

A Primer on Micro-credentials and Competency-Based Professional Learning

Introduction

To better meet the needs of their increasingly diverse student populations, many districts are looking to shift their professional learning systems to focus on competency rather than seat-time. A competency-based professional learning system enables educators to personalize and demonstrate their learning through evidence. Similarly, the shift from seat-time to competency-based professional learning allows schools and districts to focus on the discovery and application of new learning and not simply the time required to do so. By experiencing competency-based learning themselves, educators will be better prepared to make possible powerful, personalized, skill-driven learning for their students.

Recognizing that today's digitally-connected world allows for new paths and methods for acquiring information to emerge daily, schools and districts have begun building structures that support this evolution in professional learning. Micro-credentials provide a strong starting point for doing so. c

Digital Promise Micro-credentials 101

Micro-credentials provide competency-based recognition for the skills educators learn in both formal and informal settings. The Digital Promise Micro-credential Ecosystem, comprised of educators, content developers, districts and state-level educational agencies, among other stakeholders, works to establish micro-credentials as valuable and desired tools in an educator's professional journey. Digital Promise micro-credentials are:

- On-demand
 - Micro-credentials live on an agile online platform, allowing educators to start and continue the process of earning micro-credentials on their own time.
- Personalized
 - Educators can select the micro-credentials they wish to earn from a catalogue of over 300, ranging in competencies from teaching binary code to using exit tickets effectively, and create a professional learning journey aligned to their specific needs.
- Shareable
 - Educators can display their earned micro-credentials as digital badges on LMSs, social media sites, or a blog to signal their demonstrated skillset.
- Competency-based
 - By focusing on an explicit skill, micro-credentials allow educators to demonstrate ability in that skill through evidence from their practice — such as classroom videos or student work.

Each Digital Promise micro-credential is developed using a framework to ensure they:

- Focus on a single competency
- Are supported by research
- Require evidence of competence
- Include a rubric for evaluation

To earn a micro-credential, educators:

1. Select a specific skill or area in which they want to develop and demonstrate competency, or an area or skill they already possess competence in
2. Collect the required evidence as articulated in the micro-credential (e.g. videos, audio, writing samples, samples of student work, reflections from students and/or teachers etc.)
3. Submit their evidence through the online platform
4. Assessors then review the evidence against the scoring guide and rubric

If educators successfully demonstrate competence, they receive the micro-credential in the form of a digital badge.

Competency-based Professional Learning and Micro-credentials

By earning micro-credentials, educators can receive validation for the various types of learning they pursue, from an in-service curriculum workshop to a YouTube demo lesson, to hone the skills they need to better support their students.

Because micro-credentials are competency-based, that learning, whether formal or informal, is also made visible throughout an educator's classroom practice. This provides schools and districts with insight on the types of professional learning experiences that actually shift teacher practice in alignment with district priorities.

By providing the recognition educators deserve for developing their skills to meet the needs of today's complex classrooms, micro-credentials bring powerful student and educator learning into reality.

To learn more about micro-credentials and the role they play in educator professional learning, read our report [Making Professional Learning Count](#). Also, to learn how micro-credentials and competency-based professional learning can empower teacher leaders, read our report [Micro-credentials: Driving Teacher Learning and Leadership](#).

