Northern Lights Career Ladder Guidance for Level Certificate Applications

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The Northern Lights Early Childhood Career Ladder is a tool for tracking and planning professional growth. Each of the six levels requires a combination of completed education, professional experience with children and families, and a current Individual Professional Development Plan (IPDP).

This document provides guidance to support early childhood professionals applying for Level Certificates. For more information about the career ladder and many other topics relevant to early childhood professionals, please visit the Northern Lights website at www.northernlightsccv.org

The Level Certificate Application has six sections. Below you will find information about each section including a lot of detail about Section 2: Education and Observations. If you have more questions after reading this information, please contact Northern Lights staff for support.

At the end of this document we've included an appendix. The appendix includes definitions and explanations of the following items:

- Related Fields and Credits
- BFIS Quality and Credential Accounts
- Transcript Document Requirements
- Core Knowledge Areas
- Montessori and Waldorf Teacher Training
- Observation of the Practitioner, and
- Checking on Level Certificate Application Status

Section 1: Personal Information

This information allows us to verify your identity and to find your BFIS Quality and Credential account. If you don't know your BFIS Quality and Credential account number, contact Northern Lights for support at 802-540-8168 or northernlights@ccv.edu.

Northern Lights also asks you to share why you are applying for your level certificate so we can better understand the way level certificates support our field.

Section 2: Education and Observations

On the following pages you will find detailed descriptions of the education requirements for each level. You only need to meet one education option for the level for which you are applying.

Education Options for Level I:	
	Completed Fundamentals for Early Childhood Professional training
	Completed 3 college credits in child development AND additional requirements
	Completed Northern Lights-approved Level I portfolio (prior approval required)

Fundamentals for Early Childhood Professionals: To use this education option, you must have completed the Fundamentals for Early Childhood Professionals training.

Required Documents:
- Fundamentals completion certificate

3 college credits in child development AND additional requirements: To use this education option, you must have completed 3 college credits in child development, Basic Specialized Care training, Introduction to Licensing training, and one observation of the practitioner

Required Documents:
- Transcript issued by college registrar documenting 3 college credits in child development
- Basic Specialized Care training documented in your BFIS Quality and Credential account (or attach training certificate)
- Introduction to Licensing training documented in your BFIS Quality and Credential account (or attach training certificate)
- One completed observation of the practitioner form

Northern Lights-approved Level I portfolio: To use this education option, you must first request approval from Northern Lights to pursue the portfolio option. Once you receive approval from Northern Lights, you must then complete all components of a Level I portfolio before applying for the certificate using this option.

Required Documents:
- Completed Level I portfolio

Education Options for Level II:	
	Current Completed Child Development Associate (CDA) credential
	Completed 12 related college credits AND two observations of the practitioner
	Completed Northern Lights-approved Level II portfolio (prior approval required)

Child Development Associate (CDA) credential: To use this education option, you must have a current Child Development Associate (CDA) credential.

Required Documents:
- Current CDA credential certificate

12 related college credits AND two observations of the practitioner: To use this education option, you must have completed 12 college credits in at least two core knowledge areas, and two observations of the practitioner

Required Documents:
- Transcript(s) issued by college registrar documenting at least 12 related college credits
- Two completed observation of the practitioner forms

Northern Lights-approved Level II portfolio: To use this education option, you must first request approval from Northern Lights to pursue the portfolio option. Once you receive approval from Northern Lights, you must then complete all components of a Level II portfolio before applying for the certificate using this education option.

Required Documents:
- Completed Level II portfolio

Education Options for Level IIIA:	
	Completed Vermont Child Care Apprenticeship Program
	Community College of Vermont (CCV) Childcare Certificate
	Completed 21 related college credits AND two observations of the practitioner

Vermont Child Care Apprenticeship Program: To use this education option, you must have completed the Vermont Child Care Apprenticeship program

Required Documents:

- Apprenticeship certificate of completion

Community College of Vermont Childcare Certificate: To use this education option, you must have completed the Childcare certificate at the Community College of Vermont

Required Documents:

- CCV Childcare certificate OR transcript issued by CCV college registrar documenting completion of Childcare certificate

21 related college credits AND two observations of the practitioner: To use this education option, you must have completed 21 related college credits in at least three core knowledge areas and two observations of the practitioner

Required Documents:

- Transcript(s) issued by college registrar documenting at least 21 related college credits
- Two completed observation of the practitioner forms

Education Options for Level IIIB:

	Completed associate degree in early childhood education or a related field
	Completed associate degree in an unrelated field AND 21 related college credits
	Completed associate degree in an unrelated field AND qualifying Waldorf or Montessori teacher training program

Associate Degree in Early Childhood or a related field: To use this education option, you must have completed an associate degree with a major or concentration in early childhood education or a related field

Required Documents:
- Transcript(s) issued by college registrar documenting associate degree

Associate Degree in an unrelated field: To use this education option, you must have completed an associate degree in an unrelated field and completed 21 related college credits in at least three core knowledge areas

Required Documents:
- Transcript(s) issued by college registrar documenting associate degree and at least 21 related college credits

Associate Degree in an unrelated field AND Montessori or Waldorf: To use this education option, you must have completed an associate degree in an unrelated field and a qualifying two year Montessori or Waldorf teacher training program

Required Documents:
- Transcript(s) issued by college registrar documenting associate degree
- Certificate or transcript from Montessori or Waldorf teacher training program

Education Options for Level IVA:	
	Completed Bachelor's degree in early childhood education or a related field
	Completed Bachelor's degree in an unrelated field AND 30 related college credits
	Completed Bachelor's degree in an unrelated field AND qualifying Waldorf or Montessori teacher training program

Bachelor's Degree in Early Childhood or a related field: To use this education option, you must have completed a bachelor's degree with a major or concentration in early childhood education or a related field

Required Documents:
- Transcript(s) issued by college registrar documenting bachelor's degree

Bachelor's Degree in an unrelated field: To use this education option, you must have completed a bachelor's degree in an unrelated field and 30 related college credits

Required Documents:
- Transcript(s) issued by college registrar documenting bachelor's degree and at least 30 related college credits

Bachelor's Degree in an unrelated field AND Montessori or Waldorf: To use this education option, you must have completed a bachelor's degree in an unrelated field and a qualifying two year Montessori or Waldorf teacher training program

Required Documents:
- Transcript(s) issued by college registrar documenting bachelor's degree
- Certificate or transcript from Montessori or Waldorf teacher training program

Education Options for Level IVB	
	Completed Bachelor's degree in early childhood education or a related field AND Vermont Agency of Education teacher licensure with qualifying endorsement
	Completed Bachelor's degree in an unrelated field AND 30 related college credits AND Vermont Agency of Education teacher licensure with qualifying endorsement

Bachelor's Degree AND teacher licensure: To use this education option, you must have completed a bachelor's degree and received Vermont Agency of Education teacher licensure with an early childhood, early childhood special education, or elementary education endorsement.

Required Documents:
- Transcript(s) issued by college registrar documenting bachelor's degree
- Evidence of current teacher licensure

Education Options for Level VA:

	Completed Master's degree in early childhood education or a related field
	Completed Master's degree in an unrelated field AND qualifying Waldorf or Montessori teacher training program

Master's Degree in Early Childhood or a related field: To use this education option, you must have completed an master's degree with a major or concentration in early childhood education or a related field

Required Documents:
- Transcript(s) issued by college registrar documenting master's degree

Master's Degree in an unrelated field AND Montessori or Waldorf: To use this education option, you must have completed an master's degree in an unrelated field and an appropriately accredited Montessori or Waldorf teacher training program

Required Documents:
- Transcript(s) issued by college registrar documenting master's degree
- Certificate or transcript from Montessori or Waldorf teacher training program

Education Options for Level VB:

	Completed Master's degree AND Vermont Agency of Education teacher licensure with qualifying endorsement

Master's Degree AND teacher licensure: To use this education option, you must have completed an master's degree and received Vermont Agency of Education teacher licensure with an early childhood, early childhood special education, or elementary education endorsement.

Required Documents:
- Transcript(s) issued by college registrar documenting master's degree
- Evidence of current teacher licensure

Education Options for Level VI:

If you are seeking a certificate for Level VI (requiring a doctorate in early childhood education or a related field) please contact Northern Lights for assistance.

Section 3: Experience

Your professional experience working ***with children in a group*** must take place in a licensed, registered, or legally exempt child care program in Vermont or another state. Professional experience may include student teaching, and may be full-time or part-time, but not as an occasional substitute. Please list your professional experience, starting with the most current. It will be verified. Please print clearly and add additional pages if needed. Level I requires a minimum of one year of experience. Levels II or higher require a minimum of two years.

