

The 2004 National Survey of Child Development Associates (CDAs)

Council for Professional Recognition

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Note: highlighted items in paragraph two updated October 2006.

Introduction

The Child Development Associate (CDA) National Credentialing Program is a national system to improve the quality of early childhood education program by improving the professional competence of the teaching staff. Initiated in 1971, the program is designed to assess and credential early child care and educational professionals based on performance.

Since 1985, the Council for Professional Recognition (Council) has administered the CDA program. CDAs work as caregivers and teachers in Head Start programs, infant-toddler centers, preschools, child care centers, and as home visitors. Since the inception of the program, more than 200,000 individuals have been credentialed. As a result of an increase in demand for trained, qualified staff, the number of applications for the CDA program has grown to approximately 15,000 annually. Furthermore, 49 states plus the District of Columbia now incorporate the CDA credential into their child care center licensing regulations.

Every five years since 1983, a survey of CDAs has been conducted to assess the impact of credentialing on individual's careers and professional development. This report presents the results of the most survey conducted in 2004.

Questions

The survey was designed to address the following key questions about CDAs:

- Who are CDAs? What demographic characteristics describe the survey respondents?
- What are the changes in CDAs' educational level and professional experiences from the time of credentialing to present?
- How are CDA candidates fulfilling the education requirement for the credential? To what extent are they earning college credit and/or receiving continuing education?
- What professional changes occur after receiving a CDA credential? What percentage of CDAs receives promotions and/or salary increases?
- What is the retention rate for CDAs in the early childhood field? What factors influence those who remain in the profession?

Methodology

The Council worked in collaboration with the Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed At Risk (CRESPAR) at Howard University to conduct the survey and analyze the responses. This report builds on previous surveys of CDAs conducted in 1983, 1988, 1994, and 1999.

A sample of 6,511 CDAs was randomly selected from among all persons credentialed in five selected years. Surveys were mailed to 10% of CDAs awarded in 2003, 2002, 2001, 1998, and 1993. Approximately 1,300 surveys were returned, yielding a response rate of 20%. Based on the responses, the sample consisted of: 953 recent CDAs (those

credentialed one to five years prior to the survey); 258 mid-level CDAs (credentialed six to ten years prior to the survey); and 120 veteran CDAs (credentialed over ten years prior to the survey). Respondents resided in all 50 states, as well as in the District of Columbia, Guam, Puerto Rico, and U.S. military bases overseas.

Findings

Who are CDAs?

Similar to previous findings, CDAs are overwhelmingly female, 99.2%, across the three cohort groups. Also, approximately half (46.8% as compared to 49.7% in 1999) of all respondents earned a CDA between the ages of 26 and 40, and the percentage of those credentialed over the age of 40 continue to rise (41% as compared to 39% in 1994 and 33% in 1994). Consistent with previous survey results, the percentage of CDAs credentialed under the age 25 remains relatively small at approximately 12% (in comparison with 11% in 1999).

Regarding race/ethnicity, more than half (54%) of the respondents are Caucasian, a figure roughly consistent with previous surveys. While the percentage of African American respondents has increased slightly since the last survey, from 24.4% in 1999 to 26.3% in the current survey, it still marks a decline in the number of African American CDAs since the 1988 survey administration, in which 34% of CDA respondents were African American. The number of Hispanic/Latino respondents, however, has continued to climb over the past surveys, from 9% in 1988 to almost 12% in 1999 to 14% in the current administration. A decrease from the last survey was also revealed in the percentage of Native American respondents, from 4.1% in 1999 to 2.5% currently. However, the percentage of Asian/Asian American respondents (1.9%) remained consistent with the past survey findings of 1.5%.

The CDA program offers credentials in several setting endorsements. Nearly two-thirds (63.2%) of CDAs were endorsed in a preschool setting, which continues to be the most widely earned setting, followed by the infant/toddler (25%), family child care (10.5%), and home visitor (1.2%) setting endorsements. Approximately 7% of respondents reported having a CDA language specialization of which 77.8% was bilingual Spanish-English and 16.7% was monolingual Spanish, similar to previous survey findings.

What are CDAs' education and professional experiences?

Respondents provided information about their educational and early childhood professional experiences for two time periods, at the time of credentialing and at the time of survey administration, in order to examine changes in these dimensions over time. Comparisons were also examined across the three cohort groups, namely new-, mid-level-, and veteran CDAs. Data were ascertained for the two time frames for the following dimensions: educational background, years of early child care experience, type of child care setting, professional position, and salary.

A. Educational Background

Approximately 40% of CDAs within each of the three cohort groups had some college at the time of credentialing which increased to approximately 50% across groups after credentialing. Also, all groups tended to attain more two- or four-year degrees after credentialing. A repeated measures analysis of variance revealed a significant increase in educational levels ($F=262.39$, $p=.0001$, $n=972$) of CDAs across all three groups from the time of credentialing ($m=1.80$) to time of survey ($m=2.98$).

B. Years of Early Child Care Experience

At the time of credentialing, approximately 47% of veteran- and new CDAs, and 40% of mid-level CDAs had up to five years of child care experience. As expected, all groups increased in experience over time, with the veterans showing the greatest increase in years of experience.

