Child Development Associate Credential (CDA) or a CDA Equivalency?

Changing Qualifications for Early Childhood Professionals in Iowa

Children in Iowa deserve access to quality early care and education programs. Decades of research document the impact of high quality programs on children’s achievement. Children who attend high quality programs make significant gains in math and literacy skills and also have better social skills. Research demonstrates that child care providers, paraeducators, assistant teachers and teachers with specialized training in early childhood education provide higher quality experiences and programs for young children.

In Iowa, there are many initiatives that support increasing efforts in place to work towards improving the quality of programs for young children. Many of the quality efforts address the educational requirements of professionals who work with young children. This article will clarify some of the terminology and will provide answers to questions for you to consider when making your personal educational and career decisions.

What Is A Child Development Associate Credential (CDA)?

A Child Development Associate (CDA) is an individual who has successfully completed a CDA assessment and has been awarded the CDA Credential from the Council for Early Childhood Professional Recognition. S/he is able to meet the specific needs of children and works with parents and other adults to nurture children’s physical, social, emotional, and intellectual growth in a child development framework.

The Credential is awarded for three child care settings: 1) Center-based, for which Candidates receive endorsements to work with infants and toddlers or preschool children; 2) Family Child Care; and 3) Home Visitor.

A CDA Candidate must demonstrate competence in her/his ability to meet the CDA Competency Goals through her/his work in a center-based, home visitor or family child care program. The competency goals are:

1. To establish and maintain a safe, healthy learning environment
2. To advance physical and intellectual competence
3. To support social and emotional development and to provide positive guidance
4. To establish positive and productive relationships with families
5. To ensure a well-run purposeful program responsive to participant needs
6. To maintain a commitment to professionalism

Candidates must have complete 120 hours of formal child care education within the past five years with a minimum of ten hours of content in each of the following eight content areas:

1. Plan a safe, healthy environment to invite learning
2. Steps to advance children’s physical and intellectual development
3. Positive ways to support children’s social and emotional development
4. Strategies to establish productive relationships with families
5. Strategies to manage an effective program operation
6. Maintaining a commitment to professionalism
7. Observing and recording children’s behavior
8. Principles of child development and learning

The education hours must be completed under the auspices of an agency or organization with expertise in early childhood teacher preparation. This education can be for college credit or for no credit.

In addition candidates must have at least 480 hours experience with children in a group setting in the last five years.
To complete the CDA the candidate presents evidence about his or her work in relation to the CDA Competency Standards. The evidence is collected from several sources for center-based and family child care:

- A written examination
- An oral interview
- An observation while working with children
- Questionnaires submitted by parents,
- A Candidate’s file of professional resources and competency statements.

To read more about the CDA visit the website for the Council for Early Childhood Professional Recognition at [http://www.cdacouncil.org/](http://www.cdacouncil.org/)

**What is the Equivalent to the CDA?**

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) considers a minimum of 12 credits of coursework in child development, early childhood education, or early childhood special education as the equivalent of a CDA.

(For more information see: [http://www.naeyc.org/academy/pursuing/edquals/candidacy](http://www.naeyc.org/academy/pursuing/edquals/candidacy))

**I need to be a highly qualified assistant teacher for my job. Will the CDA equivalency or the CDA credential make me highly qualified?**

Yes. There are options in addition to the CDA equivalency or CDA Credential. See the Qualifications for Preschool Assistant Options chart on the Iowa Department of Education web site at [http://www.educateiowa.gov/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=940&Itemid=1279](http://www.educateiowa.gov/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=940&Itemid=1279)

*It is critical for you to understand the requirements of your employer to ensure that you are meeting employment expectations.*

**CDA Course work at Kirkwood Community College**

Kirkwood Community College does not offer the CDA on campus. However, the following courses meet the competency training requirements for the CDA. Each course is 3 credits; completing four of the following courses would be 12 hours of course work in early childhood education and would be the equivalent to the CDA credential.

- Introduction to Early Childhood Education) 3 credits
- Child Health Safety and Nutrition 3 credits
- Curriculum and Activities I, OR Infant/Toddler Care and Education (this depends on the CDA credential you are pursuing) 3 credits each
- Early Childhood Guidance 3 credits
- Early Childhood Development 3 credits (strongly encouraged as one of the CDA content areas in child development)

Other college coursework may be applicable towards the equivalency to a CDA. Individuals would need to document the course(s) they completed and determine which CDA competencies were addressed in the course. Contact Melanie Nollsch, Associate Professor, Early Childhood Education for information on early childhood degrees and CDA equivalency or CDA education for credit. See: [Contact Information](#)
How do I obtain my CDA once I have completed the college credit classes?

When an individual obtains 12 college credits in child development, early childhood education, or early childhood special education, the course work will be recognized by NAEYC as the equivalent to the CDA. The individual may decide this equivalency meets their career and professional needs.

Some individuals may decide to continue to pursue the CDA credential after completing the 12 credits of formal education. In this case, the CDA candidate would need to complete all components of the CDA application (See above: What is a CDA Credential?). The initial CDA credential is valid for three years at which time the candidate must renew the credential. Renewals after the first renewal period is every five years.

What is a Paraeducator?

Paraeducators are school or agency employees who assist teachers or other professionals by performing a variety of tasks that enhance instruction and learning. Kirkwood Community College offers courses that meet the voluntary Iowa Paraeducator Certification requirements. The courses meet the requirements mandated for the Generalist Certification and may be applied toward the requirements for the Areas of Concentration and Advanced Certifications.

The Level I Generalist requirements can be met by taking just two Kirkwood courses: Exploring Teaching, and Behavior Management. Both courses are offered every semester, so the requirements can be met in just one semester.

