

# The Primary Program for All Children

*Classrooms grounded in best-practice education, and modified to be responsive to students' differences, benefit virtually all students. Differentiation addresses the needs of struggling and advanced learners. It addresses the needs of students for whom English is a second language and students who have strong learning style preferences. It addresses gender differences and cultural differences. It pays homage to the truth that we are not born to become replicas of one another.*

Tomlinson, 1999

**T**he primary program responds to the diversity of learners by helping children to understand, respect, and appreciate individual differences. The teacher fosters the belief that all individuals have strengths to share and things to learn from others' uniqueness.

The early childhood setting may be the first place in which children realize how they are like other children and how they are different from others. Children seem to accept these differences and similarities and to know they can succeed when they experience respect and a sense of purpose. This attitude of acceptance without competition fosters growth in ALL. It helps children to realize the benefits of appreciating each other, focusing on how they can work together to find solutions, finish projects, and set and complete goals. Although external differences among people may be obvious, the need for safety, respect, caring, and equal opportunity for learning and growth are universal. By creating environments in which unique abilities and contributions are recognized and celebrated, the heritage, gender, culture and talents of all members are respected.

The primary program is designed to be child-centered and to recognize, value, and successfully accommodate the diversity of individual learners, including children of all ability levels. "The research evidence on these points is very strong; when children of all ability (or achievement) levels learn collaboratively, not only do those of lower and medium ability benefit substantially, but so do those of higher ability" (Anderson & Pavan, 1993). This encompasses boys and girls who are gifted/talented and those identified as having special needs and those with challenging behaviors.

Using differentiated instruction, primary program teachers broaden classroom activities, objectives, and experiences to meet each child's social-emotional and academic needs. "In differentiated classrooms, teachers provide specific ways for each individual to learn as deeply as possible and as quickly as possible without assuming one student's road map for learning is identical to anyone else's. The curriculum guide is a teacher source book that increases the number of learning opportunities available, rather than mandating identical experiences for each child" (Anderson & Pavan, 1993). This autonomous approach to learning in the early childhood setting allows all children the opportunity to reach their potentials without the constraints of a narrow curriculum.

In the end, it is not standardization that makes a classroom work. It is a deep respect for the identity of the individual. A teacher in a differentiated classroom:

- Respects the learning level of each student
- Expects all students to grow, and supports their continual growth
- Offers all students the opportunity to explore essential understandings and skills at degrees of difficulty that escalate consistently as learners develop understanding and skill
- Offers all students tasks that look—and are—equally interesting, equally important, and equally engaging.

A framework needs to be in place that addresses the gender, culture, ability level, language and learning style. Every child who comes through the door of any classroom or center is entitled to support and guidance from adults who believe in developing that child's potential. There are characteristics that all children should expect from the teaching and learning in a healthy classroom.

This begins when a teacher:

- Appreciates each child as an individual
- Remembers to teach the whole child, considering individual, physical, social and emotional needs
- Continues to develop expertise
- Links students and ideas
- Strives for joyful learning
- Offers high expectations and many opportunities for scaffolding
- Helps students make their own sense of ideas
- Shares the teaching with students
- Strives clearly for student independence
- Uses positive energy and humor
- Knows that discipline is more covert than overt (Tomlinson, 1999)

Educators can then plan for the child whose needs extend beyond the scope of daily practices.

“Young children with special needs are a tremendously diverse group...Two certain facts about children with special needs are *they are all children and they all have unique needs*. First, because children with special needs are children, they have needs shared by all children. These include physical needs for shelter, rest and nourishment and psychological needs to be nurtured, safe and accepted. Second, children with (special needs) have needs that are NOT shared by all other children. They need environments that are specifically organized and adjusted...they need professionals who are competent in meeting the general needs of young children...who value working cooperatively with families to meet family needs and to help families promote their child's development” (Bredekamp & Rosegrant, 1992).

The teacher can help children realize their areas of giftedness and can nurture those gifts. Children can also be taught to recognize the giftedness/uniqueness of others and not to be threatened by differences. When all children's gifts are nurtured, when strengths and differences are accepted and celebrated, when learning with and leaning upon others helps individuals and the group to grow, then gender, cultural and ability differences are addressed naturally. Teachers can expect all children to show progress toward a set of standards. When all teachers in every setting are meeting children's needs, progress is continual and all children learn.

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# Achieving High Standards

*To increase test scores or to be world-class in math and science without empowering students or affirming the dignity of human life is to lose the essence of what we and education are presumably all about ... In the end, our goal must be not only to prepare students for careers, but also to enable them to live with dignity and purpose; not only to give knowledge to the student, but also to channel knowledge to humane ends ...*

Boyer in Goldberg, 1995

**E**ffective early childhood classrooms provide rich experiences that offer quality content and are appropriate for the learning capabilities of the children. **It is only through the application of appropriate early childhood learning practices that high standards can be implemented and achieved.**

A perception by some that the implementation of content standards is in conflict with established perspectives on early education reflects misunderstanding both of the intent of standards and how to provide effective early childhood programs. Misunderstanding of good early childhood practices by educators can result in teaching practices which do not sufficiently challenge children to reach their highest potential (NAEYC & NAECS/SDE, 1991.) Kindergarten/primary classrooms that are “experientially rich”, but “content poor” are unacceptable. Likewise, standards must never be applied in ways that cause any young child to experience repeated failure. Failure is the antithesis of achieving high standards.

Appropriate practice is about **how** children learn, **how** highly competent teachers teach, and **how** family members and school personnel work cooperatively to support each child’s learning and development. **Standards are the target. One does not abandon good practice to lead children toward the achievement of high standards.** To do so results in the opposite outcome. Responsible practitioners ensure that expectations remain high, but that teaching practices adapt to the range of capacities of young learners, so that repeated success leads toward higher and higher achievement.

Practices, which have been demonstrated to assist young children in meeting high standards, include:

- Providing high-quality and age-appropriate curriculum and instruction which emphasizes direct interaction with materials, with adults, and with other children.
- Emphasizing early childhood literacy, including outreach by the school to children’s families and the community’s prekindergarten programs (Snow, et al., 1998).
- Involving children in setting meaningful and accessible learning goals, selecting and managing their learning, and in assessing their learning.
- Employing a wide variety of instructional approaches to assure that the learning levels and individual styles of children are accommodated.
- Reducing class sizes at the primary level to below twenty (Nye, et al., 1994).
- Keeping children and teachers together in heterogeneous groups for more than one year (Katz, et al., 1990).

