Introduction

Using This Book

We don't expect you will want to read this book from cover to cover. Instead you'll probably pick and choose information that fits your situation. First we provide summaries of each chapter so that you can easily find those that apply to you. Next we introduce you to the Sunshine Child Development Center, a fictional center we created to provide examples of the tasks you may face working on a third-party quality endorsement. Then we provide a list of the major third-party quality endorsement systems. This section ends with a list of common terms and their definitions. We felt that these would be more useful up front rather than in a glossary at the end of the book.

Chapter Summaries

Part 1: Preparing for the Process

This section introduces ideas, concepts, and knowledge that are vital as you consider and then commit to a third-party quality endorsement system.

Chapter 1: Defining Third-Party Quality Endorsement Systems

This chapter provides an overview of third-party quality endorsement systems—what they are and why they are valuable to the early care and education field. Chapter 1 details different options and includes a readiness assessment to help you reach a better understanding of your program's level of preparedness as you begin the process.

Chapter 2: Choosing a Third-Party Quality Endorsement System

This chapter guides you in thinking through all of the variables you must consider when deciding to pursue a third-party quality endorsement system. Whether you've already chosen a third-party quality endorsement system

to pursue or are still considering the options, it is imperative to consider the reasons for pursuing a quality endorsement before you begin ensuring a higher level of commitment to the goal.

Chapter 3: Your Role as the Leader

A common and often detrimental mistake many programs make is not giving careful consideration to the needs of the teaching team. Much of the focus is on the children—as it should be—and the adults may get lost in the process. The unfortunate result is often a lack of commitment or buy-in. Considering the needs of the adults and how best to create a culture of change before beginning the process is one of the single best advantages you can give your program. Chapter 3 focuses on how you can communicate with, support, and lead your teaching team.

Chapter 4: Professional Development

The knowledge, abilities, and skills of the caregivers in your program often have a direct link to the quality of care provided for the children. Accreditation and quality rating systems criteria increasingly emphasize professional development, which supports higher levels of skill and knowledge for early childhood professionals. Chapter 4 examines those criteria and discusses ways to support your staff in their pursuit of professional development, whether it be enthusiastically or reluctantly.

Part 2: The Process

This section focuses on the process of pursuing and achieving a third-party quality endorsement. Each chapter is dedicated to a different aspect of the process leading to a complete understanding of what, why, and how to succeed.

Chapter 5: Overview of the Self-Study Process

The time spent evaluating your program, collecting evidence, making improvements, and completing paperwork is considered to be the self-study period. Research tells us that this course of action has an impact in and of itself and should be valued as such. This time should not be considered just a means to an end. That said, a complete understanding of the process and its intent will ensure that steps aren't skipped and or rushed.

Chapter 6: Using the Self-Study Materials

Many good center directors find themselves stuck after reviewing the self-study requirements. They have everyone on board, they know what they're

doing, and they have all the materials. Then they wonder, "Now what?" This chapter presents some practical first steps to get going in the right direction. Now that you're armed with a deeper understanding of the processes and approaches toward achieving all that needs to be done, we show you how to put those things into action. Developing a practical and achievable timeline and action plans is a learned skill—chapter 6 provides insight and tips into doing that well.

Part 3: The Content

This section examines the most common and important content areas shared among third-party quality endorsement systems. The chapters in this section have similar formats but focus on their respective content areas by defining what each topic means and demonstrating how to implement the content areas in a real setting. They make connections between criteria and real-life situations and provide suggestions for implementation and tools for evaluation.

CHAPTER 7: PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

The physical environment can be thought of as an additional teacher if set up and used correctly. A well-designed classroom can increase learning and enrich a child's experience. Chapter 7 focuses on indoor and outdoor facilities and equipment, detailing how to set up, utilize, and evaluate the learning environments children experience each day.

CHAPTER 8: HEALTH AND SAFETY

Health and safety are a primary focus for most third-party quality endorsement systems. Above all, children must be protected. Without a healthy and safe environment it is futile to focus on anything else. Chapter 8 concentrates on both policy and implementation and will help center directors understand common standards and why they are important.

CHAPTER 9: TEACHING AND LEARNING

This chapter addresses the important relationships in the program and the methods used to teach young children. The focus is on the full circle of opportunities for learning and development in an early care and education setting and how teachers plan for, implement, and individualize those opportunities using curriculum, assessment, and spontaneous teachable moments.

Chapter 10: Assessment of Learning and Development

Observation and assessment have become increasingly valued in early childhood. While assessment is multifaceted, it doesn't have to be complicated. Chapter 10 describes the value of assessing children's learning as the final step in closing the learning and teaching cycle. It includes practical information on how to incorporate simple, yet effective, observation and assessment practices into your program to meet the requirements of your third-party quality endorsement system.

Chapter 11: Family and Community Involvement

A program pursuing a third-party quality endorsement system cannot succeed or truly achieve the highest quality of care without including the families and connecting to the greater community. Chapter 11 focuses on specific ways program staff can optimize those relationships.

Part 4: What's Next?

This section examines actions the program staff need to complete prior to, during, and following the on-site assessment visit. In the self-study process, a critical error often occurs after receiving the decision from the third-party quality endorsement system: adopting the attitude that the work is done when the visit is over. That is false—the work has just begun. Maintaining high standards of care takes daily commitment and effort. The chapters in this section discuss the immediate work of responding to results and feedback provided by the third-party quality endorsement system and the long-term work of maintaining high quality every day.

