

**Webinar Title:**

Micro-Credentials Webinar 4 | Developing Micro-credential Quality Assurance Standards to Attract and Retain Teachers

Webinar description:

This webinar highlights the work done by digiLEARN and the Micro-credentials Partnership of States in the development of the Quality Assurance Standards for Micro-Credentials.

The increased prevalence of micro-credentials as a tool for educator learning and licensure has led a wide array of organizations – including local education agencies, state education agencies, institutions of higher education, and third-party organizations – to independently develop and issue their own micro-credentials, each with their own understanding of what constitutes quality. The lack of consistent quality standards undermines the portability of micro-credentials across contexts, leaving earners unsure whether a micro-credential, and the competency they have demonstrated in earning it, will be recognized by their school, district, or other licensing agency.

New America, RTI International and digiLEARN analyzed micro-credentialing in North Carolina and across the country and found that the absence of consistent quality standards was one of the most significant challenges for the state’s ability to effectively utilize micro-credentials for teacher retention, development, and career advancement.

Rigorous and consistent nomenclature, quality standards, and review processes are critical for recognizers and earners to determine the quality of micro-credentials and to provide developers a basis on which to measure micro-credentials’ effectiveness and impact. By adopting consistent quality assurance standards, states can implement policies that improve portability and advance the integration of micro-credentials from a wide range of developers into systems of professional learning and licensure.

If you or your organization is interested in joining the MPOS work moving forward, please contact Myra Best at myra@digiLEARN.org

Panelists:

- Gov. Bev Perdue, digiLEARN founder and former North Carolina governor
- Dr. Ann Nutter Coffman, National Education Association
- Dr. Tommy Hodges, University of South Carolina

- Bobbette Ray, Arkansas Department of Education
- LaVerne Srinivasan, Carnegie Corporation of New York

digLEARN Board:

- Gov. Bev Perdue, Chair and Founder
- Gov. Jim Geringer, Vice Chair
- Gov. Bob Wise
- Rep. Craig D. Horn
- Dr. Felicia C. Smith
- Sen. Howard Stephenson
- Jane Smith Patterson
- John Wilson
- Kevin Howell
- Myra Best
- Rick Stout
- Terry Holliday
- Tom Miller
- Tom Vander Ark

Webinar Q&A:

1. The data continues to show the same failing reports, especially for African American students in reading. How does this innovation support or teach affective (feelings, values, etc.) domains of teaching?

Dr. Ann Coffman, Manager, Teacher Quality, National Education Association (NEA):

Micro-credentials can definitely cover more "soft" skills as well. Micro-credentials are about proving competency in a particular area, which can include more affective skills. For example, NEA will be releasing a stack on Social Emotional Learning (SEL) over the summer, and we already have a stack [focused on Restorative Practices](#).

Dr. Tommy Hodges, Dean of Education, University of South Carolina (USC):

CarolinaCrED includes [stacks](#) on several different aspects of literacy practices, including communication, language and conventions, learning environments, reading, and writing. This is in addition to stacks on bias and social and emotional learning.

Bobette Ray, Educator Effectiveness and Licensure, Arkansas Department of Education (ADE):

Micro-credentials guide educators through the process of implementing knowledge and skills from more traditional professional development into classroom practice. In addition to support in affective domains, teachers can earn micro-credentials on evidence-based practices, like using explicit instruction to teach vocabulary, with support for all students in reading comprehension.

2. Teacher salaries are low. How will teachers be able to afford this innovation?

Dr. Ann Coffman, Manager, Teacher Quality, NEA: NEA micro-credentials are all free to our members. We charge non-members \$75, and every bit of that money goes to assessment. We also have some states that include micro-credentials in teacher contracts as one type of professional learning they can take.

Dr. Tommy Hodges, Dean of Education, USC: We do not charge individuals for micro-credentials – we partner at the organization level to support professional learning. We do not believe you build capacity in professional learning by engaging in “one-offs.” Rather, capacity building is about educators charting a future not only for themselves, but the collective efficacy of educators within the building and beyond.

Myra Best, Executive Director, digiLEARN: There are multiple providers of micro-credentials across the country – some nonprofit, some for-profit, and some teacher or educator developed. Each group determines whether or how much they will charge. Some states and districts provide stipends or other means to provide professional learning at no cost to teachers. If micro-credentials are integrated into state systems, then funding for them becomes part of the system and included as a professional learning model. The Quality Assurance Standards developed by digiLEARN and the Micro-credentials Partnership of States will bring consistency to micro-credentials that improve teacher practice and provide a mechanism for states and districts to make them more available at no cost to teachers.

