When Exchange magazine was launched 30 years ago, programs serving young children were either called day care centers (full day) or nursery schools (part day). Over the years as early childhood professionals recognized that all services for preschool children provide a combination of caring, education, and development, the names of programs, and the names people applied to our profession, started to evolve. Terms like child care, child development, early childhood services, and early learning started to be used.

But three decades of changes have not moved our profession closer to agreeing on the name for our profession. To start the process of consensus building, in late January we ran on our web site an Exchange Insta-Poll, “What is the most appropriate name for our field?”. Over 2,000 readers of ExchangeEveryDay responded to this poll by telling us the one name they preferred. Two names clearly emerged as the most popular:

- Early childhood education (preferred by 31% of voters), and
- Early care and education (25%).

The gap between the first two preferred names and the next wave of choices was quite significant. Third place choice (Early childhood development) received only 8% of votes; fourth place (Early learning and development), 7%; and fifth place (Child care and early learning), 6%.
Some of the more common names now in use received very little support. For example, “child care” received only 3% of votes cast; “Pre-K” 1%; and both “Day care” and “Nursery school” received no support at all.

**Insta-Poll participant comments**

“If you believe that all people/entities provide the same level of care, I can see why you would even broach this subject. All the names you mentioned are still appropriate names. In my opinion there are still different levels of care provided. I would not want to have one name that is all encompassing.”

Mac McGuire, Ready Set Grow, Chelsea, Alabama

“Ten years ago we changed our name from St. Michael’s Day Nursery to St. Michael’s School and Nursery. It was an historic move because we are an historic organization incorporated in 1890. The change had just the effect we desired. Today, everyone understands that we teach and provide nurturing care. Our families are proud of the name and respect us as educators. Our faculty appreciate the directness of this honest approach. And the children love their ‘school’ dearly. I believe we should not shy away from the word ‘school’. It helps people to understand our work. Everyone knows we care for little children, and they now understand that we are teaching, too. While ‘School and Nursery’ remains our formal name, we use St. Michael’s School for our daily business and it’s a great fit for us. Our industry should not be afraid to use the word that the public already understands. With full-day KG, Pre-K, and wrap around programs proliferating, everyone is educating and caring. For us, ‘school’ is where this happens.”

Helen Riley, St. Michael’s School, Wilmington, Delaware

**Next steps**

First, if you have not yet expressed your opinion, the polls are still open. You can vote for your preferred name by going to www.childcareexchange.com/survey/poll.php?survey_id=132. Second, we are open to suggestions for next steps:

✦ We could stop here and leave information on our site for anyone interested in nomenclature.
✦ We could share this information with the 30 organizations who are Exchange Strategic Partners and members of the World Forum Alliance and invite their suggestions on how to follow up.
✦ We could do one more round of voting between the top two preferred names by having people write arguments for and against each title that people can read before they vote.

Send your ideas on next steps, including ideas not listed above, to me at info@ChildCareExchange.com.