



Child Care Connection

Good afternoon. My name is Nancy Thomson. I am the executive director of Child Care Connection, a child care resource and referral agency in Mercer County. Thank you for the opportunity to comment on areas of concern to the Council.

As the State is aware, the cost of reimbursement to non-DOE-funded, community-based child care centers has not increased in seven years. Teacher assistants who work in those minimally-funded classrooms are not required to have a bachelor's degree. The staff who take these low-paying teacher assistant and para-professional positions are typically not individuals with the desire to earn a college degree. Many do not have the skills to successfully navigate the college credit environment, yet they need to be knowledgeable about child development, adult-child interactions, curriculum planning and implementation, child assessment, and basic health and safety. The Child Development Associate (CDA) Credential is a nationally recognized qualification that is obtainable and reasonably affordable; it does not require college credits to be a predictable indicator of knowledge in the field. For the past sixteen years, institutions such as Thomas Edison State College and many New Jersey community colleges have articulated the CDA into college credits, yet few credential recipients have been inclined to further their education. Taking away the option to participate in early education training unless it is attached to credit-bearing coursework is limiting. When teacher assistants take CDA-focused modules in early childhood education they learn skills and concepts that they can immediately integrate into their classroom practice. When options to enroll in classes are restricted to college credit-bearing options, many will opt to take only stand-alone workshops.

Child care resource and referral agencies such as Child Care Connection have provided CDA coursework to teacher assistants in the workforce for over twenty-five years. When students enroll in CDA courses they are encouraged to attend college courses; however, many prefer, for a variety of reason, so not to do so. Several of the CCR&Rs offer both affordable on-line training as well as face-to-face, module-based CDA classes that offer a substantial amount of technical assistance, one-on-one supports, and hands-on learning. For the most part, teacher assistants prefer face-to-face training because it better meets their needs. As the *Race-to-the-Top* initiative has shifted the focus onto funding CDA coursework that is based solely on college credit and on-line delivery, a loss of quality improvement options will be the result for the numerous hardworking, minimally paid individuals who staff the infant/toddler and preschool classrooms throughout New Jersey.

The early care and education workforce needs subject area professional development opportunities that include hands-on learning experiences for all concepts, discussion, and feedback-- precisely the type of classes provided by the CCR&Rs. The workforce needs professional development choices that are accessible and affordable and include credit-bearing and non-credit bearing courses as well as face-to-face and on-line options. The capacity of the workforce is diverse, the options should be as well.

The Child Care Connection, Inc.
1001 Spruce Street, Suite 201
Trenton, NJ 08638-3957



(609) 989-7770
Fax: (609) 989-8060
www.childcareconnection-nj.org

The rate of reimbursement, salaries, and regulations are critical foundational pieces of a professional development system. Will there be suitable financial incentives to attend college credit-bearing courses? Would staff receive an increase in salary for their participation in the rigorous coursework? Would the attainment of a CDA result in a salary increase that will significantly raise their standard of living? Is the Department of Children and Families Office of Licensing prepared to raise the bar on qualifications for teacher assistants?

Without funding to maintain college-educated early childhood educators, proper incentives, and corresponding mandatory licensing requirements, the direction to offer only credit-bearing CDA opportunities will quickly dismantle an existing system that unfortunately may not result in an increased number of early childhood-credentialed educators in New Jersey's preschool classrooms. In fact, it may result in quality losses instead of gains.

I hope the Department of Education will support *Race-to-the Top* quality enhancement funding for a variety of professional development options, including the traditional CDA credential in addition to credit-bearing options. New Jersey's child care workforce and the children served will benefit from a system that is based on early childhood principles of learning.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to share my concerns regarding workforce development issues.