

Micro-Credential Guidance For Certified Educators

Introduction

Micro-credentials are a digital form of certification indicating demonstrated competency/mastery in a specific skill or set of skills. To earn micro-credentials, educators identify competencies they want to master and complete the requirements to demonstrate mastery. Because micro-credentialing is still a relatively new model of professional learning, there are few examples of strong contract language or policy documentation codifying implementation. The NEA departments of Collective Bargaining and Member Advocacy and Teacher Quality collaborated on this document to highlight some issues that local affiliates should consider when implementing a micro-credentialing program. As more NEA local affiliates integrate micro-credentials into existing professional learning systems, we will update this document and include additional examples of strong contract language. (See Annotated Bibliography)

Definition of micro-credentials

Micro-credentials are a competency-based digital form of certification. They can be issued for formal and informal professional learning experiences that support educators developing skills and acquiring knowledge to improve professional practice that supports student success. The highest quality micro-credentials are grounded in research and best practices. Micro-credentials can be developed by non-profit and for-profit entities or developed by educators.

Key Elements of Micro-credentials

To have value, the micro-credential requires three fundamental elements:

- The **issuer** is the organization(s) or institution that awards the micro-credential to the users or earners (ex. NEA, Learning Forward, CTQ, etc.).
- The **user** is the educator who earns micro-credentials.
- The **recognizer** is the school, district, or state that gives the micro-credential currency through recognition for advancement, professional compensation, and/or recertification.

Other key terms:

- The **developer** is the organization(s) or person(s) that identifies and establishes the criteria (knowledge and skills) to be recognized through the micro-credential. In many cases, it is the same entity as the issuer.
- The **assessor** is the person(s) who reviews the submitted evidence from the user and determines, based on the published rubric, the user's proficiency.

To achieve a micro-credential, educators identify a competency they want to develop and submit evidence for review to the issuer of the micro-credential to illustrate that they have mastered the competency. If the educator is successful, the issuer awards a digital badge that represents the achieved micro-credential.

Bargaining Issues

Joint Committee to Oversee Implementation

Where the Association is the exclusive bargaining representative, the terms and conditions for a micro-credential program should be negotiated. Because micro-credentials are still somewhat new and could

lead to some unanticipated consequences, we recommend initially implementing a pilot program under the auspices of a joint labor-management committee (JLMC) that oversees all the professional learning in the school district. Below is sample language:

Preamble

The [School District] and [Association] believe it is important to maintain a professional growth system that enhances student learning and supports educator practice. As part of this commitment, we believe a joint labor-management committee is the best vehicle to support a system-wide vision of professional learning that includes the design, implementation, and monitoring of ongoing, high quality professional learning for all staff based on student needs and system goals. Micro-credentialing is one important element of the [School District's] professional learning offerings.

The JLMC should be composed of an equal number of Association and school district members. The local president and superintendent can serve or designate the appointees. The teacher members should be composed of a variety of subject/grade experts. The school district may choose to have fewer members than the Association, but at no time can the number of school district appointees exceed the Association's appointees. This committee can address micro-credentials as part of the overall jurisdiction of the committee. If the school district and Association want to have a more limited committee arrangement, the two parties may create a joint committee that deals strictly with micro-credentials.

Regardless, the joint committee should consider the following:

Source: What will be the source of the micro-credentials? NEA's micro-credentials are peer-reviewed and approved by NEA. However, there are many micro-credential vendors, and NEA cannot validate all vendors' approval processes or quality control. Currently, NEA micro-credentials are certified by NEA's Center for Great Public Schools and Digital Promise. The JLMC, tasked with oversight of professional learning or micro-credentials, should vet all credible vendors.

Compensation: Educators should be compensated for earning micro-credentials. Depending on the pay structure, some options include:

- Movement across lanes on a pay schedule (where a certain number of micro-credentials would equal advanced education credits)
- A step increment equal to a fixed number of micro-credentials
- A fixed dollar amount per micro-credential(s)

Compensation for earned micro-credentials should always be part of base pay.

