

**ARTICULATION AND TRANSFER FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD
EDUCATION STUDENTS IN NEW JERSEY**

**A Position Paper
By the Articulation Working Committee of the
New Jersey Professional Development Center for Early Care and Education
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Articulation and Transfer for Early Childhood Education Students in New Jersey A Position Paper

The Articulation Working Committee

For five years the Articulation Working Committee of the New Jersey Professional Development Center for Early Care and Education has been studying the possibilities of students moving through a well-defined system of articulation and transfer from a non-credit national Child Development Associate level to graduate school. The importance of a well-articulated system becomes apparent as we undertake the tremendous task of striving to put several hundred early childhood practitioners through teacher preparation programs in a short period of time.

The committee is composed of individuals from higher education, community trainers, and child care administrators who are concerned about improving transfer of credit and experience for early care and education practitioners who wish to further their education.

In 2000 the committee held a state meeting on articulation and defined several barriers for students. In its paper *A Position on Articulation: Background, Barriers, and Objectives* the committee made several recommendations:

- Institute a stand alone P-3 Early Childhood license
- Work toward standardizing the transfer agreements between two-year and four-year institutions to include a portion of the professional education courses completed at the community college level
- Align two-year and four-year Early Childhood curricula
- Provide sophomore level coursework as an introduction to professional development courses
- Eliminate the six-credit cap on professional development transfer credits from two-year to four-year institutions
- Develop diverse course options to increase accessibility
- Develop a means of crediting experienced professionals with life experience toward a degree
- Establish conditions for acceptance of a Child Development Associate for credit

There has been some movement toward these recommendations. New Jersey now has a P-3 teaching certificate, although the rules about where this certificate is required need clarification. Many colleges have signed the General Education Foundations Agreement to facilitate course transfer, but case-by-case transfer obstacles still exist. Institutions have created new options to meet the scheduling needs of non-traditional students, such as off-site courses, increased on-line offerings, and “Saturday College.” However, there are a number of obstacles that persist in preventing practitioners from pursuing a college education and a P-3 certification.

Students Employed in Early Childhood Settings

Many students now seeking a P-3 certificate, either through the modified alternate route or through traditional programs are already working in the field. These students and others already employed represent a pool of potential teachers who might continue their education if they were not discouraged by the difficulties encountered pursuing a degree while holding a full time job.

They often enter the field of Early Childhood without formal education and begin their path by taking local workshops or courses at the community college. They are non-traditional students who are attracted to college coursework because they want to improve their practice. Designing a course of study that includes courses relevant to early childhood and making it available at the lower division level will attract students to the field. These students represent a potential pool of certified teachers that should not be overlooked or deterred.

Students Meeting the Abbott Mandate

Many students in Abbott contracted centers who are both working and going to school will find it difficult to meet the deadline of 2004. While the committee realizes the deadline is part of the mandate, it suggests the timeline should be altered for those who demonstrate substantial and consistent movement toward obtaining a degree.

Students in the traditional route need to complete field experiences and student teaching in a variety of settings; this is impractical for full time employees who must leave their employment to complete a degree program. The fastest way for Abbott contracting classroom teachers to achieve certification is by getting a degree in an approved major, obtaining a Certificate of Eligibility, and continuing in the Alternate route program. This precludes them from taking the courses they find most interesting and motivating at early stages of their education.

In addition to these students, Head Start personnel are also mandated to obtain Child Development Associate certification or AA degrees by 2003 and then pursue BA degrees. Making field specific course work available as early as possible will help keep students motivated as they take courses, which can be applied directly to their present work in the classroom.

The *No Child Left Behind Act* which was signed into law in January, 2002 requires teachers in Title I schools to have specific degrees or pass a test. Community colleges are experiencing increased enrollment due to assistant teachers obtaining 60 credits or an AA degree.

Scheduling

Scheduling is a challenge for students who also maintain full time employment. Some colleges promote “block scheduling” that requires full time attendance. This causes the college to lose potentially qualified working students. Many colleges also place restrictions on their students for capstone student teaching experiences, such as not being able to remain in their current place of employment for student teaching, or not being able to student teach in their home school district. These are all barriers for non-traditional students who desire the P-3 certificate. Flexible scheduling and off-campus classes would assist non-traditional students.

Literacy Skills

Literacy skills and prior grade point average are barriers for many who would seek a teaching certificate. Children deserve teachers who are themselves literate, competent learners, however, development of remedial options for these students will enlarge the number of eligible teacher candidates who are already attracted to Early Childhood Education. This committee endorses maintaining a 2.75 exit GPA but recommends that supports must be created for those students

needing support in mastering skills for coursework success. We further recommend that local Board of Education adult basic education programs provide accessible remedial courses that will prepare Early Childhood Education students to do well on placement tests.

