# SALUTING THE CDA®

## *Fifty Years Serving the Public Good*

Child Development Associate®
1975 50 2025
years
National Credentialing Program

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Millions of viewers tuned in when a national TV network paid tribute to the Child Development Associate® (CDA) Credential™. On October 2, 2020, Craig Melvin, anchor at NBC News and cohost of TODAY, marked the 45th birthday of the CDA®, a milestone that took place at the height of the COVID pandemic. "What a year for this important anniversary," Melvin exclaimed amid a crisis that rocked the child care field as providers closed their doors nationwide. "Yet there was a good thing that had come out of COVID," Melvin added. "Our country has come to value all the hard work and dedication of our early childhood teachers. We're finally understanding how vital they are for our children, families and economy. If we're going to be strong, we must have a strong, robust early childhood workforce."

Our country's future depends on having qualified early childhood teachers like those who earn a CDA. And the Council for Professional Recognition has helped provide them by overseeing a credential based on standards of competence gained from real-life practice with children and careful assessment of teachers' performance. The CDA program ensures teachers are ready for the early learning classroom, as Melvin told viewers nationwide. At the time he spoke, the Washington, DC, nonprofit had issued 800,000 CDAs, an achievement that helped early childhood teachers advance in their careers and helped children advance, too. That mattered to working parents, as Melvin knew firsthand since he and his wife both had busy careers. So, he saluted the Council for having awarded so many CDAs and gave kudos to Dr. Calvin E. Moore, Jr., the Council's first CEO to hold a CDA.

Under Moore's helm, Melvin predicted that "the Council is going to hit a new mark in no time by issuing a million CDAs."

The expansion of the CDA would serve the enduring purpose of the credential: boosting equity for children and for the teachers who help them develop and grow. "The Council stands firm on its history as an example of how to promote equity in the early childhood community," as Moore has often explained. "The most prominent way we do this is by positioning the CDA program as a major pipeline for racially and linguistically diverse people to enter careers in the early learning field." And this focus on equity was clear 50 years ago when the first group of educators earned their CDAs.

# *Designing the CDA®*

## A GROUP PORTRAIT OF COMMITMENT AND INCLUSION

The "Symbolic 12," as they're now called, received recognition at an event in Washington, DC, where they showed the diverse faces of the CDA. In July of 1975, these pioneers of the credential came from all corners of nation, from small rural towns and large urban centers. They included Margaret E. Wright, a Missouri native and the first one to receive a CDA, followed by colleagues from Colorado and South Carolina, New York and Pennsylvania, Idaho, Massachusetts and Minnesota. There was also a CDA from Hawaii, who came bearing pineapples so she could share them with the group. The juicy gifts were an acknowledgement of what brought the CDAs together, despite the differences among them.

The group portrait of the Symbolic 12 was a microcosm of our diverse nation. The new credential holders were high school and college graduates, along with some who were earning master's degrees. Their professional status varied, from teacher's aide in a child care center to center director, kindergarten teacher and counselor in a boys' group home. The CDAs were Black, white, Indigenous and Hispanic, but they all shared a commitment to serving young learners in the classroom.

They also shared the belief that that the CDA helped them be better teachers. "I got a lot out of the CDA and I'm really happy that I was selected to participate," said a candidate from New York. "More than anything else, the CDA program has given me confidence and improved my skills with children," said an educator from South Carolina. "It's a very exciting step in terms of training people to work with young children," said a candidate from Pennsylvania. "The CDA is such a personalized, practical way for them to get training and a credential"—one that would serve the public good, added an Idaho CDA. "Many people have a natural instinct for working with children," she said, "and can't afford to go to school." But "think

*This group shot of the "Symbolic 12," taken on July 24, 1975, during the Credential Awards Ceremony. From left: Marilyn M. Smith, Saul R. Rosoff, Edward F. Zigler, Jenni W. Klein, Stanley B. Thomas, Jr., Evangeline H. Ward, and the 12 candidates.*

of how much they could do for the country with this training." After receiving it, she couldn't "begin to tell how much the CDA and Head Start have helped me." Together, the two programs have also helped millions of children in a shared quest to build equity in early learning that dates back to the civil rights movement of the sixties.

## POVERTY AND THE PUBLIC GOOD

At the time, a national crisis put a spotlight on the crucial role of child care, much like it did during the COVID pandemic. Low-income children were among those who suffered the greatest learning losses throughout the pandemic, an issue that made the news but was far from new. Children from poor homes had already been a focus for President Lyndon Baines Johnson when he declared war on poverty in 1964. That year, nearly 20 percent of Americans were living in poverty, many of them people of color. And their plight led Johnson to launch the Great Society, an ambitious program to aid education, attack disease, conduct urban renewal and remove roadblocks to voting rights. Johnson's agenda led to the birth of new federal agencies and programs: the Office of Economic Opportunity, which provided funds for vocational training; VISTA, a domestic counterpart to the Peace Corps; and Head Start, an early education program for children of poor families.

"Five- and six-year-old children are inheritors of poverty's curse and not its creators," Johnson said in 1965, when he stood in the Rose Garden and announced the Head Start program. "Unless we act these children will pass it on to the next generation, like a family birthmark." So, Johnson was proud to announce the opening of 2,000 publicly funded centers to serve half a million children and their family members. This meant that nearly half the preschool children living in poverty would get a head start on their future by receiving early learning to make them school ready, along with medical and dental care. And their parents would also receive counseling on how to help the children develop at home.

It was an effort that would serve the public good by helping the children live productive lives rather than "wasting them in tax-supported institutions or welfare-supported lethargy," Johnson explained. "So, I believe that this is one of the most constructive, and one of the most sensible, and also one of the most exciting programs that this nation has ever undertaken." And its success depended on public support, Johnson added. "We need men and women of all walks and all interests to lend their talents, warmth, hands, and hearts"—volunteers, college students, housewives, doctors and especially qualified early childhood teachers.

But where would Head Start find the many skilled teachers who it needed? At the time, the early learning field lacked a focus on competence in teaching. Private and nonprofit child care operated under state licensing regulations that varied by state and mainly consisted of standards for indoor and outdoor space and staff-to-child ratios, along with health and safety items like water temperature and clean toilets. But teachers in most states didn't have to meet any requirements beyond passing a tuberculosis test and having a driver's license. It was a low bar that was at odds with the high value of the job and a growing belief that the early years were learning years that made a lifelong impact.

## CHANGING LIVES THROUGH QUALITY EARLY LEARNING

Teachers could play a leading role in guiding young learners toward success, as education leaders had become convinced. Their rising concern with the quality of teaching reflected research from theorists who showed that the first years of life were a were a key time for cognitive, social and emotional growth. Maria Montessori, for instance, viewed children as sources of knowledge with the educator acting as a gentle guide who helps children find information themselves. Lev Vygotsky saw the teacher as someone who helped children rise to tasks that were just beyond what they had already performed. And Erik Erickson stressed the role that teachers played in supporting children through every stage of their psychosocial growth, among the many strong reasons for the nation to raise quality in early learning programs.

Funding quality programs, as Johnson had said, yielded a high return on investment and saved taxpayer dollars. Good teachers could indeed change children's lives, according to the Perry Preschool Project, a program that took place in Ypsilanti, a small city outside of Detroit. Between 1962 and 1967, the project enrolled 58 low-income, low-testing Black children to see if high-quality education in a child's early years could raise their IQ scores. And initially it did. Though the children's scores soon evened out with those of their peers, the Perry research didn't stop when the initial academic boost seemed to go away. Nor was IQ the only thing the researchers tracked when the Perry kids were 27 years of age. Led by Nobel Laureate James Heckman, an economist at the University of Chicago, the researchers also looked at the children's success in terms of high school graduation rates, job retention, ability to

**"Five- and six-year-old children are inheritors of poverty's curse and not its creator,..."**

**– President Lyndon Baines Johnson**

form stable households and physical health. Over time, the former Perry preschoolers did better on all these measures than a randomly selected group of their peers who weren't part of the program, a finding that has continued to make the case for investments in early learning decades later.

## GIVING CHILDREN A HEAD START

Still, the Perry sample was small, and in the sixties, there was not yet a way to scale up a project like this to serve more children. The challenge fell to Edward Zigler, who helped design Head Start as a 35-year-old Yale professor. But before he scaled the heights of the ivory tower, Zigler was "an original Head Starter," as he recalled while looking back on his childhood during the Depression. His parents were Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe who came to Kansas City, Missouri, where they earned a meager living selling poultry and produce. By the time Zigler was eight years old, he was also selling fruit and vegetables from a horse-drawn carriage. But he would someday ride the road to success because the local immigrant settlement house provided him and his parents with health care, meals, social support and education. "As the son of a non-English speaker and having grown up in poverty, I've been able to exceed expectations and possibilities," Zigler said after earning a Ph.D. in psychology and joining the faculty at Yale.

He would go on to explore how children develop and used his research to right social wrongs. "I don't think we have the kind of advocacy for children that they deserve to get," he said. "We can do better by our children than we have been doing." And this conviction would lead him to promote a "whole child" approach for Head Start, based on the settlement house where he spent his early years. "Children who have uncorrected vision or hearing problems," he said, "who are ill or malnourished, who don't sleep at night because of fear or hurt, or who have parents too preoccupied with their own problems to pay attention to them will struggle with learning no matter how good the teacher."

Still, competent teachers did count in the constellation of services Zigler wanted to provide. And raising the quality of teachers became one of his concerns when he served in the Nixon White House as the first director of the Office of Child Development (OCD), now the Administration for Children and Families (ACF). In that role, he revamped Head Start by adding home visiting services, resource centers and several other new programs. He was also deeply involved in drafting the Child Development Act of 1971, a bill that would have put in place a huge national child care system in America that any parent could access. The act passed through Congress but succumbed to Cold War fever when President Richard Nixon denounced it as an attempt to take "a communal approach to child rearing over a family-centered approach," as he explained in a public statement. While Nixon vetoed the bill, Head Start continued to grow, leading to a pressing question: Who's going to staff all these child care centers?