Chapter 12: The On-Site Assessment Visit

The self-study is over and an on-site visit has been requested. Then the waiting begins. Chapter 12 focuses on the work that should happen during this time, including some important tips for handling the actual visit and what should happen when you get the results. Whether the outcome is positive or negative, it is important to know how to react and what to do with the information you receive.

Chapter 13: Maintaining Quality Standards

You did it—you achieved your goal! All that hard work paid off. Now all you have to do is keep it up for, well, forever. Chapter 13 shares tips and strategies for keeping staff members focused on the high quality standards they worked

so hard to meet, including information on how best to introduce new staff to your program's standards and expectations.

Model Program: Sunshine Child Development Center

We use examples throughout the text in an effort to bring the process to life. With our collective experience and the information we have gathered from working with hundreds of centers, we created a fictional program representing a combination of typical characteristics—the Sunshine Child Development Center.

Sunshine Child Development Center
Five classrooms: Infant, Toddler, Twos, Preschool, Prekindergarten
Center staff:

- Martha, center director
- Georgia, assistant center director
- Julio, preK teacher
- Magda, preK teacher
- Isabel, preschool teacher
- Chae, preschool teacher
- Jessica, infant teacher
- Elena, infant teacher
- Patrice, assistant infant teacher
- Shondra, toddler teacher
- Natalie, toddler teacher
- Renate, assistant toddler teacher
- Mizuki, floater

Martha is a relatively new center director (CD), having started at the center six months ago. She has her associate degree in early childhood education. The center is full and the staff has taken that as a sign that change is not necessary. Nevertheless, the board wants Martha to achieve an accreditation of her choice within two years.

Martha and the team at the Sunshine Child Development Center will go on this accreditation journey with you. In each chapter, we will begin by describing their challenges and progress and then help you think about yours.

Third-Party Quality Endorsement Systems

Because so many third-party quality endorsement systems are available to early childhood providers, we try to use general language whenever possible. But the advice and direction suggested throughout the book is relevant to many systems, particularly those listed here. If the advice doesn't apply generally, we say so. When it seems useful, we provide examples to illustrate a point, not to endorse any particular system or tool. Please review the names and acronyms below to become familiar with the systems we considered and studied while writing this book and the few we chose to use for examples. We focused on systems that currently operate nationally, primarily work with early childhood organizations, and are, at minimum, part of at least two state systems.

AMS: American Montessori Society: www.amshq.org/schools_ accreditation.htm#

APPLE: Accredited Professional Preschool Learning Environment: www.faccm.org/apple.asp

Arnett Caregiver Interaction Scale: www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/ehs/ perf_measures/reports/resources_measuring/res_meas_impa.html

ASCI: Association of Christian Schools International: www.acsi.org

CITA: Commission on International Trans-Regional Accreditation: www.citaschools.org

CLASS: Classroom Assessment Scoring System: www.classobservation.com

COA: Council on Accreditation: www.coanet.org

ECERS: Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (preschool): www.fpg.unc.edu/~ECERS/

ERS: Environment Rating Scale: www.fpg.unc.edu/~ECERS/

ITERS: Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale: www.fpg.unc .edu/~ECERS/

NAA: National AfterSchool Association: www.naaweb.org

NAC: National Accreditation Commission: www.naccp.org

NACCP: National Association of Child Care Professionals (sponsoring organization of NAC): www.naccp.org

NAECP: National Accreditation for Early Childhood Professionals (a term that refers to NAEYC's accreditation system but is rarely used): www.naeyc.org

NAEYC: National Association for the Education of Young Children: www.naeyc.org/

NAFCC: National Association for Family Child Care: www.nafcc/ accreditation/accreditation.asp

NECPA: National Early Childhood Program Accreditation: www.necpa.net

PAS: Program Administration Scale: http://cecl.nl.edu/evaluation/pas.htm

QRS or QRIS: Quality Rating System/Quality Rating and Improvement System: http://nccic.acf.hhs.gov

SACERS: School-Age Care Environment Rating Scale: www.fpg.unc .edu/~ecers/

Definitions

Here are some common terms and definitions we use throughout the text.

caregiver Anyone providing care for and teaching children; used synonymously with **teacher**.

center director (CD) Anyone charged with primary management and leadership tasks; used synonymously with **program administrator** or **administrator**.

criteria A defined measure or expectation. Some third-party quality endorsement systems use the term synonymously with **standard** and some do not (we do throughout this text). It is important to know this about your chosen third-party quality endorsement system to avoid confusion. Also, can be used synonymously with **indicator**.

early care and education One of many phrases used to describe our field. When we refer to early care and education programs we include child care,

learning centers, child development centers and more; used synonymously with **early childhood education** or **child care**.

family Any members of the child's family; used synonymously with **family members**.

key stakeholders Any individuals or groups who are invested in the success of your center, including governing board members, parent forum members, senior or executive leadership, and/or staff and families.

parent Always paired with guardian to encompass all individuals legally charged with the care of a child.

program Any entity providing care and education for children in early childhood; used synonymously with **center**.

self-study The period of time beginning when a program "enrolls" or orders materials and ending with their on-site visit.

submission When a program sends in documentation or another necessary procedure required by the third-party quality endorsement system to indicate they are ready for a visit.

third-party quality endorsement system A phrase used to encompass any external system an early childhood program uses to assess their program quality; used synonymously with **quality measurement and endorsement system**, or **third-party endorsement system**.

validator The representative of the third-party quality endorsement system who visits your program and observes and records findings to be measured against criteria or standards. Each third-party quality endorsement system has its own term—we use *validator* in this book. Can be synonymous with **assessor**, **verifier**, **representative, reviewer,** or **endorser**.