Parents and education professionals in the United States widely acknowledge how important it is for young children ages birth to five years old to have highly qualified teachers. To make these quality early learning environments a reality, U.S. states and territories are taking multiple routes to strengthen the skills and competencies of the early childhood workforce.

The path to achieving a universal standard of training for the early childhood workforce is a difficult, yet not impossible task. Nevertheless, today there is a significant gap between the vision of a highly
competent and diverse workforce, as articulated by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine,\(^1\) and the realities of workforce preparation in many states.

To help close the gap between vision and reality, in 2017, the Council for Professional Recognition (the Council) began a multi-year, strategic initiative that focuses on collaborating with nine states and the U.S. territory of Puerto Rico at the state and territory levels which includes outreach to early-childhood agencies, higher education teacher training organizations, policymakers, and high school career and technical education (CTE) programs.

This white paper introduces how nine of the fifty states and Puerto Rico are currently working towards achieving their early childhood education and training goals using a variety of strategies, including Child Development Associate\(^\circledR\) (CDA) expansion. The nine states are Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Colorado, Minnesota, Nevada, New Jersey, Ohio, and Utah. The U.S. territory of Puerto Rico is also included.

During this three year program, the Council will collect data, monitor education policies and form relationships through research and engagement that include the follow areas of interest:

1. State licensing requirements, funding resources, QRIS requirements, CDA articulation in community colleges and other relevant information.
2. New formal partnerships with higher education organizations.
3. Establishing relationships in the following communities: migrant populations, Native Americans, Spanish speaking populations, and the indigenous peoples of Alaska.

**A PROVEN PATHWAY**

The CDA is a time-tested and evidence-based methodology for closing the gap between the vision for the early childhood workforce and its current realities. For example, the Council just completed a not-yet published survey of ten years of CDA credential holders (2006-2016)\(^ii\) in partnership with the University of Virginia’s Center for Survey Research.

Preliminary findings show almost 70 percent of those who earned their CDA have since that time continued with further higher education.\(^ii\) Eleven percent of the respondents who were lead teachers became center directors, and 26 percent of those who were assistant teachers moved into lead teacher positions; showing that earning the credential also helps early educators advance in their careers.

**GETTING STARTED BY INCREASING AWARENESS OF CDA OPPORTUNITIES**

Although the CDA has a deep and wide footprint across the United States,\(^iii\) there are still many individuals and programs unaware of it. One challenge that is not unique to Alabama, however, is that
many center directors or owners are unaware of the CDA or may not know where their teachers can find training, says Kay Jennings, the executive director of the Talladega Clay Randolph (TCR) Child Care Corporation in Alabama, which operates Head Start, Early Head Start, pre-K, child care and the Parents as Teachers home visiting program throughout six rural counties in the eastern part of the state. She adds that some directors, especially in rural areas, might also think they can’t afford to pay for someone with more training, which raises the persistent dilemma that even though state and community leaders say they value high-quality early learning, the resources needed to attract higher-qualified teachers and compensate them for acquiring more education are often inadequate. In Alabama, for example, early childhood education teachers earn an average of less than $11 per hour.

To move forward in Alabama, the state Department of Early Childhood Education plans to expand its First Class Pre-K program by 122 classrooms during fall of 2017, increasing the total number of 4-year-olds served to more than 900. Because the state requires assistant teachers in those classrooms to have a CDA, the demand for training that leads to the credential is likely to increase, both in the state-funded programs as well as at private centers.

“Considering the department’s progressive plan for preschool expansion, Alabama is embarking on a monumental effort to lift up the quality of its early educator workforce’s educational qualifications,” says Katorra Enoch-Longshore, a manager in Strategic Alliances at the Council.

Alaska, another one of the nine states targeted in the initiative, will be interesting to watch in the coming months as the state’s Child Care Program Office holds informational meetings across the state. The feedback gathered in these sessions could potentially impact regulations for early educators in the future. Thread, Alaska’s child-care resource and referral network, is also working to increase awareness of the CDA, especially through the System for Early Education Development, the state’s professional development system, which provides financial assistance to providers working toward their credential. This model is worth noting because it removes one of the barriers that entry-level early childhood teachers often face when they want to advance in the field, but might not have the financial resources to afford college.

“The CDA improves the workforce by preparing early educators to work effectively with young children and their families with confidence,” says Mildred Parker, a professional development specialist with Thread, which offers both face-to-face and virtual training.

