children's development and learning.** They understand and value the role of parents and other important family members as children's primary teachers. Candidates understand how to go beyond parent conferences to engage families in curriculum planning, assessing children's learning, and planning for children's transitions to new programs. When their approaches to family involvement are not effective, candidates evaluate and modify those approaches rather than assuming that families "are just not interested."

This Initial Standard provides a general description of developmentally appropriate family and community involvement in early childhood education. See the NAEYC publication **Developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood programs serving children birth through age 8** *(2009)* *for a fully developed description of expectations for this standard.*

STANDARD 3. OBSERVING, DOCUMENTING, AND ASSESSING TO SUPPORT YOUNG CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Candidates prepared in early childhood degree programs understand that child observation, documentation, and other forms of assessment are central to the practice of all early childhood professionals. They 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 the development of every child.

Key elements of Standard 3

3a: Understanding the goals, benefits, and uses of assessment – including its use in development of appropriate goals, curriculum, and teaching strategies for young children

3b: Knowing about and using observation, documentation, and other appropriate assessment tools and approaches, including the use of *technology* in documentation, assessment and data collection.

3c: Understanding and practicing responsible assessment to promote positive outcomes for each child, including the use of assistive *technology* for children with disabilities.

3d: Knowing about assessment partnerships with families and with professional colleagues to build effective learning environments.

Supporting explanation

Although definitions vary, in these standards the term "assessment" includes all methods through which early childhood professionals gain understanding of children's development and learning. Ongoing, systematic observations and other informal and formal assessments are essential in order for candidates to appreciate children's unique qualities, to develop appropriate goals, and to plan, implement, and evaluate effective curriculum. Although assessment may take many forms, early childhood candidates demonstrate its central role by embedding assessment-related activities in curriculum and in daily routines, so that assessment becomes a habitual part of professional life.

Well-prepared early childhood candidates can explain the central **goals, benefits, and uses of assessment.** In considering the goals of assessment, candidates articulate and apply the concept of "alignment"—good assessment is consistent with and connected to appropriate goals, curriculum, and teaching strategies for young children. They know how to use assessment as a positive tool that supports children's development and learning, and that improves outcomes for young children and families. Candidates are able to explain such positive uses of assessment and exemplify them in their own work, while also showing awareness of the potentially negative uses of assessment in early childhood programs and policies.

Many aspects of effective assessment require collaboration with families and with other professionals. Through **partnerships with families and with professional colleagues**, candidates use positive assessment to identify the strengths of families and children and to develop effective learning environments. Through appropriate screening and referral, assessment may also result in identifying children who may benefit from special services. Both family members and, as appropriate, members of inter-professional teams may be involved in assessing children's

development, strengths, and needs. As new practitioners, candidates may have had limited opportunities to experience such partnerships, but they demonstrate essential knowledge and core skills in team building and in communicating with families and colleagues from other disciplines.

Early childhood assessment includes **observation, documentation, and other appropriate assessment strategies.** Effective teaching of young children begins with thoughtful, appreciative, systematic observation and documentation of each child's unique qualities, strengths, and needs. Observation gives insight into how young children develop and respond to opportunities and obstacles in their lives. Observing young children in classrooms, homes, and communities helps candidates develop a broad sense of who children are—as individuals, as group members, as family members, as members of cultural and linguistic communities. Candidates demonstrate skills in conducting systematic observations, interpreting those observations, and reflecting on their significance. Because spontaneous *play* is such a powerful window on all aspects of children's development, well-prepared candidates create opportunities to observe children in playful situations as well as in more formal learning contexts. Candidates practice a variety of formative and summative, qualitative and standardized, assessment tools and strategies.

Many *young children with disabilities* are included in early childhood programs, and early identification of children with developmental delays or disabilities is very important. All beginning professionals, therefore, need essential knowledge about how to collect relevant information, including appropriate uses of screening tools and play-based assessments, not only for their own planning but also to share with families and with other professionals. Well-prepared candidates are able to choose valid tools that are developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate; use the tools correctly; adapt tools as needed, using assistive technology as a resource; make appropriate referrals; and interpret assessment results, with the goal of obtaining valid, useful information to inform practice and decision making.

