



CDA Process 2021-2022

<https://www.cdacouncil.org/en/faqs/>

Apply for CDA

Before you Apply

What is the Child Development Associate® (CDA) National Credentialing Program?

The CDA National Credentialing Program is a professional development opportunity for early educators working with children ages birth to 5 years old to demonstrate their knowledge, skills and abilities in the early childhood education field. The CDA credentialing program assesses Candidates using multiple sources evidence, including an exam, observation and professional portfolio with resources and competency statements prepared by the Candidate.

Why should I apply to earn a Child Development Associate® (CDA)?

The CDA Credential both initially and at renewal periods is a professional development opportunity for early educators at all levels of education and experience. The early childhood education field is constantly evolving and it is important for educators to stay current with key education practices. The CDA demonstrates your knowledge, skills and abilities when working with young children, as well as your commitment to career advancement and professionalism.

What is a center-based program?

A center-based program must have: (1) at least 10 children enrolled in the program (not necessarily in the Candidate's group), and (2) at least two caregivers working with the children on a regular basis.

How do I choose the correct CDA Credential Setting?

Please review the CDA Credential settings below to determine which best describes your work with young children:

- **PRESCHOOL:** A center-based preschool setting is a state-approved child development center where a Candidate can be observed working with a group of at least eight children, all of whom are ages 3 through 5 years old.
- **INFANT-TODDLER:** A center-based infant-toddler setting is a state-approved child development center where a Candidate can be observed working with a group of at least three children, all of whom are **under** the age of 3 years old.
- **FAMILY CHILD CARE:** A family child care setting is a family child care **home** where a Candidate can be observed working with at least two children 5 years old or younger who are not related to the Candidate by blood or marriage. The setting must meet at least the minimum level of applicable state and/or local regulations. Family child care settings are also eligible in localities where there is no regulation of family child care.
- **HOME VISITOR:** A home visitor setting is an established program of home visits (to families with children 5 years old or younger) that supports parents in meeting the needs of their young children. In this setting, regular home visits are the primary method of program delivery. Candidates for a Home Visitor credential follow a slightly different assessment process. For information on how to earn a Home Visitor CDA Credential, click [here](#).

How much will it cost?

To apply for your initial CDA Credential, the cost is \$425 for online applications and \$500 for paper applications. CDA candidates save \$75 by applying online!

To renew your CDA Credential, the cost is \$150 for paper applications. Candidates who apply online will receive a \$25.00 discount and the cost for renewal is \$125.00.

Payment for both initial and renewal CDA applications are due in full at the time of application.

What is the R.O.R. Model®?

“R.O.R.” stands for Review-Observe-Reflect®. These are the tasks undertaken by the CDA Professional Development Specialist. They contribute to the assessment of the Candidate’s competency.

During the Verification Visit, the Specialist:

- **Reviews** the contents of the Professional Portfolio, the training transcripts/certificates and Family Questionnaires
- **Observes** the Candidate working with children, recording criterion evidence where applicable, and
- **Reflects** with the Candidate, focusing on the Candidate’s areas of strength or growth found in the Portfolio and/or seen in the Observation or identified in the Family Questionnaires
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What is the Professional Portfolio?

The Professional Portfolio is compiled independently by each Candidate as part of the CDA credentialing process. The compiled resources and documents are reviewed by the CDA PD Specialist during the CDA Verification Visit. The Professional Portfolio is composed of:

- Education Documentation
- Family Questionnaires
- Six (6) Reflective Statements of Competence
- Ten (10) Resources
- A Professional Philosophy Statement

What are Family Questionnaires?

Family Questionnaires are a required component of the CDA Professional Portfolio. Candidates are required to distribute the questionnaires to the families they serve and include them in their CDA Professional Portfolio. The Family Questionnaires allow the Candidate to review and address feedback from the families they serve to aid in their professional development.

What is the PD Specialist's role in the CDA credentialing process?

