

Direct Service Staff Professional Requirements: Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Review these frequently asked questions (FAQs) to better understand the professional requirements for direct service staff working in various Head Start program options. This document clarifies existing requirements and expectations; **it does not issue new regulations**. The information in these FAQs updates and consolidates information in the following Information Memorandums (IMs):

- [ACF-IM-HS-08-12 Statutory Degree and Credentialing Requirements for Head Start Teaching Staff](#) (Aug. 19, 2008)
- [ACF-IM-HS-10-06 Qualifications for Early Head Start Infant and Toddler Center-based Staff](#) (Oct. 27, 2010)
- [ACF-IM-HS-11-03 Statutory Degree and Credentialing Requirements](#) (Sept. 9, 2011)

It also builds upon information in [ACF-IM-HS-11-04 Center-based Preschool Classroom Teacher Qualification Waiver Authority and Procedures](#) (Sept. 9, 2011).

For more information on specific professional requirements, refer to the FAQs below. They are organized by role. Responses are based on the requirements found in the [Head Start Act](#) and the [Program Performance Standards](#), as well as best practice. It may be useful to federal staff, technical assistance (TA) providers, and Head Start, Early Head Start (EHS), and Migrant and Seasonal Head Start (MSHS) programs.

TABLE OF CONTENTS	PAGE
GENERAL INFORMATION	2 – 3
EDUCATIONAL AND FAMILY SUPPORT PERSONNEL	4 – 20
• CONTENT AREA EXPERTS FOR COMPREHENSIVE SERVICES MANAGERS, COORDINATORS, CONSULTANTS	4 – 5
EDUCATION COORDINATORS	4 – 5
CHILD DEVELOPMENT SPECIALISTS	4 – 5
• PRESCHOOL TEACHERS	6 – 7
• ASSISTANT TEACHERS	8 – 11
• INFANT/TODDLER TEACHERS	12 – 14
• FCC PROVIDERS	15 – 17
• HOME VISITORS	18 – 20
• FAMILY SERVICE WORKERS	21 – 22
CREDENTIALS AND DEGREES	23 – 28
• CHILD DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATE (CDA) CREDENTIALS	23 – 24
• DEGREES AND EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION (ECE)-EQUIVALENT COURSEWORK	25 – 28
WAIVERS	29

GENERAL INFORMATION**What is the difference between a “competency” and a “credential?”**

Competency refers to what professionals need to know and be able to do to meet job performance requirements. This includes specific abilities and behaviors required for job performance. A credential refers to a certificate, diploma, or other document attesting to an individual's qualification(s) that is issued by a third part with relevant authority in a particular field.

Programs must ensure that staff and consultants have the necessary knowledge, skills, and experience to effectively perform and function in their roles.

What regulations should grantees focus on when considering staff qualifications?

Grantees need to follow the Head Start Act and the Head Start Program Performance Standards. In cases when language in the Act and the Standards contradict, the Head Start Act supersedes the Standards.

Is there an exemption or “grandfather clause” in the requirements for teachers who have been teaching in Head Start or Early Head Start for a certain number of years?

No. The Head Start Act does not provide for exemptions or grandfathering of teachers who are already teaching in Head Start or Early Head Start. The purpose of the mandate is to ensure that each teacher is qualified and can provide experiences of consistently high quality for children.

GENERAL INFORMATION**What documents prove qualifications and credentials?**

To ensure a person has completed a credential, Head Start and Early Head Start programs review the credential or certificate that is issued by a third party. Programs need to ensure state-awarded credentials or certificates meet or exceed the requirements for the national Child Development Associate (CDA) credential awarded by the Council for Professional Recognition. To ensure a person has completed a degree program, Head Start and Early Head Start programs review the diploma issued by accredited colleges or universities.

For some staffing roles, programs may need to evaluate completed courses to determine the relevance of the early childhood education (ECE) or child development content to the ages of and settings where children are served by the employee. Head Start and Early Head Start programs can review the transcripts, course descriptions, and syllabi to ensure staff members have the necessary knowledge, skills, experience, and competencies to effectively perform and function in their roles with the specific age group they serve. Additionally, programs should document the reasons why this individual was the best candidate to hire.

Head Start and Early Head Start programs need to establish individualized professional development plans that support staff in meeting and maintaining professional targets as soon as possible after hire. Plans should include ongoing supports to ensure staff consistently provide appropriate, responsive interactions with children and families. Such support includes in-service and pre-service training, supervision, and frequent feedback about how to improve when necessary.

Programs should become familiar with their state's professional development system. Many state systems organize training opportunities through registries, track and recognize practitioners' achievements, and help ensure the quality of available training. States often use these systems to help programs meet higher professional development standards and progress toward higher quality rating improvement system (QRIS) ratings.

Do courses paid for with Head Start funds need to count or accrue toward a qualifying degree?

When Head Start funds are used to pay for coursework, courses should count toward earning necessary competencies, credentials, and degrees. Programs may use training and technical assistance (T/TA) dollars to provide substitutes to release staff from their teaching responsibilities to attend classes.

Back to [TABLE OF CONTENTS](#)

EDUCATIONAL AND FAMILY SUPPORT PERSONNEL: **CONTENT AREA EXPERTS FOR COMPREHENSIVE SERVICES** [MANAGERS AND COORDINATORS]**What are the current qualification requirements for education coordinators?**

All education coordinators, including those who serve as curriculum specialists, must have:

- A baccalaureate or advanced degree in ECE; **or**
- A baccalaureate or advanced degree in any subject **and coursework equivalent to a major relating to ECE with** experience teaching preschool-age children.

What are the current qualification requirements for a child development specialist who assists family child care (FCC) providers?

The Head Start Program Performance Standards require that child development specialists must have one of the following:

- An associate, baccalaureate, or advanced degree in child development **or** ECE

Additionally, child development specialists must have:

- Knowledge and experience in areas that include the theories and principles of child growth and development, ECE (birth to age 5), and family support;
- Previous early childhood experience;
- Familiarity with the national CDA competency standards; **and**
- Knowledge and understanding of the Head Start Program Performance Standards and other applicable regulations.