- Providing professional development that deepens teachers' content knowledge and improves instructional strategies to engage all children in learning.
- Setting explicit expectations for all stakeholders, including families and communities.
- Extending learning time through before- and after-school programs, tutoring, summer programs, and year-round schooling.

Currently accepted practices for working with younger children are based on a newer synthesis of viewpoints about growth and learning and take into consideration what is generally understood about:

- How development and learning unfold in universal or normative patterns
- How the patterns may differ for each individual
- The influence of the family and of the community context, including the language and culture the child brings to school, as well as the expectations of the larger culture for what needs to be learned (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997).

Some educators and members of the public think that setting standards and then only accepting children in school when they are “ready” to achieve them is the way to elevate achievement. In reality, young children are always ready to learn. They have been learning from the moment of birth, are eager to learn more and more, and can achieve quite spectacular things when caring adults (family members, caregivers, and teachers) interact in ways that help them move to that “just manageable” next level of accomplishment.

This concern with whether state and/or local standards are achievable is causing some educators to discuss a return to practices which have been shown to be ineffective in the past. Those include: recommending a change in the kindergarten entrance age to cause children to be older at the beginning of school; screening prior to kindergarten entrance to limit the enrollment of the “unready”; extra-year programs (programs known as readiness or developmental kindergartens and junior, pre-first, or pre-second grade;) and/or recommending grade retention at the kindergarten/primary level. Such practices have been demonstrated through decades of research to be ineffective and continue to have unintended negative consequences for children (Meisels, 1992). Reinstating them will do nothing to improve children's achievement.

The establishment of standards is intended to increase children's opportunities to learn—not to punish them for failing to meet the standard at an arbitrarily determined point in their development. **Educators and parents must work cooperatively to assure that every child receives the support and instruction needed to reach his or her highest potential.**

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# Ethics in Early Childhood Education

*Above all, we shall not harm children. We shall not participate in practices that are disrespectful, degrading, dangerous, exploitative, intimidating, emotionally damaging or physically harmful to children.*  
National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1998

**Ethical behavior should guide decision making of early childhood professionals at all times.**

**M**any things affect the decisions of teachers regarding young children in their care: family values, home culture and language, school or program policies, and society in general. Teachers are constantly making decisions about children. Usually decisions are made with the child's family or other professionals. But, sometimes a situation will not lend itself to a clear answer and educators get caught making a decision between equally unfavorable alternatives. This kind of a dilemma is referred to as an "ethical dilemma." For example:

- Most teachers of young children know that the research related to retention suggests that it is not in the best interest of the child, educationally or emotionally. However, in some situations, grade retention is routinely practiced and encouraged for certain children. If the teacher knows of the research and is forced to practice something against her best judgment, the teacher is faced with a professional dilemma.
- A teacher may feel the employer is not following the state licensing standards for child to adult ratio. If he/she reports the situation, he may be fired, even though he is trying to improve the learning environment and he loves and needs his job. What does he do?
- A school district may require the use of corporal punishment, which is in conflict with an administrator's professional beliefs about positive discipline for children. What should she/he do?

*Ethics is the science which enables us to understand humanity as it is and humanity as it could be; and then instructs us on how to move from reality to the ideal. To act ethically is to exercise choice which ends in right action. Virtue is the cause of right choice.*

MacIntyre, 1981

In some cases, solving the problem is a matter of reversing what has been an unacceptable trend or practice. It may be a case of education, training, or communication with all parties. But often there is not a simple answer. Often, "the right answer" doesn't surface or two values are in conflict and the early childhood practitioner feels caught in the middle. We are forced into choosing an answer that doesn't feel right. But in every case, we must focus on doing the right thing, making an ethical decision.

*The NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct* can be used to help make difficult decisions. It is a reference to help clarify our thinking and prioritize our responsibilities. Divided into three parts, it is built upon **Core Values** that we hold about **what we ought to do and to be** with young children, the

**Principles** that define practices, and **Ideals**, or exemplary practice. It is a professional compass for use in making a decision.

**The Core Values** are “deeply rooted in the history of our field” such as:

- Appreciating childhood as a unique and valuable stage of the human life cycle
- Basing our work with children on knowledge of child development
- Appreciating and supporting the close ties between the child and family
- Recognizing that children are best understood and supported in the context of family, culture, community, and society
- Respecting the dignity, worth, and uniqueness of each individual (child, family member, and colleague).

The **Ideals** guide actions. Conscientious practitioners:

- Are familiar with the knowledge base of early childhood care and education and keep current through continuing education and in-service training
- Recognize and respect the uniqueness and the potential of each child
- Respect the dignity of each family and its culture, language, customs, and beliefs.
- Establish and maintain relationships of respect, trust, and cooperation with co-workers.
- Create a climate of trust and candor that will enable staff to speak and act in the best interest of children, families, and the field of early childhood care and education

The **Principles** guide our responsibilities. The most important principle:

- ***Above all, we shall not harm children. We shall not participate in practices that are disrespectful, degrading, dangerous, exploitative, intimidating, emotionally damaging or physically harmful to children.***

**This principle has precedence over all others in the Code.**

The *Code of Ethics* should guide our daily work with young children. It should be used when we make decisions and set policies. It defines our responsibility to support children—*without harm*—to reach challenging and achievable goals. It can be used to open a dialogue when we face difficult decisions. It can be used to help us ‘think aloud’ and reflect with colleagues who share our concern for children. As a profession, we must hold ourselves to the highest standards in order to provide safe, healthy, nurturing and responsive settings for children when making decisions.

## References

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Note: *The content of the position statement was adapted with permission from NAYEC’s The Code of Ethical Conduct, which is included at the end of the position statement section.*

# Home, School, and Community Partnerships that Work

*The model of school, family, and community partnerships locates the student at the center.*

Epstein, 1997

**Children learn best in schools that support academic excellence and that encourage partnerships among school staff, families, and community members.**

**E**ffective partnerships are based upon mutual collaboration and communication. Schools, families, and children want these home-school connections. Research has shown that, in most cases:

- Families want their children to do well in school and want to be involved in their child's education.
- Teachers and administrators want family involvement.
- Children want their schools and families to communicate with one another (Epstein, 1997).