## JUDGING COMPETENCE IN THE CLASSROOM

As Zigler reflected on the issue, he stressed the need for teachers who had concrete skills to help children learn and be ready for school. Until then, professionals working in child development programs had to acquire their professional standing through a formal learning

process that lacked enough grounding in real-life practice, Zigler pointed out. "That was my primary motivation for inventing the Child Development Associate credential," he explained. "What was revolutionary about the CDA was the performance-based or competency idea behind the credential. I didn't care if you knew who Piaget was, but I did want to know if you could effectively interact with children and teach them. The fact is a paper-and-pencil test alone is not really valid to the degree that an observation of a person actually functioning is in determining that person's qualifications."

But Zigler knew there had to be a template to evaluate candidates for the CDA and judge their competence in the classroom. "I mean you go in and look at a teacher and anybody who knows early childhood education can tell you in 15 minutes whether the teacher is competent or not," he said, "but it had to be more than that. So, what should we look at? The emotional warmth between the teacher and the child, the independence that the teacher gives the child to lead, to discover what teachable moments are—these are the things you look at."

## COLLABORATING ON A NEW CREDENTIAL

It was also crucial to determine if teachers knew how to boost children's social, emotional and cognitive growth, Zigler went on to add. And he wanted to impart these skills in a detailed curriculum for students. This required collaboration, Zigler said in 1970 when he introduced the concept of the CDA at the annual conference of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). "What we decided to do was bring together the most knowledgeable people about day care in the nation: academics, practical operators of day care and the whole spectrum of those concerned with day care activities. By bringing a wide range of stakeholders together, I felt I was fulfilling the primary purpose of the Office of Child Development to be a conduit between good thinkers, good workers and government efforts for children."

Zigler's sense of purpose sparked a spirit of innovation when the task force met in 1971. Over the course of the year, OCD staff, Head Start leaders and educators met to address two tasks. Zigler asked them to focus on how to enhance the preparation and training of those who wanted to work in child care and how to define the skills required for working with children from birth to age five—questions that led to a new category of staff in the early childhood profession, the Child Development Associate, and a basic framework for the skills that competent educators should have.

Once the task force laid this foundation, it passed on the task of refining the CDA to a consortium, made up of 30 organizations and experts devoted to young learners. With federal funding, the CDA Consortium condensed the skills that the task force had developed into six competencies that made up the first set of national standards for the early learning field. They included: to establish and maintain a safe, healthy learning environment; to advance physical and intellectual competence; to support social and emotional development and to provide positive guidance; to establish positive and productive relationships with families; to ensure a well-run, purposeful program responsive to participant needs; and to maintain a commitment to professionalism.

**"It is more flexible and inclusive than traditional systems, as it is designed to accommodate ethnic and cultural diversity"**

## BENEFITS OF PERFORMANCE-BASED ASSESSMENT

The competencies formed the basis for an assessment system that would evaluate practice instead of a sequence of training. In the early years of the CDA, responsibility for assessment rested with a local assessment team

(LAT), whose members each had defined roles. The team included an adviser, who was an early childhood professional charged with watching the candidate while they worked with children and presenting three lengthy reports at an LAT meeting. The candidate played a role by preparing a portfolio with written documents and resources to support their claim to competence in the classroom. A parent/community representative collected feedback from parents or guardians who had children in the candidate's care. And lastly, a CDA rep, another trained early learning professional, conducted the team meeting to ensure that the assessment was a valid measure of the candidate's performance.

"The Consortium chose a performance-based assessment," explained Evangeline Ward, the group's executive director, because it "believed that a person's ability to complete a certain number of courses or pass a written exam is not necessarily a determinant of ability to serve children in child care programs in competent ways. It presumes, rather, that day-to-day value to children will show in performance with them." Besides, performance-based assessment had an added advantage. "It is more flexible and inclusive than traditional systems, as it is designed to accommodate ethnic and cultural diversity"—an ongoing goal of the CDA program that the Consortium would pursue until 1979 when financial roadblocks led it to dissolve.

Yet the quest to make the CDA program more inclusive continued in 1980 when the federal government awarded the grant to run the program to Bank Street College in New York. Over the next five years, Bank Street would put the program on a firm financial footing and expand it in several ways. The college undertook a major research project to explore the expansion of the CDA program beyond serving educators who worked in centers with three-and four-year-old children. The project added credential settings and categories that still exist today: home visitor programs, family child care programs and center programs for infants and toddlers. In addition, the revised system added bilingual competency and assessment standards for CDA candidates who worked in settings where they used both Spanish and English in their daily work.

## DEMOGRAPHY IS DESTINY

These changes expanded the CDA to make it more inclusive. Yet the audience for the CDA still remained somewhat narrow. Most of the early childhood teachers who earned the credential worked for Head Start because the federal government was providing funds for training and credentialing fees through the program. But the vision of those who conceived the CDA was broader as Zigler pointed out in 1980 as he addressed the future of the credential. Demography, he proposed, was among the key factors that would shape the destiny of the credential.

"To meet the challenges of the next decade," he wrote, "the CDA must both learn from its past and consider making changes in the light of anticipated demographic, economic and political conditions. American economists predict increased inflation, a trend that has been historically correlated with an increase in the number of women who work. Variegated family patterns, including single parent homes, point toward the need for child care. The increased awareness by parents of what constitutes quality child care, coupled with changing demographics, will increase not only the demand for child care services, but for improved quality

of care"—an issue the CDA resolves. "Now the challenge is to increase the number of people who get CDA training and make the public aware of the value of this credential."

And social change bore out the need for the credential, as Zigler's predictions came true. Chief among these developments was a marked increase in the number of women who worked. By the mid-1980s, 67 percent of women held jobs, many of them married moms. There was also a rise in the number of single-mother households. And these women could not achieve equity in the workplace without child care. Working moms were struggling and feeling stressed out, but this wasn't just a women's issue in the eighties. Child care was a must for many Americans and part of a broad push to improve the world of work, as Ms. magazine pointed out. "The first task in realizing the goal of a more flexible, humane workplace is to realize that the problem of the employed mother is not a women's issue—it is part of the larger issue: work and family. The reforms that benefit employed mothers also benefit others: children, fathers, handicapped individuals, and employers who need happier, more productive workers."

## *The Founding Days*

### WHERE THE COUNCIL COMES IN

A wide range of "Americans call for child care," Ms. would conclude, and the CDA needed its own home to meet the growing demand. Head Start leaders agreed. So, in 1985, they worked with NAEYC to set up a new nonprofit, The Council for Professional Recognition, to administer the CDA. The Council opened on September 1, 1985, with J.D. Andrews, NAEYC COO, as its chairman of the board, chief negotiator and mastermind behind substantial funding for the fledgling organization. Andrews would also provide much of the strategic thinking about the future of the credential, along with Dr. Carol Bunson Day, former CEO of the National Black Child Development Institute, who became the Council's founding executive director.

This was a role Day would fill for the next 20 years, and under her guidance, the Council issued its first mission and vision statements. That first mission statement explained that "The Council for Professional Recognition promotes improved performance and recognition of professionals in the early childhood education of children ages birth to 5 years old." And the Council expressed a long-term aim in its first vision statement: "The Council works to ensure that all professional early childhood educators and caregivers meet the developmental, emotional and educational needs of our nation's youngest children."

From the start, the Council imagined a better future for early childhood teachers and the children they served, and this inspired the Council to assume several roles: to serve as a permanent home for the CDA, represent the early childhood field and advocate for the increased status of early childhood teachers. The Council had big goals for the CDA and needed to design systems to make the CDA more accessible, affordable and credible nationwide. So, it reviewed all aspects of the credentialing process, including ways to increase the rigor of the candidate assessment. The Council also set national standards for CDA training, which led it to establish a curriculum that linked formal training to assessment and could build a smooth path from the CDA to associate and bachelor's degrees.

## ESSENTIALS AND IDEALS

In 1991, these efforts led to the publication of a textbook, *Essentials for Child Development Associates*, now called *Essentials for Working with Young Children*. The goal of the text, as Day wrote in the foreword, was "to prepare preschool teachers and caregivers with the knowledge they will need to help children master skills, develop friendships, grow in independence and move to new levels of thinking and understanding about the world." The result was a model curriculum to help build a model world based on tolerance and inclusion.

But the Council didn't just tout these high ideals, it gave them teeth by developing a one-year model called the CDA Professional Preparation Program, or CDAP, consisting of three phases. In phase one, candidates studied written sources prepared by the Council and performed field work in a child care program under the guidance of a mentor. In the second phase, candidates attended a series of group seminars at a local university or college, where they studied a curriculum provided by the Council. And in the last phase, candidates integrated their fieldwork with their coursework and participated in a performance-based assessment by a representative from the Council. The representative also conducted a series of interviews and reviewed written documents that a candidate submitted. At the end of the year, successful candidates received their CDAs for life.

The CDAP was short lived, but the textbook Day developed would go on to become one of the Council's hallmark publications and an integral part of the CDA process. In 2004, the Council published the second edition of *Essentials* for Working with Young Children, again under Day's direction. The text served as a curriculum for colleges, universities and other training programs that prepared CDA candidates for entry-level positions in the early childhood field. The new text included the latest knowledge on how children develop, while remaining true to the CDA's long-

term purpose, said Sue Bredekamp, the Council's director of research and lead author of *Essentials*, in a press release that announced the revision.