EDUCATIONAL AND FAMILY SUPPORT PERSONNEL: **CONTENT AREA EXPERTS FOR COMPREHENSIVE SERVICES** [MANAGERS AND COORDINATORS]**What are the current qualification requirements for content area experts?**

The Head Start Program Performance Standards highlight expertise and experience needed for content area experts, including consultants and staff such as managers or coordinators of the following services:

- **Education and child development content area experts** must meet the qualifications for classroom teachers **and** have training and expertise in areas that include child growth and development, ECE, and family support
- **Health content area experts** must have training and experience in public health, nursing, health education, maternal and child health, or health administration. In addition, when a health procedure must be performed only by a licensed/certified health professional, the agency must assure that the requirement is followed
- **Nutrition content area experts** must be registered dietitians or nutritionists
- **Mental health content area experts** must be licensed or certified mental health professionals with experience and expertise in serving young children and their families
- **Family and community partnership content area experts** must have training and experience in a field related to social, human, or family services
- **Parent engagement/involvement content area experts** must have training, experience, and skills in assisting the parents of young children in advocating and making decisions for their families
- **Disabilities content area experts** must have training and experience in securing and individualizing needed services for children with disabilities
- **Child development specialists** for family child care must have a degree in child development or ECE **and** have:
 - Knowledge and experience in areas that include the theories and principals of child growth and development, ECE (birth to age 5) and family support;
 - Previous early education experience;
 - Familiarity with the CDA competency standards; **and**
 - Knowledge and understanding of the Head Start Program Performance Standards and other applicable regulations

For agencies providing infant/toddler or birth-to-5 services, content area experts, including managers, coordinators, or consultants who work with infant and toddler staff, need the capacity to assist them in appropriately implementing and individualizing the services for children from birth to 36 months of age.

Back to [TABLE OF CONTENTS](#)

EDUCATIONAL AND FAMILY SUPPORT PERSONNEL: **PRESCHOOL TEACHERS****What are the current requirements for Head Start preschool classrooms?**

Each preschool classroom in center-based Head Start programs must have a teacher who has a qualifying degree. To be considered a qualified center-based preschool teacher, an individual must have one of the following degrees:

- An associate, baccalaureate, or advanced degree in ECE; **or**
- An associate, baccalaureate, or advanced degree in a field related to ECE **and coursework equivalent to a major relating to ECE with** experience teaching preschool-age children; **or**
- A baccalaureate degree in any field and admittance into the Teach for America program, has passed a rigorous early childhood content exam such as the Praxis II, has participated in a Teach for America summer training institute that includes teaching preschool children, and is receiving ongoing professional development and support from Teach for America's professional staff.

However, a three-year waiver may be granted if a Head Start agency can demonstrate it has attempted unsuccessfully to recruit a qualified candidate and the candidate meets the criteria.

For more information, refer to the **CREDENTIALS**, **DEGREE** and **WAIVERS** sections of these FAQs.

What are the conditions for a waiver to be granted to hire a preschool teacher who doesn't have a qualifying degree?

A three-year waiver can only be granted for individual center-based preschool teachers who will work in a classroom that does not have a qualified teacher. The Head Start agency is required to demonstrate it has been unsuccessful in recruiting a qualified teacher candidate.

A waiver will **only be considered** for a preschool classroom teacher who, at the time of the waiver request:

- Is enrolled in a program of study leading to at least a two-year degree in ECE;
- Will receive such a degree within a reasonable period of time not to exceed three years; **and**
- Has either a current national preschool center-based CDA credential issued by the Council for Professional Recognition **or** a state-awarded certificate or credential that meets or exceeds the requirements for the national preschool center-based CDA credential.

For more information, refer to the **WAIVERS** section of these FAQs.

EDUCATIONAL AND FAMILY SUPPORT PERSONNEL: **PRESCHOOL TEACHERS****How many clock hours of training or coursework should preschool teachers have on an annual basis?**

The Head Start Act requires that each Head Start teacher attend not less than 15 hours of professional development per year. Such professional development shall be high quality, sustained, intensive, and classroom-focused in order to have a positive and lasting impact on classroom instruction and the teacher's performance in the classroom. It also will be regularly evaluated by the program for effectiveness. Ideally, trainings and courses should be connected to college credits whenever possible.

Each agency and program shall create, in consultation with an employee, an individualized professional development plan. They also will ensure that plans are regularly evaluated for their impact on teacher and staff effectiveness. Each employee's plans should address staff qualification goals and ensure they have the knowledge, skills, experience, and competencies needed to responsibly perform and function in their role as preschool teacher. Plans should include ongoing supports, such as attending in-service and pre-service training, supervision, and frequent feedback about how to improve when necessary.

Programs should become familiar with their state's professional development system. Many state systems organize training opportunities through registries, track and recognize practitioners' achievements, and help ensure the quality of available trainings. States often use these systems to help programs meet higher professional development standards and progress toward higher QRIS ratings.

What are considered appropriate training or coursework topics for preschool teachers?

Preschool teachers must have ECE coursework that focuses on the growth and development of children ages 3 to 5 years old. Substantial and adequate coursework and training in preschool development and ECE helps teachers provide age-appropriate services and programming. Ideally, trainings and courses connect to college credits.

Related topics may include, but are **not limited to**:

- Early childhood development
- Planning and implementing learning experiences that advance the intellectual and physical development of preschool-aged children
- Supporting cognitive and language skills, including home languages
- Planning for and delivering individualized services, including for children with disabilities
- Develop consistent, stable, and supportive relationships with very young children and families
- Culturally responsive and sensitive practice
- Methods for communicating effectively with children, families, and other staff members
- Methods for identifying child abuse and neglect
- Planning for successful child and family transitions
- Promoting positive adult-child interactions
- Supporting parents in their role as their child's first and most important caregiver, teacher, and advocate
- Observing and recording children's behavior
- Planning a safe and healthy learning environment, indoors and outside
- Teaching performance and classroom instruction for preschool-aged children

EDUCATIONAL AND FAMILY SUPPORT PERSONNEL: **ASSISTANT TEACHERS****Do the assistant teacher requirements identified in the Head Start Act of 2007 apply to center-based staff working with infants and toddlers?**

No. Current regulations require one qualified teacher for every four infants and toddlers. Group or classroom sizes for infants and toddlers must have no more than eight children enrolled; therefore, each of the two teachers for a group of eight children must meet the minimum staff qualifications.