School-family-community connections benefit everyone involved. Families give their children a clear message that learning is an important and respected endeavor. Schools give their students a clear message that the involvement of all families is valued. School administrators demonstrate their respect for other viewpoints by implementing a partnership model in which staff, family members, and community members are offered genuine roles in important decision making.

Family and community involvement in the schools has the added benefit of extending the boundaries of learning beyond the school building. Such involvement can lead to a better understanding of both school and community needs. School staff, family members, and community members are encouraged to become advocates for the schools and the community and to work together for school and community improvement.

Too often schools fail to recognize and remove barriers that limit family and community involvement in the schools. The scheduling of meetings and events during the traditional school day, lack of child care for younger children, lack of transportation, language differences, and families' own educational experiences may interfere with greater school involvement (Coleman, 1991). Remedies can be as simple as scheduling meetings at times more convenient to families, providing child care, transportation, and translators, as needed, and creating family friendly spaces within the schools.

Getting families more involved in schools will not necessarily lead directly to better student achievement but may have other positive effects. Epstein (1997) has described six types of school involvement that may lead to changes in students' achievement, attitudes, and/or behavior:

1. Parenting: [to] help all families establish home environments to support children as students
2. Communicating: [to] design effective forms of school-to-home and home-to school communication about school programs and their children's progress

3. Volunteering: [to] recruit and organize parent help and support
4. Learning at home: [to] provide information and ideas to families about how to help students at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions, and planning
5. Decision Making: [to] include parents in school decisions, developing parent leaders and representatives
6. Collaborating with Community: [to] identify and integrate resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development

After choosing a goal upon which to focus, school staff, family members, and community members can identify the type of family involvement and the strategies that will help them reach that goal.

*In a partnership, teachers and administrators create more family-like schools...[and] parents create more school-like families.*

Epstein, 1997

Rarely, if ever, can one person working alone create lasting, comprehensive change. Effective school-family-community partnerships require a committed team and a plan for action. The team is most likely to be successful if its membership is representative of all stakeholders. Successful teams also need access to resources and time to meet.

Before developing an action plan, school-family-community teams need to determine what is already working and what needs to be improved. The primary focus of action plans should be student success. Action plans should also contain connections to curricular and instructional reform.

Like rose gardens, school-family-community partnerships need to be nurtured. Partnerships are more likely to be successful when members trust one another, are committed to a common goal, communicate effectively, and share a commitment to the development of individual members' skills and abilities. Effective partnerships also take time. Short term goals and planning should take place within the context of a multi-year plan.

School-family-community partnerships benefit families, schools and the community. The primary beneficiary of these partnerships, however, is the student.

## References

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# Building Effective School Teams

*The improvement process is sometimes easier than one thinks it is going to be. While change takes time and perseverance, if you have the patience and the will, you can be successful.*

Quinn, et al., 1996

The primary purpose of effective school teams is to create and maintain optimal learning environments for children. The team fosters a school climate in which learning is viewed as a natural and joyful activity and all children are seen as learners, capable of working harmoniously, creatively and productively.

What is a school team? Teams are groups of individuals that share several characteristics:

- Connections among members and coordination of team functions
- Clear role expectations and responsibilities for team members
- Commitment to a common goal or purpose (Quinn et al, 1996)

To be effective, school teams must include all of the adults who work with students including teachers, specialists, non-certified staff, administrators, and school board members.

*Teams become a way to pool everyone's wisdom.*

Tom Rendon, 1999

While school teams can be instantly created by an administrative order, building effective teams requires time, energy, and commitment. Team members need time and opportunities to build trust, to develop relationships with one another, and to establish roles and responsibilities within the team. Teams must also develop structures and strategies for effective communication among team members and with other educational stakeholders including students, families, and other community members. In addition, teams need to be able to accept divergent opinions, resolve conflict, and make decisions in a timely manner. Team building is a continuing effort as teams evaluate their own functioning and movement toward their primary purpose of school improvement.

Effective school teams are able to:

- Articulate the school and/or school district's vision
- Formulate a plan, set goals, and assess their progress as they work to achieve that vision
- Communicate and collaborate effectively within the team and with students, families and other members of the community
- Work together to get necessary resources for themselves and their students
- Evaluate their own effectiveness
- Accept accountability for their actions

Effective school teams function as a whole, and individual team members are both accountable to one another and to the team. "Success or failure is a team event. No outside obstacle is an excuse for team failure, and no individuals fail. Only the team can fail" (Katzenbach & Smith, 1993).

Common barriers to the creation of effective school teams include:

- Administrations not fully committed to the organizational changes required to support a team environment
- Implementation of teams without first addressing the issue of trust
- Unrealistic expectations, including underestimating the time needed to build an effective team (Rendon, 1999)

Effective school teams benefit the staff involved, their school, and the community. Most importantly, effective teams create schools in which the primary focus is helping children learn.

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# Active Learning Through Play

*Play teaches the child, without his being aware of it, the habits most needed for intellectual growth, such as stick-to-itiveness, which is so important in all learning. Perseverance is easily acquired around enjoyable activities such as chosen play. But if it has not become a habit through what is enjoyable, it is not likely to become one through an endeavor like school work.*

Bettelheim in Wasserman, S., 1990

**P**lay is a natural and universal learning activity of children and adults. It is a lifelong need and pursuit vital to all human beings. Play is motivated by an inner drive to imagine, explore, experiment, discover, and learn.

The primary program views play as a critical part of the growth and development of young children. Primary age children learn through play and it is the fundamental means children use to express themselves. Play is closely connected to a child's cognitive, social, emotional and physical development. These experiences give children feedback that helps them to make sense of their world and gives adults insights into a child's development.

Play allows learners to project themselves into the realm of possibility while enabling them to develop, alter, and refine current understandings as they explore, imagine, imitate, construct, discuss, plan, manipulate, problem-solve, dramatize, create and experiment. Through play, children demonstrate their knowledge, represent their experiences, and further explore their world.

The ability to play requires skills that developmentally evolve for each child as they gain play experiences through:

- Initiating play choices
- Maintaining a focus in play
- Staying with an activity
- Creating and experimenting
- Using a variety of play materials and activities
- Enjoying play
- Joining a group and playing with others
- Communicating and negotiating wants and needs

(Educational Productions, Inc., *Hand-in-Hand Video Series*, 1993.)