Although assessment can be a positive tool for early childhood professionals, it has also been used in inappropriate and harmful ways. Well-prepared candidates understand and practice **responsible assessment.** Candidates understand that responsible assessment is ethically grounded and guided by sound professional standards. It is collaborative and open. Responsible assessment supports children, rather than being used to exclude them or deny them services. Candidates demonstrate understanding of appropriate, responsible assessment practices for culturally and linguistically diverse children and for children with developmental delays, disabilities, or other special characteristics. Finally, candidates demonstrate knowledge of legal and ethical issues, current educational concerns and controversies, and appropriate practices in the assessment of diverse young children.

*This Initial Standard provides a general description of developmentally appropriate assessment in early childhood education. See the NAEYC publication **Developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood programs serving children birth through age 8** (2009) for a fully developed description of expectations for this standard.*

STANDARD 4. USING DEVELOPMENTALLY EFFECTIVE APPROACHES

Candidates prepared in early childhood degree programs understand that teaching and learning with young children is a complex enterprise, and its details vary depending on children's ages, characteristics, and the settings within which teaching and learning occur. They understand and use positive relationships and supportive interactions as the foundation for their work with young children and families. Candidates know, understand, and use a wide array of developmentally appropriate approaches, instructional strategies, and tools to connect with children and families and positively influence each child's development and learning.

Key elements of Standard 4

4a: Understanding positive relationships and supportive interactions as the foundation of their work with young children

4b: Knowing and understanding effective strategies and tools for early education, including appropriate uses of technology

4c: Using a broad repertoire of developmentally appropriate teaching /learning approaches

4d: Reflecting on own practice to promote positive outcomes for each child

Supporting explanation

Early childhood candidates demonstrate that they understand the theories and research that support **the importance of relationships and high-quality interactions in early education**. In their practice, they display warm, nurturing interactions with each child, communicating genuine liking for and interest in young children's activities and characteristics. Throughout the years that children spend in early childhood settings, their successful learning is dependent not just on "instruction" but also on personal connections with important adults. Through these connections children develop not only academic skills but also positive learning dispositions and confidence as learners. Responsive teaching creates the conditions within which very young children can explore and learn about their world. The close attachments children develop with their teachers/caregivers, the expectations and beliefs that adults have about young children's capacities, and the warmth and responsiveness of adult-child interactions are powerful influences on positive developmental and educational outcomes. How children expect to be treated and how they treat others is significantly shaped in the early childhood setting. Candidates in early childhood programs develop the capacity to build a caring community of learners in the early childhood setting.

Early childhood professionals need **a broad repertoire of effective strategies and tools** to help young children learn and develop well. Candidates must ground their curriculum in a set of core approaches to teaching that are supported by research and are closely linked to the processes of early development and learning. In a sense, those approaches *are* the curriculum for infants and toddlers, although academic content can certainly be embedded in each of them. With preschool and early primary grade children, the relative weight and explicitness of subject matter or academic content become more evident in the curriculum, and yet the core approaches or strategies remain as a consistent framework. Engaging conversations, thought-provoking questions, provision of materials, and spontaneous activities are all evident in candidates' repertoire of teaching skills.

Candidates demonstrate the essential *dispositions* to develop positive, respectful relationships with children whose cultures and languages may differ from their own, as well as with children who may have developmental delays, disabilities, or other learning challenges. In making the transition from family to a group context, very young children need continuity between the practices of family members and those used by professionals in the early childhood setting. Their feelings of safety and confidence depend on that continuity. Candidates know the cultural practices and contexts of the young children they teach, and they adapt practices as they continue to develop *cultural competence*, culturally relevant knowledge and skills.

