



Professionalizing the Child Care Workforce: Teachers' and Leaders' Views of Louisiana's Early Childhood Ancillary Certificate

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Summary:

- This report uses survey data to describe the experiences of 95 child care teachers and 175 child care leaders in navigating Louisiana's new requirement that all lead teachers in publicly funded child care sites obtain an Early Childhood Ancillary Certificate (ECAC) within two years of being hired or promoted into their position.
- Most teachers and leaders reported positive views of this new credentialing requirement. For example, the vast majority of teachers (92%) agreed that the ECAC helps improve teacher-child interactions, and more than two-thirds of leaders (69%) agreed that the ECAC will improve the quality of early childhood education in Louisiana.
- However, almost half (47%) of teachers reported that ECAC training programs posed challenges for teachers who work full time.
- Almost one-third (31%) of leaders did not feel "very" familiar with the ECAC requirements, and many reported that ensuring that all lead teachers at their site were in compliance was difficult.
- The biggest barriers teachers faced in pursuing the ECAC were related to balancing the ECAC program with other work and personal obligations and navigating the complexity of applying for a Child Development Associate (CDA) – one of the key steps in the process.

Teaching and caring for young children is a complex, demanding job that can have lasting impacts on children's lives. However, in the United States, early educators – especially those working in child care sites – often have little training and limited access to professional supports to guide them in this work.¹

In an effort to professionalize the workforce and improve teaching quality, states have introduced new training requirements that aim to equip teachers with the skills they need to effectively teach and care for young children. However, these requirements can also unintentionally create challenges for early educators.

This report is the [second in a three-part series](#) about the hurdles Louisiana’s child care teachers face as they pursue the Early Childhood Ancillary Certificate (ECAC), a credential now required for all lead teachers working in Louisiana’s publicly funded child care sites.

The Early Childhood Ancillary Certificate

Since 2019, all lead teachers in publicly funded child care sites in Louisiana are required to earn an ECAC credential within two years of assuming their position. While teachers who possess a Bachelor’s degree in any field or an Associate’s degree in early childhood education (ECE) automatically qualify for the ECAC, those who do not have either degree must enroll in one of 29 ECAC training programs housed at colleges, non-profits, and other community organizations throughout the state.²

The process for earning an ECAC builds on the widely-recognized Child Development Associate (CDA) credential – the most common ECE credential in the United States – which requires teachers to complete 120 hours of professional education in early childhood development, 480 hours of ECE work experience, a professional portfolio, a teaching observation, and an exam.³ In addition to the CDA requirement, ECAC enrollees also receive additional observations and coaching focused on improving the quality of teacher-child interactions.

Efforts to professionalize the ECE workforce can put new demands on teachers’ time and resources, while providing few incentives. The ECAC requirement was designed to address these barriers: teachers have two years from their date of hire or promotion to earn the credential; they are able to complete their ECAC training program at no cost to them by applying for a scholarship from the Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE); and once teachers complete the credential, they are eligible for the School Readiness Tax Credit (SRTC), a refundable tax credit worth up to \$3,300 per year.

Yet even with the tuition coverage and the financial incentive, LDOE estimates that **most teachers** who enroll in ECAC programs do not go on to earn their credential.

This brief aims to capture how both teachers themselves, as well as the directors at their sites, view the ECAC credential and what they see as the key challenges in earning the credential.

The Study of Early Education (SEELA): Louisiana Survey

In the fall of 2020, we invited all teachers and site leaders from child care sites that receive any public funding in three large Louisiana parishes – Jefferson, Orleans, and Rapides – to participate in a voluntary workforce survey. Across the three study communities, 61% of teachers responded to the survey, as did leaders from 60% of publicly funded child care sites. The survey included questions about the ECAC requirement, perceptions about its utility, and potential hurdles for completion.

