

*This document outlines quality assurance standards for micro-credentials that will undergo a pilot process for validation and is not for public distribution. For more information, please contact Myra Best at [myra@digilearn.org](mailto:myra@digilearn.org).*

# THE MICRO-CREDENTIALS PARTNERSHIP OF STATES

## QUALITY ASSURANCE STANDARDS FOR MICRO-CREDENTIALS



January 2023



**WYOMING**  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



UNIVERSITY OF  
**South Carolina**



Professional Teaching Standards Board

**The Micro-Credentials Partnership of States is led by:**



**With generous support from:**



**Thank you to our national partners:**

New America

Learning Forward

Digital Promise

BloomBoard

Learning Policy Institute

National Education Association (NEA)

National Board for Professional Teaching Standards

*Copyright 2022 digiLEARN and RTI International. All rights reserved.*

# The Micro-Credentials Partnership Of States

## Quality Assurance Standards for Micro-credentials

### INTRODUCTION

Micro-credentials are a growing part of efforts to transform existing state systems of professional preparation, learning, and compensation. When effectively integrated into these systems, micro-credentials can offer educators the opportunity to independently identify and develop new competencies, earn recognition for existing expertise, and measure competence in new skills developed through existing professional learning offerings.

In 2022, digiLEARN convened partners from Wyoming, South Carolina, Arkansas, and North Carolina to form the Micro-credentials Partnership of States (MPOS), a collaborative multistate effort to identify opportunities and address challenges related to educator micro-credentialing across states, and to develop policy recommendations to support consistency in implementation. Additional national partners and advisors played an important role in guiding the work of the MPOS including RTI International, New America, Learning Forward, Digital Promise, BloomBoard, the Learning Policy Institute, the National Education Association (NEA), and the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. The effort received financial support from the Carnegie Corporation, NEA, and the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation.

#### What is a Micro-Credential?

A high-quality micro-credential is a verification of proficiency in a job-embedded discrete skill or competency that an educator has demonstrated through the submission of evidence assessed via defined evaluation criteria.

### SUPPORTING THE DEVELOPMENT AND RECOGNITION OF HIGH-QUALITY MICRO-CREDENTIALS

The MPOS produced these Micro-credential Quality Assurance Standards to provide guidance to educators, school districts, and state leaders as they incorporate micro-credentials into systems of professional learning and licensure. The primary goal of this effort was to support the development and recognition of high-quality micro-credentials across state systems of education that ultimately improve teaching and learning in schools. These standards provide those who are developing, issuing, and recognizing micro-credentials—including states, school districts, schools, and public and private vendors that develop micro-credentials—universal criteria against which they can assess the quality of individual micro-credentials. The quality standards are informed by a comprehensive analysis of international and cross-disciplinary approaches to micro-credentialing, with input from practitioners and national experts in educator micro-credentialing. Partner states have committed to aligning their current micro-credential offerings to these standards in the pursuit of assuring quality, value, and increased portability within and among MPOS partner states.



The Quality Assurance Standards are presented as a tool for stakeholders to measure the caliber of individual micro-credentials, but alone they cannot guarantee a successful shift toward a system that adequately recognizes and rewards educator competency. With that in mind, the MPOS has developed a series of recommendations for how states and districts can transform the broader system of educator preparation, learning, and compensation to increase the viability of competency-based models. Ultimately, the goal of these recommendations is to inform policies and practices that support state-level systematic improvements in the educator human capital ecosystem, including educator recruitment, credentialing, professional learning, and retention.

## THE IMPORTANT ROLE OF MICRO-CREDENTIALS

A high-quality micro-credential is a verification of proficiency in a job-embedded discrete skill or competency that an educator has demonstrated through the submission of evidence assessed via defined evaluation criteria. Micro-credentials, when embedded into a comprehensive professional learning system, have the capacity to assess and recognize an educator's acquisition of skills, knowledge, and competencies so they can improve practice, advance in their career, and be acknowledged and rewarded as professionals across schools and districts nationwide. In doing so, micro-credentials provide an important opportunity for states and districts to personalize professional learning and facilitate equitable development for educators to improve student outcomes, regardless of their context.