Teachers prepare the active learning environment with time, space and materials for play. Teachers facilitate play skills as an essential learning experience that supports the needs and abilities of all children. Children learn best when they can choose their own activities. Play is the work of children and should not be considered in conflict with academic learning for children through grade three. Adults provide opportunities for play and learning through the variety of materials and activities they provide. Children engage in the learning because it becomes an expressive activity that results from a desire to make sense of the world in which they live.

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# Teaching to the Ways Children Learn

*There is no one best way to educate all children. We must discover a child's areas of strengths and characteristic approaches to learning. We must, as much as possible, bring the teaching to where the child is.*

Gardner, 1983

**E**very child deserves having materials and information presented in such a way as to best engage that child in his/her own learning. To ensure success of all children educators must be knowledgeable of how children learn; be able to identify a child's strengths; and be able to develop strategies and techniques that encourage each child's learning.

Much has been discovered through the years as to how a child learns.

- **Piaget**—A sequential flow occurs through stages of development at individual rates. Learning is based on relating new experiences to prior knowledge. Concrete, hands-on experiences/activities work best to develop a pattern of problem solving and logical thinking.
- **Vygotsky**—Language and thought are interrelated and interdependent. An integral process of language as a means of structuring and representing knowledge is strongly supported. The “zone of proximal development” suggests the support/assistance needed for children to continue to stretch beyond what they can comfortably do.
- **Constructivists**—Learning is an ongoing experience where children continually act upon and organize their experiences as they try to make sense of their world. The cycle of learning starts with awareness, moves to exploration, to inquiry, to utilization and on to new awareness.
- **Brain Research**—The neuroscientists are discovering individual uniqueness in how the brain takes in, sorts, stores, and uses information. Optimal age ranges for learning specific information have been suggested. Information must be meaningful and engage the child for learning to occur.
- **Multiple Intelligences**—Each person has multiple types of intelligence. Each person has more dominance in some areas of intelligence than in others. The areas of dominance suggest the preference for learning style and method of processing information.
- **Learning Styles**—Children think and learn in many different ways. While all children can and do learn, there are variations in how they concentrate, absorb, process, and recall information.
- **The Value of Play**—Play is the fundamental, natural, universal activity of children. Understanding the stages and development of play guides teachers in their program planning.

- **Active Learning**—Learning occurs more easily for children who are fully engaged in meaningful activities.
  - Children choose from available activities, materials, and experiences for a substantial portion of the day
  - Experiences are meaningful and learner-centered
  - Children have opportunities to ask questions, solve problems, and think independently
  - There is a range of expectations for all children
  - Children have opportunities to make decisions and to be creative
  - Learners are respected and trusted
  - Adults learn along with children
  - Mistakes present opportunities to learn
  - Content areas are integrated
  - Assessment is a part of the daily routine

Research suggest that each child is born ready to learn, has his/her own rate of development and has individual strengths and weaknesses. These findings continue to reinforce the uniqueness of each child. One of the greatest challenges of educators is ensuring the success of all children. Teaching must be based on how the child learns.

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# School Readiness

*...reaching the school readiness goal will require a twofold strategy: one part focused on supporting families in their efforts to help their children get ready for school, and the second on helping the schools to be responsive to the wide range of developmental levels, backgrounds, experiences, and needs children bring to school with them.* Katz, 1991

**S**chools must be organized around the belief that children are always ready to be nurtured and accepted, to learn, and to be successful. Children's early success in school is the responsibility of parents, communities and schools. Neither schools alone, nor parents alone, nor communities alone can produce students who meet high standards. Positive home and preschool environments and responsive schools are necessary to assure that all children enter school ready to learn and stay that way.

Concerns about school readiness in our country arise from a set of socially constructed notions about going to school and not about characteristics inherent in the child (Graue, 1993). In other words, perspectives about readiness have their sources in the particular belief systems parents and educators have about child development and the functions of schooling. Delayed kindergarten entrance results when parents and educators worry that the increasing curricular expectations in the kindergarten will compromise children's prospects for success.

Inequities in the early experiences of children who are poor, who are learning English as a second language, and who otherwise do not have the support for their early development typically available to more affluent groups, are exaggerated when such children are the youngest in a class group. Bringing school entrance ages into harmony with compulsory attendance age would assist in reducing these differences and provide all children with more equitable opportunity for early success in school.

Parents continue to focus their worries about school readiness on younger males (Bellissimo, Sacks, & Mergendoller, 1995). This may be explained by other studies that show that girls are more likely to demonstrate literacy skills thought to lead to early achievement (knowing letter names) and small motor skills (buttoning own clothes) earlier than boys (Zill, Collins, West, & Hausken, 1995). Other research on both social adjustment of younger children and on academic and physical skills do not show differences significant enough to warrant holding children back (Spitzer, Cupp, & Parke, 1995).

A more productive way to think about readiness is to shift thinking from "Are they ready to enter?" to "What must we do to make sure all children can be successful?" This perspective places responsibilities on adults—parents, educators, and policy-makers—to shape the early home and community environment to support children's development and learning.

The National Education Goals Panel has provided a comprehensive framework to think about the aspects of children's early development that must be in place to assure success in school. Specific academic skills often thought to be prerequisites for school success can easily be learned by children whose needs in five areas have been met. The areas are: 1) Health and physical well being; 2) Social and emotional well being; 3) Approaches to learning; 4) Language development; and 5) General knowledge about the world around them (Kagan, Moore, & Bredekamp, 1995).

Schools can play a major role promoting learning readiness through policies and strategies designed to improve learning climates for young children from preschool through the primary grades.

Ready schools:

- Smooth the transition between home and school
  - Strive for continuity between early care and education programs and elementary schools
  - Help children learn and make sense of their complex and exciting world
  - Are committed to the success of every child
  - Are committed to the success of every teacher and every adult who interacts with children during the school day
  - Introduce or expand approaches that have been shown to raise achievement
  - Are learning organizations that alter practices and programs if they do not benefit children
  - Serve children in communities
  - Take responsibilities for results
  - Have strong leadership
- (Shore, 1998).

