

# Why Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice (DEIJ) Matters and Resources to Support the Work

Vermont Early Childhood Advocacy  
Alliance Monthly Equity Discussion

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The University of Vermont

# DEIJ in Early Childhood

**In early childhood (EC), diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice (DEIJ) looks like:**

- Promoting anti-bias education (4 goals - identity, diversity, justice, activism)
- Creating inclusive and equitable learning environments that value all children's unique identities and experiences
- Creating supportive environments for young children to explore and express their identities
- Challenging stereotypes and celebrating the joy, agency, and everyday lives of diverse people

# Why DEIJ Matters in Early Childhood

## **Foundational period of children's development:**

- Physical development: sense of self and body awareness
- Social and emotional development: sense of self and identity; how to interact with others, form relationships, navigate the social world
- Cognitive development: cognitive flexibility; language skills; learning about different cultures, backgrounds, and perspectives; critical thinking

## **Promotes a more just society:**

- Gives children the skills, knowledge, language, and confidence to challenge biases and injustices

# Current, Quickly-Changing Sociopolitical Climate

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20540

April 3, 2025

**Reminder of Legal Obligations Undertaken in Exchange for Receiving Federal Financial Assistance and Request for Certification under Title VI and SP24 v. Harvard**

**Requesting Certification:**

On behalf of \_\_\_\_\_, I acknowledge that I have received and reviewed this Reminder of Legal Obligations Undertaken in Exchange for Receiving Federal Financial Assistance and Request for Certification under Title VI and SP24 v. Harvard. I further acknowledge that compliance with the below and the assurances referred to, as well as this certification, constitutes a material condition for the continued receipt of federal financial assistance, and therefore certify our compliance with the below legal obligations.

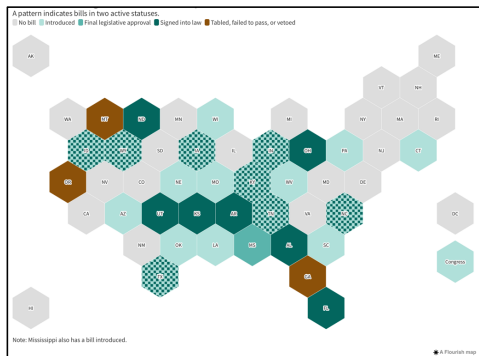
\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Title and District or State

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 provides that "no person in the United States shall, on the ground of race, color, or national origin, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance."

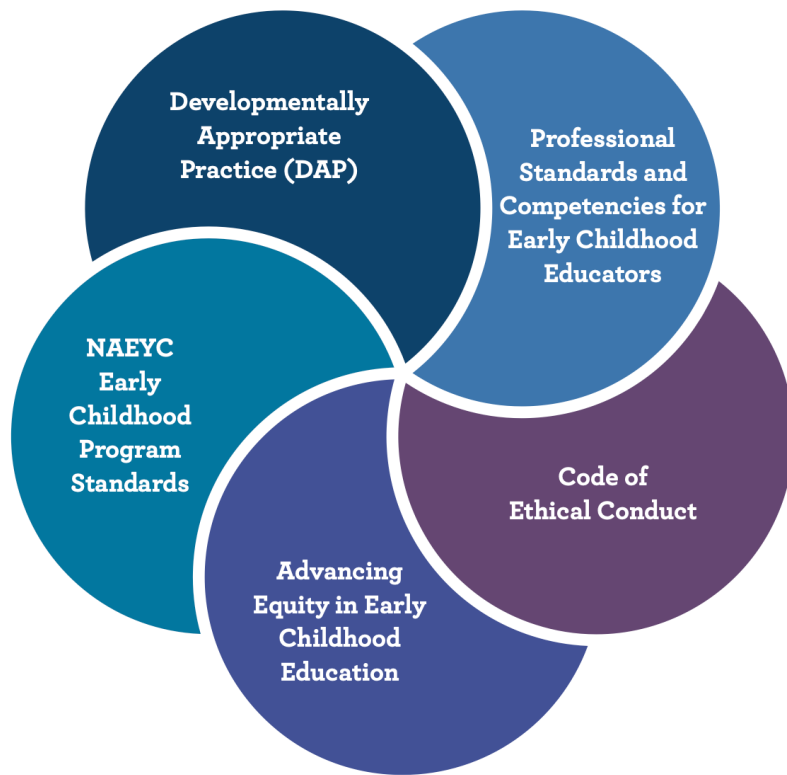
Notification of the obligation imposed by Title VI are incorporated throughout federal funding and continuing as a specific condition on the receipt of federal funds by educational institutions throughout