"Much of the content from *Essentials* remains timely," Bredekamp wrote. "But we now know so much more from research about the kinds of teaching and curriculum that contribute to children's development and learning. Some of the revisions reflect changes in the way we talk in the field," Bredekamp showed through some examples. "Instead of talking about freedom of practice, we now talk about what research says predicts positive outcomes for children. Instead of self-control, we speak more broadly about self-regulation—the ability to adapt behavior and emotions to the demands of a situation. Instead of activities, we talk about learning experiences to convey a sense of a thoughtfully planned, coherent curriculum. Instead of mainstreaming, we talk about inclusion to reflect research demonstrating that children with disabilities and their typically developing peers benefit from being served in the same programs." And inclusion was the Council's mantra as it expanded the number of CDAs by making changes to the initial assessment process.

## RAISING STANDARDS AND REDUCING STEPS

In 1990, the Council set up a direct assessment system that cut down on the people and procedures required by the LAT model. The new assessment system consisted of just three steps. The candidate prepared a professional portfolio; was observed by a CDA advisor, an early childhood professional whom the candidate chose; and participated in a verification visit conducted by a representative of the Council. During the verification visit, the candidate engaged in an interview with the Council rep, took a written exam and reviewed feedback from families with children in the candidate's classroom.

The changes streamlined the assessment but that didn't mean the Council was lowering its standards for the credential. Instead, the Council raised the bar for rising teachers before they even went through the assessment. In the past, the Council had not required candidates to have a high school degree. Their training experience could be formal or informal and they had to have 640 hours of experience working with children in the previous five years. Under the revised system, the Council required candidates to have a high school diploma or G.E.D, 120 hours of formal training and 480 hours of experience working with children in the previous five years—revisions that led to a balanced mix of theory and real-life experience in the classroom. It also required CDA holders to renew their credential every three years to ensure they kept up to date with the latest knowledge on how to guide young children ahead.

## A FOND FAREWELL TO THE LAT

The CDA was building the future of the credential, Day said. Still, she had warm thoughts of the past as she remembered the people who had brought the Council to this point. The new streamlined system meant the end of the local assessment teams that had accomplished much, as she explained. "So, we share the feelings of loss that have been expressed by LAT members across the country." Her thanks went out to "those of you who have worked tirelessly with the program for a long time, to those of you who struggled with the Consortium and with Bank Street to give the CDA the credence and integrity to overcome skepticism

and doubt, and to those whose participation showed the true power of the collaborative process."

So, Day "saluted all of those who served as CDA representatives, advisors, and parent/ community representatives for the nearly 50,000 credentialed during the founding period of the CDA." The birth pangs of the credential were over. "We're moving ahead. But thanks to your steadfast service, we are building upon that era whose reverberations will forever challenge us to ensure the best possible care and early education for America's youngest children."

The Council had reason to be proud by 1995 when it marked its ten-year birthday overseeing the CDA. It had worked with ACF to stabilize and improve the benefits of the CDA program to the nation's children. It had quadrupled the number of CDAs credentialed. It had increased the visibility of the credentialing program through workshops and keynote addresses at early childhood state and national meetings. It had published two editions of the National Directory of Early Childhood, a listing of formal teacher preparation programs, and prepared detailed research reports on the status of CDAs. It had also developed a curriculum, *Essentials* for Working with Young Children, which was used by hundreds of training programs nationwide—all strong signs of progress, as Day pointed out.

Still, the Council couldn't take all the credit for these achievements. Instead, they showed the strength of the early childhood community, Day recalled as she bid a fond farewell to the LAT. "My most poignant impressions," she reminisced, "are gestures of solid support that helped us stay the course, remain fixed on our target to improve the CDA, and move steadfastly into the future. These memories are of smiles, warm handshakes, nods, winks and hugs as I travelled through the country, meeting with friends old and new and inch by inch, mile by mile, crafting a place for the Council in the permanent landscape of early childhood education."

The CDA community that Day encountered on her travels had helped the credential find a solid place in the mainstream of early learning nationwide. By 1995, 46 states and the District of Columbia recognized the CDA as an optional staff qualification for teachers and directors in their child care center licensing regulations. Several states, including Iowa, Nebraska, New Jersey and Ohio, had guidance on developing professional development systems that linked CDA training with certificate- and degree-granting programs statewide. Oklahoma enacted legislation that allowed CDAs to teach in state-funded public preschools for four-year-olds, and Florida passed regulations that required licensed child care centers to have one staff member with a CDA or equivalent credential for every 20 children.

## BUILDING FELLOWSHIP TO SERVE CHILDREN

As the CDA swept the country, the Council teamed up with allies who also wanted to raise standards for teachers. The Council worked closely with other early childhood organizations, like Zero to Three and WestEd, to expand access to the infant/toddler credential. Council staff members met on a regular basis with representatives from these likeminded groups to discuss strategies for increasing the number of qualified infant/toddler teachers to meet staffing needs for Early Head Start Programs. Council staff also participated in the Infant/Toddler Training Institutes conducted by WestEd and its yearly Institute for Head Start

Programs Serving Pregnant Women, Infants and Toddlers, and their Families Conference.

The Council also affirmed its ties with Head Start in 1995 when it made a 10-year agreement with the Head Start Bureau to design and run the National Head Start Fellowship Program. The program's goal was to mold leaders who had a strong grasp of policy. And that made it a natural match for the Council's mission to raise the status of the early childhood profession. The Council also used the fellowship to form ties with other early childhood groups, leading to a benefit that went two ways. It boosted the Council's status and built a huge array of resources throughout the early learning field for the Head Start fellows.

Under the Council's helm, the fellows enjoyed exposure to high-level federal work and opportunities for real-world education in lawmaking and administration. They received mentoring from senior staff at federal sites that included the offices of Administration for Children and Families assistant secretary Mary Jo Bane; Administration on Children, Youth and Families commissioner Olivia Golden; and ACYF associate commissioners Helen Taylor and Joan Lombardi. There were also opportunities for serving rotations in other offices, such as the Domestic Policy Conference in the White House and shadowing staff like secretary of Health and Human Services Donna Shalala.

The chance to serve in these high-profile settings "allowed the fellows to observe how public policies for education are developed and implemented on the national level," according to Sue Wilson, one of the first Head Start fellows. "This is a lengthy process," she admitted, "so a one-year fellowship cannot afford a look at policymaking from start to finish on any single issue. The fellows instead view different issues at different stages. Our vantage points are our work placements within government. The challenge then is to put the small glimpses of the process together, somewhat like imagining a whole movie from the coming attractions"—ranging from the time of legislative mandate through framing an approach to implementation, seeking input from experts and developing a plan to carry the initiative out.

The outcome of the legislative process makes an impact on a wide range of programs and people in the early childhood field. So, one focus of the fellowship program was to gather a wide range of perspectives. As the Council designed the fellowship, a great deal of discussion centered on ways to make diversity a hallmark of the program. The experience would be diverse, with an emphasis on program development, policy and research. So would the ethnic and cultural makeup of the fellows and their professional background, whether from Head Start, private child care, or research and education. Diversity among the fellows, as the Council understood, helped them splice together different perspectives of policy, leading to a coherent picture of the early childhood field throughout the nation.

## SPREADING SOCIAL JUSTICE OVERSEAS

The Head Start fellowship also advanced the Council's enduring goal to promote equity in early learning. And it took this quest overseas in 1992, when it went to northern Italy to develop the Reggio Emilia Alliance. The city of Reggio Emilia in the Romagna region had been a hotbed of resistance to fascism during World War II, and the city resolved to plant the seeds of freedom once peace arrived. As the city emerged from the rubble of war, its citizens set about building a new society

free from injustice, inequity and oppression. The foundation for that society was a group of publicly funded early childhood programs that allowed young students the chance to make decisions about their own education, placed an emphasis on self-expression, community cooperation and openness to new ideas.

The Reggio Emilia schools began as a parent initiative. At the war's end, the city's parents came together with a shared vision: a new kind of preschool where teachers would treat children with respect and encourage parents to be active participants in their children's education. This vision became a reality with the help of educator and philosopher Loris Malaguzzi. His approach was to develop a curriculum that encouraged long-term research projects as the primary path to learning, an emblem of the Reggio Emilia approach that has led to education reforms across the globe.

Recognition of the approach exploded in 1991 when a panel of experts commissioned by Newsweek identified the Reggio Emilia preschools as among the top preschools in the world. The schools gained added fame through the Hundred Languages of Children, a travelling exhibit that has told the story of the Reggio Emilia educational experience to visitors from around the world through images, stories, drawings and firsthand accounts of the schools.

## CROSSING BOUNDARIES IN EDUCATION

The Council also had firsthand experience of the Reggio Emilia approach since Day joined a group of education leaders of color from Washington, DC, on a study tour to Italy in 1992. The five-day tour included visits to Reggio Emilia schools, talks with teachers and meetings with the school's leaders, including Loris Malaguzzi himself. The delegation also received a warm welcome at a special session of the city council. And Day played a starring role at the event since her colleagues chose the Council's founding director to give an official response on the DC group's behalf.

The Council went on to manage the explosive demand for insights on the Reggio Emilia

approach to early learning. Upon returning home, the Council offered to extend support in the introduction of Reggio Emilia ideas to U.S. schools and the translation of Reggio Emilia materials into English. The Council also volunteered to enlist its parent organization, NAEYC, in the effort to promote the Reggio Emilia approach to every segment of the early childhood community across the nation.

The Council's proposals met with a welcome response from Malaguzzi and led to a series of discussions on how to move ahead. Between 1994 and 2004, the Council laid out the groundwork for exposing educators in the U.S. to the Reggio Emilia approach through study tours, the Hundred Languages of Children exhibit, videos, catalogues and other publications. As it reached out to the early childhood community, the Council described how the Reggio Emilia approach stemmed from resistance to fascism and the city's desire for children to become independent thinkers who grasped the value of social justice. This had always been one of the CDA's core values since it emerged in response to the need for Head Start teachers. And the Council began its campaign for Malaguzzi's approach by appealing to members of the Head Start community from the local to the national level.

Head Start leaders would join Council staff and board members on a series of study tours to Italy which included visits to several schools and presentations about ongoing classroom projects, along with conversations with parents and school staff. The tours helped participants gain firsthand knowledge of the Reggio Emilia approach. And the Council's board members would also learn more about the approach when the board convened in Italy for its winter 2003 meeting.

