

Qualifications for Preschool Teacher Assistants

A variety of federal and state programs regulate the qualifications required for teaching assistants in preschool programs (assistants are sometimes described as paraeducators, paraprofessionals, associates, aides, etc.). The type of preschool program and required program standards determine the required qualifications for teaching assistants. The table below provides options open to teaching assistants for meeting state and federal requirements.

Qualification options for:

- Shared Visions Preschool Programs
- Statewide Voluntary Preschool Programs
- Preschools providing early childhood special education instructional services

See the rows below for appropriate qualifications options based on the program standards being followed in each classroom: Iowa Quality Preschool Program Standards (IQPPS); National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC Accreditation+); and/or Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS).

| Program Standards | Child Development Associate (CDA) [®] Credential | Paraeducator Certificate | Associate's/ Bachelor's Degree | Two Years of College |
|-----------------------------|--|---|--|--|
| IQPPS | Meets requirements; or has the equivalent; or is enrolled and working toward a CDA [®] or the equivalent ¹ | Meets requirements (must include generalist and EC certificates) | Meets requirements ² | Meets requirements ² |
| NAEYC Accreditation+ | Meets requirements; or has the equivalent; or is enrolled and working toward a CDA [®] or the equivalent ³ | Meets requirements (must include generalist and EC certificates) ³ | Meets requirements if certificate includes 12 credit hours in specified areas ¹ | Meets requirements if a total of 12 hours of credit in specified areas ¹ |
| HSPPS | Meets requirements (or if enrolled in a CDA [®] credential program to be completed within two years of hire) | Does not meet requirements | Meets requirements | Meets requirements if enrolled in a program that will lead to an associate or baccalaureate degree within two years of hire. |

Qualification Descriptions: Child Development Associate (CDA) Credential®

The Council for Professional Recognition administers the Child Development Associate (CDA®) National Credentialing Program designed to assess and credential early childhood education professionals. A Child Development Associate (CDA) Credential® is based on a core set of competency standards and the CDA® credentialing process ensures an individual has knowledge of how to nurture the development of children, ages birth to five years old. An individual with a CDA® is prepared to support children's physical, social, emotional, and intellectual development while partnering with families and other adults. The purpose of the CDA® Credential is to enhance the quality of early care and education by defining, evaluating and recognizing the competencies of early care professionals. Individuals awarded the CDA® Credential meet the following competency standards:

1. Planning a safe and 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 operation
6. Maintaining a commitment to professionalism
7. Observing and recording children's behavior
8. Understanding the principles of child development and learning

For additional information about the CDA® credentialing process, go to the Council for Professional Recognition's [web page](#).

Notes on Iowa Requirements for Preschool Teacher Assistants Specific to Early Childhood

- The generalist paraeducator certificate meets Iowa requirements; however, in early childhood programs including the Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program (SWVPP), generalist **and** early childhood certificates **are required**. The generalist certificate requires completion of an approved paraprofessional certification program and verification of high school completion or equivalence. Paraeducator certification is obtained through the BOEE.
- Classrooms implementing IQPPS or HSPPS: If you are unable to hire a qualified preschool teacher assistant, reference IQPPS standard 8.2R and Head Start standard §1302.91(e)(3) for options to hiring qualified preschool teacher assistants. For classrooms implementing NAEYC Accreditation+, please reference the [NAEYC Accreditation+ Process Tools and Resources](#).
- For information on Iowa paraeducator programs, visit the Department's [Paraeducator Certification webpage](#).
- For licensure requirements and information contact: [the Iowa Board of Educational Examiners](#).

Clarification notes from chart:

1. The equivalent of a CDA® for programs which are NAEYC accredited would be a minimum of 12 college credits (semester hours) in early childhood education, child development, elementary education, and/or early childhood special education.
2. Teaching assistants with a Bachelor's, Associate of Arts degree or two years of college in fields other than early childhood education must have a professional development plan specific to early childhood.
3. Programs may be able to achieve NAEYC® Accreditation even if criteria for staff qualifications are not met.