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# United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, EDUCATION,  
LABOR, AND PENSIONS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6300

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August 21, 2023

Michelle Kang  
CEO  
National Association for the Education of Young Children  
1401 H Street NW, Suite 600  
Washington, D.C. 20005

Dear Ms. Kang:

We write with deep concern about the resources that the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) recommends for early childhood educators and child care facilities as an accrediting entity, and with questions about how these resources are related to the accrediting process. NAEYC comprises nearly 60,000 individual members of the early childhood community and accredits early childhood programs across all 50 states.<sup>1</sup> Federally funded Head Start programs, early childhood programs located on military bases, and early childhood education programs in federal buildings all receive accreditation by NAEYC. In addition, NAEYC actively encourages its members to lobby their federal and state elected officials to advocate for increased funding for the Head Start program.<sup>2</sup>

On May 31, the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee heard testimony from NAEYC Managing Director of Policy and Professional Advancement, Lauren Hogan. Ms. Hogan was unable to answer basic questions about NAEYC's stance on parental consent with regard to sensitive topics and materials presented to young children. Her inability to answer straightforward questions was troubling.

As a resource to early childhood programs, NAEYC publishes and promotes "well-respected books that reflect the latest research on a range of topics in early childhood education" that are "grounded in NAEYC's standards."<sup>3,4</sup> Some of these materials contain controversial topics and factually incorrect content that should not be recommended for use in classrooms, especially for children as young as two years old. One such set of materials that was recommended in NAEYC's peer-reviewed journal, "Young Children," contains a list of children's books that aim to reinforce

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<sup>1</sup> *NAEYC Accreditation*, NAEYC, [https://ais.naeyc.org/search\\_programs](https://ais.naeyc.org/search_programs) (last visited Aug. 9, 2023).

<sup>2</sup> *Head Start*, NAEYC, <https://www.naeyc.org/our-work/public-policy-advocacy/head-start> (last visited Aug. 9, 2023).

<sup>3</sup> *Book Recommendations*, NAEYC, <https://www.naeyc.org/resources/pubs/books/recommendations> (last visited Aug. 9, 2023).

<sup>4</sup> *Professional Development*, NAEYC, <https://www.naeyc.org/resources/pd> (last visited Aug. 9, 2023).

the concepts of “*alike and different*,” including a book called, “Our Skin: A First Conversation About Race.”<sup>5</sup> The book includes a paragraph which states:

A long time ago, way before you were born, a group of white people made up an idea called race. They sorted people by skin color and said that white people were better, smarter, prettier, and that they deserve more than everybody else.<sup>6</sup>

This is not only historically inaccurate, but it is perplexing why NAEYC would promote a book that is in contrast to some of its other recommendations. NAEYC says that “Reading and discussing carefully selected picture books is one way to address matters of race(ism) [sic] and discrimination.”<sup>7</sup> But books like these, in which one race is singled out and ridiculed, may also instill division and teach children to think about race as a point of contention from an early age, and it is unclear how NAEYC evaluates these potential drawbacks in its decision to recommend this book to early childhood educators.

NAEYC claims that the “Young Children” journal “combines research and practice” which “supports educational excellence and focuses on meeting the needs of all children, birth through third grade.”<sup>8</sup> Many of the articles in this journal contain troubling recommendations dictating how the concept of gender should be taught to young children. In one article, the author states that:

Gender is varied and dynamic. All of us express our gender differently over the course of our lives; children should be encouraged and supported to play, explore, and define the gender that feels right to them at the time (without an expectation of day-to-day or month-to-month consistency).<sup>9</sup>

To reinforce the idea of fluidity in gender, “Young Children” advises early childhood educators to include books in their library that “depict characters whose gender identities and expressions are multifaceted, fluid and/or ambiguous.”<sup>10</sup> Books discussing this topic and targeting audiences as young as three years old are encouraged to be added to classroom libraries with the goal “to help all the children and adults in [the] program embrace a more inclusive, less restrictive view of gender.”<sup>11</sup>

NAEYC acknowledges some families may be in conflict as to how a child care center or teacher addresses issues of gender. However, NAEYC is so committed to the promotion of gender fluidity

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<sup>5</sup> Leanne M. Evans, *The Power of Science*, NAEYC, <https://www.naeyc.org/sites/default/files/globally-shared/downloads/PDFs/resources/pubs/dap-focus-preschool-addl-material-chap-17.pdf> (last visited Aug. 9, 2023).