Several stakeholders are responsible for individual roles within the micro-credentialing process. The MPOS has adopted the following key terms used by the Council of Chief State School Officers' (CCSSO) Design, Assessment, and Implementation Principles for Educator Micro-credentials to provide common language for these roles.

Micro-credentialing Roles & Descriptions	
<b>Developer</b>	The organization(s) or individuals that identify and establish the expected knowledge and skills to be recognized through the micro-credential (often the same entity as the issuer).
<b>Earner</b>	The individual who submits evidence demonstrating their learning competency in order to earn a micro-credential.
<b>Assessor</b>	The individual(s) who review evidence submitted by earners and apply criteria to assess and determine each earner's proficiency.
<b>Issuer</b>	The organization(s) or institution(s) that formally award the micro-credential to earners who have successfully met the proficiency criteria (often the same entity as the developer).
<b>Recognizer</b>	The organization(s) or institution(s) that recognize and give currency or value to the micro-credentials and allow them to be used by earners for various purposes.

## DEVELOPING A UNIVERSAL STANDARD OF QUALITY

The MPOS Quality Assurance Standards provide criteria by which earners, developers, assessors, issuers, and recognizers can gauge the quality of a given micro-credential, establishing universal quality, portability, and value to educators across the nation.

Developed by experts and practitioners within the partnership, the MPOS Quality Assurance Standards include key quality indicators accompanied by a brief description of the standard. They also note responsible roles within the micro-credentialing process where applicable.

Recognizing the opportunity micro-credentials represent for professional learning across roles, the term “educator” within the standards refers to all educator groups within K-12 education including pre- and in-service teachers, paraprofessionals, instructional support staff, operational support staff, and school/district leaders.

Micro-credential Quality Assurance Standards	
Indicator	Description
<b>Distinct Competency</b>	The micro-credential measures a discrete skill or capability that corresponds with the defined competency.
<b>Evidence Basis</b>	The micro-credential reflects a skill or competency that is supported by high-quality, peer-reviewed research and best practice.
<b>Informed and Rigorous Design</b>	Micro-credential content and evaluation criteria are co-developed by content experts and representatives from the intended audience. Development is informed by third-party research and includes peer review to ensure high-quality outcomes for earners and the students they serve.
<b>Evaluation Criteria</b>	Evaluation measures competency using established criteria that <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• are specific to the competency being assessed,</li><li>• align with state or nationally recognized educator standards,</li><li>• clearly articulate the scope and format of the artifacts or evidence required,</li><li>• are authentic to the earner’s work processes and/or products, and</li><li>• are available to earners and recognizers upon request.</li></ul>
<b>Evidence of Competency</b>	The micro-credential requires the earner to provide substantive evidence from their practice to demonstrate proficiency in the desired skill or competency.