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# Tracking and Retention

*Attacking the very real problem of low achievement with retention makes for more compelling political rhetoric than advocating more complex and costly strategies for quality education. Denigrating promotion by calling it social might do something for political campaigns, but it surely does nothing to improve schooling for the children who need it most.* Oakes, 2000

**T**he fact is that neither social promotion nor retention alone can foster student success. Neither takes into consideration new insights regarding how students learn. Research on year-round schooling, ungraded primaries, and different uses of time in school suggest that the debate on social promotion is another example of how we are trying to make the practices of the early and mid-20th century work for the 21st century (National Association of State Boards of Education, 1999).

Retention should not be perpetuated on the basis of false assumptions as to its educational benefit to young children. Further, policies that delay children's entry into school and/or segregate them into extra-year classes label children as failures at the outset of their school experience and are simply more subtle forms of retention. Not only is there a preponderance of evidence that there is no academic benefit from retention or tracking in its many forms, especially for young elementary age children, but there are also worrisome threats to the social-emotional development of the child subjected to such practices.

Although research does not support grade retention, many educators and parents do. Sometimes it is true that teachers do see children who have been retained, placed in extra year classes, or held out of school for a year making progress. It is also true that they have no opportunity to see how well the children might have progressed had they been promoted or moved along with their age-mates. The vast majority of control-group studies that are structured to measure this comparison come down clearly on the side of promotion. Students recommended for retention but advanced to the next level end up doing as well as or better academically than comparable non-promoted peers. Children who have been retained demonstrate more social regression, display more behavior problems, suffer stress in connection with being retained, and more frequently leave high school without graduating.

Policies sanctioning retention should be highly suspect given the lack of demonstrated effectiveness and prevalent bias against certain groups of children (e.g., young-in-grade males, children of color, English language learners). The current methodology used in selecting students for retention or tracking makes it impossible to predict accurately or equitably who will benefit. Given the natural variability in children's developmental patterns in the early childhood years and the widely acknowledged unreliability of testing young children, it is unlikely that valid and reliable processes for determining who might benefit from being retained or otherwise held back can ever be applied with surety.

Pro-retention policies as a strategy for establishing rigorous academic standards are likely to be self-defeating. The lowered expectations parents and teachers develop toward retained children decrease

the probability that such children will ever attain their potential. Rhetoric around the term “ending social promotion” (which has increased dramatically in the standards-based climate of today’s schools) creates a climate that supports an increase in retention. The only circumstances under which it may be useful to urge the end of “social promotion” is when there is a clear understanding that we know many strategies for improving children’s achievement that we are not using fully and which are less costly in both human and financial terms than retention. These include:

- Participation in high quality preschool at age three and four
- Improving the quality of infant/toddler child care settings
- Participation in full time kindergarten
- Lowering class size
- Access to tutoring outside of class time
- Participation in summer programs and/or year-round schooling
- Participation in after school programs
- Multiage grouping/looping/ungraded primary
- Professional development designed to institutionalize more effective teaching practices

The educational community can no longer afford to ignore the consequences of policies and practices which: 1) assign the burden of responsibility for failure to the child, rather than the program; 2) place the child at risk of further failure, apathy toward school, and demoralization; and 3) fail to contribute to quality early childhood education. Ending conditions that prevent all children from learning the most they can must be a priority for us all (National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in the State Departments of Education, 1987).

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# Assessment of Young Children

*Young children are notoriously difficult to assess accurately, and well-intended testing efforts in the past have done unintended harm.*  
National Education Goals Panel, 1998

**G**ood assessment is an important, integral part of good teaching. Assessment practices must be appropriate for young children and must be intended for the purpose of ultimately benefiting children’s learning and well-being. High-stakes accountability testing of individual children is not appropriate before the end of third grade.

The current climate which demands greater accountability and enhanced educational performance, presents teachers and administrators with decisions about how to implement assessments that are appropriate for young children, and at the same time, responsive to the legitimate demands from parents and the public for clear and useful information. Knowledge about assessment and the unique development of young children is essential for making the right decisions.

**Group-Administered Standardized Achievement Tests**—As evaluation tools for young children, achievement tests are not adequate for showing how or what students are learning, the kinds of help they need, or the quality of teaching they receive. Group-administered, standardized achievement tests often fail to measure much more than children’s test-taking ability, and *should not be used to make important educational decisions about young children.*

## Assessment and the Unique Development of Young Children

Assessing children in the earliest years of life—from birth to age 8—is difficult because it is the period when young children’s rates of physical, motor, and linguistic development outpace growth rates at all other stages. Growth is rapid, episodic, and highly influenced by environmental supports: nurturing parents, quality care-giving, and the learning setting.

Because young children learn in ways and at rates different from older children and adults, we must tailor our assessments accordingly. Because young children come to know things through doing as well as through listening, and because they often represent their knowledge better by showing than by talking or writing, paper-and-pencil tests are not adequate. Because young children do not have the experience to understand what the goals of formal testing are, testing interactions may be very difficult or impossible to structure appropriately. Because young children develop and learn so fast, tests given at one point in time may not give a complete picture of learning. And because young children’s achievements at any point are the result of a complex mix of their ability to learn and past learning opportunities, it is a mistake to interpret measures of past learning as evidence of what could be learned.

For these reasons, how we assess young children and the principles that frame such assessments need special attention. What works for older children or adults will not work for younger children; they have unique needs that we, as adults, are obliged to recognize if we are to optimize their development.

Source: Shepard, L. A., Kagan, S. L., & Wurtz (Eds). (1998)

In order to help young children learn, assessment must be a part of the regular classroom program in which teachers who know the children are the primary assessors. Standardized, multiple-choice achievement tests are developed by large publishing companies that have no connection to local curricula and are not accountable to local communities. By eliminating the use of standardized tests for evaluating students and using appropriate methods instead, we can significantly improve the quality of education for young children (Fair Test, 1991).

**Screening and Diagnostic Assessment**—Screening and developmental assessments are used for referral and identifying disabilities and special needs of children. The purpose of identification is to provide follow-up intervention with appropriate health, educational, and special services to ensure that children benefit from support for optimum growth and learning.

Screening assessments are intended to be used only for referral purposes, and should never be used for making instructional decisions, to identify children for special education, or to show growth across time. In-depth, diagnostic testing must be administered by trained specialists, and the results must always be considered within the context of multiple sources of evidence from multiple settings. Follow-up services and educational experiences must be carefully coordinated among teachers, parents, administrators, and service providers.

