

COMPONENT XI: ACCREDITATION/VALIDATION

DEFINITION:

Accreditation/validation is the process designed to assess high quality care and education for programs serving young children. Programs that pursue accreditation/validation make a commitment to improving the performance of their early childhood services. This commitment to program improvement is the driving force behind the accreditation/validation process.

BACKGROUND:

By 2000, only 3% of the childcare programs in Maryland were accredited. There has been a recent increase in the number of working mothers, which has created a strong demand for quality child care. Recent research in early childhood education indicates that the early years are crucial to determining whether children enter school ready to learn and whether they subsequently become successful learners. The accreditation project increases the number of children who are cared for in programs that meet high-quality standards and provide care in a safe and nurturing environment while providing linguistic and cognitive stimulation.

The establishment of an Early Childhood Accreditation Project in Maryland was guided by research (Barnett, Bryant et. Al. Cambell & Ramey) that demonstrated children's disposition for learning and school readiness are improved when they attend high quality early care and early education programs. The following are commonalities of early childhood programs that have long-term positive effects on school readiness:

- Curriculum content and learning processes that cultivate school-related skills and knowledge with an emphasis on language development
- Qualified teaching staff aided by highly-qualified supervisors using reflective teaching practices
- Low teacher-child ratio and small class size
- Intense and coherent programming
- Collaborative relationships with parents

STRATEGIES/MODELS:

Strategies:

All education programs that are components of a Judy Center must pursue and complete either state or national accreditation of their programs. Public school programs are accredited through local or state boards of education. However, the validation process differs from an accredited school, because it is *specific to a program within the school*, which undergoes self-assessment and program involvement. Judy Center programs must receive accreditation/ validation for all programs within the first eighteen (18) months of the initial grant period and must renew their accreditation/validation every 3 years thereafter.

Licensed or regulated Judy Center programs seeking accreditation/validation include: Head Start, Center-Based Child Care, Family Child Care, Public Prekindergarten, Kindergarten, and inclusive Special Education Prekindergarten and Kindergarten. Other Judy Center Programs that are non-licensed such as Infants and Toddlers, Family Support Centers, and Even Start may utilize their own project specific evaluation tools.

Models:

The recognized Accreditation Programs include:

(1) Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE)

MSDE's Early Childhood Accreditation Project is designed to increase the number of early childhood and learning programs in the state of Maryland to complete national or state program accreditation. Maryland's accreditation project developed *Standards for Implementing Quality Early Childhood Program: Center-based Child Care and Head Start* in 2000 and revised the *Standards for Implementing Early Learning Programs: Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten* in 1998.

MSDE revised these *Standards* for the use of staffs in Maryland's center-based childcare, Head Start, public pre-kindergarten and kindergarten programs in 2004. These documents are the tools designed to guide staff through a systematic process of self-appraisal, program improvement, validation, and accreditation/validation.

Both sets of standards identify and focus on three areas that support the development and maintenance of high quality programs.

The three focus areas are:

- Program’s administration (mission, personnel, continuity, accountability)
- Program’s operation (learning environment, curriculum, instruction, assessment, care and learning opportunities), and the
- Home and community partnership

The *Standards* consist of three supporting documents:

