

What's the Difference between a CDA, an CCDS Apprenticeship Certificate, a College Certificate 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.

What is the MT Child Care Development Specialist Apprenticeship Certificate?

This is a professional development option in MT that requires college course work in early childhood and on the job mentoring. The program is jointly supported through the state Department of Labor and Industry and the Department of Public Health and Human Services/ Early Childhood Services Bureau. The certificate is accepted by Head Start as equivalent to a CDA credential and is recognized as Level 4 Certification on The MT Practitioner Registry.

What is an Early Childhood College Certificate?

Some colleges offer a thirty credits college certificate in early childhood education. This is recognized at Level 4 on the The Montana Practitioner Registry/Career Path. Check with your college or university to see if this option is available.

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 bachelor's degree with at least 20 semester college credits in Early Childhood Education/Child Development meets the education requirements for Level 6 Certification on The MT Practitioner Registry. A degree in early childhood/child development meets the education requirements for Level 7 Certification on The Practitioner Registry.

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-PSC meets the education requirement for Level 6 Certification on The MT Practitioner Registry.

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

For Levels 4-9 on the Montana Practitioner Registry/Career Path, Early Childhood/Child Development college credits are required. Early childhood professionals applying to The MT Practitioner Registry for Levels 4 – 9 Certification must provide copies of transcripts or grade reports for review.

In 1994 the Montana Board of Public Education approved the Early Childhood Permissive Special Competency (EC-PSC) 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.

Each college must apply to the state Office of Public Instruction to be approved by the Board of Public Education for the EC-PSC. Colleges must prove that they meet the Montana standards for the EC-PSC. The EC-PSC requires 20-26 specialized semester credits depending upon the college or university. Check with your college or university to find out if they have been approved to offer the EC-PSC.

The EC-PSC includes content in the key areas listed below. This same content (20 semester credits) is required for Levels 4-9 on the Career Path. The 20 credits required for The MT Practitioner Registry must include course work from at least 6 of the following content area with some course work in each of the four areas with an asterisk.

Child/Human Growth and Development*	Early Childhood Curriculum*
Child Guidance*	Family and Community Partnerships*
Exceptionality (Developmental Diversity)	Health, Safety, and Nutrition
Learning Environments	Observation and Assessment
Professionalism	Program Management/Administration
Personal Dispositions	

For questions about early childhood professional development or the MT Practitioner Registry, please contact the Early Childhood Project or institutions of higher education in MT that are regionally accredited by the US Department of Education.

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