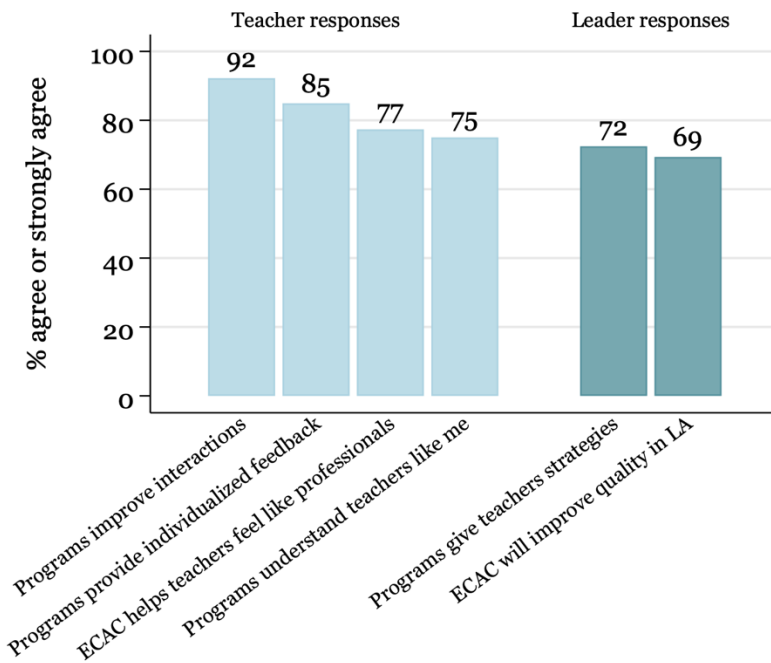
In our sample, 160 teachers held an ECAC, but many of these teachers earned it with their existing degrees or credentials and never enrolled in one of the state’s ECAC programs. This report focuses on the 95 teachers in our sample who had *any* experience with an ECAC program: 29 teachers who completed a state-approved ECAC program, 59 teachers who were working towards a credential at the time of the survey, and 7 teachers who had begun a program but did not finish. This group of teachers can best shed light on the challenges associated with earning an ECAC through these state-approved programs. The report also includes findings from the 175 child care leaders who completed the survey. Leaders are responsible for ensuring all lead teachers earn an ECAC within two years of assuming their position at the site.

ECAC Buy-in from Teachers and Leaders

The teachers and leaders in our sample viewed both the ECAC requirement and their experiences with ECAC programs favorably. As shown in the first panel of Figure 1, the majority of teachers agreed or strongly agreed that ECAC programs help teachers improve adult-child interactions (92%), that ECAC programs provide teachers with individualized feedback (85%), that the ECAC helps teachers feel like professionals (77%), and that the instructors in ECAC programs understood teachers (75%).⁴

Likewise, most leaders agreed or strongly agreed that ECAC programs provide teachers with strategies to face challenges in their classrooms (72%) and that the ECAC requirement will improve the quality of early childhood education in Louisiana (69%).

Figure 1. Teachers’ and leaders’ perceptions of the ECAC requirement and training programs



Note: Based on 73 - 77 teacher responses and 127 - 137 leader responses.

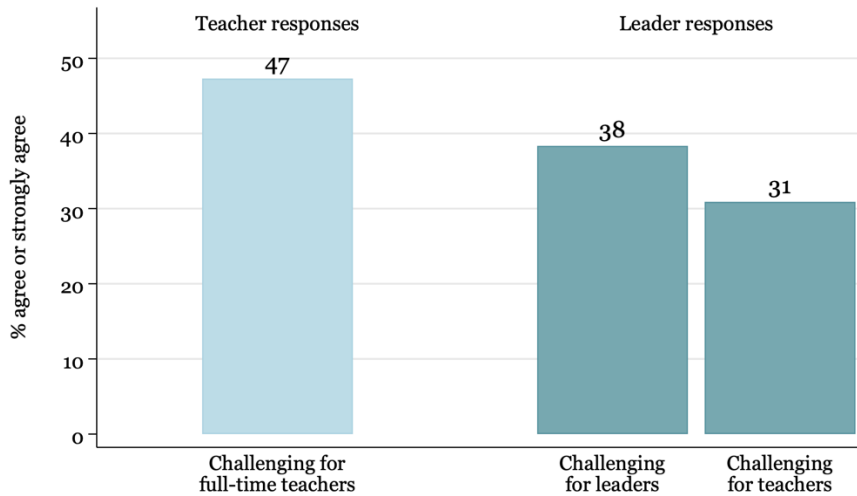
The high level of buy-in from leaders is important because a supportive site leader can be essential in helping teachers navigate ECAC requirements, including balancing the demands of work and ECAC training. The teachers in our sample reported broad site leader support: 87% agreed or strongly agreed that their site leader supports teachers in completing the ECAC requirements. Eighty percent of leaders reported that they had encouraged teachers at their site to enroll in an ECAC during the fall that the survey was administered. A similar percentage (79%) agreed or strongly agreed that supporting teachers in pursuing the ECAC was a priority for them.

