

Guidance for Career and Technical Education (CTE) Programs Supporting High School Students in Completing the Child Development Associate® (CDA) Credential™ as an End of Pathway Assessment

During the busy months of high school students' junior and senior years, ongoing support from school faculty and program leaders can help students understand and meet Child Development Associate® (CDA) Credential™ preparation requirements before graduation. The information below provides important steps and checklists to help students apply for and complete the CDA preparation process.

It is important for students to understand they cannot submit their CDA application until they have met **ALL** prerequisite requirements, including 120 hours of child development/early childhood education, with at least 10 hours in each of the eight [CDA® Subject Areas](#). They also must have completed 480 hours of experience working directly with children in the age groups of the CDA setting to which they are applying—center-based infants and toddlers (ages birth to 36 months), center-based preschoolers (ages 3 to 5), center-based birth to five, or family childcare (ages birth to 5). In addition, students must have completed the *CDA® Professional Portfolio*. The sections below offer information and resources to track these requirements and ensure completion.

Achieving 480 Hours of Work Experience

Students can accumulate the 480 required hours of experience while working or volunteering in a child care program. The setting may be a program serving young children in a student's high school or in the community. The student must gain the experience working with an age group and in a setting that matches the type of credential the student is hoping to earn.

Example: To meet the 480 hours (based on a 32-week school year), a student needs to work 3 hours a day (within a 5-day week) to be completed in one year. If a student plans to complete the program in two years (based on a 32-week school year), they need to work 1.5 hours per day (within a 5-day week). Students can earn additional hours by working extra hours in the summer.

Documenting Training Hours

Schools must verify in writing that the student has completed the 120 clock hours of training required for a CDA® and that the training is specific to the credential type the student is applying for. The verification letter must be written on the school letterhead, which includes the school address and phone number. It may be signed by teachers, administrators, principals, assistant principals, office administrators or training coordinators.

Preparing the CDA® Professional Portfolio

Students will upload information and documents required for their *CDA® Professional Portfolio* at the time of application by using the [Council's E-Portfolio Tool](#). The E-Portfolio system takes them through the portfolio sections step-by-step to meet the setting-specific requirements outlined in the *CDA® Competency Standards* books. The [CDA Professional Portfolio](#) includes transcripts, certificates and documentation of professional education; family questionnaires, the resource collection, six reflective

statements of competence, and a professional philosophy statement. A [CDA E-Portfolio Frequent FAQ](#) document is available to support students in preparing and completing the CDA credentialing process and E-Portfolio. When students are finished with the sections, they will be able to create a PDF document that they can save and share.

Applying to the Council for Professional Recognition for CDA® Assessment

The following steps will help students stay on track during the sequence of application:

- ❑ **YourCouncil Account:** Once students are near the end of their *final semester* in their program, they should set up a [YourCouncil](#) account.
- ❑ **Application Fee:** Students must submit the nonrefundable, non-transferable application fee with their applications.
- ❑ **Scholarships:** Students who are eligible for scholarships usually receive an eligibility notice from the funder, followed by a letter and voucher code. Some programs send checks directly to the Council. If the funder awards a voucher code, students must enter the voucher code in their cart to “checkout” in [YourCouncil](#).
- ❑ **Payment:** If students are ineligible for CDA® assessment fee scholarships, they must secure payment before submitting their applications.
- ❑ **Identifying a PDS:** Students identify a CDA PD Specialist™ **before** completing the application online, by using the PD Specialist Directory, which is located within the student’s dashboard in *YourCouncil*. The PD Specialist is notified that the student added their PDS number to their application. The PD Specialist will agree to serve and make final arrangements once a student receives a “Ready to Schedule” notice for a CDA Verification Visit®.
- ❑ **Exam Authorization:** After payment, candidates will receive their first “Ready to Schedule” notification, authorizing and outlining their six-month deadline to schedule and complete the CDA exam.
- ❑ **CDA Verification Visit® Authorization:** Once the student’s CDA exam score is received by the Council, candidates will get a second notification to inform them of their credentialing decision and whether a verification visit with a PD Specialist will be needed. Please see Path 1, 2, and 3 below for details about the CDA Verification Visit.
- ❑ **Timeline:** There is a six-month timeline limit to complete the CDA exam and CDA Verification Visit. Therefore, it is crucial that students schedule their exam as soon as possible after their application.

Language Specialization

Students may apply for language specialization. Bilingual specialization is for candidates working in bilingual programs and whose job requires them to use English and another language. Monolingual specialization is for students whose job requires them to use a language other than English. Students who wish to apply for assessment in another language will indicate this in their application. If the language specialization relates to a language other than English or Spanish, the students must receive the Council's approval **before** completing and submitting their application.

Taking the CDA® Exam

Students schedule online and take the CDA® exam at a local [Pearson Vue](#) testing center. Based on the student's exam results, they will complete one of three paths.

- **Path 1: Streamlined Credentialing Decision.** If a student demonstrates the qualifying level of competence on the exam, they may receive a streamlined credentialing decision. For this path, the Council will review the student's portfolio and provide a credentialing decision without requiring a CDA Verification Visit®.
- **Path 2: CDA Verification Visit®.** If the student does not receive a qualifying level of competence on the exam, they will complete a verification visit. In this path, the PD Specialists can access the student's uploaded professional portfolio in advance. Following the CDA Verification Visit®, the Council will review both the exam scores and the visit scores to render a credentialing decision.
- **Path 3: Retake the CDA® Exam.** If the student does not pass the exam, they will receive two additional exam attempts. The results of these additional exam attempts will determine whether the student becomes eligible for an expedited credentialing decision or will move forward with a verification visit. If a student is not successful after their final exam attempt, they will not receive the credential and may reapply after a six-month waiting period.

Participating in a CDA Verification Visit®

If students have been scheduled for a CDA Verification Visit®, they will receive a second *Ready to Schedule* notice. The CDA Verification Visit will take place at the early childhood program listed on the application where the student is volunteering or working and will include:

- A one-hour review of the candidate's professional portfolio by the PD Specialist, unless it has already been reviewed by the PD Specialist ahead of time.
- A two-hour observation of the candidate as a lead teacher working directly with children in the appropriate setting.
- A one-hour reflective dialogue focused on the candidate's strengths, progress, and goals.

For more information about the CDA® credentialing process, please see the following resources:

- [CDA High School Pathways](#)
- [CDA High School Handbook](#)