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Bartholomew County Accreditation Readiness Study

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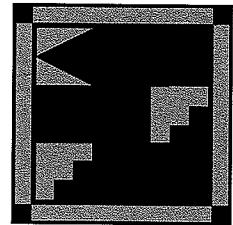
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Bartholomew County Accreditation Readiness Study Final Report

December 1999



C E N T E R
for
F A M I L I E S
at
P U R D U E
U N I V E R S I T Y

Bartholomew County Step Ahead Council

Conducted by the Center for Families
Department of Child Development and Family Studies
Purdue University

Katherine R. Kensinger, M.S.
James G. Elicker, Ph.D.
Shelley M. MacDermid, Ph.D.

Strengthening services to families with research, education, and outreach

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Readiness Study
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Preface

In October 1997, the Bartholomew County Step Ahead Council approached the Center for Families at Purdue University with an interest in improving the quality of child care in their community. Originally, the Council request was for a quality rating system, similar to accreditation, which could be implemented on the community level. After further discussion, the focus shifted to exploring the level of readiness of programs in the community for voluntary accreditation by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC).

The Center for Families contacted Katherine Kensinger, a graduate student interested in research on quality in early childhood programs, to determine her interest in conducting the study. She and her major advisor, Dr. James Elicker, agreed that the study would be a viable thesis topic, and thus, agreed to conduct the study.

Katherine Kensinger and James Elicker met with the Step Ahead Council in October 1997 to discuss the plans for the study. It was agreed that Katherine would visit consenting programs to conduct observational quality and readiness assessments and interview teaching and administrative staff. Data collection began in May 1998 and was concluded in October 1998.

This is the final report of the findings of the Bartholomew County Accreditation Readiness Survey. It is the hope of the researchers that the community will find it a useful tool for aiding and encouraging programs to become nationally accredited by NAEYC.

Glossary of Terms

National Accreditation: Accreditation by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) is a credential of high quality that early childhood programs may receive if they participate in the process and meet the necessary requirements as evaluated by an outside validator. It is completely voluntary. Programs who enter the process must pay certain fees to participate and be validated.

Early Childhood Program Quality: Environments for children (i.e. child care programs, early childhood programs) are frequently described in terms of how the program meets the needs of children and fosters optimal development in specific developmental areas or globally. This includes things like adult:child ratios, group size requirements, teacher qualifications, the adult work environment, daily interactions between staff and children, and interactions between staff and parents to name just a few.

The Accreditation Readiness Survey: This is a rating scale designed to help programs perform a self-assessment of their program's readiness level in regard to national accreditation. The total possible score is 80, with a possible range of 1-80. For the purposes of this study, a score of 65 or higher was considered "ready" for accreditation, which is 80% of the total possible score.

The Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Revised: This rating scale (referred to in the text as the ECERS-R) is a widely used quality assessment instrument. It is designed to assess overall classroom quality in early childhood programs, and has been found to be a very reliable and valid measure of quality. It has a total possible score of 7 with a possible range of 1-7. For the purposes of this study, two classrooms from each program (unless there was only one classroom) were assessed with this instrument. The scores of each classroom were averaged to obtain a program quality rating. A score of 1=poor quality, a score of 3=minimal quality, a score of 5=good quality, and a score of 7=excellent quality.

Barriers (or obstacles) to Accreditation: These refer to areas or conditions that program personnel view as keeping them from pursuing or achieving NAEYC accreditation.

Program Weaknesses: These refer to areas that appeared from the readiness and quality assessments to be areas that need improvement in each program. These areas are possible actual obstacles to accreditation.

Staff Stability: This refers to the average length of time that the teaching and administrative staff have been employed at their program. It has been found in many studies of early childhood program quality that the length of time that the staff has been employed is positively related to the quality of the program, meaning that the longer the staff has worked there, the higher the quality levels tend to be. For the purposes of this study, staff stability was calculated by averaging the number of months that each staff member had been employed at each program to obtain a program staff stability average.

Executive Summary

The purpose of the Bartholomew County Accreditation Readiness Study, conducted by the Department of Child Development and Family Studies at Purdue University, was to provide information to participating programs and the community about:

- Program quality levels;
- Program readiness levels for national accreditation;
- Perceptions of staff and administrators about the barriers to and benefits of accreditation by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC);
- To provide recommendations for program improvements that may help programs to achieve accreditation by NAEYC.

Data were collected from 11 early childhood programs in Bartholomew County to provide this information. This included observational assessments (performed by the first author), questionnaires (completed by program personnel), and teacher and administrator interviews (conducted by the first author with program personnel). Seventy questionnaires were received and 25 interviews were conducted.

Major Findings

Program Quality and Readiness Scores

- The average NAEYC accreditation readiness score across all participating programs was a 59.8, with a possible range of 1 to 80. The actual range for the participating programs was 41 to 74. This indicates that the average program assessed still needs changes in at least some areas in order to be ready for accreditation.

- The average quality score across all participating programs was 4.2, with a possible range of 1 to 7 (1=poor, 3=minimal, 5=good, 7=excellent). This indicates that the average quality score in the community reflects minimal to good quality. However, it should be noted that this average quality score is consistent with the average of quality of programs in several large, national studies.
- Across all programs, the strongest areas in terms of quality and readiness were in regard to personal care routines, interactions between teachers and children, health and safety, and nutrition and food service.
- The weakest areas, again across all programs, tended to be in regard to space and furnishings, language and reasoning activities and learning opportunities, activities provided for the children on a daily basis, physical environment, and staff qualifications and development.

Perceptions of Barriers to Accreditation Cited By Program Personnel

The most commonly reported barriers to accreditation by program staff were:

- lack of money (66%)
- lack of information about NAEYC accreditation (49%)
- lack of needed equipment (40%)
- a lack of time (36%)
- and high staff turnover rates (26%)

These are the areas that program personnel viewed as obstacles for them to overcome before pursuing or achieving accreditation. This study offers support for the perceptions concerning a lack of information, high staff turnover, and a lack of equipment. However, it was beyond the scope of this study to validate staff concerns regarding a lack of time. Future research could examine these perceptions to determine their validity.