- Federal messaging that PreK – 12 public education settings should stop promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives, social-emotional learning, and culturally responsive teaching
- Federal and state restrictions or threats to research, funding, and academic freedom in higher education, all of which has significant implications for teacher education

[Map of states (n=29) and U.S. Congress regarding bills to restrict DEI in institutions of higher education that have been introduced (n=129), approved (n=20), passed (n=19), or tabled (n=73)]

#### NAEYC's Foundational Documents



Based on decades of research on child development, teaching, and learning, the EC field expects EC educators and those working with young children to continue:

- Creating inclusive, supportive, and equitable learning environments for all children
- Promoting anti-bias education
- Engaging with young children in ways that support their development, including safe exploration and expression of their identities

## Resources that Can Support and Justify DEIJ in EC

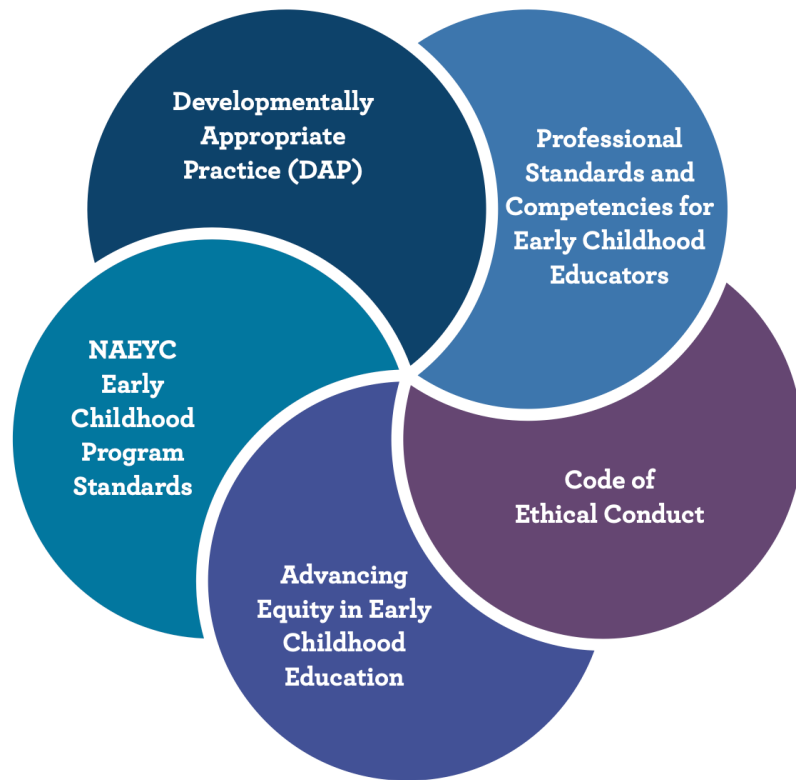
- [Vermont Guiding Principles: Supporting Each and Every Young Child and Family's Full and Equitable Participation](#) (birth - Grade 3)
- [Vermont Early Learning Standards](#) (I. Developing Self; III. Social Studies, 3. Physical & Cultural Geography)
- K-3 Standards:
  - [College, Career & Civic Life: C3 Framework for Social Studies State Standards](#)
  - [Social Justice Standards: The Learning for Justice Anti-Bias Framework](#)

### [Supports]

- Vermont Agency of Education's [Equity Lens Tool](#) (2020; common vocabulary and protocol for evaluating policies, programs, practices and decisions for equity)
- Vermont Department of Libraries' [Racial and Social Justice Resources](#)
- [Equity In a Divided Community: Leadership Tips and Talking Points](#) (June 2021)

# Resources that Can Support and Justify DEIJ in EC

## NAEYC's Foundational Documents



"These foundational statements are grounded in NAEYC's core values, **which emphasize diversity and inclusion and respect the dignity and worth of each individual**. The statements are built upon a growing body of research and professional knowledge that underscores the complex and critical ways in which early childhood educators promote early learning through relationships— with children, families, and colleagues—that are embedded in a broader societal context of inequities in which implicit and explicit biases are pervasive."



## Identifying Our Way Forward

- Recognize that this moment creates various constraints, concerns, and opportunities that affect individuals differently (e.g., based on their identities, personal and professional circumstances, EC setting, and other factors).
- There is power in being proactive! Reflecting on our values, training, research, and comfort, we can determine where we have the agency within our practice to advance DEIJ in EC.

**What pressures are you feeling related to DEIJ? How are you responding?**

**Where do you have agency within your practice or scope of influence to advance DEIJ in EC?**

**How can you work with others to feel more supported?**