The Head Start Act requires all teachers providing direct services to infants, toddlers, and families to have, at a minimum, a current CDA credential and training or coursework in early childhood development with a focus on infant and toddler development. For organizational purposes, some programs might call one of their staff working with a group of infants and toddlers an assistant teacher. Regardless of their title, both staff members serving as the primary teacher for a group of up to four children must meet all the credential and other requirements for an EHS teacher.

Some programs hire a third staff member to work within a group of eight infants and toddlers. While regulations do not require this person to have at least a CDA, it is best practice to ensure they are—or are on the path to becoming—qualified.

For more information, refer to the [INFANT/TODDLER TEACHERS](#) section of these FAQs.

What staff roles are defined as “assistant teachers?”

All Head Start agencies operating the preschool center-based program option must employ two teaching staff members for each preschool classroom. These staff can either consist of:

- One teacher and one assistant teacher; **or**
- Two teachers

Assistant teachers are staff assigned to preschool classrooms in addition to the teacher who is fully qualified. Classrooms with two fully qualified teachers are not required to have assistant teachers.

For more information, refer to the [PRESCHOOL TEACHERS](#) section of the FAQs.

What are the qualification requirements for teacher assistants?

All teaching assistants in center-based programs must:

- Have a current national preschool center-based CDA credential issued by the Council for Professional Recognition; **or**
- Have a state-awarded certificate or credential that meets or exceeds the requirements for the national preschool center-based CDA credential; **or**
- Be enrolled in a CDA or state-awarded credential program that will be completed within two years; **or**
- Have an associate **or** baccalaureate **or** be enrolled in a program leading to such a degree.

It is recommended that programs also support teacher assistants in pursuing the same professional requirement targets as teachers.

EDUCATIONAL AND FAMILY SUPPORT PERSONNEL: ASSISTANT TEACHERS
<p>If an assistant teacher does not have a preschool center-based CDA credential, what are additional pathways for meeting the credential target?</p> <p>Assistant teachers who don't have a valid and age-appropriate CDA can demonstrate they meet the credential target by enrolling in a program that leads to a:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Baccalaureate or an associate degree in ECE; or • National preschool center-based CDA credential issued by the Council for Professional Recognition or a state-awarded certificate or credential that meets or exceeds the requirements for the national preschool center-based CDA credential which will be completed within two years.
<p>What are the advantages of ensuring assistant teachers get their credentials?</p> <p>Enrolled children and families, as well as programs and staff, benefit when assistant teachers gain credentials. Children benefit when two qualified (credentialed or degreed) staff members plan for and intentionally support their learning and development. Teachers gain a professional peer who can support them in delivering services. Often, when staff feel professionally satisfied, they are more likely to stay their position. Continuity of staff allows program managers to focus more on programming rather than coping with staff turnover. In addition, credentialed assistant teachers who are working towards a degree are better positioned to apply for preschool teacher vacancies.</p>
<p>If a state has a certification process or credential programs in place for teacher aides, assistants, and ECE paraprofessionals, may a Head Start program consider an assistant teacher who has such a state certificate as meeting the credential target?</p> <p>Head Start programs will need to become familiar with any such options offered in their state, as there is wide variation across states. A program must demonstrate that the state-awarded certificate or credential meets or exceeds the requirements for the national CDA credential issued by the Council for Professional Recognition. Some options may not meet the level of competency recognized in the national CDA credential, a college credential, or a two-year degree. For example, some states only require that the person have a general education development (GED) or high school diploma and on-the-job training with close supervision by a teacher or program. Other states require college coursework, college lab experiences, and an associate degree, or a state or independently administered assessment.</p> <p>For more information, refer to the CDA CREDENTIALS section of the FAQs. Learn more about the specific requirements for the national CDA credential access at http://www.cdacouncil.org/the-cda-credential.</p>

EDUCATIONAL AND FAMILY SUPPORT PERSONNEL: **ASSISTANT TEACHERS****How many clock hours of training or coursework should assistant preschool teachers have on an annual basis?**

Each agency and program shall create, in consultation with an employee, an individualized professional development plan. They also will ensure that plans are regularly evaluated for their impact on teacher and staff effectiveness. Each employee's plan should address staff qualification goals and ensure they have the knowledge, skills, experience, and competencies needed to responsibly perform and function in their role as an assistant teacher. Plans also should include ongoing supports, such as attending in-service and pre-service training, supervision, and frequent feedback about how to improve when necessary.

The Head Start Act doesn't specify how many clock hours of annual training or coursework are required for preschool assistant teachers. However, OHS believes that a minimum of 15 clock hours of professional development per year is important for all program staff members who support the progress of children's development. Ideally, trainings and courses connect to college credits whenever possible.

Professional development should be high-quality, sustained, intensive, and outcome-focused in order to have a positive and lasting impact on the assistant teacher's performance to provide nurturing and intentional interactions designed to foster each child's development and learning.

Programs should become familiar with their state's professional development system. Many state systems organize training opportunities in registries, track and recognize practitioners' achievements, and help ensure the quality of available trainings. States often use these systems to help programs meet higher professional development standards and progress toward higher QRIS ratings.

EDUCATIONAL AND FAMILY SUPPORT PERSONNEL: **ASSISTANT TEACHERS****What are considered appropriate training or coursework topics for assistant teachers in preschool classrooms?**

Assistant teachers working in preschool classrooms must have ECE coursework that focuses on the growth and development of children ages birth to 3 years to 5 years old. Substantial and adequate coursework and training in preschool development helps teachers provide age-appropriate services and programming. Ideally, trainings and courses connect to college credits.

