



CDA and Career and Technical High Schools as an Effective Entry into Early Care and Education



A white paper

Introduction

In April 2015, the Institute of Medicine and National Research Council of the National Academies released a report, entitled “Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation,” asking the question: *How can the science of children’s health, learning and development inform how the workforce supports children from birth through age 8?*

The report highlighted a number of key messages, chief among them was the notion that the “adults who provide care and education of children birth through age 8 bear a great responsibility for their health, development and learning.” The report authors also pointed out, however, that current systems and services are fragmented, and practices and policies have not kept pace with what the early care and education community deems vital to effectively provide for birth-to-8 children.

Of particular note is the recommendation—one of 13—that calls for the development and implementation of “comprehensive pathways and multiyear timelines at the individual, institutional and policy levels for transitioning to a *minimum bachelor’s degree qualification requirement*, with specialized knowledge and competencies, for all lead teachers working with children from birth through age 8.”ⁱ

The establishment of viable career pathways is, the Council for Professional Recognition agrees, a critical element of success for early educators. For 30 years, the Child Development Associate™ (CDA) National

Credentialing Program has been part of a continuous progression of skills and competence for many early educators. As the leading organization dedicated to the professional development of early childhood educators, the Council, and its CDA, represent expert consensus about what early educators should know and be able to do. It plays a significant role across the spectrum of early childhood settings in the United States, from employer-sponsored child care to federal government-funded entities.ⁱⁱ

In its 30-year history, thousands of early educators used the CDA to launch their later achievement of baccalaureate, masters and doctoral degrees in the field of early care and education.

Today, the Council’s partnerships with institutions of higher education, such as the Ivy Tech Community College System in Indiana, Tennessee State University and Rasmussen College in Minnesota, are indicative of its efforts to help early educators—many of whom are adult learners—adapt to and succeed in a clear career pathway with progressive attainment of credentials and degrees.ⁱⁱⁱ For this reason, the CDA is characterized as “the best 1st step” for many in the field—more than 360,000 people have earned a CDA—including high school students interested in pursuing a career working with young children.

For many workforce endeavors, high school—specifically career and technical high schools (CTE)—offer the first-step entry point to careers. Because CTE across the United States have child care and early education programs, the purpose of this paper is to

i Institute of Medicine and National Research Council. Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation. Washington, D.C.: The National Academies Press, 2015

ii Washington, Valora, Ph.D. Why CDA? Why Now? A Focus on Competency. Council for Professional Recognition. Washington, D.C., 2014

iii Washington, Valora, Ph.D. Degree Programs: Progress and Pitfalls for ECE. Washington, D.C.: Child Care Exchange Magazine, January/February 2015

examine whether high school is an effective entry point for initial early childhood education professional development, and whether the CDA assessment process beginning at this level leads to the pursuit of the bachelor's degree minimum qualification recommended by the IOM-NRC report.

In 2011, guided by the belief that a commitment to professionalism can begin as early as high school, the Council began allowing high school juniors and seniors enrolled in Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs to earn their CDA credential. These ambitious students were required to meet all of the qualifications of other CDA candidates, including 120 hours of education, 480 hours of work experience, a professional portfolio and family questionnaire, direct observation by a Council-contracted Professional Development Specialist, and a comprehensive examination.

Since 2011, of those that self-identified as completing their CDA training at a CTE program, at least 555 CDA credentials were awarded to high school students.

Three Burning Questions

- 1. Are high school faculties capable of creating an ideal pathway into the profession?*
- 2. Is the high school vocational level an effective entry point into the ECE profession?*
- 3. What challenges do high school faculties and students face in navigating this pathway?*

A Word about the CTE Survey

The Council developed surveys targeting two specific audiences: CTE teachers/administrators ("faculty") and high school students ("student") who attained their CDA.

The faculty survey was initially distributed electronically to 35 state administrators across the country, who, utilizing individual listservs, further disseminated the survey via e-mail to 310 assistant teachers/aides, classroom teachers, education

supervisors,/coordinators/specialists, program/center directors, family child care providers and administrators. There were 258 respondents, for an 83 percent response rate.

The student survey was also distributed electronically to 530 students who applied for the CDA credential in 2014. Seventy-eight students submitted responses, for a 15 percent response rate.

Are High School Faculties Capable of Creating an Ideal Pathway into the Profession?

The results from the faculty survey indicated clear support for the CDA as an effective entry point to the field of early care and education:

- Half of the faculty respondents claim to be actively involved in activities that prepare high school students to pursue a CDA and a career in early childhood education.
- Slightly more than eight in 10 (85 percent) "agree" or "strongly agree" that applying for the CDA credential prepares students for working with children.
- There has been a 31 percent increase in the number of CTE programs that offer the CDA.

Yes, High Schools are an Effective Entry Point

Overall, 95 percent of students reported being "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with the quality of their CDA training.

