

**Early Childhood Access Consortium for Equity (ECACE)
Recommendations for Consideration: Credit for the CDA**

Finalized May 31, 2022

Finalized 5.31.22, for Consideration During the June 14, 2022 ECACE Consortium Meeting

Recommendation Area:

Assigning Higher Education Credit for the Child Development Associate®

The CDA for Credit working group recommends the Consortium endorse the following recommendations for awarding higher education credit for the most widely recognized early childhood credential, the national Child Development Associate (CDA) credential, and the following dates for implementation of the recommendation for all Consortium institutions.

Summary of Recommendation:

Early Childhood Access Consortium for Equity (ECACE) member institutions should award six semester hours of college credit for holders of the Child Development Associate (CDA) credential aligned with Fundamental Principles adopted by the ECACE on January 21, 2022 and as outlined in the May 31, 2022 Recommended Framework for Assigning Higher Education Credit for the Child Development Associate. This recommendation acknowledges the competencies demonstrated by holders of the CDA through the CDA assessment coupled with training and experience and increases working adults' interest in and likelihood to enroll, persist, and complete additional credentials and degrees, as supported by research. This recommendation is in keeping with similar efforts at other institutions of higher education and higher education systems across the nation.

Background on the Recommendation:

[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. Members of the working group include representatives from consortium community colleges and universities, employers, advocates, and state agencies. A complete list of working group members is provided in Appendix A.

On January 21, 2022, the working group recommended:

1. **Fundamental principles for awarding credit for the CDA within consortium institutions.**
In brief, the Fundamental Principles include that credit must be meaningful and apply to a degree or credential, transparent, and offered in a timely and affordable way. The state should agree upon a standard number or range of credits and to the degree possible, students should not have to “reprove” themselves to receive the credit, as competencies have already been demonstrated.
2. **The working group provide recommendations for best practice models and ways to operationalize CDA for credit in Illinois by May 31, 2022.** During this time, the CDA for Credit working group will continue to meet to study other state and institutional models for awarding credit for the CDA.
3. **ECACE member institutions have in place a mechanism to award credit for the CDA that is built upon the fundamental principles no later than January 31, 2023.**

On January 25, 2022, the Consortium approved all three recommendations made by the CDA for Credit Working Group, including the Fundamental Principles for Awarding Higher Education Credit for the CDA (See Appendix B). Accordingly, the working group continued its efforts through May 2022.

About the Child Development Associate Credential:

The [CDA](#) is the most widely recognized credential in early childhood, a national credential that recognizes competencies demonstrated 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.

Over 800,000 CDAs have been awarded since its inception in 1976. 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 Recommendation:

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, earning the CDA allows workforce members to serve as lead teachers in a licensed center and be left alone with young children without supervision.

As of March 2022, there are currently 5,122 people in Illinois with a CDA. Please see below for the breakdown of those CDAs.

CDA Type	Specialty	Total Active
Preschool		1,936
Infant Toddler		2,394
Family Child Care		726
Home Visiting*		66
Total		5,122

*The working group did not contemplate credit for the home visiting CDA, as it was determined to be out of the purview of the working group and how the associated legislation defines incumbent early childhood workforce.

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

- Acknowledge the competencies demonstrated by CDA holders through the CDA assessment process,
- Serve as a steppingstone towards career advancement and a higher education pathway towards additional credentials and degrees for working adults,
- Build the confidence of working adults and individuals with some or no college experience in their ability to be successful in higher education, and
- Increase students' interest in and likelihood to enroll, persist, and complete additional credentials and degrees, as supported by research.

Activities of the Working Group:

From December 2022 through May 2022, the working group met ten times. In between meetings, members met with national organizations and colleges and universities in other states with experience providing higher education credit for the CDA. Those institutions and organizations are listed in Appendix C. The group also reviewed documents such as a cross-walk of the Gateways and CDA competencies and discussed possible models that members of the group were considering.

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, primarily but not exclusively, through state community colleges. Of those we spoke with, a few key themes emerged.

- **Number of Credits:** Generally, institutions who provide credit for already earned CDAs provide six semester hours of credit that apply to the AAS degree.
 - Of the institutions we spoke with, none provide less than six semester hours. Some provide nine, and one provided 18 semester hours (though believed this was too many).
 - In Oklahoma, all institutions received funding for state scholarships offer 6 credit hours for those with a CDA. In Nebraska, there is wide variation, but most offer 6 – 9 semester hours and some as little as 3. Nebraska is in the process of finalizing a statewide agreement to award 9 semester hours for three common courses designed to be used across all institutions. In Massachusetts, community colleges offer credit for the CDA and are provided state funding for scholarships and program support. Institutions are required to offer 9 semester hours (of their choice).
 - One of the working group members reached out to Rasmussen University, a private, for-profit institution with locations in Illinois, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Florida, Kansas, and North Dakota; she reported that the institution offers 12 *quarter hours* (or a little less than 9 semester hours) for the CDA.
- **Contingencies or Reassessment:** None of the institutions we spoke with required students to (re)demonstrate competencies or complete additional assessments.