This was the first opportunity for the board as a group to visit the Reggio Emilia schools and meet their leaders. The board also had the chance to broaden its knowledge of early learning worldwide since its visit coincided with two international education events sponsored by the city: a study group designed around visits to the schools and a conference on Crossing Boundaries. The world had come to Reggio Emilia as over 1,000 conference attendees travelled there from about 50 countries. Their presence provided a chance for board members to cross boundaries while engaged in dialogues on how to improve the quality of life and learning for all children.

These discussions also led the Council board to think about how the Reggio Emilia approach could advance its enduring mission to support America's diverse population of children and families. How could the Council recast the Reggio Emilia approach in ways that would support its own approach to equity and inclusion? And how could the Council use the Reggio Emilia approach to deepen its knowledge of how different cultures affect children's development and growth?

Some answers came from Carla Rinaldi, pedagogical consultant to Reggio children, as Day recalled after hearing her speak. Rinaldi talked about concepts and values that are "transcultural," Day said, and could guide schools in defining their expectations for children. Children's input and hopes also counted, Rinaldi explained, since the Reggio approach was a "pedagogy of listening" to draw meaning and value from different points of view. "Listening," as Rinaldi explained, "is a prerequisite for any teaching relationship and a way of learning from children themselves."

The Council also learned a great deal from its decade of involvement with the Reggio Emilia program before handing over the reins to the

North American Reggio Emilia Alliance in 2004. Granted, the steps the Council took to spread the Reggio approach were outside of its general purview as administrator of the CDA. Still, this involvement was consistent with the Council's goal to build communities of early childhood teachers who embrace social justice and promote bold systems change. "The challenge for the profession," as Day explained, "is growing leaders with the ability to conceptualize integrated systems and inspire others to work toward achieving them." It was not enough to ensure the optimal growth and development of children through the interaction of individual teachers and children. Change had to come through all the systems that interact to produce and sustain schools.

## GOING GLOBAL WITH THE CDA®

These systems include the U.S. Armed Forces, where the Council made a worldwide impact on child care for service members in America and abroad. In 1986, an agreement between the Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Defense encouraged all DOD child care programs to promote CDA training, leading to the award of the credential to both center staff and family providers who served children from an army base. According to the agreement, the Council developed an army training program based on the six competency goals of the credential. The agreement also resulted in a pilot project that involved 17 army sites and 70 CDA candidates, along with CDA advisors and CDA reps to conduct assessments.

The project led the Council to hit the skies and go global in 1989 when it went to Germany to train CDA reps. Army child care providers also had the chance to reach new heights as they progressed through the Council's program. Under the army's system, educators without degrees started their careers at competitive minimum pay. Then they had to progress through a three-tier core training program in which they automatically received raises and promotions when they completed each CDA training component and when they showed competence in the classroom. The result was a system that benefitted both educators and

those they served. Linking pay with performance resulted in lower staff turnover, higher parent satisfaction and higher-quality early learning for service members' children.

## PROOF OF PROGRESS AND POTENTIAL

The CDA was also making a positive impact on the early childhood field, and the Council had the data to prove it. In 1999, it conducted a survey of 1,000 CDAs, whose responses proved the value of the CDA. Following prior surveys from 1983 to 1994, the 1999 survey measured the impact of holding a CDA among educators at different stages of their careers, from new teachers who had recently earned the credential to veteran teachers who had held the credential for at least a decade. These educators responded to 30 questions on their background, demographic traits, education, experience and opinion of CDA coursework, along with career changes after earning the credential. What they told the Council showed that the CDA had expanded the potential of those in the early learning profession.

According to the survey's results, CDAs showed a pattern of continued professional development and career growth. While 22 percent of mid-level educators held CDAs when they were credentialed, 33 percent of them had obtained two- or four-year college degrees by the time of the survey. In addition, the percentage of CDAs who earned advanced degrees more than doubled for veteran teachers and even rose a bit for novice teachers—results showing that CDA holders increasingly sought more education. And the CDA sped their path toward higher degrees since 42 percent of respondents received college credits for their CDA coursework.

And not only did CDAs pursue higher ed, but they also received higher pay and more promotions, as their responses made clear. All groups of CDAs reported receiving healthy salary hikes over time after earning the credential. The percentage of CDAs earning at least $30,00 a year more than doubled for veteran teachers and mid-level teachers. It also nearly doubled for teachers who had more recently entered the profession. And bumps in position went along with these bumps in pay. About a third of respondents worked as teacher assistants or aides before earning their CDAs, and afterward, less than a third remained in these entry-level roles.

So, CDA holders moved up in their careers, according to the survey. That encouraged them to stay in the early childhood field, and this commitment to the profession made them stand out from their peers. At a time of high turnover in the early learning field, 87 percent of the respondents were still working in the profession, including 78 percent of veteran teachers who had earned their CDAs at least 10 years before. And 63 percent of these long-term CDA holders belonged to professional organizations, where they could join colleagues in lifting up the status of the field and giving its members more support.

## HITTING THE HUNDRED THOUSAND MARK

The findings of the survey, in short, revealed that the CDA was serving its stated purpose to serve as an entry point for continued success in the early childhood field. And spreading the reach of the credential also held the promise of leading to greater success for young learners. Earning a CDA seemed to make educators more committed to the children and families they served, as the

Council's survey data revealed in 1999. And that year, the Council reached a milestone when it awarded its 100,000th CDA to Mary Ann Barban, an educator from Nashville, Tennessee.

Mary Ann had always wanted to teach children but heard time and again that the profession was low paid and not worth her time. These negative comments convinced her to go into biological research at first. Yet Mary Ann's nagging wish to pursue her childhood dream finally led her to quit her research job and volunteer in a child care center. Since she had no formal training in early learning, she also went on to earn her CDA, an experience that opened new pathways in her career.

The CDA also opened Mary Ann's mind to the broad social issues that affect young children and their families. The CDA courses made her more aware of prejudice and racism. She learned how important it is to bring a multicultural approach to her classroom work, and this led her to become more sensitive to each child's unique needs. Her growing knowledge also increased her confidence in the classroom and skills at interacting with children's parents. "I share what I've learned with the parents and am less reserved and more assertive when dealing with them," Mary Ann said. And she took this same self-assured approach as she discussed her dreams and future goals.

"I want to empower children with coping skills that will help them grow," Mary Ann explained. And she, too, grew by becoming a lead teacher within a year of earning her CDA, a promotion that fueled her commitment to the early learning field. "I'm not sure exactly where I'll be in five years," she admitted, "but I know I'll still be learning and evolving into a better caregiver for children," she said as she received a plaque from Day at the opening session of the NAEYC annual conference in 1999.

## A QUARTER CENTURY OF THE CDA®

A year later in 2000, another historic gathering would take place when the Council marked the 25th birthday of the CDA. To mark the occasion, the Council honored five early childhood teachers who had continued to renew their credentials for more than 20 years. These teachers had seen how the credential can serve as the best first step toward higher education, higher pay and job promotions. "For me, it was a personal thing to think I could take a college class and be successful and continue to be through the years," said Carolyn Selph, an educator from Oklahoma. And Frances Pryor, another of the five honorees, showed how far you could go with a CDA. She had become the director of a Head Start center and felt that that she owed it all to her CDA. "The day I earned my credential was the most exciting day of my life," she said. "It helped me in all areas and motivated me to do more."

The Council was also doing more to expand the reach of the credential and make it more robust, as Sue Bredekamp explained while reflecting on the CDA at 25. "Over a quarter century," she wrote, "the knowledge base of child development and education has expanded greatly in such areas as brain research, curriculum and early literacy, to name a few. So, education programs that prepare educators need to keep pace with this new knowledge." To assist in this task, the Council began exploring distance learning in partnership with the National Head Start Association and its HeadsUp! Satellite network. The joint effort led to a 44-clock-hour course on early literacy that could count toward the CDA's educational requirement or toward college credit, Bredekamp added. "And other technological enhancements for CDA credentialing were planned for the future."

# *A Decade of Innovation*

## THE CDA® IN THE CYBER AGE

The Council ventured further online in 2004 as the number of CDA holders reached over 181,000 nationwide. The Council had a website for internet users to access CDA assessment and renewal procedures. It provided free downloadable Council publications and forms, including CDA competency standards books, along with CDA application and renewal packets—all features that helped reduce the costs of applying for a CDA and further expand the reach of the credential before Day retired in 2005. And the Council would take steps to harness technology even more under the leadership of Dr. Valora Washington, a renowned scholar and founder of the CAYL Institute to advance change for children. She became Council CEO in 2011, after a series of short-term leaders, and brought in a decade of innovation.

Following years of study, the Council launched CDA 2.0, which updated the CDA knowledge base and added new elements to the credentialing process. They included candidate reflection and the creation of a nationwide network of Professional Development Specialists who provided candidates with mentoring and coaching. The PD Specialists also assessed candidates' grasp of the six CDA competencies and guided the candidates' self-reflection during the verification visits.

CDA 2.0 embraced technology by making it simpler for candidates to apply online and keep track of the credentialing process. CDA candidates could now select a PD Specialist from an online directory and schedule an electronic CDA exam at a convenient time at widely located Pearson VUE testing centers. Pearson VUE delivered the exam scores and the PD Specialists' verification visit scores electronically to the Council, so credentialing decisions would now take days instead of months as they had in the past. In addition, CDA 2.0 smoothed the credentialing system by providing new competency standards books that contained everything candidates needed to prepare for a CDA: the observation tool, family questionnaire master sheet and full paper application.

