ACCREDITATION DECISION MATRIX

NECPA • NAEYC • NAFCC

Each pathway supports national quality and continuous improvement. Check each statement that your team can implement consistently.

NECPA MAY FIT WHEN...	NAEYC MAY FIT WHEN...	NAFCC MAY FIT WHEN...
___ 1 PATHWAY We prefer **one direct program accreditation path** from enrollment to Council decision.	___ 1 PATHWAY We are comfortable starting with **Recognition** before progressing to Accreditation.	___ 1 PATHWAY We are an eligible **home-based family child care educator** seeking an educator-centered award.
___ 2 EVIDENCE We can complete the SAI and maintain **centralized paper or digital documentation.**	___ 2 EVIDENCE We can manage narratives, records, and progress **digitally in the Early Learning Hub.**	___ 2 EVIDENCE We can use the portal for **required documents, self-certification, and family surveys.**
___ 3 ON-SITE REVIEW We are ready for a **required, scheduled verification visit** with all classrooms observed.	___ 3 ON-SITE REVIEW We accept a **possible random visit** or would choose Accreditation+ for a guaranteed visit.	___ 3 ON-SITE REVIEW We are ready for a **4-6 hour observation, unannounced within a 4-week window.**
___ 4 STAFFING We can identify **one qualified Lead Teacher for each age group.**	___ 4 STAFFING We can map staff to **program-wide ECE I, ECE II, and ECE III thresholds.**	___ 4 STAFFING The primary educator meets current **NAFCC experience and training requirements.**
___ 5 MAINTENANCE We can sustain a **3-year award** with annual reports in years 1 and 2.	___ 5 MAINTENANCE We can sustain a **5-year Accreditation term** with annual reports and annual fees.	___ 5 MAINTENANCE We can sustain a **3-year award** and complete the required **18-month update.**

WHAT DO YOUR CHECKMARKS SUGGEST?

The column with more check marks may point to the pathway your team should explore first.

MOSTLY NECPA	MOSTLY NAEYC	MOSTLY NAFCC	MIXED RESULT
Explore the direct program path and scheduled verification visit.	Explore the tiered model and digital evidence system.	Explore the FCC educator path and the unannounced observation window.	Compare eligibility, qualifications, total cost, and team capacity

THE BEST FIT IS THE PATH YOU CAN MAINTAIN WITH INTEGRITY.

Before paying, review current standards, confirm eligibility, map qualifications, calculate full-term costs, and verify state recognition or benefits.

Learn more: This tool was developed by NECPA based on information provided on the leading accrediting agency websites. Please confirm current eligibility, requirements, fees, state recognition, and funding supports before applying.

QUALITY PARTNER COMPARISON

NECPA • NAEYC • NAFCC

A Comparison of Three Leading National Early Childhood Accreditation Systems : Nationally recognized accreditation systems that go beyond state licensing to increase quality programs.

WHAT IS NECPA & WHY IT MATTERS



NECPA is a nationally recognized early childhood accreditation system that supports continuous quality improvement through research-based, provider-informed practices. Focused on relationships, health and safety, family engagement, and whole-child development, NECPA offers a practical and supportive approach designed for real early childhood environments. Built by providers, for providers, the process emphasizes meaningful quality practices while supporting diverse program types and teaching approaches.

FEATURE	NECPA	NAEYC	NAFCC
Founded	1991	1985	1982
Eligible Programs	Centers & Family Child Care	Centers	Family Child Care Homes
Accreditation Approach	Indicator-based, systemic quality monitoring	Documentation-heavy self-study model	Standards-based with documentation and observation
Total Cost (Est.)	Approx. $2,090–$2,585 over award period	Approx. $5,075–$8,325 over award period	Approx. $1,220–$1,600 over award period
Avg. Annual Cost	Approx. $697–$862 award year	Approx. $1,015–$1,665 per award year	Approx. $407–$533 per award year
Support	Unlimited phone & email support; custom one-on-one training starting at $450 for up to 12 months.	Phone & email support; custom training starting at $400+.	Email and portal support; online accreditation resources and webinars
Self-Study Training	Included, pre-recorded, no additional cost	Pre-recorded $300+; live $400+	Standards webinars and resources available; coaching may cost extra
Site Visit Included	Yes	Yes	Yes—in-person or virtual
Focus Areas	Whole child: relationships, health, safety, family, community	Curriculum, teaching, assessment, families, professional development	Relationships, environment, learning activities, safety and health, professional and business practices

WHAT ACCREDITATION TELLS FAMILIES

When you see the accreditation seal, it means that a program is dedicated to quality and has voluntarily chosen to be evaluated against rigorous national quality standards that go far beyond what state licensing requires.

Not sure which to choose? Complete our Quality Partner Decision Matrix !