

INTERNATIONAL DEMAND GROWING FOR CHILD DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATE CREDENTIALLED EDUCATORS

WHITE PAPER

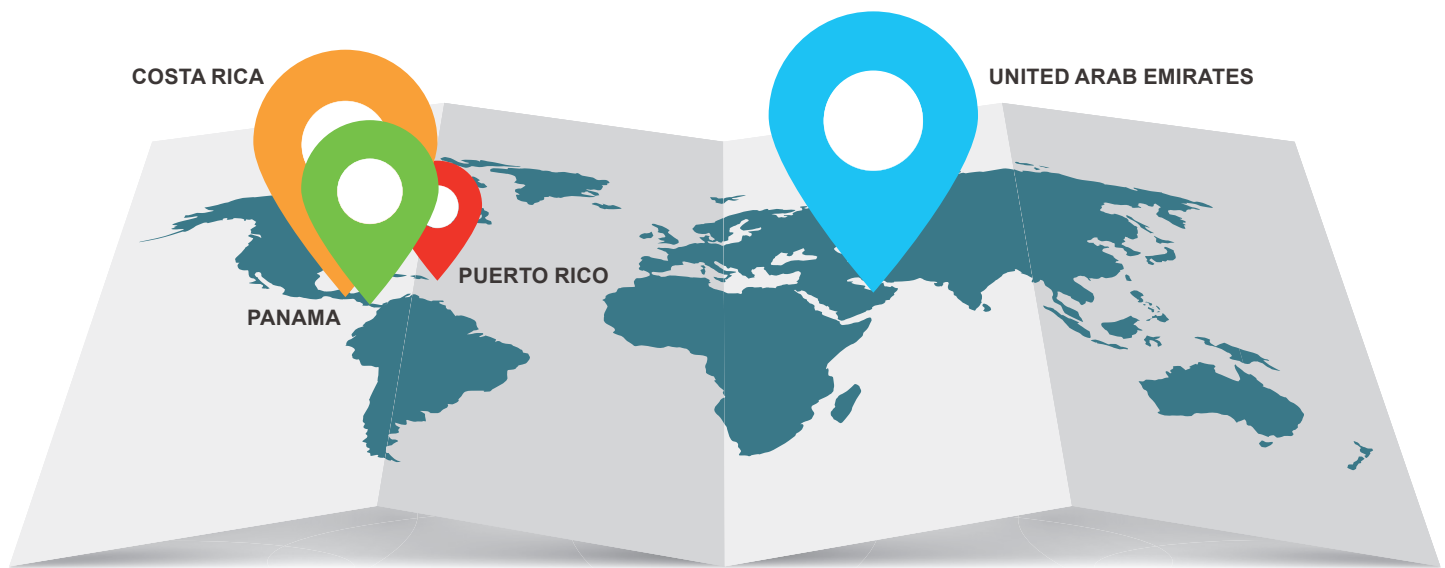
For more than 45 years, the Child Development Associate® (CDA) credential™ has been an important professional qualification for over 400,000 early childhood educators throughout the U.S. Now, earning the CDA® credential also represents high standards for early childhood educator training and professional development in the United States and in a small, but growing number of other countries.

The Council for Professional Recognition (the Council), which administers the CDA®, has responded to increased demand by creating partnerships with national and international early education organizations and government agencies. Through these partnerships, the Council works collaboratively to extend its CDA® training and competency-based standards to early childhood education programs in other nations.

In recent years, education officials in Latin America and the Middle East have approached the Council to find out more about the CDA® after learning that the credential is required for many early educators working in U.S. Department of Defense child care programs. “For them that was enough because the early childhood military programs have a great reputation as being among the best,” says Vilma Williams, senior manager for Multilingual and Special Programs at the Council.

This white paper describes the Council’s emerging role beyond the 50 states and the lessons being learned as we expand.

INTEREST IN THE CDA BEYOND THE 50 STATES



The CDA in Puerto Rico

“The CDA® credential is highly valued in Puerto Rico,” says Gloria de Llovio-Domínguez, executive director of the Governor’s Early Childhood Council in Puerto Rico. “It is equated with specialized knowledge and competent behavior in early childhood professionals.”

Evidence of the value communities and their elected officials place on the CDA® has become more visible in Puerto Rico following the 2016 passage of a law mandating all teachers in child care centers and preschools earn a CDA® credential. This mandate for a CDA® is part of the state certificate in early childhood education and also applies to teachers who already had a bachelor’s degree.

The Head Start programs in Puerto Rico have long required teachers to have a CDA®. Now, a variety of other training organizations are offering CDA® students the opportunity to meet Puerto Rico’s mandate and the need for high-quality training and demonstrable competencies that early childhood education professionals need. The government is “striving for a CDA® training program that is delivered in a more uniform way,” by ensuring that training providers meet proven high-quality standards, says de Llovio-Domínguez.