Community-Wide Recommendations

Increase the Overall Quality of Programs in Bartholomew County

1. Provide program staff and administrators with training and assessment tools so that they can conduct periodic self-evaluations of their classrooms and programs. By performing self-evaluations, they can continue to fine tune strong areas and become more aware of ways to improve weak ones.

2. Offer opportunities for staff development focused on program improvement, using the NAEYC Accreditation standards, through community-wide workshops, training sessions, and newsletters. Foster networking opportunities among early childhood professionals so that they can share their expertise with others.
3. Encourage continuing education for early childhood professionals through scholarships and grants for CDA credentials and college credits.
4. Establish a community resource center to provide early childhood professionals access to items which would enrich the program, but may cost too much for any one program to purchase.
5. Work to decrease staff turnover in early childhood programs. This could be achieved by efforts to raise wages, increase benefits, and express public appreciation for the important jobs early childhood professionals perform.

Increase the Knowledge Level of Early Childhood Personnel About National Accreditation

1. Provide community-wide training sessions specifically focused on the NAEYC accreditation criteria and process. Perhaps NAEYC validators would be willing to donate their time to conduct these sessions.
2. Encourage early childhood personnel to conduct self-evaluations of their programs. This could be done by using the Accreditation Readiness Survey used for this study, following up with the Early Childhood Rating Scale-Revised Edition for more in-depth self-evaluations.
3. Provide incentives for programs to conduct self-assessments and make improvements. Establish "stepping stones" toward accreditation readiness, so that programs are publicly recognized for making improvements as they work toward accreditation.
4. Encourage NAEYC accredited programs in the community to serve as mentors for unaccredited programs. This could increase both the level of knowledge about accreditation and dispel misperceptions about barriers.
5. Encourage community early childhood professionals to join and participate in the Indiana Association for the Education of Young Children, the National Association for the Education of Young Children, or other national professional early childhood organizations.
6. Conduct community-wide public awareness campaigns to inform parents of children in early childhood programs of the costs and benefits of high quality, accredited programs for young children.

The Bartholomew County Accreditation Readiness Study

In October of 1997, the Bartholomew County Step Ahead Council approached the Center for Families at Purdue University for help establishing a rating system to assess the quality level of early childhood programs in their community. Originally, a community-specific rating system was suggested. After discussing the issue, the Step Ahead Council determined that they would like to encourage programs to become accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), a nationally recognized, voluntary hallmark of higher quality.

The Center for Families contacted Katherine Kensinger, a graduate student in the Department of Child Development and Family Studies with research interests in quality in early childhood programs, to see if she would be interested in conducting this study. After discussing the idea with her major advisor, Dr. James Elicker, the two agreed to conduct the study. After this decision, Katherine and James met with representatives from the Bartholomew County Step Ahead Council to discuss the plans for this study. A comprehensive list of twenty-four early childhood programs in the community was given to Katherine. Consent forms were sent to each program on the list to determine which would like to participate in the study. Of those 24, eleven early childhood programs participated in the study.

Data collection began in May 1998 and continued until it was concluded in October 1998. To collect the needed information, Katherine visited each participating program to conduct observational quality and readiness assessments and to interview

teaching and administrative staff. Directors and teachers also completed questionnaires containing questions about their perceptions of program readiness, barriers and benefits of accreditation, and demographic information. The questions that the researchers planned to answer were:

- 1) What are the barriers to voluntary NAEYC accreditation as perceived by early childhood center staff and administrators?
- 2) What are the assessed program strengths and weaknesses, as identified by an outside observer, using established assessment instruments?
- 3) Are the assessed program weaknesses as identified by an outside observer similar or different to those perceived by center personnel?
- 4) Are there differences between the perceptions of center teaching staff and administrators in regard to accreditation and barriers to accreditation?
- 5) Is a program's staff stability associated with perceived or observed levels of accreditation readiness?
- 6) Is the perceived level of understanding of NAEYC accreditation associated with perceived program readiness?
- 7) Will the perceived experiences of other local programs with NAEYC accreditation influence staff/directors' perceptions of the worthiness of the accreditation process?

Research Question #1: What are the barriers to voluntary NAEYC accreditation as perceived by early childhood center staff and administrators?

This question was answered using data from the director/staff surveys (see Appendix D) and individual interviews (see Appendix E) to illuminate the barriers perceived by the staff and administrators to participating in the accreditation process. Eighteen administrators responded to this question, 47 teaching staff responded, and 5 respondents did not provide information about their job title. Eleven directors, 1 assistant director, and thirteen teachers participated in the interviews.

The most commonly reported barriers to accreditation on the questionnaires were: lack of money, lack of information, and lack of needed equipment.

- Sixty-six percent of all respondents (46=yes, 24=no) indicated a lack of money as a barrier to accreditation
- 49% (34=yes, 36=no) indicated a lack of information
- 40% (28=yes, 42=no) indicated a lack of equipment
- 36% (25=yes, 45=no) indicated a lack of time
- 26% (18=yes, 52=no) indicated high staff turnover
- 19% (13=yes, 57=no) indicated a lack of staff support
- 9% (6=yes, 64=no) indicated a lack of administrative support
- 7% (5=yes, 65=no) indicated a lack of parental support
- 4% (3=yes, 67=no) indicated inadequate leadership
- and none of the respondents indicated the presence of a new director as a barrier to pursuing or achieving accreditation.

Additionally, Figure 1 provides a graphic breakdown of the answers given by teachers and administrators, to display any differences in perceptions of barriers between the two groups.

Some perceived barriers discussed in the interviews, which offer further support for the questionnaire results, included:

“The part that is kind of a stumbling block for us would be the ratios in some of the rooms and the CDA [Child Development Associate Teacher Credential].”

