

Micro-credentials:

# Igniting Impact in the Ecosystem



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# Introduction

We are witnessing a watershed moment in education.

Educators across the country are meeting the complex and real-time demands of the 21st century classroom. Through micro-credentials, they are being recognized for doing so.

As the nation's classrooms become increasingly diverse, educators are seeking professional learning opportunities that support them in gaining the skills needed to craft personalized and engaging learning experiences for *all* students.

Since 2014, Digital Promise has been developing a catalogue of micro-credentials for educators that signals professional growth and competence in the classroom practices research defines as crucial to student success and personalized learning.

Four design features define educator micro-credentials:

- **Competency-based:** Micro-credentials allow educators to focus on a discrete skill related to their practice — for instance, checking for student understanding — and collect the evidence — such as classroom videos or student work to demonstrate ability in that specific skill.
- **On-demand:** Through an agile online platform that clearly identifies each micro-credential's competency and required evidence, educators can start and continue the process of earning micro-credentials on their own time.
- **Personalized:** Because educators are able to select the micro-credentials they wish to earn, they can create their own professional learning journey aligned to their specific student needs and school-wide instructional goals.
- **Shareable:** Once educators earn micro-credentials, they can display the digital badges on Edmodo, LinkedIn, or a blog to signal their demonstrated competence wherever their professional journey might take them.

## There are five steps to earning a micro-credential:

- 1 Educators select the micro-credential they want to earn based on their students' needs and their own interests.
- 2 Educators develop the required evidence for that particular micro-credential.
- 3 They then submit that evidence for evaluation.
- 4 Experts in the field evaluate the evidence against the associated rubric to determine if the educator should be awarded the micro-credential.
- 5 If the evidence demonstrates competence, educators earn the micro-credential and can choose to share the awarded digital badge.

The micro-credentials educators earn function within a larger **micro-credential ecosystem**, a network of school districts, organizations, and educators across the country. This ecosystem is comprised of three players:

- **Issuing Organizations:** The organizations, non-profits, universities, and others, that collaborate with Digital Promise to develop the content of the micro-credentials.
- **Earners:** The educators, classroom teachers, librarians, principals, instructional coaches, etc., who engage with the resources of the micro-credentials and seek to earn them.
- **Recognizing Entities:** The school, district, and state agencies that define the various ways micro-credentials provide value in an educator's professional career.

The ecosystem is critical to intervening in the professional development (PD) gap we opened this report with: the need for professional learning opportunities that help teachers craft personalized and engaging learning experiences for *all* students. Because of this, Digital Promise is constantly working with partners to extend and strengthen the micro-credential ecosystem's impact.

This report is one example of that effort. What follows are stories of promising micro-credential journeys from our partners.

Each story is broken down into four parts:

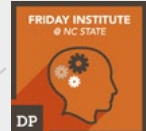
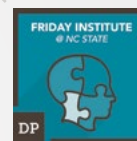
- **Context:** The organizational history of each partner and key points that laid the groundwork for the need for micro-credentials.
- **Challenge:** What the partner sought to solve with micro-credentials.
- **Micro-credential Solution and Implementation:** The logistical and programmatic details pertaining to the micro-credential rollout.
- **Key Takeaways:** Reflections from each partner as they move forward.

Through the stories of these two recognizers and two issuers, we can learn how to help shape a path for districts and organizations to develop their own micro-credential journeys to support powerful learning for their teachers and students.

This report is one example of that effort. What follows are stories of promising micro-credential journeys from our partners.



# The Friday Institute for Educational Innovation at NC State University\*, Issuer



## Using micro-credentials to scale implementation of strategies that support student learning differences

By embedding micro-credentials into their Massive Open Online Course for Educators (MOOC-Ed), the Friday Institute for Educational Innovation was able to recognize hundreds of educators from across the country as they developed the skills to meet the needs of *all* learners.

This “Learning Differences” MOOC-Ed provided the pathway to connect, at scale, educators from across the country to *content* about strategies to support all kinds of learners. But through the associated micro-credentials, this content was put into *practice* on that same scale, by providing accessible support to educators as they implemented these strategies in their classrooms.

### Context

The Friday Institute’s journey with micro-credentials began in the Institute’s Education Workforce Development core area and the development of their MOOC-Eds. MOOC-Eds are designed to create engaged communities of educators through free online course modules around specific topics with resources, digital learning communities, and guidance by experts in the field. MOOC-Eds bring together educators with diverse sets of expertise and experience through online forums, Twitter chats, and community

boards. By removing geographic locality as a factor, MOOC-Eds are able to support rich peer learning across the country.

The “Learning Differences” MOOC-Ed was first offered by the Friday Institute in fall 2014. As expectations of an educator’s classroom practice were moving toward a more personalized approach, this MOOC-Ed was designed to help educators recognize the various needs of each individual student and support their growth in the classroom.

