

# 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 determines the required qualifications for teaching assistants. The tables below provide options available to teaching assistants for meeting state and federal requirements. The qualification options that teaching assistants may choose in order to meet the requirements of that program and/or program standards are listed in each column.

## Qualification options for Head Start and Title I Programs

Program Name	Child Development Associate (CDA) <sup>™</sup> Credential	Paraeducator Certificate	Associate's/ Bachelor's Degree	Two Years of College
Head Start and Title 1 <sup>1</sup>	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 to be completed within two years of the time of hire.

### 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) Early Learning Program and Accreditation Standards and Assessment Items; and/or Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS).

Program Standards	Child Development Associate (CDA) <sup>TM</sup> 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 <sup>2</sup> .	Meets requirements (Must include generalist and EC certificates)	Meets requirements <sup>3</sup>	Meets requirements <sup>3</sup>
NAEYC®	Meets requirements; or has the equivalent; or is enrolled and working toward a CDA® or the equivalent <sup>2</sup>	Only meets requirements if a total of 12 hours of college credit in specified areas <sup>2</sup>	Meets requirements if at least 12 credit hours in specified areas <sup>2</sup>	Meets requirements if a total of 12 hours of credit in specified areas <sup>2</sup>
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

### Qualification Descriptions Child Development Associate (CDA) Credential<sup>TM</sup>

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<sup>TM</sup> 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. A Child Development Associate is able to meet the specific needs of children and work with families and other adults to nurture children's physical, social, emotional, and intellectual growth in a child development framework. The purpose of the CDA® Credential is to enhance the quality of early care and education by defining, evaluating, and recognizing the competences of early care professionals. Individuals awarded the CDA® Credential meet the following competency standards:

1. To establish and maintain a safe, healthy learning environment.
2. To advance physical and intellectual competence.
3. To support social and emotional development and to provide positive guidance.
4. To establish positive and productive relationships with families.

5. To ensure a well-run, purposeful program responsive to participant needs.
6. To maintain a commitment to professionalism.

The CDA® Credential is awarded by the Council for Professional Recognition. The CDA® is a recognized part of the child care licensing/registration requirements in Iowa, and is part of the process of achieving some types of accreditation standards. For additional information about the CDA® credentialing process, go to the [Council for Professional Recognition's webpage](#).

## Notes on Iowa Requirements for Paraeducators Specific to Early Childhood

- The generalist paraeducator certificate meets Iowa requirements; however, in EC programs including the Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program, 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. The requirements for renewal of paraeducator certificates are determined locally.
- The requirements for renewal of the CDA® Credential vary by program type. For those with a CDA®, the currency of the credential must be maintained in Head Start Programs and in any classroom that is implementing Head Start Program Performance Standards or NAEYC® Standards. For Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program classrooms, Shared Visions Preschool Programs, or preschools providing early childhood special education instruction services following the Iowa Quality Preschool Program Standards, requirements for renewal of the CDA® Credential are determined locally.
- **Classrooms adhering to IQPPS or Head Start standards:** if you are unable to hire a qualified preschool teacher assistant, please reference IQPPS standard 6.3 and Head Start standard §1302.91(e)(3) for options to hiring qualified preschool teacher assistants. For classrooms adhering to NAEYC standards, please reference the [NAEYC Standards and Assessment Items](#) support document.
- **For information on Iowa's paraeducator programs contact:** Dr. Maryam Rod Szabo, Iowa Department of Education, 515-360-7369 or at [maryam.rod\\_szabo@iowa.gov](mailto:maryam.rod_szabo@iowa.gov)
- **For licensure requirements and information contact:** [the Iowa Board of Educational Examiners](#).
- **For information on Title I requirements contact:** Veronica Andersen, Iowa Department of Education, 515-402-2736 or at [veronica.anderson@iowa.gov](mailto:veronica.anderson@iowa.gov)

### Clarification notes from chart:

1. ESSA requires programs using Title I funds to follow Head Start Program Performance Standards.
2. The equivalent of a CDA® for programs that are NAEYC accredited would be a minimum of 12 college credits (semester hours) in early childhood education, child development, elementary education, or early childhood special education.
3. 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 staff development plan addressing how early childhood expertise is being provided to guide the curriculum.
4. Programs may be able to achieve NAEYC® Accreditation even if criteria for staff qualifications are not met.