

OEC Partnership with NAEYC to Support Quality Improvement in Connecticut

Since its inception in 2013, the Office of Early Childhood (OEC) has worked to build an early childhood system for our state based on continuous improvement across settings. In addition to these efforts, the Child Care and Development Fund provides CT with resources and requirements related to quality improvement; and future federal child care funding is expected to require states to have a system to support and distinguish program quality. For child care settings, the OEC supports continuous improvement through 1) accreditation quality improvement supports (AQIS) for licensed child care centers, group homes, and license-exempt child care programs; and 2) staffed family child care networks (SFCCNs) for licensed family child care programs. Jointly, these two systems help programs and providers to improve the quality of the program for children and families, as well as their business practice, and professional development activities.

Why partner with NAEYC?

To continue to strengthen our continuous improvement system for child care settings, the Connecticut Office of Early Childhood partnered with the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) to develop structures for licensed programs to move toward accreditation. NAEYC has a long history of supporting quality improvement in early childhood education in the United States and abroad. First launched in 1985, the system for NAEYC Accreditation of Early Learning Programs changed the field by shifting its focus from basic health and safety to a broader conceptualization of early learning and development. In 2017, NAEYC piloted and launched a streamlined accreditation system based on indicators that are predictive of quality. The accreditation standards address the following areas: relationships among children, families, and the community; staff competencies, leadership, and management; health and the learning environment; and curriculum, teaching, and assessment. NAEYC has already completed the hard work and research to develop observable criteria that are strong indicators of program quality. We plan to leverage this work for our state system. Working with national partners will ensure a strong and streamlined infrastructure based on existing, proven approaches to strengthen programs through continuous improvement.

What is CT's vision for the system?

The Connecticut Office of Early Childhood will create a quality improvement system that bridges licensing standards to accreditation standards, including accreditation standards for family child care settings. In our system, we will not rate programs or classrooms, as many states do. The new system will focus on simplicity; accessibility; and leveraging existing health, safety, and quality assurance. This will offer a supportive structure for programs, increase transparency and clarity for families, and reduce state overhead expenses. Connecticut has historically been among the top three states in the percentage of NAEYC Accredited early care and education programs. This impressive ranking is due to state investments, visionary leadership, and ongoing accreditation support from within the agency for the field.

What role does accreditation have in the system?

Integration of support for NAEYC Accreditation into our quality improvement system is consistent with our current funding structure, vision, and approach. Connecticut requires programs to be accredited to receive state funding through our School Readiness program, Child Day Care Contracts, and Smart Start. Since 1997, School Readiness legislation has funded accreditation support to improve programs and has used NAEYC Accreditation to give parents a clear way to identify program quality. State reimbursement rates also include a bonus for each child enrolled in an accredited program.

Both the State of Connecticut and NAEYC are excited to move forward in this partnership. Please watch for future updates as our work progresses.