Additional issues to consider:

- Will there be a limit to the number of micro-credentials for which an educator can be compensated per year? This issue may arise from the need of the school district/school to project budgetary expenditures.
- How often during the year will earned micro-credentials be reviewed for salary movement? Will micro-credentials be reviewed continuously throughout the year, periodically (such as beginning, half-way, and end of year), or just once (the beginning or end of year or a pre-determined date)?

When the local and school district negotiate and reach agreement on some or all of these issues, the parties can sign a separate Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) codifying the terms. However, we recommend that the JLMC continue to oversee the program to monitor the success of the program and identify areas that need to be addressed.

Professional Advancement: Micro-credentials that are bundled or stacked to demonstrate mastery of a variety of skills may be recognized as one demonstration of fulfilling specific requirements for earning professional learning credits/units and/or for teacher leadership roles. Recognizing a stack of micro-credentials for advancement should not exclude recognition of other accepted demonstrations such as advanced degrees, advanced credentialing, and endorsements. Such determination should be resolved through negotiations in bargaining jurisdictions or by the JLMC tasked with oversight of professional learning or micro-credentials, specifically. In addition, micro-credentials, like all other earned credits, do not expire. Therefore, once an educator receives credit for them, either through additional compensation or credit for fulfilling continuing education requirements, school districts cannot later invalidate these gains should the requirements of the micro-credential change.

Portability: Consider how the school district and Association can ensure portability between school districts and ultimately, between and among states.

Alignment: Micro-credentials should align with the existing professional learning system in the district and/or state and educators' professional learning goals. Achieving micro-credentials should be job-embedded and rooted in classroom practice.

Recertification and Re-licensure: Does your state affiliate have a strategy to lobby legislatures or state education agencies to include recognition of micro-credentials as another form of earning professional units or professional development points towards recertification? For example, Massachusetts currently recognizes up to 2 micro-credentials for a total of 10 professional development points (PDPs) for recertification. Tennessee also recognizes micro-credentials for the purpose of professional learning that supports recertification. (See Annotated Bibliography)

Acceptance Process: Will the JLMC, select/determine which micro-credentials will be included in a menu of options for district credit or will others serve in this role, such as an independent outside organization or university? If there is a panel, members should include teacher/content leaders, as well as representatives from the school district. Teacher panel members should earn additional compensation for this role. Consider language that includes guidelines on teacher leader panel selection and how long teachers serve on this panel. The joint committee/panel created by the JLMC should oversee and approve micro-credential topics or content and/or issuers of micro-credentials. Those who serve in the role of oversight should include teacher/content leaders, as well as representatives of the school district.

Orientation: The Association membership must be educated about micro-credentials - what they are and how they work. The JLMC will collaboratively develop training and materials for Association members. This orientation will occur multiple times during work hours and will also be available electronically.

Additional issues that should be considered:

- If the district serves as the assessor for educators achieving the micro-credential, is there an appeal process if competency is deemed not to have been met and the member does not achieve the micro-credential?
- If a member does not earn the micro-credential during the initial submission process, does s/he have a specific time frame to re-submit additional evidence for the same micro-credential, using the feedback provided by the assessor? (Currently, in NEA's system, seekers of

micro-credentials who do not achieve mastery may use the feedback provided to submit additional evidence of mastery and resubmit.)

Words matter: Micro-credentials should never be confused with digital badges, which have been around for over a decade. Encourage UniServ directors and members not to use the term digital badge interchangeably with micro-credential. Doing so will diminish the seriousness of the micro-credentialing concept in professional learning. The digital badge that accompanies the achievement of the micro-credential is simply the electronic representation of the micro-credential. What is significant about the badge is the context, including who earned it, how it was earned, who issued it and, when possible, the evidence that was required to illustrate the rigor of the process.

Also, policymakers should avoid prescribing that teachers earn a certain number of micro-credentials. To do so could increase pressure to dilute or water down the standards to earn the credentials. In addition, we do not want an educator to be penalized for not earning a prescribed number and perhaps be subject to discipline. However, a local affiliate can advocate for stacking or bundling topic-related micro-credentials to earn additional compensation or to qualify for job advancement by demonstrating requisite skills to fulfill a specific job. We recommend including no micro-credentials that consist of fewer than 10 hours of actual work. (In districts, a metric often used is 10 hours of work equals 1 CEU or 1 in-service credit.) How to calculate the 10 hours (as a minimum) of work required to earn a micro-credential is up to the issuer.

