



SUBMISSION FORM

All submission forms must include the following information. Separate submission forms must be turned in for each eligible program. **Deadline: Tuesday, April 7, 2026.** Please include this submission form as the first page of your electronic entry. Contact Gage Harter with any questions.

PROGRAM INFORMATION

County: Chesterfield County

Program Title: Chester Early Learning Academy (CECLA) School Partnership with CTE Early Childhood Education (ECE) Program

Program Category: Health and Human Services

CONTACT INFORMATION

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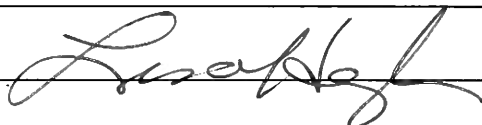
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SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Name: Lisa High

Title: Chesterfield Co Public Schools Deputy Superintendent

Signature: 

Chester Early Learning Academy (CECLA) School Partnership with
CTE Early Childhood Education (ECE) Program
(Health and Human Services Category)

Executive Summary:

The partnership with CTC ECE is a transformative collaboration between Chesterfield County Public Schools' CTE program and the CECLA. This nationally distinctive model embeds high school juniors and seniors inside a functioning pre-kindergarten center serving at-risk three to five-year-olds. Students complete a rigorous two-year ECE program culminating in 480 hours of hands-on work-based learning experience and attainment of the nationally recognized Child Development Associate (CDA) credential. At the same time, CECLA children benefit from enriched instructional support during critical developmental years. This partnership addresses two urgent community priorities: strengthening kindergarten readiness and building a sustainable early childhood workforce pipeline. Its measurable success, including exceptional credential pass rates and direct employment outcomes, has led to plans for expansion through the development of an additional early learning center, increasing access and opportunity for students and families across the county.

Problem or need addressed by the program:

Chesterfield County faces a growing demand for qualified early childhood educators, with more than 400 regional job openings in childcare and early learning settings. At the same time, CECLA serves three-to five-year-old children identified as most at risk due to economic and environmental factors that may hinder kindergarten readiness. These intersecting challenges, workforce shortages, and school readiness gaps require bold, coordinated solutions. County leaders recognized that traditional workforce development models alone would not sufficiently address the shortage of credentialed early childhood professionals. Likewise, early learning centers benefit from additional trained adults in classrooms to provide individualized support for

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vulnerable children. The partnership program was developed to strategically align and address these needs.

By embedding CTE students within CECLA classrooms, CCPS created a dual-impact model that simultaneously strengthens early childhood outcomes and cultivates a highly trained workforce pipeline. The program aligns with Virginia Department of Education standards, industry-validated competencies, and national CDA requirements, ensuring students meet rigorous professional benchmarks. This initiative reflects the county's commitment to investing in children, supporting families, and proactively addressing workforce demands. Rather than responding reactively to shortages, CCPS designed an innovative, sustainable solution that improves educational outcomes today while preparing the workforce of tomorrow.

Program Description:

Launched during the 2021–2022 school year, the partnership with ECE is a two-year, standards-aligned program for high school juniors and seniors, uniquely collocated within the CECLA. Students engage in daily immersive work-based learning in pre-kindergarten classrooms serving children ages three to five. Under the supervision of licensed educators and a properly endorsed CTE instructor, students assist with lesson design, classroom management, child supervision, developmental monitoring, health and safety compliance, and differentiated instruction. Academic integration ensures students apply literacy, mathematics, and science concepts while supporting young learners.

A defining component of the program is the completion of 480 documented hours of field experience required for the CDA credential. Students compile professional portfolios, complete

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state-approved child abuse prevention training, demonstrate emergency preparedness procedures, and undergo formal assessment by CDA specialists through on-site observation and examination. The program is supported by a 14-member Education & Training Advisory Committee composed of childcare directors, business leaders, and workforce partners who provide guest instruction, mentorship, and employment pathways. Community partners include The Goddard School, YMCA Programs, Clover Hill Children's Center, Redeemer Lutheran Childcare, and other regional providers that offer internship and job placement opportunities.

The county strategically leveraged existing facilities and personnel, ensuring cost efficiency while maximizing impact. Due to its measurable success and strong workforce outcomes, plans are underway to develop an additional early learning center to expand student access and increase the number of future educators entering the pipeline. This expansion demonstrates both sustainability and scalability with hallmarks of high-performing county initiatives.

Program Cost:

This partnership and program are funded through strategic CTE funds, state CTE reimbursement allocations, local school division allocations, and federal Perkins support for credential attainment and workforce readiness. By embedding the program within CECLA, the school division maximized existing instructional infrastructure and staffing resources, eliminating the need for new capital investment. Ongoing funding supports instructional personnel, credentialing exam fees, curriculum resources, student assessments, and professional development. Because CDA credential attainment is aligned to high-demand workforce needs, the program qualifies for state performance-based funding tied to industry credentials, further

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strengthening its long-term sustainability. The partnership model also reduces long-term workforce development costs by preparing students for immediate employment in early childhood settings upon graduation. By integrating academic instruction, hands-on lab experience, and industry credentialing within one cohesive structure, the program leverages public education funding to directly address local workforce shortages. This diversified funding approach ensures fiscal responsibility while maintaining program quality and scalability for future expansion.