Related topics may include, but are **not limited to**:

- Early childhood development
- Planning and implementing learning experiences that advance the intellectual and physical development of preschool-aged children
- Supporting cognitive and language skills, including home languages
- Planning for and delivering individualized services for children, including those with disabilities
- Develop consistent, stable, and supportive relationships with very young children and families
- Culturally responsive and sensitive practice
- Methods for communicating effectively with children, families, and other staff members
- Methods for identifying child abuse and neglect
- Planning for successful child and family transitions
- Promoting positive adult-child interactions
- Supporting parents in their role as their child's first and most important caregiver, teacher, and advocate
- Observing and recording children's behavior
- Planning a safe and healthy learning environment, indoors and outside
- Teaching performance and classroom instruction for preschool aged children

Back to [TABLE OF CONTENTS](#)

EDUCATIONAL AND FAMILY SUPPORT PERSONNEL: **INFANT/TODDLER TEACHERS****What are the current qualification requirements for infant/toddler teachers?**

Section 645A(h)(1)-(2) of the Head Start Act requires that all teachers providing direct services to infants, toddlers, and families must have a minimum of a CDA credential **and** have been trained or have **equivalent coursework** in early childhood development with a focus on infant and toddler development.

Each group of eight infants and toddlers in center-based settings must have **two** qualified teachers who are each responsible for exclusively working with no more than four children. To be considered qualified, all infant/toddler teachers in center-based programs must have one of the following:

- A national CDA credential issued by the Council for Professional Recognition; **or** a comparable certificate or credential that meets or exceeds the **requirements for the national CDA credential** **and** have been trained or completed **equivalent coursework** in early childhood development with a focus on infant and toddler development; **or**
- An associate, baccalaureate, or advanced degree in ECE or related field **and** have been trained or completed **equivalent coursework** in early childhood development with a focus on infant and toddler development.

When the credential is used to meet this requirement, infant/toddler center-based teachers must have a current national or comparable CDA credential that has a focus on infants and toddlers, preferably within a center-based setting. The family child care CDA credential includes an infant and toddler focus; however, programs would then create an individualized professional development plan to provide teachers with additional training and coursework in effectively working within center-based settings.

Once hired, infant/toddler teachers continue to attend ongoing training and courses on an annual basis. See questions below for more information.

For more information, refer to the **CDA CREDENTIALS** section of the FAQs. Learn more about the specific requirements for the national Infant/Toddler center-based and Family Child Care CDA credentials issued by the Council for Professional Recognition at <http://www.cdacouncil.org/the-cda-credential>.

What is a comparable credential?

A comparable credential is one that meets or exceeds the **requirements for the national CDA credential**. There are a number of programs other than the Council for Professional Recognition that offer credentials or certificates for infant and toddler teachers. A number of state, territory, and tribal agencies, boards, and commissions, as well as accredited colleges and universities and other early childhood organizations, have developed infant and toddler certificates and degree programs that meet or exceed the **requirements for the national CDA credential**. In some cases, comparable credential or certificate endorsement programs that require more than the national CDA have assigned college credit that accrue toward a two-year degree.

For more information, refer to the **CDA CREDENTIALS** section of the FAQs. Learn more about the specific requirements for the national CDA credential issued by the Council for Professional Recognition at <http://www.cdacouncil.org/the-cda-credential>.

EDUCATIONAL AND FAMILY SUPPORT PERSONNEL: INFANT/TODDLER TEACHERS**How many clock hours of training or coursework should infant/toddler teachers have on an annual basis?**

Each agency and program shall create, in consultation with an employee, an individualized professional development plan. They also will ensure that plans are regularly evaluated for their impact on teacher and staff effectiveness. Each employee's plan should address staff qualification goals and ensure they have the knowledge, skills, experience, and competencies needed to responsibly perform and function in their role as an infant/toddler teacher. Plans also should include ongoing supports, such as attending in-service and pre-service training, supervision, and frequent feedback about how to improve when necessary.

The Head Start Act doesn't specify how many clock hours of annual training or coursework for infant and toddler teachers. However, OHS believes that a minimum of 15 clock hours of professional development per year is important for all program staff members who support the progress of children's development. Ideally, trainings and courses connect to college credits whenever possible.

Professional development should be high-quality, sustained, intensive, and outcome-focused in order to have a positive and lasting impact on the infant/toddler teachers' performance to provide nurturing and intentional interactions designed to foster each child's development and learning.

Programs should become familiar with their state's professional development system. Many state systems organize training opportunities in registries, track and recognize practitioners' achievements, and help ensure the quality of available trainings. States often use these systems to help programs meet higher professional development standards and progress toward higher QRIS ratings.

EDUCATIONAL AND FAMILY SUPPORT PERSONNEL: **INFANT/TODDLER TEACHERS****What are considered appropriate training or coursework for infant and toddler teachers?**

Infant and toddler teachers must be trained or have early childhood development coursework that focuses on the growth and development of children ages birth to 3 years old. Substantial and adequate coursework and training in infant/toddler development helps infant/toddler teachers provide age-appropriate services and programming. Ideally, trainings and courses connect to college credits.

Related topics may include, but are **not limited to**:

- Infant/toddler development, including early brain development
- Planning and implementing learning experiences that enhance the child's physical, social, emotional, and intellectual development
- Supporting cognitive and language skills, including home language
- Planning for and delivering individualized services for children, including infants and toddlers with disabilities
- Developing consistent, stable, and supportive relationships with very young children and families
- Culturally responsive and sensitive practice
- Methods for communicating effectively with infants and toddlers, their families, and other staff members
- Methods for identifying child abuse and neglect
- Planning for successful child and family transition
- Promoting positive adult-child interactions
- Supporting parents in their role as their child's first and most important caregiver, teacher, and advocate
- Observing and recording children's behavior
- Planning a safe and healthy learning environment, indoors and outside
- Safety issues in infant/toddler care (e.g., reducing the risk of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS))

Do infant/toddler teachers have a year after their date of hire to attain their infant/toddler credential?

No. Section 645A(h)(1)-(2) of the Head Start Act states that all infant and toddler teachers providing direct services must have a minimum of a CDA credential, and have been trained or completed equivalent coursework in early childhood development with a focus on infant and toddler development.