**No matter what language they speak, what culture they grow up in, or where they live, young children need skilled educators who can help them reach their potential.**

All the changes to the CDA process led to a better experience, according to extensive field testing and feedback from candidates that the Council received. "The new CDA 2.0 is great," enthused a candidate upon completing the CDA exam at a Pearson VUE testing center. "It was very user friendly. I like how the CDA exam allowed me to flag answers, later review them and go back to change my answers. I loved the option of checking to see if I left any incomplete answers at the end," she said. And more praise came from a CDA who had used CDA 2.0 to renew her credential online. "The system was easy to navigate and guides you every step of the way," she said. "Being a classroom teacher, I find it hard to take care of things during the day. The online process allowed me to complete my renewal quickly," and the system also included enhancements that made it easier for PD Specialists to do valid assessments.

A few months after CDA 2.0 rolled out, over 2,300 seasoned early educators responded to the Council's invitation to become PD Specialists, and the new system gave them a solid foundation for filling their role. Prospective specialists could now take a self-paced, online training program and complete it in four hours. The system also included multimedia training to give PD Specialists all the information needed to conduct the Verification Visit® using a new ROR model, which consisted of the following steps: review a candidate's professional portfolio, observe the candidate working in the classroom and hold a reflective dialogue with them.

It all added up to a better experience for PD Specialists as they assessed candidates' skills. "The videos were very helpful," one specialist pointed out, "because I could actually view people interacting in a setting. The questions that were asked helped me determine what I need to reflect on, review and rehearse before I complete my first verification visit as a Professional Development Specialist. So, thank you for bringing the process into the electronic age."

## CROSSING COUNTRIES AND CULTURES

The Council was also bringing the CDA to rising educators from different countries and cultures. This expansion continued a process that had begun in the late seventies, when the families and children that CDAs served had changed with the influx of Latin American immigrants to the U.S. In response, as we have seen, the CDA Consortium added bilingual competency standards and assessment requirements to the system, so candidates working in Spanish/English programs could demonstrate their special skills. The first bilingual candidate earned the credential in 1979, and growing numbers of educators from Spanish-speaking regions, such as Guam, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands, came to join the ranks of those who earned a CDA. In 2008, the Council responded to their growing presence in the early childhood field by publishing the first edition of the competency books in Spanish.

And the Council ramped up its efforts to reach more diverse groups of young learners as new waves of immigration from Africa, Asia and the Arab world changed the demography of our nation. In 2013, the Council's commitment to ensure equity in education for all children led it to establish a department of multilingual and special programs that offered CDA assessments in the languages that candidates speak with the children they serve. The Council understood the need to recruit a more diverse early childhood workforce because children respond better to educators who resemble them, know their culture and speak their language. So, it has worked with educators in 24 languages—including world languages such as Spanish, Arabic and Mandarin and those for more specific populations, such as Haitian Creole, Navajo and Yup'ik, which is spoken among Alaska's Eskimos and Aleuts.

No matter what language they speak, what culture they grow up in, or where they live, young

**"A solid body of evidence shows that the foundations for learning are largely built in the early years of life, before a child ever crosses the threshold of a primary school,..."** – UNICEF

children need skilled educators who can help them reach their potential. Advances in brain science have shown over the years that the interactions young children have with adults in the first 1,000 days of life make a lasting impact on the children's development and growth. These findings led groups like the World Health Organization (WHO), World Bank and UNICEF to make quality education for all young children one of their key goals.

"A solid body of evidence shows that the foundations for learning are largely built in the early years of life, before a child ever crosses the threshold of a primary school," UNICEF noted in a global report. "Children who fall behind in these early years often never catch up with their peers, perpetuating a cycle of underachievement. Every child deserves access to quality early education." Yet, "only 50 percent of educators in developing countries are trained." So, child advocates worldwide issued a ringing call to enhance curriculums and teacher training. And the Council responded by partnering with international early learning organizations and government agencies to extend its training and standards to early childhood programs in other nations.

The Council began this global outreach in 2012 by partnering with Arabian Child, a Dubai-based educational group, to expand the CDA in the Middle East. The credential met a vital need, according to Samia Kazi, COO of Arabian Child. "The CDA ensures that people who are working with young children meet quality standards," she said. "Though you have qualifications, even a master's degree in early childhood, it doesn't mean you belong in the classroom. But when you obtain your CDA credential through the assessment process, you have proven that you meet those international standards."

Educators around the world have reached those yardsticks with the Council's support. In 2013, the Council issued the CDA to educators in Dubai, Panama, Egypt, Ghana and China. As it brought the CDA to different countries, the Council took care to respect local customs and cultures. This required some tweaks, but the curriculum remained faithful to the credo that early educators are professionals with a duty to give young children the best possible start in life. Educators who are competent and caring interact with children in ways that build their confidence, boost their cognitive skills and help them become productive adults who serve the public good. "Early education helps communities thrive," said Margaret Chan, director-general of WHO, because "it has a direct impact on the stability and prosperity of nations in the future."

The Council was doing its part to mold the citizens of tomorrow. It knew the promise of early education, it was prepared to face the obstacles and it paved the way ahead with more ways to give educators cutting-edge skills. It added new information on brain science to its curriculum, opened up the credential to high school students, and inspired excellence in CDA instruction by giving Gold Standard awards to training organizations that provided stellar service to their students.

Committed trainers — from Alabama to the United Arab Emirates—contributed to the success of the credential. The Child Development Associate had come a long way since Margaret Wright earned the first CDA in 1975. By 2020, more than 800,000 credentials had been issued. That number was still growing, with greater awareness that the early years are learning years when quality teaching counts. Yet there were roadblocks to come. "The challenge of the CDA is

not complete," as Zigler knew in 1981. Instead, "it is constantly changing to keep pace with its own accomplishments."

## OUR EDUCATORS DESERVE EQUITY

The CDA had done much to achieve equity in early learning for children worldwide. Yet the educators who had done the hard work on the ground were left behind as they suffered from low pay and lack of recognition. So, discussions on professionalizing the early childhood field, as Dr. Washington pointed out, had to follow by two guiding ideas: respect for the early childhood workforce and a deliberate focus on equity for its members. "Talk about professionalizing the early childhood field," she wrote in 2019, "is today's hot topic. More than ever, the field's expanding knowledge base in child development and the science of early learning has expanded our views of what children can achieve and increased our focus on the capacity of the staff who work with them."

Qualified teachers play a crucial role, and there were far too few of them to meet the demand. By 2019, America faced a severe child care shortage due to low wages for a job that is often stressful, making it hard to recruit and retain teachers. "This deficit approach to the people who do the work of educating young children," Washington went on to add, "is ironic since little respect is rendered to those who are deeply immersed in demonstrating respect for the children they serve." And case in point, "we celebrate the amazing power of brain development yet tolerate widespread poverty and poor working conditions among those responsible for interacting with children in ways intended to foster early brain development," something that's vital for later success.

Early childhood teachers also play a vital role in allowing parents to work, as the public became aware in 2020, when COVID dealt a crippling blow to the early childhood field. As health concerns led centers to close, Washington called for equitable treatment of early childhood teachers and urged policymakers to consider how to support the early childhood workforce during the pandemic. "We advocate for financial assistance for early childhood educators and child care workers who are losing their paychecks during school closures, and we call on governments and employers to do all they can to also support early childhood education."

The Council stood behind early childhood teachers during the public health crisis as it stayed true to the legacy of the past. "For 45 years," Washington wrote, "the CDA has been a valued credential earned by early childhood educators." Now child care center owners and operators, parents and others faced tough decisions and looked to the Council for support. "We are here for you" became the Council's mantra, and it would remain so, after personal reasons led Washington to step down as CEO. Her departure took place at a crisis point, but Washington knew she was leaving the CDA's future in good hands.

# *A Time for Vision*

## A POSTER CHILD FOR THE CDA®

In May 2020, Dr. Calvin E. Moore, Jr. took the Council's helm, and his appointment had special meaning because he was the first CEO to hold a CDA. Like Edward Zigler, he was a Head Starter who had found success, as he recalled upon assuming his role as Council CEO. "My

early experiences at Head Start ignited my interest in learning and I intended to go to college after serving in the U.S. Air Force for four years. My plans changed when my aunt suggested I work in Head Start, which enrolled me in a CDA program at a community college. I went on to earn my Ph.D. and continued to grow as a professional, too. After teaching for five years, I rose through the ranks to become the child care administrator for Alabama, then deputy director for the Office of Child Care in the federal Administration for Children and Families before becoming Council CEO. My climb up the career ladder shows what is possible for our early childhood teachers, and that makes me a poster child for the CDA."

Moore's experience and education were needed as the early education field struggled to steer through perilous currents. By 2021, the industry faced a perfect storm of events. More than four million people had left the workforce as 60 percent of child care centers shuttered their doors. The closures hurt the economy as women's employment took an especially strong hit. And this, too, was a blow to equity, as Vice President Kamala Harris declared in the Washington Post. "Without affordable and accessible child care, working mothers are forced to make an unfair choice," a point that Edward Zigler had made decades ago and that now filled the news. The public became aware that early childhood educators are essential for the economy and for America's working families, something the Council had long known. And under Moore's guidance, the Council looked for ways to support America's educators through COVID and expand their ranks to meet the pressing demand.

## CDAs SPEAK OUT

The Council began in June of 2020 by convening a CDA Advisory Committee that provided insights to guide early childhood teachers in making a safe return to classrooms. The committee of credential holders focused on ensuring safety and health in the classroom while coming up with creative ways to engage young learners. The committee members knew how to do this since CDA training encourages teachers to

make learning fun, and the committee members brought that playful spirit to their guidance.

So, they suggested turning safety guidelines into games to prevent children from becoming frustrated with constant reminders to follow the distressing new rules. For example, the committee members suggested using dolls to show the right way of wearing a mask and showing children how to express themselves with raised eyebrow or winks when masked. The committee members also suggested that providers teach children to air hug, hug a teddy bear or themselves since physical contact was no longer safe—all tips that reflected the committee's experience and education, as Moore explained. "CDAs know how to nurture the emotional, physical, intellectual and social development of children, and in these historic times, we must react quickly to circumstances. So, I'm grateful to the advisory committee for sharing on-the-ground strategies that will smooth the transition back to the classroom for children, parents and early childhood teachers."