<sup>6</sup> Megan Madison et al., *Our Skin: A First Conversation About Race* (2021).

<sup>7</sup> Brian L. Wright, *Now Read This! Books that Promote Race, Identity, Agency, and Voice*, NAEYC (Nov. 2020), <https://www.naeyc.org/resources/pubs/tyc/oct2020/now-read-this>.

<sup>8</sup> *Young Children*, NAEYC, <https://www.naeyc.org/resources/pubs/yc> (last visited Aug. 9, 2023).

<sup>9</sup> Stephanie Feeney et al., *Focus on Ethics: Gender Expression and Identity*, NAEYC (Nov. 2019), <https://www.naeyc.org/resources/pubs/yc/nov2019/gender-expression-identity>.

<sup>10</sup> Janice Kroeger et al., *Tate and the Pink Coat: Exploring Gender and Enacting Anti-Bias Principles*, NAEYC (Mar. 2019), <https://www.naeyc.org/resources/pubs/yc/mar2019/exploring-gender-enacting-anti-bias>.

<sup>11</sup> Feeney et al., *supra* note 9.

it has determined it may be the *ethical responsibility* of the teacher “to respect children’s gender self-determination,” thus ignoring the expressed wishes of a parent.<sup>12</sup>

A NAEYC accreditation should help parents “find the best possible early childhood experience for their children.”<sup>13</sup> By contrast, the materials referenced above, and many others on NAEYC’s website, raise concerns about whether your organization is prioritizing the promotion of racial division and radical ideas about gender to young children above efforts to ensure that children have a well-rounded early education. Given NAEYC’s prominent role in our child care system, including working with both public and private providers, many receiving federal funds, we request that you answer the following questions **on a question-by-question basis, no later than September 5, 2023.**

1. How does NAEYC advise child care centers to collaborate with parents who disagree with certain topics being taught or presented in NAEYC-recommended books?
2. Does NAEYC recommend that parental consent be obtained prior to socially complex topics being taught to young children?
3. Does NAEYC make recommendations for accredited centers regarding how a teacher should refer to a child by different pronouns than those accompanying their biological sex if that child’s parent requested otherwise?
4. What standards does NAEYC use to guide teaching complex social concepts in a developmentally appropriate manner?
  - a. What standards does NAEYC use to determine at what age complex social topics are introduced to children? Please provide any written guidance provided to child care centers before, during, or after the accreditation process.
5. What process does NAEYC follow in selecting books that are promoted on NAEYC’s website and recommended for inclusion in a classroom?
6. How is the information in NAEYC’s recommended children’s books evaluated and vetted for factual accuracy?
  - a. Does NAEYC have any literature or sources to support the claim from “Our Skin: A First Conversation About Race” that says “a long time ago, . . . a group of white people made up an idea called race”? If yes, what literature or source of information supports this statement?

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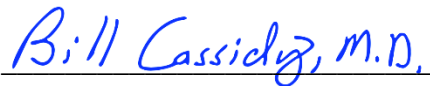
<sup>12</sup> *Id.*

<sup>13</sup> *The Value of a NAEYC-Accredited Program*, NAEYC, <https://www.naeyc.org/our-work/families/value-naeyc-accredited-program> (last visited Aug. 9, 2023).

7. What are NAEYC's accreditation requirements for an early child care center? Please provide a copy of all paperwork, materials, FAQs, or other guidance documents a child care center would receive as part of the accreditation process.
8. What percentage of child care centers that seek an accreditation succeed?
9. What is the total cost of accreditation? What are the annual or recurring costs a center would be required to pay to remain in good standing?
10. How many NAEYC accredited early child care centers are associated with the Head Start program? How many are associated with a federal agency? How many are associated with or located on a U.S. Government military installment?
11. Are child care centers required to include NAEYC-recommended books in their curriculum in order to achieve accreditation?
12. Are early childhood learning centers that are religiously affiliated required to include books or other resources that are in conflict with their closely held religious beliefs to achieve accreditation?

Thank you for your prompt attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



Bill Cassidy, M.D.  
Ranking Member  
U.S. Senate Committee on Health,  
Education, Labor, and Pensions



Markwayne Mullin  
United States Senator