~Director

“It’s a lot of paperwork and a lot of extra time to get done and I’m sure that it’s helpful to the program, but for our program, when we’re on a budget...we don’t have the staff and the other support system that would really help us.” ~Director

“Our problem is money and that’s what it boils down to basically. And people, when they call, we don’t have parents asking, even if we’re licensed, or NAEYC qualified. They just want to know how much it costs.” ~Director

“We have children all day long and there’s never time when our complete staff can meet together. That’s one drawback.” ~Director

"I don't know what accreditation is, like I know it means something good, but that's all I know about it." ~Teacher

"Well, I don't know a tremendous amount [about accreditation], but right now I am taking my CDA and...and they have explained a little bit how it works." ~Teacher

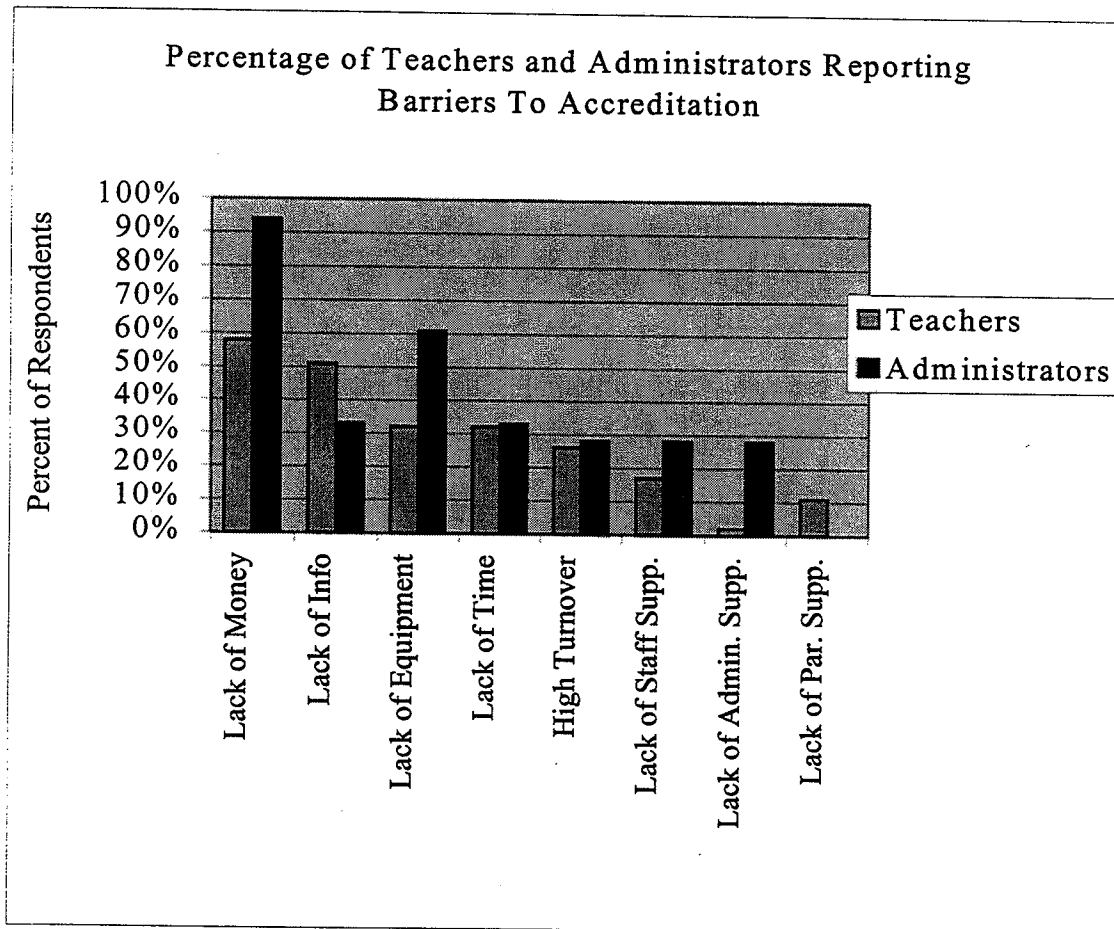


Figure 1

Research Question #2: What are the assessed program strengths and weaknesses, as identified by an outside observer, using established assessment instruments?

To answer this question, the total readiness survey scores (a measure of readiness for NAEYC accreditation) and the ECERS-R scores (a measure of overall classroom

quality) are reported for each site. A tool compiled by Jean Berkwitt and Deborah Flis which was published in 1995 called the *NAEYC Accreditation Readiness Survey: Getting Ready is Easy!* was used by the author to assess each site's level of readiness for accreditation at the program level. The purpose of this instrument is to provide a useful tool to programs interested in beginning the self-study process, for determining their readiness level for accreditation. This 80 item rating scale is divided into subscale categories which include director readiness, staff readiness, interactions among staff and children, curriculum, staff-parent interaction, staff qualifications and development, administration, staffing, physical environment, health and safety, nutrition and food service, and evaluation. Each item contains a statement about a program characteristic which the observer rates as a 1 (not met), 2 (partially met), or 3 (fully met). Each of the subscales yields a score by adding up the number of items rated with a 3. A total score is obtained by adding the subscale scores together. The highest possible total score is 80. This instrument is available through the NAEYC publication office for \$5.00.

The quality scores were derived from the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Revised Edition (Harms, Clifford, & Cryer, 1998). The ECERS-R is an observational rating scale that provides quality ratings for each of the following subscales: Space and Furnishings, Personal Care Routines, Language-Reasoning, Activities, Interaction, Program Structure, and Parents and Staff. Each item receives a score between one and seven (1 = inadequate, 3 = minimal, 5 = good, and 7 = excellent, with remaining numbers falling in between). These scores are summed for each subscale and divided by the number of items rated to determine a mean subscale score, ranging from 1 to 7. The total ECERS-R score is derived by adding all of the item scores and dividing by the total number of items rated, yielding a total score with a possible range of 1 to 7. This was administered in two classrooms at all sites with more than one classroom to derive ECERS-One and ECERS-Two scores. For the two sites with only one classroom, only one ECERS-R assessment was completed. If a site had two classrooms, the mean ECERS-R score was calculated.

Table 1 shows the readiness and quality scores for each program that participated in the study. Eighty percent of the possible Total Readiness Survey score is a score of 65

or higher, and was considered “ready” for accreditation for this study. A total score of 5 is termed “good” on the ECERS-R.