Cooperation Between Two-Year Colleges and Four-Year Institutions

In spite of much regional activity and efforts to develop collaborative transfer programs, barriers for many students continue to exist. While many institutions have signed the General Education Foundation agreement, many students in A.A. programs still find they lose general education credits when transferring. Some institutions require additional courses or specific courses not aligned with the two-year college requirements. In addition, community college advisors must advise their students to take different courses depending on the requirements of the receiving institution. Advisement is key to taking courses that will transfer. If New Jersey is going to support a general education agreement, efforts must be made to ensure it has universal applicability among the institutions accepting it.

Maintaining High Standards

Many 4-year institutions are NCATE accredited and are therefore bound by certain standards for courses and teaching faculty. This committee supports the community college professional organization NJ-ACCESS in its efforts to align standards with the four-year institutions and to adopt standards for courses and curriculum. Comparison and alignment of course content across institutions and establishing guidelines for course content that match nationally recognized standards is vital for transfer from two- to four-year institutions.

Clear Information about the P-3

Adequate, accurate and consistent information is crucial to students making decisions about their future. Again we emphasize the importance of advisement. Outside Abbott districts, the application of the P-3 certificate is unclear. In spite of the code that describes it as a “preschool – third grade” certificate, it does not have wide recognition outside Abbott districts. It is unclear where the certificate is valid, which field experiences will lead to the certificate, and where provisional teaching can be completed.

Consistent standards should be in place for teacher with degrees. Presently there are great differences from one college to the next in qualifications for admission to P-3 programs. Some programs take any qualified candidate; others accept only currently employed Abbott teachers. Some admit only holders of CE’s into their alternate route program; others admit pre-service teachers and teachers without CE’s or candidates not currently employed in a preschool setting.

Field Placements and Student Teaching

The quality of field work is another issue. For students who work fulltime, a requirement of an unpaid placement outside the center is a barrier to program completion. But again, NCATE standards are in place for universities requiring fieldwork and student teaching. Compromising the quality of the field experiences by restricting the variety of settings, confining settings to fewer age groups, limiting the opportunity to be involved in settings different than the teacher’s classroom and those settings deemed appropriate by the university, should be considered in relationship to the student’s ability to spend time outside the workplace. Support for improving

quality in community programs and developing model center will provide broader resources for satisfactory field placements.

Mentoring

There must be a solution to the mentor issue. In some cases qualified individuals have been denied hire into an Abbott contracted center because the district was not able to supply a mentor immediately for the provisional teaching candidate. Mentors are difficult to find and having regular classroom teachers leave their classrooms to mentor other teachers for four weeks is difficult for everyone including children. In many situations provisional teachers in the alternate route programs are destined to frustration and failure due to inadequate support during their first months in the classroom. Alternative solutions such as using retired teachers as mentors or shortening the amount of time required for classroom visits should be considered.

Child Development Associate

Lastly, the committee would like to address the CDA as a step in a larger picture of professional growth. The CDA, a national credential specific to early childhood, should receive some recognition in the form of credit. This committee recognizes the difficulty of credit in relationship to the six-credit cap and the thirty-credit restraint for professional development courses. Those too, are issues that should be explored. Many teachers enter the profession by obtaining a CDA, but there is no standardization for course content or literacy requirements across the state. However, while there are many issues involved in CDA for credit, the committee would like to see this topic open to full discussion by all levels of professional development and a process in place that determines how non-credit CDA can be accepted for credit.

Conclusion and Recommendations

There is a shortage of teachers in New Jersey. There is an increasing need for certified teachers in early childhood classrooms and there is a potential pool of teachers already working in early care and education. There has also been a change in student population in recent years. There are more older adult learners and as a group they come with diverse ages, education, cultural backgrounds, and teaching experiences. The working staff members in early childhood programs who wish to obtain a teaching certificate need an infrastructure that supports their entry into teacher preparation programs and a working viable system that enhances their movement toward a degree and certification. By developing a student-friendly system of articulation and transfer, New Jersey can support those already dedicated to working with preschool children and encourage those attracted to the field while maintaining high standards for teachers of our youngest children.

The Articulation Working Committee makes the following recommendations:

- A state articulation plan lead by a state agency, department or institution
- Early Childhood programs to program alignment between two-year and four-year institutions
- Alignment of standards between two-year and four-year Early Childhood programs

- Clear information from the NJ Department of Education specifically for higher education advisors
- More options for field placement
- Funding for P-3 mentors
- A statewide discussion on how Child Development Associate fits into professional development plans for early childhood practitioners

Office of Professional Standards and Articulations
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