The “Learning Differences” MOOC-Ed explores three theoretical constructs related to learning differences:

- **Working Memory:** The ability to hold on to information long enough to use it;
- **Executive Function:** The ability to organize, act, and rank information; and
- **Learner Motivation:** The intrinsic and extrinsic factors that contribute to finishing a cognitive task.

Educators who participate in this MOOC-Ed are exposed to robust content on differentiated instruction, from cutting-edge research in developmental psychology to student case studies and lesson simulations.

*\* Established in 2005, the Friday Institute works at the intersection of research and policy, community engagement, and state and local government to drive innovation in teaching, learning, and leadership. Four focus areas center the work of the Institute: Innovations in Teaching and Learning, Education Workforce Development, Evaluation and Policy Analyses, and K-12 Technology Enhancements.*

Through the MOOC-Ed format, engaging with this content can happen on an extremely large scale, literally reaching hundreds of educators across the country.

But this is only half the mission of the MOOC-Ed: the true goal is for educators to *activate* content competently by applying it meaningfully in the classroom.

## Challenge

Through the open, online format of MOOC-Eds, the Friday Institute was able to scale access to professional learning *content* for educators, but they had not figured out how to similarly scale the personalized, job-embedded support needed to transfer that content into practice. According to Lauren Acree, Policy and Personalized Learning Lead at the Friday Institute, “There are people literally from the other side of the world in our MOOC-Eds. We figured out how to scale providing the content, but not how to support teachers instilling that content. I call it the implementation gap: the gap between — I got really good PD and — how do I implement it in my classroom?”

The Friday Institute wanted to find a way to support all educators in the “Learning Differences” MOOC-Ed as they apply effective differentiated instruction in their classrooms. The Institute tried to use online forums to glean how educators were incorporating the content of the course into their classrooms. However, capturing what people were doing in their classrooms and providing feedback to support that implementation were contingent on an educator’s level of participation in the online forum and any evidence of practice they were willing to share. Given the volume of geographically dispersed educators and inconsistent participation in the online forums, anticipating and providing the real-time, personalized coaching needs of each educator to support the application of their learning was a true challenge.

Meeting the coaching needs of these educators on their journey to implementation required a pathway that wasn’t bound to place, was adaptive to context and skill level, and was able to meet the large volume of educators enrolled.




Enter micro-credentials.

## Micro-credential Solution and Implementation

During the summer of 2015, the Friday Institute, in partnership with Digital Promise, launched three micro-credential stacks, executive function, learner motivation, and working memory, aligned to its “Learning Differences” MOOC-Ed. These stacks articulate a series of sequenced skills leading to effective differentiated instruction and provide the scalable, coaching on-ramp the Friday Institute needed.

The truth of the matter is that even with great professional development, the multiple demands on an educator make it challenging to transfer PD content into action in the classroom. However, as educators produce evidence of competence through classroom artifacts in the micro-credential process, they are incentivized to apply their learning in their day-to-day work. By aligning micro-credential stacks to the three core units of the “Learning Differences” MOOC-Ed, the Friday Institute provided educators the scaffolded support they needed to develop their classroom practice to honor student learning differences.

Additionally, the micro-credentials added “more structure through reflections, since they ask educators to share what they learned from the resources provided, and also what made them effective at the time of implementation. This push toward metacognition and self evaluation facilitates more rigorous learning,” according to Acree.

Stack	Sample Micro-credentials
 <p><b>Executive Function</b> The ability to encourage autonomous and self-directed student learning in diverse learner profiles</p>	<p>Data-Driven Decision Making in Executive Function</p> <hr/> <p>Foundations of Practice in Executive Function</p>
 <p><b>Learner Motivation</b> The ability to balance intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in inciting student achievement</p>	<p>Applying Strategies to Support Learner Motivation</p> <hr/> <p>Engaging Your Peers in Learner Motivation</p>
 <p><b>Working Memory</b> The ability to support each student's unique needs in order to consume and retain information for later use</p>	<p>Empowering Your Learners in Working Memory</p> <hr/> <p>Data-Driven Decision Making in Working Memory</p>

The inclusion of micro-credentials in the “Learning Differences” MOOC-Ed provided educators the opportunity to think through how best to integrate the course’s resources in their teaching practice and demonstrate their ability to do so.

“Here is a researched best practice. We’re helping you *understand* it through MOOC-Eds and *implement* it through micro-credentials. Sure, you may get it conceptually, but what’s more important is whether it shaped your actual teaching with your students – micro-credentials help answer that question.”

