



# Credit for Prior Learning Policy for the CDA<sup>®</sup> Credential

Awarded by the Council for Professional Recognition, the **Child Development Associate<sup>®</sup> (CDA) Credential<sup>™</sup>** is a *nationally recognized* credential in early childhood education that demonstrates an early educator's competence in working with young children.

The Credit for Prior Learning (CPL) policy provides guidelines to support the awarding of college credit to students who have earned the Child Development Associate (CDA) Credential. The goal is to help CDA<sup>®</sup> holders aspiring to continue their education earn academic credit for their knowledge and skills, making it easier to complete an early childhood degree.

We encourage credit for prior learning coordinators and student success teams to help students understand their CPL options and guide them through the process. The Council commits to supporting the work of higher education institutions, in this effort.

## Policy and Procedures

### ELIGIBILITY

The Council's CPL policy recommendations apply to learners who have earned the Child Development Associate<sup>®</sup> (CDA) Credential<sup>™</sup>. CDAs have met the following requirements:

- 120 hours of education in 8 CDA<sup>®</sup> Subject Areas
- 480 hours of work experience with young children
- Prepared the *CDA<sup>®</sup> Professional Portfolio*
- Completed a proctored CDA<sup>®</sup> exam

As a result of earning the CDA credential, current and prospective college students are considered in good academic standing with the Council.

### ACADEMIC CREDIT

The number of academic credits a student may earn by holding a CDA<sup>®</sup> varies by institution and state. The Council recommends instructional policy to recognize the CDA as credit for prior learning, ensuring it is treated consistently with ECE credit-bearing coursework and applicable degree programs.

The **8 CDA<sup>®</sup> Subject Areas** represent the body of knowledge (theory) CDA candidates are required to learn and apply in their daily work (practice). Candidates must complete 120 clock hours of formal early childhood education students covering the growth and development of young children in the age group for which they are applying for the credential, with no fewer than 10 training hours in each of the eight CDA subject areas.

## THE 8 CDA<sup>®</sup> SUBJECT AREAS

1. Planning a safe and healthy learning environment
2. Advancing children’s physical and intellectual development
3. Supporting children’s social and emotional development
4. Building productive relationships with families
5. Managing an effective program operation
6. Maintaining a commitment to professionalism
7. Observing and recording children’s behavior
8. Understanding the principles of child development and learning

The Council recommends institutions review their ECE curriculum and determine which courses align with the CDA<sup>®</sup> *Competency Standards* and 8 CDA<sup>®</sup> Subject Areas. See the [Relationship Between the CDA<sup>®</sup> Competency Standards and 8 CDA<sup>®</sup> Subject Areas](#) resource for additional information. In addition, the 480 hours of direct work experience with young children aligns with college level practicum, field experience, and student teaching. As a result, colleges should consider giving credit for 120 hours of education and 480 hours of work experience.

## APPLICATION

This section describes how credits awarded by earning the CDA<sup>®</sup> can be applied to course requirements.

Typically, credit is awarded for some or all of the following coursework: introduction to early childhood education, health, safety, and nutrition, methods courses, practicum experiences, or child development.

To recognize the breadth of education, work experience, assessment and evaluation CDAs have completed to earn the national credential, the Council recommends CPL be applied to required/credit-bearing courses, instead of electives/non-credit courses. Below is a snapshot of the way credit may be awarded for the CDA:

IHE Course Equivalency	Credit Hours	CDA Subject Areas
<b>Introduction to Education/Foundations for Early Education</b>	1 Semester/15 Clock Hours	Understanding principles of child development and learning
	<i>or</i>	Observing and recording children's behavior
<b>Child/Human Growth &amp; Development</b>	1 Semester/15 Clock Hours	Advancing children's physical and intellectual development
	<i>or</i>	Supporting children's social and emotional development
	1 Quarter/10 Clock Hours	Understanding principles of child development and learning
	<i>or</i>	Observing and recording children's behavior
	1 Continuing Education Unit (CEU)/10 Clock Hours	

