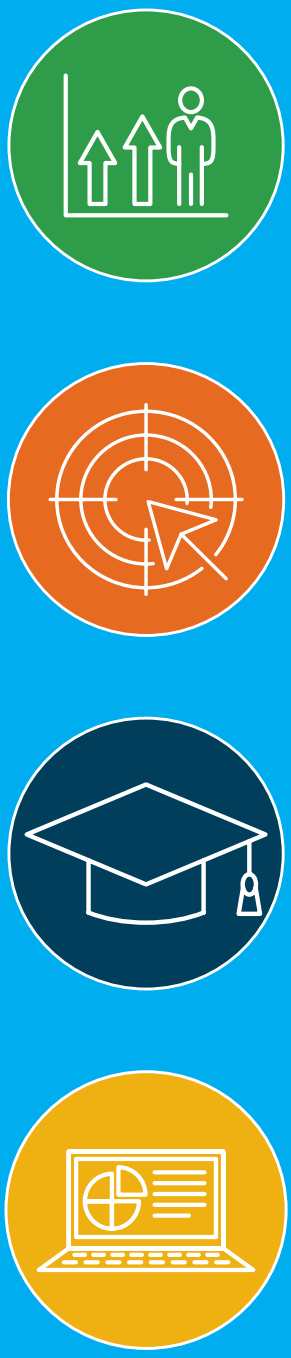
Building Credential Currency

Resources to Drive Attainment across K-12, Higher Education, and Workforce Development



ESG Education Strategy Group
ACHIEVING GREATER IMPACT

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4. Report on Attainment of Priority Non-Degree Credentials

Process to Effectively Build Non-Degree Credentials into K-12 Data & Accountability Systems

In addition to funding, many states have prioritized and incentivized non-degree credential attainment at the K-12 level through accountability and reporting. Prior to ESSA, only 11 states included credential attainment in their high school accountability and reporting systems. Today, 26 states have included attainment of industry-recognized credentials in these systems.

To create strong and meaningful incentives within this framework, your state will want to make sure that it is collecting comprehensive, validated data; storing that information in the appropriate data systems; and creating processes in accountability and reporting to clearly prioritize only the non-degree credentials that are aligned to in-demand, high-skill, high-wage occupations. Use the checklist below to jumpstart a conversation with your state team about building—or refining—a process to include priority non-degree credentials in reporting and accountability efforts.

Collecting the Right Data

To establish a strong practice of monitoring and reporting on non-degree credential attainment, you will first need to confirm that your team is collecting the right information. Getting quality data on non-degree credentials is a challenge for many education systems across the country, but there are concrete components states can look for to ensure their data are robust and reliable.

Your state/districts will need data that are:

✔ Student-level.

Collecting credential data at the individual level will enable you to analyze disparities across student sub-groups and special populations to monitor equity in access and attainment and will better enable you to validate the data's accuracy.

✔ Validated or reported directly by a third party.

Self-reported information (either from student surveys or teacher reporting) is often the easiest way to collect credential attainment data—but it also leaves the door open for error.

The best way to ensure your state receives reliable data is through data sharing agreements with credentialing vendors. See the sample agreement, modeled after that one used by Tennessee, for guidance on how these agreements might be structured.

If data sharing agreements are not an option, the state systems can still take measures to ensure that it receives reliable information. Some states require districts or institutions to submit proof of attainment (often in the form of a copy of the credential) as part of an audit process. States may select a percentage of credentials (generally between 10% and 20%) or randomly select a small number of districts to validate credential data.

States may also consider creating and disseminating student-level reporting templates that incorporate all required fields of information, rather than allowing institutions to submit data in multiple formats or to varying degrees of specificity. If a single student information system is used across the state, these structured data fields could also be built into that system directly.

✔ Comprehensive of all test attempts—including failed attempts as well as passes.

It is often easier to collect information on students who pass credential exams than those who fail, but only collecting "pass" information paints an incomplete picture of credential attainment. What percent of test-takers pass credential exams? Are their disparities in participation and pass rates among various student sub-groups? Answering questions like these requires more comprehensive information than just a list of students who passed the credential exam.

✔ Detailed—including basic pieces of information like credential name and test date.

