

A Credential or a Degree: Which is the Best Option For Me?

CREDENTIALS

Child Development Associate (CDA)

The Council for Professional Recognition awards the CDA to early care & education professionals who have demonstrated their skills and competency in working with young children and their families. This is an **entry-level** professional credential that recognizes community-based training and/or college credit and experience in early education. There are three areas of specialization in the CDA: 1. Center-based setting: infant/toddler or preschool, 2. Family child care setting, 3. Home visitor setting. For this credential, you must be 18 years or older and have a high school diploma or a GED equivalent, possess a minimum of 480 hours of work experience with young children, and 120 hours of formal training with at least 10 hours of training in eight specific areas. Coordinated by the Council for Professional Recognition, the CDA credential shows that you have reached a certain competency in working with young children. One of the benefits of the CDA is that it is recognized in many states and can be used as an entry-level credential. One drawback is that it must be renewed every three years. Many community colleges offer credit-based classes to help prepare for earning the CDA. Since these classes carry college credit that will count towards certificates and degrees in early care and education, they are recommended whenever possible. The CDA requires that you keep accurate records and make certain the formal training workshops you take will count towards the CDA. For more information on the CDA, contact: Council for Professional Recognition, 2460 16th, NW, Washington, DC 20009, (202) 265-9090 or www.cdacouncil.org.

Certified Child Care Professional (CCP)

The National Child Care association administers the Certified Child Care Professional Credential. This is also an **entry-level** professional credential that recognizes community-based training and/or college credit and experience in early education. For this credential, you must be 18 years or older and have a high school diploma or a GED equivalent, possess a minimum of 720 hours of work experience with young children, and 180 clock hours of formal training reflecting the 15 Professional Ability Areas with at least 1 hour of training in eight specific areas. Quality standards extend beyond licensing requirements, good facilities, and best intentions. Professionals exhibiting standards of excellence in child care and early childhood education are recognized by the The National Child Care Association (NCCA) through the awarding of the Certified Child Care Professional (CCP) Early Childhood Education Specialist. For more information on the CCP contact NCCA at 1-800-543-7161, or www.nccanet.org.

National Administrator Credential (NAC)

The NAC is a comprehensive, forty-hour course for Director's and administrators of child care program and an award for demonstrated mastery of administration skills. The NAC course focuses on nine competencies and offers directors a chance to receive 40 hours of high-quality, relevant, college-level education in a five-day time frame. Classes are limited to 20 students to foster discussion and maximize learning. For more information on NAC contact NCCA at 1-800-543-7161, or www.nccanet.org.

Gateways to Opportunity Credentials

Gateways to Opportunity is a comprehensive statewide resource, designed to support practitioners in continuing their professional development. Gateways to Opportunity credentials are awarded and recognized by the Illinois Department of Human Services. Gateways to Opportunity Credentials currently available to practitioners include:

- **Illinois Director Credential (IDC)** - validates the education knowledge and experience of administrators in the fields of Early Childhood and School-Age and is recognized as a national standard of management and leadership capabilities
- **ECE Credential** - validates a foundational or base knowledge, skills and experience in early care and education that practitioners should know/understand to work in the field
 - **Level 1 ECE Credential** - consists of 48 clock hours of training designed for anyone considering a career working with children birth to age 8 and/or those that are new to the field (an entry level credential)
- **Infant Toddler Credential (ITC)** - validates the specialized knowledge, skills and experience required to work with children birth to 36 months

Gateways to Opportunity credentials are symbols of professional achievement that can be earned by completing an approved program at an entitled college or university, by completing a portfolio that documents education and experience, or by completing the Level 1 ECE training. For more information about the Gateways to Opportunity credential program and other services visit www.ilgateways.com or call 866-697-8278.

CERTIFICATES/DEGREES

Certificate in Child Development or Certificate of Proficiency

A certificate in Child Development or Certificate of Proficiency is designed to give the student a basic understanding of child development trends, curriculum planning, teacher-family communication, program models and more. The number of college credit hours required to earn a certificate varies at each community college, but generally the certificate is one half of an Associate's degree (approximately 30-34 credit hours). Many community colleges have designed their certificates to lead a student to an Associate-level degree. If a student chooses to begin with a certificate, there may be clear pathways to continue at that college to earn an Associate's degree.