continued on next page



Micro-credential Quality Assurance Standards	
Indicator	Description
<b>Naming and Framing</b>	<p>Developers and issuers label both individual and stacks of micro-credentials in a way that plainly and accurately describes the related competencies and requirements so that</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• earners can determine which micro-credentials meet their professional needs, and</li> <li>• recognizers have the necessary information to determine where an individual or stack of micro-credentials fit into their broader system of professional learning.</li> </ul>
<b>Support Resources</b>	Relevant, evidence-based, and publicly accessible resources, including exemplar submissions and opportunities for collaboration, are embedded to provide sufficient information, tools, and support for developing the competency.
<b>Training</b>	Developers and assessors are provided with training appropriate to their role to establish inter-rater reliability and ensure consistency in content and approach. Earner orientation includes how individual micro-credentials can improve their practice and addresses the process of submission and resubmission.
<b>Feedback, Reflection, and Resubmission</b>	Submission and resubmission processes emphasize an earner's continuous improvement and professional growth through reflection on professional practice and associated evidence. Feedback on submitted evidence is timely, targeted, and actionable.
<b>Transparency</b>	All components of the micro-credential are available to earners and recognizers upon request, including the description, learning resources, third-party independent research base, and evaluation criteria.
<b>Recognition</b>	Issuers provide a digital record of completion that includes documentation of evidence submitted to fulfill evaluation criteria.
<b>Continuous Improvement</b>	Data-driven processes are in place for periodic review of content and evaluation criteria of existing micro-credentials based on emerging best practices and user feedback.
<b>Access and Support</b>	Developers and issuers use processes that reduce barriers (including, but not limited to, financial, geographic, and time-related barriers) and increase access to micro-credentials and related supports to ensure all educators can engage equitably regardless of experience, identity, or location. Synchronous and asynchronous supports are made available on a flexible basis to support access, including opportunities for collaboration among earners.
<b>Platform and Badging</b>	Issuers maintain micro-credentials on a digital platform that makes them readily accessible to earners and recognizers over time. This can include issuers providing earners with digital badges that provide the metadata required for recognizers to verify the skills and competencies demonstrated.

## TRANSFORMING STATE SYSTEMS TO SUPPORT MICRO-CREDENTIALS

Although the Quality Assurance Standards address the development and administration of individual micro-credentials, state agencies and other recognizers must create an environment in which micro-credentials can become an integral part of professional learning for any career in education.

The following recommendations identify important issues that need to be addressed with policies and procedures that establish an ecosystem where high-quality micro-credentials can equitably serve educators in varied contexts, thereby maximizing educator and student outcomes. By committing to implement these recommendations in concert with the quality standards, members of the MPOS aim to increase micro-credential value and portability within and between states.

### Systems-Level Recommendations

#### 1. Integrate Micro-credentials into Larger System of Professional Learning

Micro-credentials represent one element of a comprehensive system of professional learning informed by adult learning best practices, where they serve as a conduit to additional opportunities for learning, leadership, and compensation. Micro-credentials should be aligned with and, when possible, offer an alternative to existing seat-time based professional learning requirements.

#### 2. Balance Individual and System Goals

Micro-credentials must be embedded within systems so that they align with the strategic priorities of states and districts, while also allowing individual educators to meet their own professional learning goals. Systems should clearly differentiate instances in which professional learning requirements are tied to a prescribed program, pathway, or certification process, like licensure or career advancement pathways, and those wherein educator development can be more self-directed.<sup>1</sup>

#### 3. Maintain Educator Ownership and Agency

Micro-credentialing provides an opportunity for educators to take ownership in their own development by selecting micro-credentials that align to their professional needs and the needs of students. To the extent possible, state systems should seek to preserve the element of educator choice when linking micro-credentials to licensure, career advancement, or compensation.



<sup>1</sup> New America further clarifies the need to develop policies that address the intended outcomes of incorporating micro-credentials in different contexts including license renewal, ongoing professional development, and career advancement. See *Harnessing Micro-credentials for Teacher Growth: A Model State Policy Guide*.

#### **4. Establish Currency**

Individual and stacks of micro-credentials must provide educators with personal and professional value within state and local systems. This can include recognizing micro-credentials as part of licensure, re-licensure, career advancement, graduate coursework, and/or compensation.

#### **5. Embed Micro-credentials into Career Pathways**

Policies should identify clearly defined pathways where micro-credentials can be combined, linked, and stacked with others in the system to enable the earner to develop and demonstrate a broader set of competencies known to improve professional practice. Pathways should maximize opportunities for choice within the system to leverage the power of relevant, personalized learning for educators.



#### **6. Prioritize Collaboration and Support**

Support structures and processes should encourage and facilitate collaboration among earners through feedback loops, professional dialogue, and other options to engage synchronously and/or asynchronously while allowing earners to complete at their own pace. Support structures should be aligned with evidence-based approaches that support adult learning, including professional learning communities (PLCs), professional coaching, mentoring, etc.

