

**Bemis Farms
Preschool and Childcare**

CRITERIA FOR HIGH-QUALITY EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS

The National Association for the Education of Young Children 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--parents, staff, and administrators--who are involved in the program. Each day of a child's life is viewed as leading toward the growth and development of a healthy, intelligent, and contributing member of society.

A great deal of knowledge, gleaned from years of research and observation, now exists about child development and learning, and how to provide optimal environments for young children. The Academy's Criteria are based on that knowledge and the practical experience of thousands of early childhood professionals who work with young children and their families.

How Decisions Are Made

The Commission bases its decision on professional judgment and considers the overall context of the program, its uniqueness, the overall level of compliance as well as the interrelationships among criteria components. Although there is no explicit numerical weighting system assigned to the Criteria, Commissioners are trained to review programs taking into consideration the fact that some criteria are more important than others. For example, providing developmentally appropriate learning experiences is certainly more critical than providing a change of clothing.

Commissioners are instructed to give greatest weight to the following components of the Criteria: interactions among teachers and children, curriculum, staff-child ratios and group sizes, and health and safety. Because the system involves actually observing what happens to children in the program, the Commission will give greatest weight to the results of the observations. The administrative criteria such as qualifications of the staff, personnel policies, and operating procedures support the delivery of quality care and education in the classroom. Compliance with these administrative criteria increases the likelihood that positive interactions and appropriate curriculum will occur in classrooms; however, compliance with the administrative criteria does not guarantee that such high-quality experiences will be observed.

From the NAEYC's accreditation experience, they have found that having a well-qualified early childhood specialist to direct the educational program and well-trained teachers are the most powerful predictors of classroom practice. The amount and kind of training the teaching staff have had, the administrator's qualifications, the availability of appropriate materials, and the organization of the environment also play a vital role in influencing the nature of the child's experiences.