

**WE SURVIVED  
ACCREDITATION:**

**Now what????**

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## ABSTRACT & PURPOSE OF SESSION

When we engage in [re]accreditation, typically our programs are so focused on the documentation process and site visit that we don't necessarily think about what to do once the decision is received....

This session will focus on sharing [and using] insights gained across a survey of NCCCC member programs.

## QUESTIONS

# 1: Immediate aftermath -  
The accreditation decision produces a range of reactions, emotions, and responses that can have significant but not necessarily anticipated impacts on the program, staff, and families. How should program leaders plan for and respond to:

- a. Approval
- b. Deferred
- c. Denied

#2: Accreditation is a cycle, not a finish line: How can programs maintain momentum?

- a. Letting go of stress
- b. Setting new goals
- c. Achieving balance

#3: As campus programs, we have a responsibility to share our work with others; How can program leaders facilitate sharing insights we gain from the accreditation process with:

- a. Other programs & community
- b. NAEYC (or other accrediting bodies)
- c. Staff & families
- d. University colleagues and students?

## **BACKGROUND: OUR PROGRAM STORY**

First accreditation (under old system) was in 2005. I came in as [interim] director after the program had been initially deferred, with the revisit scheduled about 6 weeks after my arrival. Our staff and families were confused, anxious, and embarrassed.

I had been a validator in another state in the old system (which inspired some measure of confidence). We held weekly staff meetings to collaboratively

- review successful criteria (to help them regain self-esteem & confidence)
- fix cited criteria (as a “problem to solve” like any other we might encounter).

We did get a successful decision within a short period of time.

## OUR PROGRAM'S RESPONSE FOLLOWING 2005

### # 1: Post-decision response:

- Relief, no desire to celebrate....
- Defensiveness, i.e., “we know we are a good program, why do we have to prove it to someone who knows nothing about us?”
- Negativity towards the concept of accreditation and NAEYC in particular
- Wanting to place blame

### #2: Regaining momentum: DIFFICULT, but do-able

- Letting go of stress:
  1. staff saw director change as opportunity;
  2. teachers wanted to cooperate, but had high level of dread towards new NAEYC system
  3. I organized one-week ‘summer institute’ to get the process going
- Setting new goals:
  1. Refocus on 3 elements of program mission
  2. Reinvent environment, curriculum, & website
  3. Organized, collaborative approach to next cycle
- Achieving balance: work on goals as parallel processes

### #3: Sharing insights with:

- Other programs & community: joined local accreditation initiative; partnered
- NAEYC): explored existing options; established and maintained frequent contact with NAEYC; attended all support workshops & sessions
- With staff & families: had at least annual ‘update’ meetings; distributed & posted samples of ongoing documentation; enlisted parents as folio reviewers
- With university colleagues and students: cultivated relationships; used website & campus listserv to keep our process visible; used grad course to inform; enlisted ECE faculty as folio reviewers

## 2010 PROCESS

### # 1: Post-visit response:

- Celebrate visit while waiting for decision...(so far, flowers for teachers, several pitchers of margaritas, & a zillion thank you notes to everyone on campus; planning for open house
- Pragmatic view: we now have evidence that our program is excellent regardless of outcome
- Negativity: accreditation value acknowledged, NAEYC process viewed as counter-productive and 'over the top'
- Joint ownership regardless of outcome

### #2: Forward momentum:

- Letting go of stress: Set accreditation aside for remainder of year and take time to appreciate our effort
- Setting new goals:
  1. Continue present initiatives and re-start 'back-burner' items
  2. Debrief the process and create reasonable maintenance strategy
  3. Plan "B" strategy in event of negative outcome.
- Achieving balance: Designate specific (reasonable) time frame for continuing work

### #3: Sharing insights with:

- Other programs & community: Media release; Organize luncheon seminar with area programs
- NAEYC): invite staff to write reflective (anonymous) statements, summarize & forward
- With staff & families: report to families; post electronic folios to website
- With university colleagues and students: written report to Dean/Provost; campus PR

## NCCCC FEEDBACK

THANK GOODNESS FOR THE  
LISTSERV!!!!!!