#### **7. Collect Earner Completion Data to Leverage Professional Expertise of Personnel**

Micro-credentials allow states, districts, and schools to identify and capitalize on the expertise of educators and staff. States should employ a data system that tracks completion of quality micro-credentials by earner to provide opportunities to strategically draw on professional expertise to improve student outcomes and reveal systemic gaps and inequities.

#### **8. Employ Continuous Improvement Methods**

Issuers and recognizers should regularly evaluate the effectiveness of their micro-credentialing systems by collecting and acting upon valid and informative data on the earner experience and micro-credential's long-term effects on professional practice and student learning. Recognizers should also continually monitor processes and the personnel assessing the quality of micro-credentials to ensure continuity and fidelity to the standards.

#### **9. Enact a Research Agenda**

Issuers should develop and enact a robust research agenda to investigate and demonstrate the value of micro-credentials as a tool for educator development, retention, and equity. A research agenda that identifies how micro-credentials improve practice and drive equitable student outcomes is especially important to ensure that all students ultimately benefit.



## APPENDIX

### Appendix 1: Glossary of Terms

<b>Competency</b>	The desired knowledge, skills, and behaviors displayed through the evidence submitted by an earner upon completion of a micro-credential.
<b>Currency</b>	The recognition of the value of a given micro-credential within the professional preparation, learning, and compensation ecosystem providing utility to the earner.
<b>Digital Badge</b>	A web-based, clickable icon issued upon successful completion of a micro-credential that contains verifiable metadata. Digital badges are not limited to recognition of micro-credential completion as they can also be used to represent achievements earned in a computer game.
<b>High-quality Micro-credential</b>	A verification of proficiency of a job-embedded discrete skill or competency that an educator has demonstrated through the submission of evidence assessed via defined evaluation criteria.
<b>Maintenance</b>	The process by which earners can formally renew a previously earned micro-credential by demonstrating continued competency.
<b>Metadata</b>	Information contained in a digital badge that includes the issuer, micro-credential name, description of competency assessed, assessment criteria, evidence of completion, and date earned.
<b>Stack</b>	A combination of a defined series of micro-credentials into larger skill sets and credentials.

### Appendix 2: References

- Brown, D. (2019). *Research and Educator Micro-credentials*. Washington, DC: Digital Promise. [digitalpromise.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/researchandeducatormicrocredentials-v1r2.pdf](https://digitalpromise.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/researchandeducatormicrocredentials-v1r2.pdf)
- Council of Chief State School Officers. (2020). *Design, Assessment, and Implementation Principles for Educator Micro-credentials*. <https://ccsso.org/resource-library/design-assessment-and-implementation-principles-educator-micro-credentials>
- Crow, T., & Pipkin, H. (2017). *Micro-credentials for Impact: Holding Professional Learning to High Standards*. Oxford, OH, and Washington, DC: Learning Forward and Digital Promise. <https://learningforward.org/report/micro-credentials-impact-holding-professional-learning-high-standards/>
- Great Lakes Comprehensive Center & Midwest Comprehensive Center. (2019). *Cross-State Collective Inquiry Project: Micro-Credential Quality Criteria*. [https://www.ctc.ca.gov/docs/default-source/commission/agendas/2020-08/2020-08-4i-ca-ctc-microcredential-508.pdf?sfvrsn=52652eb1\\_4](https://www.ctc.ca.gov/docs/default-source/commission/agendas/2020-08/2020-08-4i-ca-ctc-microcredential-508.pdf?sfvrsn=52652eb1_4)
- Knowles, M. S., Holton, E. F., & Swanson, R. A. (2014). *The Adult Learner*. Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.

## Appendix 3: The Micro-Credentials Partnership of States

---

### Leadership Team

---

This decision-making body includes key leaders from all partner states.