The CDA in Panama

The Council has signed an agreement with 123 EDU, an educational organization in Panama, to provide CDA® training. The partnership between the Council and 123 EDU created an opportunity to improve the skills and knowledge of early educators in this Central American country. It also is helping to develop additional partnerships with the private sector, government agencies, higher education institutions and local communities. In January 2017, the Council began conducting in-country training for Professional Development Specialists (PD Specialists). The Council expects to work with the Republic of Panama Ministry of Education by participating in the first Leaders Preparing Leaders international education conference to be held in Panama City in October 2017. Meanwhile, the Council has plans to conduct CDA® focused webinars tailored specifically to the needs of Panama's early childhood educators.

"The CDA® offers a number of hands-on tools to staff who are working in early childhood education," says Berta Mariñas De Janón de García, the director of professional development at 123 EDU. "The CDA provides application strategies that go from theory to practice."

The Council is already well on the way toward achieving the goal of having at least 25 CDA® credential holders in Panama before the end of 2017. Additionally, the Council will also support 123 EDU in partnering with at least one local university and local child care centers to recruit CDA® candidates.

"We expect from the relationship with the Council to have the support of a structure that allows us to stay at the forefront of the changes in early childhood education," Mariñas De Janón de García says.

The CDA in Costa Rica

In Costa Rica, the Council is working with Fundación DEHVI, a nonprofit based in San Jose, to begin promoting the CDA® credential as an option for students. A cohort of early childhood educators began CDA® classes earlier this year (2017). Fundación DEHVI is working to persuade the country's National Institute of Vocational Training to endorse the CDA®.

The CDA in the United Arab Emirates

"We strongly believe that a CDA® certification is for everyone, regardless of your qualifications," says Samia Kazi, the general manager of Arabian Child, a nonprofit early childhood organization. "The CDA® ensures that you meet international best practices and are providing young children with what they need at this vulnerable age."

In partnership with Arabian Child, the Council introduced the CDA® to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) on a pilot basis in 2012. Government officials were so impressed with the results that they approved the CDA® as an acceptable credential for lead teachers in nurseries for young children up to age 4 and in school-based programs serving 3- to 5-year-olds, according to Kazi.

Some government programs in the UAE have included the CDA® in their human resource policies covering the hiring of early childhood teachers. For example, since 2013 the Ministry of Social Affairs, which oversees nurseries, has indicated that the CDA® is one of the required credentials for teachers and teaching assistants.

“We now have candidates from the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain and we are looking to grow into other neighboring countries,” says Kazi.

The growing diversity of the population in the Middle East, she adds, means that more teachers who were trained elsewhere are getting jobs in the UAE. Because government leaders believe the CDA® represents a high standard of quality, they want early childhood educators in a variety of settings to have the CDA® credential. Another advantage of the CDA® is that it is “curriculum neutral,” Kazi notes, meaning that it applies to in-classroom settings using a variety of instructional approaches.

LESSONS LEARNED FROM INTERNATIONAL CDA OUTREACH

Many of the lessons learned in the 45 years of offering CDA® in the United States have proven useful as the credentials expand in international contexts. CDA® credential content and processes have always emphasized:

1. Linguistic and cultural adaptations
2. Policy and community support; and
3. Building local expertise

Linguistic and Cultural Adaptations

It’s important to note that educational organizations in other countries adhere to the same rigorous requirements any CDA® candidate needs to obtain a CDA® credential. This includes: 120 hours of early childhood education training and 480 hours of documented work in a specific early childhood education setting.

The Council’s five decades of experience helps us understand the need for high-quality standards and competencies of the CDA® anywhere the CDA® credential is offered. It also means the Council understands the need for culturally sensitivity and, at times, flexibility based on local customs. For

example, the Council has made some adaptations to localized training materials to meet the needs of educators and early childhood systems in other countries and cultures. This is always done without compromising the CDA® Competency Standards, the CDA® assessment, or credentialing system. Credentialing is managed in ways that respect the candidate's culturally appropriate practices. This means that how teachers demonstrate that they meet the Council's CDA® standards can vary to fit cultural differences.

"We really need to be very sensitive to their needs and to their government systems," says Abena Ocran-Jackson, senior manager of Credentialing and Program Services for the Council. She adds that teachers need to "be able to translate their practice based on their own cultural practices."

In the U.S., for example, teachers are often trained how to instruct children to carefully approach a dog they might want to pet. This is a common experience for most young children growing up in the U.S. But keeping dogs as pets may not be part of the culture in some areas in the Middle East, so in understanding and respecting cultural differences, even within the same region, the Council adapted the text to describe a scenario in which a child might want to pet any regionally popular animal, such as a goat.

Camille Bryan, senior manager of Program Services at the Council, explains the international attraction of the CDA® Credential: "The beautiful thing about the CDA® is that the basic early education teaching principles are universally transferable and they are competency-based. This is why the CDA® has gained so much interest from other countries, because it is a system that is very adaptable and lends itself well to culturally diverse environments that embrace differences."