- Session description & 3 questions sent out 2.1.2011
- 17 program directors responded from MA, SC, AL, PA, MN, SC, NY
- All respondents were either approved (15) or awaiting decision (2)
- Responses transcribed to spreadsheet per question & sub-question
- Content analysis across narratives
- Themes identified & categorized

## QUESTION #1: RESPONSE TO ACCREDITATION DECISION

- Expect primary responses to be RELIEF and/or exhaustion,
- Anticipated jubilation may be super-ceded by a feeling that the decision is somewhat ‘anti-climactic,’ especially if extended wait time occurs or decision is received over summer break
- Some teachers will feel let-down or hurt when scores reported were not what they expected
- Programs find it difficult or resist planning for possible negative outcome(s).
- Celebrations common across programs, but support/participation may vary according to level of enthusiasm among staff & families
- Popular activities include
  - Dinner out for faculty/staff
  - Theater tickets
  - Pedicures/spa for staff
  - Congratulatory comments posted in center or staff area
  - Immediate Emails/press release common across programs
  - Flowers, thank-you notes
  - Center open house for campus support system, families, staff

## QUESTION #2: FORWARD MOMENTUM

### LETTING GO OF STRESS

- Universal support for taking a “Break”
- Directors often assume, but conceal, stresses associated with accreditation in order to relieve staff; that may not be healthy in the long run....
- Organized processes diminish stress
- Focus on letting go of accreditation as top priority and ‘getting back to’ our most important work, with children & families

## QUESTION #2: FORWARD MOMENTUM

### SETTING NEW GOALS

- Use lessons learned from process to re-organize, making on-going documentation more efficient
  - Coded program handbooks, unit plans, evaluations
  - Archiving system for emails, newsletters, flyers, photos (per standard)
  - Designated time to do folio updates annually; batch work among staff
- Figure out practical ways to use folios so staff feel their work was not wasted as a one-time effort
  - Convert paper portfolios to classroom notebooks 'that tell our story' available to families and visitors; incentive to maintain then has larger purpose
  - Share electronic folios (websites)
- Incorporate accreditation tasks into annual program goal-setting, but put in perspective of mission & other goals (e.g. classroom observation tool 1x year to maintain focus on criteria)
- Brainstorm ways to re-engage staff with professional development (e.g., read a good book together, such as *Minds in the making* (Galinsky))

## QUESTION #2: FORWARD MOMENTUM

### MAINTAINING BALANCE

- Don't rush; wait on possibility of another NAEYC "reinvention," given feedback they received in Gilliam Report
- Involve staff in analysis of time-on-task and pace on-going process accordingly
- Make conscious decisions about criteria to leave 'unmet' and reserve highest level of focus for program priorities
- Do cost analysis, including in-kind services, overtime, additional staff, etc. to identify REAL cost of accreditation for program.
- Advocate for appropriate level of resources from program sponsors or re-align budgeting priorities to absorb costs

### QUESTION #3: SHARING INSIGHTS

#### WITH COMMUNITY & OTHER PROGRAMS

- Take initiative to organize
  - Face-to-face or online networking with local accredited programs, (GoToMeeting/conference call, etc.)
  - Taking control of the community conversation about accreditation
  - Meet/greet for staff from local accredited centers
- Share portfolios & resources
- Share information about alternatives to NAEYC
- Set up mentoring partnerships to cut costs of PD & share skills (e.g., using technologies for documentation, etc.)
- Create community listserv/discussion board

## QUESTION #3 SHARING INSIGHTS

### WITH NAEYC

- Invite staff to write reflective narratives (cathartic, even if ignored by NAEYC)
- Forward information about REAL incurred costs
- Collaborate with other programs to write collective feedback that represents community perspectives
- Advocate for changes to NAEYC system
- Propose accreditation alternatives to program sponsors
- In states with multiple accountability measures (increasing at alarming rate), advocate for waivers

## QUESTION #3 SHARING INSIGHTS

### WITH STAFF & FAMILIES

- Coded handbooks (reduces questions, raises awareness of criteria & standards)
- Invite parent advisory boards to discuss program improvement
- Include section on accreditation status/progress in annual report; distribute to staff & families
- Create 'fact sheet' and include accreditation information in new family orientation meetings
- Include accreditation updates on PTO meeting agendae
- Share program and classroom folios (remove confidential evidence)

**QUESTION #3**  
**SHARING INSIGHTS**

WITH UNIVERSITY COLLEAGUES & STUDENTS

- Use 'official' PR mechanisms (e.g. Media Relations Office)
  - Media releases
  - Revise PR documents
  - Newspaper
- Faculty/Staff discussion boards
- Annual reports
- Share folios in undergraduate & graduate courses
- Collaborate with other campus programs to write position papers??

## WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

- As NCCCC members, what can we do to advocate on behalf of the national campus ECE community for accreditation processes that are rigorous but reasonable?
- As directors of high visibility programs, what can we do to advance the conversation about accreditation in our communities?
- As program leaders, how can we use our insights to support our staff, without being overwhelmed ourselves?