The CDA Advisory Committee spoke to the concerns of educators nationwide, and many of them joined in to support the early childhood field when the Council hosted a virtual Capitol Hill Day in 2022. More than 300 CDA holders registered to participate and meet with lawmakers and their staff to discuss the issues that mattered most to the sector and the families it served. During the meetings, the educators also made a strong case for expanding the number of CDA-credentialed educators to help more children receive high-quality care as the child care crisis went on. "The pandemic has impacted early childhood education in ways that we could not have imagined," Moore said. "We have a tough road ahead, but I am optimistic. The CDAs who participated in the virtual Capitol Hill Day shared their experiences working with children." And the Council was "grateful to our educators for their engagement," added Linda Hassan, the Council's board president at the time and chief program officer at the Center for Equity and Inclusion in Portland.

## EMBEDDING EQUITY THROUGHOUT THE CDA®

Equity and inclusion had long been among the Council's core values, and they took the spotlight as another crisis added to the disruption brought on by the pandemic. In June of 2020, national unrest erupted after the violent death of George Floyd. The senseless killing of a Black man while in police custody left the nation bewildered and pointed to an even greater need for educators who would show children the value of equity when they were young, Moore said. "Early childhood educators who go through the CDA process know that their goal is to help children learn tolerance and acceptance of people of different races, ethnicities and cultures. We try to ensure that the learning environment shows evidence of diversity with which young children can easily associate. These are lessons Americans of every background must immediately embrace in every facet of their lives and, most importantly, in their hearts."

The Council took the lesson to heart as it worked with the Children's Equity Project at the University of Arizona to embed equity in every aspect of the CDA credentialing process. With funding from the Trust for Early Learning, the Council and Children's Equity Project revised the six competency areas discussed in *Essentials* for Working with Young Children, the CDA textbook, to be more inclusive, leading to a third edition in 2022. "For example, we added more content on inclusive practices for English learners and

children with disabilities," said Dr. Shantel Meek, founding director of the Children's Equity Project. "We also worked to foster positive racial identity in the behavior competency area by adding content on how teachers' perceptions of behavior are subjective and how discipline practices can be racially biased." Hence, the importance of building a diverse early childhood workforce for the nation's diverse young learners. "The way we think about equity should be a core part of the basics."

## BALANCING RESOURCES, COST AND QUALITY LEARNING

The state of Maryland expressed the same conviction in 2021 when it promised more opportunity for every Maryland child in its Blueprint for the Future. The Blueprint provided the foundation needed to lift up every child to reach their full promise by transforming Maryland's education system into a world-class model. As part of the Blueprint, the state made a commitment to transforming early childhood education. It aimed to provide full-day pre-K at no or reduced cost for more families and public-private pre-K partnerships to expand options for families. The state also planned to expand wraparound services for families through community-based groups like Judy Centers and Patty Center, increase funding for the Maryland Infants and Toddler's Program to support students with special needs and devote more funds to raising the overall quality of student experiences in early childhood education.

Fulfilling these ambitious goals required building a broad pipeline of diverse, competent teachers and boosting the status of the early childhood profession. So, the state was raising the yardstick for teacher preparation, induction and mentoring programs to attract and retain high-quality teachers. But a question arose, as it had many years ago in the early days of Head Start. What's an efficient way to train enough qualified teachers for a large government push to support underserved students? In 2021, as in 1975, the CDA was an answer as the state aimed to balance resources, costs, and quality early learning.

The Maryland State Department of Education acknowledged the value of the CDA by giving the Council a $1 million grant to increase credential holders in the state. The grant covered the cost of credential fees, training and books, the Council explained as it worked with Maryland Family Network to get the word out about the funding, how to apply and the value of earning a CDA. The credential is an efficient way for educators to advance their careers, the Council pointed out. CDA holders have the skills to help children advance, too, the state agreed as it described the dual benefits of the grant. "This is an important step in Maryland's effort to create a revised early childhood education career ladder," said Steven Hicks, then the state's assistant superintendent at the Division of Early Childhood. "We're proud to be working with the Council to make it happen. We know that a learning environment that includes educators who meet the Council's high standards will help Maryland's children be better prepared to start elementary school."

Children who receive quality early learning are also more likely to graduate high school, as solid research has shown. When they do, they're looking for careers, and the Council provided a way for them to enter an in-demand field. In 2021, the Council released the *Child Development Associate (CDA) Handbook for High School: A Guide to Advocacy and Implementation*. The handbook includes planning and design tools, resources and

individualized instruction—everything teachers and administrators need to help students earn CDAs in career and technical education (CTE) programs. And the handbook has advanced several goals. It has helped high school students graduate career ready, encouraged them to seek higher education and helped meet America's pressing demand for professionals in the early learning field.

## MANNING UP FOR MEN

The high school CDA also holds the promise of bringing more men into the early childhood workforce, where they make up a meager 3.2 percent of the profession, a figure that has scarcely budged for many decades. Increasing the ranks of male early childhood teachers has been one of the Council's causes in recent years, and Council leaders have pursued it by holding panels and speaking out in the press against social norms that deter men from going into what's considered a traditional female field. Earning a CDA can help fight this social stigma, Moore knows firsthand as an educator and a male. "Acquiring my CDA," he said, "gave me the confidence to do more—which is important early in a career." And having more male early childhood teachers is also important for all young learners during their most formative years. The Council believes we should man up for men in the early childhood field so children can interact with a gender-balanced workforce. Having role models of nurturing men helps both boys and girls as they build their sense of identity and learn how to interact with the wider world.

Many young men are also seeking their own sense of identity during the high school years, as the Council has pointed out. They're searching for a path in life and exploring their options. So,

**They should make young men aware that teaching can be a gateway to careers in advocacy and policy with the potential to help children nationwide.**

it's a good time to introduce them to the early learning field. Administrators and teachers in CTE programs can encourage them by talking about men in positive ways and putting up displays that depict men in caring roles. They should make young men aware that teaching can be a gateway to careers in advocacy and policy with the potential to help children nationwide. And earning a CDA will help them take that first step in an appealing way.

The high school CDA is a great way to bring more young men into the early childhood field because men tend to like action-based learning. "The CDA is very hands on," said Bryan Nelson, director of MenTeach, a nonprofit devoted to boosting the number of men in education. He earned the credential before going on to college and graduate school, so he shows how the CDA promotes continued professional growth. "It appeals to many men by providing a clean step-by-step process for getting the skills they need, and that makes it an incredible career ladder."

In addition, earning a CDA is so much less expensive than getting a college degree. "It's almost impossible to pay back college loans," according to Patrick Frueh, a technical assistance specialist at Action for Children in Columbus, Ohio, and a Professional Development Specialist who assesses CDA candidates for the Council. "The CDA, on the other hand, offers a cost-effective way to get the skills you need," Frueh said, "and the greater return on investment might encourage more men to get into the field."

## COMPETENCE COUNTS

The high cost of college is among the factors that has spurred a growing demand for competency-based teacher education, like the CDA, in recent years—a development that reflected steady growth of competency-based education as a whole. As of 2020, 128 higher education institutions in the U.S. had already adopted 851 undergraduate and 206 graduate

competency-based education programs. Moreover, 82 percent of respondents in the 2020 National Survey of Postsecondary Competency-Based Education said they expected additional and explosive growth over the next five years.

This response reflected a strong belief in the benefits of competency-based education for students. Competency-based education allows students to spend much less money and time than they would on a traditional college degree. Meanwhile, they're gaining the skills they need to embark right away on a career. And this has been essential for the early learning field since 2020, when the pandemic shuttered child care centers and sent young children home to finish their education online. Even now, many centers remain short staffed and unable to accommodate all the children who need early education. This ongoing issue has highlighted the importance of quality early education not only to children's development, but also to the early childhood workforce, many of them immigrants and women of color.

Across the early childhood field, rising teachers face many barriers to getting the education they need. Competency-based education can help clear the way by providing flexible pathways and focusing on what a student knows and can do, rather than the time they spent learning or even when they learned their skills. Competencies are measured and assured by well-defined assessments instead of time spent in class. This means that students can prepare more quickly for the early education field. A competency-based approach also allows faculty to focus their teaching and mentoring on filling gaps in students' existing knowledge rather than trying to cover a prescribed set of content. And it frees students to focus their efforts on parts of the curriculum that they don't know.

This can be especially important for lower-income workers who need to quickly increase their skills if they are to advance in their careers. "Time is the enemy of the poor," said Charla Long, director of the Competency-Based Education Network. "When we remove time-based measures of learning, it helps on the diversity, equity and inclusion piece." Having a diverse group of teachers also promotes equity in early education for young children, who learn best from teachers who look like them and understand their culture. But "unfortunately, there are too many structural inequities in the early care and education field," Moore explained in 2021. "We want every aspect of our credentialing process to reflect the diversity in the field and give educators the tools to ensure their young students are successful."

This has been the purpose of the CDA since the Symbolic 12 received their credentials in 1975. And the Council remained true to this goal in 2021 when it opened a new chapter in the history of the CDA. The crying demand for child care since the start of the COVID pandemic led the Council to launch an ambitious endeavor: Reimagining the CDA to broaden the pipeline of qualified early childhood teachers. Since the start of the Reimagine project, the Council has drawn on a legacy that goes back to launch of Head Start, President Johnson's program to bring equity to early learning nationwide. The need for qualified teachers led to the current version of the CDA and its competence-based approach: 120 hours of formal training, 480 hours of classroom experience, preparation of a professional portfolio, a family questionnaire, an on-site observation and an exam. These basic components have remained the same as the Council works to scale up the CDA process and respond to a crisis no one imagined.