Ensuring quality requires knowing what is being measured. In any collection strategy, including credential name and test date is essential to both analyzing trends and validating information. If your state will require districts and schools to submit copies of certification as proof of attainment, critical information fields should still be included in your data system for easy look-up (as opposed to having the submitted file serve as the "data").

Storing Credential Data

Like other student information, credential data should be stored securely within the state's longitudinal data and/or student information system(s). To do this, your state will likely have to create customized fields to house student-level credential data and develop guidance and training for districts to safeguard data quality.

Your data system should include, at a minimum, the following fields:

✔ Credential name and code.

As most analyses will want to compare trends across credential types, states must be able to easily identify credentials within their data systems. The most effective way to do this is by assigning each credential a unique alpha-numeric code. Relying on state-determined alpha-numeric code ensures consistency across districts and schools, alleviates confusion at local levels, and enables easier crosswalks between credentials and the specific programs or courses in which they are offered.

✔ Test date.

Storing the test date is not only essential for validating data accuracy, but may be useful if your system stores information on multiple testing attempts. If a student sits for the same credential exam more than once, your state may want to collect that information but use only the most recent test in its reporting.

✔ Attempt result (pass or fail).

As noted above, having complete information about all credential exams attempted is essential for analyzing trends in participation, pass rates, etc.

✔ Related career pathway.

If credentials are earned as part of a career pathway or CTE program of study, including this information in your data storage system can help your state team identify the pathways and programs that offer opportunities for embedding aligned non-degree credentials and/or scaling student attainment of those credentials.

✔ (Recommended) Space to upload a file.

If your validation strategy includes states providing copies of credentials earned, storing those files in the same system may increase efficiency in access.

Ensuring Accuracy

To ensure that the information coming into your system from school- and district-level reporting is accurate, your state should also work to:

✔ Develop guidance for districts entering data into the student information system.

Your state should develop specific guidance for districts on using and navigating the new credential-related fields. Guidance should include a crosswalk between alpha-numeric codes and their assigned credential name, directions on how and where to upload copies of credentials earned (if including in your system), protocols for assigning multiple credential attempts to a student profile, directions on how to batch upload multiple records if your system supports the functionality, and contact information in the event of additional questions.

✔ Conduct training sessions for local data coordinators.

In addition to written guidance, your state should organize training sessions (either in-person training days and/or webinars) to orient local data coordinators to your reporting system and requirements. Training sessions should include a demonstration of the data entry process, tips for troubleshooting common errors, and ample time for questions from local attendees. If organizing training over webinars, consider recording the webinars and making the video available for individuals to refer back to later.

✔ Work with state and/or local student information system vendors to pre-populate fields.

Closed-choice fields—like the alpha-numeric codes assigned to each credential offered in your state—should be pre-populated in the system to reduce data entry errors. Pre-populated options should be reviewed regularly to ensure that all current options are available within the system and out-of-date field options are removed from the system.

Including Credential Data in Reporting and Accountability

Ultimately, the incentive to offer and scale attainment of priority non-degree credentials rests in how your state team embeds credentialing data into its reporting and accountability systems. Through public reporting and accountability—which may be further tied to funding decisions, statewide awards, or public recognition—states can signal to its institutions that the attainment of high-value non-degree credentials is a significant priority.

To do this, your state will need to determine:

✔ The level(s) of accountability in which credential attainment lives, including:

- ✔ School report cards and other public reporting
- ✔ Perkins accountability and reporting
- ✔ State accountability system
- ✔ Federal accountability system

✔ The process by which your reporting and/or accountability system(s) will distinguish priority non-degree credentials from lower-value opportunities.

This is a critical step that will require careful consideration. Accountability and reporting systems provide clear signals of priorities to districts and schools and incentivize stakeholders to measure and monitor those priorities. Setting a high bar by clearly distinguishing high-value credentials from the broader universe of credential options is imperative to protecting high expectations for all students.

To do this, your system(s) could choose to:

- ✔ **Limit reporting to only include the non-degree credentials that are aligned to in-demand, high-skill, high-wage occupations.** With this option, there is no need to distinguish priority non-degree credentials from other options, because your system only reports on and awards priority credentials.
- ✔ **Store and report data on all credentials to track high-value credential attainment against total credential attainment.** Even if your state does not want to include non-priority credentials in its accountability systems and decision-making, it may still be useful to track the attainment of all credentials. Realizing, for instance, that your state's overall credential attainment rate is much higher than

its priority credential attainment rate may be useful to direct best practices and opportunity areas for bolstering high-value attainment. If your state will collect data on all credentials, make sure your data system includes an indicator for whether the credential is on your state's priority list.