**Harmful Effects of High-stakes Assessment**—As a result of inappropriate uses of assessment instruments, or use of a single test to make “high-stakes” decision, all too often children are tracked into high or low ability groups, retained at grade level, placed in extra-year classes, or screened out of “regular” classes and mislabeled or sorted into “special” classes. Such practices are not beneficial to children, and indeed are more often harmful to them (Meisels, 1987; Shepard & Smith, 1989; Shepard, Kagan, & Wurtz (Eds.). National Education Goals Panel, 1998).

Furthermore, in some instances, high-stakes tests are used to determine school rankings and merit pay for teachers. If tests play a significant role in grade advancement and are the primary basis for school’s so-called accountability, teachers feel compelled to spend considerable time preparing children to take tests. In such cases, the tests consume much of the school curriculum. Valuable instructional time is lost in preparing for tests by reading isolated paragraphs and answering multiple-choice questions. Opportunities for higher level thinking are lost when time is spent not on posing problems for which math might be used, and not in the process of coming to a natural understanding of math concepts, but on reviewing skills such as addition, subtraction, and division—all in isolation. Decisions about instruction and assessment must be made in the context of supporting learning for all students (Perrone, 1991).

**Making Decision About Testing and Other Assessments**—Teachers must make instructional decisions based on their understanding of each child’s learning needs and how to best support each child. This requires ongoing assessment and evaluation through 1) observation of process,

2) observation of products, and 3) communication and interaction among teachers, children, and their families. Good instructional decisions are dependent on teachers' knowledge and skills in assessment and evaluation to support optimum learning for every child. (Bowman, Donovan, & Burns, 2000; Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; Hohman & Weikart, 1995; Meisels, Jablon, et al., 1994; NAEYC & NAECS/SDE, 1991; NASBE, 1988; NAECS/SDE, 2000; Stiggins, 1997, 1999).

Administrators of early childhood programs who consider the use of standardized tests must ask themselves how children will benefit from testing. Why is testing to be done? Does an appropriate test exist? What other sources of information can be used to make decisions about how best to provide instruction and services for an individual child? How can information about student progress be best collected and most clearly reported to parents, the board, and the community? In answering such questions, administrators should apply principles of meaningful assessment and evaluation grounded in knowledge about how children develop and learn.

In order to avoid inappropriate interpretations and uses of assessment, a clear understanding about different types of assessment and their different purposes is essential. Keeping in mind that "well-intended testing efforts in the past have done unintended harm," school administrators, teachers, and governing boards must not lose sight of considering the ultimate benefit to children's learning and well-being.

(Note: In Nebraska, screening/readiness testing in connection with entrance to kindergarten is prohibited and group-administered, norm-referenced standardized tests are prohibited below Grade 2.)

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# Class Size

*Reducing class size to below 20 students leads to higher student achievement. This is particularly true in kindergarten, first, second and third grades.*

U.S. Department of Education, 1998

The above and following were stated in May, 1998, as part of a very comprehensive research document that was released by the U.S. Department of Education called: *Reducing Class Size: What Do We Know*. Analysis of twenty years of research on class size found the pattern of research findings points more and more clearly toward the beneficial effect of reducing class size.

The following are the findings:

- A consensus of research indicates that class size reduction in the early grades (kindergarten through third) leads to higher student achievement.
- The most significant effects of class size reduction on student achievement appear when class size is reduced to between 15 and 20 students.
- The greatest results were achieved when the teacher workload was reduced to under 20 rather than the adding of associates to larger classrooms.
- The related student achievement moves the average student from the 50th percentile up to somewhere above the 60th percentile. For disadvantaged and minority student the effects are somewhat larger.
- Student, teacher, and parents all report positive effects from the impact of class size reduction on the quality of classroom activity.
- The focus on the early grades suggests that smaller classes represent a preventative, rather than a remedial approach.
- Teachers will need professional development opportunities to optimize the potential benefits of smaller classes.
- While research indicates that class size reduction leads to higher student achievement, it must also be recognized that the quality of instruction plays a major role. Ongoing professional development for teachers will maximize student achievement results.

Tennessee's Project STAR is the most cited long-term research on class size. It found children in small classes outperformed students in larger classes in both reading and math on the Stanford Achievement Test. Students in small K–3 classes had better high school graduation rates, higher grade point averages, and were more likely to enroll in post secondary education.

“Small classes in early primary grades benefit students and provide a basis for substantial education reform without necessarily requiring massive infusions of funds. Consider some potential cost saving from using small classes in grades K-3:

- Fewer retentions
- Less need for remediation and/or special education
- Improved behavior
- Increased achievement” (Achilles, 1996)

### **Benefits of Smaller Classes**

Benefits to the student in a smaller class:

1. Each student receives a larger portion of the educational resources represented by the teacher’s instructional time.
2. There is more time for each student to contribute while other listen.
3. Students develop better relationships with their classmates and with their teacher.
4. Students receive more individualized attention.

Benefits shared by teachers, administrators and parents:

1. Classroom atmosphere is improved.
2. Teachers have more flexibility to use different instructional approaches and assignments.
3. Enhanced instruction and assessment:
  - \* More time to spend in small group
  - \* More time for individualized instruction
  - \* More time for child-centered practices
  - \* Greater opportunity to cover more material in greater depth

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# Technology and Young Children

*Technology has...power to help students obtain, organize, manipulate, and display information...”*  
*“Using technology for meaningful activities also helps integrate a variety of disciplines, more closely resembling activities that people undertake in the world beyond the classroom.*

North Central Regional Education Laboratory, 1999

**T**echnology can be defined as the use of a mechanical or electronic means to receive, send or process information. Technology tools might include telephone, television, video, camera, scanners, printers, computers, projection devices, laser disks, CD or be as simple as a calculator. Additional interactive technology might include: internet, e-mail, online discussion groups, video conference by fiber optics, or other formats, hand held devices, automobile communication systems, and cellular phones. These tools assist us in accessing and processing information. The speed, quality, and quantity of information we receive is then communicated to others.

## **Purpose**

Learning takes place when multiple avenues of sensory input connect in the brain to past experiences. This information acquired by the learner then becomes integrated for use in problem solving, reasoning, exploration, analysis, interpretation, and the application of new knowledge.