Table 1
Quality and Readiness Scores

Program	Total Readiness Survey Score	Mean ECERS-R Quality Score
A	57	3.9
B	70	5.0
C	53	3.8
E	41	3.4
F	41	2.5
G	74	5.1
H	69	4.8
I	59	4.0
K	63	4.9
L	62	4.8
N	69	4.7

Note: Scores shown in bold type are those that were above the criteria for good overall program quality, or ready for accreditation.

From this table, we can see that four programs received 80% of the possible Total Readiness Score (1 full-day, 3 half-day). Two programs (1 full-day, 1 half-day) received an overall ECERS-R score of 5 or above. Using these threshold criteria, a majority of the programs involved in this study would require significant improvements to attain a level of program quality suitable for accreditation.

The subscale scores for each instrument were also examined. Figures 2 and 3 provide proportions of the total possible scores for each subscale for the entire sample of programs and tables 2 and 3 provide specific subscale scores for the ECERS-R and the Readiness Survey for all programs combined and for each program. The criteria used to determine readiness were a score of 5 or higher on the ECERS-R and a score of 80% of

the total possible points or higher on the readiness survey. Overall, the areas of highest quality and readiness were:

- Personal Care (ECERS-R)
- Interactions (ECERS-R)
- Director Readiness (RS)
- Staff-Child Interactions (RS)
- Staffing (RS)
- Health & Safety (RS)
- and Nutrition and Food Service (RS).

The areas of lowest quality and readiness were:

- Space & Furnishings (ECERS-R)
- Language and Reasoning (ECERS-R)
- Activities (ECERS-R)
- Physical Environment (RS)
- and Staff Qualifications and Development (RS)

Table 2
Mean ECERS-R Subscale Scores for Each Program

Center	Space & Furnishings	Personal Care	Language & Reasoning	Activities	Interactions	Program Structure	Parents & Staff
A	4.1	5.8	3.5	2.7	6.4	3.0	4.7
B	3.5	5.3	4.9	4.4	6.1	5.7	6.4
C	4.1	5.5	3.6	2.5	4.6	3.0	3.8
E	2.3	4.9	3.0	1.3	6.3	3.0	4.6
F	2.6	3.4	2.5	1.4	4.1	1.7	2.4
G	4.9	6.0	5.4	3.6	6.7	6.0	5.0
H	3.9	5.4	6.3	3.9	5.8	6.0	4.8
I	4.4	5.8	3.3	1.9	5.9	3.6	4.3
K	4.3	5.8	5.0	3.7	6.2	5.3	5.2
L	4.4	5.3	4.7	2.9	6.4	5.1	5.1
N	5.1	4.4	4.6	2.9	5.6	6.0	5.6

Note: Scores in bold print are those that were above the criterion for "good" quality.

Additionally, the proportion of the total possible scores for each subscale for the entire sample was also computed, in an effort to give the community an idea as to how close each program was to achieving the total possible points . The results are shown in Figure 2.

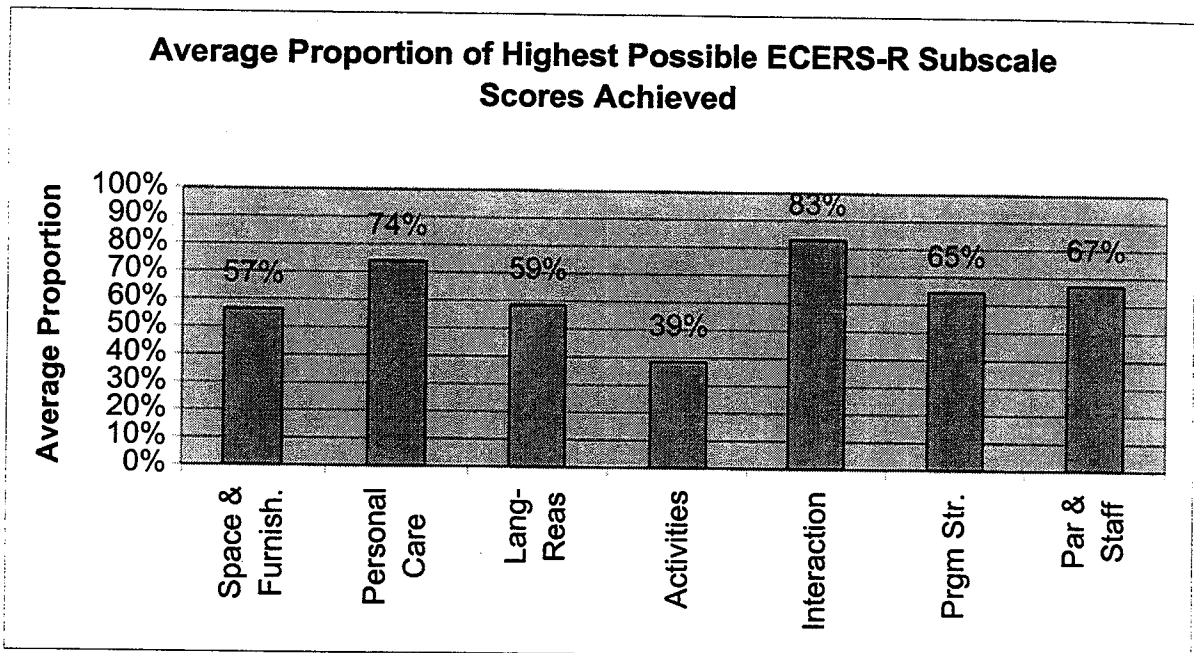


Figure 2

The same type of information is also reported for the Readiness Survey (see Table 3 and Figure 3).