**CREATING HIGHER EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES AT MULTIPLE LEVELS**

Community colleges and four-year institutions are also critical partners in the effort to improve families’ access to high-quality early childhood education programs. As states raise the level of qualifications for early educators, these policy changes also impact postsecondary institutions as they anticipate
increased demand for training. In Ohio, for example, Charvella L. McKaye, who teaches in Columbus State Community College’s Early Childhood Development and Education program, is monitoring implementation of the state’s Step Up to Quality (SUTQ) tiered rating system. By 2020, SUTQ will require providers to hire more qualified teachers, and all programs that receive funding from the state are required to participate in the rating system.

“The need is great for teachers to receive their CDA, especially in Ohio because of the SUTQ initiative,” McKaye says. This year, the college is increasing the number of students going through its CDA program from 42 to 72 because of a grant-funded partnership with the City of Columbus. The students will go through the program as part of a cohort, which helps them provide support to each other as they train and practice what they are learning. While Columbus State faculty members teach the program, two of the three cohorts will actually receive their training in the community, which is more convenient for providers, especially if they are working or have families.

McKaye adds that more teachers and assistants without credentials, family child-care providers, and even child-care centers need to be aware of the CDA and “its potential for a variety of career opportunities.”

EXPANDING EARLY CHILDHOOD PROFESSIONAL PREPARATION TO HIGH SCHOOL ECE STUDENTS

While some states, such as Alabama, are increasing the demand for highly qualified early educators by expanding state-funded pre-K programs, other states are looking at broader issues that affect those currently in the early childhood education field, as well as those who might consider it as a future career path.

In Colorado, early education leaders are thinking about the importance of the early childhood education workforce as
part of a comprehensive learning continuum, as well as how early learning professionals can advance in their careers.

Through a public-private partnership, the state recently completed its Early Childhood Workforce Plan 2020, which focuses on preparing, supporting, compensating and retaining early educators.

“I would like to see a streamlined system of how to enter the early childhood workforce that is not burdensome while promoting stackable credentials or coursework that will propel the workforce to higher pay, a sense of belonging and professionalism as part of a comprehensive P-20 system,” says Heather Craiglow, the director of the Colorado Department of Human Services’ Head Start Collaboration Office. “I would like to see the early childhood workforce seen as professionals that have specialized training to support the growth and development of not only children but the family.”

High school CDA programs—often delivered as part of Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs—are a key strategy for reaching those goals, and with CTE programs, internships and other real-world learning opportunities for students getting more attention in recent years, now is an opportune time for more states and school districts to expand access to CDA training as part of high school CTE programs.

In Utah, for example, the entire early childhood CTE pathway designated by the Utah State Board of Education, supports the CDA, explains Mary Matthews, part of the family and consumer sciences faculty at Lone Peak High School in Highland, UT.

Instructional time in the classroom counts as professional development toward the required 120 hours of coursework and time spent working in a preschool or child-care classroom counts toward the 480 hours of training for CDA candidates.

“I think the CDA is a great opportunity for students to start their career path. Whether they continue in early childhood education or not, there are professional traits learned as they work to complete a portfolio and track their training and work hours,” Matthews says. “In addition, to have a professional certificate at the completion of high school is an amazing accomplishment and one that can bless students financially.”

**PRELIMINARY FINDINGS**

The state strategy is a three year initiation. First year results from January–September 2017 include:

- 3,066 initial CDAs awarded
- 3,234 CDA Professional Development Specialists (individuals who conduct Verification Visits as part of the CDA process) added
- 13 new strategic partnerships with educational organizations
• 348 high school CDAs awarded for 2017 – a 128.9% growth from 2016
• 6 new higher education partnerships

THE FUTURE OF THE STRATEGIC INITIATIVE

While the Council is focusing on high impact in these specific nine states and territory, we continue to work with all states and U.S. territories. Please contact us if we can be of assistance to your state or community at partnerships@cdacouncil.org.


ii. Council for Professional Recognition Survey produced in conjunction with the University of Virginia was conducted in second quart of 2017. Results are expected to be published in a December 2017.

iii. In 2017, the Council for Professional Recognition is expected to issue 20,000 first-time CDA’s, and more than 20,000 renewal CDA’s in the United States.

iv. 3rd Quarter Dashboard Report from the Council for Professional Recognition.