



How to Meet Education Requirements for Lead Child Care Teachers: The Child Development Association Credential and the North Carolina Early Childhood Credential

The Child Development Associate (CDA) Credential

A Child Development Associate (CDA) credential is one way to meet the education requirements to work in a child care facility in North Carolina. While a CDA is not mandatory, it can help with career advancement and many employers prefer it. The Child Development Associate credential is recognized across the United States and worldwide.

To obtain a CDA, you must complete many components such as:

- Completing 120 hours of formal education in a CDA program
- Creating a professional portfolio
- Having a CDA verification visit
- Passing the CDA exam

See the [Council for Professional Recognition](#) for a complete list of CDA components.

Funding Your CDA

There are costs involved with earning a CDA, including course tuition and [application fees](#). Before paying out of pocket, you may try to secure funding through:

- [Teacher Education and Compensation Helps \(TEACH\) Early Childhood® North Carolina](#)
Visit the website to learn how to who is eligible and how to apply for scholarship programs.
- [Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act \(WIOA\) through NCWorks](#)
Get started by finding the [NCWorks Career Center](#) near you and making an appointment. [This article](#) explains WIOA funding for child care workers.
- **Your current employer**
Ask your employer about coverage for tuition, release time, and/or exam fees.

Registered Apprenticeship Programs through [ApprenticeshipNC](#) offer the opportunity for paid employment while you complete CDA coursework.

Completing Your CDA Coursework

[North Carolina community colleges](#) offer CDA coursework in in-person, online, and hybrid formats. They may also provide portfolio support and CDA exam preparation. There are also private CDA training programs, but these may have higher cost. Review these [tips for finding a high-quality CDA training provider](#).

The North Carolina Early Childhood Credential

A faster option to meet the education requirements to be a lead teacher in a child care facility in North Carolina is the [North Carolina Early Childhood Credential](#) (NCECC). This is a state-issued credential that shows you have basic training in early childhood education.

There are three ways to earn the North Carolina Early Childhood Credential. Contact [your local community college](#) to check on availability, including whether online or evening options are offered.

1. **EDU 119: Introduction to Early Childhood Education** is a college credit course. It often runs a full 16-week semester.
2. **Test-Out Option for EDU 119** allows early childhood professionals to earn Credit for Prior Learning by passing a challenge exam based on knowledge gained through work experience or professional development.
3. **EDU 3119: Introduction to Early Childhood Education** is a non-credit continuing education offering equivalent to EDU 119. It commonly runs 6 to 8 weeks. This course is also available through some [Child Care Academies](#).

Lead teachers lacking the North Carolina Early Childhood Credential have six months to enroll in EDU 119 (or complete one of the DCDEE-approved equivalents listed above), plus up to 18 months to complete the course.