Figure 3

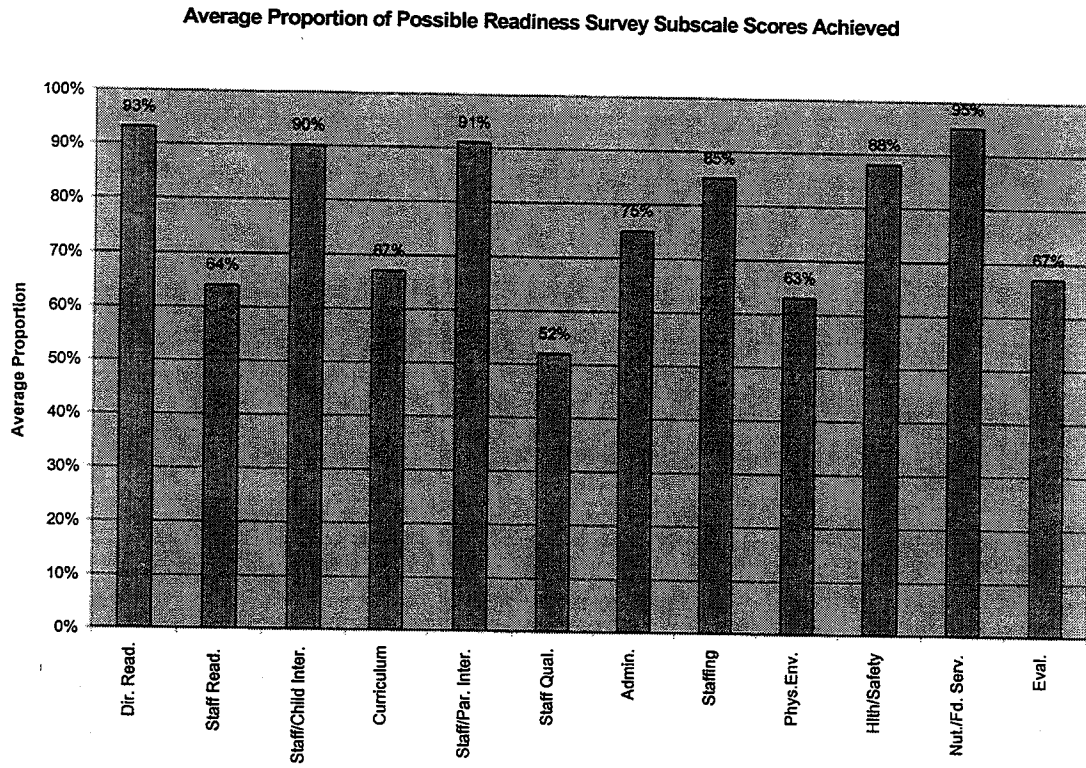


Table 3

Readiness Survey Subscale Scores for Each Program (Scale)

Prog	Dir. Read (1-4)	Staff Read (1-5)	Staff- Child Inter. (1-9)	Curr (1-9)	Staff- Parent Int. (1-7)	Staff Qual. &Dev (1-6)	Admin (1-9)	Staffing (1-3)	Phys. Env. (1-8)	Health & Safety (1-11)	Nut& Food Serv. (1-4)	Eva l. (1- 5)
A	4	3	9	6	7	3	8	2	7	11	4	1
B	4	4	9	7	7	3	9	0	7	11	4	5
C	4	0	9	4	5	3	5	3	3	10	4	3
E	3	0	5	1	5	1	7	3	2	7	4	3
F	2	3	6	4	6	3	3	3	2	7	2	0
G	4	3	9	8	7	6	7	3	8	11	4	4
H	4	5	9	9	7	5	8	3	5	10	4	5
I	4	5	7	4	5	3	6	3	5	10	4	3
K	4	5	9	8	7	1	6	2	4	9	4	4
L	4	2	9	7	7	4	7	3	7	11	4	4
N	4	5	8	8	7	2	8	3	5	10	4	5

Note: Scores in bold print are those that met the criteria for "ready" for accreditation in this study.

From this information, it is possible to identify the areas in which programs most frequently showed strengths. In terms of interactions, the community average ECERS-R score was 83% of the total possible score, indicating that in terms of interactions with children and parents, teachers in this community are doing a good job. The ECERS-R subscale assessing personal care routines (washing hands, etc.) had a community average score, which was 74% of the total possible score. This also appears to be an area in which program personnel are doing a good job. The areas of director readiness, staff-child interactions, staff-parent interactions, and nutrition and food safety on the Readiness Survey were all at 90% or above in terms of the proportion of the total possible score, offering further support for the findings of the ECERS-R in regard to interactions, and demonstrating that these are areas in which programs are doing very well. Health and safety and staffing also appeared to be strong areas community wide.

However, it is also possible to identify the most frequent areas in which programs showed weaknesses. The area of Activities on the ECERS-R, which deals with the types and amounts of activities that are available to the children on a daily basis, appeared to be

a common area of weakness for programs in this sample, with no programs achieving a subscale score of 5 (good) or higher. Space and Furnishings, and Language and Reasoning on the ECERS-R also appeared as common weaknesses, with only one program scoring a 5 or higher. This indicates that programs need to make a conscious effort to increase the variety of activities, and opportunities for language and reasoning and to make them available to children for a substantial portion of the day. Programs also should take a careful look at their room arrangements to ensure that they are promoting optimal development and to make sure that there are enough chairs and cots for every child.

Correlating with the Space and Furnishings subscale on the ECERS-R was the Physical Environment subscale on the RS. Only 3 programs scored 80% or higher on this subscale. Another weak area appearing on the RS was in the area of Staff Qualifications and Development. Programs should make a conscious effort to make staff training a top priority. Only two programs achieved scores in this subscale of 80% or higher.

Research Question #3: Are the assessed program weaknesses as identified by an outside observer similar or different to those perceived by center personnel?

Staff perceptions of readiness did not appear to be related to either observed ECERS-R quality nor with observed accreditation readiness (RS). The correlation between the staff and observer ratings was not statistically significant. This indicates that many staff do not have an accurate perception of their program's areas of weakness, globally or in relation to specific aspects of quality or accreditation readiness.

Research Question #4: Are there differences between perceptions of teaching staff and administrators in regard to accreditation readiness and barriers to accreditation?

Item 12 on the survey questionnaire, dealing with how ready the respondent feels his or her program is for accreditation, was coded (1= not ready through 4=now ready), and averages for teachers (N=35) and administrators (N=14) (data missing for 21

respondents) were computed. The scores for teachers and administrators (M (teachers)=2.74 , M (administrators)=2.57) were compared using a statistical test to determine if there are differences between two groups. This was done to determine if there are significant differences in the overall readiness perceptions between program administrators and teachers. No statistically significant difference was found, meaning that teachers and administrators do not have different perceptions about the readiness level of their program. The mean scores indicate that the average readiness score that program personnel gave to their programs was “ready, with certain changes.” This indicates that most staff agree with the observer’s assessment that changes need to be made, but tended to indicate a higher readiness level than did the outside observer.