C. Setting

In contrast to the 1999 survey findings, the majority of CDAs in the current survey worked in a non-Head Start center-based setting (40.8%), as opposed to a Head Start center-based setting, at the time of credentialing, followed by a Head Start center-based setting (26.8%), and a family child care setting (11.7%). However, veteran CDAs (46.6%), tended to work at traditional Head Start based centers more often than the other groups. Since credentialing, the same pattern was found for veteran- and new CDAs, however, the majority of mid-level CDAs were divided equally between working in Head Start center-based- (29%) and non-Head Start center-based- (28.5%) settings.

D. Professional Position

At the time of credentialing, the majority of respondents were assistant teachers/aides (36%), followed by classroom teachers (35%). At the time of survey, the percentage of classroom teachers had increased from 35% to 41% and program/center directors increased from 7% to 10.5%, similar to those found in the previous survey. Contrary to the 1999 survey results, the program/center director positions were more often held by mid-level (11.9%) and new- (10.5%) CDAs than veteran CDAs (7.7%).

E. Salary

A repeated measures analysis of variance revealed significant increases in annual salaries from time of award to time of survey across all three cohort groups ($F=586.51$, $p=.0001$, $n=972$). At the time of credentialing, the annual earnings of over 53% of respondents in all groups were under \$15,000, a reduction from 70% in the last survey. However, at the time of the survey, less than 26% of mid-level- and veteran CDAs and 41% of new CDAs still earned under \$15,000. Over 70% of new- and mid-level CDAs reported current annual earnings between \$10,000-25,000. Moreover, the current annual salary range for

veteran CDAs was even higher. Over 65% of veteran CDAs reported to earn between \$15,000-34,999.

How are CDAs fulfilling their education requirement?

The Council requires that CDA candidates complete 120-clock hours of formal education distributed across eight subject areas of early childhood/child care. The Council strongly encourages, but does not require, that this requirement be met through degree-track credit. Survey respondents were asked to provide information regarding where their training was obtained, whether college credit was earned for training, and whether financial assistance was applied toward training expenses.

For several of the survey items addressing professional development, the respondents were encouraged to select all applicable responses, thus multiple responses were provided. As a result, it is not possible to clearly analyze the degree to which the goal of degree-track credit is being earned. The results indicated that most CDAs received training through credit courses (40.5%), followed by continuing education units (32.3.4%), the CDA Professional Preparation Program (29.4%), and non-credit courses (13.4%). A similar pattern of findings was found across the three cohort groups.

In terms of training delivery systems, CDAs most often received training at a non-Head Start early childhood organization (32.5%), followed by a two-year community college (27.1%), a Head Start facility (23.1%), a vocational/technical school (10.4%), a four-year college/university (10.2%), and a military institution (2.8%). Head Start facilities, the most frequently employed training delivery system in the 1999 survey, were more often attended by veteran CDAs (67.1%) than mid-level- (52.3%) or new- (47.7%) CDAs.

Despite the fact that CDA candidates are permitted to satisfy the education requirement with 120 hours of non-credit training, 45% of the CDAs received college credit for some or all training they received to fulfill this requirement. Most were awarded between three and twelve college credits for their training. A greater percentage of new CDAs (69.9%), as opposed to veteran CDAs in the last survey, received this educational benefit over mid-level- (20.6%) or veteran- (9.6%) CDAs.

As found in the previous survey, over 60% of respondents did not pay any portion of their CDA training, however, substantially more new- (70%) and mid-level- (21.6%) CDAs are receiving less financial assistance and paying toward training expenses than veteran CDAs (8.4%).

What professional changes occur after CDA credentialing?

The survey assessed changes in CDAs' professional experiences as a result of obtaining the CDA credential. The professional areas consisted of the following: possible salary increases, promotions, job changes, and retention in the field.

Overall, half (50.7%) of the CDAs indicated that they received salary increases after earning their CDA credential. A greater percentage of new CDAs (69.1%), compared to mid-level CDAs in the 1999 survey, experienced salary increases than mid-level- (19.8%), and veteran- (11.1%) CDAs. Consistent with the prior study, approximately 70% of all CDAs received annual salary increases up to \$500.

Regarding promotions, 28% of all respondents reported receiving a promotion upon earning the CDA credential, a greater percentage of veteran CDAs (39.7%) were promoted than mid-level- (35.9%) or new- (25.9%) CDAs. For a large majority (86%), the new position was with the same employer.

A substantially large majority (90.1%) of respondents reported that they are still in the early childhood profession, a slight increase from 87% reported in 1999. Even among the veteran cohort, over 82% have remained in the profession over 10 years after credentialing, as have approximately 84% and 93% of mid-level- and new CDAs respectively.

In terms of ongoing professional development, approximately 32% of the respondents reported that they have been awarded college credit toward a degree for having a CDA credential, an increase from 22% in 1999. Regarding membership in early childhood associations, approximately 63% and 41% of respondents are current members of NAEYC and NHSA.