**Gov. Bev Perdue, Chair**

Founder, digiLEARN  
North Carolina Governor, 2009–2012

**Myra Best, Initiative Lead**

Executive Director  
digiLEARN

**Chad Auer**

Deputy State Superintendent of Public Instruction  
State of Wyoming

**Barnett Berry**

Research Professor and Director of Policy and Innovation  
University of South Carolina

**Eric Davis**

Chairman, State Board of Education  
State of North Carolina

**Keasha Grant**

Education Associate  
SC Department of Education

**Tommy Hodges**

Interim Dean and Professor  
University of South Carolina

**Terry Holliday**

Former Chairman, National Board for Professional Teaching Standards  
Former Kentucky Education Commissioner

**Johnny Key**

Commissioner of the Arkansas Department of Education

**Ashley McBride**

Digital Learning Consultant  
North Carolina Department of Public Instruction

**Rebekah "Becky" McIver**

Transformation Coordinator  
Arkansas Department of Education

**Pierce McNair**

Director of Research, Education and Public Works Committee  
South Carolina House of Representatives

**Brendan O'Connor**

Executive Director, Professional Teaching Standards Board  
State of Wyoming

**Olivia "Libby" Ortmann**

Education Associate  
SC Department of Education

**Maria Pitre-Martin**

Liaison and Policy Advisor  
NC State Board of Education

**Bobette Ray**

Program Advisor  
Arkansas Department of Education

**Elizabeth Scarbrough**

Director of Personalized Learning, CrED  
University of South Carolina

**Molly Spearman**

Superintendent of Education  
South Carolina Department of Education

**Tom Tomberlin**

Director, District Human Resources  
North Carolina Department of Public Instruction

**Cindy Van Buren**

Assistant Dean for Professional Partnerships  
University of South Carolina

**Tom Vander Ark**

CEO and Partner  
Getting Smart

## National Advisors

Advisors provide guidance and consult on recommendations that the leaders are considering.

**Mary Dean Barringer**

Education Consultant  
Former Council of Chief State School Officer

**Peggy Brookins**

National Board for Professional Teaching Standards

**Kristen Franklin**

Director of Micro-credentials  
Digital Promise

**Jason Lange**

President and CEO  
Bloomboard

**William McDiarmid**

Education Consultant  
Former Dean of the School of Education  
University of North Carolina

**Machel Mills-Miles**

VP, Standards Implementation and Outreach  
Learning Forward

**Ann Nutter-Coffman**

Manager, Teacher Quality  
National Education Association

**Angela Quick**

VP, Education and Workforce  
RTI International

**Ryan Saunders**

Policy Advisor  
Learning Policy Institute

**Melissa Tooley**

Director of PreK–12 Educator Quality  
New America

## Task Force

The Task Force plans, aligns, and implements our work plan.

**Myra Best (Project Lead)**

Executive Director  
digiLEARN

**Kyle Canuette**

Education Consultant  
RTI International

**Meghan Doyle**

Education Advisor  
RTI International

**Keasha Grant**

Education Associate  
SC Department of Education

**Ashley McBride**

Digital Learning Consultant  
North Carolina Department of Public Instruction

**Rebekah "Becky" McIver**

Transformation Coordinator  
Arkansas Department of Education

**Frank McKay**

Education Consultant  
RTI International

**Olivia "Libby" Ortmann**

Education Associate  
SC Department of Education

**Bobette Ray**

Program Advisor  
Arkansas Department of Education

**Elizabeth Scarbrough**

Director of Personalized Learning, CrED  
University of South Carolina

**LaChawn Smith**

Education Leadership Consultant  
RTI International

**Emily Swartzlander**

Communications Consultant, digiLEARN  
President, EBS Strategies

**Tom Tomberlin**

Director, District Human Resources  
North Carolina Department of Public Instruction

**Cindy Van Buren**

Assistant Dean for Professional Partnerships University  
of South Carolina

Partner list as of December 2022