

Delaware Institute for Excellence in Early Childhood

CDA Professional Portfolio

Preparation Program:

Model Development and Implementation



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Summary

The DIEEC Child Development Associate (CDA) Professional Portfolio Preparation Program, conducted from July 2021 through June 2023, effectively supported early childhood educators across Delaware in completing the professional portfolio required to apply for a CDA credential. Through the two-year program, the Delaware Institute for Excellence in Early Childhood (DIEEC) developed and implemented three support models, including a comprehensive cohort model, a fast-paced comprehensive cohort model, and a self-paced (non-cohort) model, facilitating ten cohorts and supporting two additional groups of educators working through the self-paced model. Of the 189 early childhood educators who enrolled in the program, 93 successfully completed their portfolios and became ready to apply for the CDA credential – 21 for the family child care credential, 45 for the infant-toddler credential, and 27 for the preschool credential. This brief provides an overview of the models developed, highlights participant experiences, and offers recommendations for sustaining and enhancing the program's impact.

Background

The CDA is a nationally recognized credential for early childhood educators, with credentials specific to preschool, infant-toddler, and family child care settings. A home visitor CDA credential is also an option, although it was not included as part of this program. Eligibility requirements for the CDA include a high school education, 120 hours of professional early childhood education, and 480 hours of work experience in the selected CDA setting. The Council for Professional Recognition assesses each educator's competency through an exam, an observation, and a review of their professional portfolio.

As part of the state of Delaware's efforts to increase qualifications within the field of early childhood education, the DIEEC CDA Professional Portfolio Preparation Program focused on recruiting educators ready to work toward the CDA, specifically supporting educators to complete their professional portfolios. The state of Delaware provided further support for participating educators, financing the CDA application fees along with a yearlong subscription to Quorum, an approved online professional development platform used to complete the required 120 hours of professional early childhood education.

Models

The primary goal of this program was to develop models that were responsive to educators' needs and that could be feasibly and sustainably scaled up. Year 1 focused on development and implementation of initial models, and year 2 focused on making improvements and implementing refined models.

A cohort style was adopted as the design for the initial model. Cohorts bring together learners who have a common interest, focus, or need. Cohort participants learn together in a consistent group for the duration of the experience, which promotes peer learning and social support as well as provides an opportunity to network and strengthen working relationships.

DIEEC CDA Professional Portfolio Preparation Program Model Components	Comprehensive Cohort Model	Fast-Paced Comprehensive Cohort Model	Self-Paced (non-cohort) Model
Implementation timeframe	6 months	3 months	6 months
CDA support materials - CDA Essentials for Working with Young Children (textbook) - CDA Essentials Workbook - CDA Competency Standards - Binder and printed templates	✓	✓	✓
12 structured classes organized around the professional portfolio	✓	✓	
“Pulse Polls” to check on educator progress and provide additional supports as needed	✓	✓	
Personalized coaching & availability for program visits	✓	✓	
Monthly office hours	✓	✓	✓
Offer of a “practice” observation with a trained observer	✓	✓	
Technical assistance related to accessing the CDA application, PD Specialists, and payment vouchers	✓	✓	✓
Review of relevant content from the textbook * year 2 only, based on participant and instructor feedback from year 1 implementation	✓	✓	

The **comprehensive cohort model** included the components listed above, implemented over a six-month period. The comprehensive cohort model was designed to support educators who were completing the 120 hours of professional education while also working to complete their professional portfolio.

Feedback from year 1 participants noted that the pacing was not ideal for educators who had already completed the 120 hours of professional education and were solely focused on completing their portfolio. Recognizing that educators are enrolling from a variety of entry points, an additional model was introduced in year 2 for those who already completed the 120 hours of professional education and preferred to move forward with their portfolio at an accelerated pace. In year 2, the **fast-paced comprehensive cohort model** included the same components as the comprehensive cohort model but was structured to take place over a three-month period.

