

Preface: Do We Know What a Credential Is?

In this document (and in the survey referred to herein), we use the definition of credential proposed by Gwen Morgan of the Center for Career Development in Early Care and Education:

“the awarding of any certificate, permit, or other document which certifies that an individual has mastered a specific set of defined skills and knowledge and has demonstrated competencies to perform a role or different roles in out-of-school-time programs. A credential may be awarded by a professional association, state agency, higher education consortium, or other organization with a legitimate interest in the qualifications of individuals working in the field, and signifies a consensus by those groups of the validity of the standards set forth.” (Morgan, 1998).

Because SAC is such a broad field, we wanted to learn about all the credentials being offered—not just those called “school age care credentials.” Our survey asked for information about *any* credential appropriate for caregivers who work with school age children. As we learned in the process of conducting this survey, this definition still leaves room for a bewildering breadth of credentialing options. This spirit of innovation has produced many examples for potential replication, but it also raises questions for the school-age community.

For example, this report describes credentials that take less than a day to earn, and others that take nearly two years. Is there a minimum (or a maximum) time requirement for a certificate to be deemed a “credential?” Some credentials, such as the national CDA credential, are specifically designed for caregivers of children under 5 years, yet many states reported use of the credential with school-age staff. Does the use of a credential by the school-age community (even though the credential was never intended to be used in this way) make it in fact a school-age credential?

These and other questions indicate the discussions that lie before the school-age community as we nurture the growing professionalism that benefits the school-age workforce and the children and families in our communities. Our starting point, the discussion about “What is a credential, anyway?” is clearly not yet over. While this report cannot and does not answer this query, it does describe some of the many ways in which our colleagues across the country are answering the question.

Overview of Survey

Surveying Process

An 8-page credentialing survey was distributed by mail in July, 1998 to 265 potential respondents in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. Surveys were distributed to:

- NSACA affiliates
- State licensing officials
- Career development networks
- Community colleges
- Representatives of large SAC providers (YMCA, etc.)

The survey was designed with the input of 17 “key informants,” SAC and career development experts from throughout the country. A phone interview was conducted with each informant, and a draft of the survey was circulated to all informants for further comment.

Follow-up phone calls were made to recipients from states still not represented in received surveys, in an attempt to have all states represented. In some cases, the original recipients of the survey indicated that someone else in their state would be more qualified to answer the survey, and a new copy was sent to that individual. As of March, 1999, 73 surveys were received from 39 states. A complete copy of the survey is included in Appendix 1.

Surveying Issues

One of the initial issues faced in designing the survey was determining the audience. Not every state has an NSACA affiliate, or even an active network of SAC professionals. State agencies’ oversight of SAC programs is often restricted to safety and health issues, not training or credentialing. Career development efforts in many states have focused on early childhood, and may or may not be inclusive of SAC. Nevertheless, we hoped by “casting the net wide” to hear about most of the existing credentialing efforts.

We are not certain if we succeeded in this regard. In a few states, we did not receive a survey although we had heard of credentialing efforts underway and made multiple contacts in an effort to include a response from that state. In others, the contradictory information we received from respondents indicated that information about SAC efforts was not reaching all members of the child care community.