Children need real-life experiences with real people to benefit from available technologies. Technology should be used to enhance curriculum and first hand experiences (Perry, 1999). Children require an integrated and well-balanced set of experiences to help them grow into capable adults who can handle social-emotional interactions as well as develop their intellectual abilities. When these take place at the appropriate time for the development of the child they become keys to healthy development. As with all other tools, adults must protect children from misuse or inappropriate use.

The purpose of technology is:

- To prepare students for a dynamically changing society
- To facilitate students achieving high standards and quality work
- To provide all students with equity in the availability of information
- To increase student achievement by addressing children’s various learning styles
- To allow children to control selection, pace, and level of difficulty in processing information
- To provide interactive experiences which develop curiosity, problem solving and independent thinking skills
- To assist the child in the development of multiple ways to communicate
- To address the brain’s preference for visually presented information
- To provide a tool for use in the investigative processes of learning
- To provide another way to communicate learning for assessment

## Principles

As the convergence of technologies takes place in our society, the challenge for teachers and students is to develop a literacy with the tools of learning to prepare them for processing information. This improves communications, problem solving, critical questioning, researching, synthesizing and applying knowledge in new and unique ways.

In the use of technology the following principles are relevant to best practice for young children:

- ◆ Early childhood professionals use technology to facilitate student achievement.
- ◆ Selection of software and hardware is based upon relevance to curriculum, and software is absent of violence and stereotyping.
- ◆ Integration of technology with curriculum should be authentic and of interest to the learner.
- ◆ A technology rich environment encourages higher order thinking skills, problem solving and collaboration.
- ◆ Use of appropriate technology allows time for independent exploration and skill development.
- ◆ The selection of technology equipment and materials is based on needs and interests of each individual student.
- ◆ Multi-sensory technology tools address the learning styles and adaptive needs of the learner.
- ◆ Students using technology are involved in decision making regarding the application to and assessment of their work.
- ◆ Teachers acquire in depth professional development and support for implementing the use of technology.
- ◆ Equity of access to technology is provided for all learners.
- ◆ Educational communities work together to promote the appropriate uses of technology (NAEYC, 1996).

## Research and Best Practice

When technologies are integrated into the curriculum as a vital element of instruction to solve real problems dealing with important issues, children gain the ability to use them as natural tools for learning just as they would a pencil, chalk, or paint brush (Shade & Watson, 1990). To maximize the potential of all tools of technology, they need to be viewed on the same level with our other instruments of instruction.

Computers and other equipment for learning need to be in the classroom as opposed to isolated to a hallway or specific room away from everyday activities. Children need to be able to choose the use of such technological tools based upon the work they have to accomplish. When these tools are isolated to laboratory settings for special purposes the impact of their potential is minimized. Their use then becomes a separate unrelated subject called “Computer Literacy.”

Interactive technologies become powerful tools when they are used to create multi-media presentations by students or teachers. Open-ended software can encourage children to articulate decision making and planning which leads to greater verbal interactions with others (Forman, 1994, video). The interactive software enhances the decision making process, extends math exploration and problem solving and supports social interactions with collaboration and perspective formation.

Some software labeled “integrated learning” may be only a cluster of activities related to a subject area without consideration for development of concepts and goals.

Technology powerful classrooms have been shown to have positive effects on the instructional process, on basic and advanced skills. To be effective it must become part of the whole educational environment. Studies have shown the following gains made by students (Bialo & Sivin-Kachala, 1996 and Dwyer, 1994).

- Exploration and representation of information was expressed dynamically and in many forms
- Students became socially aware and more confident
- Students communicated effectively about complex processes.
- Students became independent learners and self-starters.
- Students worked well collaboratively.
- Students knew their areas of expertise and shared spontaneously.
- Students used technology routinely and appropriately.
- Students increased writing skills.
- Students gained a better understanding and a broader view of math.
- Students gained an ability to teach others this new knowledge.
- Greater problem solving and critical thinking skills were obtained (Kosakowski 1998).

## Considerations

### ***What appropriate use of technology looks like for young children?***

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Sending an e-mail to a relative who lives overseas</li><li>▪ Submitting one’s story to a children’s web site</li><li>▪ Using the internet as a source of news and weather</li><li>▪ Using children’s CD-ROM books for exploring and interacting</li><li>▪ Taking a virtual visit to a museum or historical location</li><li>▪ Interacting with a primary source of information, for example, meteorologist, astronaut, congresswoman, librarian, historian, neighbor or relative</li><li>▪ Becoming an explorer of safe informational web sites for problem solving on real world issue; for example, how to assist in a project on endangered species</li><li>▪ Listening to a story she write being read back to her (especially useful for children with visual impairments)</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Using the Internet for evaluation and ordering of consumer goods.</li><li>▪ Creating a multi-media presentation of a group project</li><li>▪ Using the tools of technology for student-led conferences</li><li>▪ Creating pieces of art, music, or literature using the tools of technology</li><li>▪ Understanding there are quality sources of information and how to recognize them among the vast amounts of information available</li><li>▪ Keeping a personal portfolio of work</li><li>▪ Using the informational tools of technology to sort, order or classify information for a real world problem</li><li>▪ Communicating and transferring information using multiple tools of technology</li></ul> |
|---|---|

### **What inappropriate use of technology looks like for young children?**

- Using a computer for reasons other than planned, goal specific work or related exploration
  - Expecting students to operate equipment without receiving the adequate instruction on operation and application
  - Expecting students to rely only on their peers for support and coaching
  - Using technology exclusively for learning concepts and skills, without teacher instruction
- Not providing an environment for exploration that is free of violence and stereotyping
  - Expecting children to grasp concepts from skill and drill software
  - Not allowing students the use of technology for authentic work in problem solving real issues
  - Using technology exclusively for training in computer literacy skills
  - Using the computer as a reward or means of discipline

The rapid growth rate of technology continues to challenge educators in professional development. As a facilitator of appropriate use and exploration of technology, educators need not feel overwhelmed by every new piece of hardware or software. By becoming a co-learner in inquiry/investigation processes, the educator models appropriate use of multiple media resources. Students then gain insight and experiences in processing information.

