

# Quick Look: Benefits of Credentials



ADMINISTRATION FOR  
**CHILDREN & FAMILIES**



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This document provides an overview of the benefits of early childhood (EC) and school-age (SA) credentials. It describes research related to developing and implementing EC and SA credentials, and State-specific information on implementing credentials, with a focus on the identified benefits. Information is provided in three sections:

1. [An overview of Credentials and Aligned Professional Development Systems \(PDS\)](#)
2. [Research on the benefits of credentials](#); and
3. [State-specific evidence of the benefits of credentials](#).

## Credentials and Aligned PDS

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Credentials play an integral role in aligned PDS. EC and SA core knowledge and competencies (CKCs) provide the foundation for PDS. State credentials are typically based on CKCs and often link to EC and SA workforce's advancement on career pathways. States employ a variety of approaches to administering and verifying credentials. Entities such as professional development offices, workforce data registries, child care resource and referral agencies, and other State agencies offer these credentials.

**Credentials** are defined as *documents certifying an individual has met a defined set of requirements established by the grantor of the credential*. Credential requirements usually include knowledge and skills confirmed by:

- Assessment, demonstration of competence;
- Work/practical/field experience; and
- Professional activities/contributions (sometimes).

## Research on the Benefits of Credentials

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Research on quality early education settings suggests connections between teacher/caregiver education and training and the quality of care as well as program quality and child outcomes (Arnett, 1989, Early, et al., 2007, Tout et al., 2005). Studies show a strong association between high-quality programs and credentialed personnel (Dennehy & Noam, 2005, Hyson et al., 2008). States that include credentials in their PDS identified a number of key benefits to EC and SA programs and the workforce. Some of these include:

- Reaching caregivers with minimum training, who are not ready for the Child Development Associate (CDA) Credential™ process;
- Providing a stepping stone to the CDA Credential™;
- Providing specialized content to strengthen infant toddler practice;
- Establishing a cohesive credential out of existing, but disconnected, components;
- Providing a progression to higher knowledge and skill by building on current PDS;
- Offering multiple credit-based and noncredit options for education and training; and
- Integrating recognition of specialized Infant Toddler, Preschool and SA knowledge and skill in the career pathway (United States Child Care Bureau, 2007).

## State-Specific Evidence of the Benefits of Credentials

This section includes research on the benefits of specific State credentials for the following:

- [California](#);
- [Florida](#);
- [New York](#);
- [Tennessee](#); and
- [Vermont](#).

### CALIFORNIA

A study by Vu, Jeon, and Howe (2008) examined classroom quality and teacher involvement in 231 classrooms, sponsored by 122 different agencies that were staffed and supervised by teachers and program directors holding varying levels of credentials within the California Child Development Permit (CCDP). They examined what different levels look like in terms of classroom quality and whether such credentials are an acceptable substitute for a formal Bachelor's degree. They used the CCDP EC credentialing system as a case study.

The research questions asked:

1. *Are there differences in classroom quality when teachers and their supervisors hold different credentials within the CCDP?*
2. *Are there differences in classroom quality when a teacher has a Bachelor's and a credential, rather than only a credential?*

The researchers found that the teachers' education and credential levels, as well as the credential levels of the program directors, predicted classroom quality.

### FLORIDA

Akiva and McGovern (2010) found significant gains in participant knowledge after completing the Palm Beach County Afterschool Educator Certificate. The Palm Beach County Afterschool Educator Certificate Pilot study examined the first year of implementation for a credential program. The pilot included four cohorts of approximately 30 participants each. Three of the four cohorts completed assessments before and after the credential pilot.

Participant post-test scores were higher than pre-test scores in all instances. Moreover, the knowledge gains were statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ). After the training, researchers asked participants to reflect on their knowledge in specific areas before and after the credential pilot. Every individual reflection item showed higher post- than pre-scores, which also proved statistically significant at the .05 level.

This study shows that participants gained knowledge in all areas of the Afterschool Educator Certificate. Furthermore, participation in certificate/credential training showed a positive association between gains in afterschool educator knowledge and credential training participation.

## NEW YORK

The New York State School-Age Care (SAC) Credential is a statewide training program for SA care providers. The Cornell Early Childhood Program began to evaluate the statewide credential during its fourth year of implementation.

With funding from the Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service and the New York State Office of Children and Family Services, the evaluation effort focused on:

- Documenting the history and development of the NYS SAC Credential;
- Examining the effects of the NYS SAC Credential on SA care provider professional development, retention in the field, and knowledge and attitudes; and
- Assessing the impact of the NYS SAC Credential on the quality of SA programs.

Preliminary findings (McCabe and Cochran, 2006) indicated that the SAC training/credential program positively impacted program quality in SA settings. Pre- and post-credential assessments documented program improvements in:

- Interactions among staff and SA children;
- Implementation of activities;
- Overall program structure; and
- Space and furnishings among providers who received the credential.

Researchers also found that approximately 40% of those who earned the SAC credential received a raise.

## TENNESSEE

Tennessee conducted an external evaluation of the State's one-year Infant Toddler Credential Pilot to assess the impact of this credential on providers' practices and on the overall quality in the caregiving setting.

The pre- and post-evaluations yielded positive findings on all key outcome measures. Global environment quality scores (measured using the Infant Toddler Environmental Rating Scale and Family Day Care Rating Scale) significantly increased by the completion of the pilot, and participating providers behaved more sensitively and less harshly and detachedly when interacting with children. More providers began to believe in their ability to make positive changes. Providers also reported improved ratings of their relationships with parents.

The pilot evaluation also found that providers, administrators, and coaches were satisfied with the program. Coaching, training, academic coordination, and materials rated quite favorably with the participants, and 98% of providers said they would recommend the program to a peer or colleague.

Because of the evaluation of the Infant Toddler Credential Pilot, Tennessee has an evidence-base to inform the State's implementation of their Infant Toddler Credential. Through their pilot, Tennessee increased their readiness to establish a statewide Infant Toddler Credential.

## VERMONT

Richards (n.d.) helped Vermont examine the capacity of the Credential/Accreditation Bonus program to improve the quality and retention of the child care workforce in Vermont. In Vermont's program, providers who obtained a CDA Credential™, or degree related to child care, are eligible to receive the \$1,000 Credential/Accreditation Bonus.

To examine the impacts of the program, Vermont Child Care Services Division commissioned a survey of program participants made up of providers and program directors. Providers and programs reported caring for nearly 3,000 children combined. Providers stated they were motivated to enroll in the program for the opportunity to increase their knowledge base.

Thirty-nine percent reported educational reasons for obtaining further education. Employment reasons were the most common goal stated for obtaining further education. Forty-two percent of individual providers reported they were motivated by the chance to obtain better positions or by current job requirements. Thirty-eight percent of providers stated the Credential/Accreditation Bonus provided a financial incentive to obtain their CDA Credential™ or qualifying educational degree.

Program participants reported that receiving the bonus was integral to obtaining additional training. Eighty-one percent of the individual providers stated that receiving a bonus encouraged them to continue to develop professionally. One-fifth of the providers stated they spent at least part of the bonus on classes and further professional development opportunities. Ninety-nine percent of individual providers believed achieving a credential positively impacted the quality of care they provide.

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