- **Common Courses:** Institutions tended to award credit for two courses, “Introduction to Early Childhood” and “Health, Safety, and Nutrition.” Some also provided credit for methods courses, practicum experiences, or “Child Development.”

Recommendations:

The CDA for Credit Working Group recommends the following.

1. The Consortium approve the following framework for Consortium Institutions to provide credit for the CDA.
2. The Consortium endorse the following implementation models for providing credit.
3. The Illinois Community College Board review agency policies for prior learning assessment to ensure that any barriers to implementing the process are addressed.
4. The Illinois State Board of Education ensure a clear process for making programmatic changes related to acceptance of the CDA.

Recommendation 1: Recommended Framework for Assigning Higher Education Credit for the Child Development Associate

- a. **Six semester hours of ‘meaningful’ credit** will be awarded for those with an active Child Development Associate (CDA) upon enrollment into any two- or four- year Consortium institution, unless one of the exceptions listed below exist. Credit must apply to the early childhood credential or degree. Institutions are not expected to award separate credit for multiple CDAs.
- b. **The awarding of credit will not be contingent** upon the completion of other activities, coursework, or assessments. Institutions may award additional credit as deemed fit through an assessment of prior learning or other appropriate process.
- c. **Credit awarded must be an early childhood or related course** (e.g., child development, human development). This cannot be a general education course, unless the course is early childhood related (e.g., child development, human development).

It is recommended but not required that credit be given for required early courses that contain the Gateways competencies that align to those competencies assessed through the CDA, as the intention is to recognize competencies met and not require students to have to repeat coursework for competencies achieved.

- d. **Institutions will provide credit for the Preschool CDA at the earliest opportunity and no later than January 31, 2023 and the Infant Toddler CDA no later than January 31, 2024.**
 - a. It is recommended, but not required, that institutions provide credit for both the Preschool and Infant Toddler CDAs at the same time and no later than January 2023 for consistency and transparency for the early childhood field. The CDA competencies are the same across the Preschool, Infant Toddler, and Family Child Care Credentials; student demonstration of the competencies varies somewhat by the age and setting in which they work.

Awarding credit for the Family Child Care CDA is optional at this time. The Working Group did not contemplate awarding credit for the Home Visiting CDA credential.¹

e. **Institutions must document credit for the CDA clearly on students' transcripts.**

f. **Exceptions to awarding credit include the following:**

- Credit for the CDA has already been awarded at another institution or awarded for another CDA specialization (e.g., preschool, infant toddler, family child care). Institutions are not expected to award separate credit for multiple CDAs.
- The student has already completed an Associate of Applied Science degree in early childhood or a Gateways Level 2 or higher (though the 4-year would accept credit that had been awarded for CDA). If a student already has an Associate of Arts degree, the students' CDA will be considered on a case-by-case basis. Institutions would need to
- The student has already completed all courses that include the Gateways competencies that align to the CDA competencies.
- The CDA is expired, in which case, credit will be determined on a case-by-case basis by the individual enrolling institution.

None of these exceptions are meant to preclude the award of credit by individual institutions on a case-by-case basis in a way that aligns with the institution's policy for awarding CDA credit.

Recommendation 2: Implementation Models

Below are a few of the models that the group discussed during its work. Most of these models were used in other states and/or institutions. These models align to the fundamental principles and recommended framework for awarding higher education credit for the CDA. The working group considered the existing crosswalk of CDA competencies to Gateways competencies in awarding credit when considering possible models.

Curricular Design/Redesign: This option might include redesigning the curriculum to align six semester hours to the CDA. These courses could be used for learners interested in earning a "CDA on the Way", while taking courses as well. These courses might include:

- Courses that include Gateways competencies at varied levels and include CDA competencies,
- Modularized courses that represent Gateways Level 2 competencies that are aligned to CDA competencies, and
- Elective early childhood courses covering Gateways Competencies aligned to the CDA.

Each of these options represents non-duplicative learning for students that contributes to the attainment of credentials and degrees and are reflective of CDA competencies.

Best Fit: Best fit alignment assumes an analysis of existing courses and the placement of Gateways aligned CDA competencies. These options might include:

¹ The legislation does not include Home Visitors in the definition of the incumbent workforce; therefore, the working group determined that consideration of the Home Visiting CDA was outside of their charge.