The Head Start Act of 2007 supersedes previous requirements; therefore, center-based teachers working with infants and toddlers no longer have a year from their date of hire to attain their infant/toddler CDA credential. The Head Start Act gives no authority for OHS to grant waivers for EHS teachers.

NOTE: Grantees that are awarded Early Head Start-Child Care (EHS-CC) Partnership funding have up to the first 18 months of the initial award to ensure that all EHS-CC Partnership teachers and providers meet the minimum qualifications. After the initial 18 months, staff—even newly hired staff members—need to meet the minimum qualifications.

Back to [TABLE OF CONTENTS](#)

EDUCATIONAL AND FAMILY SUPPORT PERSONNEL: FAMILY CHILD CARE (FCC) PROVIDERS
For information on CHILD DEVELOPMENT SPECIALISTS , explore the CONTENT AREA EXPERTS FOR COMPREHENSIVE SERVICES section of the FAQs.
<p>What are the current qualification requirements for FCC providers?</p> <p>Head Start regulations require FCC providers to have previous ECE experiences and one of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An associate or baccalaureate degree in child development or ECE; • A national CDA credential issued by the Council for Professional Recognition, preferably in FCC settings, or a comparable certificate or credential that meets or exceeds the national CDA credential requirements; or • Be enrolled in a CDA credential, associate, or bachelor degree program within six months of beginning services and acquire the credential or degree within two years of beginning services.
<p>What is a comparable credential?</p> <p>A comparable credential is one that meets or exceeds the requirements for the national CDA credential. There are a number of programs other than the Council for Professional Recognition that offer credentials or certificates for FCC providers. A number of state, territory, and tribal agencies, boards, and commissions, as well as accredited colleges and universities and other early childhood organizations, have developed certificates and degree programs that meet or exceed the requirements for the national CDA credential. In some cases, comparable credential or certificate endorsement programs that require more than the national CDA have assigned college credit that accrue toward a two-year degree.</p> <p>For more information, refer to the CDA CREDENTIALS section of the FAQs. Learn more about the specific requirements for the national CDA credential issued by the Council for Professional Recognition at http://www.cdacouncil.org/the-cda-credential.</p>
<p>Which CDA credential is recommended for FCC providers who are only providing services for infants and toddlers?</p> <p>FCC providers should obtain the CDA for the FCC setting. This credential covers the growth and development of children ages birth to 5 years.</p>

EDUCATIONAL AND FAMILY SUPPORT PERSONNEL: **FAMILY CHILD CARE (FCC) PROVIDERS****How many clock hours of training or coursework should FCC providers have on an annual basis?**

Each agency and program shall create, in consultation with an employee, an individualized professional development plan. They also will ensure that plans are regularly evaluated for their impact on teacher and staff effectiveness. Each employee's plan should address staff qualification goals and ensure they have the knowledge, skills, experience, and competencies needed to responsibly perform and function in their role as an FCC provider. Plans also should include ongoing supports, such as attending in-service and pre-service training, supervision, and frequent feedback about how to improve when necessary.

The Head Start Act doesn't specify how many clock hours of annual training or coursework for FCC providers. However, OHS believes that a minimum of 15 clock hours of professional development per year is important for all program staff members who support the progress of children's development. Ideally, trainings and courses connect to college credits whenever possible.

Professional development should be high-quality, sustained, intensive, and outcome-focused in order to have a positive and lasting impact on the FCC provider's performance to provide nurturing and intentional interactions designed to foster each child's development and learning.

Programs should become familiar with their state's professional development system. Many state systems organize training opportunities in registries, track and recognize practitioners' achievements, and help ensure the quality of available training. States often use these systems to help programs meet higher professional development standards and progress toward higher QRIS ratings.

NOTE: Not all states include FCC in their QRIS systems; in these cases, the tracking would mainly be for licensing standards and not QRIS.

EDUCATIONAL AND FAMILY SUPPORT PERSONNEL: **FAMILY CHILD CARE (FCC) PROVIDERS****What are considered appropriate training or coursework for FCC providers?**

FCC providers must have coursework that focuses on child development or ECE. Appropriate coursework and training helps FCC providers provide age-appropriate services and programming. Ideally, trainings and courses connect to college credits.

Related topics may include, but are **not limited to**:

- Early childhood development, including infant/toddler and early brain development
- Planning and implementing learning experiences that enhance the child's physical, social, emotional, and intellectual development
- Supporting cognitive and language skills, including home language
- Planning for and delivering of individualized services for children, including young children with disabilities
- Developing consistent, stable, and supportive relationships with very young children and families
- Culturally responsive and sensitive practice
- Methods for communicating effectively with very young children, their families, and other staff members
- Methods for identifying child abuse and neglect
- Planning for successful child and family transitions
- Promoting positive adult-child interactions
- Supporting parents in their role as parents and their child's primary teacher
- Observing and recording children's behavior
- Planning a safe and healthy learning environment, indoors and outside
- Safety issues in infant/toddler care (e.g., reducing the risk of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS))

Back to [TABLE OF CONTENTS](#)

EDUCATIONAL AND FAMILY SUPPORT PERSONNEL: **HOME VISITORS****What are the current qualification requirements for home visitors?**

Current Head Start regulations require home visitors to:

- Have knowledge and experience in:
 - Child development and ECE
 - The principles of child health, safety, and nutrition
 - Adult learning principles
 - Family dynamics
- Be skilled in communicating with and motivating people
- Have knowledge of community resources and the skills to link families with appropriate agencies and services

Home visitors receive expertise and oversight from staff and consultants who have training and experience in a field related to social, human, or family services.

Home visitors assist parents in fostering the growth and development of their child through family and community partnership services. [Head Start and Early Head Start Relationship-Based Competencies for Staff and Supervisors Who Work with Families](#) [PDF, 1.5MB] identifies important competencies for working with families.

EDUCATIONAL AND FAMILY SUPPORT PERSONNEL: **HOME VISITORS****How many clock hours of training or coursework should home visitors have on an annual basis?**

Each agency and program shall create, in consultation with an employee, an individualized professional development plan. They also will ensure that plans are regularly evaluated for their impact on teacher and staff effectiveness. Each employee's plan should address staff qualification goals and ensure they have the knowledge, skills, experience, and competencies needed to responsibly perform and function in their role as a home visitor. Plans also should include ongoing supports, such as attending in-service and pre-service training, supervision, and frequent feedback about how to improve when necessary.