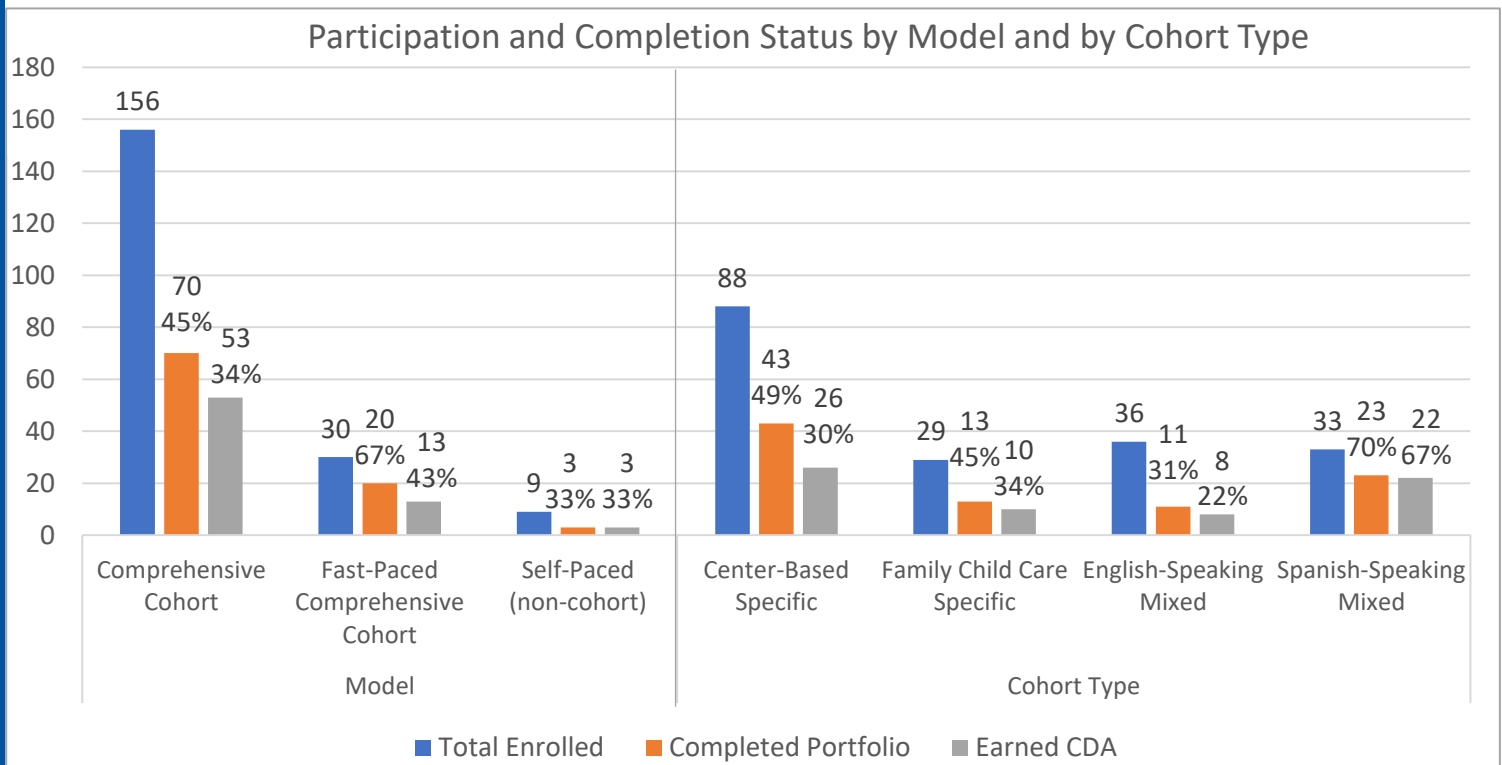
Additionally, the **self-paced (non-cohort) model** offered during year 1 and year 2 provided educators with the flexibility to work through their education hours and complete their portfolio independently at their own pace, while having access to DIEEC instructors for check-ins as needed.

Implementation

To maximize the benefits of the cohort design, cohorts were determined based on participant need each year. During year 1, DIEEC facilitated four cohorts following the comprehensive cohort model. One cohort was comprised of family child care educators, one of Spanish-speaking educators, one of center-based educators, and one mixed cohort included educators from a variety of settings. DIEEC also supported a group of educators following the self-paced model. Out of the 93 educators who participated in year 1, 41 (44%) successfully completed their portfolios, including 15 educators working toward the family child care credential, 14 working toward the infant-toddler credential, and 12 working toward the preschool credential.

During year 2, DIEEC facilitated four cohorts following the comprehensive cohort model and two cohorts following the fast-paced comprehensive cohort model, as well as supported another group of educators through the self-paced model. Of the four cohorts following the comprehensive cohort model, one was comprised of family child care educators, one of Spanish-speaking educators, and two of center-based educators. Both of the cohorts following the fast-paced comprehensive model were comprised of center-based educators. Of the 102 educators who participated as part of year 2, 52 (51%) have completed their portfolios, including 6 educators working toward the family child care credential, 31 toward the infant-toddler credential, and 15 toward the preschool credential.

