

Info Sheet: Montana Early Care and Education Career Development

MSU Early Childhood Project

Bozeman, Montana

Fall 2005

What's the Difference Between CDA and an Early Childhood College Degree?

What is CDA?

A CDA (Child Development Associate) is a national credential awarded by the Council for Early Childhood Professional Recognition. This credential requires at least 120 hours of formal training within the last five years. This training may be for college credit or noncredit, but must be under the auspices of an agency or organization with expertise in early childhood teacher preparation. Completing the CDA without college credit allows one to meet the training requirements for Level 3 on the Montana Early Care and Education Practitioner Registry (Career Path). The CDA plus 20 early childhood college credits meets the training requirements for a Level 4 on the Practitioner Registry.

Associate Degree

The Associate Degree is a two-year college degree and consists of a minimum of 60 semester credits which include both early childhood and general education credits. Completing this degree meets the training requirements for a Level 5 on the Montana Early Care and Education Practitioner Registry.

Bachelor's Degree

A Bachelor's Degree is a four-year college degree that requires at least 120 semester credits in early childhood education/child development and general education coursework. A degree in early childhood/child development meets the training requirements for a Level 6 on the Practitioner Registry. This degree is currently offered by MSU-Bozeman and UM-Western.

Early Childhood Minor

An early childhood minor consists of a minimum of 20 semester credits in early childhood education/child development. The minor has been approved by the Montana Board of Education and is recognized by the Office of Public Instruction as meeting the state standards for an Early Childhood Permissive Special Competency (EC-PSC). The EC-PSC is an endorsement that may be added to an elementary teaching certificate. Completing the elementary education degree with an EC-PCS meets the training requirement for Level 6 on the Practitioner Registry. The minor is currently offered through MSU-Bozeman and through UM-Western.

Distance Learning

In Montana all CARE courses (www.carecourses.com) and Child Care Resources on-line training (www.childcaretraining.org) are approved in Montana. Contact your Child Care Resource and Referral Agency for information about other correspondence courses and independent studies they may offer.

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What Twenty Credits Are Accepted as Early Childhood/Child Development?

For Levels 4-8, Early Childhood/Child Development college credits are required.

In 1994 the Montana Board of Public Education approved the Early Childhood Permissive Special Competency (ECPSC) which means that individuals who complete the necessary requirements have this competency added to their elementary teaching certification. Teachers receiving this competency complete specialized early childhood courses focusing on children birth through age eight and their families.

Due to the amount of research that supports specialized education for teachers, the following national organizations have made recommendations that pre-kindergarten through third grade primary teachers have special certification of competencies: National Association for the Education of Young Children, National Association of Elementary School Principals, National Association of State Boards of Education, National Board of Professional Teaching Standards, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, and Association for Childhood Education International.

The Montana ECPSC is currently offered through MSU-Bozeman and the University of Montana-Western. Each college must apply to the state Office of Public Instruction to be approved by the Board of Public Education for the ECPSC. Colleges must prove that they meet the Montana standards for the ECPSC. The ECPSC requires 20-26 specialized semester credits depending upon the college or university.

The ECPSC includes content in the areas listed below. This same content (20 semester credits) is required for Levels 4-8 on the Career Path. When the degree is in a Social Science or Education rather than Early Childhood Education/Child Development (or Level 5 with an unrelated degree), there must be 20 credits from these areas as well. The 20 credits must include course work from at least 5 of the following content areas (6 areas beginning January 2006):

- Child/Human Growth and Development
- Learning Environments
- Exceptionality (Developmental Diversity)
- Family and Community Partnerships
- Early Childhood Curriculum
- Child Guidance
- Observation and Assessment
- Program Management/Administration
- Professionalism
- Practicum or lab credits in infant/toddler through third grade programs or classrooms, or student teaching in a Kindergarten through 3rd grade classroom count for a maximum of 5 semester credits.

Practitioners applying to the Practitioner Registry for Level 5 or 6 who do not have a degree in ECE/CD or the Montana ECPSC must provide transcripts of course work in the above content areas for review.

For questions about CDA or any of these college programs, contact the Early Childhood Project.



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