Challenges Meeting ECAC Requirements

Although most teachers and leaders reported positive feelings about the ECAC, their responses also highlighted notable challenges. When asked how familiar they were with the ECAC requirement (very, somewhat, or not at all), almost a quarter (23%) of leaders were only somewhat familiar and 9% were not at all familiar with the requirement. Site leaders with insufficient knowledge of the ECAC requirement may find it difficult to ensure that their site or individual teachers are in compliance.

Figure 2 shows that nearly half of teachers (47%) agreed or strongly agreed that the ECAC program they attended was challenging for teachers who worked full-time. Thirty-eight percent of leaders also agreed or strongly agreed that meeting the ECAC requirement at the site level was challenging for leaders, and 31% felt that it was challenging for teachers to earn an ECAC.

Figure 2. Teacher and leader reports that meeting the ECAC requirement is challenging⁵



Note: Based on 74 teacher responses and 123 - 133 leader responses.

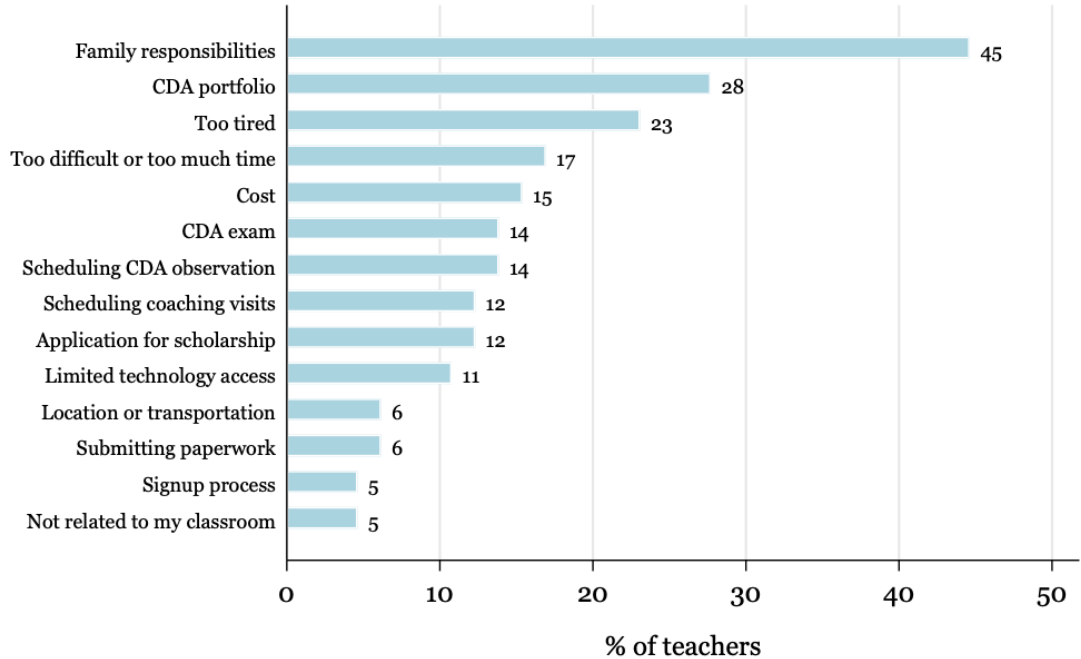
Understanding the specific factors that make ECAC credentialing challenging is important in order to know where teachers need support in completing the process. We asked teachers to indicate which of a set of listed barriers and challenges they experienced as they worked towards ECAC completion.

Two types of challenges were most salient. First, teachers struggled to balance the time and demands of the ECAC program with other personal and work obligations. The most common barrier teachers reported was family responsibilities, such as child care or elder care (45% of teachers). Nearly a quarter of teachers (23%) reported being too tired to do coursework after working a full day.

The second set of challenges related to completing requirements related to earning a CDA credential, which involves additional activities after coursework ends such as being observed, passing an exam, submitting documentation, and other tasks. Almost one-third of teachers (28%) reported that preparing the CDA portfolio was a challenge. Fourteen percent reported that passing the CDA exam

posed a challenge, and the same percentage reported that scheduling CDA observations was hard.

Figure 3. Teacher reports of barriers to ECAC completion⁶



Note: Based on 65 responses.

Implications

Credentialing requirements like the ECAC are intended to professionalize the ECE workforce and foster higher-quality early learning environments but are unlikely to yield desired goals if teachers struggle to engage with the training experience.