The CDA PD Specialist conducts the CDA Verification Visit with the Candidate. During the CDA Verification Visit the CDA PD Specialist:

- Reviews the Candidate's Professional Portfolio
- Observes the Candidate working with children
- Facilitates a reflective dialogue with the Candidate.

At the end of the CDA Verification Visit, the CDA PD Specialist electronically submits the Candidate's scores to the Council.

What is the process to earn a CDA Credential?

For a detailed description of the CDA Credentialing process, please select the setting for which you be applying to earn your CDA Credential: [Center-Based Preschool](#), [Center-Based Infant-Toddler](#), [Family Child Care](#) and [Home Visitor](#).

What do I have to do to be eligible for a CDA Credential?

The eligibility requirements to apply for a CDA Credential are as follows:

- You must have a high school diploma **or** be a high school junior or senior in an early education/child development Career and Technical Program

- Any time before you apply: Complete 120 clock hours of professional education covering the eight CDA Subject Areas
- Within 3 years before you apply: Obtain 480 hours of experience working with young children
- Within 6 months before you apply: Prepare a CDA Professional Portfolio according to the requirements outlined in the CDA Competency Standards book

Are there scholarships available to assist Candidates with the assessment fee?

Yes, if you are income eligible, the state may pay for all or part of your training. The state may also cover the assessment fee. To determine if you are eligible, please contact your state office for detailed information about available funding.

Additionally, please visit our [CDA Scholarships](#) page for a list of organizations by state who provide financial assistance to individuals who wish to pursue a CDA Credential.

Where can I obtain training?

The Council for Professional Recognition does not provide training nor do we specifically endorse any training program or CDA curriculum. It is the Candidate's responsibility to evaluate and select a training organization, agency or institution to complete their training.

While formal education hours can be for credit or noncredit, they must be earned through an agency or organization with expertise in early childhood teacher preparation. **The Council does not accept training provided by individual consultants.**

Can high school and career and technical education program Candidates count their training hours as formal education?

Yes, these Candidates are eligible to apply for the CDA Credential.

What is considered formal education?

Formal education hours can be for credit or noncredit, however, they must be earned through an agency or organization with expertise in early childhood teacher preparation. The agency or organization must verify your education in the form of an official transcript, certificate, or letter. **The Council does not accept training provided by individual consultants.**

Are application and training materials available in Spanish?

Yes, please visit our [online bookstore](#) to view materials available in Spanish.

I speak two languages. Can I apply for a bilingual specialization?

Candidates who wish to obtain a bilingual specialization must work in a bilingual setting that requires the Candidate to speak both languages daily and consistently and have a working knowledge of two languages.

I have a disability and will need special accommodations to complete the CDA credentialing program. How do I request special accommodations?

It is the Council's commitment to provide a standardized and fair assessment for all eligible CDA Candidates. Prior to submitting the CDA Application, a CDA Candidate with a documented disability should submit the [Special Accommodations Request Form](#) to the Council.

Applying for your CDA Credential

What type of training do I need to apply for the CDA Credential?

Candidates must complete 120 hours of formal early childhood education training, covering the growth and development of children ages birth to 5 years, with no fewer than 10 training hours in each of the 8 CDA Subject Areas:

- Planning a safe and healthy learning environment
- Advancing children's physical and intellectual development
- Supporting children's social and emotional development
- Building productive relationships with families
- Managing an effective program operation
- Maintaining a commitment to professionalism
- Observing and recording children's behavior
- Understanding principles of child development and learning

While formal education hours can be for credit or noncredit, they must be earned through an agency or organization with expertise in early childhood teacher preparation. Training will not be accepted from independent consultants nor conference workshops for an initial CDA Credential application. The agency or organization must verify your education in the form of an official transcript, certificate, or letter.

How many hours of work experience are required to apply for the CDA Credential?

You are required to complete 480 hours of professional work experience with young children. Your work experience must be with children of the correct age according to the CDA setting for which you are applying.

Eligible professional work experience hours include:

Paid or volunteer hours and must be completed before you submit your CDA Initial Application.