## NOW! NEW! *NEXT!*

Over 800,000 educators had earned CDAs by 2020 when the pandemic hit the early childhood field hard. The Council needed imagination as COVID posed roadblocks to the credentialing process. Many early learning programs shut down or were severely understaffed. State and local governments put strict limits on the number of visitors allowed into centers, so Professional Development Specialists couldn't conduct assessments and the Council could not award credentials, which made the child care crisis even more severe.

In this uncertain time for child care, Moore resolved to turn the crisis into an opportunity by reimagining the CDA. "I joined the Council in the middle of the pandemic when we needed to rebuild the early learning field," Moore recalled. He knew that disruptions like COVID often create new needs that demand new solutions. So, he called on the collective imagination of Council staff to come up with bold innovations. "Now! New! Next!" became his anthem as he urged everyone at the Council to think big about the credentialing process and embed a customer focus in all their work.

The Council also made its customers and stakeholders part of the reimagine effort because there are limits to the individual imagination. Ideas develop best through collaboration, so organizations need to ignite the collective imagination. The key to making this happen is sharing ideas while they are still being developed. So, the Council set up forums for people to contribute their expertise in early childhood education and their experience with the CDA.

The Council began by bringing together a Blue-Ribbon Panel of thought leaders from the early childhood field. The panel members agreed that allowing virtual assessments and ramping up the Council's technology would encourage more candidates to complete their CDAs as COVID forced the early childhood field to go remote. Still, the Council knew it had to dig deeper to explore the sector's changing needs. The Council had to get inside candidates' heads to imagine the improvements they wanted to see in the credentialing process.

Success in imagining your customer's needs takes a system and the Council found one in design thinking, an approach to innovation that blends people's needs, the possibilities of technology and the requirements of business. It leads you to empathize with your users, create a prototype and then repeatedly test. Design thinking became the credo for businesses like Apple and IBM as they changed their culture so employees would put consumers at the center of every decision. And the Council took this approach along with BCT Partners, a New Jersey consulting firm that Moore had encountered while working at the federal level. "I knew they had expertise that aligned with issues we were facing, including an overwhelmed call center and some nagging technology quirks. BCT was also well versed in design thinking so they could guide us through the process and help us be more candidate centric."

The Council learned what candidates wanted by listening to their concerns. In 2021, the Council took a deep dive into its interactions with shareholders and their reactions to the Council's key products: its website, online application system, CDA exam and CDA assessment. To explore these components of the credentialing process, Council staff and outside experts worked together to pinpoint strengths, pain points and windows for improvement.

The Council looked for the insights it needed by connecting with over 5,500 stakeholders and two dozen early learning experts. It contacted stakeholder groups and CDAs, both current and prospective, to collect data on their experience with the Council website. It conducted focus groups with English and Spanish speakers. It sent out online surveys to educators in different classroom settings to gain input on the tasks they routinely performed in their programs. It undertook a job analysis study for the Council's CDA exam to take a critical look at the Council's measures of competence and make any needed revisions.

In addition, the Council took steps to learn more about the support structures that different groups of educators could depend on while working toward a CDA. So, it constructed profiles of candidates, based on factors like where candidates lived, their education level, language, experience in teaching and race. Then it used these representative profiles to determine the likelihood of candidates earning the credential and how to increase their chances of success, a way to make the early learning workforce more inclusive and diverse.

"The Council has also aimed to ensure equity and access in the credentialing process through stellar customer service and seamless technology in all the systems our stakeholders use," said Beth Heeb, the Council's VP of quality assurance and research. "Every one of them, from CDA candidates to PD Specialists, should have the support they need when engaging with us. Meeting their diverse needs is a big part of our commitment to equity since we serve candidates who speak a wide range of languages and come from a wide range of roles in the early childhood field. Their diverse needs drove the redesign to make the CDA process easier and more efficient."

Technology now allows the Council to ease some of the pain points candidates have endured while proceeding through the process of earning a CDA. For example, the Council has a new website that offers a streamlined, user-friendly experience. Revised exams are available in English and Spanish, and Pearson VUE is preparing to put them into its system. And a design team is working on a new dashboard that will let candidates track their progress—all ways the Council has harnessed the power of high tech to help more candidates succeed.

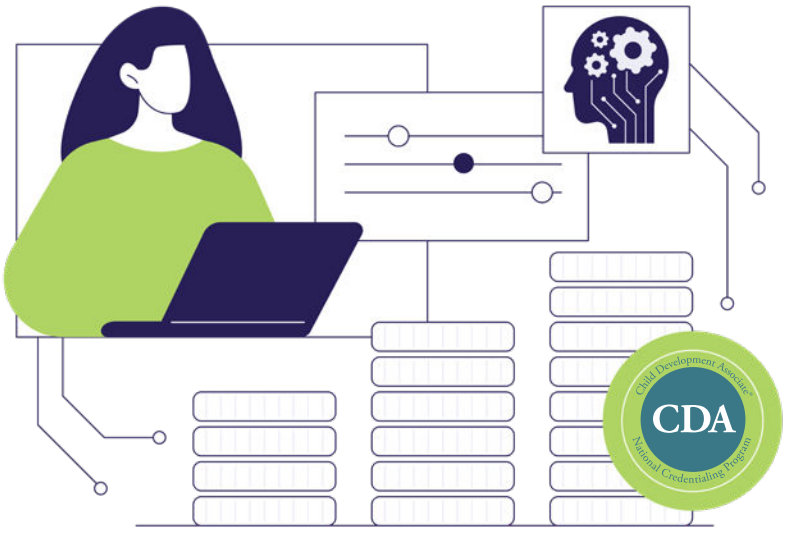
Many of these improvements are part of YourCouncil 2.0, said the Council's VP of credentialing, Abena Ocran-Jackson. "The Council's new streamlined platform for candidates and PD Specialists provides an option for virtual verification visits and more access to information. It offers a PD Specialist matching process to make it simpler to schedule assessments. The system connects our credentialing team with our call center, so people can quickly get the information they need, instead of suffering through lengthy waits on the phone. And it will provide links for candidates to connect with training organizations to get the coursework they need."

These changes will resolve long-term issues that have dogged candidates for decades, and Moore feels their pain because he, too, faced roadblocks in the early nineties while working toward his CDA. Granted, his experience wasn't precisely the same, Moore said while looking back. "When I earned my CDA, the credentialing process was longer, and the LAT model involved more community members. At the same time, the process was less formal since the Council has since required candidates to take an exam and put together a portfolio of resources to use on the job. So, the steps candidates go through now differ from what I experienced then. But I did deal with some of the same frustrations, like needing more information and not being able to reach the right folks. Like many CDA candidates, I also earned the credential as a demand of my job and the stakes may be higher for our educators now."

Since the days when Dr. Moore earned his CDA, more states have required early childhood teachers to hold a CDA. In Florida, for example, a law that took effect in 1995 requires every child care center to have at least one staff member with a CDA. In Washington, DC, a 2016 law mandates that all assistant teachers must have a CDA. In addition, support for the credential has been especially strong in Puerto Rico, Oklahoma, Louisiana, Arkansas, Alaska, Wyoming, Michigan and Ohio. All these states have embedded the CDA in their child care licensure and career ladder for professionals in the early learning field.

And the demand for qualified teachers, like those who earn a CDA will only rise due to the recent push toward pre-K for all young children. Granted, the American Families Plan of 2021, President Joe Biden's push for national pre-K, failed to become law, like the 1971 Child Development Act after Nixon's veto spelled its doom. Fortunately, the campaign for public pre-K has expanded beyond the White House and the divisive politics of Capitol Hill. Lawmakers in the states have taken up the gauntlet by expanding the pipeline of skilled early childhood teachers and investing in programs that meet working families' needs.

All but four states—Idaho, Montana, South Dakota and Wyoming—have a state-run preschool program that reaches some students, most often children from low-income households or those with special needs. California, Colorado, Hawaii and New Mexico recently passed laws to provide access to early learning for all young children. Governors in Illinois, Michigan and New Jersey



have also taken the first steps in the same direction. And it's a trend that's caught the attention of Steven Barnett, founder and senior co-director of the National Institute for Early Education Research, as well as one of the authors of its widely read State of Preschool yearbook. "I don't think we've had a wave like this," he exclaimed last year. "That dramatically changes the landscape," leading to an even greater need for educators with CDAs.

The success of pre-K for all depends on boosting the ranks of skilled teachers, much like it did in the early days of Head Start. The CDA was the answer then and remains a solution for states now. In Michigan, for example, preschools can hire an assistant teacher without a CDA, but that person must have finished at least one credit-bearing course in child development to begin and must complete the credential within two years. In Hawaii, assistant teachers must have a CDA or have completed the coursework for a CDA upon hire. North Carolina stipulates that assistant teachers must have a high school diploma or GED and must hold or be working toward a minimum of a CDA. Similarly, Tennessee requires that assistant teachers show active progress toward completion of a CDA to be rehired. And Oregon provides training/technical assistance to support assistant teachers in obtaining their CDAs within two years of hire.

The requirements educators face now have made the Council even more determined to come up with something new and prepare for what's next—a journey that's involved roadblocks, too. "We're striving to scale up a system that wasn't meant to manage today's demands," explained Andrew Davis, the Council's COO. "In 1975, 12 people received those first CDAs. Now we're awarding nearly 50,000 CDAs a year, and we've managed to do that by tweaking the CDA process over time. Now we're ramping up for a future in which we can sustain twice our current volume. Delivering on that promise requires wholesale system changes, a tricky process that involves many intertwined parts. So, we've had to make added changes while moving through the full cycle of innovation."

## DATA AND DEMAND

The Council's ongoing efforts to advance the credential will help more educators get ahead in their careers. That's the good news from the latest in the series of CDA stakeholder surveys that began in 1983. The "2022 CDA Credential Holder Survey and Focus Groups Narrative Report" showed that CDA holders know the demands of the real-world classroom and increasingly have what it takes to meet them. According to the data, 87 percent of CDA holders feel more prepared for the classroom because they've gained a foundation in early learning and best practices for the classroom. "The CDA was a wonderful way to get into my current position," one teacher pointed out in a focus group, "and get into the job market I wanted to be in."