Louisiana’s ECAC was designed to address many of the concerns that typically accompany policies that raise educational requirements for early educators, and our results suggest that the ECAC is well-regarded by early educators in child care settings. Teachers felt that programs provide useful feedback, improve teacher-child interactions, and help teachers feel like professionals. Leaders believed that ECAC programs give their teachers strategies to face challenges in the classroom and that the ECAC requirement will improve the quality of early childhood education in Louisiana.

Nonetheless, according to LDOE, the majority of teachers who begin an ECAC program fail to earn the credential. Responses to this survey underscore the barriers both teachers and leaders faced while working to fulfill the ECAC

requirement. Teachers reported struggling to balance ECAC training demands with their jobs and personal obligations, and also found it challenging to navigate the multi-step CDA credentialing process. Leaders, while supportive of teachers, weren't always familiar with the requirements, and found it difficult to make sure all teachers at their site earned an ECAC.

These findings mirror many of the challenges described by ECAC program leaders in the first report of this series⁷, which emphasized the burden placed on teachers during the complex ECAC process. In particular, program leaders noted that the many steps teachers must complete before, during, and after completing their coursework, like program and scholarship applications, CDA exams, and portfolio creation, created a lot of hurdles for teachers. They observed that most teachers failed to complete their program due to family obligations or because they left their child care job altogether.⁸

Early educators work high-stress jobs with low pay. Being asked to complete coursework, homework, and other training requirements on top of working full time and attending to personal and family commitments is a substantial burden for the workers in this field, even when coupled with scholarships and tax credits.

These results suggest that in order to effectively support teachers in ECAC completion, policymakers and ECAC program leaders should build in supports that make it easier to juggle training with personal and professional demands. These supports could include paid work leave for teachers to attend ECAC trainings and/or funding for sites to hire substitute teachers to cover for teachers who need to leave to work on ECAC requirements during regular hours.

Structural changes around program requirements and supports may also be helpful. Many candidates find requirements related to the CDA particularly difficult to navigate. Targeted supports to clarify the process and coach teachers through the process could help.

In order for ECAC programs to have the biggest impact possible on early childhood quality, they will need to better adapt to teachers' needs and implement changes that make it possible for teachers to balance competing work, personal, and training demands.

Endnotes

¹ McLean, C., Austin, L.J.E., Whitebook, M., & Olson, K.L. (2021). Early Childhood Workforce Index – 2020. Berkeley, CA: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley.

<https://cscce.berkeley.edu/workforce-index2020/report-pdf/>

² The ECAC can be earned through four pathways: (1) Having already earned a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential prior to 2018; (2) Holding an Associate’s degree in an ECE-related field; (3) Holding a Bachelor’s degree in any field; (4) Completing a training program that has been approved by the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE)

³ For more information about the CDA certificate, visit

<https://www.cdacouncil.org/en/about/learn-about-the-cda/>

⁴ Sample sizes vary from figure to figure because not all respondents answered all survey items.

⁵ Teachers were asked to indicate how much they agreed with the following statement regarding the program where they earned or were working towards an ECAC: “The program is challenging for teachers who are working full time.” Leaders were asked to indicate how much they agreed with the statements “Meeting the ECAC requirement is a challenge for center directors like me” and “The ECAC training is challenging for teachers to complete”.

⁶ In response to the question “Which of the following have posed challenges for you?”, teachers could mark as many options as they liked from the following list:

- The cost
- The sign-up process
- Inconvenient location or no transportation
- The work was difficult and/or took too much time
- The work was not related to what happens in my classroom
- My family responsibilities (e.g. child care, elder care)
- I was too tired to attend classes and do homework after working a full day
- Limited access to materials or technology I needed (e.g. WiFi, computer, printing)
- Scheduling coaching visits
- Scheduling my CDA observation
- Preparing the CDA portfolio
- Passing the CDA exam
- Submitting required paperwork
- Applying for the Pathways scholarship

⁷ Bassok, D., Herring, W., Markowitz, A.J., & Bellows, L. (2021) *Professionalizing the Child Care Workforce through Credentialing: Lessons from Louisiana's Early Childhood Ancillary Certificate*. Retrieved from http://bit.ly/seela_ecac_programleaders.

⁸ It is important to note that the data used in this report were collected only from teachers who *continued* to work in ECE during or after their enrollment in an ECAC program. The opinions of the teachers who did not earn an ECAC because they ultimately left the field altogether are not represented in this report.

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