

## **South Dakota AEYC Public Policy Platform**

### **PREAMBLE**

The South Dakota Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) has been guided by the same mission and philosophy for many years -- *to serve and act on behalf of the needs, rights, and well being of all young children*. Our primary focus is on the provision of educational and developmental services and resources. The SDAEYC Public Policy Agenda priorities were generated after all members were invited to weigh in on the most important and critical needs for moving the profession and service to children and families forward in the state. SDAEYC Position Statements are adopted by the Governing Board to state the Association's position on issues related to early childhood education practice, policy, and/or professional development.

The list includes current priorities grouped in three broad areas:

1. Development of a funded early childhood system that is sustainable in order to ensure quality programs and access to affordability for families.
2. Worthy wages for those who provide care and education for young children.
3. State funding for preschool programs

The policy statements are based on four overarching principles:

1. All Children deserve access to a safe and accessible, high quality early childhood education that includes a developmentally appropriate curriculum, knowledgeable and well-trained providers, staff and educators, comprehensive services that support their health, nutrition, and social well being, in an environment that respects and supports diversity.
2. All Early Childhood Professionals deserve to be supported as professionals with a career ladder, ongoing professional development opportunities, and compensation that will attract and retain high quality educators.
3. All Families deserve access to early care and education programs that are affordable and of high quality, and to be participants in the education and well being of their children through parental involvement in programs and schools, as well as opportunities to increase their educational attainment.
4. All Communities deserve accountability for the quality of early childhood programs provided to all children, backed by the state and federal funding needed to deliver quality programs and services.

### **STATE ROLE IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION**

The state role in early childhood education is a critical one. The role of the state government in early childhood education is to:

1. Promote effective state-level administration for quality early childhood education and related services, equal opportunity, and adequate and equitable resources for each and every child;
2. Establish goals, policies, budgets, and programs in early childhood education in consultation with early childhood experts, educators, providers, local agencies responsible for early childhood education, business, and other interested citizens and to regularly review such goals, policies, budgets and programs;

3. Administer, oversee and regularly monitor systems relating to the quality of early childhood programs and services;
4. Establish requirements for credentials and professional licensure, including preparation and ongoing professional development, and articulation between two year and four year institutions of higher education and other providers of professional development;
5. Coordinate programs and services both within and among state agencies and entities responsible for early childhood education and related services, such as health, family support, and other human services;
6. Provide technical assistance to local agencies and entities, programs, and individual providers of early childhood education; and
7. Undertake data collection, analysis and evaluations of programs and services provided with state funds and disseminate the findings widely.

### **FEDERAL ROLE IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION**

The federal role in early childhood care and education is a critical one. The appropriate role of the federal government is to:

1. Partner with states and local communities to help ensure equal education opportunity and excellence in early childhood education programs;
2. Provide resources targeted to national goals in early childhood education and to help states and localities assist special populations, such as economically disadvantaged children, children with disabilities, and children whose native language is other than English, to meet high academic standards and develop personal, health, and social competencies;
3. Protect the civil rights of all children, families, and early childhood program personnel; and
4. Undertake and promote research, data collection and analysis, program evaluation, and dissemination of child development, effective early childhood education programs and services, and professional development programs.

### **DEFINITIONS OF TERMS**

For purposes of this document, the following terms mean:

The terms “early childhood” and “young children” mean children from birth through age eight.

The term “early childhood education program” includes child care, preschool, and the early elementary grades.

The term “early childhood professional” includes all staff and administrators of an early childhood program, a family childcare setting, or an elementary school.

The term “public funds” means any resources from local, state, and federal government.

The term “school” means any elementary grade school.

I. DEVELOPMENT OF A FUNDED EARLY CHILDHOOD SYSTEM THAT IS SUSTAINABLE  
IN ORDER TO ENSURE QUALITY PROGRAMS AND ACCESS TO AFFORDABILITY  
FOR FAMILIES.

SUSTAINABILITY OF EARLY CHILDHOOD COORDINATION SYSTEMS

- Change takes time. Sustainability will allow for thoughtful decision making, long-term visioning, strategic planning, and achievement of goals.
- Through coordination and communication, various programs that work with young children can increase system-wide efficiency by reducing duplication and sharing resources.
- Development and sustainability of an early childhood system requires dedication from individuals who must take time away from the daily obligations of their work to discuss and make decisions that affect the early childhood infrastructure in the state.
- Those who provide direct services to young children and families can best inform policy makers about the strengths, assets and areas for improvement regarding current policies.