Well-prepared early childhood teachers make purposeful use of various learning formats based on their understanding of children as individuals and as part of a group, and on alignment with important educational and developmental goals. A flexible, research-based **repertoire of teaching/learning approaches to promote young children's development**. These include:

- Fostering oral language and communication.
- Drawing from a continuum of teaching strategies.
- Making the most of the environment, schedule and routines
- Setting up all aspects of the indoor and outdoor environment
- Focusing on children's individual characteristics, needs, and interests.
- Linking children's language and culture to the early childhood program.
- Teaching through social interactions
- Creating support for play.
- Addressing children's challenging behaviors.
- Supporting learning through *technology*.
- Using integrative approaches to curriculum

All of these teaching approaches are effective across the early childhood age span. From the infant-toddler room to the early grades, young children are developing not only early language and reading skills but also the *desire* to communicate, read and write. They are developing not only early math and science skills and concepts but also the *motivation* to solve problems. They are developing empathy, sociability, friendships, self-concept and self-esteem. Concept acquisition, reasoning, self-regulation, planning and organization, emotional understanding and empathy, sociability – development of all of these is deeply entwined with early experiences in mathematics, language, literacy, science and social studies in the early education program. Children's development in the social, emotional and cognitive functioning domains – developing independence, responsibility, self-regulation and cooperation - can be critical to success in the transition to school and in the early grades.

Early childhood professionals make decisions about their practice based on their developing expertise. They make professional judgments through each day based on knowledge of child development and learning, individual children, and the social and cultural contexts in which children live. From this knowledge base, effective teachers design activities, routines, interactions and curriculum for specific children and groups of children. They consider both what to teach and how to teach, developing the habit of *reflective, responsive and intentional practice to promote positive outcomes for each child*.

This Initial Standards provides a general description of developmentally appropriate and effective teaching strategies, tools and approaches for early childhood education. See the NAEYC publication

Developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood programs serving children birth through age 8 (2009) *for a fully developed description of expectations for this standard.*

STANDARD 5. USING CONTENT KNOWLEDGE TO BUILD MEANINGFUL CURRICULUM

Candidates prepared in early childhood degree programs use their knowledge of academic disciplines to design, implement, and evaluate experiences that promote positive development and learning for each and every young child. Candidates understand the importance of developmental domains and academic (or content) disciplines in early childhood curriculum. They know the essential concepts, inquiry tools, and structure of content areas, including academic subjects, and can identify resources to deepen their understanding. Candidates use their own knowledge and other resources to design, implement, and evaluate meaningful, challenging curriculum that promotes comprehensive developmental and learning outcomes for every young child.

Key elements of Standard 5

5a: Understanding content knowledge and resources in academic disciplines: language and literacy; the arts – music, creative movement, dance, drama, visual arts; mathematics; science, physical activity, physical education, health and safety; and social studies.

5b: Knowing and using the central concepts, inquiry tools, and structures of content areas or academic disciplines

5c: Using own knowledge, appropriate early learning standards, and other resources to design, implement, and evaluate developmentally meaningful and challenging curriculum for each child.

Supporting explanation

Good early childhood curriculum does not come out of a box or a teacher-proof manual. Early childhood professionals have an especially challenging task in developing effective curriculum. As suggested in Standard 1, well-prepared candidates ground their practice in a thorough, research-based understanding of young children's development and learning processes. In developing curriculum, they recognize that every child constructs knowledge in personally and culturally familiar ways. In addition, in order to make curriculum powerful and accessible to all, well-prepared candidates develop curriculum that is free of biases related to ethnicity, religion, gender, or ability status—and, in fact, the curriculum actively counters such biases.

The teacher of children from birth through age 8 must be well versed in **the essential content knowledge and resources in many academic disciplines**. Because children are encountering those content areas for the first time, early childhood professionals set the foundations for later understanding and success. Going beyond conveying isolated facts, well-prepared early childhood candidates possess the kind of content knowledge that focuses on the "big ideas," methods of investigation and expression, and organization of the major academic disciplines. Thus, the early childhood professional knows not only *what* is important in each content area but also *why* it is important—how it links with earlier and later understandings both within and across areas. Because of its central place in later academic competence, the domain of language and literacy requires in-depth research-based understanding and skill. Mathematics, too, is increasingly recognized as an essential foundation.

Teachers of young children demonstrate the understanding of **central concepts, inquiry tools and structure of content areas** needed to provide appropriate environments that support

learning in each content area for each child, beginning in infancy (through foundational developmental experiences) and extending through the primary grades. Candidates demonstrate basic knowledge of the research base underlying each content area, basic knowledge of the core concepts and standards of professional organizations in each content area, and rely on sound resources for that knowledge. Finally, candidates demonstrate that they can analyze and critique early childhood curriculum experiences in terms of the relationship of the experiences to the research base and to professional standards.