Statistical analyses of the responses to each of the specific perceived barriers to accreditation were conducted to determine if there were differences in the frequency with which teachers and administrators reported specific barriers (see also Figure 1). The following significant differences were found: Thirty-two percent of the teachers and 61% of the administrators reported lack of equipment as a barrier to accreditation, 58% of teachers and 94% of administrators reported lack of money, and 2% of teachers and 28% of administrators reported lack of administrative support as barriers . In all other comparisons, the frequency differences were non-significant, meaning that teachers and administrators did not differ greatly on their responses to those items.

Research Question #5: Is the level of a program’s staff stability associated with perceived or observed levels of accreditation readiness?

Table 7 displays the average staff tenure (in months) with the quality and readiness scores for each program.

Table 7
Staff Stability and Quality and Readiness Measure Scores

Program	Avg. Staff Tenure (in months)	Mean ECERS-R Score (1-7)	Total Readiness Checklist Score (1-80)
A	54	3.9	57
B	118	5.0	70
C	17	3.8	53
E	24	3.4	41
F	20	2.5	41
G	139	5.1	74
H	24	4.8	69
I	30	4.0	59
K	47	4.9	63
L	45	4.8	62
N	37	4.4	69

The correlations between staff tenure and both program quality and readiness were positive and significant. From this analysis, we were able to conclude that programs with longer staff tenure tended to have higher quality and readiness scores, indicating that the retention of teaching and administrative staff is important to providing higher quality care.

Research Question #6: Is the perceived level of understanding about NAEYC accreditation associated with perceived program readiness?

Our analyses found that the perceived level of understanding about NAEYC accreditation (knowledge of its criteria and process) was positively related to the perceptions of program readiness, suggesting that it is important to know about accreditation in order to make an accurate assessment of your program's accreditation readiness.

Research Question #7: Will the perceived experiences of other programs in the accreditation process influence staff/directors' perceptions of the worthiness of the accreditation process?

The authors explored perceptions program staff held about other programs' experiences with the accreditation process. Thirty-one percent of the questionnaire respondents indicated that they knew of other programs that had gone through the accreditation process. Of the 31% who knew of other programs' experiences:

- 4.6 % strongly disagreed that the other programs' efforts were "worth it"
- 4.6 % disagreed that they were "worth it"
- 47.2% indicated that they neither agreed nor disagreed
- 30.3% agreed that these efforts were "worth it"
- and 9.6% strongly agreed that these efforts were "worth it."

Although a majority of the respondents in this sample did not indicate that they were familiar with other programs' experiences with NAEYC accreditation, about one-third of those who were familiar with other programs' experiences appeared to view these efforts as worthwhile. However, the majority of the respondents familiar with other programs experiences either disagreed or were undecided that accreditation efforts were "worth it." This indicates that a large proportion of these program personnel were undecided or negative about the worthiness of the extra effort required to achieve NAEYC accreditation.

Conclusions

From these results, we can determine that while there were certain strengths exhibited by the programs that participated in this study, the overall program quality and readiness levels have considerable room for improvement. It is important to remember, however, that these community quality ratings are consistent with those of other larger, and nationally representative studies. One of the goals of NAEYC accreditation is to

increase program quality through its accreditation process, and it is a tribute to the programs in this study that they were willing to participate in these assessments and to consider pursuing national accreditation. With the results of this study, and a better understanding of their areas of strengths and weaknesses, these programs may be equipped to make improvements and achieve accreditation.

Each program that participated in this study received a detailed report of its quality and readiness assessments, as well as program specific recommendations for improvement. With this information these early childhood programs will be able to begin to implement quality improvements that will bring them closer to NAEYC accreditation.

Bartholomew County Accreditation Readiness Study
Community-Wide Recommendations For Action

Increase the Overall Quality of Programs in Bartholomew County

1. Provide program staff and administrators with training and assessment tools so that they can conduct periodic self-evaluations of their classrooms and programs. By performing self-evaluations, they can continue to fine tune strong areas and become more aware of ways to improve weak ones.
2. Offer opportunities for staff development focused on program improvement using the NAEYC accreditation standards through community-wide workshops, training sessions, and newsletters. Foster networking opportunities among early childhood professionals so that they can share their expertise with others.
3. Encourage continuing education for early childhood professionals through scholarships and grants for CDA credentials and college credits.
4. Establish a community resource center to provide early childhood professionals access to items which would enrich the program, but may cost too much for any one program to purchase.
5. Work to decrease staff turnover in early childhood programs. This could be achieved by efforts to raise wages, increase benefits, and express public appreciation for the job early childhood professionals perform.

Increase the Knowledge Level of Early Childhood Personnel About National Accreditation

1. Provide community-wide training sessions specifically focused on the NAEYC accreditation criteria and process. Perhaps NAEYC validators would be willing to donate their time to conduct these sessions.
2. Encourage early childhood personnel to conduct self-evaluations of their program. This could be done by using the Accreditation Readiness Survey used for this study, following up with the Early Childhood Rating Scale-Revised Edition for more in-depth self-evaluations.

3. Provide incentives for programs to conduct self-assessments and make improvements. Establish “stepping stones” toward accreditation readiness, so that programs are publicly recognized for making improvements as they work toward accreditation.
4. Encourage accredited programs in the community to serve as mentors for unaccredited programs. This could increase both the level of knowledge about accreditation and dispel misperceptions about barriers.
5. Encourage community early childhood professionals to join and participate in the Indiana Association for the Education of Young Children, the National Association for the Education of Young Children, or other national professional organizations.
6. Conduct community-wide public awareness campaigns to inform parents of children in early childhood programs of the costs and benefits of high-quality, accredited programs for young children.