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# Grouping for Learning

*As perhaps never before in world history, individuals are being valued for their ability to connect with other individuals and to help the groups to which they belong to be harmonious and productive.*

Anderson & Pavan 1993

Children benefit from flexible grouping which allows the teacher to instruct students on the basis of interests and learning needs. When children are grouped by their interests more often than by other characteristics (such as skill level) the opportunities to learn from each other are maximized. Children need chances to learn cooperatively and to experience the value of collaboration. Ultimately, social interaction leads to better understanding and a consolidation of learning.

Students achieve best when groupings are varied and flexible. Groupings should provide opportunities for each child to interact with a variety of children and adults. It must not involve tracking, extra year programs and retention.

The composition of groups affects not only how and what children learn but also the way children feel about themselves and the way they relate to each other. Long-term, static ability grouping affects children negatively. Anderson & Pavan (1993) suggest that teachers:

- Assign students to heterogeneous classrooms.
- Regroup for homogeneity for teaching specific skills only.
- Assess children in skill groups frequently so those no longer needing such instruction will be assigned to different groups.

Tracking, the sorting of children by ability or prior performance for long periods of time, and retention, repeating the same grade or course, are harmful to children. Reports in 1985 by Oakes (cited in Saphier & Gower, 1997) state, “Well documented examinations of tracking in the U.S. show conclusively that low track students are systematically disadvantaged by low expectation, less opportunity to learn, less interesting materials, and less interesting teaching.” Tracking is unnecessary when the teacher accepts children’s current levels of functioning and then focuses on helping them progress from there during each school term. Instruction is designed to meet the individual needs of each child instead of relying solely on grade/age level objectives.

Extra year programs are a form of tracking which isolates children from peers based on external factors. This is especially true for boys and youngsters of color. The composition of groups affects not only how and what children learn but also the way children feel about themselves and the way they relate to each other. Saphier and Gower show that, “The damage to self-esteem and motivation that befalls elementary children labeled ‘low-track’ is deep and permanent and shows up later in secondary school performance. The cost is not only their self-esteem, but also their interest and motivation.”

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# Code of Ethical Conduct

Position statement of the National Association for the Education of Young Children. Adopted 1989, amended 1997.

## Preamble

NAEYC recognizes that many daily decisions required of those who work with young children are of a moral and ethical nature. The NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct offers guidelines for responsible behavior and sets forth a common basis for resolving the principal ethical dilemmas encountered in early childhood care and education. The primary focus is on daily practice with children and their families in programs for children from birth through 8 years of age, such as infant/toddler programs, preschools, child care centers, family child care homes, kindergartens, and primary classrooms. Many of the provisions also apply to specialists who do not work directly with children, including program administrators, parent and vocational educators, college professors, and child care licensing specialists.

## Core Values

Standards of ethical behavior in early childhood care and education are based on commitment to core values that are deeply rooted in the history of our field. We have committed ourselves to

- Appreciating childhood as a unique and valuable stage of the human life cycle
- Basing our work with children on knowledge of child development
- Appreciating and supporting the close ties between the child and family
- Recognizing that children are best understood and supported in the context of family, culture, community, and society
- Respecting the dignity, worth, and uniqueness of each individual (child, family member, and colleague)
- Helping children and adults achieve their full potential in the context of relationships that are based on trust, respect, and positive regard

## Conceptual Framework

The Code sets forth a conception of our professional responsibilities in four sections, each addressing an arena of professional relationships: (1) children, (2) families, (3) colleagues, and (4) community and society. Each section includes an introduction to the primary responsibilities of the early childhood practitioner in that arena, a set of ideals pointing in the direction of exemplary professional practice, and a set of principles defining practices that are required, prohibited, and permitted.

**The ideals** reflect the aspirations of practitioners. **The principles** are intended to guide conduct and assist practitioners in resolving ethical dilemmas encountered in the field. There is not necessarily a corresponding principle for each ideal. Both ideals and principles are intended to direct practitioners to those questions which, when responsibly answered, will provide the basis for conscientious decision-making. While the Code provides specific direction and suggestions for addressing some ethical dilemmas, many others will require the practitioner to combine the guidance of the Code with sound professional judgment.

The ideals and principles in this Code present a shared conception of professional responsibility that affirms our commitment to the core values of our field. The Code publicly acknowledges the responsibilities that we in the field have assumed and in so doing supports ethical behavior in our work. Practitioners who face ethical dilemmas are urged to seek guidance in the applicable parts of this Code and in the spirit that informs the whole.

## **Ethical dilemmas always exist**

Often “the right answer”—the best ethical course of action to take is not obvious. There may be no readily apparent, positive way to handle a situation. One important value may contradict another. When we are caught “on the horns of a dilemma,” it is our professional responsibility to consult with all relevant parties in seeking the most ethical course of action to take.

## **Section I: Ethical responsibilities to children**

Childhood is a unique and valuable stage in the life cycle. Our paramount responsibility is to provide safe, healthy, nurturing, and responsive settings for children. We are committed to support children’s development, respect individual differences, help children learn to live and work cooperatively, and promote health, self-awareness, competence, self-worth, and resiliency.

## **Section II: Ethical responsibilities to families**

Families are of primary importance in children’s development. (The term family may include others, besides parents, who are responsibly involved with the child.) Because the family and the early childhood practitioner have a common interest in the child’s welfare, we acknowledge a primary responsibility to bring about collaboration between the home and school in ways that enhance the child’s development.

## **Section III: Ethical responsibilities to colleagues**

In a caring and cooperative work place, human dignity is respected, professional satisfaction is promoted, and positive relationships are modeled. Based upon our core values, our primary responsibility in this arena is to establish and maintain settings and relationships that support productive work and meet professional needs. The same ideals that apply to children are inherent in our responsibilities to adults.

## **Section IV: Ethical responsibilities to community and society**

Early childhood programs operate within a context of an immediate community made up of families and other institutions concerned with children’s welfare. Our responsibilities to the community are to provide programs that meet its needs, to cooperate with agencies and professions that share responsibility for children, and to develop needed programs that are not currently available. Because the larger society has a measure of responsibility for the welfare and protection of children, and because of our specialized expertise in child development, we acknowledge an obligation to serve as a voice for children everywhere.

Complete position statement may be accessed at <http://www.naeyc.org/about/position/pseth98.htm>.