



## Position Statement on Qualifications for Early Education and Care Professionals

Young children's development is enhanced when the early education and care programs they attend are staffed by highly qualified professionals.

Highly qualified professionals possess specialized knowledge regarding the health, safety and developmental needs of children. These professionals are life long learners who pursue higher levels of competency through continuing education, supervised experience, and networking.

**The Michigan Association for the Education of Young Children (MiAEYC) supports qualifications, training and education for adults who educate and care for young children in all regulated family child care homes, group child care homes, preschools and child care centers.** MiAEYC advocates for qualifications and levels of education in the licensing regulations that promote the healthy development of children.

A child's early years are critical<sup>1</sup>. The research indicates adults who provide education and care must understand the unique needs of young children and create an environment that enhances each child's development. Specialized knowledge about young children's development and their care in a group setting will enable adults to create that high quality program<sup>2</sup>.

We believe that:

- All who educate and care for children must initially complete a basic level of training and education based on the Early Childhood Core Knowledge and Core Competencies document<sup>3</sup>.
- Continuing training and education, emphasizing core knowledge and core competencies, is essential.
- On-going mentoring and supervision are necessary for professional growth.
- Advancement in the profession is contingent on ongoing professional development.
- State regulations must stipulate basic qualifications, training, and education for each position.
- Highly trained and educated staff are key to quality education and care.

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<sup>1</sup> Shonkoff, JP and DA Phillips, Ed. (2000) *From Neurons to Neighborhoods*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

<sup>2</sup> Barnett, WS. (2003) Better Teachers, Better Preschools: Student Achievement Linked to Teacher Qualifications, *Preschool Policy Matters*, 2. New Brunswick, NJ: NIEER

<sup>3</sup> Kent County Professional Development System Training Consortium. (2003) *Core Knowledge and Competencies for Early Childhood Care and Education Professionals*. Grand Rapids, MI: Grand Rapids Community College. (Approved by the Michigan Children's Action Network, 2005.)

## Key Points

- The best child care and education has educated and trained staff.
- Specialized education helps professional caregivers understand and respond to every child's unique needs.
- Ongoing professional development of adults is key to quality care.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### *Can anyone who likes children care for them?*

Educating and caring for young children in group settings requires specialized knowledge and skills. Liking children or being a good parent does not mean this knowledge and these skills are present. Parents can feel assured that highly trained caregivers are prepared to work with their children from different families and diverse backgrounds in group settings.

### *What difference does a well-trained child care provider make for children?*

Evaluation of the Michigan Department of Education School Readiness Program found that children who attend quality early education and care programs rate higher on attendance, showing initiative, retaining learning, completing assignments, and imagination and creativity. The better the quality of the preschool program children attend, the better prepared they are for kindergarten. The quality standards include:

- Teachers and staff who are well-trained in early childhood education.
- Supervision by a qualified early childhood specialist.
- Adequate funding for on-going early childhood training.<sup>4</sup>

The report by the National Institute for Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) found that higher quality care is related to fewer reports of children's problem behaviors, higher cognitive performance, higher language ability and higher levels of school readiness. They also found the converse is true: inferior care predicts poorer outcomes in the above areas. In the NICHD study, quality depends on caregivers who:

- Have a formal education in early childhood
- Have opportunities for specialized training and professional development.
- Can provide sensitive, responsive, cognitively stimulating care.<sup>5</sup>

### *Is there a difference between training and education?*

Both training and education provide instruction, information, techniques and strategies. Traditionally, training is non-credit bearing instruction and education is a formalized system of study. Both are important and essential to providing staff with the information and skills they need to provide insightful and responsive care and education to young children.

### *What is the basic level of training and education for adults who educate and care for young children?*

The basic level of training and education includes an introduction to the core knowledge and competencies needed to promote healthy child development in young children. In Michigan this knowledge and these competencies are identified in the Early Childhood Core Knowledge and Core Competency Document adopted by the State of Michigan.

The categories of knowledge and competence are:

- Child development and learning
- Health, safety and nutrition

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<sup>4</sup> Michigan Department of Education. (2004) *Early Childhood Standards of Quality for Prekindergarten*. [http://www.michigan.gov/documents/Early\\_Childhood\\_Standards\\_of\\_Quality\\_-\\_Draft\\_107748\\_7.PDF](http://www.michigan.gov/documents/Early_Childhood_Standards_of_Quality_-_Draft_107748_7.PDF)

- Interactions and guidance (discipline)
- Teaching and learning
- Family and community collaboration
- Program management
- Assessment and evaluation
- Professionalism

Knowledge and skills necessary to work with children from diverse backgrounds including children with special needs is incorporated in all the categories.

### ***Where can child care staff get training and education?***

Training and education are available from many sources. Child care providers can get introductory and on-going training from state and regional resource and referral agencies, other early childhood and human service agencies, and professional associations that focus on the education of young children. Many of the state's colleges and universities offer coursework and college degrees in early childhood education, child development and related fields. Scholarships and other supports are available.

### ***Does training guarantee a good child care provider?***

Just like any profession, job performance varies among individuals. However, initial and on-going training and education promote knowledge and skill development necessary for providing quality care.

### ***Why should the state identify qualifications, training and education in regulations for child care programs?***

To guarantee that the health, safety and developmental needs of young children are met, state regulation must articulate and enforce guidelines regarding the qualifications, training and education of adults working in these programs.

<sup>5</sup> NICHD Early Child Care Research Network. (1993). *The NICHD Study of Early Child Care: A comprehensive longitudinal study of young children's lives*. ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED3530870.

## **Michigan Stories**

These are stories about people in early childhood care and education known to MiAEYC members. The names have been changed.

***A Head Start parent who became an assistant teacher at Head Start.*** Sally began working as an assistant at Head Start when the mandate was made for staff to have a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential. (This is a national entry-level credential for the early childhood field.) The program paid for her to take the appropriate college courses. After a child development class, Sally began noticing children as individuals with their own interests and abilities. At a classroom management class, Sally learned techniques to manage the group while facilitating the development of individual children. As Sally applied the information she learned about young children and their care/education, she also noticed that behavior problems decreased. The children were more engaged in the stimulating program she offered; they were learning more and discovering how to interact with each other; and Sally spent less time on discipline problems.

***A parent who put her three-year-old child in a child care center:*** When Elizabeth had to enter the working world after being a stay-at-home mom, she researched different child care options for her three-year-old daughter, Claire. Elizabeth wanted to find just the right setting for Claire to learn social skills. Elizabeth selected an accredited

child care center. Within a month of placing Claire there, the director approached Elizabeth to talk about some of Claire's behavior the staff had noticed and about which they were concerned. After thoughtful discussions and considerations, Elizabeth took Claire to the local center for assessment of special needs. Claire was diagnosed with autism. While the family began receiving services to help Claire develop, Elizabeth credited the child care center staff with pointing the family in the right direction. The staff, because of their training and education, identified the developmental delay, found the appropriate community resource, worked with the family through the process, and continued to support Claire and her family once services began.

***A child development center director:*** A child development center director interviewed six candidates for a Lead Teacher position in the preschool room. Four candidates had very limited early childhood education and varying experience with young children, but they all stated that the job would be easy for them. Two candidates held Associate Teacher positions in the center, both were extremely competent in their positions, had many years of experience with young children and early childhood education degrees. By contrast, these candidates expressed that they would really like the job and work hard at it, but they knew it was a huge responsibility and hoped that they were ready for it. Why were the inexperienced candidates with limited education more confident than those more qualified to do the job? The director surmised, "They just don't know what they don't know."

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