3. How will clinical experiences be addressed?

Dr. Tommy Hodges, Dean of Education, USC: Existing clinical experiences remain critical and would likely benefit from expansion (e.g. residencies and apprenticeships). The completion of micro-credentials requires being embedded in those clinical experiences.

4. Will micro-credentials replace educator preparation programs?

Dr. Tommy Hodges, Dean of Education, USC: The short answer is no. However, programs committed to competency-based systems of professional learning that can be adapted to the needs of the individual teacher candidate will find that micro-credentials accomplish many of these goals. We have found micro-credentials particularly beneficial in our [alternative preparation program](#).

Dr. Ann Coffman, Manager, Teacher Quality, NEA: Micro-credentials should not replace teacher preparation programs. For initial certification, micro-credentials should be used as a supplemental tool to demonstrate a candidate’s competency in particular areas. They cannot take the place of targeted instruction and clinical preparation. There are some states that are trying to have micro-credentials be a short-track option to teacher certification; however, I would highly advise caution moving in that policy direction.

5. What is the cost? Are there federal dollars to support this effort?

Myra Best, Executive Director, digiLEARN: The cost varies depending on the organization or provider. There are federal dollars available for professional development for teachers. [Please go here](#) for an overview of the resources available.

6. What are the important steps for states to take to support teachers in implementing MCs?

Bobette Ray, Program Advisor, Office of Educator Effectiveness and Licensure, ADE: , It is important for state agencies to develop a good communications plan so teachers clearly understand what micro-credentials are and how teachers or educators benefit from micro-credentials in their particular role. Next, agencies need to determine how micro-credentials fit or integrate into their existing systems. For example, most educator credentials are measured by seat time or hours, and we don't have a lot of experience in measuring acquisition of effective skills for teachers.

Dr. Tommy Hodges, Dean of Education, USC: Support is important for the success of competency-based learning through micro-credentials. A communications plan to emphasize that micro-credentials are not just for teachers, but all educators, is helpful. Micro-credential systems should be built to flex to the needs of school and district goals. To do that, district and school leadership should have opportunities to earn micro-credentials to create customized support plans.

Myra Best, Executive Director, digiLEARN: NC recently completed [Transforming Educator Learning in North Carolina: Realizing the Potential of Micro-credentials](#) to help decision-makers determine the best strategy for formally integrating micro-credentials in the professional learning system for NC educators.

6. Have the micro-credentials on the National Education Association (NEA) website been evaluated for college credit through NCCRS?

Dr. Ann Coffman: They have not been. We have explored using a national third party to do this, but we have not yet done so. We have several colleges and universities that have reviewed them and are offering college credit for the NEA micro-credentials.

7. Are any federal programs/activities driving micro-credentialing – ideally including economic incentives that would be provided to participants (i.e. "if you take micro-credential topic 'robotics', you get X percentage increase in salary")?

Dr. Tommy Hodges, Dean of Education, USC: We are not aware of federal funds that specifically support micro-credentials. In SC, micro-credentials are not available for individual purchase. Because our aim is to build capacity in schools and districts, we work through contracts. A "client" would purchase a portal on our micro-credential platform and access to their selected micro-credentials.

Dr. Ann Coffman, Manager, Teacher Quality, NEA: To the best of my knowledge, there are no current federal programs targeting micro-credential funding. However, as a professional learning activity, supporting micro-credentials could fall under ESEA Title II funding.

Myra Best, Executive Director, digiLEARN: There are federal dollars available for general professional development for teachers. [Please go here](#) for an overview of the resources available.

8. Is there any research out there that can show a relationship between obtaining micro-credentials by teachers and the teachers' effectiveness regarding student growth (as shown by EVAAS)?

Bobette Ray, Educator Effectiveness Advisor, ADE: In Arkansas, we are collecting educator "perception data" from pre- and post-credential surveys. The survey asks teachers to rate their knowledge and ability to implement the skill before beginning the micro-credential and then after earning the micro-credential. We've seen that educators believe their skill level improves as a result of the learning from the micro-credential. We are also able to collect anecdotal data through interviews with teachers who earn micro-credentials that indicate many educators prefer micro-credentials to other forms of professional development and see them as being beneficial to their professional practice. We (Educator Effectiveness/ADE) hope that we can begin a pilot to compare student achievement data for students in classes where the teacher earns micro-credentials with classes where the teacher does not.

Myra Best, Executive Director, digiLEARN: New America completed [national research](#) about the status of micro-credentials for digiLEARN that speaks to the "thin" data about the impact of micro-credentials on teacher practice and student learning. Gathering the impact is the phase two work the Micro-Credentials Partnership of States is pursuing now that we have the Quality Assurance Standards.