Appendix A
(Please see ordering information for Readiness Survey)

Appendix B

April 15, 1998

Dear

The Center for Families at Purdue University has been asked by the Bartholomew County Step Ahead Council and the Child Care Standards Committee to conduct a community wide study of early childhood programs' perspectives on, and readiness for accreditation by the National Association for the Education of Young Children. Your program was recommended by Jalene Hahn of Step Ahead as a potential participant in this study.

The purpose is to fairly, objectively, and confidentially assess each program's readiness for national accreditation. This is in an effort to provide center administration and staff with concrete and realistic strategies for continuing to raise the threshold for quality in early childhood programs, and move closer to NAEYC accreditation. We will also be interested in gaining an understanding of what center staff and directors think about accreditation.

The study will be conducted by Katie Kensinger, a Master's student in the department of Child and Family Studies, and Dr. Jim Elicker, a professor in the same department. Confidentiality about centers and individuals will be carefully maintained during the study and in the final report. Individual programs will receive informal feedback throughout the process of the study.

What would be required of your program? Katie would make a one day visit to complete the readiness assessment by observing the program. Also during that day, twenty minute interviews would be conducted with two teachers and one administrator scheduled at your convenience. A brief survey questionnaire would be completed by all staff members. All of these activities would be completed in one day.

Tangible benefits for participating centers will include a confidential report of the readiness level of your center or preschool for accreditation, and recommendations for steps to take to achieve accreditation. Each participating center or preschool will also receive a copy of the final report with a summary of the results for all Bartholomew County programs. (Results for individual programs will remain confidential.)

Enclosed you will find a self-addressed, stamped envelope with a response card. Please complete it and send it back by **Friday, April 24, 1998** to let us know if you are interested in more information regarding participation in this important Bartholomew County project. Thank you very much for your time. We hope you will participate to gain confidential information for your own program, and to contribute to an overview of all early childhood centers in the county. Please address questions or comments to us at the phone numbers listed below.

Sincerely,
Katherine R. Kensinger, M.S.
(765) 477-2476
James Elicker, Ph.D.
(765) 494-2938

Accreditation Study Response Form

Name of Program:

_____ **Yes**, our program is interested in participating in this project.

_____ Number of Head Teachers on site

_____ Number of Assistant Teachers/Teacher Aides on site

_____ Number of administrators (i.e. Director, Assistant Director) on site

Person to address further correspondence to:

phone # () _____

_____ **No**, we are not interested in participation at this time.

Appendix C
Staff Consent Form

The Center for Families at Purdue University has been asked by the Bartholomew County Step Ahead Council and the Child Care Standards Committee to conduct a community wide study of early childhood programs' perspectives on and readiness for accreditation by the National Academy of Early Childhood Programs (NAECP), the accrediting body for the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). Your program has chosen to participate.

The purpose is to fairly, objectively, and confidentially assess each program's readiness for national accreditation. This is in an effort to provide center administration and staff with concrete and realistic strategies for continuing to raise the threshold for quality in early childhood programs, and to move closer to NAECP accreditation. We will also be interested in gaining an understanding of what center staff and directors think about accreditation.

The study will be conducted by Katie Kensinger, a Master's student in the Department of Child Development and Family Studies, and Dr. Jim Elicker, a professor in the same department. Confidentiality about centers and individuals will be carefully maintained throughout the study and in the final report. Individual programs will receive informal feedback throughout the process of the study.

Katie will make a one day visit to complete the accreditation readiness assessment by observing the program. Also during that day, twenty minute interviews will be conducted with two randomly selected teachers and one administrator, scheduled at your convenience, to obtain information concerning perceptions about barriers to accreditation and the value placed on it. This interview will be tape recorded for later transcription by the researchers. These tapes will be kept confidential with no one but the researchers hearing them or seeing the transcribed interview. A brief, anonymous, and confidential survey questionnaire will be completed by all staff members. All of these activities will be completed in one day. These activities are all completely voluntary and you may choose to not participate or withdraw from participation at any time without penalty. Directors will have no knowledge as to the participation level of staff members.

Tangible benefits for participating centers will include a confidential report of the readiness level of your center or preschool for accreditation presented to the center director, and recommendations for steps to take to achieve accreditation. Each participating center or preschool will also receive a copy of the final report with a summary of results for all Bartholomew County programs. (Results for individual programs will remain confidential.)

If you are willing to participate in the interview process, please sign the blank below and return this form in the provided envelope. Seal it before turning it in to ensure complete confidentiality. Only the researchers will see these forms. Whether willing to participate or not, please return this form in the envelope so that we will be able to choose our sample more accurately. Thank you very much for your time. We hope you will participate to gain confidential information for your own program, and to contribute to an overview of all early childhood centers in the county. Please address questions or comments to us at the phone numbers listed below. If there are concerns about the treatment of research participants, contact the Committee on the Use of Human Research Subjects at Purdue University, ENAD 328, West Lafayette, IN 47907. The phone number for the Committee's secretary is (765) 494-6840.

Sincerely,
Katherine R. Kensinger, M.S.
(765) 477-2476

James Elicker, Ph.D.
(765) 494-2938

Initials _____

Name: _____

Job Position: _____

- Yes, I agree to participate in this voluntary and confidential study, including the interview process, and understand that all my answers will remain confidential.
- No, I do not agree to participate in the interview portion of this study.

Principal Investigator Signature

Investigator Signature

Sign one copy and return to the researcher in the attached self-addressed, stamped envelope.
Keep one copy for your records.

Readiness Survey Questionnaire

As you may know, we are conducting a study to determine the actual and perceived readiness level for NAEYC accreditation in your program. We are also interested in what you feel are obstacles to achieving this accreditation. Please take a few moments to complete this brief, anonymous survey questionnaire and place it in the envelope. Return it to Katie Kensinger at Purdue University by _____ . We request that it be returned by this date, to help us with our visit to your center on _____. Your completed questionnaire will be seen only by the researchers. This survey is completely voluntary, although we ask that you return the survey in the envelope provided, whether completed or not. Please take the time to include any comments that you wish to make, as well. Thank you for your time and valuable insight.

