



New toolkit helps states assess credentials' value for students and employers

Step-by-step resource from Education Strategy Group helps education and workforce leaders determine which certifications to prioritize for high-skill, in-demand jobs

Employers need workers for high-skill jobs. Workers need training beyond a high school diploma to access those jobs. And state governments need a certifiably skilled workforce to meet their education goals, attract industry and contribute to their economies. Floating amid this triangle are thousands of credentials that claim to meet everyone's needs—the worker, the employer, the community. Which ones lead to jobs that can sustain a family, grow a business and fuel an economy—and which do not provide meaningful value?

A new toolkit from [Education Strategy Group](#) (ESG) aims to catalyze this essential analysis within states. Funded by Lumina Foundation and made freely available, *Building Credential Currency: Resources to Drive Attainment across K-12, Higher Education, and Workforce Development* takes state and local policymakers through a step-by-step process for collaboratively accomplishing four objectives key to meeting their educational attainment goals:

- **Identifying** in-demand, high-skill, high-wage occupations and associated non-degree credentials;
- **Validating** those findings with employers and finalizing a statewide list of “priority” non-degree credentials;
- **Incentivizing** priority non-degree credential attainment through funding strategies for schools and colleges, articulated postsecondary credit for high school earners, and rigorous accountability systems; and
- **Reporting** and monitoring priority non-degree credential attainment with reliable, verified data.

Across the country, the pathway to economic security and self-sufficiency looks far different than it once did. Significant economic shifts—spurred both by rapid technological advancement and the downturn of the Great Recession—have fundamentally altered the reality of education and work. Postsecondary education is now a requirement to access good jobs, but there are many more pathways learners can take to get there, including those that culminate in non-degree credentials. Thirty million “good jobs” nationwide are held by individuals with less than a bachelor's degree and more than a high school diploma, and a sizable segment of these workers earn more than the average B.A. holder. This important “middle” represents a significant opportunity for growth.

States and communities across the country have begun to recognize that non-degree credentials (sometimes referred to as industry-recognized credentials) have an important role to play in education systems seeking to be more responsive to the new economy. Yet there are thousands of these credentials available—more than 100,000 from 4,000 vendors and other providers. Identifying which are high-value and which are not is complex.

With 26 states including industry-recognized credentials in their high school accountability systems and others contemplating whether such credentials should count toward their postsecondary attainment goals, the stakes have never been higher. The choices states make about which non-degree credentials “count” will either encourage learners down a meaningful career path or unwittingly steer them to pursue lower-value credentials that do not lead to good jobs.

The new toolkit is a guide for implementing the strategy outlined in ESG’s September 2018 *Credential Currency* report produced with Advance CTE and the Council of Chief State School Officers. The toolkit lays out an evidence-based methodology that K-12, postsecondary, and workforce development leaders in any state can use to approach this work with greater confidence. Among its features is a survey that states can administer to employers to gauge what they need from workers.

“Cross-sector collaboration is essential so that the work of identifying and encouraging credentials of value is efficient,” said Matt Gandal, president of Education Strategy Group. “Otherwise students can get conflicting signals from various arms of the education system and from employers, misleading them in unproductive directions.”

As a next step, ESG will be leading an institute this fall to provide support to a handful of states that have formed such teams across K-12, higher education and workforce development. ESG will offer technical assistance in refining and implementing their strategies for prioritizing the most valuable non-degree credentials available in their states.

To access the toolkit and download customizable versions of the tools within it, visit <http://edstrategy.org/resource/building-credential-currency/>.