The Head Start Act doesn't specify how many clock hours of annual training or coursework for home visitors. However, OHS believes that a minimum of 15 clock hours of professional development per year is important for all program staff members who support the progress of children's development. Ideally, trainings and courses connect to college credits whenever possible.

Professional development should be high-quality, sustained, intensive, and outcome-focused in order to have a positive and lasting impact on the home visitor's performance to provide nurturing and intentional interactions with parents and families designed to foster each child's development and learning.

Programs should become familiar with their state's professional development system. Some state systems organize training opportunities in registries, track and recognize practitioners' achievements, and help ensure the quality of available training for home visitors. States often use these systems to help programs meet higher professional development standards and progress toward higher QRIS ratings.

Head Start and Early Head Start grantees can use the [Relationship-Based Competencies for Staff and Supervisors Who Work with Families](#) [PDF, 1.5MB] to improve the preparation and ongoing professional development of staff and supervisors who work with families.

EDUCATIONAL AND FAMILY SUPPORT PERSONNEL: **HOME VISITORS****What is considered as appropriate training or coursework for home visitors working with families with infants and toddlers?**

Home visitors must have knowledge and experience in child development and ECE; the principles of child health, safety and nutrition; adult learning principles; and family dynamics. Home visitors also need to be able to effectively work with families in supporting the parents' role as the primary educator of their child. Home visitors supporting families with infants and toddlers must have training or coursework that focuses on the growth and development of children ages birth to 3 years old. Appropriate coursework and training that focuses on infant/toddler development helps home visitors provide age-appropriate services and programming for young children. Ideally, trainings and courses connect to college credits.

[Relationship-Based Competencies for Staff and Supervisors Who Work with Families](#) [PDF, 1.5MB] identifies important competencies for working with families in Head Start and Early Head Start. Grantees can use this resource to improve the preparation and ongoing professional development of staff and supervisors who work with families.

Additional topics may include, but are **not limited to**:

- Early childhood development with respect to children from birth to age 3, preschoolers, and early brain development
- Structured child-focused home visiting that promotes parents' ability to support the child's cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development
- Methods to help parents promote language skills, including home language and emergent literacy
- Planning for services for children with disabilities
- Developing consistent, stable, and supportive relationships with very young children and families
- Culturally responsive and sensitive practice
- Methods for communicating effectively with infants and toddlers, their families, and other staff members
- Methods for identifying child abuse and neglect
- Planning for successful child and family transitions
- Promoting positive parent-child interactions
- Strengths-based parent education, including methods to encourage parents as their child's first and most important caregiver, teacher, and advocate
- Observing and recording children's behavior
- Planning a safe and healthy learning environment in the home
- The principles of child health, safety, and nutrition
- Strategies for helping families cope with crisis
- The relationship of health and well-being of pregnant women to prenatal and early child development
- Family dynamics
- Adult learning principles

Back to [TABLE OF CONTENTS](#)

EDUCATIONAL AND FAMILY SUPPORT PERSONNEL: **FAMILY SERVICE WORKERS****What are the current qualification requirements for family service workers?**

Current Head Start regulations require consultants and staff with oversight responsibilities for family service workers to have training and experience in the fields related to social, human, or family services. Additionally, programs must ensure that staff serving as family service workers have the necessary knowledge, skills, and experience to effectively perform and function in their roles.

Family service workers need knowledge and skills to be able to support and engage families of children participating in Head Start. They are responsible for strengths and needs assessment, family goal setting, and the development of service plans, family advocacy, and coordination of service delivery through family and community partnership services. They may also provide parent and family engagement services and work in partnership with teaching staff and home visitors, as appropriate, to link family goals, children's learning, and developmental progress. Additionally, staff supporting parent and family engagement must have training, experience, and skills in supporting parent leadership and in assisting the parents of young children in advocating and making decisions for their families.

Each agency and program shall create, in consultation with an employee, an individualized professional development plan and shall ensure that plans are regularly evaluated for their impact on teacher and staff effectiveness. Each employee's plan should address staff qualification goals and ensure staff have the knowledge, skills, experience, and competencies needed to responsibly perform and function in their role as a family service worker. Plans also should include ongoing supports, such as attending in-service and pre-service training, supervision, and frequent feedback about how to improve when necessary.

[Relationship-Based Competencies for Staff and Supervisors Who Work with Families](#) [PDF, 1.5MB] identifies important competencies for working with families in Head Start and Early Head Start. Grantees can use this resource to improve the preparation and ongoing professional development of staff and supervisors who work with families.

Are there credentialing programs for family service workers?

Yes. There are a number of credentialing programs available for family service workers that can be accessed through national or state programs. Review options by state and access detailed information about programs on the [Credentialing and Degree Programs for Family Service Workers Database](#).

Current Head Start regulations do not require specific qualifications for family service workers. However, they do require programs to ensure that staff serving as family service workers have the necessary knowledge, skills, and experience to effectively perform and function in their roles. The regulations require consultants and staff with oversight responsibilities to have training and experience in the fields related to social, human, or family services.

EDUCATIONAL AND FAMILY SUPPORT PERSONNEL: **FAMILY SERVICE WORKERS****How many clock hours of training or coursework should family service workers have on an annual basis?**

Each agency and program shall create, in consultation with an employee, an individualized professional development plan. They also will ensure that plans are regularly evaluated for their impact on staff effectiveness. Plans should address staff qualification goals and ensure they have the knowledge, skills, experience, and competencies needed to responsibly perform and function in providing services to children, primarily in the child's home, through intensive work with the child's parents and family as the primary factor in the growth and development of the child. Plans also should include ongoing supports, such as attending in-service and pre-service training, supervision, and frequent feedback about how to improve when necessary.

The Head Start Act doesn't specify how many clock hours of annual training or coursework for family service workers. However, OHS believes that a minimum of 15 clock hours of professional development per year is important for all program staff members who support children and families' well-being. Ideally, trainings and courses connect to college credits whenever possible.