Well-prepared candidates choose their approaches to the task depending on the ages and developmental levels of the children they teach. They use their own **knowledge, appropriate early learning standards, and other resources to design, implement, and evaluate meaningful, challenging curriculum for each child** With the youngest children, early childhood candidates emphasize the key experiences that will support later academic skills and understandings—with great reliance on the core approaches and strategies described in Standard 4 and with great emphasis on oral language and the development of children's background knowledge. Working with somewhat older or more skilled children, candidates also identify those aspects of each subject area that are critical to children's later academic competence. With each child, early childhood professionals support later success by modeling engagement in challenging subject matter and by building children's faith in themselves as young learners—as young mathematicians, scientists, artists, readers, writers, historians, economists, and geographers (although children may not think of themselves in such categories).

Early Childhood curriculum content / discipline areas include:

- Learning goals, experiences and assessment in academic disciplines or content areas including

    - Language and literacy

    - The arts: Music, creative movement, dance, drama, and visual arts

    - Mathematics

    - Science

    - Physical activity, physical education, health and safety

    - Social studies

Designing, implementing and evaluating meaningful, challenging curriculum requires alignment with appropriate early learning standards, and knowledgeable use of the discipline's resources to focus on key experiences for each age group and each individual child.

Early childhood teacher candidates, just like experienced teachers, go beyond their own basic knowledge to identify and use high-quality resources, including books, standards documents, Web resources, and individuals who have specialized content expertise, in developing early childhood curriculum. In addition to national or state standards (NAEYC & NAECS/SDE 2002) or desired several larger goals are also held by all early childhood teachers:

- **Security and self-regulation.** Appropriate, effective curriculum creates a secure base from which young children can explore and tackle challenging problems. Well-implemented curriculum also helps children become better able to manage or regulate their expressions of emotion and, over time, to cope with frustration and manage impulses effectively, rather than creating high levels of frustration and anxiety.

- **Problem-solving and thinking skills.** Candidates who have skills in developing and implementing meaningful, challenging curriculum will also support young children's ability—and motivation—to solve problems and think well.

- **Academic and social competence.** Because good early childhood curriculum is aligned with young children's developmental and learning styles, it supports the growth of academic and social skills.

With these goals in mind, candidates develop curriculum to include both planned and spontaneous experiences that are developmentally appropriate, meaningful, and challenging for all young children, including those with developmental delays or disabilities; that address cultural and linguistic diversities; that lead to positive learning outcomes; and that—as children become older—develop positive dispositions toward learning within each content area.

*This Initial Standard provides a general description of challenging and meaningful developmentally appropriate curriculum for early childhood education. See the NAEYC publication **Developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood programs serving children birth through age 8** (2009) for a fully developed description of expectations for this standard.*

STANDARD 6. BECOMING A PROFESSIONAL

Candidates prepared in early childhood 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.

Key elements of Standard 6

6a: Identifying and involving oneself with the early childhood field

6b: Knowing about and upholding ethical standards and other early childhood professional guidelines

6c: Engaging in continuous, collaborative learning to inform practice; using technology effectively with young children, with peers, and as a professional resource.

6d: Integrating knowledgeable, reflective, and critical perspectives on early education

6e: Engaging in informed advocacy for young children and the early childhood profession

Supporting explanation

The early childhood field has a distinctive history, values, knowledge base, and mission. Early childhood professionals, including beginning teachers, have a strong **identification and involvement with the early childhood field,** to better serve young children and their families. Well-prepared candidates understand the nature of a profession. They know about the many connections between the early childhood field and other related disciplines and professions with which they may collaborate while serving diverse young children and families. Candidates are also aware of the broader contexts and challenges within which early childhood professionals work. They consider current issues and trends that might affect their work in the future.

