



Blueprint for Maryland's Future

Early Childhood Education Licensure

The Blueprint for Maryland's Future "Blueprint," a keystone piece of legislation passed in 2021 with a veto override from Maryland's General Assembly, has transformed the education system in Maryland. One of the most significant expansions to the system due to the Blueprint is the expansion of early childhood education programs. This expansion increases funding for more providers to offer a full-day preschool program and enhances the rigor for educators who serve Maryland's pre-k students. This paper outlines how education support professionals (ESPs) can prepare to meet the rigorous licensure standards by the 2025-2026 school year.

Education Article §7-1a-04 outlines the new programmatic requirements.¹ Among the requirements are new licensure requirements for both teachers and education support professionals, expectations for pre-kindergarten providers' curricula, higher standards for public and private programs, which includes a public rating by Maryland EXCELS program, and a tiered system to determine program eligibility based on a student's age and household income. Maryland EXCELS is [Maryland's quality rating and improvement system](#) for child care and early education programs.

New Certification Requirements for Teachers/Teaching Assistants Beginning SY 2025-2026

Lead Teacher Requirements

A teacher must have, at a minimum:

- State certification for teaching in early childhood education; or
- Bachelor's degree in any field and are pursuing residency through the Maryland Approved Alternative Preparation Program, which includes early childhood coursework, clinical practice, and evidence of pedagogical content knowledge.

Teaching Assistant Requirements

A teaching assistant must have at least:

- A Child Development Associate (CDA) certificate; or
- An associate's degree

Child Development Associate (CDA) Attainment

Currently, childcare center staff and providers must have at a minimum, a high school diploma to begin working in pre-kindergarten programs. The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) partners with the Council for Professional Recognition to support educators in obtaining their Child Development Associate certificate through scholarships. More information relative to CDA may be found at <https://www.cdacouncil.org/en/about/learn-about-the-cda/>

CDA Requirements/Criteria²

- A CDA professional portfolio with all required documents, which can include:
 - Lesson plans
 - Sample assignments
 - Audio or video recordings of educators' teaching style



- Performance evaluations
- Letters of recommendation or testimonials by parents or supervisors
- 480 hours of professional work experience in a center-based or same type of program setting with children three to five (3-5) years old.
- 120 hours of formal early childhood education for the setting where you work (infant/toddler, pre-school, or family child care) with a minimum of 10 hours in each of the eight CDA subject areas. They include:
 1. Planning a safe, healthy learning environment
 2. Advancing children's physical and intellectual development
 3. Supporting children's social and emotional development
 4. Building productive relationships with families
 5. Managing an effective program
 6. Maintaining a commitment to professionalism
 7. Observing and recording children's behavior
 8. Understanding principles of child development and learning
- Collaboration with a CDA professional development specialist who will:
 - Conduct a verification visit
 - Review the portfolio
 - Conduct an observation
 - Submit a score recommendation to the Council
- Once the eligibility has been met, the CDA verification visit has been conducted, and the CDA exam has been completed, the results will be reviewed by the CDA Council and PD specialist to render a credentialing decision.

Recommendations

1. **MSEA affiliates should work with local school systems (LSSs) to enhance the salary scale of education support staff professionals to adequately and fairly compensate them for attaining additional credentials.** The new Blueprint requirements for early childhood teaching assistants require them to spend time, money, and additional resources to obtain an associate degree or CDA. Similar to the compensation model for teachers who acquire a National Board Certification or take course credits, ESPs could be incentivized to stay in the pre-k programs by fairly compensating them for their work and additional educational attainments or credentialing.

MSEA chief negotiators may also coordinate during the bargaining period to ensure there are uniform associate degree requirements and compensation models. Specifically, it would be more beneficial for ESPs in positions requiring an associate degree or CDA credential to have a separate salary lane as opposed to receiving additional, flat dollar stipends added to compensation.
2. **MSEA affiliates should expand negotiated funding to include tuition reimbursement for ESP members who take or need to retake the CDA exam, in addition to course credits, tutoring courses, and the purchasing of testing materials for certification.** One of the largest barriers to ESPs entering the education workforce is the accumulated expenses it takes for test preparation and exam costs. Therefore, members should have access to course reimbursement, or be able to



apply for a stipend or funding from their local to assist with the cost of testing prep materials. This also applies to teaching assistants who look to pursue an associate degree to become qualified.

Locals can adopt a memorandum of understanding for incentives or reimbursement models that mirror provisions for those teachers pursuing a national board certification (NBC) who receive a stipend to retake an assessment for the NBC. In the alternative, existing provisions providing for professional development monies or course reimbursement should be expanded to cover these new statutory requirements. We also recommend that affiliates investigate how funds provided from MSDE Leads grants could support this recommendation.

- MSEA affiliates should work to organize the Maryland General Assembly and State Board of Education to fund the Child Care Career and Professional Development Fund (CCCPDF) to provide tuition assistance to ESPs to obtain an associate's degree.** According to a recent report at the State Board of Education, there are two credentialing programs that assist child care providers in their career and professional development. One of these programs, the CCCPDF, is specifically designed as a tuition assistance program to help child care providers obtain a college education at a participating college/university in Maryland, but no funding has been set aside to fund the program.

It is important that our local affiliates determine an organizing strategy to advocate through the Maryland General Assembly and through the State Board of Education for tuition assistance in the forms of grants/scholarships (not loans) and to allocate funding to members in a similar way the CCCPDF is providing funds to childcare providers.

CEPP Resources

The Center for Education Policy and Practice (CEPP) is committed to providing our members with the resources they need as credentials and certification requirements revolve through the implementation of the Blueprint. The following resources outline the ways that CEPP will support ESPs during this process.

- **CDA Attainment Professional Development** CEPP will provide webinar-style, self-paced training to be available in the 2023-2024 school year to support ESPs with understanding and excelling in the eight CDA subject areas. This training will be available to members on MSEA Professional Learning Portal.

MSDE Resources

The MSDE Division of Early Childhood provides a host of resources to support current ESPs looking to obtain additional credentialing:

- [CDA Credentialing Process Overview](#) This document provides an overview of preparing to obtain the CDA certification.
- ["CDA Assessment & Credentialing System: Everything You Ever Wanted to Know!"](#) This PowerPoint presentation, paired with a recorded webinar, provides a detailed outline of what a CDA is, how to navigate the credentialing process, and how to be successful in obtaining one.
- ["CDA Assessment & Credentialing System: Everything You Ever Wanted to Know!"](#) This recorded webinar and the PowerPoint presentation provide an overview of the CDA assessment and the process to obtain it.
- [CDA Funding Application](#) This application is for early childhood educators seeking financial support to earn the CDA credential. The Maryland Family Network provides guidelines for setting up your CDA



profile, applying for CDA funding through MSDE, and using it to pay for your CDA credential. You can also refer to [3 Easy Steps to Apply for CDA Funding](#).

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- 1 Maryland Constitution, Chapter 36 of 2021, (2021)
 - 2 Williams, Vilma, and Sandra Kowalchek. "Everything You Ever Wanted to Know about the CDA® Assessment & Credentialing System for High School Students!" Maryland Department of Education, 13 June 2019.