HEALTH, SAFETY, AND QUALITY

- Any provider of care and education to children from two or more unrelated families should be regulated by the state without exception, including all centers, family daycare home, group family daycare homes, and kith-and-kin care paid with public funds.
- Licensing standards should be coordinated statewide, streamlined and comparable for all out of home settings with the state, including standards regarding staff qualifications, ongoing training requirements, parent roles, group size and staff-child ratios, discipline, health and safety aspects, and developmentally appropriate curriculum.
- South Dakota must establish a system for implementing standards that includes monitoring and inspection, including adequate licensing staff with early childhood training to monitor compliance with standards and assure technical assistance and leadership.
- Standards should require regular review and public reporting of their continued effectiveness in promoting good services for children.
- Public purchase of services should be limited to regulated settings.
- All early childhood programs should be free of tobacco, illegal drugs, alcohol, hazardous materials, and violence.
- Licensing standards should be clear and reasonable and reflect current research findings related to children's health development and to reducing the risk of harm.
- Policies should promote incentive mechanisms that encourage and reward achievement of a higher quality of service beyond the basic foundation of licensing.

- Regulating agencies should provide consumer and public education to families, providers, and the public of the importance of early years and of ways to create environments that promote children's learning and development.

#### AFFORDABILITY FOR FAMILIES

- Quality child care can cost as much as a college education. Families with young children often cannot afford to pay the true cost of quality care. Programs with a proven record of providing quality care should be subsidized so that all families have access to affordable, quality care.
- All families should be informed of services available to help pay for child care when they cannot afford it.
- Child care programs receiving financial support from the state should be closely monitored to ensure quality.
- Families should be provided with an option to have the full cost of child care expenses as pre-tax deductions in their paychecks.
- Provisions such as direct subsidy for low-income families and sliding-fee scale mechanisms must be made so that program options are not limited by family income.
- High quality early childhood programs should be available to all families who want or need the service at a price that each family can afford.

## II. WORTHY WAGES FOR THOSE WHO PROVIDE CARE AND EDUCATION FOR YOUNG CHILDREN.

#### EQUITABLE COMPENSATION

- Compensation must be sufficient to attract and retain qualified staff to work with young children and reduce high rates of turnover and its detrimental effect on children. Salaries and benefits should be comparable to other professionals with equivalent training and responsibilities.
- Compensation for early childhood professionals should be equivalent to that of other professionals with comparable preparation requirements, experience, and job responsibilities.
- Early childhood professionals should be encouraged to seek additional professional preparation and should be rewarded accordingly.
- The provision of an adequate benefits package is a crucial component of compensation for early childhood staff.
- Compensation should not be differentiated on the basis of the ages of children served.

#### FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE FOR PREPARATION AND ONGOING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- Resources should be available to provide financial assistance to individuals in a program of preparation toward a credential or degree necessary to teach in or direct an early childhood program. Such financial assistance may take the form of scholarships or grants, or loans tied to loan forgiveness if the individual fulfills the credential or degree requirements and makes a commitment to remain in the field of early childhood.

- Early childhood educators should be eligible for the same reduced tuition at accredited colleges and universities as K-12 educators when enrolling in off-campus education courses (workshops for credit, etc.)

#### CAREER LADDERS

- Career ladders should be established, providing additional increments in salary based on performance and participation in professional development opportunities.
- Ongoing professional development is essential for teachers to stay current in an ever expanding research base and to continually improve their teaching skills and the learning outcomes for children. Personnel standards must articulate common core knowledge and skills necessary for all individuals who work with young children with special learning and developmental needs and their families, as well as the specialization knowledge and skills required for each of these roles.

### III. STATE FUNDING FOR PRESCHOOL PROGRAMS

#### PUBLIC INVESTMENT/FUNDING

- A substantial commitment of new public funds must be made to begin to meet the compelling and immediate need for comprehensive, high-quality preschool programs for all children.
- The adequacy/sufficiency of resources should take into account the full cost of quality services and programs for all children.
- Coordination of services should ensure that services are not duplicated through multiple funding sources.
- Whenever public funds do not serve all eligible children, such resources should be targeted to the most economically disadvantaged communities or children.
- Public funds should be available to support access to high quality, comprehensive preschool programs in a variety of settings based on whether the provider meets standards of quality and not the status as for-profit or non-profit, or affiliated or not affiliated with specific institutions.

*Approved by the SDAEYC Board on 12/09/2011*