- **Weigh credentials differently based on their alignment to in-demand, high-skill, high-wage occupations.** If your state prefers to keep the full breadth of credentials in its reporting and accountability system(s), you may consider creating tiers for credential quality, whereby credentials closely aligned to in-demand, high-skill, high-wage occupations translate to more points than credentials unaligned to your state's priority occupations.

✔ The denominator your state will use in reporting credential attainment data.

How will your state frame credential attainment? Though there is no one "right" answer, the story your state will be able to tell depends significantly on the denominator chosen. Your state should be cognizant of what it wants to say about credential attainment and clearly communicate those parameters to readers.

Your state may choose a denominator from a number of options, including:

- Ninth grade cohort
- All graduating students
- All students enrolled in career pathways
- All CTE completers
- Only students who took in a credential exam
- Only students that passed a credential exam on the first attempt

Sample Data-Sharing MOU with Credentialing Exam Vendors[9]

To download a customizable version of this tool, visit http://edstrategy.org/resource/building-credential-currency/.

This Memorandum of Agreement ("MOA") is entered into by and between the *{PARTY NAME}* (*"PARTY NAME"*), hereinafter referred to as "*{PARTY NICKNAME}*" and the *{STATE}* Department of Education, with offices located at *{ADDRESS}*, hereinafter referred to as "*{STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION ABBREVIATION}*."

1. Project Overview and Statement of Work

Under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act ("FERPA") Section 99.31(a)(6)(i), *{PARTY NICKNAME}* agrees to disclose information to the "*{STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION ABBREVIATION}*" to provide information on student achievement of industry certifications.

{Description of the purpose behind the study and each party's responsibility}

It is the goal of the department that every student in *{STATE}* graduates high school prepared for postsecondary coursework and qualified for quality employment. To achieve this, high school students are encouraged to focus their elective credits on robust, career-aligned learning pathways. For students focusing in career and technical education ("CTE") through one of the programs of study in the 16 nationally recognized career clusters that the department promotes, robust learning pathways should culminate with the achievement of nationally recognized industry certifications, meaningful work- based learning experiences, and/or attainment of postsecondary credit hours through early postsecondary opportunities. As it pertains to industry certifications, all department-promoted certifications are aligned with postsecondary and employment opportunities and with the competencies and skills that students should have acquired through their chosen programs of study.

The purpose of this agreement is to share data about industry certification attainment and to be able to track how many students in *{STATE}* earn an industry certification upon high school graduation or immediately after high school graduation. It is the responsibility of the *{PARTY NICKNAME}* to send data to the *{STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION ABBREVIATION}* about individuals who take and individuals who pass *{NAME OF INDUSTRY CERTIFICATION}* annually. This data is to be sent to the *{STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION ABBREVIATION}* no later than September 1 of each year for the prior year information. It is the responsibility of the *{STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION ABBREVIATION}* to match the data submitted from *{PARTY NICKNAME}* to the student information on file to determine how many students in *{STATE}* graduate with an industry certification.

9 This sample data sharing agreement is based on the agreements that the Tennessee Department of Education has in place with multiple credential vendors.

2. Definitions

Wherever used in the MOA, the following words and terms will have the respective meanings ascribed to them as follows:

2.1 "**Confidential Information**" means any personally identifiable student information including that derived from education records as determined under FERPA. Confidential data shall not include personally identifiable teacher evaluation data or student free and/or reduced price lunch status.

2.2 "**Reports**" means any reports developed by *{PARTY NICKNAME}* and accompanying materials. The types of reports and the data contained within these reports will be determined by the *{PARTY NICKNAME}* and *{STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION ABBREVIATION}*.

2.3 "**Data**" means all information, records, files, and data used by the *{PARTY NICKNAME}* and provided to *{STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION ABBREVIATION}*. Data may include individual level Confidential Information.

