

## Early Childhood Access Consortium for Equity (ECACE)

### Recommendations for Consideration: Credit for the CDA

#### 1.25.22

##### Recommendation Area:

Assigning Higher Education Credit for the Child Development Associate® (CDA), fundamental principles, and timelines.

The CDA for Credit working group recommends the Consortium endorse the following fundamental principles (page 2) for awarding higher education credit for the national Child Development Associate (CDA) credential and the following dates for the working group to suggest best practice models and for which Consortium institutions to operationalize the recommendations.

##### Background

[Public Act 102-0174](#), Section 20 (b) (10) states: *By January 31, 2022, the Consortium shall decide how to assign college credit for the incumbent workers who have a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential and for future workers obtaining a CDA.*

Since December 20, 2022, an ad hoc working group has been meeting to develop recommendations for consideration by the Consortium.

##### *Information about the CDA*

The [CDA](#) is a nationally recognized credential that acknowledges competencies acquired by the early childhood workforce in understanding ways to advance children's health, physical, intellectual, and social emotional development; building relationships with parents; being a professional; and observing and recording children's learning. The credential requires 120 clock hours of training and 480 hours of professional work experience. Competency in required areas is assessed through:

- Submission of a professional portfolio
- Observation by and reflective session with a child development specialist, and
- A standardized assessment.

The CDA was established in the early 1970s by early childhood leaders in the field, such as Ed Zigler and Marilyn Smith to meet the increasing demand for early educators with a foundational level of competency. The credential has been adapted over time and is reviewed regularly to ensure its validity and reliability. Historically, many community colleges across the country have developed pathways for students to build upon the credential towards degrees.

##### Rationale for the Recommendations

Providing meaningful pathways into higher education in a way that recognizes prior learning and student competencies will benefit both students and higher education programs. Evidence from a [2020 study](#) published by the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education and the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning shows that adult student of all races, ethnicities, and income levels who received credit for prior learning were more likely to complete college credentials than adult students who did not.

The working group recognized that as the workforce shortage has been exacerbated in Illinois; anecdotally, we are hearing that more employers/providers and staff have turned to the CDA to provide a timely and affordable pathway to a foundational level of competence. In Illinois, CDA holders can serve as lead teachers in a licensed center and can be left alone with young children. As of January, 2022 the Council for Professional Recognition, the organization that awards the CDA, reported that there are currently 5004 people in Illinois with a CDA.

The working group recognized the value of awarding credit for the CDA, in a meaningful way, to:

- Serve as a steppingstone towards career advancement and a higher education pathway towards additional credentials and degrees,
- Build students' confidence in their ability to be successful in higher education,
- Increase students' interest and likelihood to enroll, persist, and complete additional credentials and degrees, as supported by research.

Many individual institutions and other state higher education systems have developed seamless pathways for those who earn the CDA credential to receive credit towards higher level credentials and degrees.<sup>1</sup> The working group will continue to explore some of these models in more detail over the next few months.

### Recommendations

The working group recommends that the Consortium endorse the following fundamental principles for any program that awards credit for the CDA in Illinois and further recommends the following dates for developing best practice models and operationalizing these requirements in Consortium institutions.

#### *Recommendation 1: Fundamental Principles*

The CDA for Credit Working group recommends the following fundamental principles should be adhered to by all Consortium member institutions.

- **Meaningful Credit for the CDA:** Programs must provide a clear pathway from the CDA to higher level credentials and degrees, and credit awarded must count towards the next credential and degree, in a way that shortens the pathway to graduation
- **Recognizing Acquired Competencies:** Programs must recognize the knowledge, skills, and abilities that ~~they~~ ~~that~~ the workforce has and for which they have been assessed, and, to the degree possible, students should not have to “re-prove” themselves through additional coursework and assessments **for the competencies assessed through the CDA.**
- **Transfer of Credit:** Students must be able to transfer CDA credit to both 2- and 4-year Consortium member institutions and have this credit count towards credentials and degrees.

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<sup>1</sup> While the full breadth of IHEs and states providing pathways and credit for a CDA is not known, we know that the following states have done work in this area, and we have or are planning to speak with them. States: Oklahoma, Michigan, Massachusetts, Colorado, Maryland.

- **Transparency:** How and what credit is awarded must be transparent to current and potential students and employers.
- **Standard Number/Range of Credits:** All institutions should award a standard number or range of credits for the CDA. (The number of credits will be determined over the coming months and informed by practices of other states.)
- **Timely and Affordable:** Awarding credit to those who already hold the CDA when they come to a higher education institution must be timely and affordable and must not cost the same (time or money) as taking a class.

Additionally, the working group recognized the value of the following for students and higher education programs. However, at this time, the working group believed that these pathways should be optional and recommended further work to understand how other states and institutions have implemented these principles.

- **CDA on the Way:** Students should be able to earn college credit while they work towards the CDA. Early Childhood coursework and the embedded CDA competencies could be sequenced so that students can attend higher education programs and, early in the program, meet the educational requirements and have the required competencies to be awarded the CDA. In addition, programs could embed activities needed to complete the portfolio within these courses
- **Embedding CDA within High School Dual Credit Programs:** Programs might consider working with area high schools to establish dual credit programs that embed CDA competencies within the work. Students would be able to then meet the education requirements for the CDA prior to high school. Upon earning the requisite professional experience and other assessments, they could be awarded the CDA. Aligned competencies toward the Level 2 Credential could also be partially met, putting them on a pathway to higher credentials and degrees.

#### *Recommendation 2: Best Practice Models*

The CDA for Credit working group recommends that the group continue to meet over the next few months to study other state and institutional models for awarding credit for the CDA. The working group will then provide recommendations for best practice models and ways to operational CDA for credit in Illinois by May 31, 2022.

#### *Recommendation 3: Operationalize Credit for CDA*

The working group recommends that all ECACE member institutions must have in place a mechanism to award credit for the CDA that is built upon the fundamental principles no later than January 31, 2023.

#### **Working Group Members**

The following members participated in one or more of the working group meetings to date. The working group included members from Illinois colleges and universities, providers/employers, representatives from Regional Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies, and advocates.

Christi Chadwick, IBHE (convener)

Marcus Brown, ICCB (convener)

Ashley Nazarak, Carole Robertson Center for Learning  
Brenda Smith, Skip-A-Long Child Development Services (Provider)  
Carolyn Beal, Southwestern Illinois Community College  
Ireta Gasner, Start Early  
Jason Dockter, Lincoln Land Community College  
Jean Zaar, College of DuPage  
Johnna Darragh Ernst, Heartland Community College  
Joi Patterson, Governor's State University  
Kate Connor, Truman College  
Kelsey Swanson, Child Care Resource & Referral of Midwestern Illinois  
Linda O'Connell-Knuth, Waubensee Community College  
Lindsay Meeker, Western Illinois University  
Marcy Mendenhall, SAL Family & Community Services  
Melissa Bachelor, Lewis and Clark Community College  
Melissa Johnson, Highland Community College  
Melissa Szymczak, Joliet Junior College  
Nichole Miller and Kelsey Ward, Children's Home and Aid  
Rebecca Swartz, Southern Illinois University, Edwardsville