9. How do you get stakeholders to buy into micro-credentials to increase their validity? For example, if our institution developed a workplace communications credential, how is my credential valued over another one?

Dr. Tommy Hodges, Dean of Education, USC: CarolinaCrED's micro-credentials are reviewed (and revised, if needed) annually based on the pursuer submissions, assessor feedback, and alignment to state standards and initiatives. Feedback from stakeholders at the state level help refine our micro-credentials and make sure they are effective for alternative certification, induction, and veteran educators alike.

Myra Best, Executive Director, digiLEARN: Integrating micro-credentials into state systems of professional learning, along with the use of consistent quality assurance standards, will lead to building a database to validate micro-credentials. Please see question 16 for more information.

Dr. Ann Coffman, Manager, Teacher Quality, NEA: As states enter into the micro-credential space, I highly recommend convening groups of educators to validate micro-credentials being used. For example, if a state is interested in pursuing specific micro-credentials, convene a group of practicing educators to review the possible micro-credentials. Identify the elements that you'd like the educators to review (e.g. rigor, content, research, etc) and have them discuss if the micro-credentials truly represent the quality standards within the state. By allowing educators to do this work, you've expanded state capacity and will have natural ambassadors to talk about the micro-credentials as you implement them.

10. Is there a way for NEA to partner with higher ed institutions to collaborate on micro-credential promotion and/or development?

Dr. Ann Coffman, Manager, Teacher Quality, NEA: The NEA is happy to chat with higher ed institutions that are interested in collaborating around micro-credential development and implementation.

11. Will the micro-credential courses be standardized, where all participants are offered the same courses? Or are micro-credentials a framework that different organizations/states/entities adapt to fit their goals?

Bobette Ray, Educator Effectiveness/ADE: In Arkansas, if I understand the question, we will lean toward the latter. We promote micro-credentials as personalized learning relevant to the educator's professional growth goal, so we want to allow teachers the autonomy to self-select. This is one reason the quality assurance standards are important. If teachers are self-selecting, they need to be confident that the micro-credential is high-quality and grounded in research. Micro-credentials approved for licensure requirements are approved on the basis of the educator's content area requirements and pedagogy requirements.

Dr. Tommy Hodges, Dean of Education, USC: CarolinaCrED in the University of South Carolina's College of Education believes micro-credentials not only support personalized professional learning for the educator, but also for the school and districts. We have built our mCrED menu of support to and service options to flex to the unique goals and needs of schools, districts, and organizations. A unique framework is built to amplify the effectiveness of competency-based learning.

Dr. Ann Coffman, Manager, Teacher Quality, NEA: Micro-credentials provide a level of choice and flexibility that can support a district's learning goals while at the same time honoring the knowledge and skills of the educator. For example, if a district wants to focus on supporting their ELL students, they could ask that teachers take three of the eight micro-credentials in the stack. This allows the teacher to review what is available and have some freedom to choose which competencies they would like to pursue.

12. Is there a single source or list of all micro-credential courses available and links to them (and perhaps even a resource to find financial assistance/etc. to take courses) for educators?

Dr. Tommy Hodges, Dean of Education, USC: CarolinaCrED's micro-credential catalog can be found [here](#). We do not "sell" micro-credentials to individual educators, as we believe they should be part of a larger system of personalized professional learning. Schools, districts, and organizations purchase micro-credentials for educators across the state of South Carolina.

Dr. Ann Coffman, Manager, Teacher Quality, NEA: Every organization that works with micro-credentials has their own platforms and ways of publishing their micro-credentials. I believe that this is due, in part, to the fact that there are currently not organizing standards around what a micro-credential is or isn't. NEA has partnered with Digital Promise over the years to ensure that there is some similarity and continuity around micro-credentials. NEA's micro-credentials can be found at nea.certificationbank.com. Digital Promise's catalog of micro-credentials can be found at <https://microcredentials.digitalpromise.org/explore>

Myra Best, Executive Director, digiLEARN: One of the challenges to micro-credentials is their individual choice/voice without consistent standards or recognized approval. The Micro-Credentials Partnership of States' Quality Assurance Standards is an effort to alleviate that issue. As a result, multiple developers are creating micro-credentials with varying standards, making it more challenging to determine which ones are rigorous. The three largest providers of micro-credentials are the [NEA](#), [Digital Promise](#), and [Bloomboard](#). However, the challenge continues to be a consistent set of quality assurance standards that states, districts, schools and educators can use to determine the rigor or quality of micro-credentials offered.