With regard to the issue of a bachelor's degree as a minimum qualification, pursuing a CDA yields positive results. The spark ignited through the CDA credentialing process often leads candidates to pursue more education as they become more confident in what they know and are able to do with young children. When it comes to educational attainment:

- About 54 percent of the student respondents reported “some college,” with 15.4 percent enrolled in a two-year college degree, and 29.5 percent working toward a four-year degree.
- Nearly half (45.1 percent) reported that they did receive college credits for their high school CDA training.
- Eight in 10 (81.5 percent) said that earning a CDA encouraged them to continue their education toward a degree.
- A high proportion of students (90.9 percent) “agree” or “strongly agree” that applying for a CDA credential adequately prepares them to begin a career working with children.

In the area of employment:

- Forty-six percent of the student respondents are employed and working with children on a part-time basis.
- Fourteen percent are employed and working with children on a full-time basis.
- Sixteen percent are employed and not working directly or indirectly with children, and 24.3 percent are not employed at all. Of those not currently working with children or unemployed, 47.2 percent plan to work with children in the future.
- Reflective of their CTE training, slightly less than half (46.9 percent) work in a preschool setting; a significantly smaller percentage (10.2 percent) work in an infant/toddler setting. Predominant job titles include assistant teacher/aide or student (37.5 percent, respectively) or classroom teacher (15.6 percent).

The Pathway is not Without Challenges

There are, undoubtedly, potholes along the pathways to an early care and education career. As indicated in the IOM-NRC report

and its 13 recommendations, educational attainment for early educators is impacted by a number of multiple, competing adaptive pressures, including various training standards, program funding and compensation.

- **Training Standards:** According to various reports and studies, 72 percent of the nearly 2 million early care and education teachers in the United States lack an associate’s degree or higher, in part because pre-K teachers are not always required to have a degree due to varying state-level standards. Additionally, 93 percent of the ECE workers and directors with a bachelor’s degree did not possess a degree specifically in early childhood education.^{iv}

The effectiveness of the CDA as part of the career pathway is illustrated by the fact that eight in 10 of the student survey respondents (81.5 percent) who attend college major in early childhood education.

- **Funding:** According to the faculty survey respondents, most (62 percent) high school CDA candidates use personal resources to pay the CDA assessment fees. To a lesser degree, students utilize scholarships or grants (34 percent), or high school fees (11 percent) to cover the cost. There is money available for CTE programs.

The Obama administration budget includes \$1.3 billion for CTE state grants, an increase of \$200 million over FY 2015, which the administration would use to finance the new American Technical Training Fund. The budget also proposes reauthorizing the Carl D. Perkins Act and reiterates and expands upon the blueprint for reform released by the Department of Education in 2012. Florida has just allocated \$350K in their 2015-2016 school budget for CTE programming through the Carl D. Perkins IV State Plan. At the state level, Delaware will use \$500,000 in grant funds to

iv U.S. Government Accountability Office. Early childhood education: HHS and Education are taking steps to improve workforce data and enhance worker quality. Washington, D.C., 2012

implement career and technical education programs, and Kansas State University has allocated \$750,000 for the years 2015-2016; 2016-2017 for high school students who are enrolled in CTE programs to enroll in college CTE courses tuition free.

- **Compensation:** Only 7.5 percent of the student survey respondents reported earning between \$20,000 and \$35,000; nearly seven in 10 (68.7 percent) earn less than \$10,000. Although 62.9 percent said it became easier to find a job after receiving their CDA, 76.2 percent reported no increase in salary; 19 percent reported an increase of less than \$500.

The Council has long advocated a change in the way teachers are compensated. The data begs the question: “How do we entrust our nation’s most valuable asset—our children—to a workforce that is woefully and tragically underpaid?”

Most states that have compensation and retention initiatives typically tie stipends and/or salary enhancements to early care and education credentials, like the CDA or college degrees. Because compensation is directly tied to teacher quality, the Council supports these types of initiatives. However, these programs also can only go as far as their funding, with some forced to deny participation when all funds are exhausted.

Summary

The Council for Professional Recognition and the CDA are clearly aligned with the overall vision of the IOM-NRC report. The data found in the Council CTE surveys indicate that:

- **High school is an ideal starting point to begin the CDA credential process and, consequently, foster additional learning and professional development at the college level.**
 - o The Council operates under the premise that its CDA, along with a bachelor’s degree with specialized early education

training, best establishes the competency needed to become an effective early care and education professional.

- **High school faculties are indeed creating effective pathways into the ECE community.**
 - o There is virtual consensus among both sets of respondents that the CDA credentialing process represents an opportunity to establish a lasting career in the early care and education profession.
- **Additional governmental and non-governmental intervention is required to “build a more coherent infrastructure,” as recommended by the IOM-NRC report.**
 - o Such intervention among policymakers and stakeholders must be built on the notion that the ECE community is not a bunch of “babysitters,” but rather a cadre of professional “teachers” requiring adequate preparation, compensation and support. ■

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