

# LEADING FOR QUALITY: HOW ACCREDITATION STRENGTHENS EARLY CHILDHOOD LEADERSHIP

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH



# WELCOME & INTRODUCTIONS

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## **Participant Intro**

Name

Program/program type



# WHO IS MTAEYC?

## Montana Association for the Education of Young Children

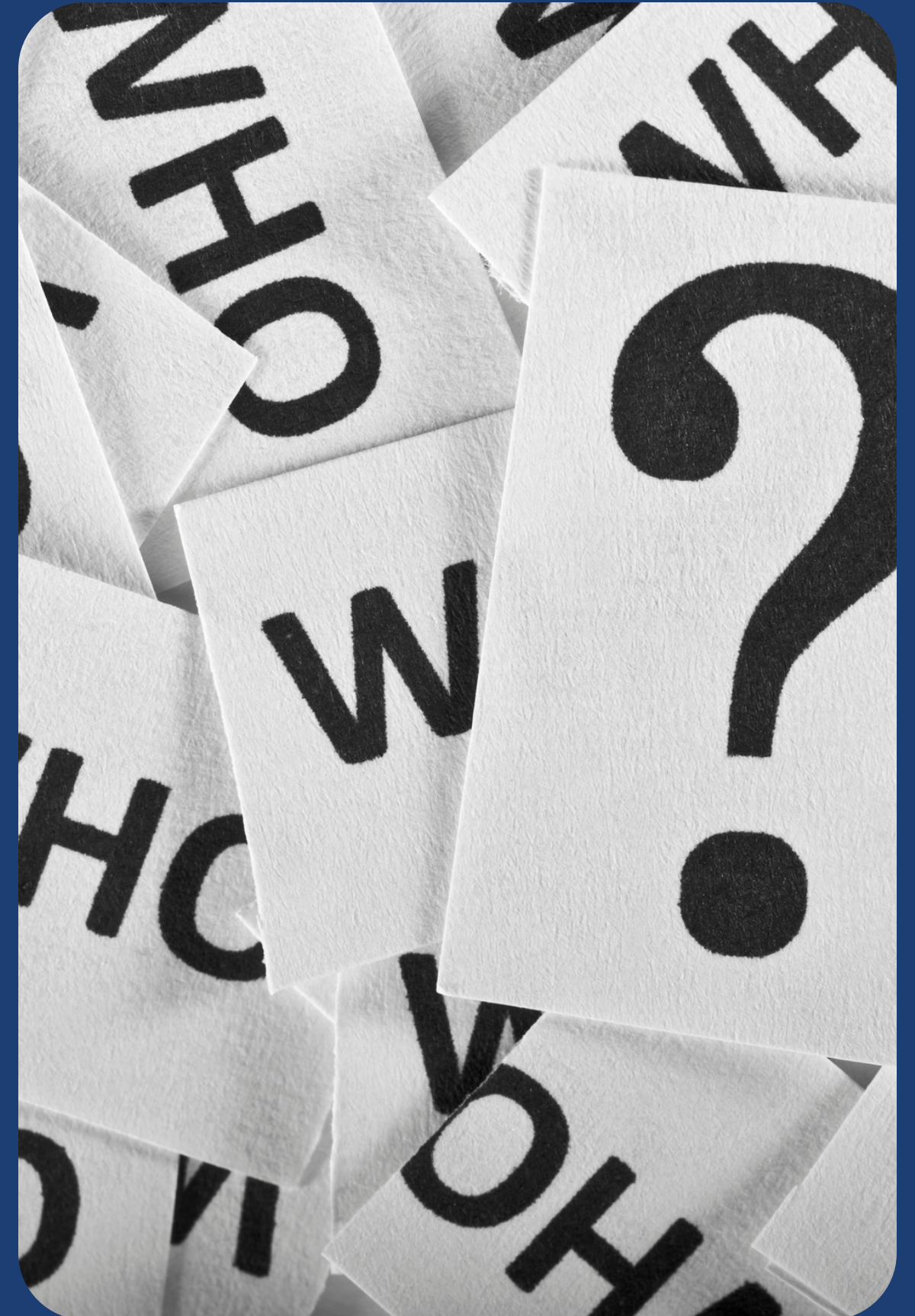
Mtaeyc is Montana's affiliate of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and is dedicated to supporting high-quality early childhood education across our state.

### Our mission is to:

- Promote a strong community of early childhood professionals
- Advocate for high-quality care and education for young children
- Support professional growth through training, leadership, and collaboration
- Strengthen the early childhood profession across Montana

### How we support programs:

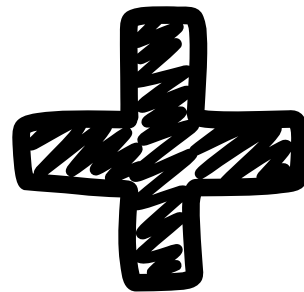
- Professional development
- Annual conference
- Advocacy
- Resources and networking
- Accreditation mentorship and coaching





## One Word Check-In

Based on what you currently know or have heard, what is the first word or idea that comes to mind when you think about accreditation?



