OR THE 1.8 MILLION MEMBERS OF THE US EARLY
care and education workforce, the realities of
teaching are paradoxical. On one hand, research
clearly indicates that a well-trained and educated
workforce is essential in helping young children
achieve their full potential. Government entities across the
federal, state, and local levels are spending billions of dollars
annually to enhance early care and education programs. On
the other hand, many early education staff have relatively
low levels of education and income. For example, 20 percent
of all preschool teachers have a high school education or
less, as do nearly 50 percent of all child care classroom staff.
Average yearly income ranges from $11,500 for an in-home
early child care provider to $18,000 for a preschool teacher
(GAO 2012).

There is a clear disconnect between the importance US
society places on quality early childhood education and the
salaries early childhood staff earn. We must continue to
work diligently to advance the professional development
and compensation levels of the early childhood workforce
and professional recognition for the field.

Any effort to advance the early care and education field
must address these realities by supporting the professional
development of the people who are part of it. Many mem-
bers of the early childhood workforce who seek to improve
their education are not traditional young adult college stu-
dents. How can we best serve these individuals and advance
recognition of the field?

The best first step
Since 1975, the early care and education field has relied on
the Child Development Associate (CDA) Credential to form
the foundation for professional development. The CDA
Credential represents expert consensus about what early
childhood educators should know and be able to do. For
this reason, it plays a significant role across the spectrum
of early childhood education settings in the United States,
from employer-sponsored child care to federal government-
based entities such as Head Start and military child care
programs, state-level quality rating and improvement
systems, and a wide range of community-based services for
young children and their families. Given its national stature,
the CDA Credential is portable across states and school dis-
tricts nationwide. It is competency based, multilingual, and
adaptable to any setting where young children are enrolled.
And it has stood the test of time—more than 305,000 people
have earned the CDA Credential.

The CDA Credential is a pathway to learning best teaching
practices for many people:
- The assistant teacher with a dozen years of practice but
  without much formal education
- The teacher who already holds an academic degree but
  needs to gain hands-on practical skill and competency
- The high school student interested in a career with young
  children

A distinguish feature
of the credential
is its comprehensive,
competency-based
focus. Since its
inception, the
CDA Credential has included multiple sources of evidence:
120 hours of formal training, 480 hours of work experience,
a professional portfolio, family questionnaires, an on-site
observation, and a computer-based exam. Consistent
with NAEYC Professional Preparation Standards (Lutton
2011), the CDA Competency Standards transform discrete
learning experiences into an integrated body of knowledge,
dispositions, and skills. The CDA Credential represents an organized process, a coherent sequence of learning experiences aligned with defined learning outcomes, and a system of assessments that ensure that Candidates master defined learning outcomes and can demonstrate them in practice.

**What is CDA 2.0?**
Given its strong value and recognition in the early childhood landscape, it was with enormous care, research, and field engagement that the Council for Professional Recognition set out to transform the CDA credentialing process into an even more powerful professional development experience. Following several years of study, the Council launched CDA 2.0 in June 2013. CDA 2.0 updates the CDA knowledge base while preserving familiar, time-tested elements such as the portfolio, parent engagement, and the exam. CDA 2.0 also adds new elements, such as Candidate reflection and the creation of a nationwide network of Professional Development Specialists (PD Specialists) who bring mentoring and coaching skills and the early childhood education expertise needed to assess a Candidate's competencies and facilitate the Candidate's self-reflection during the Verification Visit.

**CDA 2.0 embraces technology, making it easy for Candidates to apply online and take control of their credentialing process.**

CDA 2.0 embraces technology, making it easy for Candidates to apply online and take control of their credentialing process. Candidates select a PD Specialist from the online directory, and they schedule the electronic CDA exam at a convenient time and location, using widely located Pearson VUE testing services. Because Pearson VUE delivers exam scores and the PD Specialist's Verification Visit scores electronically to the Council, credentialing decisions now take days rather than months.

Indeed, CDA 2.0 is a stronger and more streamlined professional development experience than ever.

