CHILD CARE PLANNING COUNCIL OF SONOMA COUNTY

Sonoma County Definition and Statement of Quality Child Care

All Sonoma County children (0–18 years of age) in child care and early learning programs, (including family child care homes, school based child care and center based care), will be cared for in programs that are safe and healthy, nurturing, stimulating, interactive, culturally appropriate and sensitive to the needs of all children.

Child care programs in Sonoma County will plan and implement programs that support the social, emotional, cognitive and physical development of children. The success of programs is dependent upon a well-educated workforce, strong linkages to a supportive community, and healthy relationships between caregivers and families.

The specific standards for quality child care will be the existing quality standards:

- Title 5 Regulations,
- Head Start Performance Standards,
- National Association for the Education of Young Children's (NAEYC) Criteria for Accreditation,
- National Association of Family Child Care (NAFCC) Quality Standards, and
- Environment Rating Scales

Which Standards Apply to Which Child Care Settings?

The documents outlining high quality child care are specific to various programs:

- Title 5 contains required regulations for all child care programs under contract with the Child Development Division of the California Department of Education.
- Head Start Performance Standards are requirements for Head Start Programs.
- The NAEYC Criteria can be used by any center program and are the avenue towards becoming accredited if a program desires.
- The NAFCC Quality Standards serve the same purpose for family child care programs.
- The various Environment Rating Scales address centers, infant/toddler centers, Family Child Care Homes, and After School programs.

Programs that are required to adhere to particular standards or regulations may also incorporate the NAEYC/NAFCC criteria in their programs.

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Background Information

In 2004, the Sonoma County Child Care Planning Council convened a series of community meetings in order to develop a Sonoma County Child Care Plan. A goal of that plan is to develop a definition of quality child care that the community of Sonoma County and the child care field can agree upon, and that will be useful to parents, providers, agencies and collaborative efforts related to child care.

As a community, we care that when our children are away from their families, they are cared for in environments and programs that meet a high level of quality. Overwhelmingly, research shows that when children are in child care, the quality of that care is an important determining factor in the optimal growth and development of children. Study after study indicates that children who have had high quality child care experiences have a greater opportunity to reach their maximum potential in life. Therefore, the goal of the definition contained in this document is to provide guidance about what constitutes quality child care, and to further our ongoing community effort ensuring that all children in Sonoma County are cared for in high quality settings.

The process of developing a definition began in March 2005 when the Quality Committee began to meet. Participants included representation: from Sonoma County Child Care Planning Council; First 5 of Sonoma County; Santa Rosa Junior College, Child Development Department; Community Child Care Council of Sonoma County (4Cs); Maternal Child Health; Professional Association of Childhood Educators Alternative Payment Program; Community Action Partnership Head Start; Sonoma County Office of Education; and the Sonoma County Child Care Association. The group met and worked over an extended period of time and established the preceding definition of quality child care for Sonoma County.

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