## Key Takeaways

By integrating micro-credentials into the “Learning Differences” MOOC-Ed, the Friday Institute was able to engage hundreds of educators with rich, well-researched best practices and guide their *implementation* of strategies into actual classroom practice – all at scale. Glenn Kleiman, Executive Director of the Friday Institute, articulates the synergy created through the Institute’s implementation of micro-credentials this way:



# Baltimore County Public Schools\*, Recognizer

By earning micro-credentials, teachers are recognized for their skills in personalizing learning for students

Baltimore County Public Schools (BCPS) empowered their teachers to put the student learning experience at the center of the classroom through the Students and Teachers Accessing Tomorrow (S.T.A.T.) Initiative. By earning micro-credentials, BCPS teachers are recognized for their ability to execute S.T.A.T.-aligned classroom practices that support the unique talents and needs of their students.

## Context

Under the tenure of Superintendent Dallas S. Dance, BCPS implemented the S.T.A.T. Initiative. The central mission of S.T.A.T. is to transform BCPS into a learner-centered, personalized 21st century learning environment through technology.

S.T.A.T., a coordinated effort of the Office of Digital Learning and the Office of Organizational Development, is designed to support BCPS in transforming into a district that encourages student choice and learning autonomy. One of the primary ways S.T.A.T. plans to accomplish this is by providing digital learning devices for every student. What is key to driving this change is a commitment to rethinking the professional development BCPS educators receive. To help facilitate this shift in professional learning, BCPS created the S.T.A.T. teacher role, an in-school professional learning coach in every school whose primary function is to support classroom teachers through learner-centered professional development.

The Office of Digital Learning is responsible for driving effective technology integration in all BCPS schools. This office also provides professional development in instructional technology for all educators, including S.T.A.T. teachers. According to Chief of Organizational Development Billy Burke, the S.T.A.T. teacher role represents the shift to more job-embedded, personalized professional development articulated as a priority under Superintendent Dance: "When Dr. Dance came to BCPS, one of the first conversations we had was how to change professional development. I knew we needed to find a way for it to become job-embedded and linked to what teachers were doing in the classroom – all based on analyzing classroom data and adjusting practice based on that data."

## Challenge

In order for S.T.A.T. to actualize a culture of technology-enriched, personalized student learning, professional learning for BCPS educators needed to shift to a more competency-based model, as well. If teachers experienced this kind of learning, they would be better prepared to apply it with their students.

The Office of Digital Learning, which manages S.T.A.T., implements the "University Model" in its professional development programming, an "active" workshop-based format that incorporates reflection and choice in the

\* Baltimore County Public Schools is the public school district of Baltimore County, Maryland, serving just over 111,000 students.



instructional technology professional learning available to BCPS educators. These workshops explore various topics that align to BCPS priorities like formative assessment and small group instruction. But these workshops do not provide the skill-based focus needed to support implementation of those pedagogical priorities that are in line with S.T.A.T.

Enter micro-credentials.





## Micro-credential Solution and Implementation

The Office of Digital Learning partnered with Digital Promise to roll out a micro-credential pilot focused on S.T.A.T. teachers during the 2015-2016 school year. Classroom teachers were given the opportunity to engage in micro-credentials in Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) with their S.T.A.T. teachers.

To introduce participating educators to the details of the micro-credential pilot,

BCPS developed a Wiki that explained the process for participating in the pilot. First, educators needed to complete a survey about their own professional learning, both formal and informal. After the survey, educators completed an introductory course on micro-credentials, "Micro-credentials: Personalized Professional Learning," which provided an overview of the concept of micro-credentialing and how to navigate the micro-credential platform. At this point, educators selected two micro-credentials from the approved list of 24 and began the process of earning their chosen micro-credentials.

All 24 micro-credentials offered during the pilot aligned with S.T.A.T.'s vision for BCPS as a 21st century, learner-centered environment. To support the robust role an educator plays in the S.T.A.T. environment, the micro-credentials BCPS selected had stakes in every part of a teacher's day, inside the classroom and out, from developing student portfolios to co-planning with other teachers.

Sample Pilot Micro-credentials	
	<p><b>Crafting Driving Questions</b> Using proven inquiry strategies to motivate and guide deeper learning.</p>
	<p><b>Using Exit Tickets Effectively</b> Educator uses data to monitor student progress and adjust instruction.</p>
	<p><b>Creating Flexible Learning Environments</b> Teacher creates flexible learning spaces that serve multiple learning activities. Pedagogy is foundational in designing learning processes to accommodate collaborative learning environments.</p>
	<p><b>Using Research to Inform Teaching</b> Educators use academic research to inform their teaching.</p>

All of the micro-credentials selected under the pilot articulate for BCPS teachers the competencies that will help engage and support the individual needs of students in the S.T.A.T. digital learning environment.

