

CANDIDATE FOR PRESIDENT-ELECT

(one member to be elected to a one-year term as President-Elect, a two-year term as President, and a one-year term as Past President)



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What do you see as the greatest issue(s) facing the early childhood field today, and what role do you see for NAEYC in addressing it?

First and foremost, I remain firmly committed to the teachers who work in our early care and education classrooms and family child care settings. Teachers and providers are increasingly asked to do more each day to respond to the demands of creating high-quality learning environments for the increasing diversity in early childhood settings. In addition, there is a growing awareness that teachers are the key component of quality. Therefore, we cannot continue to ignore the need for new ideas to address inadequate compensation and benefits for early childhood teachers. Although there have been some successful strategies developed, the problem has not been adequately resolved. Indeed, there is a high percentage of teachers who must rely on government financial assistance. It strikes me as ironic that the public money we use to provide financial assistance for our workforce

could be “front-loaded” to improve salaries and benefits. There is no doubt that a third-party source will be needed to support compensation initiatives. Parents and programs have been maxed out as a revenue resource.

The role of NAEYC with regard to this issue is one of leadership, but that leadership should be shared with those who best understand the issue—our teachers. A serious and focused initiative involving teachers, leaders, and policy makers is required to move forward an agenda focused on professional development and fair compensation.

Please describe your efforts on behalf of children and families and the specific strengths and skills you would bring as a member of the NAEYC Governing Board.

I have been a leader and a researcher, as well as an advocate, administrator, and a teacher of young children and adults. I began my career as a teacher and administrator in programs for young children. I worked in the military child care system as well as community-based child care and pre-K programs. I have been a professor for many years, and the grounding of my teaching in classroom and program experience has contributed to my success as a professor. I have also served in leadership and policy positions. In 2009 I took professional leave from my teaching position at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro to become the director of the North Carolina Division of Child Development and Early Education, where I served until 2013. I was responsible for the North Carolina Pre-Kindergarten Program (NC Pre-K), licensed child care facilities, and child care subsidies.

To say the least, the skills needed to lead the state’s early childhood system were monumental and the policy work challenging. I put my research, teaching, and leadership skills to the test by attempting to create a systemic approach to early care and education in North Carolina. During my tenure as director, I coordinated the development of a revision to our Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System, improved the teacher education standards for pre-K teachers, and integrated NC Pre-K into the division. With much support from early childhood leaders across the state, we successfully achieved the goal of developing an integrated early care and education system that included all the various facets of the early care and education field.

Currently, I continue to work toward creating a coordinated approach to professional development in my local community and state through a Smart Start-funded professional development initiative. This project addresses all aspects of quality enhancement, including teachers’ learning and work environments.

My education and experience are in child development and early childhood education. It is my lifelong vocation. I have also served as a state NAEYC Affiliate president and a state policy team member; therefore I recognize the strength in the Affiliate system and the importance of nurturing leadership at the regional, state, and local levels. My strength is as a collaborative leader. I enjoy the creative juices that flow when leaders in all roles and with varying approaches come together to construct a better way. Indeed, it is this collaborative approach through which I thrive and succeed, and I believe it is what is needed to respond to diverse early childhood programs and communities.