<p><b>Health, Safety &amp; Nutrition/Wellness for Young Children</b></p>	<p>1 Semester/15 Clock Hours <i>or</i> 1 Quarter/10 Clock Hours <i>or</i> 1 Continuing Education Unit (CEU)/10 Clock Hours</p>	<p>Planning a safe and healthy learning environment  Managing an effective program operation  Observing and recording children's behavior</p>
<p><b>Practicum/Student Teaching</b>  <i>Counts toward 480 hours of Direct Work Experience with Young Children</i></p>	<p>1 Semester/15 Clock Hours <i>or</i> 1 Quarter/10 Clock Hours <i>or</i> 1 Continuing Education Unit (CEU)/10 Clock Hours</p>	<p>Building productive relationships with families  Managing an effective program operation  Maintaining a commitment to professionalism  Observing and recording children's behavior</p>

**VALIDATION METHODS**

Institutions may request learners to submit documentation of prior learning, including training certificates, a copy of the Council’s award credential, and prior transcripts. National standards guiding CPL require at least one form of evidence of assessment, such as content exams, workforce or military experience, portfolios, or institutionally prepared assessments or interviews. The CDA ensures credential holders exceed these standards, with evidence secured through an examination, observational visit, portfolio, and interview.

**FEES**

Fees for the CDA are separate from those the institution may charge. Institutions may charge specific fees related to the processes of application, advising, evaluation of transcripts and credentials, or other applicable documents and processing fees. Institutions should follow CAEL standards when setting and communicating about these fees.

**TRANSFERABILITY**

The CDA is a portable and transferable early childhood education (ECE) credential because of its:

- **National Recognition** – The CDA credential is issued by the Council for Professional Recognition, making it valid across all 50 U.S. states and U.S. territories.
- **Applicable Across Various Early Childhood Education Settings** – The CDA is accepted across diverse ECE environments, including center-based programs for infants/toddlers, and preschools, family child care homes, Head Start programs, and US military programs.
- **Portability Across States** – Since the CDA Credential is not state-specific, professionals with a CDA can relocate to different states and continue to meet the qualification requirements for teaching positions in the early childhood field.

- **Alignment with Federal and State Standards** – Many state policies and systems recognize the CDA as a foundational qualification for ECE professionals, ensuring transferability between employment opportunities.
- **Career Advancement and Further Education** – The CDA serves as the best first step for early childhood professionals and provides an accessible pathway toward associate and bachelor’s degrees.

Because of these factors, the CDA is a highly valuable credential for early childhood professionals seeking career flexibility and national recognition.

### **STUDENT PARTICIPATION SUPPORT**

The Council recommends institutions designate a consortium of faculty or staff well-trained on assessing the CDA as CPL to provide consistent guidance to students on the requirements. Students should be able to participate in workshops, credit courses, or tutorials to support their CPL application.

### **ACCOMMODATIONS**

This institution providing the CPL will provide ADA accommodations for students. In addition, the CDA is awarded to candidates in languages other than English, representing the language in which they work in an early childhood setting with children.

### **FACULTY & STAFF SUPPORT**

The Council recommends institutions offer written policies and procedures with ongoing professional development for faculty and staff providing credit for prior learning services. Institution staff should work with state system leaders and CDA education providers to ensure embedded coursework and articulation credits are granted according to industry standards and evaluation of the skills, competencies, learning outcomes, and assessments of coursework.

### **TRACKING**

The Council recommends each institution plans for tracking student participation in credit for prior learning assessment, credit awarded, continuation in the degree program, and fees assessed.

The Council may request institutions prepare an annual report reflecting the level of student participation in each form of credit for prior learning assessment and the resulting credit awards in each category for CDAs.

### **REVIEW**

The Council recommends a CPL review process for CDAs to be conducted annually, at a minimum, to ensure it aligns with up-to-date best practices and becomes a fixed event on the institutional planning calendar.

### **Effective Date:**

[Date of policy approval]