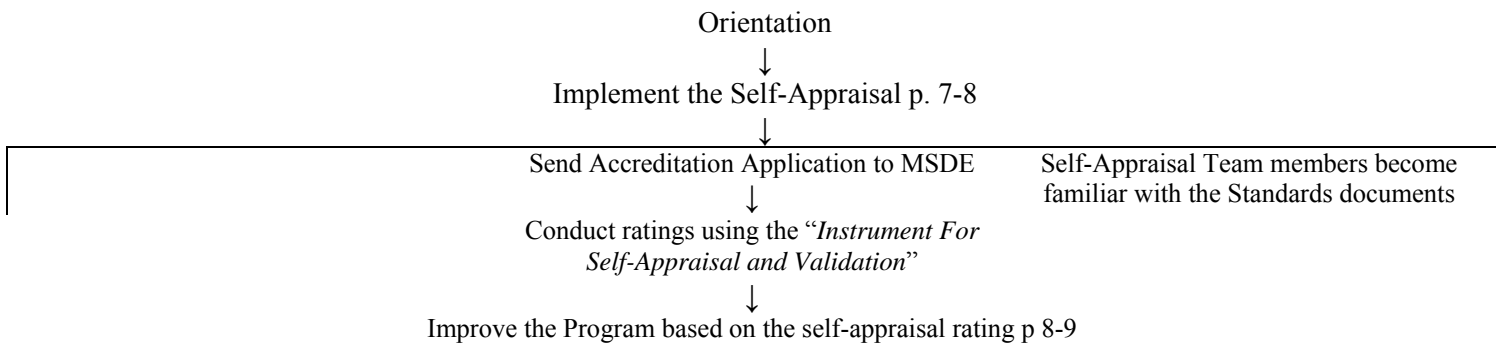
- **Guide to Accreditation: Self-Appraisal and Validation.** This document outlines the self-appraisal process and the process for non-public programs to seek accreditation and public programs to seek validation from MSDE. These processes allow for consistent articulation of the key elements of high quality programs among Maryland’s early childhood professionals.
- **Standards for Implementing Quality Early Childhood Programs: Instrument for Self-Appraisal and Validation for Center-based Child Care and Head Start Programs.** This document is used to rate the quality of center-based child care and Head Start programs occurring in classroom environments by participating staff and agency administrators.
- **Standards for Implementing Quality Early Childhood Programs: Instruments for Self-Appraisal and Validation for Prekindergarten and Kindergarten Programs:** Participating teachers and other members of the local school systems use this document to rate the quality of individual public prekindergarten and kindergarten programs.

Challenges/Strategies/Solutions:

Challenges	Strategies/Solutions
Time Constraints	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a timeline early and stick to it.
Lack of trained staff to support multiple programs undergoing the process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amend your budget to include funds for trained consultants to assist in the process
Size of the validator pool Backlog on the National level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider becoming an MSDE trained validator • MSDE will continue to train new validators • Schedule your validation visit at least 2 months in advance
Consistency and training of validators for different types of programs (i.e. school, child care, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MSDE is providing training in both of these areas (Public PK/K and Center-Based Child Care/Head Start)
Coordination of requested validation date and scheduling validators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schedule your validation visit at least 2 months in advance
It takes time and money to build a quality program (Cost of quality)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set reasonable and realistic expectations regarding time frame • Utilize technical assistance to keep the process moving • Build enough money into the budget to provide for qualified staff, professional development, substitutes, appropriate instructional materials, upgrading equipment etc.
Staff turnover/ staff qualification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider and advocate for incentives, one- time bonuses, increase compensation package, tuition reimbursement through grant writing, private partnerships, and other resources.
Assisting programs in providing developmentally appropriate quality ECE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide exposure to best practices, current research, staff development, consultants, professional resource library, mentoring.