The chart below shows overall enrollment and completion status by model and by cohort type. Educator interest was substantial across both years, with 93 educators enrolling in year 1 and 102 educators enrolling in year 2. There was slight overlap, however, in that there were six educators who enrolled in year 1, did not complete the program, and re-enrolled in year 2. In total, 189 educators from a variety of programs across Delaware enrolled in this initiative. Of those, 93 (49%) completed their professional portfolios, and 69 (37%) earned their CDA credentials, as of June 2023.



*Note: Six educators enrolled in year 1, did not complete the program, and re-enrolled in year 2; one of those educators completed her portfolio and earned her CDA during year 2. These individuals are included in enrollment totals for both years, but the portfolio/CDA completion is only included as part of year 2.

As displayed in the chart, there were differences in completion rates by model. On the high end, 67% of educators who enrolled in a fast-paced comprehensive cohort completed their portfolios. It is noteworthy that the fast-paced comprehensive model was designated for educators who had already completed their required 120 hours of professional early childhood education. Therefore, these participants were not working to complete Quorum at the same time as they were completing their portfolio, which may have contributed to their ability to complete the portfolio in a timely manner. While the comprehensive cohort model did provide a longer time period, feedback indicated that educators following the comprehensive cohort model still felt overwhelmed at times trying to focus on both completing their professional education hours while also working on their portfolio. On the low end, only 33% of educators who enrolled in the self-paced (non-cohort) option completed their portfolios. However, the number of educators who participated in the self-paced option was small, and it is noteworthy that of the 33% who did complete their portfolio, everyone has applied for and earned their CDA.

There were also differences in completion rates by cohort type. The cohorts specific to Spanish-speaking educators had the highest completion rates, with 70% of educators across the two cohorts completing their portfolios and 67% earning their CDA. The one mixed cohort comprised of both center-based and family child care educators had the lowest completion rate, with 31% of participants completing their portfolios and 22% earning their CDA. Instructor feedback indicated that with the differing content needs of the family child care credential compared to both the infant-toddler and preschool credentials, it was sometimes difficult for participants in the mixed cohort to remain engaged and clearly understand which components were relevant to them. The mixed cohort was also the largest cohort, including 36 participants, compared to the average cohort size of 19. It is possible that the group was too large for participants to be fully engaged and individually supported.

Attendance was examined for trends across cohorts. In both years, attendance was mandatory for class 1 and tended to gradually decrease over the course of the program. Overall, educators who attended more classes were more likely to complete their portfolios.

To report on the participant experience, participating educators completed surveys midway through the program in year 2. Educators reported a range in their confidence levels for completing the CDA preparation program. Notably, several educators expressed a need for help with time management, which led to instructors offering individual consultation around time management. Through survey responses, participants also indicated that:

- Cohort sessions were helpful for preparing their professional portfolios.
- Cohort sessions supported individuals in gaining knowledge and identifying ways to improve their early childhood practices.
- In-person classroom visits helped participants to identify their strengths and areas for growth.

Finally, 100% of participants endorsed that they would recommend the DIEEC CDA Professional Portfolio Preparation Program to a peer who wants to earn their CDA.

Recommendations

Based on the implementation of the DIEEC CDA Professional Portfolio Preparation Program, we offer the following recommendations:

- Continue to offer multiple models to meet the needs of enrolled participants. A shorter time frame may be a better fit for educators who have already completed the required 120 hours of professional education and prefer to move at a faster pace. Cohorts implemented over a longer period of time may be the better option for educators who are working to simultaneously complete the 120 hours of professional education.
- Optimize cohorts by considering the audience carefully to emphasize collaborative learning, positive peer climate, and social support. In addition to focusing cohorts for family child care educators, center-based educators, and Spanish-speaking educators, also provide opportunities for individuals from within the same program to enroll in the same cohort.
- Offer a variety of support options for participating educators, including individual, group-based, and peer-driven as well as both structured and as-needed, ensuring educators have ample opportunities to ask questions and work through barriers.
- Offer additional support for organization and time management. Further, extending the length of the comprehensive cohort by two months to allow educators time to focus solely on making progress toward the 120 hours of professional education may prevent educators from feeling overwhelmed during the more demanding periods of the program.
- Address specific needs for individuals working through self-paced options, collecting data early on and again midway through the program, to gauge engagement levels and identify potential areas for additional support.
- Implement a comprehensive data management system. Collect demographic and educational data during enrollment and conduct surveys or interviews with participants who withdraw or are unable to finish in order to guide future support strategies.
- Require in-person attendance at the initial class session and consider providing incentives for individuals to attend subsequent class sessions.
- Continue conducting outreach and offering supports to educators who have not completed their portfolios by the end of the program.
- Make the responses to frequently asked questions and the points of contact for the variety of CDA requirements and processes readily available.

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