



Earning a Child Development Associate (CDA) Through Career and Technical Education (CTE)

High School Pathways to the Early Childhood Education Field





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Introduction

Early childhood education (ECE) is a robust field full of diverse career opportunities. School districts can help high school students start a career in the field by using existing Career and Technical Education (CTE) Programs of Study to help students obtain a nationally recognized Child Development Associate® (CDA) credential.

By offering a pathway to a CDA through a CTE Program of Study, high schools can help students start in the child care workforce at a higher wage rate, articulate the CDA into college credit for eligible early childhood education programs, and/or start on a path to getting an early childhood college degree with minimum debt while working at a local child care and early learning program through available scholarship programs, such as [T.E.A.C.H. Scholarships](#).

School districts interested in creating a CDA pathway in their CTE Programs of Study can download a free copy of the [Child Development Associate® \(CDA\) Handbook for High School: A Guide to Advocacy and Implementation](#) from the Council for Professional Recognition website with supports that include:

- a checklist to help start a program;
- needs assessment resources, templates, examples of verification letters, student expectation forms, Professional Portfolio requirements, etc.; and
- guidance for identifying resources and garnering support.

The Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) and Texas Education Agency (TEA) are committed to supporting school efforts to create a CTE pathway to a CDA. This document will walk a school district through each of the components needed to successfully implement a CDA CTE Program of Study in their local high school. If you have questions, please contact Bethany McKee (bethany.mckee@twc.texas.gov).

Purpose Statement

This document offers advice for Local Education Agencies (LEAs) that want to prepare high school students for a career in early childhood education. Its intended audience is LEA staff who design and implement Early Learning CTE Programs of Study.



Child Development Associate® (CDA) Credential

The CDA credential is the most widely recognized ECE credential, and high school students in Texas can earn their CDA before graduation. To be eligible for a CDA, students must complete the required hours of professional education through their CTE Program, work experience hours in an infant/toddler or prekindergarten classroom, and create a professional portfolio. Before taking the CDA Exam, students will schedule a Verification Visit with a CDA Professional Development Specialist.

High school students in Texas can earn their CDA before graduation.

More details about the process to earn a CDA and what each requirement entails can be found in the free [Child Development Associate® \(CDA\) Handbook for High School: A Guide to Advocacy and Implementation](#) on the Council for Professional Recognition website and in the [CDA Competency Standards books](#).

CDA Requirements

- 120 hours of professional education covering the eight CDA subject areas
- 480 hours of experience working with young children **within three years of the CDA Credential application**
- A CDA Professional Portfolio prepared **within six months of the CDA Credential application**, which includes:
 - education documentation;
 - family questionnaires;
 - six reflective Statements of Competence;
 - 10 resources; and
 - a Professional Philosophy Statement.
- High School Training Verification Letter

Application Process

Students must apply for the CDA while they are still in high school. Students need to do the following:

- Create a [YourCouncil account](#) their senior year.
- Register in the [Texas Early Childhood Professional Development System \(TECPDS\)](#), if they are 16 years old and over.
 - Students younger than 16 cannot create a TECPDS account.



- Schedule a four-hour CDA Verification Visit at the candidate’s work site the second semester of senior year to review the professional portfolio, observe teaching, and dialogue.

If students are not able to complete their requirements and apply for the CDA Exam by graduation, they may need to take additional professional education courses to qualify for the non-High School Pathway CDA. More information can be found in the “Post-Graduation Supports” section.

CDA Exam

- [Schedule](#) the exam at a Pearson VUE testing site.
- Find more about [CDA Exam special accommodations](#).

Learn more about the CDA and the [High School CDA Pathway](#).

Professional Education

Through an Early Learning CTE Program of Study, high school students will earn 120 clock hours of professional education that cover the eight CDA Subject Areas. The following CTE courses can help high school students obtain their professional education hours through classes that cover the CDA Subject Areas and meet the CTE minimum requirements of three courses and at least four credits.