Micro-credentials provided BCPS educators with a more complete way to grow and meet the professional demands of leading their students. “Micro-credentials selected for our pilot expanded PD offerings around district initiatives where growth is taking place and also filled gaps not covered by our workshops. Say, something specific like using exit tickets effectively – we don’t necessarily cover that topic in individual workshops. Micro-credentials dig into one specific piece of instruction,” according to Amanda Lanza, Specialist in the Office of Digital Learning.

At the core of the mission of the S.T.A.T. Initiative is empowering students to become active participants in their own learning through customized educational experiences. What micro-credentials provide BCPS educators is an opportunity to experience that same shift in empowered learning. “You’re really responsible for learning on your own with micro-credentials. It’s very, very different than any other PD. The element of implementation being put on the educator was very different – in a good way. It was empowering,” according to Jennifer Madrid, S.T.A.T. teacher at the Rosedale Center, an alternative 6-12 school in BCPS.

Beyond serving this direct purpose of recognizing the skills necessary for developing customized, digital learning environments for BCPS students, micro-credentials also convert to continuing professional development credits (CPD). CPDs can count towards a Master’s degree equivalency and salary advancement, as well as teacher certification renewal. Every two BCPS approved micro-credentials earned can fulfill one Maryland State Department of Education CPD credit.

The incentive structures employed by BCPS for earning micro-credentials recognize the increasing demands placed on educators committed to effective 21st century teaching and, at the same time, place value on educators owning their role in that journey. BCPS educators who earn micro-credentials are able to increase their compensation and, if they submit earned micro-credentials for a Master’s equivalency, educators may now be eligible for new leadership opportunities.

BCPS is also at the beginning stages of implementing a way for earned micro-credentials to serve as “district teacher leadership endorsements,” according to Chief Burke. This way of mapping and identifying expert teacher talent allows for those educators who want to remain in the classroom to do so, while still receiving district-level leadership recognition and opportunities.

## Key Takeaways

Baltimore County Public Schools attests to the many ways micro-credentials can work in conjunction with established systems of professional learning and instructional innovation to strengthen a district-wide culture of personalized, technology-enriched learning that has meaning for educators and students.

BCPS is committed to a complete shift in how student and educator learning relate to and strengthen one another in the digital environment. According to Chief Burke, educator micro-credentials help answer the question now in front of BCPS: “How can we measure how teachers facilitate a classroom that requires that students take ownership for their own learning – that we’ve taught kids how to learn, not so much the content, because honestly, content changes constantly, but how to do learning on their own. We aren’t there yet, but micro-credentials are helping us think through how to get there.”



# The Mobile Technology Learning Center at the University of San Diego\*, Issuer

## Using micro-credentials to strengthen teacher practice in the blended secondary environment

Through micro-credentials, the Mobile Technology Learning Center (MTLC) was able to recognize Houston Independent School District high school teachers as they personalized student learning in their newly tech-powered school environments.

### Context

MTLC partners with school districts to successfully roll out digital innovations catered to their unique contexts. Understanding how crucial it is that all stakeholders — educators, district leadership, and school administration — have support in rethinking their role during these transitions into digital learning, MTLC is committed to a model of *personalized* professional development for their partners.

One partnership that showcases MTLC’s commitment to this approach to personalized professional development is with the Houston Independent School District (HISD), the largest school district in Texas.

HISD recently launched PowerUp, a district-wide initiative aimed at transforming teaching and learning through personalized digital integration. PowerUp is designed to prepare students for a world where they will be expected to make meaning in a variety of complex ways.

PowerUp is novel in that it is equally invested in innovating student *and* teacher learning. PowerUp continues the district’s larger strategic priority of human capital effectiveness by equipping teachers to “more effectively facilitate instruction, manage curriculum, collaborate with their peers, and engage today’s digitally wired students.”

PowerUp seeks to accomplish this goal through three main drivers: the HUB, a digital learning and teaching platform for students, teachers, and parents; a personalized approach to learning for all HISD students; and accessible and cutting-edge technology in all schools, namely a one-to-one program that will provide a laptop to each HISD high school student.

As HISD transforms into a technologically-integrated school district through PowerUp, its teachers and leaders must have the tools to optimize learning and instruction in this new digital environment - more specifically, each student having their own device (one-to-one) at all HISD high schools.

### Challenge

The Office of Secondary Curriculum and Development at HISD wanted to ensure that all high school educators were prepared

\* The Mobile Technology Learning Center was established in 2011 as a university-based research center seeking to fuel innovation in K-12 education through effective technology integration. Housed within the School of Leadership and Education Sciences at the University of San Diego, MTLC partners with school districts across the nation to build engaged and student-powered digital learning environments.

to leverage the one-to-one format in service of facilitating personalized learning experiences for students under PowerUp. As a result, HISD consulted MTLC to design a professional development strategy that would meet these new needs of HISD high school educators and students.