And more young people are starting to feel this way. The number of CDA earners between 18 and 34 has been increasing, in part because high school CTE programs have ramped up their CDA instruction in recent years. This means that students can graduate career ready for a field that urgently needs staff in the wake of the pandemic. But the quality of teachers still counts in the hiring process as center directors strive to hire the most qualified teachers for the precious children they serve. So, 80 percent of owners and directors are more likely to hire someone with a CDA than someone without it, and one program owner

*(Left) Dr. Calvin Moore with (Right) Jada Vargas, the millionth CDA recipient*

summed up the reasons why. "For me, it shows that the staff is very dedicated, knowledgeable and willing to put in the effort because it's a lot of work to earn a CDA."

Candidates who succeed gain crucial skills and are more prepared for the classroom, as 79 percent of owners and directors agreed. The top benefits of earning a CDA, according to survey respondents, are better knowledge of evidence-based practices, specialized knowledge of child development and readiness to manage difficult classroom situations, as owners and directors pointed out. CDA holders appear more adept at interacting with children and communicating with parents. They also stay longer on the job and seem more committed to their work due to the effort it takes to earn the credential.

Still, it's more convenient now than it was in the early days of the credential. Remote learning has been on the rise, especially since the pandemic, at the training centers and institutions of higher ed where CDA candidates undertake their coursework. Candidates can now take their classes either onsite, online or in a hybrid combination, and that matters because 62 percent of CDA candidates hold full-time jobs, often in the child care field, while completing their coursework. And the programs that they work in approve of the endeavor. "We see the CDA as a steppingstone to professionalism in early childhood," as the owner of one child care center explained. "And so, even folks who we've identified as having degrees in early childhood, they need to get a CDA."

It pays off by helping CDA holders advance in their careers, according to 73 percent of the teachers who the Council surveyed. Half of employers pay CDAs up to 10 percent more than their noncredentialled peers. And many get promotions, most commonly to lead teacher. Still, CDA holders realize that earning a CDA is about more than pay and promotions. Earning a CDA is a way to build new skills and serve children better, the reason 60 percent of respondents said they pursued the credential. Some are novice teachers,

like one focus group participant who praised the CDA as a way of "providing you with knowledge if you have no knowledge of child care." Others are seasoned teachers who put in the effort to keep their credentials up to date. Over a third of CDA holders have renewed their credentials tat least once to refresh their existing knowledge and explore new areas of interest in their field.

The Council encourages CDA holders to continue learning, especially those who represent underserved groups. Our enduring goal is to promote equity for both teachers and young children, so it's important to look at the faces behind the figures. Over half of CDA holders are people of color and a quarter speak Spanish. So, the credential promotes diversity, equity and inclusion by giving all early childhood professionals more chances to build rewarding careers.

## CELEBRATING THE MILLIONTH CDA®

The Council's relentless pursuit of this goal led it to reach an impressive milestone in 2023 when it issued the millionth CDA, as Craig Melvin had predicted in 2020 on NBC. The honor went to a young woman from Arizona who embodied the Council's longstanding commitment to underserved groups and its hopes for the future of early learning. Jada Vargas is a member of the Apache tribe who earned her CDA in high school while serving Native children at a center on her reservation. She has continued working at the center while advancing her education so she can do even more as a teacher to improve life for the members of her tribe.

**Our enduring goal is to promote equity for both teachers and young children, so it's important to look at the faces behind the figure.**

Jada's sense of mission and social conscience have grown since earning her CDA and she's now determined to lift her community up. "As a Native American, I feel I have a responsibility to address some of the issues my people face, whether it's poverty, struggles with parenting or failure to see the value of education. I also want to help preserve Apache culture and language as a part of my classroom practice with young children," she said last year when Council staff honored her achievement in Washington DC. As we toasted Jada, we also raised a glass to a lofty dream: awarding our next million CDAs. And the Council again aimed high when it issued new mission and vision statements in March 2024.

## CHANGING SOCIETY WITH THE CDA®

The new statements conveyed the Council's resolve to meet rising calls for competent early childhood teachers as the early learning field rebuilt. The Council was prepared since it believed there were endless prospects for the CDA in the wake of COVID, the move toward child care for all and more recognition of the credential in state regulations for child care. These factors have led us to reimagine the CDA and take steps to scale up the credential. But increasing demand for the CDA didn't lead the Council to abandon its founding ideals. "One's first mission in life should be to make a positive difference," as Peter Drucker a renowned management guru said in the eighties when the Council got its start.

The Council believed Drucker was right, as shown in its first mission statement from 1985: "The Council for Professional Recognition promotes improved performance and recognition of professionals in the early childhood education of children ages birth to five years old"—something we've strived to do from the start. And we expressed our long-term aim in our first vision statement: "The Council for Professional Recognition works to ensure that all professional early childhood educators and caregivers meet the emotional and educational needs of our nation's youngest children"—still a valid goal, but by 2024 it didn't go far enough.

The early learning landscape had changed since the Council's early days, as the Council acknowledged in its new mission and vision statements. According to our new mission statement, "The Council for Professional Recognition advances career pathways for early childhood educators through high-quality, competency-based credentialing." And this mission serves a broad goal, as shown by our new vision statement: "The Council for Professional Recognition envisions a society where all children learn and thrive in environments led by competent, valued early childhood educators."

These revisions to the words in our mission and vision statements reflect the advent of new research and regulations, policies and practices for serving children best. In recent decades, brain science has proved the value of early learning for "all children to thrive," as we say in our new vision statement. And this is a broad goal that will shape our whole "society" for decades to come. That was the impetus for Head Start, part of Lyndon Baines Johnson's bold program to build a great society for all. The CDA played a role in the program, and over the decades, the Council has put a brighter spotlight on the social goals of the CDA as we've reached for our dream of equity in early learning.

That's still also the goal of Head Start, and the Council reaffirmed its ties with the program in 2024 by holding a Head Start Virtual Open

House. "We have a long history with the Head Start Fellowship," Moore said as he kicked off the event for the latest group of fellows. They were a diverse group of rising early childhood leaders who had come to learn how the CDA could help them make an impact on their communities nationwide. And that has been the goal of the Head Start Fellowship since it began in 1995 under the leadership of Dr. Day. At the time, Day explained that the "fellowship was a natural match for the Council's mission to foster the increased status and recognition of education professionals, so it provided a great chance to expand the capacity of promising leaders in the field." And the Council did so while administering the fellowship until 2005.

Despite the passage of time, this year's cohort of fellows still had much to gain from the Council's insights, as shown by the attendees' interest while hearing from Council staff. Their presentations covered the full scope of Council efforts from advancing multilingual learning to boosting community engagement, from forming partnerships in the early childhood community to advocating for policies that benefit educators and young learners. In addition, Council staff described their work to refine the CDA assessment process and broaden the reach of the CDA, all to serve an enduring goal. Since the dawn of the fellowship under Day, the Council, like Head Start, has strived to promote diversity, equity and inclusion, Moore pointed out. "Together, we can reach the North Star of a society in which all children succeed with the support of competent early childhood teachers. So, we're looking to you to be the next cohort of leaders, not only in Head Start but across the early learning landscape nationwide."

## THE SOUL OF THE CDA®

In recent years, the Council has planted the seeds of change by reimagining the CDA to train more teachers who can help young children bloom. This goal has also led us to update *Essentials* so our textbook would reflect changing times while preserving our founding ideals. They were present in the first edition, a model curriculum to build tolerance and inclusion. The second added the latest research and advice on helping all young learners advance. And now the step-by-step tools we give CDA students in the third edition have a laser focus on our longtime mission to serve the public good.

The CDA emerged in the wake of a poverty crisis that led to the launch of Head Start. And the crises of recent times have led the Council to be even more committed to social justice in the early childhood classroom. In the past few years, there's been a rise in racial and ethnic tensions, pointing to the need to teach tolerance when young minds are most open. Equally pressing is the shortage of early childhood teachers, a persistent issue that took the spotlight during the pandemic. The gap between supply and demand is especially glaring in low-income, marginalized communities and those of color—precisely the ones that suffered the greatest losses from the pandemic. Add to this the setbacks that women suffered as they had to make an unfair choice between caring for their children and keeping their jobs.

All this fueled public support for a fairer, more balanced system. So, we seized the moment to embed equity throughout our new edition of *Essentials*, from the type of books we recommend to techniques for settling conflicts and talking to

families. We've honed our focus on how teachers can use the microcosm of the classroom to make a macro impact by giving children a sense of social justice when they are small. That's also a prime time for children to learn to value difference among their peers in our increasingly diverse classrooms. So, *Essentials* now offers new tips on how to help young learners rejoice in what joins them and respect what sets them apart.

Our children have changed, so we have broadened our discussion on the best ways to help them succeed. Still, we have stayed true to our roots under the leadership of Dr. Moore, a CDA holder and former Head Start student. He's expanding on the legacy of Edward Zigler, an original Head Starter, as he called himself, and father of the CDA. Zigler was convinced that "we can do better by our children than we have been doing," and the Council has shared this belief as we urge the public to embrace children's best interests in every aspect of their lives—and in their hearts.

Our sense of conviction has inspired our efforts to stand up for our teachers and support them in earning their CDAs so they can serve young children best. A key step in the credentialing process is careful study of the *Essentials*, and it, too, has paved the way for change while preserving the past. Now—as Zigler was 50 years ago—we're determined to give all children the head start they deserve in school and life. That remains our North Star because we know that a great society begins with a great education for every child. Building equity in early learning is still the essence of *Essentials*—and the soul of the CDA.

**— we're determined to give all children the head start they deserve in school and life. That remains our North Star because we know that a great society begins with a great education for every child.**

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