



CDA for Credit Working Group Meeting Early Childhood Access Consortium for Equity January 4, 2021 Minutes

A meeting of the Early Childhood Access Consortium for Equity CDA for Credit Working Group was called to order at 2:30 pm via telephone and video conference as permitted by Public Act 101-0640.

Participating in the meeting were: Christi Chadwick, Illinois Board of Higher Education; Marcus Brown Illinois Community College Board; Amanda Gnad, Consultant, IAA; Sue Maes, Consultant, IAA; Melissa Batchelor, Lewis & Clark Community College; Carolyn Beal, Southwestern Illinois Community College; Kate Connor, Truman College; Johnna Darragh Ernst, Heartland Community College; Jason Dockter, Lincoln Land Community College; Heidi Elliott, Children's Home & Aid; Ireta Gasner, Start Early; Melissa Johnson, Highland Community College; Lindsay Meeker, Western Illinois University; Marcy Mendenhall, SAL Family and Community Services; Nichole Miller, Children's Home & Aid; Ashley Nazarak, Carole Robertson Center for Learning; Joi Patterson, Governors State University; Brenda Smith, SAL Family and Community Services; Kelsey Swanson, Child Care Resource & Referral of Midwestern Illinois; Rebecca Swartz, Southern Illinois University Edwardsville; Melissa Szymczak, Joliet Junior College; and Jean Zaar, College of DuPage.

ECACE Project Director Christi Chadwick welcomed everyone and informed attendees how to submit public comment. A quick round of introductions followed.

Chadwick presented the charge and purpose of the consortium and working group and highlighted language from the [establishing legislation](#) that, by January 31, 2022, the Consortium shall decide how to assign college credit for the incumbent workers who have a Child Development Associate (CDA) and for future workers obtaining a CDA." The Consortium will also develop "standardized methods for awarding credit for prior learning". She then identified the end-users mentioned in legislation – the workforce; employers; children, families and community; and the State and discussed how the legislation addresses each of these stakeholder groups.

Chadwick briefly provided more information on what a CDA is – a nationally recognized credential based on standard core competencies and training requirements – and its history. The CDA was created in the early 70s through an effort of Ed Zigler and other early childhood leaders. The CDA was initially administered by multiple organizations and then NAEYC, until NAEYC established the Council For Professional Recognition. She shared what was agreed on in the prior meeting – that some elements are necessary, some elements are optional, and some elements are unneeded.

Patterson asked what percentage of early childhood educators have a CDA. Chadwick said she would have to check with Gateways but that, anecdotally and based on the increasing number of programs, the number seems to be growing. Mendenhall noted that the CDA was originally created in response to a workforce shortage in the early 1970s, which mirrors today's urgent shortage. Patterson asked if someone with a CDA would also have Gateway credentials. Mendenhall and Connor answered that they could but the two are not equivalent. Regarding workforce and teacher need, Connor emphasized that the benefit of the CDA is the credential's speed.



Chadwick, after a question from Patterson, briefly outlined the ways an employee could advance through the early childhood profession, including CDA. Meeker noted that, in her experience in Illinois and elsewhere, roughly 50-60% of students who obtain a CDA go on to get an associate's degree or higher. The CDA helps the student feel successful and like they are not starting from zero, which can be invaluable. Patterson mentioned that her university has a prior learning assessment (PLA) process.

Meeker noted that the tier-based pay structure often found at childcare centers encourages further education and qualifications. Chadwick shared information about a pilot program working on increasing salaries for child care teachers.

Smith said that, for her clients, advancing through an associate's degree is often more expensive (with financial aid) than individual trainings that can also progress their career.

Batchelor noted that CDAs only last a couple years before they must be renewed. The goal should be taking that two year period to move the student to complete the degree.

Nazarak said that, from a provider perspective, the CDA is the first step in the upskill process. The Carole Robertson Center is working to continually progress their staff into a pathway that, eventually, leads to degree attainment. Chadwick asked why they opt for the CDA instead of encouraging staff to directly seek a degree. Nazarak answered that it is accessible to candidates, it better serves people with language barriers, and, as Connor noted, helps encourage candidates that success is possible. Mendenhall added that a "grow your own" program, where the employer helps their staff advance in the field, builds trust and security. It is a form of teambuilding and helps build momentum for people who may not have seen a degree as a possibility.

Chadwick then shifted to a [Jamboard](#) to explore what, in an ideal world, would be the outcome for students who earn CDA for credit? And for the workforce? The link to the Jamboard can be found here - [Jamboard](#). Results can be found at the end of this document or at the link.

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Anonymous Penguin joined



Johnson noted that her school and others are working on embedding CDA in their dual credit programs. She also mentioned that CDA must be renewed while credit does not.

Brown asked about the staffing timeline, specifically what it means to staff up quickly. Swanson explained that, hypothetically, someone could finish in three or four months. Miller recounted a client who had been in the field and had her certificate in two months. Nazarak agreed.

Patterson asked how four-year institutions could be more involved. Is there something the four-years need to do or is it a matter of better communication? Nazarak responded that the onus currently is on the candidate to maneuver the system and that each school is different with no consistent assessment. This creates a myriad of additional challenges and causes far too many candidates to fall out. Chadwick commented that, in Illinois and elsewhere, a consistent message from employers is that they would love to get their students in the degree pipeline, but that higher education doesn't move fast enough, it's not affordable, and there are structural barriers in place. She said the intention of the legislation was to help meet that need without forcing workers to start from scratch. Gasner agreed that the legislation seems to aim for standardizing the CDA process. Individual schools may do additional PLA work, but this consortium is working for a more systemic approach. Patterson this to the dual credit process.

Szymczak shared in her area, some employers and workers feel a CDA is "enough" and there is not motivation to advance to a degree unless they want to go into management. Some employers are also concerned that, if they accommodate workers getting progressively higher credentials and



degrees, the workers will leave them. Meeker agreed, noting that the pay scale is a related issue. Gasner pointed out that these issues are layered and interconnected.

Connor and Chadwick spoke about the gap between the higher education system and the actual workers. Mendenhall shared that her organization has navigators who help that process. She also emphasized the looming deadline for developing a system. Szymczak noted that the system will also need safeguards to ensure the person being awarded credit actually earned the credit.

There was no public comment.

Chadwick and Brown thanked everyone for participating and contributing to the discussion. The meeting closed at 4:03 pm.