2.4 "**Third Party**" means any person or organization other than the *{PARTY NICKNAME}*.

2.5 "**Industry Certification**" refers to the certificate or credential issued by the *{PARTY NICKNAME}*.

2.6 "**Sat for**" refers to the individuals who actually took the certification exam as issued through the *{PARTY NICKNAME}*.

2.7 "**Passed**" refers to individuals who sat for and successfully completed the industry certification as issued through the *{PARTY NICKNAME}*.

2.8 "**CTE**" means Career and Technical Education.

2.9 "**Testing Site**" means the location at which an individual sat for the industry certification.

2.10 "**Testing Date**" refers to the date the individual sat for the industry certification.

2.11 "**Score/Certification Status**" refers to the result of the individual's performance on the industry certification.

3. Period of Performance

The Period of Performance of this MOA is January 21, 2016 to September 30, 2021 ("MOA End Date"). The MOA End Date may be extended only by mutual written agreement of the Parties.

4. Dates and Types of Data Requested

Data to be transferred pursuant to this agreement:

{Description of the data and data variable to be requested}

Industry certification attainment of individuals from September 2 to September 1 of the following year to be submitted annually on September 1.

Data submitted should include the following (if available):

- First name
- Middle name
- Last name
- Home address
- Home ZIP code
- Birth month
- Birth day
- Birth year
- Social Security (if available)
- School district (if available)
- Testing site (if available)
- Testing date (if available)
- Score/certification status

5. Data Agreement

The *{PARTY NICKNAME}* agrees to send confidential data to *{STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION ABBREVIATION}*, and to observe the following security provisions when transferring and reporting data. These provisions set forth are subject to Federal and State confidentiality laws and ensure that the required confidentiality of personally identifiable information is always maintained.

Transfer

5.1 All data transfers will be encrypted with a minimum of 128 bits and uploaded to the *{STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION ABBREVIATION}* secure server/Secure File Transfer Pathway (SFTP).

5.2 Additional modes of data transfer may be identified and requested over the duration of the MOA.

Outline of the Data Flow

5.3 A representative of the *{PARTY NICKNAME}* must sign this MOA along with the representative of the *{STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION ABBREVIATION}*.

5.4 Data will be used ***only*** for analyses that respect privacy and confidentiality of all concerned parties including individuals, students, teachers, classrooms, schools, districts, intermediate school districts, and the State of *{STATE}*.

5.5 Data may ***only*** be used for the purposes of identifying how many *{STATE}* students earn an industry certification.

5.6 The handling of all data will, at all times, adhere to the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).

6. Indemnification

6.1 The *{PARTY NICKNAME}*, to the extent not prohibited by law, will indemnify and hold harmless *{STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION ABBREVIATION}* as well as its employees, agents, and representatives from and against any and all claims, liabilities, losses, and causes of action which may arise, accrue, or result to any person or entity which may be injured or damaged as a result of the *{PARTY NICKNAME}*'s gross negligence, willful misconduct, or any failure to comply with any provision of this MOA.

6.2 The *{PARTY NICKNAME}* or its representatives further agrees it shall be liable for the reasonable cost of attorneys for *{STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION ABBREVIATION}* in the event such services is necessitated to enforce the terms of this MOA or otherwise enforce the obligations of the *{PARTY NICKNAME}* and its representatives to *{STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION ABBREVIATION}*.

6.3 In the event of any such suit or claim, the *{PARTY NICKNAME}* or its representative shall give *{STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION ABBREVIATION}* immediate notice thereof and shall provide all assistance required by *{STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION ABBREVIATION}* in *{STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION ABBREVIATION}*'s defense. *{STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION ABBREVIATION}* shall give the *{PARTY NICKNAME}* and its representative written notice of any such claim or suit, and the *{PARTY NICKNAME}* and its representative shall have the full right and obligation to conduct the *{PARTY NICKNAME}* or its representative's own defense thereof.

6.4 Nothing contained herein shall be deemed to accord to the *{PARTY NICKNAME}* or its representatives, through their attorney(s), the right to represent the State of *{STATE}* in any legal matter, such rights being governed by *{STATE}*'s *{CODE AND SECTION NUMBER}*.

{Party Signature(s)}

Name: _____

Title: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____