

MICRO-CREDENTIALIAL GUIDANCE

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 earn them. Because micro-credentialing is a relatively new model of professional learning, there is very little existing 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-credential program. This is the first version of this document. As more NEA locals have experiences with micro-credentials, we anticipate revising this document and ultimately including strong contract language that our locals have negotiated.

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. Educators identify a competency they want to develop, submit evidence that they have mastered the competency, and receive a digital badge once the evidence is approved. Micro-credentials can be developed by non-profit and for profit entities or developed by educators.

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 relatively new and could lead to some unanticipated consequences, we recommend initially implementing a pilot program under the auspices of a joint labor-management committee 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 which 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 joint committee would 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.

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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 labor-management committee tasked with oversight of professional learning or micro-credentials should vet all credible vendors.

Compensation: Educators should be compensated for earning micro-credentials. Options include lane movement on a pay schedule across lanes (where a certain number of micro-credentials would equal advanced education credits) or a fixed dollar amount per micro-credential, depending on the pay structure. A step increment could equal a fixed number of micro-credentials. Compensation for earned micro-credentials should be part of base pay.

- An additional issue to consider:
 - Will there be a limit to the number of micro-credentials for which an educator can be compensated per year? The school district/school will need to project budgetary expenditures.

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 and/or advanced credentialing or endorsements. Such determination should be resolved through negotiations in bargaining jurisdictions or by the labor-management committee tasked with oversight of professional learning or micro-credentials, specifically. In addition, microcredentials, like all other earned credits, do not expire. So, 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 microcredential change.

Portability: How do the school district and association ensure portability between school districts and ultimately, between and among states?

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: What will be the strategy for working with state affiliates 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 for recertification. Tennessee also recognizes micro-credentials for the purpose of professional learning that supports recertification.

Approval process: Will the joint committee approve credentials or will other individuals 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

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how long they serve on his panel. The joint committee or a panel created by the joint committee should approve micro-credential topics or content and/or issuers of micro-credentials. Approvers should include teacher/content leaders, as well as representatives of the school district.

- Additional issues that should be considered:
 - Is there an appeal process if competency is not deemed to have been met and the member does not achieve the micro-credential? (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.)
 - 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)?

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

Words matter: Encourage UniServ and members not to use the term digital badge interchangeably with micro-credential. Doing so will diminish the seriousness of the micro-credential concept in professional learning. The badge is simply an electronically displayed icon to represent the earned micro-credential. 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. This is not to say that the local cannot 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 job. We recommend creating no micro-credential that involves 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.

Also, be sure that affiliate staff know that micro-credentials (although digital badges have been around for over a decade) are still in their infancy. **To have value, the micro-credential requires three elements:**

- **the issuer (NEA, Learning Forward, CTQ, etc.);**
- **the user (the educators who earn them); and importantly,**
- **the recognizer (the school district or state) that gives the micro-credential currency through recognition for advancement, professional compensation, and/or recertification.**

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 Marcy Magid (CBMA) mmagid@nea.org and Linda Davin (TQ) ldavin@nea.org.