1. I understand that completion of this survey is completely voluntary.

_____ yes

_____ no

Understanding of NAEYC Criteria

Accreditation criteria are extensive and detailed. A lot of people who are not actively participating in the process may feel unclear about what exactly is involved. This section is devoted to determining your level of understanding.

2. I feel that I have: (Choose one)

_____ extensive knowledge of accreditation criteria

_____ general knowledge of accreditation criteria

_____ only limited knowledge of accreditation criteria

_____ no knowledge of accreditation criteria

3. I feel that the accreditation criteria are: (Choose one)

_____ very clear

_____ are clear in some areas and not clear in others

_____ not clear

_____ don't know

Comments: _____

17. Do you have a CDA credential?

Yes No

18. I have completed: (check only the highest level achieved)

high school/GED

some college

Associate's (A.A.) Degree

Major _____

Bachelor's (B.A./B.S.) Degree

Major _____

Graduate Degree

Major _____

Any Concluding Comments?:

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. Please seal it in the envelope provided and return it today via U.S. mail. Thanks again! We look forward to visiting your center soon. Have a great day!

10. I am willing to put forth the effort to achieve accreditation for our program:

5	4	3	2	1
strongly agree	agree	neither agree or disagree	disagree	strongly disagree

11. I think NAEYC accreditation is important:

5	4	3	2	1
strongly agree	agree	neither agree or disagree	disagree	strongly disagree

12. I feel that this program:

____ is now ready for national accreditation

____ could be ready for accreditation, with minor changes

____ could be ready for accreditation, with major changes

____ is very far from readiness for accreditation

Comments:

Demographic Information

13. My job title here is: _____

14. I have worked at this program site for:

____ years ____ months

15. I have worked in this classroom for:

____ years ____ months

16. I have worked in the early childhood education field:

____ years ____ months

Observations of Others in the Process

6. I know of other programs in the community that have gone through the accreditation process.

- yes (go to questions 7 & 8).
- no (go to question 9 below).

7. I perceived their experience as requiring:

- a lot of extra effort and energy
- moderate extra effort and energy
- a small amount of extra effort and energy
- no extra effort and energy
- I don't know how much extra effort or energy was required.

8. I perceive their efforts towards accreditation as worth it:

- | | | | | |
|----------------|-------|---------------------------|----------|-------------------|
| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| strongly agree | agree | neither agree or disagree | disagree | strongly disagree |

Comments:

Our Program

9. I am interested in raising the accreditation readiness level in this program:

- | | | | | |
|----------------|-------|---------------------------|----------|-------------------|
| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| strongly agree | agree | neither agree or disagree | disagree | strongly disagree |

Benefits

Although there may be cons to pursuing accreditation, some early childhood professionals feel that there are pros as well. If you feel there are any pros what are they? Please feel free to add comments in the sections provided.

5. I feel that potential benefits of NAEYC accreditation for our program could be: (check all that apply)

- improved quality for children
- improved work environment for staff
- improved status for our program in this community
- improved status for staff employed in an accredited program
- improved daily practices (i.e., curriculum, classroom management)
- improved physical environment
- better equipment
- improved health and safety for children
- improved health and safety for staff
- more parental involvement
- more parental understanding of the goals of our program
- I see no benefits at all.

Please list any additional benefits:

Comments:

Obstacles

Many early childhood professionals report that there are things that make pursuing accreditation difficult. This section is designed to explore anything that you feel is holding your program back from accreditation . Please add any additional concerns in the comments sections.

4. My concerns about pursuing accreditation are : (check all that apply)

- lack of money
- lack of equipment
- lack of parental support
- lack of staff support
- lack of administrative support (i.e., director, owner or governing agency does not support accreditation.)
- lack of time
- high staff turnover
- inadequate leadership (i.e., director does not have a strong knowledge base about accreditation, not successful at motivating people, etc.)
- new director
- lack of information about accreditation

Please list any additional reasons:

Comments:

Director/Staff Interview

(Interviewer will begin with a brief introduction of herself and the study. She will say something to the effect that not everyone is familiar with NAEYC standards and criteria in an effort to put the interviewee at ease with whatever level of knowledge that they possess.)

1. (For teacher's only) So, what age group do you work with?
 - 1A). What do you like best about that age group?
 - 1B) What other ages have you worked with?
 - 1C) Which is your favorite?
2. How long have you been working in the early childhood field?
3. What drew you to the field?
4. Tell me a little bit about your professional background. (Here the interviewer is looking for information concerning education level, years of experience at different levels (i.e. cook, assistant teacher, head teacher, director))
5. How long have you been at this center? (If not already answered in #4)
 - 5A. Ask about visions of quality. (If you were asked to tell someone what the term "quality in early childhood programs" means to you, what would you say? What are the components of a quality program to you?)
6. As you may know, this is a study focusing on how you feel about your center in regards to accreditation readiness. Some people are more familiar with NAEYC accreditation than others. Tell me a little about what you know about accreditation at this point. (i.e. definition, purpose, etc.)
 - 6A. Why did you agree to enter into this process (in terms of consenting to participate and in considering accreditation for this program? What is your motivation for entering into this process?)
7. Do you feel it is important? Why/why not?
8. How do you think your co-workers/staff feel about accreditation at this center? Explain.
 - 8A. Is there a consensus?
9. What kinds of changes do you think accreditation, or the pursuit of it, would produce in this program?
10. If you were to decide (or find out) that you were going to begin the accreditation process, what would your plan be? How would you prepare for it and go about getting started?

Appendix E

Center Code _____

11. Have you ever been involved in the accreditation process?
12. (If yes) What was your experience with that?
13. What have you heard about other programs' experiences with the accreditation process?
14. Has what you've heard affected your present view of the process?
15. What do you see as the value of achieving accreditation?
15A) drawbacks?
16. What do you feel is keeping your program from achieving accreditation? (What else? Probe until they can no longer come up with any response. Write down to refer to on next question.)
17. How do you think these issues could be addressed? (Refer to notes from previous question and ask for solutions to each barrier mentioned.)
19. Is there anything else that you would like to tell me that I haven't asked about in regards to accreditation?
19. Based on what you know about accreditation and about your program, how would you rate the program's readiness level right now? (Scale of 1-10, percent, whatever).