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- **Best Fit, 6 hours:** Providing 6 semester hours of credit for courses that represent the “best fit” for providing credit for the CDA (Health Safety and Nutrition, Introduction to Early Childhood, Practicum courses, Child Development, etc.). This option provides credit upon enrollment based on analyzed best fit.
- **Best Fit Plus Model:** This model would include providing six semester hours of credit upon enrollment in courses that provide the ‘best fit’ and are best aligned to the appropriate competencies. In addition, institutions could provide additional or specific alternative credit through an assessment of non-CDA-aligned competencies (e.g., for competencies in these courses that are not covered through the CDA). It is important to note, however, that students must be guaranteed six hours of credit, regardless of outcomes on any prior learning assessment. The prior learning assessment should be used as an opportunity to receive additional or alternative course credit (e.g., a core course instead of an elective).

Recommendation 3: The working group recommends that the Illinois Community College Board review agency policies for prior learning assessment to ensure that any barriers to implementing the recommended process for awarding credit for the CDA are addressed.

Recommendation 4: The working group recommends that Illinois State Board of Education ensure a clear process for making programmatic changes related to acceptance of the CDA.

Appendix A

Working Group Members

The following members participated in one or more of the working group meetings. The working group was convened by IBHE and ICCB and include members from Illinois colleges and universities, providers/employers, representatives from regional Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies, and early childhood advocates.

Christi Chadwick, IBHE (convener)
Marcus Brown, ICCB (convener)
Ashley Nazarak, Carole Robertson Center for Learning
Beth White, Illinois State University
Beth Smaka, Sauk Valley Community College
Brenda Smith, Skip-A-Long Child Development Services
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
Rachel Adeoudu, Northeastern Illinois University
Rebecca Swartz, Southern Illinois University Edwardsville
Ty Jiles, Chicago State University

Appendix B

Fundamental Principles for Awarding Credit for the CDA Within Consortium Institutions

Approved by ECACE, January 2022

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 or degrees, and credit awarded must count towards the next credential or degree, in a way that shortens the pathway to graduation
- **Recognizing Acquired Competencies:** Programs must recognize the knowledge, skills, and abilities 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.
- **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.
- **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.

Appendix C

National Context – States and Institutions Awarding Higher Education Credit for the CDA

Maryland

- MD Department of Education: Angeline Bishop, Branch Chief, Credentialing Branch; LaTanya Taylor, Credentialing Specialist
- [Montgomery College](#), Sonia Hernandez, Collegewide Senior Director/Chair, Early Childhood Education Programs at Montgomery College
 - 6 semester hours of credit: Introduction to Early Childhood Education and Child Health, Safety and Nutrition
- Anne Arundel Community College, Candace Place, Director TEACH Institute Special Projects
 - 6 semester hours of credit: Introduction to Early Childhood Education and Child Health, Safety and Nutrition

Massachusetts

- Strategies for Children, Amy O’Leary, Executive Director and Marisa Fear, Associate Director of Research and Policy
 - 9 semester hours for those receiving grants and scholarships from the State of Massachusetts.
- [North Shore Community College](#), MA; Kathy Gallo, Director, Education & Care Partnership Office
 - 9 semester hours: Child Growth and Development, Field Placement, Seminar 1

Nebraska

- [Nebraska Department of Education Office of Early Childhood](#), Julie Miller, Early Childhood Career Development Specialist; Jene Chapman, Program Specialist
 - Currently credit varies by institution, but NE is finalizing a plan to award 9 semester hours of credit for common courses across community colleges

Oklahoma

- Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education, Gina McPherson, Special Programs Manager
 - [6 semester hours of credit](#): Institutional choice

Pennsylvania

- [Pennsylvania Keys](#) (nonprofit arm of Office of CD and Early Learning), Dr. Marnie Aylesworth; Rebecca Lamar; Knouse, Elizabeth;
 - Credit varies by institution, from 3 to 12 hours, depending on the school and program. Probably most typically 6 hours. For example:
 - Bucks Community College: 6 credits, Foundations for Early Learning and Early Learning and Development 1

- Eastern Iowa Community Colleges (Clinton Community College, Scott Community College, Muscatine Community College), Heather Anderson, SCC, Early Childhood Education Department Coordinator
 - 18 semester hours of credit: Introduction to Early Childhood Education 3; Child Health, Safety and Nutrition* 3; Early Childhood Curriculum I & 2 6; Early Childhood Guidance
- Jefferson State Community College, Birmingham AL, Dr. Cindy Shackelford
 - 9 semester hours of credit: Introduction to Early Care and Education of Children 3; Materials and Methods for Teaching Children 3; Children's Health and Safety 3

National Organizations

Council for Professional Recognition: The Council is the organization that administers the CDA program and awards credentials. Over the course of the committee's work, we talked to the Council multiple times. The Council shared data, information, and materials.

National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC): NAEYC formerly administered the CDA and current accredits early childhood higher education programs. We spoke with them about accreditation issues related to awarding credit for a prior credential.