13. Does South Carolina and North Carolina have micro-credentialing in place as a state?

Dr. Tommy Hodges, Dean of Education, USC: Yes, South Carolina has micro-credentialing in place as a state. The State Department of Education awards 12 renewal credits for each micro-credential earned and is part of the Certificate Renewal Matrix. This job-embedded professional learning relies on evidence that the educator has applied the learning in a way that impacts the learners and evidence that the educator has reflected on the implementation.

Myra Best, Executive Director, digiLEARN: North Carolina does not have state policy for micro-credentials, as professional learning is the purview of Local Education Agencies (LEAs) and Public School Units (PSUs). Beginning in 2017, the NC Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) funded digital learning grants that include micro-credentials as a priority. As teacher-directed, competency-based professional learning experiences, micro-credentials offer educators options to more traditional forms of professional development and greater control over their learning experiences. The NC State Board of Education and NCDPI is a partner with the Micro-Credentials Partnership of States and is exploring how to best implement micro-credentials statewide.

14. Please consider the time it takes to do modules.

Dr. Tommy Hodges, Dean of Education, USC: Micro-credentials are not modules. A micro-credential is a performance assessment of a specific skill. Data indicates that a micro-credential can take from between three and 21 hours to complete. The variation in the range depends on whether the pursuer is approaching the micro-credential to demonstrate an existing competency or to learn a new skill.

Dr. Ann Coffman: Absolutely. With the NEA micro-credentials, the micro-credentials all take about 15 hours of time. We have many states that are translating those hours then to fit their CEU requirements.

15. I've designed a game-based learning micro-credential for educators offered through CSU Fullerton. Is there a way for NEA to partner with higher ed institutions to collaborate on micro-credential promotion and/or development?

Dr. Ann Coffman: Happy to have a conversation about what this could look like and connect you to our local and/or state affiliate as well.

16. Continually assessing the effectiveness of micro-credentials is critical to ensuring student needs are being met. Can you speak to how you are monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of your various programs or initiatives, and what data you collect to ensure that students are experiencing growth?

Myra Best: Great question and very appropriate to the next phase of the Micro-Credentials Partnership of States' work. The next phase of work is the validation of the Quality Assurance Standards and the development of a rubric so states, districts, and schools can self-assess the quality of the micro-credentials they are using in their schools use the resource as a tool to help define and shape policies that states and districts need to implement the work.

We will also begin state regional focus groups and multi-state surveys to learn about stakeholder perspectives for micro-credentials and other professional learning in states. The information will inform the continued implementation of micro-credentials and their integration into states' human capital systems with proper human, technical, and financial support. Lastly, with the research design, we will identify quality micro-credentials and measure their impact on teacher practice and ultimately student learning. All of this information will be broadly available through a national clearing house.

Dr. Tommy Hodges, Dean of Education, USC: Our Research, Evaluation, and Measurement Center provides services in evaluation, research, measurement, and professional development to determine the effectiveness of our micro-credentials on teacher effectiveness and student learning. We are still early in this work, so we look forward to using that research to influence educational policy and practice.

17. How can further developing and expanding standards for these types of learning opportunities help address educator retention issues?

Dr. Tommy Hodges, Dean of Education, USC: Since micro-credentials are a natural extension of an educator's professional learning journey, they are learner-centered opportunities that support school, district, and state goals. Educators engage in both formal and informal learning but are rarely recognized for their informal learning. Micro-credentials allow them to do both. Educators spend less time on professional development and more time on new learning to expand their practice and increase student learning.

Dr. Ann Coffman, Manager, Teacher Quality, NEA: Micro-credentials represent a different way of thinking about professional learning. They can provide a method of professional learning freedom that educators aren't typically given. We know that autonomy in teaching and learning has a direct impact on educator retention and would hope that micro-credentials represent a path toward more professional learning autonomy.

Myra Best, Executive Director, digiLEARN: Like educational leaders in other states, those in the states represented by the Micro-Credentials Partnership of States have recognized the imperative to improve professional learning options as a strategy both to retain educators and improve teaching practices and student learning. As teacher-directed, competency-based professional learning experiences, micro-credentials offer educators options to more traditional forms of professional development and greater control over their learning experiences.

The self-directed and competency-based features of micro-credentials can potentially help schools attract and retain high-quality educators. Although the challenges of recruiting and retaining educators are multiple and complex, among the factors that lend themselves to policy solutions are educators' working conditions. Nine out of 10 teachers believe that the media largely ignores this issue while over-focusing on the role of standardized tests and teaching about race. I encourage you to go to [this report](#) for a comprehensive look at how MCs may impact teacher retention.