Level 1 • Principles of Education and Training 13014200 (one credit, no prerequisites or co-requisites)

Level 2 • Child Development 13024200 (one credit, no prerequisites or co-requisites)
• Child Development Associate Foundations N1300500 (one credit)

Level 3 • Child Guidance 13024800 (two credits)

Level 4 • Practicum in Early Learning 13014520 (two credits)
• Practicum in Early Learning/Extended Practicum in Early Learning 13014525 (three credits)

Included in this document is a crosswalk of the current CTE courses’ knowledge and skills that correspond to the CDA Subject Areas. Teachers can use this crosswalk when planning their curriculum. Teachers can find more information on the knowledge and skills for the Education and Training courses through the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) located on the [Texas Administrative Code website](#).

Students must complete at least 10 hours in each of the eight CDA Subject Areas.



CDA Subject Area and CTE Course

Planning a safe and healthy learning environment

Course: Child Development, Principles of Education and Training, and Practicum in Early Learning

Advancing children's physical and intellectual development

Course: Child Development

Supporting children's social and emotional development

Course: Child Development

Observing and recording children's behavior

Course: Child Development Associate Foundations

Building productive relationships with families

Course: Practicum in Early Learning

Managing an effective program operation

Course: Practicum in Early Learning

Maintaining a commitment to professionalism

Course: Principles of Education and Training and Practicum in Early Learning

Observing and recording children's behavior

Course: Principles of Education and Training and Practicum in Early Learning

Understanding principles of child development and learning

Course: Child Development



Work Experience

Students participating in the Early Learning CTE Program of Study must complete **480 hours** of experience working in their selected track (either center-based infant/toddler or center-based preschool) within three years of applying for the CDA Credential. The Child Development course gives students the opportunity to learn more about different age groups and choose their track before they begin their work experience hours. Each student will enter into an employment agreement with the child care center where they complete their work experience. Child care programs must stipulate that the students are kept in classrooms for the age group in their chosen track, even if they work in different classrooms before they are assigned to their final classroom.

480
Hours of Work
Experience

To find high-quality child care centers where students can gain work experience hours, schools can use Texas Rising Star ratings (Texas' Quality Rating System) to look for three- and four-star centers in the area. To connect with Texas Rising Star child care programs in the area, contact local [Workforce Solutions](#). A full list of local Workforce Solutions Board areas, including counties served, can be found at the bottom of the web page.

CDA Professional Portfolio

Each high school student must create a CDA professional portfolio before applying for the CDA Exam. The portfolio must be prepared **within six months of the CDA Credential application** *either* online or in hard copy.

For online portfolios, it is important to find a platform that students can continue to access after they graduate (e.g., a Google Drive that is linked to a non-school issued email address). The pieces of the professional portfolio can be used as projects in Practicum in Early Learning that provide the grade for each reporting period.

To ensure that students can take their CDA Exam, CTE programs should arrange for them to work in the same local child care centers for six months beforehand. It is helpful if the student's shift overlaps with either drop-off or pick-up times for the children, so they can form the relationships with parents that are essential to the Family Questionnaires. Students will also be able to use the classroom they have been assigned to for the observation portion of the Verification Visit.



The professional portfolio elements are

- education documentation;
- family questionnaires;
- six reflective statements of competence;
 - Written narratives on each of the 13 CDA functional areas and answering questions for each of the six CDA competency standards;
- 10 resources covering the six competency goals; and
- a professional philosophy statement.

More details about what each requirement entails can be found in the free [Child Development Associate® \(CDA\) Handbook for High School: A Guide to Advocacy and Implementation](#) on the Council for Professional Recognition website and in the [CDA Competency Standards books](#).

High School Training Verification Letter

To apply for the CDA Exam, high school students must have a Training Verification Letter that verifies the student completed the required 120 professional education hours. The letter must be on school letterhead that includes the school address and phone number and identifies the student's CDA training track. Accepted signers include:

- Teachers
- Administrators
- Principals
- Assistant principals
- Office administrators
- Training coordinators

There is an example Training Verification Letter on page 82 of the Council for Professional Recognition's [Child Development Associate® \(CDA\) Handbook for High School: A Guide to Advocacy and Implementation](#).

Examples of Structuring a CTE Program of Study for CDA Certification

Included are possible ways to structure an Early Learning CTE Program of Study to make sure students have enough hours to stay on track and apply for their CDA Exam before graduation. Estimates are based on how many hours students work in their child care centers per week, and on a calendar with approximately 45% of the school year taking place in the fall semester and 55% in the spring semester. School districts will need to create their own structures based on their unique calendars and course schedules.



