



# Why CDA?



## *CDA is the Best 1st Step!*

*“The CDA™ represents 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.”*

**Valora Washington, PhD**  
CEO  
Council for Professional Recognition



- **An assistant teacher** with experience, but little formal education
- **A family child care provider** who must improve the quality of his/her setting to meet licensing requirements
- **A high school student** interested in pursuing a career in working with young children

The CDA helps early educators meet current state and national professional requirements. CDA recipients are competent practitioners who value vital knowledge and skills **and** formal education. It has stood the test of time, with more than 350,000 CDAs awarded since the early 70s, and 20,000 new CDAs and 18,000 renewals in 2013 alone.

But there's more.

1. **The CDA** online process is streamlined, with credentialing decisions taking days rather than months.
2. **The CDA** is portable, recognized in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, U.S. territories, community colleges, school districts and the military.
3. **The CDA** is the only national multilingual credentialing system that assesses educators in the language of their daily work.

## Why CDA?

The Child Development Associate™ (CDA) National Credential represents the crossroad where education and experience meet. This crossroad epitomizes competence and is a pathway to learning best teaching practices for many early educators, including:

- **A lead teacher** who already holds an academic degree, but needs to gain hands-on practical skill and competency in early care and education

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## Why CDA? Why Now? — A Focus on Competency

### *A white paper*

**T**he early care and education field, which is comprised of 1.8 million educators, is in the midst of a major historical shift from a relatively low public profile to one that demands increased accountability and high quality results for young children. Early childhood programs that ensure young children's early academic success have progressively become the focus of federal, state and local policy discussions.

In this respect, there have been many efforts over the past few decades focused on increasing the competency of early educators. There is more than enough evidence that well-trained, responsive and effective teachers are essential to a high-quality early care and education program. However, much of the policy response has been to focus heavily on increased academic training. We argue that academic training is necessary but insufficient to advance teacher competence. Teacher competence requires the crossroad of both knowledge and experience.

This paper aims to bring attention to teacher competence as an essential element to support the early care and education workforce and advance professional development for the field.

## Focus on Competence

**S**ince 1975, the early care and education field has relied on the CDA as the foundation of professional development. The CDA represents expert consensus about competence, i.e., what early educators should know and be able to do. The CDA 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, such as Head Start and military child care programs. The CDA is also included in many state-level QRIS systems and a wide range of local community-based services for young children and their families.

Given its national presence, the CDA credential is portable across states and school districts nationwide. It is competency-based, multilingual and adaptable to any setting where programs for young children are offered. The CDA has stood the test of time—more than 350,000 early educators have earned the CDA credential, with 20,000 new CDAs and 18,000 renewal CDAs awarded in 2013 alone.

## Why CDA?

**W**hat makes the CDA credential so effective in enhancing educator competence? For one, the CDA credential contains many of the components of an early educator's competency that both research and subject matter expert consensus have demonstrated are important. Competency must include **both** a strong knowledge base (**education**) and demonstrated practice (**experience**). The CDA has accomplished this in several ways. Listed below are six elements tied to educator competency that make the CDA credential an effective measure of teacher practice:

1. The CDA™ encompasses multiple sources of evidence, such as 120 hours of professional education in early childhood development, 480 hours of work experience, a Professional Portfolio that demonstrates an understanding of competence, feedback from families, an observation that demonstrates effective practice, and content knowledge via the CDA exam. In many states, a high school diploma is the only requirement that an early educator needs to

be hired, while other states have established CDA-related certificate programs that are often described as equivalent but still do not offer a comprehensive professional development system, such as the CDA.<sup>i</sup>

2. The CDA credentialing assessment represents an organized process, a coherent sequence of learning experiences aligned with defined learning outcomes, and a comprehensive system of assessment that ensures that candidates master defined learning outcomes and—most importantly — can demonstrate them in practice.
3. The CDA includes a direct observation by a Council Professional Development Specialist of the CDA candidate in their work setting as a lead teacher. A 2013 study suggested that states might consider indicators, such as observation-based scores of teacher interactions that are more closely related to student academic outcomes.<sup>ii</sup>
4. The CDA credentialing assessment can be conducted in any language that supports the language that a teacher’s daily work requires. When program settings and teachers acknowledge and support children’s home language and culture, ties between the family and school are strengthened.<sup>iii</sup> Moreover, the CDA embeds knowledge and skill required for working with diverse children and families. Conversely, a majority of teachers in a study conducted by Ray and Bowman (2003) felt they had learned to work with culturally diverse children and families from other teachers or on their own rather than through their teacher training experience.<sup>iv</sup>
5. The CDA values parent involvement that encourages family members to provide feedback on a CDA Candidate’s strengths and areas for professional development. When teachers and families work together,

a child’s development and learning are fully supported. Substantial research has found significantly positive correlations between parent involvement and young children’s cognitive development, approaches to learning, language and vocabulary acquisition and pre-literacy skills.<sup>v</sup> While on the other end of the spectrum, a 2009 survey of university faculty members shows that their students’ field experiences were inadequate; offering few or no opportunities to work with families.<sup>vi</sup> This is a critical element of being a CDA.

