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

The Fishback Center for Early Childhood Education became the first program in the state of South Dakota to be accredited by the National Academy of Early Childhood Programs (NAECP) in affiliation with the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). The center pursued accreditation at the inception of the process in 1985. It continues to maintain its accredited status with the new accreditation process which was put in place in 2007. The accreditation process increased in criteria from 100 standards to just over 430 standards that are randomly reviewed, 20 standards that are always reviewed and 5 that are always required for candidacy.

Currently there are 6,759 programs in the United States, Puerto Rico, Guam, and US Military Bases, with South Dakota having 4 programs in the state. This translates into less than 7% of early childhood programs nationwide achieve accredited status. The Fishback Center for Early Childhood Education has been in that 7% category since the NAEYC Accreditation program’s inception. Few university lab schools (approximately 2% of the programs which are accredited) maintain accreditation due to the difficulty of balancing the needs and demands of the university mission, the children and families, and the accrediting body’s standards.

NAEYC Accreditation Process

NAEYC Accreditation is a voluntary process by which early childhood programs demonstrate that they meet national standards of excellence. It is a rigorous process. Programs seeking accreditation undergo intensive self-study process (usually a two year-long process) collecting information from parents, teachers, and administrators. The collected information is in the form of questionnaires, observations, and documentation showing evidence for the national standards. Programs receive an onsite visit by an early childhood professional validator to confirm the results of the self-study. The validator’s report is then submitted to the NAECP review board made up of a panel of early childhood education experts to grant or defer the program’s accreditation status.

The Accreditation process includes: (1) Committing to a year-long self-study process, (2) Submitting candidacy materials, (3) Submitting a letter of intent, (4) Applying for a Validation Visit, (5) Notification of Accreditation Decision, and (6) Annual Reports for years 2-5. In year 4 the process begins again. While in the accreditation self-study the program and each classroom develops portfolios to provide evidence for the standards in the portfolio. Once
established the portfolio is updated and maintained. Unannounced validation visits may occur at any time after a program is accredited.

**Validation Site Visit**

This year, the program prepared for a validation site visit, which occurred in March 2012. The Fishback Center for Early Childhood Education was reaccredited in June of 2012. The SDSU Kindergarten is the only kindergarten in the state that has the status of national accreditation. The Out of School is the only after school program in the state of South Dakota that is accredited.

The validation visit occurred during an ice storm, which incidentally was the only poor weather that occurred in the 2011-2012 winter. The visit went well. The accreditation criterion results (in percentages) regarding program standards included: (1) Relationships – 91%, (2) Curriculum – 87%, (3) Teaching – 100%, (4) Assessment of Children’s Progress – 100+%*, (5) Health – 100%, (6) Teachers – 100+%*, (7) Families – 100%, (8) Community Relationships – 100+%*, (9) Physical Environment – 91%, and (10) Leadership and Management – 100%.

* The starred percentages indicated that emerging criteria were also met putting the percentage of criteria met over 100%.

The classroom observation results reported were: (1) Toddler T/Th AM – 92%, (2) Three & Four AM – 88%, (3) Four & Five PM – 93%, and (4) Kindergarten – 96%.

**NAECP Commendations and Recommendations for Fishback Center**

The Academy’s accreditation commendations for the center were: (1) a strong use of DAP practices in Teaching in the areas of culturally and linguistically appropriate strategies, (2) a well-developed assessment system of children’s growth and progress including formal and informal ongoing, integrated assessment to inform curriculum and families of children’s growth, (3) the program’s support of its teaching team and the depth of qualified teachers, (4) the program’s building of community relationships to support transitions of children and families into other community programs.

The Academy’s recommendations for the center were: (1) to strengthen evidence in both program and classroom portfolios, (2) Relationships – continue to develop strategies to support friendship building in children, (3) Curriculum – strengthen curriculum portfolio evidence in Early Literacy, Early Mathematics, and Social Studies, (4) Health – strengthening hand-washing practices, (5) Families – strengthening strategies to know and understand program’s families, specifically their cultural backgrounds and structure of families, (6) Building and Physical Design – strengthening environmental space for adults, and ongoing maintenance cleaning, (7) Leadership and Management – strengthen annual program evaluation process, and family involvement through an advisory board.

**Program Goals**
Our accreditation program goals during the 2010-11 year were to translate our Family Handbook and Family Information Packet, as well as Home Visit information forms into Spanish, Chinese, and Korean. We completed the Chinese translation. A second goal has been to bring a more family style snack routine – considering how we prepare and serve snacks which we completed. A third goal was to improve on family involvement by being more transparent with program development and decision making. To work towards this goal, we reinstituted the Parent Advisory Council which completed a policies and procedures review process and worked towards building family involvement through the development of a family communication center and family hospitality events that will be implemented this next year.