Associate of Applied Science (A.A.S.)

The Associate of Applied Science can be earned at some two-year community colleges. The A.A.S. is designed to meet the needs of students wishing to prepare for employment or who are presently employed in the field of early childhood education. The A.A.S. generally requires between 60-65 credit hours, depending on the college, and is focused almost entirely on early childhood or related courses. Most programs include a supervised internship where students have the opportunity to work in the field. A.A.S. degrees typically require between 15-22 credit hours of general education courses, such as English, speech, history or psychology. This is the degree route to take if you plan to seek employment immediately after completion of a two-year program. However, consider how your professional goals may change over time when considering this degree option.

Associate in Science/Arts Degree (A.S. or A.A.)

Associate in Science/Arts degree can be earned at some two-year community colleges. On average, an A.S. or A.A. requires approximately 30 hours of general education and approximately 40 hours of courses related to early education. Most A.S. or A.A. degrees give students the opportunity to work in the field under supervision through an internship program. This is the degree route recommended if you plan to transfer your credits to a four-year institution. Plan your transfer program with a Counselor and the catalog from the four-year University you plan to attend.

Associates of Arts in Teaching (AAT)

The Associates of Arts in Teaching can be earned at some community colleges. An Associate of Arts in Teaching is a rigorous, structured Education degree program, designed by a Steering Committee, with membership from: ISBE, IBHE, ICCB, Public and Private Universities, & Community Colleges. The AAT requires a student to complete the entire AAT Program, maintain a GPA of at Least 2.5, pass the Illinois Basic Skills Test, complete Appropriate Field Experience, initiate a Professional Portfolio containing standards-based artifacts, and exhibit Appropriate Dispositions

Bachelor's Degree in Early Childhood/Child Development

This Bachelor's degree has several different titles, such as Human Development and Family Life or Child and Family Studies. Typically, this degree does not lead to state teacher certification, but it does require general education courses, professional courses, early childhood courses and practicum. Many positions in the field of early care and education do not require state teacher certification. Because this degree does not lead to state teacher certification, right now, institutions offering this degree may be in a better position to accept early childhood or education courses in transfer from accredited two-year colleges. Consider your professional goals and the type of employment you plan to pursue when considering this degree program.

Bachelor's Degree in Education with an Emphasis in Early Childhood

The Bachelor's degree in Early Childhood Education usually leads to state teacher certification. The degree requires general education courses, professional courses on teaching methods, early childhood courses and related electives. In many teacher education programs, students have professional semesters where they are in the classroom student teaching in a supervised setting. When considering this degree, evaluate the coursework offerings that are available and specific to early childhood (birth to eight years of age).

Graduate Degrees

Many types of graduate degrees are offered through various Universities. These degrees are highly specialized and individualized. For more information about graduate degree offerings, check with various four-year Universities to find the degree program that best meets your personal/professional needs.

Master's of Arts, Science or Education

The Master's degree is highly specialized and varies greatly in content and focus from institution to institution. For more information about a Master's program, consult individual Universities to find the degree program that best meets your personal/professional needs.

Doctor of Philosophy

Doctoral work is highly specialized and varies greatly in content and focus from institution to institution. For more information about a doctoral program, consult individual universities to find the degree program that best meets your personal/professional needs.

Conclusion:

When taking any formal training hours or credit-based course work, it is extremely important to retain:

- Training certificates
- Training agenda's including: descriptions, outlines, goals, objectives, etc.
- College course description catalogs
- Course syllabus
- Transcripts

These items will provide the necessary documentation required to pursue a credential and/or a degree, now or in the future.

For more information on career pathways and financial resources available to support your pathway the Illinois Network of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies at www.inccrra.org or 1-800-649-1884; Gateways to Opportunity www.ilgateways.com or 1-888-548-8080 or Illinois Student Assistance Commission www.collegezone.com.

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