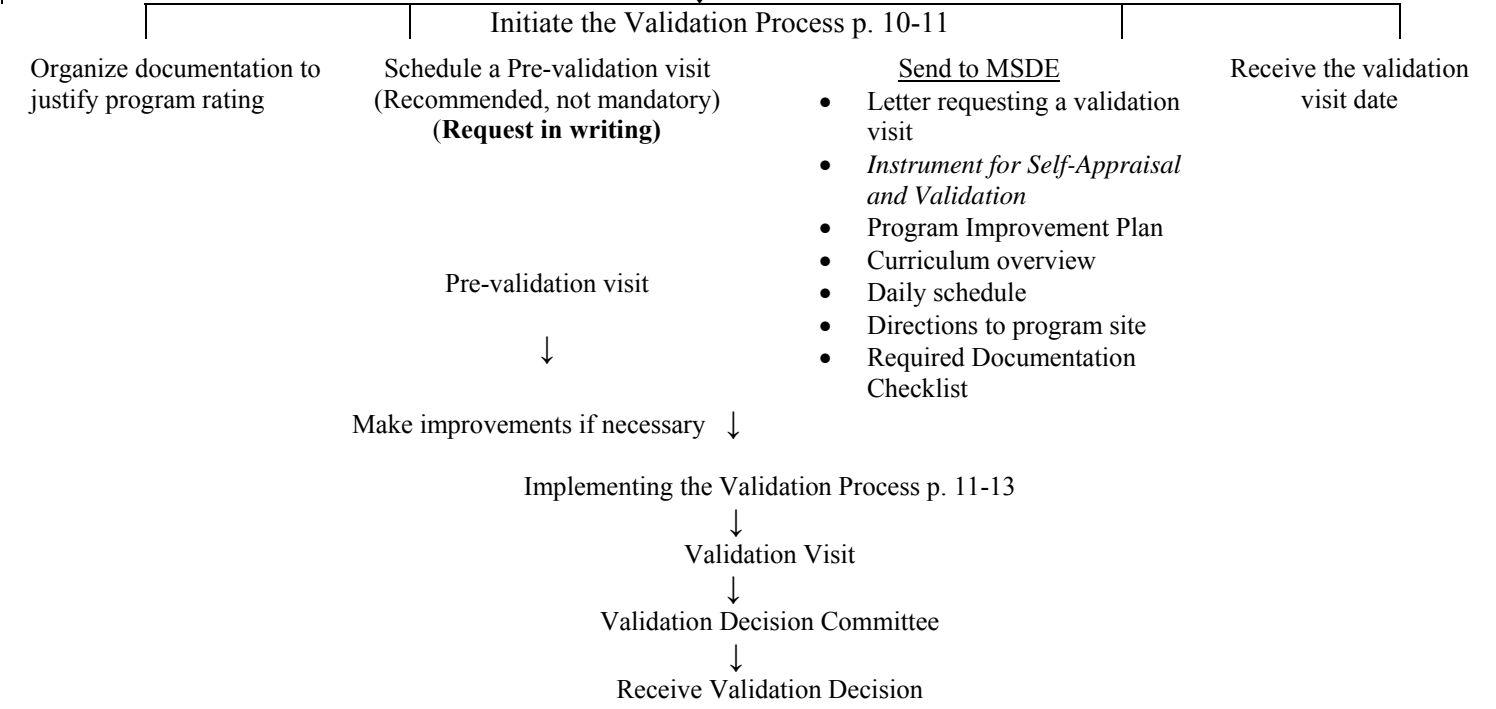
MARYLAND STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION EARLY CHILDHOOD ACCREDITATION PROCESS FLOW CHART

Phase 1: Implementing the Accreditation Process



Analyze the results	Identify strengths and needs of the program. Expand the self-appraisal team, if necessary	Establish a Program Improvement Plan - Objective - Strategies - Resources - Time line - Person Responsible	Implement strategies for program improvement	Reassess program improvements within three (3) months	Complete the Instrument for <i>Self-Appraisal and Validation</i> . Re-rate and date each indicator that can now be rated “Fully Met”
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Phase 2: Implementing the Validation Phase



For additional information about the MSDE Early Childhood Accreditation Project contact:

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Division of Early Childhood Development
Early Learning Branch
Early Childhood Accreditation Project
200 West Baltimore Street, 5th Floor
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E-mail: jnixon1@msde.state.md.us

Website: www.mdk12.org/instruction/ensure/readiness/index.html

Resources:

Guide to Self-Appraisal and Accreditation / Validation, 9Section 1) of *Standards for Implementing Quality Early Childhood Program*.

(1) National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)

The NAEYC Academy for Early Childhood Program Accreditation administers a national, voluntary, professionally sponsored accreditation system to help raise the quality of all types of preschools, kindergartens, child care centers, and school-age child care programs.