To develop the most effective professional learning strategy for HISD, MTLC conducted a series of in-school needs assessments where the mobile device roll-out had taken place. From these needs assessments, MTLC found that educators and school leadership had access to support during the district’s PowerUp transition, but no access to the *differentiated* support they needed. “This support,” according to Katie Martin, Director of Professional Learning at MTLC, “needed to be more personalized – they needed coaching. They weren’t really sure what they were supposed to be doing now in their particular classrooms because of technology.”

HISD teachers were still experiencing a “one-size-fits-all” approach to professional learning. They had access to content, like curriculum and pacing guides aligned to the new learning environment ushered in through PowerUp,

but no support in how to implement those changes in their own classrooms. One of the major outcomes of the needs assessments and this specific insight was a clear articulation by HISD of the teacher *competencies* that will help students become self-directed, inquisitive learners in a digitally connected setting. These competencies outlined the classroom actions a teacher would need to take in order to prepare students to thrive in a digitally complex world – students HISD would call “Global Graduates.”

However, crafting a professional learning strategy that was not only personalized, but also competency-based, presented HISD and MTLC a challenge.

Enter micro-credentials.

## Micro-credential Solution and Implementation

During the 2015-2016 school year, MTLC partnered with Digital Promise to develop the “Global Graduates” micro-credential stack. The “Global Graduates” stack is comprised of 11 micro-credentials, each articulating a skill that teachers would need to foster a student-empowered digital learning environment.

Sample Global Graduate Micro-credentials	
	<p><b>Developing Student Portfolios</b> Teachers are able to create opportunities for students to revise and reflect on work they’ve created, and publish and synthesize what they’ve learned through the creation of digital portfolios.</p>
	<p><b>Developing Educator Portfolios</b> Teachers are able to build a digital portfolio for themselves that records their learning journey in becoming more reflective practitioners.</p>
	<p><b>Creating Flexible Learning Environments</b> Teachers are able to create a variety of learning spaces that facilitate a range of authentic activities on a spectrum of collaborative to individual work.</p>

The “Global Graduate” micro-credential stack gives educators the opportunity to show competence with classroom practices that leverage the connectivity afforded by the addition of technology. By earning “Global Graduate” micro-credentials, HISD educators received the individualized support they needed to implement the vision of PowerUp in their own classrooms. Whether it’s in developing student portfolios or designing classroom spaces that encourage autonomous student learning, the “Global Graduates” micro-credential stack recognizes educators as they leverage technology to provide a learning experience that engages and empowers students.

The design principles of micro-credentials align seamlessly with the priority PowerUp places on powering student *and* teacher learning. Through micro-credentials, educators make their learning visible throughout their classroom practice, which requires reflection and creative problem-solving, both traits and mindsets HISD wants to see in their “Global Graduates.”

The “Global Graduates” micro-credential stack creates a richer learning experience for students and teachers. For example, Diana Cornejo-Sanchez, a Professional Learning Specialist at MTLC who was responsible for assessing micro-credential submissions from HISD, recalls an educator’s transformative reflection on his experience with the “Communicating with Guardians” micro-credential: “Rather than just setting up a Facebook page to show that this teacher has been communicating with guardians, he now had to really understand that technology allows this to be a two-way communication requirement. His reflection raised questions like, ‘How can I make sure guardians are allowed opportunities to communicate back? How can the Facebook platform help

to increase overall parent involvement?’” As this reflection illustrates, the “Global Graduate” micro-credentials challenge and support educators to optimize the power of the digitally-responsive classroom.

## Key Takeaways

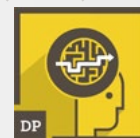
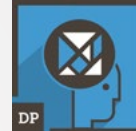
From redesigning summer teacher induction to offering teachers pathways to leadership while remaining in the classroom, HISD is in the midst of a comprehensive reform around teacher professional learning. The “Global Graduates” micro-credential stack is poised to continue this traction and propel the district forward in digital innovation and student empowerment.

Through the “Global Graduates” micro-credentials, HISD educators and students have the opportunity to share in personalized learning experiences made possible through technology. This shared journey into personalized, technologically-rich, and rigorous learning between teacher and student has the potential to shape a school culture into one that is learner-centered and digitally adept — one of the primary goals of the PowerUp initiative at HISD.

Educator micro-credentials strengthen MLTC’s theory of action regarding professional development since they “support districts to think through systems and really empower teacher-leaders to engage in ongoing opportunities for job-embedded instructional support,” according to Katie Martin, Director of Professional Learning at MTLC. As MTLC moves forward, it is committed to scaling its partnership with Digital Promise and expanding its portfolio of micro-credentials through other district partnerships where on-the-ground, skill-specific professional learning can drive the impact of burgeoning system-wide innovation.



