

# Using Micro-credentials to Engage Educators in Differentiated Learning

*Competency-Based Learning Isn't Just for Kids; A Contemporary Approach to Professional Development*

## Introduction to Micro-credentials

*"If personalized, competency-based learning is good for our kids, why not the adults? We want to see genuine growth and development in our professionals, not compliance learning. Our micro-credential prototype is one of several ways we are attempting to bring meaningful learning in a personalized fashion to our educators." BJ Voges / Volusia County Schools, Florida*

Throughout their careers, teachers continually learn and develop new instructional strategies in their classrooms, yet those skills are rarely documented as professional learning. Educator growth is typically measured in seat time earned through participation in professional development activities. While many districts have shifted to a greater emphasis on lesson observation and feedback, coaching, and participation in professional learning communities, the reality is that even with quality professional development, it can be challenging for teachers to find the time to transfer their knowledge into practice consistently and effectively.

The traditional professional growth model, developed in the late 1900's, is no longer relevant in today's rapidly changing technology-driven educational environment. Aligning professional development to current instructional strategies is long overdue. Along with differentiated learning for students, there is a growing movement towards competency-based, personalized adult learning. Earning micro-credentials provides teachers with incentives to develop new skills and demonstrate their knowledge in the classroom.

Micro-credentials have garnered attention in recent years as a practical alternative to traditional teacher training. The core tenets of micro-credentials differ from traditional professional development models in several ways in that they are personalized, available on demand, competency based, and shareable.

**Personalized:** Teachers choose an area of focus, typically a specific skill they want to develop or an area in need according to school and district initiatives, with the goal of demonstrating competency in a research-based effective teaching practice.

**On-Demand:** Teachers pursue their learning when and where they choose, during the school day and on their own time.

**Research-backed** – Each micro-credential focuses on effective teaching practices that have been validated through published research.

**Competency-based:** Evidence of competency is collected while teachers are implementing the new skills in the classroom or outside of school hours. Evidence can be submitted using a variety of artifacts, which may include student work samples, classroom observations, demonstration videos, self-evaluation, and reflections. After the evidence has been reviewed by certified assessors, feedback is provided, and the educator is awarded the designated micro-credential.

**Shareable:** Teachers will receive a digital badge for each micro-credential earned and can share their accomplishments through social media networks, on their resumes, online profiles, and directly with colleagues and administrators in their schools and districts.

## How to Earn a Micro-credential

To earn a micro-credential badge, educators must follow a prescribed path to demonstrate competency in a specific skill or set of skills. There are six steps to earning a micro-credential, starting with an identified need or professional learning interest.

1. **Identify skill gap.** Educators personally identify -- or receive -- data- driven recommendations for the specific competencies they want or need to develop.
2. **Understand learning need.** Educators review the criteria for micro-credentials around those specific competencies that align with their learning needs and career goals.
3. **Engage in learning experiences.** Educators develop knowledge and skill through blended experiences from one or more sources.
4. **Submit evidence.** Educators upload and submit a portfolio of evidence following a required set of criteria to demonstrate competency of that discrete skill set.

Submissions of evidence include a diverse set of content types to provide a holistic view of the educator's competency within his or her specific environment.

Most importantly, most micro-credentials require some proof of student outcome (such as a student assignment, reflection, video or assessment) to be included in the submitted evidence. The diversity of evidence types supported is valuable because it provides comprehensive insight into the educator's skills and showcases them regardless of the particular classroom setting (e.g., special education, music class, ELL, high school, grade school).

5. **Complete evaluation.** The evidence is evaluated against a predefined rubric by certified reviewers with expertise in the topic, and each teacher receives personalized feedback on the submission whether a micro-credential is awarded or not.
6. **Receive recognition.** Once the educator demonstrates competency, he or she earns a micro-credential and receives recognition of competency in that discrete skill. Credentials are aggregated in an online portfolio that can stay with an educator throughout his or her career and is easily shared both privately and publicly.