# ACCREDITATION AS A LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK

## How can Accreditation help Leaders?

- Turn individual knowledge into shared systems
- Establish clear and consistent expectations
- Connect daily practices to a larger program vision
- Make professional development more intentional
- Strengthen communication with staff and families
- Create a culture of reflection and continuous improvement

You do not have to pursue accreditation tomorrow to begin using its standards as a leadership tool today.

# TYPES OF ACCREDITATION



# WHAT IS ACCREDITATION?

## **A voluntary commitment to quality**

- Programs choose to measure their practices against nationally recognized standards.

## **A framework for strong programs**

- Standards address teaching, relationships, health and safety, family partnerships, and program leadership.

## **A process of reflection and improvement**

- Programs identify strengths, set goals, strengthen systems, and document their progress.

## **External recognition of quality**

- An outside review verifies that program practices meet established standards.

# LEADERSHIP BEYOND YOUR PROGRAM

Every program that commits to intentional leadership and continuous improvement contributes to a stronger early childhood culture in Montana.



With nearly 1,000 licensed programs serving more than 22,000 children, every additional accredited program expands the reach of high-quality early learning across Montana.

**321**

Licensed Child Care  
Centers

**530**

Home Based  
Child Care

**22, 420**

Capacity in licensed  
programs

**Imagine the impact if every year more Montana programs committed to intentional leadership and continuous improvement.**

# UNDERSTANDING THE TWO ACCREDITATION PATHWAYS

Both NAEYC and NAFCC accreditation are nationally recognized, research-based systems designed to support continuous quality improvement. While they share the same goal, each is tailored to different early learning settings.

| NAEYC Accreditation                                                                                             | NAFCC Accreditation                                                                       | Both Accreditation Systems...                                            |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Designed for:</b> Child care centers, preschool programs, school-based programs, and eligible group programs | <b>Designed for:</b> Family and group child care homes                                    | ✓ Are voluntary and nationally recognized                                |
| Focuses on classroom quality, teaching practices, leadership, and program systems                               | Focuses on high-quality care and education within a home-based setting                    | ✓ Are based on research and evidence-based best practices                |
| Typically involves a team of educators working toward shared program goals                                      | Typically supports an owner/provider leading quality improvement within their own program | ✓ Promote high-quality learning environments and positive child outcomes |
| Emphasizes consistency across classrooms and the entire program                                                 | Emphasizes intentional practices that reflect the unique strengths of family child care   | ✓ Include self-assessment, reflection, and continuous improvement        |
| Guided by the <b>NAEYC Early Learning Program Standards</b>                                                     | Guided by the <b>NAFCC Quality Standards</b>                                              | ✓ Strengthen partnerships with families and communities                  |
|                                                                                                                 |                                                                                           | ✓ Validate quality through an external review process                    |

# WHAT DOES ACCREDITATION ACTUALLY LOOK LIKE?

## Self-Assessment

Where are we now?

- Reflect on current practices.
- Compare your program to national standards.
- Celebrate strengths and identify opportunities for growth.



## Program Improvement

Where do we want to go?

- Set realistic goals.
- Strengthen policies, practices, and learning environments.
- Make intentional changes over time.



## Documentation & Application

Tell your program's story.

- Gather evidence that demonstrates quality.
- Organize policies, procedures, and examples of practice.
- Submit your application when you're ready.

## Observation & Verification

An outside perspective.

- An assessor observes your program.
- Documentation and practices are reviewed.
- Quality is validated against national standards.



## Accreditation Decision

Recognition of your commitment.