**Candidates' experiences**
With the new Child Development Associate Credentialing System, everything a Candidate needs to prepare for a CDA is included on perforated pages in the new competency standards books, including the observation tool, the family questionnaire master, and the full paper application. Following extensive field testing of the new CDA 2.0 credentialing system and the awarding of the new credential to CDA Candidates, it is clear from their feedback that Candidates value the new CDA 2.0 experience. They appreciate its ease of use and say that it enhances their feelings of being professional:

The new CDA 2.0 credentialing system was absolutely great! It was very user friendly. I like how [the CDA exam] allowed me to flag answers and later review them—I could go back and change my answers. I loved the option of checking to see if I left any incomplete questions at the end.

— CDA 2.0 Candidate Completing the CDA Exam at a Pearson VUE Testing Center
I would recommend the online renewal process to everyone. It is easy to navigate and guides you each step of the way. I liked being able to send messages and get a prompt response. Being a teacher in the classroom, I find it hard to take care of things during the day. The online process allowed me to complete my renewal application easily and quickly.

—CDA 2.0 Candidate Renewing the CDA Credential Online

The CDA Professional Development Specialist experience
In just a few months, more than 2,300 senior early educators responded to our invitation to become PD Specialists. Prospective specialists can take the self-paced online training and complete it in about four hours. The multimedia training gives them all the information they need to conduct the new CDA Verification Visit using the ROR Model—Review the Candidate’s professional portfolio; Observe the Candidate working with children, and hold a Reflective dialogue with the Candidate.

I enjoyed the [CDA Professional Development Training for PD Specialists] modules. The videos were very helpful because I could actually view people interacting in a setting. The questions that were asked helped me determine what I need to reflect on, review, and rehearse before I complete my first Verification Visit as a Professional Development Specialist. Thank you for bringing the process into the electronic age and implementing changes that benefit younger Candidates and those of us in rural settings.

—CDA Professional Development Specialist

The partnership experience
Partnerships with a wide variety of employers, colleges, and training organizations is a cornerstone of Council operations—and a key to how the Council strives to support individual early educators while advancing the field. Through these partnerships the Council creates seamless, responsive, and customized experiences for Candidates and supports fieldwide systems development. All partners have an assigned Council staff member who reviews course syllabi to ensure that they align with standards, build articulation pathways, and align with state quality rating and improvement systems. One partner explains,

After many years of diligent work preparing participants for their CDA, [my state organization] has entered into a formal partnership with the Council for Professional Recognition. This was sparked by the revolution of the CDA process that promises to be more efficient and effective and will allow [us] to con-

inue to offer quality CDA preparation to Tennessee’s early childhood workforce.

—Katari Coleman, Program Director, Tennessee Early Childhood Training Alliance, Tennessee State University

Steps forward
Earning a CDA Credential is a big commitment for Candidates and an achievement they feel very proud of. The Council actively encourages holders of a CDA Credential to continue their education (a requirement for renewal) and to earn additional credentials and degrees.

Acquiring my CDA back in 1992 gave me the confidence to do more—which is so important early in a career.

—Calvin E. Moore Jr., Deputy Director, Office of Child Care, US Department of Health and Human Services

The field of early care and education is in the midst of a historical shift and a defining moment with respect to the assessment of child outcomes, program impact, and fiscal accountability. We know that early care and education programs are only as effective as their staff. Therefore, moving forward will not be easy, in no small measure because of the paradox affecting our workforce.

The Child Development Associate credential, established in 1975, is the most widely recognized credential in the early care and education field. Through the CDA Credential, the Council impacts the professional development of more early care and education professionals than any other single institution. By focusing on the dedicated individuals driving early childhood education, the CDA Credential is an essential element of any strategy to advance the field.

References


Get Involved—Find Out More
To find out more about how the CDA 2.0 supports professional development for infant, toddler, preschool, and family child care professionals and home visitor programs, visit the Council for Professional Recognition website at www.cdacouncil.org. Keep up with all the news from the Council by subscribing to CouncilLINK, the monthly newsletter.