This program was intentionally structured to deliver high-quality workforce preparation while minimizing new capital investment. By leveraging existing facilities and staff within the CCPS, and CECLA, the county avoided the need for new construction or major infrastructure expenditures.

Operating Costs:

Primary operating costs include:

- Salary and benefits for a properly endorsed CTE Early Childhood instructor
- CDA credential exam fees and portfolio submission costs
- Workplace Readiness Skills assessment fees
- Curriculum materials, instructional supplies, and consumables
- Related early childhood training equipment
- Ongoing professional development for instructional staff
- Advisory committee coordination and industry partnership engagement

These investments directly support credential attainment, hands-on training experiences, and alignment with workforce standards.

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Capital Costs:

Because the program is co-located within CECLA's operational early childhood environment, no additional capital construction, renovation, or facility expansion was required. Classroom and lab space was already designed to support early childhood instruction, significantly reducing start-up expenses.

Replication Considerations for Other Counties

Counties seeking to replicate this model would need:

- Access to, or partnership with, a licensed early childhood center
- A state-endorsed Early Childhood CTE instructor
- Active industry advisory committee participation
- Funding for CDA assessments and credentialing fees
- Classroom curriculum materials and simulation equipment

By embedding workforce credentialing within an existing public education framework, the program reduces duplication of services while maximizing student credential attainment and direct entry into the early childhood workforce.

Results/Success of the Program:

The program delivers measurable, multi-level impact. Over the past three years, 90 percent of the participating students earned the CDA credential, an exceptional pass rate for a nationally rigorous certification process. Students also graduate with the Workplace Readiness Skills credential, validating mastery of professional competencies and durable skills valued by Virginia's business community. Graduates transition directly into employment within regional

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childcare centers, with several maintaining permanent positions following summer placements. Employers report that program completers demonstrate advanced classroom management skills, regulatory knowledge, professionalism, and instructional competence beyond typical entry-level candidates.

For CECLA students, the presence of trained high school educators increases individualized instruction, enriches classroom activities, and strengthens developmental support during a critical period of brain development. The partnership enhances kindergarten readiness by providing additional instructional capacity in literacy, numeracy, and social-emotional learning. Leadership development further amplifies outcomes. Through Family, Career and Community Leaders of America (FCCLA), students engage in community service, competitive events, and professional skill-building activities that foster civic responsibility and workforce confidence.

The program produces a powerful dual-generation return on investment:

- High school students graduate workforce-ready with industry credentials.
- Preschool students receive enhanced academic and developmental support.
- The community gains qualified early childhood professionals prepared to meet urgent staffing needs.

The planned expansion to a second early learning center underscores the program's proven success and growing demand. CCPS has not only addressed a workforce gap, but it has also built a model of excellence worthy of replication nationwide.

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The program has produced measurable workforce and student achievement outcomes. During the 2022-2023 school year, nine out of ten participating students earned their CDA credential, making them among the first high school students in the region, and among the first in the Commonwealth in recent years, to achieve this nationally recognized certification. Student performance has continued to improve, with a 100% pass rate during the 2023-2024 school year and again a 100% pass rate in the 2024-2025 school year. Students also earn the Workplace Readiness Skills for the Commonwealth credential, demonstrating mastery of entry-level employability competencies and durable skills validated by Virginia's business and industry community.

Graduates have transitioned directly into employment with regional childcare providers, with several maintaining long-term positions after summer placements. Employers report that students enter the workforce with strong classroom management skills, knowledge of compliance and safety regulations, and confidence in instructional delivery. Beyond workforce outcomes, CECLA classrooms benefit from increased adult support, enriched learning activities, and individualized attention for at-risk preschool students. High school participants implement literacy, math, and science-based activities that reinforce kindergarten readiness skills. Leadership development is integrated through FCCLA participation, community service projects, and competitive events, further strengthening employability and civic engagement. The program demonstrates a dual-generation impact: high school students graduate workforce-ready with industry credentials, and preschool children receive expanded instructional support during critical developmental years.

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Worthiness of Award:

The School Partnership with Early Childhood Education represents a bold reimagining of how counties can align workforce development with early childhood services. Rather than separating career preparation from community need, this model intentionally integrates the two. High school students are not merely observers; they are embedded contributors within a live early learning environment while earning a nationally portable credential. Few secondary programs nationwide offer the CDA credential within a public school setting, and even fewer do so while directly supporting at-risk preschool populations. This partnership creates immediate and long-term impact: strengthening kindergarten readiness today while solving workforce shortages for tomorrow.

The program's scalability is already evident. Due to its success, Chesterfield County is planning the development of an additional early learning center to expand student participation and increase access for families. This forward-looking expansion demonstrates sustainability, strong leadership commitment, and measurable community return on investment. By uniting education, workforce development, and early childhood services into a single coordinated initiative, Chesterfield County has created a high-impact, replicable model that improves lives across generations. This is not simply a CTE program. It is a workforce solution, a school readiness strategy, and a community investment in one cohesive model.

Supplemental Materials:

[Supplemental Materials](#)