6. The CDA credential is a pathway to learning best teaching practices for many early educators, such as:
  - o A lead teacher who already holds an academic degree, but needs to gain hands-on practical skill and competency in early care and education
  - o An assistant teacher with experience, but little formal education
  - o A family child care provider who must improve the quality of his/her setting to meet licensing requirements
  - o A high school student interested in pursuing a career in working with young children<sup>vii</sup>

## Why Now?

**T**he Council for Professional Recognition recognizes the value of having an effective early childhood workforce that possesses the competence to serve young children and families. Specialized early childhood teacher preparation processes, like the CDA credentialing assessment system, are essential to both supporting the professionals who work in the field, as well as advancing the professional development

components for the field. The confidence that the CDA offers an early educator is extremely important to their career pathway.

After all, the reality is that a great many early educators are adult learners to whom the field must be responsive. Therefore, the CDA is essential to any states' career lattice or QRIS system.

The CDA credential reflects the foundational level of knowledge acquired to work with young children. It helps early educators meet current state and national professional requirements, and recognizes them as competent practitioners who value the importance of acquiring both current knowledge and skills to work with young children **and** families.

We know there are performance and credibility gaps in the early care and education field<sup>viii</sup> and must insist on strong field-wide leadership to support pathways that align with degree programs. More professional mentoring and coaching have been proven to compliment the necessary ingredients for developing effective early care practitioners.<sup>ix</sup> With approaches to professional development that include knowledge and experience, such as the CDA, it is more likely that educator competence and effective teaching practices will advance the field of early care and education by supporting the nearly 2 million professionals who care for young children every day.

<sup>i</sup> Examples include:

**New Hampshire Early Childhood Credential:** <http://www.dhhs.nh.gov/dcyf/cdb/documents/earlychildhood.pdf>

**New Mexico Child Development Certificate:** [http://www.cnm.edu/programs-of-study/communication-humanities-and-social-sciences/educ/brochure/Child\\_Development\\_Certificate.pdf](http://www.cnm.edu/programs-of-study/communication-humanities-and-social-sciences/educ/brochure/Child_Development_Certificate.pdf)

**Wisconsin ECE Initial Certificate:** [http://www.del.wa.gov/publications/PD/docs/Stackable\\_Certificates.pdf](http://www.del.wa.gov/publications/PD/docs/Stackable_Certificates.pdf)

<sup>ii</sup> Guernsey, et. al., p. 14 Note: The *New America* report cited: Sabol, T.J., Soliday Hong, S.L., Pianta R.C., Burchinell, M.R., 2013, *Can Rating Pre-K Programs Predict Children's Learning?* Science, pp. 845-846, <http://www.sciencemag.org/content/341/6148/845.summary?sid=0dd10888-95c2-4763-9f73-eb-9157ccd884>

<sup>iii</sup> National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1995. Position Statement. Responding to linguistic and culturally diversity: Recommendations for effective early childhood education. [www.naeyc.org/about/positions/pdf/PSDIV98.pdf](http://www.naeyc.org/about/positions/pdf/PSDIV98.pdf)

<sup>iv</sup> Ray, A. & Bowman, B. 2003. *Learning multicultural competence: Developing early childhood practitioners' effectiveness in working with children from culturally diverse communities*. Final report to the A.L. Mailman Family Foundation Initiative on Race, Class and Culture in Early Childhood, Chicago.

<sup>v</sup> Fantuzzo, J., Tighe, E., & Childs, S. (2000). Family Involvement Questionnaire: A multivariate assessment of family participation in early childhood education. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 92(2), 367–370

<sup>vi</sup> Hyson, M., Tomlinson, H.B., Morris C.A.S. 2009 *Quality Improvement in Early Childhood Teacher Education: Faculty Perspectives and Recommendations for the Future*. Early Childhood and Parenting (ECAP) Collaborative. Champaign, Ill. Retrieved from <http://ecrp.uiuc.edu/v11n1/hyson.html>.

<sup>vii</sup> Washington, V., p. 68

<sup>viii</sup> Goffin, S., Washington, V., 2007. *Ready or Not: Leadership Choices in Early Care and Education*. Teachers College Press. New York.

<sup>ix</sup> Whitebook, M., Kipnis, F., Sakai, L., Almarez, M., 2011. *Learning together: A study of six B.A. completion cohort programs in early care and education: year 3*. Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California at Berkeley, Berkeley, Calif. pp. 5-6

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