Professional development should be high-quality, sustained, intensive, and outcome-focused in order to have a positive and lasting impact on the family service worker's performance to provide nurturing and intentional interactions with parents and families designed to foster family well-being, positive parent-child relationships, and their child's development and learning. Head Start and Early Head Start grantees can use the [Relationship-Based Competencies for Staff and Supervisors Who Work with Families](#) [PDF, 1.5MB] to improve the preparation and ongoing professional development of staff and supervisors who work with families.

[Back to TABLE OF CONTENTS](#)

CREDENTIALS AND DEGREES: CHILD DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATE (CDA) CREDENTIALS**Which staffing roles require a CDA credential as the minimum qualification?**

Currently, as a minimum requirement, regulations identify the following roles as needing to have or obtain a current CDA credential that is appropriate to the age of the children and setting where they are being served:

- Infant/toddler teachers, at date of hire
- FCC providers, enrolled in CDA program within six months of hire and obtained within two years of beginning service provision
- Preschool assistant teachers, enrolled in a CDA program to be completed within two years

NOTE: Grantees that are awarded with Early Head Start-Child Care (EHS-CC) Partnership funding have up to the first 18 months of the initial award to ensure that all EHS-CC Partnership teachers and providers meet the minimum qualifications. After the initial 18 months, staff—even newly hired staff members—need to meet the minimum qualifications.

What types of CDA credentials does the Council for Professional Recognition in Washington, DC offer? Which ones are applicable for Head Start and Early Head Start staff?

The Council for Professional Recognition offers four types of CDA credentials that are applicable to Head Start and Early Head Start programs:

- Infant/toddler center-based setting (working with children birth to 36 months)
- Preschool center-based setting (working with children 3 to 5 years old)
- FCC setting (working with children birth to age 5)
- Home visitor setting (working children birth to age 5)

The Council for Professional Recognition also offers bilingual specializations for each of these settings. A bilingual child development setting has specific goals for achieving bilingual development in children. It consistently uses two languages (English and another language) in daily activities. It also helps parents to understand the goals and support their child's bilingual development. Candidates for bilingual specialization must:

- Work in a bilingual program that requires the candidate to speak both languages (English and another language) daily and consistently
- Have a working knowledge of those two languages

For more information about the national CDA credentials issued by the Council for Professional Recognition, visit <http://www.cdacouncil.org/the-cda-credential>.

CREDENTIALS AND DEGREES: CHILD DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATE (CDA) CREDENTIALS**Must staff keep their CDA status current?**

The CDA needs to be current whenever staff members are using a CDA to meet the minimum qualification requirement, such as for a preschool teacher assistant, infant/toddler center-based teachers, and FCC providers. Therefore, these staff members need to ensure they maintain a current status through the renewal process.

When staff members have a degree in ECE or child development and are supplementing their professional development with a CDA, it is encouraged that they maintain a current CDA status through the renewal process.

What documents prove qualifications and credentials?

To ensure a person has completed a credential, Head Start and Early Head Start programs review the credential or certificate that is issued by a third party. Programs need to ensure state-awarded credentials or certificates meet or exceed the requirements for the national CDA credential awarded by the Council for Professional Recognition. To ensure a person has completed a degree program, Head Start and Early Head Start programs review the diploma issued by accredited colleges or universities.

For some staffing roles, Head Start and Early Head Start programs may need to evaluate completed courses to determine the relevance of the ECE or child development content to the ages of and settings where children are served by the employee. Programs can review the transcripts, course descriptions, and syllabi to ensure staff members have the necessary knowledge, skills, experience, and competencies to effectively perform and function in their roles with the specific age group they serve. Additionally, programs should document the reasons why this individual was the best candidate to hire.

Head Start and Early Head Start programs need to establish individualized professional development plans that support staff in meeting and maintaining professional targets as soon as possible after hire. Plans should include ongoing supports to ensure staff consistently provide appropriate, responsive interactions with children and families. Such support includes in-service and pre-service training, supervision, and frequent feedback about how to improve when necessary.

Head Start and Early Head Start programs should become familiar with their state's professional development system. Many state systems organize training opportunities through registries, track and recognize practitioners' achievements, and help ensure the quality of available training. States often use these systems to help programs meet higher professional development standards and progress toward higher QRIS ratings.

[Back to TABLE OF CONTENTS](#)

CREDENTIALS AND DEGREES: DEGREES AND EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION (ECE)-EQUIVALENT COURSEWORK
Does a person with an early childhood degree need additional experience in working with children to be hired as a qualified Head Start teacher?

No. A candidate who has an associate, baccalaureate, or advanced degree in ECE does not need additional work experience with children to be qualified as a Head Start preschool teacher.

Are there alternate routes for teachers with a four-year degree in a field other than ECE to be considered qualified as a preschool teacher?

Yes. Individuals with non-ECE degrees are qualified to teach in preschool classrooms when they **have experience teaching preschool children and** one of the following:

- **Coursework equivalent to a major in ECE** comparable to state-accredited programs of study for ECE degrees
- A state-issued license to teach preschool where the license prerequisites include completion of **coursework equivalent to a major in ECE**
- Evidence that the specific degree included pre-K in the degree study program, as often demonstrated through an endorsement or specialization noted on the diploma, license, or transcript

Additionally, individuals with non-ECE degrees are qualified as preschool teachers when they have been admitted into the Teach for America program **and:**

- Passed a rigorous early childhood content exam such as the Early Childhood Praxis
- Participated in the Teach for America training institute that includes teaching preschool children
- Continue to receive ongoing professional development and support from the Teach for America's professional staff

Do college degrees earned in foreign countries meet the qualified teacher mandate for preschool classrooms?

In order for a teacher with a degree from a foreign institution to be qualified, the program must verify that the degree or degree equivalency meets one of the basic requirements of a qualifying degree outlined in Section 648A of the Head Start Act.