# Kettle Moraine School District\*, Recognizer



Using micro-credentials as a salary lever to incite a district-wide culture of educator collaboration and applied professional learning

By designing a compensation structure that connects an educator's salary advancement with earned micro-credentials, Kettle Moraine School District (KMSD) made continuous and reflective educator learning and practice a valued district priority.

## Context

Legislated in 2011, Wisconsin Act 10, also known as the "Budget Repair Bill," allowed Wisconsin school districts to implement teacher salary models not tethered to years of teaching experience or higher education credits. This gave Wisconsin school districts the opportunity to decide what was of value in the professional trajectory of their educators. This did not mean they had to do away with the traditional markers of professional growth: graduate degrees or years of classroom teaching. Instead, Wisconsin Act 10 provided school districts the chance to exercise autonomy in what was being monetarily recognized as formative to student learning.

In fall 2013, KMSD took the opportunity provided by Act 10 to begin thinking through a re-designed compensation model that more accurately reflected and recognized the work teachers put forth to intentionally shape student learning. During this time, KMSD was also in the midst of rethinking its approach to professional development to support the district's priority of personalized

student learning. "Our teacher professional development mirrored much of what was going on in classrooms — a one-size fits all approach," according to Superintendent Pat Deklotz, "You weren't able to differentiate. We realized the personalized, more organic learning many of our top educators were already engaging in was what drove real change in classrooms for students."

Through Act 10, KMSD now had the chance to create a teacher compensation structure aligned to its shift in teacher professional development, and the result could help to actualize their vision of a personalized, 24/7 student learning district.

The state-level conversation at this time regarding how Wisconsin Act 10 would shape educator compensation models focused primarily on "merit pay" or a "pay-for-performance" structure. However, KMSD felt that this route would breed a climate of competition among staff and "undermine all the work we'd been trying to do to create structures for collaboration in teacher professional learning" according to Superintendent Deklotz. The ability for KMSD teachers to collaborate is a key driver in personalizing student learning. When teachers collaborate, they tap into each other's strengths to support different student learning needs.

\* Kettle Moraine School District is a public school district located in Wales, Wisconsin serving over 4,100 students in grades PK-12.

## Challenge

KMSD was committed to taking full advantage of the opportunity provided by Act 10 to recognize professional benchmarks that yield actual impact on student learning. The compensation model KMSD would roll-out had a tall order to fill: it needed to encourage teacher collaboration while supporting personalized teacher professional learning.

Taking its cue from Act 10's break from traditional indicators of teacher professional growth, KMSD wanted to develop a compensation model that recognized teachers committed to *ongoing* professional learning and its application – knowing that when the two work in tandem, vibrant and effective personalized learning experiences for students are created.

Over and above the completion of graduate-level coursework or years of classroom teaching, KMSD wanted their new compensation structure to encourage their teachers to *demonstrate* professional growth through skills that directly create more engaging and individualized learning experiences for students. The real issue for KMSD was finding the right vehicle to feature in their new compensation model that communicated the district's investment in personalized, competency-based teacher professional learning.

Enter micro-credentials.

## Micro-credential Solution and Implementation

After several conversations with Digital Promise, KMSD knew educator micro-credentials could be the vehicle to transform the way compensation functioned for a teacher's professional life, while strengthening KMSD's efforts to personalize student learning.

During spring 2014, KMSD received School Board approval to pilot a compensation system where earned micro-credentials lead to increases in a teacher's base salary. According to Superintendent Deklotz, Board approval was unanimous since they "understood how this model supported KMSD's priority of collaborative, competency-based teacher practice and also saw how it could serve as an on-ramp for providing personalized learning experiences for students."

KMSD worked closely with a focus group of teachers that summer to refine the details surrounding the new salary structure. KMSD officially implemented the micro-credential-integrated salary model during the 2015-2016 school year.



This new compensation model would award a permanent base salary increase, ranging from \$200 to \$600 depending on difficulty for each earned micro-credential. A salary scale that utilized earned micro-credentials encouraged continuous and ongoing professional learning among teachers. In their deliberation process, KMSD considered a stipend model, which would award a one-time monetary amount to teachers for earned micro-credentials. But for Superintendent Deklotz, "stipends are for completed work; the potential of micro-credentials for our district's students and teachers is worthy of more than one-time work – that job is never finished."

The process of earning micro-credentials and achieving salary advancement is coordinated by the Office of Human Resources and the Office of Teaching and Learning. First, educators seek "pre-approval." This step requires educators to provide in writing the rationale for earning the selected micro-credentials and how they are going to impact their students and align with the district's mission. Once approval is granted, an educator begins the process of developing the artifacts and evidence to show the impact the micro-

credential’s stated competency has on student learning. If successful, an educator then submits proof of the earned micro-credential to the Office of Human Resources for the salary increase to take effect.