Because young children are at such a critical point in their development and learning, and because they are vulnerable and cannot articulate their own rights and needs, early childhood professionals have compelling responsibilities to **know about and uphold ethical guidelines and other professional standards.** The profession's code of ethical conduct guides the practice of responsible early childhood educators. Well-prepared candidates are very familiar with the *NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct* and are guided by its ideals and principles. This means honoring their responsibilities to uphold high standards of confidentiality, sensitivity, and respect for children, families, and colleagues. Candidates know how to use the Code to analyze and resolve professional ethical dilemmas and are able to give defensible justifications for their resolutions of those dilemmas. Well-prepared candidates also know and obey relevant laws such as those pertaining to child abuse, the rights of children with disabilities, and school attendance. Candidates use professional judgment to make decisions about the use of media and technology with young children in ways that are appropriate for the individual and the group, that are integrated into the curriculum, that provide equitable access and that "engages children in creative play, mastery learning, problem solving and conversation." (NAEYC, 1996; Copple & Bredekamp, 2009) Finally, candidates are familiar with relevant professional guidelines such as national, state, or local standards for content and child outcomes; position statements about, for

example, early learning standards, linguistic and cultural diversity, early childhood mathematics, technology in early childhood, and prevention of child abuse; child care licensing requirements; and other professional standards affecting early childhood practice.

Continuous, collaborative learning to inform practice is a hallmark of a professional in any field. An attitude of inquiry is evident in well-prepared candidates' writing, discussion, and actions. Whether engaging in classroom-based research, investigating ways to improve their own practices, participating in conferences, or finding resources in libraries and Internet sites, candidates demonstrate self-motivated, purposeful learning that directly influences the quality of their work with young children. Candidates—and professional preparation programs—view graduation or licensure not as the final demonstration of competence but as one milestone among many, including professional development experiences before and beyond successful degree completion.

At its most powerful, learning is socially constructed, in interaction with others. Even as beginning teachers, early childhood candidates demonstrate involvement in collaborative learning communities with other candidates, higher education faculty, and experienced early childhood practitioners. By working together on common challenges, with lively exchanges of ideas, members of such communities benefit from one another's perspectives. Candidates also demonstrate understanding of essential skills in interdisciplinary collaboration. Because many children with disabilities and other special needs are included in early childhood programs, every practitioner needs to understand the role of the other professionals who may be involved in young children's care and education (e.g., special educators, reading specialists, speech and hearing specialists, physical and occupational therapists, specialists in gifted education, school psychologists). Candidates demonstrate that they have the essential communication skills and knowledge base to engage in interdisciplinary team meetings as informed partners and to fulfill their roles as part of IEP/IFSP teams for children with developmental delays or disabilities. They use *technology* effectively with children, with peers, and as a professional resource.

Well-prepared candidates practice is influenced by **knowledgeable, reflective, and critical perspectives.** As professionals, early childhood candidates' decisions and advocacy efforts are grounded in multiple sources of knowledge and multiple perspectives. Even routine decisions about what materials to use for an activity, whether to intervene in a dispute between two children, how to organize nap time, what to say about curriculum in a newsletter, or what to tell families about new video games are informed by a professional context, research-based knowledge, and values. In their work with young children, candidates show that they make and justify decisions on the basis of their *knowledge* of the central issues, professional values and standards, and research findings in their field. They also show evidence of *reflective* approaches to their work, analyzing their own practices in a broader context, and using reflections to modify and improve their work with young children. Finally, well-prepared candidates display a *critical* stance, examining their own work, sources of professional knowledge, and the early childhood field with a questioning attitude. Their work demonstrates that they do not just accept a simplistic source of "truth"; instead, they recognize that while early childhood educators share the same core professional values, they do not agree on all of the field's central questions. Candidates demonstrate an understanding that through dialogue and attention to differences, early childhood professionals will continue to reach new levels of shared knowledge.

Finally, early childhood candidates demonstrate that they can engage in **informed advocacy for children and the profession.** They know about the central policy issues in the field, including professional compensation, financing of the early education system, and standards setting and assessment. They are aware of and engaged in examining ethical issues and societal concerns about program quality and provision of early childhood services and the implications of those

issues for advocacy and policy change. Candidates have a basic understanding of how public policies are developed, and they demonstrate essential advocacy skills, including verbal and written communication and collaboration with others around common issues.