Non-eligible work experience hours include:

Note: Babysitting, Before and After School Programs, Sunday school programs, and Drop in Programs are not eligible settings where a Candidate can prove his or her competence around the Competency Standards and experience hours in these settings should not be counted towards the 480 hours of experience.

What materials are available to help me through the process?

Candidates applying for an initial CDA Credential are required to purchase a CDA Competency Standards book in the setting of their work with children. The CDA Competency Standards books gives Candidates a detailed guide through the CDA credentialing process and requirements.

Also available is the Essentials for Working with Young Children textbook and Essentials Workbook. Together, these books assist the Candidate prepare the CDA Professional Portfolio, study for the CDA Exam and offer a number of resources the Candidate can use in the classroom.

Purchase all three and save, see [CDA Value Packages](#) in the Council Bookstore.

Who is PearsonVUE?

Pearson VUE is the Council's partner for delivering the CDA Exam at testing centers all over the country. The Council has partnered with Pearson VUE in order to create a more powerful professional development experience for CDA Candidates.

How do I find a PD Specialist?

In order to properly complete your application process, you will need to find a nearby PD Specialist to conduct your CDA Verification Visit. To assist you with this process, we have created the [Find-A-PD Specialist Online Directory](#).

How do I use the Find-A-PD Specialist Online Directory?

To use the Find-A-PD Specialist Online Directory, Candidate's enter their work zip code, their classroom setting and the language in which they teach into the database. The database will generate the names and descriptions of PD Specialists nearest to the Candidate. The Candidate then selects the nearest PD Specialist and sends a request to the PD Specialist to conduct their CDA Verification Visit. If the PD Specialist is available to complete the verification visit, they will respond to the Candidate with their PD Specialist ID number. The PD Specialist ID number is required to complete and submit the CDA application.

What is the PD Specialist ID Number?

CDA PD Specialists who successfully complete the CDA PD Specialist training receive an official Identification Number (ID #) from the Council. The CDA PD Specialist ID # is a required field on the CDA application.

The Candidate receives the CDA PD Specialist ID # once the CDA PD Specialist has agreed to conduct the CDA Verification Visit. Please note: CDA PD Specialist ID #s are not to be

shared between Candidates, the agreement to conduct the CDA Verification Visit is per Candidate, per visit.

What do I have to do to complete the CDA credentialing process?

To complete the CDA credentialing process you must:

- Meet all eligibility and training requirements.
- Purchase a CDA Competency Standards book in the setting of your work with children
- Complete the documentation collection: Professional Portfolio, Family Questionnaires.
- Submit a completed CDA application with full payment
- Take the CDA Exam at a local Pearson Vue test center
- Complete the CDA Verification Visit with the PD Specialist

How can I help to ensure my training will be accepted by the Council?

All training must have been taken under the auspices of an early childhood training agency that has expertise in teacher preparation. Official documentation of the training must be provided in the form of a certificate, letter on official letterhead or a college transcript.

Training documentation should include the following: Training agency's name and address (seal/logo), Candidate's name, date of the training session(s), content area, number of hours successfully completed, and an authorized signature.

How do I convert my clock hours into training hours?

Please use the following formulas to convert your clock hours to training hours:

1 CEU = 10 clock hours

1 Semester Credit = 15 clock hours

1 Quarter Credit = 10 clock hours

1 DHS Credit = 1 clock hour

1 Unit = 1 clock hour

To be eligible to apply for your first CDA, you need:

12 CEUs = 120 clock hours

8 Semester Credits = 120 clock hours

12 Quarter Credits = 120 clock hours

After you Apply

How to schedule the CDA Exam?

Before scheduling your CDA Exam, you must receive a “Ready to Schedule” notice from the Council. Once you have received this notice you are ready to schedule your CDA Exam. To schedule please visit the [Pearson VUE website](#) to find the testing center near you or call (866) 507-5627.

What can I expect on the CDA Exam?