KMSD offered 20 of Digital Promise’s “Deeper Learning” micro-credentials as eligible for base salary increases. These “Deeper Learning” micro-credentials synergized educator practice with KMSD priorities since they

support educators in actually shifting their classroom practice to be responsive to the unique needs of every student. The [“Deeper Learning” micro-credentials](#) approved by KMSD supported educators in teaching mindset attributes, like grit and resilience, and critical thinking skills, such as creative problem solving. KMSD articulated these skills as critical to bringing forth the district’s vision of learning that is personalized and inquiry-based.

Sample Kettle Moraine Micro-credentials	Competency Demonstrated
	<p><b>Creative Problem Solving</b> Teachers are able to encourage students, individually and in groups, to imagine, think creatively, improvise, and innovate to solve real-world problems.</p>
	<p><b>Grit and Resilience</b> Teachers are able to develop persistence and a passion for personal and academic growth in students in order for them to experience long-term success in life.</p>

Through micro-credentials, KMSD recognized those teachers who were shifting their classroom practice in the direction the district was headed regarding student learning. “Because they are in alignment with what we’re doing, teachers began seeing micro-credentials as an on-ramp to enable their achievement of the district’s goals around personalized learning,” according to Theresa Ewald, Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning.

KMSD’s micro-credential-based compensation model also supports collaboration among teachers. According to Assistant Superintendent Ewald, “The majority of our educators engage micro-credentials in small groups of teachers — anywhere from 5 to 60 teachers learning together, really unlocking that collective intelligence.” The way KMSD

has messaged the importance of micro-credentials has encouraged their teachers to share best practices and problem-solve together in professional learning communities.

Teacher leadership opportunities are also created through this micro-credential-integrated compensation structure. When earning micro-credentials in a group, some KMSD teachers can serve as group leaders where they manage the group’s pre-approval process. And in some cases, KMSD teachers have served as thought leaders in the micro-credential earning process by researching micro-credentials not yet approved by KMSD and preparing a rationale for earning them.



## Key Takeaways

By connecting salary advancement to earned micro-credentials, KMSD has placed value on competency-based learning and also defined KMSD as a personalized learning district. According to Jessica Scherer, a Kettle Moraine educator, “the goal is now about growing and pursuing passions we have as teachers.” At this time, over 80% of KMSD teachers have earned micro-credentials and the resulting base salary increase.

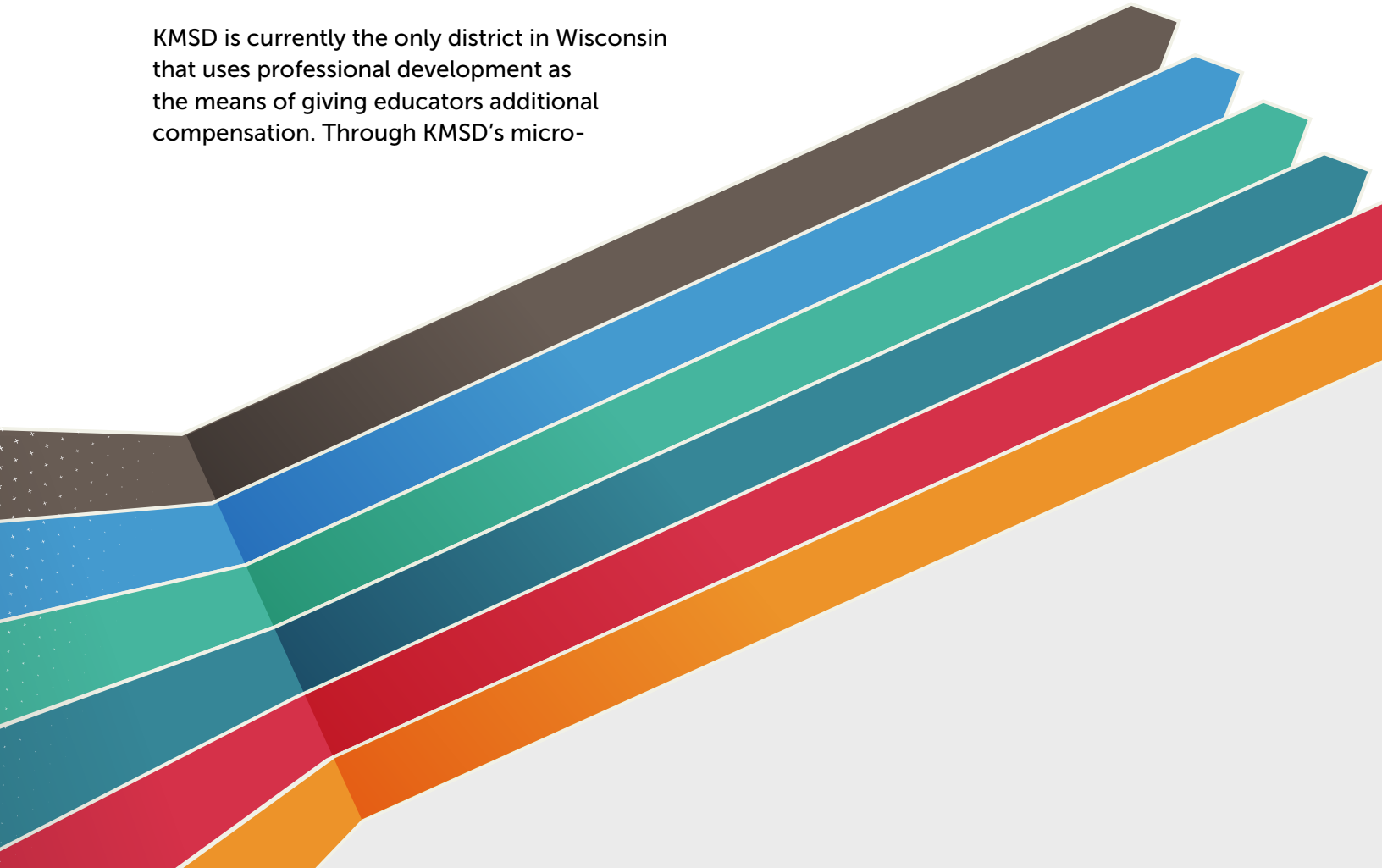
This compensation model also serves an organizational function for KMSD’s teacher talent management. According to Superintendent Deklotz, “We have had the experience where multiple districts are talking to the same candidate about a position and the micro-credential salary system tipped the scale in our favor. I think it reflects our value for teacher voice in shaping their professional role. Forgive the cliché, but a lot of other districts haven’t put their money where their mouths are.”