*This Initial Standard provides a general description of the unique nature of the early childhood profession, it's unique Code of Ethical Conduct and other guidelines, and special importance of collaboration and continuous learning in a rapidly evolving field that includes professional roles and settings inside and outside of traditional schools. See the NAEYC publication **Developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood programs serving children birth through age 8** (2009) for a fully developed description of expectations for this standard.*

STANDARD 7. EARLY CHILDHOOD FIELD EXPERIENCES

Field experiences and clinical practice are planned and sequenced so that candidates develop the knowledge, skills and professional dispositions necessary to promote the development and learning of young children across the entire developmental period of early childhood – in at least two of the three early childhood age groups (birth – age 3, 3 through 5, 5 through 8 years) *and* in the variety of settings that offer early education (early school grades, child care centers and homes, Head Start programs).

Key elements of Standard 7

7a. Opportunities to observe and practice in at least two of the three early childhood age groups (birth – age 3, 3-5, 5-8)

7b. Opportunities to observe and practice in at least two of the three main types of early education settings (early school grades, child care centers and homes, Head Start programs)

Supporting explanation

A key component of NAEYC standards at all degree levels is hands-on field or clinical experiences. Each of the first six NAEYC Standards includes a key element focused on application or use of knowledge and skills related to the standard. These key elements are learned, practiced and assessed in field experiences. This Initial and Advanced Program Standard 7 is comparable to NAEYC Associate Program Criterion 5.

Field experiences should be well planned and sequenced within and across degree levels to prepare candidates for the unique qualities of the early childhood developmental period and early educational settings. From field observations for the candidate considering an early childhood career, to systematic inquiry into their own classroom practices for the candidate in the field, to immersion in applied research for the doctoral candidate, supervised, reflective field experiences are critical to high quality professional preparation. Developmental research and theory has long been the foundation of early childhood education theory and practice.

Initial and Advanced programs should assign **field experiences in at least two age groups and at least two early education settings**. Current research and policy leaders hope to build a more integrated and aligned PreK-3 system for young children, for early childhood teacher preparation and for early childhood professional careers. Although the current early education system is fragmented, many of the teachers currently working in Head Start, preschool and child care settings are enrolled in early childhood baccalaureate degree programs in order to meet the requirements of the federal Head Start program, to meet the requirements of NAEYC accreditation for early educational settings directly serving young children, or to increase their career options. Although state policies and professional credentials may focus one age group or

setting in a particular context, over the course of a career, an early childhood teacher may move from an infant toddler setting, to a third grade classroom, and then to a community Head Start or prekindergarten program. In the current context, a sequence of field experiences should ensure that graduates of baccalaureate programs in early childhood are qualified for a career with options across the entire early childhood age range and in multiple early education settings.

Finding high quality early childhood field sites is a challenge across all early childhood settings - whether primary school, child care center, or Head Start classroom. The "professional development schools" movement and the current interest in "residency" models for teacher education underscore the challenge of identifying and partnering with high-quality sites in which education professionals can develop or refine their skills with competent mentorship and supervision. Some programs may choose to partner with high need / low resource schools or centers. Many programs are working with states, communities or local school districts to raise teacher qualifications and improve quality in child care, Head Start, or primary grade classrooms. When the quality of the field site is not high, it is the responsibility of the teacher preparation program to provide other models and/or experiences to ensure that candidates are learning to work with young children and families in ways consistent with the NAEYC standards.

Quality field experiences support candidates to understand and apply the competencies reflected in the NAEYC standards as they observe, implement and receive constructive feedback in real world early learning settings. **Indicators of strength** in the quality of field experiences include:

- Field experiences are well planned and sequenced, and allow candidates to integrate theory, research and practice.

- When settings used for field experiences do not reflect high quality standards, candidates are provided with other models and/or experiences to ensure that they are learning to work with young children and families in ways consistent with the NAEYC standards.

- Faculty and other supervisors help candidates to make meaning of their experiences in early childhood settings and to evaluate those experiences against standards of quality.

- Adults who mentor and supervise candidates provide positive models of early childhood practice consistent with NAEYC standards.

- Field experiences expose candidates to settings that include cultural, linguistic, racial and ethnic diversity in families and communities.