The Level II certifications, Areas of Concentration and Advanced are available by taking courses at Kirkwood Community College. Early Childhood is an area of Level II certification and can be completed by taking ECE 103 – Introduction to Early Childhood Education.

For more information about paraeducator certification for college credit see: Paraeducator Certification at: www.kirkwood.edu/paraeducator

Do Paraeducator Classes count toward my CDA or the CDA Equivalency?

The Introduction to Early Childhood Education course matches the CDA content areas. The alignment of Level I Generalist courses, Exploring Teaching, and Behavior Management are less specifically focused on early childhood and center more on K-12 general and special education. Individuals taking these courses would need to be sure to plan course projects/assignments so they can document the relationship to working with young children. The class instructor can provide guidance to ensure that the assignments meet student needs.

Can I earn a CDA without completing college credit?

Yes. Individuals who wish to earn a CDA credential without completing college credit would need to compile their training hours from approved, recognized training organizations such as Child Care Resource and Referral, Area Education Agencies or ISU Extension. The candidate would need to ensure a minimum of ten hours in each content area listed in the section: What is a CDA Credential? For assistance in pursuing a CDA through the non-college credit option contact Grant Wood AEA. See: Contact Information
How do I decide whether to pursue a CDA with college credit, the equivalency to a CDA (12 college credits) or a CDA without college credit?

This is a highly individualized decision but there are several issues to consider as you determine the best choice for you.

CDA or Equivalency (12 college credits):

As the education requirements in the field continue to change, the college credit option provides the greatest potential for career growth.

The classes listed under CDA coursework and What is a Paraeducator? are also part of degree programs. Often individuals decide to work towards a diploma (33 credits) or an associate degree (AA in Liberal Arts with interest area in ECE, AAS in Early Childhood Education or a 33 credit Diploma in ECE) after completing a course or two towards the CDA equivalency. Continuing your education provides additional career opportunities in the field. For more information about a diploma or degree in early childhood see http://www.kirkwood.edu/site/index.php?d=515.

College credits are yours forever and do not need to be renewed.

Kirkwood classes are offered in evenings and during the summer to meet the needs of employed students

T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood Iowa, www.iowaaeye.org, can pay for college credit courses and the books and materials required to achieve the 120 training hours and/or towards your degree in early childhood education.

College classes help individuals integrate theory and practice. You will become more effective in your work with children as you increase your understanding of how children learn and how to effectively apply that information.

CDA with 120 hours of non-credit training:

This may be an option to consider if you have a significant number of non-credit training that matches the CDA competency that have been complete in the last five years AND

You are comfortable with the need to renew your credential every 3 to 5 years.

What if I have some non-credit training but not in every content area or not totaling 120 hours?

Sometimes individuals need just a few more hours in specific content areas to complete their education hours for the CDA. The individual may look for additional non-credit classes in the needed content areas OR they may choose to take a college class or two to meet the additional hours. This CDA candidate would be submitting a CDA application that was a combination of non-credit and for credit education hours. If you need help determining which credit class to take to complete your 120 hours contact the coordinator of Early Childhood Education for assistance. (Tip: One 3 credit college class is 48 contact hours)
I want to take classes for credit but have not been a student for a long time. What support services are available at Kirkwood Community College?

**Tutoring**

The mission of Kirkwood’s Tutoring Services is to provide academic support to all students enrolled at Kirkwood Community College creating an open environment of learning for students.

Free Tutoring is Available: See Tutoring Services for more information at http://www.kirkwood.edu/tutoring

**Computer Labs**

The primary goals of the computer labs and classrooms is to provide assistance to students that will enhance their chances of succeeding in technology-based classroom assignments and to provide access to equipment that will support the needs of instruction where we celebrate life-long learning. See http://www.kirkwood.edu/computerlab for locations and hours.

**Writing Center**

Writing consultants work with you, asking questions and making comments, to show you how to improve your writing and help you learn to edit and proofread your work. Writing Center consultants are all English department faculty members, but we help students with assignments from all departments. See http://www.kirkwood.edu/site/index.php?p=17584 for more information.

**Learning Services**

Kirkwood Community College has established policies and procedures to implement provisions of the Americans with Disability Act (ADA). These policies and procedures are used to determine reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities to meet academic and technical standards required for their educational program. The Learning Services department offers support for students with disabilities. These services are available to qualified students at no cost. Using a case management team approach to assist students, Disability Services arranges reasonable accommodations for its clients. See http://www.kirkwood.edu/learningservices for more information

**What is it like to be an adult learner at Kirkwood?**

Adult students in the early childhood and paraeducator classes will find faculty who are both knowledgeable about the field and who also know about how adults learn. There will be many opportunities to network with others, build relationships, and apply your assignments and knowledge to your job.

Read more about learning as a non-traditional student at the Adult Learners web site at http://www.kirkwood.edu/adult
CONTACT INFORMATION

Kirkwood Community College Contact Information:

Individuals who are pursuing the CDA equivalency, credential or a degree in early childhood contact:

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Kirkwood Community College
Early Childhood Education,
6301 Kirkwood Blvd. SW
Cedar Rapids, Iowa
319- 398-1258 OR
1-800-332-2055 ext 1258
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Individuals who are interested Paraeducator Certification contact:
Doug Van Oort
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T.E.A.C.H. Iowa Contact Information
Individuals interested in T.E.A.C.H. scholarship information contact:
Barb Merrill
5525 Meredith Drive Suite F
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bmerrill@iowaaec.org Web site: www.iowaaec.org
T.E.A.C.H. applications and reimbursement forms are now available on our website