Singing by teachers is also not a uniform practice in early childhood programs in the Middle East, particularly in the UAE. While songs in U.S. preschool classrooms are often a way in which teachers build literacy skills or celebrate holidays or special occasions. The Council understands and respects teachers being encouraged to use other practices such as rhyming or chanting.

Policy and Community Support

The Council typically works with nongovernmental and governmental groups as a result of their invitation and interest in the CDA® credential and associated training. In our experience, the invitation to offer CDA® credentials outside of the 50 states stems from each country's intentions to make the CDA® credential a requirement for early childhood educators working in those countries.

This allows Council staff to provide the technical assistance needed by these groups to establish CDA® credentialing programs that also builds policy and community support. Our work in the UAE and in Panama illustrate this important collaborative approach:

When Vilma Williams, senior manager, Multilingual and Special Programs, visited Panama to introduce the CDA during April 2017, she met with the Panamanian Director of Early Childhood at the Ministry of Education and four other organizations: Panama Ministry of Social Development, the Inter-American Development Bank, the World Organization for Early Childhood Education, and local colleges and universities, that want to bring uniform and high-quality early education instruction to young children.

Williams also traveled to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to conduct multiple CDA® and Professional Development Specialist training sessions. She met with Moza Al Shoomi from the Ministry of Social Affairs to discuss and share information about the CDA® credential and its importance in the professional development of early childhood educators in the UAE.

“As a result of this meeting with the Ministry of Social Affairs, Moza Al Shoomi expressed a desire to embed the CDA® credential in the national policy that regulates child care,” Williams said.

Building Local Expertise

It is the Council’s intention to use the CDA® credential as a means to support others as they build their own foundations and stepping stones for their local early childhood education workforce. We know local educators and officials have the best understanding of what their needs are and how to meet them. Two examples of our work to build local capacity are through the development of local Professional Development Specialist expertise and building on the strengths of local training or educational requirements.

In an international context, the CDA® credential may be earned at various stages of a candidate’s career. For instance, preschool teachers in the UAE already have college degrees, but lack the practical experience they need to handle day-to-day work in a classroom with young children. In this case, the CDA competencies serve as an important skill development component in their early childhood education.

“You get your degree, which is very good, but then you go work in a center and you don’t know how to change a diaper,” says Williams, giving just one example of how an educator with a bachelor’s degree might not have sufficient preparation to attend to the needs of young children. When an early educator prepares for the CDA® it’s clear they have made the choice to work with young children and have already had supervised experiences in a range of classroom environments to meet the CDA® requirement of 480 hours of experience in the setting where they will work.

Fatema Abdul Latif Al-Thaw Adi worked as a kindergarten teacher in the UAE for five years before accepting a position as a child-care supervisor at the Kid's Palace Nursery in 2012. She says the credential has been a valuable complement to a college education for her and her colleagues.

“College prepared us with all the theories in the field of education and with knowledge related to teaching young children and being a teacher,” she says. “However, the CDA® guided us as practitioners to reach the international standards in the field.”

Al-Thaw Adi adds that becoming knowledgeable about the CDA® standards gave her a new perspective on best practices and competencies. The training improved the way she and her teachers work in partnership with parents and has guided them in increasing the safety of the center environment.

“Moreover, it is proof that I am able to work as an early childhood professional, not only in UAE but also overseas,” she says. “It was a challenge that I am glad I experienced.”

In some cases, early educators that have earned a CDA® are now supervising and mentoring other early childhood professionals who already have a college degree. “If it was up to us, every early educator would have the CDA® credential—no matter where in the world they are,” says Ocran-Jackson.

The Council collaborates with its international partners in the selection, training and monitoring of CDA Professional Development Specialists™ prior to approval.

PD Specialists are trained by Council staff to fulfill all the responsibilities of conducting the Verification Visit of CDA® candidates, which includes:

- Reviewing the candidate's documentation
- Observing the candidate's work with children and families
- Conducting a dialogue with the candidate to facilitate the candidate's reflection about their work and thoughts towards setting future goals.

“The PD Specialist network follows the same guidelines as the CDA® when it comes to candidates being assessed on their ability to demonstrate an understanding of the CDA® Competency Standards and Functional areas. It uses the same localization tweaks based on cultural differences when it comes to individual countries,” Camille Bryan, who manages the PD Specialist program at the Council and who recruited PD Specialists in the United Arab Emirates explained.

Bryan added “Recruiting PD Specialists in the UAE was a great success. The early childhood educator there were all very interested, enthusiastic and eager to be a part of the process through their work with Arabian Child.”

CONCLUSION

The Child Development Associate® Credential is proving to be valued, useful, and adaptable in international contexts as we see through our emerging work in Panama, United Arab Emirates, and Costa Rica.

The Council believes the growing interest in the CDA® outside of the U.S. will continue to expand. In addition, through partnerships with a variety of international education programs, training organizations and government agencies, the CDA® signifies an international standard for the high-quality early childhood educational training needed for educators working with young children, their families and local communities and cultures.



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