Micro-credentials represent a new and innovative form of personalized professional learning developed to support the professional practice of educators. Because micro-credentials are relatively new, the research is still quite limited. Although they have the potential to become an effective form of professional learning, they are probably best adopted as part of a system of professional learning that provides multiple options for educators. The guidance included in this document was developed to assist locals considering implementing a micro-credential program.

For guidance and information on micro-credentials for Education Support Professionals, please go to: nea.org/mcesp

Annotated Bibliography

Micro-credentialing Local Contract Language Example:

Wheaton-Warrenville Collective Bargaining Agreement. Board of Education & Wheaton-Warrenville (IL) Education Association. (July 1, 2018 - June 30, 2022) See Article XI, Section 11.11.F, Advanced Coursework, Micro-credentials, pp. 31-32. Available at: <https://www.cusd200.org/cms/lib/IL01001538/Centricity/Domain/29/Contract%202018-2022%20Final%201.0%20SIGNED.pdf>

Micro-credentialing State Policy Examples:

The Tennessee Department of Education re-licensure policy includes micro-credentialing from state-approved issuers as part of its policy. For more information about the Tennessee re-licensure regulations, go to: <https://www.tn.gov/education/licensing/licensing-faq/pdp-faq-for-educators.html>

From the TN DOE on re-licensure:

Professional Learning 1 micro-credential earned through a state-approved provider = 6 PDPs Digital certificate provided by state-approved micro-credentials provider

Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education re-licensure policy includes micro-credentialing from approved providers as part of its policy. License Renewal Guidelines for Massachusetts Educators. (November, 2017). For more information about the Massachusetts re-licensure regulations, go to: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/licensure/academic-prek12/guidelines-re-cert-ma-educators.pdf>

From the MA DOE Guidelines for License Renewal (p. 19):

Micro-credentials	2 badges = 10 Professional Development Points (PDPs) as long as the badges are in a related topic area 1 badge bundled with other related PD activities may amount to a minimum of 10 PDPs. (Refer to “Bundling” on p. 17.)	2 badges = 10 PDPs as long as the badges are in a related topic area 1 badge bundled with other related PD activities may amount to a minimum of 10 PDPs. (Refer to “Bundling” on p. 17.)
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Certification and Licensure Resources

Design, Assessment, and Implementation Principles for Educator Micro-credentials. (January, 2020). Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO). Available at: <https://ccsso.org/resource-library/design-assessment-and-implementation-principles-educator-micro-credentials>

CCSSO convened a wide range of stakeholders through the Certification and Licensure Collective (CLC) to support states to improve certification and licensure systems, including initial licensure, renewal, and reciprocity or teacher mobility. Educator micro-credentials are a critical part of this effort so teachers can have the ability to expand, validate, and receive recognition for their professional learning experiences. Additionally, educator micro-credentials are gaining recognition as an approach for educators to demonstrate proficiency on a discrete skill or competency to indicate their expertise.

Tooley, Melissa & White, Taylor. (August 2018). Rethinking Re-licensure: Promoting Professional Learning through Teacher Licensure Renewal Policies. New America. pp. 29 -31. Available at: <https://www.newamerica.org/education-policy/policy-papers/rethinking-relicensure/>

The authors examine states’ requirements and processes for licensure renewal, including reviewing the development of effective professional learning pathways. The authors also look at promising policies and innovative practices. As part of this exploration, the authors look at state considerations for licensure renewal, including micro-credentials which have recently gained traction as a potential approach to directly measure teacher professional learning.

NEA’s Collective Bargaining & Member Advocacy and Teacher Quality departments are collecting sample bargaining language or policy documents related to micro-credentials. Please send any samples, as well as comments about this document, to: collectivebargaining@nea.org and educatorsupports@nea.org.