Section 4: Individual Professional Development Plan (IPDP)

Please enter your current IPDP in your BFIS Quality and Credential Account. If you are not able to do so, please attach a copy of your current IPDP to this application. Your IPDP must be written or updated within the last six months. Level Certificate applications will be delayed if your IPDP is outdated or not properly completed. Samples, forms, and tutorials are available at northernlightsccv.org. You can also contact your Northern Lights Resource Advisor for support.

Section 5: Statement of Truth and Accuracy

In order to be eligible for a Child Development Division professional recognition bonus, you must review and sign the statements in section 5.

Section 6: Submission

Northern Lights at CCV can accept applications and supporting documents by email or postal mail. If you email a document, please be sure the PDF file is unlocked and not password protected.

Submit the following information to Northern Lights:

1. A fully completed application form
2. Completed Federal W9 form [if you will be applying for a CDD professional recognition bonus]. You can find a form here:
3. Any supporting documentation or required documents

Where to send your documents:

Email: northernlights@ccv.edu (PDF format strongly encouraged for all attachments)
Mail: Northern Lights at CCV, PO Box 489 Montpelier, VT 05601

See the appendix for more information about checking on your application status

APPENDIX

Related Fields and Credits

In Vermont, Related Fields are degrees with a major or concentration in early childhood, child or human development, elementary education, special education with a birth to eight focus, and child and family services.

Related Credits are credits earned from college coursework that meet the following criteria:

- Course relates to working with children birth through grade three and their families; and
- Course content clearly falls within one or more Early Childhood Core Knowledge Areas or Afterschool Core Competencies; and
- Credits are awarded by an appropriately accredited institution of higher education; and
- Student earned a grade of a C- or better in the course.

More information about related fields and credits is available at:
https://northernlightsccv.org/training/related-fields-and-credits/

BFIS Quality and Credential Accounts

All transcripts and training certificates you send to Northern Lights are added to your BFIS Quality and Credential accounts. Please check your account before sending documents to Northern Lights. If the document is in your account, please don't send it again. Sending duplicate paperwork can cause delays in application processing.

Transcript Document Requirements

To document ALL college credit or degrees, you must submit an official or unofficial transcript issued by the college registrar. Transcripts printed from online student portals are not accepted. The college name, student name, course titles, grades, and dates must be on the document and easy to read. The document must either be mailed to Northern Lights or emailed to us as a PDF. For credits to qualify, you must have earned a grade of C-minus or higher in your eligible coursework.

Core Knowledge Areas

Certain career ladder levels require that coursework is completed in different core knowledge areas. Vermont's core knowledge areas for early childhood professionals are: child development; families and communities; observing and assessing; how we teach; what we teach; healthy, safe environments and nutrition; professionalism; and program organization. More information is available at:
https://northernlightsccv.org/career-development/competencies-standards/

Montessori and Waldorf Teacher Training

Montessori and Waldorf teacher training programs can sometimes count toward requirements for career ladder level certificates. For more information about accreditation of Montessori and Waldorf teacher training programs and equivalencies to the career ladder levels, please look in the sidebar on the following page: https://northernlightsccv.org/career-development/early-childhood-career-ladder/

Observation of the Practitioner

Many levels in the career ladder require an observation of the practitioner. Guidance for completing observations of the practitioner and a template are available on the Northern Lights website. The forms are on the sidebar of the Career Ladder page at: https://northernlightsccv.org/career-development/early-childhood-career-ladder/

Checking on Level Certificate Application Status

It take about 30 days for Northern Lights to process most level certificate applications. After 30 days, check the credential tab of your BFIS Quality and Credential Account. Northern Lights will also mail you a hard copy of your certificate. Once your Level Certificate has been listed in BFIS, it will take an additional 2-4 weeks for bonus payments to be issued by the Vermont Association for the Education of Young Children (VTAEYC) to those who qualify.

It's important to remember that Northern Lights does not issue bonuses. For questions about the Recognition Bonus, contact VTAEYC at pdsupports@vtaeyc.org. More information about the Child Development Division's criteria for a professional recognition bonus is available here: https://dcf.vermont.gov/cdd/providers/funding