The CDA Exam has 65 multiple-choice questions – 60 questions and 5 scenario questions (with a short narrative and photo). The Candidate will have up to one hour and 45 minutes to complete the exam. The only computer-based skill needed to take the Exam is the ability to point and click a mouse. The exam requires no scrolling, typing or even double-clicking. Click [here](#) to review a short exam tutorial and see how easy it will be to complete the CDA Exam at a testing center.

Need help studying? The [Essentials Study Guide Bundle](#) includes the Essentials for Working with Young Children textbook and the Essential Workbook, the textbook addresses every question on the exam and the workbook has sample test questions to further assist Candidates successfully study for the CDA Exam. Don't miss out on these great study guides available in the Council Bookstore.

How do I schedule the CDA Verification Visit?

Before scheduling the CDA Verification Visit with your CDA PD Specialist, you must receive a “Ready to Schedule” notice from the Council. Once you have received this notice you can contact your CDA PD Specialist to schedule the CDA Verification Visit.

What can I expect during the CDA Verification Visit?

During the CDA Verification Visit, the CDA PD Specialist will:

- **Review** the contents of your Professional Portfolio, training transcripts/certificates, and Family Questionnaires
- **Observe** you working with children
- **Reflect** with you, focusing on your areas of strength or growth found in the Portfolio or seen during the Observation

How can I change my PD Specialist?

If you applied online, **once you have located a new CDA PD Specialist**, please log into the YourCDA online application system to edit the CDA PD Specialist information.

If you applied by mail, **once you have located a new CDA PD Specialist**, please call the Customer Support Team with the new PD Specialist ID number to update your account.

If you need help locating a new CDA PD Specialist, please visit the [Find-a-PD Specialist Online Directory](#).

How long will it take for the Council to make a credentialing decision?

There is no set timeframe for the Council to make a credentialing decision, as there are a number of factors that may delay the process. Generally, once a Candidate has successfully completed the CDA Exam and Verification Visit, the scores are transmitted to the Council within 24-48 hours. If there are no errors nor missing information, the credentialing decision may take 1-3 business days.

If there is an error or information is missing, the review process to retrieve missing items and/or correct errors may take a minimum of 4-6 weeks for a credentialing decision to be made.

Will I be notified when it is time to renew my CDA Credential?

The Council will send a courtesy email reminder when it is time to renew your CDA credential. However, this email is a courtesy and is not guaranteed, nor should it be the sole reminder for renewing your CDA Credential. To help ensure you do not miss these courtesy reminders, please make sure the Council always has your current email on file.

Does the Verification Visit have to take place at the center where the Candidate works?

Yes, the observation must take place at the center or home where the Candidate works or volunteers with children. The Review and Reflection can take place in a quiet place outside of the classroom. The Candidate will need to prepare ahead of time to have another teacher cover their classroom during the Review and Reflection portion of the CDA Verification Visit. Please note: The CDA Verification Visit does not take place until the Candidate applies and receives a Ready to Schedule notice from the Council.

How are Candidates scored during the CDA Exam and Verification Visit?

Candidates do not receive a pass or fail score on the CDA Exam and Verification Visit. Rather, the Council comprehensively evaluates how Candidates score in each of the thirteen CDA Functional Areas on the CDA Exam and during the CDA Verification Visit to make a credentialing decision.

Can I get a refund on the CDA assessment fee?

The CDA Credential assessment fee is nonrefundable.

Credentialing Decision

How will I be notified about my credentialing decision?

You will be notified by mail of your credentialing decision.

What happens if my CDA Credential is denied?

If the Council determines that your cumulative score does not meet the credentialing requirement, you will be notified by mail with information regarding the decision and appeal procedures.

What happens if a Candidate does not score well on the CDA Exam?

The decision about whether to issue a CDA credential will be made after weighing all evidence of the Candidate's competence. The CDA Exam is only one part of the evidence. Other evidence of stronger skills may balance evidence of weaker skills and competence.

How will the final decision be determined?

After the Council receives the scores for both your CDA Exam and Verification Visit, the Council calculates a cumulative score to determine your final credentialing decision.