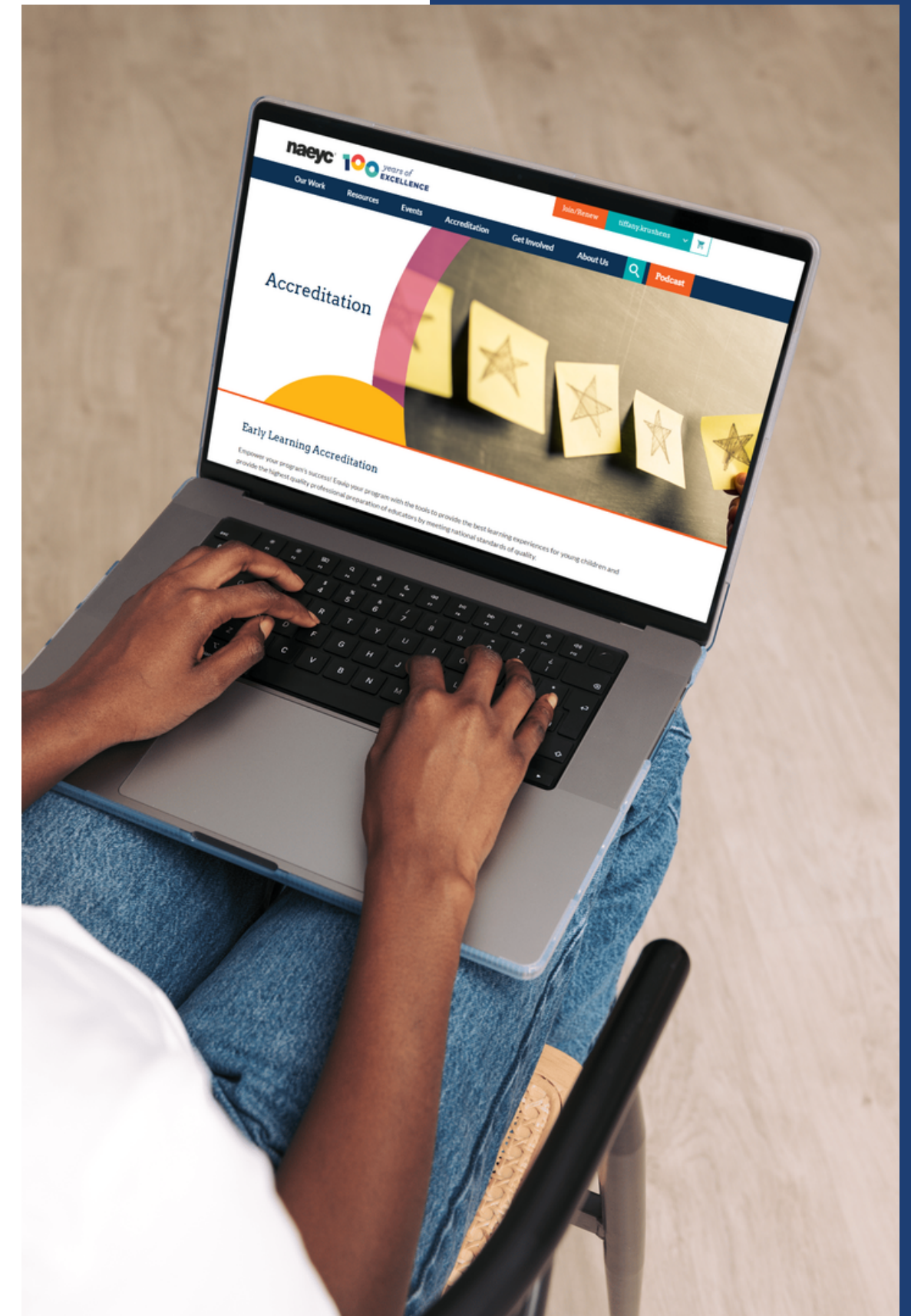
- Your program receives feedback.
- Accreditation is awarded when standards are met.
- Celebrate your team's accomplishment.



## Continuous Quality Improvement

Quality doesn't stop here.

- Continue reflecting.
- Continue learning.
- Continue improving.



# From Managing the Day to Leading the Program

| Reactive                       | Intentional                     |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Individual knowledge           | Shared systems                  |
| "The way we've always done it" | Research-based practices        |
| Solving today's problems       | Planning for long-term quality  |
| Inconsistent practices         | Shared expectations             |
| Hoping quality is happening    | Measuring and improving quality |
| Individual classrooms          | One unified program vision      |





## Activity

Choose one area:

- Staff expectations and consistency
- Family communication
- Policies and procedures
- Professional development
- Teaching practices
- Staff support and workplace culture
- Program vision and goals

Reflect:

- Where are we now?
- What would a stronger, more intentional system look like?
- What is one leadership action I can take in the next 30 days?
- Who needs to be involved?

# THE ACCREDITATION MENTORSHIP PROGRAM

## **Mentorship and Support**

- Connects programs with experienced early childhood leaders
- Provides guidance through the accreditation process
- Encourages peer learning and shared problem-solving
- Supports reflection, goal setting, and program improvement

## **How Mentorship Works**

- Programs are paired with an experienced mentor
  - OR paired with a cohort depending on interest
- Mentors provide guidance, resources, and encouragement
- Regular check-ins help programs stay on track
- Mentorship supports programs from exploration through accreditation





# DISCUSSION:

## ACCREDITATION AS A LEADERSHIP TOOL

- How could accreditation support the leadership goals you identified today?
- What would make accreditation feel achievable or worthwhile for your program?
- What support would you need to consider taking the next step?

# CONTACTS

## EMAIL

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## WEB

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