All estimates consider that students will miss days for various reasons, such as: testing, sickness, extracurricular activities, long weekends, holidays, or early release days. Estimates also assume that students do not join these courses partway through the year.

For the professional education clock hours, estimates are based on a course schedule with one 50-minute class held five days a week. For Child Guidance and Practicum in Early Learning, students attend class one day a week and spend the other four days working in a child care classroom.

To meet the work experience hours, students should work four days a week during the school year. They may also need to work some hours over summer break. These are only recommendations and may vary depending on the situation.

Students might spread their summer work hours over multiple months or compress them into full-day work weeks depending on the child care center's needs and the student's schedule. Students may also have to work over winter break or other times to reach the 480 required work experience hours.

Depending on the employment agreement with the child care center, students may work for longer than a typical school day (e.g., until the child care center closes). Each fall semester for Child Guidance and Practicum in Early Learning includes two weeks of trainings and review before students are sent out for approximately nine weeks of work experience. Each spring semester includes approximately 13 weeks of work experience.





1.5 hours
4 days/week
Child Care Center

1
day/week
Classroom

Estimates for **1.5 hours per day** for four days a week at a child care center and one day a week in the classroom starting Semester 5:

Semester	CTE Course	Professional Education Clock Hours Completed	Hours of Experience Working with Young Children Completed
Semester 1	Principles of Education and Training	62	0
Semester 2	Principles of Education and Training	77	0
Summer 1	(No course; no work experience)	0	0
Semester 3	Child Development	62	0
Semester 4	Child Development	77	0
Summer 2	(No course; no work experience)	0	0
Semester 5	Child Guidance	10	52.5
Semester 6	Child Guidance	15	75
Summer 3	(Summer work experience)	0	225
Semester 7	Practicum in Early Learning	10	52.5
Semester 8	Practicum in Early Learning	15	75
Totals	(Hours completed)	328	480



2 hours
4 days/week
 Child Care Center

1
day/week
 Classroom

Estimates for **two hours per day** for four days a week at a child care center and one day a week in the classroom starting Semester 5:

Semester	CTE Course	Professional Education Clock Hours Completed	Hours of Experience Working with Young Children Completed
Semester 1	Principles of Education and Training	62	0
Semester 2	Principles of Education and Training	77	0
Summer 1	(No course; no work experience)	0	0
Semester 3	Child Development	62	0
Semester 4	Child Development	77	0
Summer 2	(No course; no work experience)	0	0
Semester 5	Child Guidance	10	70.5
Semester 6	Child Guidance	15	101
Summer 3	(Summer work experience)	0	137
Semester 7	Practicum in Early Learning	10	70.5
Semester 8	Practicum in Early Learning	15	101
Totals	(Hours completed)	328	480



3 hours
4 days/week
Child Care Center

1
day/week
Classroom

Estimates for **three hours per day** for four days a week at a child care center and one day a week in the classroom starting Semester 5:

Semester	CTE Course	Professional Education Clock Hours Completed	Hours of Experience Working with Young Children Completed
Semester 1	Principles of Education and Training	62	0
Semester 2	Principles of Education and Training	77	0
Summer 1	(No course; no work experience)	0	0
Semester 3	Child Development	62	0
Semester 4	Child Development	77	0
Summer 2	(No course; no work experience)	0	0
Semester 5	Child Guidance	10	105
Semester 6	Child Guidance	15	150
Summer 3	(Summer work experience)	0	0
Semester 7	Practicum in Early Learning	10	105
Semester 8	Practicum in Early Learning	15	150
Totals	(Hours completed)	328	510



4 hours
4 days/week
 Child Care Center

1
day/week
 Classroom

Estimates for **four hours per day** for four days a week at a child care center and one day a week in the classroom starting Semester 5:

Semester	CTE Course	Professional Education Clock Hours Completed	Hours of Experience Working with Young Children Completed
Semester 1	Principles of Education and Training	62	0
Semester 2	Principles of Education and Training	77	0
Summer 1	(No course; no work experience)	0	0
Semester 3	Child Development	62	0
Semester 4	Child Development	77	0
Summer 2	(No course; no work experience)	0	0
Semester 5	Child Guidance	10	140
Semester 6	Child Guidance	15	200
Summer 3	(Summer work experience)	0	0
Semester 7	Practicum in Early Learning	10	140
Semester 8	Practicum in Early Learning	15	200
Totals	(Hours completed)	328	680



Materials

There are physical materials students will need for the CTE Program of Study that can be purchased through the Council of Professional Recognition's [online store](#). Students will need the *CDA Essentials* textbook and the *CDA Competency Standards* book.

