



First Step

A Child Development Associate (CDA) Credential and Career and Technical Education (CTE) Program

The Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE), Division of Early Learning (DEL), in collaboration with the Division of Postsecondary and Career Education (PCE), successfully launched the First Step Child Development Associate (CDA) credential program in 2016. First Step students earn the nationally recognized CDA while simultaneously completing their high school diploma. The First Step pilot program was implemented in 2016 in response to the increased need for qualified early learning professionals in the District of Columbia. OSSE recognized the CDA credential as an attainable, stackable credential that serves as a gateway to higher education and employment in the field of early childhood education. The program name reflects the truism that attaining a CDA is the best **first step** that a student can take on the early childhood education career pathway.

Specifically designed for high school students with interest in education careers, First Step provides students with the following:

- Competency-based education in early childhood growth and development;
- Practicum experience working with young children enrolled in licensed high-quality child development centers;
- Paid summer employment at these centers through the District of Columbia's summer youth employment program;
- Individualized college and career counseling;
- Preparation for the CDA requirements, including site observation and examination preparation;
- Fully paid application and examination fees; and
- Access to financial aid for college through specialized scholarships, such as the Teacher Education and Compensation Helps (T.E.A.C.H.) Early Childhood® Project, DC Tuition Assistance Grant (DCTAG), and Mayor's Scholars, if eligible.

To ensure students are well-prepared to work in early childhood education programs, the First Step program provides students with a highly-qualified instructor, school-based support, more than the required 120 classroom hours, funding for all transportation costs for travel to and from practicum sites, and hourly compensation for the summer as they work to complete the 480 practicum hours needed to obtain the CDA credential. While working in DC child development centers, students have the opportunity to experience professional responsibilities, connect classroom concepts with work experience, and receive valuable feedback from instructors, teachers, and administrative staff during their practicum experience.

In addition, CDA students enjoy opportunities to attend early childhood education conferences to learn from experts in the field, and engage in a host of relevant enrichment and training opportunities to further their professional development.

BENEFITS OF THE FIRST STEP PROGRAM INCLUDE:

- Earn a CDA while simultaneously completing high school diploma
- Instruction from highly-qualified CDA instructors
- Paid summer practicum
- Access to professional conferences and training opportunities
- Access to additional scholarship programs for college tuition assistance
- Eligibility to receive six college credits after obtaining the CDA credential

How long does it take students to complete the First Step program?

First Step students commit to participation over two school years in order to obtain the CDA credential. OSSE recommends that high school sophomores and juniors participate in the program, allowing sufficient time to complete all coursework, engage in two full summer practicum opportunities, and participate in supplemental work experiences throughout the years.

"The First Step program completely changed the way I think about education. I feel really confident in my skills as a CDA candidate and a big sister!"

- Ingris Flores, First Step student, Capital City Public Charter School

What additional supports do students receive from OSSE?

OSSE provides a CDA advisor that supports students as they:

- Complete college applications and search for scholarships;
- Prepare employment and identify career opportunities; and
- Participate in supplemental professional development and background checks to guarantee students are employable soon after graduation.

"Our (First Step) students are a group of learners who inspire success in each other both in and out of the classroom."

- Michelle Marbury, Instructor