KMSD is currently the only district in Wisconsin that uses professional development as the means of giving educators additional compensation. Through KMSD’s micro-

credential-integrated compensation model, educators are encouraged and rewarded for sharing in the power of personalized, ongoing learning alongside their students.

## Conclusion

Micro-credentials offer a promising way to support the preparation, support, and recognition of educators as they meet the complex needs of today’s classrooms. Throughout each story above, we see how the use of micro-credentials to articulate what effective teacher practice looks like helps move each organization closer towards its vision of success. These stories can serve as starting points for organizations beginning their micro-credential journey. In short, educator micro-credentials can create a stronger professional learning system that supports continuous educator growth, and in turn, the students they serve.



# Complete List of Micro-credentials Used by Case Study

All micro-credentials listed are accessible at [digitalpromise.org/bloomboard](https://digitalpromise.org/bloomboard).

## The Friday Institute at North Carolina State University

- Foundations of Practice in Executive Function
- Empowering Your Learners in Executive Function
- Supporting Students in Executive Function
- Data-Driven Decision Making in Executive Function
- Engaging Your Peers in Executive Function
- Foundations of Practice in Learner Motivation
- Empowering Your Learners in Motivation
- Engaging Your Peers in Learner Motivation
- Applying Strategies to Support Student Motivation
- Data-Driven Decision Making in Learner Motivation
- Foundations of Practice in Working Memory
- Empowering Your Learners in Working Memory
- Engaging Your Peers in Working Memory
- Applying Strategies to Support Students in Working Memory
- Data-Driven Decision Making in Working Memory

## Baltimore County Public Schools

- Active Listening
- Effective Leadership
- Productive Teamwork
- Resolving Conflicts
- Collaborative Problem Solving
- Kind Critiquing
- Productive Researching
- Sound Decision-Making
- Systems Thinking
- Grit and Resilience
- Self-Reliance and Autonomy
- Growth Mindset
- Practicing Reflection

## Mobile Technology Learning Center at the University of San Diego

- Using Research to Inform Teaching
- Using Exit Tickets Effectively
- Checking for Understanding
- Seeking Student Input
- Facilitating Classrooms Meetings
- Creating Flexible Learning Environments
- Developing Student Digital Portfolios
- Collaborating in PLCs
- Connecting with Students
- Developing Educator Digital Portfolios
- Communicating with Guardians

## Kettle Moraine School District

- Performance Assessment Reliability
- Embedding Habits, Skills and Dispositions in Performance Assessments
- Design Thinking and Doing
- Productive Researching
- Developing Computational Thinking
- Use of Common Assessments
- Creative Problem Solving
- Grit and Resilience