Accreditation is a process in which a program's administrators, staff, and parents join with representatives of the Academy to determine whether that program meets nationally recognized Criteria for high quality.

The Academy defines a high quality early childhood program as one that meets the needs of and promotes the physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development of the children and adults who are involved in the program.

The components involved in this program include:

- Interactions among Teachers and Children
- Curriculum
- Relationships among Teachers and Families

- Staff Qualifications and Professional Development
- Administration
- Staffing
- Physical Environment
- Health and Safety
- Nutrition and Food Service
- Evaluation

**For more information about the Academy’s accreditation process, contact the Academy at:

National Academy of Early Childhood Programs

NAEYC

1509 16th Street, N.W.

Washington, DC 20036-1426

Phone: (202) 232-8777 or (800) 424-2460. Ext. 11360

FAX: (202) 232-1720

Or by email at:

http://www.naeyc.org/accreditation/newPolicy.asp#new_structure

(2) National Early Childhood Program Accreditation (NECPA)

The National Early Childhood Program Accreditation (NECPA) Commission believes that the best way to achieve this goal is through the use of an independent, voluntary accreditation program. The NECPA program is an Automated Accreditation Indicator System (AAIS).

Dr. Rich Fiene developed this system and the instrument itself, in conjunction with the renowned Early Childhood Education Programs Department of Pennsylvania State University at Harrisburg.

The NECPA has been carefully crafted to create broad public understanding of the benefits of high quality early childhood care and education. Coupled with this increased understanding is a raised awareness of the “professional expertise” required to deliver that high care and appreciation of the advantages that children receive from accredited centers and schools.

The NECPA has several components. The first is a thorough self-assessment of the program by management, staff, and parents to determine how closely the NECPA standards are being met. The second component is an action plan to address weaknesses. The third component is an on

site visit by a trained NECPA Verifier. The fourth component is a review by the NECPA National Accreditation Council. The process is self-paced.

Accreditation is a growing process. As a program works through the self-assessment, its goal should be to meet the NECPA standards fully. Programs generally find it necessary to spend more time making changes in their programs in order to meet the standards.

As a pre-requisite to accreditation, all centers must have possessed a license in good standing from their respective states for at least one year. Full accreditation is granted for three years with satisfactory annual reviews. There are restrictions regarding changes in location and management for accredited centers.

NECPA – Contact Information: The NECPA Commission, Inc.
1150 Hungryneck Boulevard Suite C305
Columbia, SC 29210
1-800-505-9878
www.necpa.net

(3) National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC)

The National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC) is a national membership organization working with more than 400 state and local family child care provider associations across the United States.

The mission of NAFCC is to support the profession of family child care and to encourage high-quality care for children. NAFCC has promoted high-quality family child care through accreditation, leadership training, technical assistance, public education, and policy initiatives.

NAFCC developed its first accreditation system in 1988. Ten years later, there were NAFCC-accredited family child care providers in 44 states and the District of Columbia. A 1995 study of accredited providers conducted by the Families and Work Institute confirmed that accreditation increases providers' professionalism and self-esteem, improves quality of care, and develops leadership skills. In communities that support family child care, accredited providers find opportunities for further professional development such as becoming a mentor to other providers, an Observer for NAFCC, or a trainer.

In 1994, NAFCC began a major initiative to develop a new accreditation system for family child care. The goal was to recognize the special nature of high quality in this special form of child care. The Quality Standards for the new NAFCC Accreditation system were developed through a two-year, consensus-building process.

The new NAFCC accreditation began national operation in 1999.

Contact Information:

National Association for Family Child Care

5202 Pinemont Drive

Salt Lake City, Utah, 84123

Phone: (801) 269-9338

FAX: (801) 268-9507

E-mail: nafcc@nafcc.org **Website:** <http://www.nafcc.org>

- A list of NAFCC Accredited Family Day Care Providers by state is offered here.