

Early Childhood Education Certification

Overview

As Maryland expands its provision of pre-kindergarten for young children in the state, building the capacity of the early childhood education (ECE) workforce is a key issue. One piece of this is certification requirements for early childhood educators. The purpose of this note is to:

- Review the current requirements for ECE educators in MD
- Review recent national efforts to create a unified structure for ECE certifications
- Review model ECE career ladders in top-performing Singapore

Current Requirements in Maryland

In Maryland, as elsewhere in the US, early education programs for both 3 and 4 year olds have different funding streams with different staffing requirements. Some of these are set federally (Head Start, Early Head Start) and some are set by the state (child care regulations, state pre-kindergarten programs). As the ages served by child care providers and pre-kindergarten programs overlaps, there are different requirements for different providers serving the same age children. Currently in Maryland, the requirements for teachers and assistant teacher in state-funded pre-K programs is:

	Lead teacher	Assistant teacher
Public school-based and private providers funded with pre-k expansion funds	BA, with ECE certification	HS diploma or Child Development Associate certification (CDA)
Private providers, funded with other state pre-k funds or by Child Care Block Grant (CCBG)*	6 semesters of college-level ECE coursework	HS diploma

*CCBG is federally funded and provides child care funding for low-income families

National Efforts of Note

Child Development Associate (CDA) Credential

The most widely-recognized national credential for early childhood educators is the Child Development Associate (CDA) certification. This was first offered in the 1970s. CDAs are offered in four different areas: 1) center-based, pre-school for children ages 3-

5; 2) center-based, infant-toddler programs, for children ages 0-3; 3) family child care for children ages 0-5; and 4) home visitor for families with children ages 0-5. The exam for the credential is administered by Pearson and is offered online through Pearson test centers. The test itself is based on competencies set by the Council for Professional Recognition. In addition to the test, CDA candidates must: 1) have 120 hours of training; 2) prepare a portfolio that is reviewed by a CDA specialist; and 3) have 480 hours of experience working with young children. About 18,000 CDAs are awarded each year. A CDA specialist reviewer must have a CDA or higher degree in early childhood education and experience teaching in the type of early childhood program as the applicant. The cost for CDA assessment is \$425 and renewal is \$125. The credential is valid for three years, at which point it needs to be renewed. Some states and counties pay for the assessment.

The Council has recently announced a new certification for CDA training providers called the CDA Gold Standard. There are two CDA Gold Standard certifications: the CDA Gold Standard Comprehensive and the CDA Gold Standard Select. Both require 40 hours of core training. In addition to that, the Comprehensive certifies trainers who offer 10 hours of high quality training in each of the 8 CDA subject areas. The Select certifies CDA training providers who offer 10 hours of high quality training in each of 4 of the 8 areas. To be certified as a Gold Standard training provider, providers need to submit an application and host a site visit by a Gold Standard specialist. A Gold Standard Specialist must meet the following requirements:

- Experience teaching early childhood education courses as a faculty member at a college or university or as an ECE trainer.
- A graduate degree in early childhood education, child development, or a closely related field.
- Expertise in the Council's CDA Competency Standards and Subject Areas.
- An understanding of student assessment in secondary and higher education programs.

Any early childhood organization or education institution is eligible to apply.

Power to the Profession Task Force

The Power to the Profession Task Force was convened in January 2017 by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and includes membership from 15 national organizations representing early childhood educators. The group includes:

- American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees
- American Federation of Teachers
- Associate Degree Early Childhood Teacher Educators
- Child Care Aware of America
- Council for Professional Recognition
- Division for Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children

- Early Care and Education Consortium
- National Association for Family Child Care
- National Association of Early Childhood Teacher Educators
- National Association of Elementary School Principals
- National Education Association
- National Head Start Association
- Service Employees International Union
- Zero to Three (Harvard University)

The purpose is to “define the early childhood profession by establishing a unifying framework for career pathways, knowledge and competencies, qualifications, standards and compensation.” It is funded by the Gates Foundation and the Kellogg Foundation, among others. The Task Force has laid out a series of steps to take to complete this agenda. To date, they have 1) agreed on a common definition of the profession and a timeline for their work; 2) adopted a set of preliminary standards for the profession; 3) released a preliminary draft outline of specializations, competency attainment sources, qualifications and pathways.

The draft structure has three levels of Early Childhood Educator: Level 1, Level 2 and Level 3. In this schema, training for ECE Level 1 would be a professional training program like a CDA; training for Level 2 would be an Associate’s Degree program; and for Level 3 would be a Bachelor’s degree or Master’s Degree program. The Task Force mapped out expectations for each type of training program, distinguishing between “introductory” or foundational knowledge and “essential” knowledge that is a more advanced level of knowledge that enables the individual to independently design and implement practices in the classroom. The same is done for application of this knowledge. The map also considers different age bands (full continuum from birth through 3rd grade; birth through pre-K; K-3rd grade). The full mapping can be found [here](#).

The Task Force expects to gather feedback and finalize this framework by December 2018. After that, they plan to work on implementing this framework at the federal and state level and design a process for continuously reviewing and revising the framework.

National Board for Professional Teaching Standards

The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards has an early childhood certification. Like all National Board Certificates, this certificate is designed to document advanced teaching skills. The early childhood certification is part of the NBPTS’s Generalist Certification. The Generalist is offered at two developmental levels: Early Childhood (for teachers of children ages 3-8) and Middle Childhood (for teachers of students ages 7-12). The certification is only available to practicing licensed teachers

with at least three years of teaching experience. Here are the standards for [early childhood](#). The National Board certification is for fully certified teachers with at least three years of teaching experience. It is offered in 25 certificate areas in 16 different disciplines at four developmental levels. The certification process requires: 1) a computer based assessment of content knowledge and pedagogical practices for teaching that content; 2) a portfolio that documents skills in differentiating instruction for students; 3) a portfolio including a video of the applicant teaching with commentary reflecting on teaching and interactions with students; and 4) a portfolio demonstrating that the applicant is an effective and reflective practitioner. The cost for certification is \$1900. The candidate pays the cost, although some states and schools systems reimburse applicants for these fees or pay a bonus upon certification.

Early Childhood Certification in Singapore

Singapore has recently created a career ladder for early childhood educators. It is not, at this point, part of the educator career ladder. The creation of the ladder is part of a dramatic expansion of the early childhood sector in Singapore, which until the past decade was exclusively private. Part of this expansion involved the development of a highly skilled workforce. Singapore created new credentials along with the new career ladder. The career ladder for early childhood educators has three tracks: a “educarer” track; a teacher track; and a leader track. None of the positions require an advanced degree at this time. There are required salary ranges for each level on the ladder.