The *CDA Competency Standards* book includes the "Comprehensive Scoring Instrument" for the CDA Verification Visit and the "Reflective Dialogue Worksheet." School districts can budget for the cost of these materials based on their funding and estimated number of students. The CTE teacher may be able to pay for the books and other materials as consumable items using their budget for the class, but the teacher will need to discuss the budgeting with the CTE director.

Funding

The Early Learning CTE Program of Study includes costs for school districts that can be reduced.

School districts can use Perkins funding to support activities that are consistent with the purpose of the [Perkins V Act](#).

Additional state funding sources such as [CTE Allotment](#) and [School Transportation Allotment](#) may be used for CDA Exam costs and for student transportation to or from the child care sites on a school bus.

Texas Education Code (TEC), §48.156, permits the state to provide a one-time reimbursement to districts and open-enrollment charter schools to help cover the cost of industry-based certification (IBC) exams taken by students in Grades 9–12. Only one reimbursement per student is allowable for a passed certification exam, so districts need to find additional funding sources to cover the CPR and First Aid certification costs. CTE teachers may be able to work with their schools' health or physical education teachers to provide CPR and First Aid training to students. CTE teachers should consult with administrators to determine whether required CPR training can be modified to meet this requirement. See [IBC Reimbursement](#) for more information. Additionally, for students that are hired as full-time workers at a child care program, they may qualify for free CPR and First Aid training at a local community college through the Texas Workforce Commission's Skills for Small Business program.

Students hired by child care centers for their work experience hours will need to complete background checks to count towards child care ratios. School districts need to work with the child care centers to decide how the background checks will be ordered and funded, but students may be responsible for the transportation to and for the payment of the background checks. Learn more about Child Care Regulation's [Background Check Rules](#).

The program includes costs for school districts that can be reduced.



Post-Graduation Supports

If students are not able to complete requirements and apply for the CDA Exam by graduation, they may need to take additional professional education courses to qualify for the non-High School Pathway CDA.

Students who have eligible child care jobs after graduation can use [T.E.A.C.H.](#) scholarships or other local scholarships to cover the cost of the CDA Exam. Students need to be aware of the timeline to complete their 480 work experience hours to make sure that all 480 hours are within the required three-year limit. The T.E.A.C.H. scholarship requires that early childhood educators

- be employed at least 30 hours per week in a licensed childcare center OR registered or licensed family child care home;
- earn less than \$20 per hour;
- have a high school diploma or GED;
- complete the required 120 hours of training in the CDA core competency areas, CDA portfolio, and family questionnaires;
- have a sponsoring employer (that completes part of the application, and commits to covering the \$21.25 assessment fee and provides increased compensation); and
- have an active account with TECPDS (must submit a TECPDS account number).

T.E.A.C.H. Scholarships are also available to help students working in a child care classroom while attending an institution of higher education in pursuit of an associate or bachelor's degree. School districts can share the T.E.A.C.H. flyer with those interested in taking the CDA Exam after graduation while pursuing an associate or bachelor's degree.

Connecting CTE Programs of Study and Quality Child Care Programs

CTE program staff need to partner with high-quality child care centers to ensure students have work experience in their chosen track. For help connecting with Texas Rising Star-certified childcare programs in the area, reach out to the local [Workforce Solutions Board](#).

A full list of local Workforce Solutions Board areas, including counties served, can be found on the website. Included in this document are items to help school districts partner with child care programs that serve as work experience placement sites.

- Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) for students to sign
 - An example of an MOU can be found on page 101 of the Council for Professional Recognition's [Child Development Associate® \(CDA\) Handbook for High School: A Guide to Advocacy and Implementation](#).
- Proof of enrollment in a child care related career program for the placement site



- Proof of enrollment must be signed by the superintendent or principal affirming the student's placement in the CTE program.
- Tracking students' work experience hours
 - An example of the work experience sign-in sheet can be found on page 102 of the Council for Professional Recognition's [*Child Development Associate® \(CDA\) Handbook for High School: A Guide to Advocacy and Implementation*](#).
- MOUs for child care centers to sign
 - Expectations to keep the students in consistent age group classrooms for their work experience
 - Expectation that child care centers commit to giving students a permanent classroom six months before their CDA Exam where they can get their parent letters and do the verification visit
 - This may require another lead teacher if the student is not over 18 years old.
 - The class may be smaller than all-day classrooms if it is only available when the student is working.
 - Salary or wage expectations

Resources and Information

CDA Council for Professional Development Handbook

Download a free copy of the [*Child Development Associate® \(CDA\) Handbook for High School: A Guide to Advocacy and Implementation*](#) from Council for Professional Recognition website for

- a checklist to help start a program;
- needs assessment resources;
- templates;
- examples of verification letters, student expectation forms, Professional Portfolio requirements, etc.; and
- guidance for identifying resources and garnering support.



Texas Minimum Standards Language

For more information on the minimum qualifications for child care center employees, review page 72 of Texas Health and Human Services Commission's (HHSC) [Minimum Standards for Child Care Centers](#).

- Division 2, Child Care Center Employees and Caregivers
§746.1105. What minimum qualifications must each of my child care center employees meet?
Subchapter D, Personnel
Division 2, Child Care Center Employees and Caregivers
October 2018
- Each child care center employee must:
 1. Meet the requirements in 40 TAC Chapter 745, Subchapter F (relating to Background Checks)
 2. Have a current record of a tuberculosis examination, showing the employee is free of contagious TB, if required by the Texas Department of State Health Services or local health authority [Low]; and
 3. Complete a notarized Licensing Affidavit for Applicants for Employment form as specified in Human Resources Code, §42.059. [Low]
- §746.1107. What additional minimum qualifications must each of my caregivers meet?
Subchapter D, Personnel
Division 2, Child Care Center Employees and Caregivers
October 2018
- Except as otherwise provided in this division, each caregiver must comply with minimum standards for employees and must [Low]:
 1. Be at least 18 years of age [Medium]; and
 2. Have a:
 - (a) High school diploma [Medium-High];
 - (b) High school equivalent [Medium-High]; or
 - (c) High school certificate of coursework completion as defined in Texas Education Code, §28.025(d). [Medium-High]

For more information on minimum standards language for employees under 18, review pages 73–74, of the HHSC's [Minimum Standards for Child care Centers](#).

- §746.1109. When may I employ a person under the age of 18 or a person who does not have a high school diploma or equivalent as a caregiver?
Subchapter D, Personnel
Division 2, Child Care Center Employees and Caregivers
April 2017
 - (a) You may employ a 16- or 17-year-old who has a high school diploma or its equivalent and count the person in the child/caregiver ratio, provided that:



- (1) You don't leave the person alone with sole responsibility for or in charge of an individual child, a group of children, or the child care center [Medium];
 - (2) The person works in the same room with and is supervised by a caregiver qualified under §746.1107 of this title (relating to What additional minimum qualifications must each of my caregivers meet?) [Medium-High]; and
 - (3) The person has completed a child care-related career program, which:
 - (A) The Texas Education Agency (including a charter school), the Texas Private School Accreditation Commission, other similar educational entity in another state, or federal agency approves [Medium]; or
 - (B) A home-school approves, and the person completes all 24 hours of pre-service training before being placed in a room with children. [Medium]
- (b) You may employ a 16-, 17-, or 18-year-old who attends high school but has not graduated and count the person in the child/caregiver ratio, provided that:
- (1) You don't leave the person alone with sole responsibility for or in charge of an individual child, a group of children, or the child care center [Medium];
 - (2) The person works in the same room with and is supervised by a caregiver qualified under §746.1107 of this title [Medium-High];
 - (3) The person is currently enrolled in or has completed a child care-related career program, which:
 - (A) The Texas Education Agency (including a charter school), the Texas Private School Accreditation Commission, other similar educational entity in another state, or federal agency approves [Medium]; or
 - (B) A home-school approves, and the person completes all 24 hours of pre-service training before being placed in a room with children [Medium]; and
 - (4) The person is expected to obtain a high school diploma or equivalent. [Medium]





If you have questions regarding implementation of a CDA CTE Program of Study at your local high school, please contact Bethany McKee (bethany.mckee@twc.texas.gov).