Individuals who meet one of the basic requirements also must establish equivalency with U.S. higher education standards. Those with foreign credentials would need to show that their educational credentials have been evaluated by a private organization that is deemed qualified by the U.S. Department of Education and specializes in the evaluation and interpretation of foreign education programs. Such education must be deemed equivalent to that gained in an accredited U.S. education program, or full credit has been given for the courses at a U.S. accredited college or university. For further information, visit: www.ed.gov/

When an independent review determines that the degree does not qualify the candidate, they would need to:

- Earn enough course credits to have the equivalency of a major at a college or university in the U.S.; **or**
- Follow the routes described in the previous FAQ.

Under any of the categories of the Head Start Act, this person must also have preschool teaching experience.

CREDENTIALS AND DEGREES: DEGREES AND EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION (ECE)-EQUIVALENT COURSEWORK
What counts as "coursework equivalent to a major in ECE?"

Generally, this would be determined by the specific, accredited college or university offering the courses in degree programs. Coursework equivalent to a major relating to ECE includes, but **is not limited to**, courses that focus on:

- Child development
- ECE
- Early childhood curriculum as a whole or by domain, such as math, science, or literacy
- Early childhood teaching and instruction
- Child assessment
- Child psychology
- Family development
- Health and physical development
- Early mathematics and science
- Children's literature

Such courses may be offered in various departments, such as education, home economics, family and consumer science, human ecology, music, art, library sciences, physical education and recreation, psychology, family studies, and others. For infant/toddler teachers and FCC providers, ECE coursework needs to include content focusing on the growth and development of children ages birth to 3 years.

Head Start agencies in states that license or certify state pre-K teachers also may choose to accept the types and numbers of courses recognized by the state education agency as qualifying teachers to teach preschool-aged children **as long as they also have experience teaching preschool aged children.**

Does a person with an associate, baccalaureate, or advanced degree in a field other than ECE need experience teaching preschool-aged children in addition to the courses equivalent to a major relating to ECE?

Yes. In order to meet the qualification requirement, an individual who has a degree in a field other than ECE must have:

- Experience in an early childhood setting with children ages 3 to 5; **and**
- Courses equivalent to a major relating to ECE.

The Head Start Act does not prescribe the kind or duration of qualifying experience; each grantee may establish its own criteria.

NOTE: Degrees in early elementary are considered a field **other than ECE.**

CREDENTIALS AND DEGREES: DEGREES AND EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION (ECE)-EQUIVALENT COURSEWORK
<p>Does a person with a degree that includes student teaching or other supervised practicum experiences in an early childhood setting need additional experience working with children to be qualified as a Head Start or Early Head Start teacher when the experience matches the ages of children assigned to the teacher?</p> <p>No. A teacher who has a degree that includes student teaching or other experiences in a supervised placement with infants, toddlers, or preschoolers does not need additional employment experience with children to be qualified. The college placements are supervised and certified by the college and the state as an acceptable part of the requirements for their degree program.</p>
<p>If a teacher has a bachelor's degree in a field other than ECE, can the "coursework equivalent to a major" be earned at the associate degree level or must they be earned at a four-year college?</p> <p>The additional courses used toward the "equivalency" for a major in ECE may be earned from accredited two- or four-year colleges and universities.</p>
<p>Must all the courses that total toward the "equivalency" for a major in ECE come from one college?</p> <p>No. Teachers who already have a degree in a field other than ECE may combine the records of coursework completed at more than one accredited institution.</p>
<p>Do one-credit courses count toward the requirement for coursework equivalent to a major?</p> <p>In cases where the college or university requires one or more specific one-credit courses, those would count toward the requirement for coursework equivalent to a major in ECE. Courses given for one credit rarely provide the intensity of study or the depth of content necessary for mastery of a subject or improvement of teaching skills.</p>

Back to [TABLE OF CONTENTS](#)

WAIVERS
<p>What is a waiver for preschool teacher qualifications?</p> <p>A waiver provides a limited time (no more than three years) under which the Head Start agency can hire a person who lacks a degree in ECE or related field with ECE coursework equivalency as a preschool teacher. It is intended that the program will use the three-year timeframe to support the teacher in gaining the appropriate qualifications.</p>
<p>Can a grantee receive a waiver for an (EHS) or MSHS infant/toddler teacher?</p> <p>No. The Head Start Act gives no authority for OHS to grant waivers for EHS or MSHS infant/toddler teachers. The EHS teacher qualification regulations stated in the Head Start Act of 2007 supersede previous requirements; therefore, center-based teachers working with infants and toddlers no longer have a year from their date of hire to receive their infant/toddler credential.</p> <p>NOTE: Grantees that are awarded Early Head Start-Child Care (EHS-CC) Partnership funding have up to the first 18 months of the initial award to ensure that all EHS-CC Partnership teachers and providers meet the minimum qualifications. After the initial 18 months, staff—even newly hired staff members—need to meet the minimum qualifications.</p>
<p>When does a Head Start program seek a waiver for a preschool teacher who doesn't have a qualifying degree?</p> <p>A program may seek a three-year waiver for an individual who:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The program considers competent but does not have the qualifying degree for a preschool teacher; and • Will work in a preschool classroom that does not have a teacher with a qualifying degree. <p>To be granted a waiver, the program must provide evidence that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The agency has attempted unsuccessfully to recruit an individual who already meets the qualifications; and • The individual is enrolled in a program that grants an ECE or related degree and will receive such degree in a reasonable time not to exceed three years; and • The individual has, at a minimum, a current national preschool center-based CDA credential issued by the Council for Professional Recognition or a state-awarded alternate certificate for preschool teachers that meets or exceeds the requirements for the national CDA credential.
<p>What are the conditions for a preschool classroom that doesn't have a teacher who has a qualifying degree?</p> <p>When a preschool classroom in a center-based program does not have a teacher with a qualifying degree, that classroom must have a teacher who:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is on an individually approved waiver and enrolled in a program leading to a minimum of an associate degree in ECE or a related field with coursework that is equivalent of a major in ECE, and that the degree will be completed within a reasonable period not to exceed the three-year waiver period; and • Has either a current preschool center-based national CDA credential issued by the Council for Professional Recognition or a state-awarded certificate or credential that meets or exceeds the requirements of the national preschool center-based CDA credential.

Back to [TABLE OF CONTENTS](#)