



# Micro-Credential Professional Development Programs for Teachers

Program Design and Strategies for Implementation

# District Leadership Forum

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# 1) Executive Overview

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## Key Observations

**Administrators at profiled districts and educational systems offer both internally and externally developed micro-credential programs to provide teachers with personalized professional development opportunities.**

Administrators at **District A** and **State G** rely on external providers such as Digital Promise and Teaching Matters to offer micro-credential opportunities to teachers. In contrast, instructional designers at **County E** build micro-credential offerings internally and adapt them as needed to fit the context of each of their constituent districts. In a hybrid of these two approaches, teachers at **District B** can either engage with district-developed micro-credential programs, third-party developed programs, or independent programs created by individual teachers.

**Profiled programs use micro-credential professional development offerings to provide more nuance to the teacher evaluation process.** At **District A**, administrators struggle to formally align micro-credential programs to teacher evaluation frameworks due to union influence on the evaluation process. However, administrators at District A require teachers to develop personalized professional development plans as a part of their evaluation process, and these plans can incorporate micro-credential programs. Similarly, contacts at **District B** use micro-credential program participation to provide more depth to evaluation conversations between district evaluators and district teachers.

**Contacts express the importance of strong incentives to maximize teacher participation in micro-credential programs.** Administrators at **District A** offer professional development credits that assist in state-mandated, re-certification processes to teachers who complete full groups of related micro-credentials. Administrators at **District B** and **District D** offer participating teachers varying levels of monetary compensation. Contacts at **State G** oversee several districts experimenting with compensation benefits tied to participation in micro-credential programs. Other State G districts have increased teacher participation by allowing teachers to apply micro-credential program success towards re-certification requirements.

**Contacts at District C and State G explain that their pilot programs enable administrators to solve issues before program expansion.** Both educational systems solicit feedback from participating teachers to develop more effective programs. Both also saw low rates of participating teacher success earning micro-credentials early in the pilot process. However, administrators did not express concern about this because they instead focused on determining what influences teacher success in the program. This mindset allows administrators to identify potential changes to the program before it reaches all teachers within each respective system.

## 2) Micro-Credential Program Design

### Rationale & Providers

### Micro-Credential Programs Personalize Teachers' Professional Development Opportunities

Micro-credential programs for primary and secondary school teachers adapt professional development models from an attendance-based model to a competency-based model. Often, traditional teacher development models prioritize attendance at professional development sessions, while the micro-credential model prioritizes skills and competencies that teachers gain from professional development programs. Multiple profiled school districts and educational systems, including **State G**, explain that these new competency-based, micro-credential programs stem from a commitment to competency-based learning for students.

Contacts from **District B** describe how traditional professional development programs often focus on generic, large-group sessions instead of personalized learning. Contacts express that this traditional model often lacks adequate engagement and ignores teachers' unique professional needs.

Contacts also cite the value of personalized curricula in these programs, which allow teachers to choose the content most applicable to their needs as opposed to all engaging with the same content. As contacts at District B describe, teachers know their own professional needs better than administrators do, so professional development programs should be responsive to teachers' own preferences.

Contacts at **District B** also note that micro-credential programs' flexibility enables teachers to better align professional development opportunities to personal schedules and priorities.

### Overview of Profiled Professional Development Programs

Institution	Program Overview
<b>District A</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Micro-credential programming started in 2016, with curricula sourced from Digital Promise<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• Teachers can gain required re-certification credits upon completing groups of micro-credentials</li> <li>• 150 teachers have participated thus far</li> </ul>
<b>District B</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Micro-credential programming started in 2014, with 90 percent of teachers now engaged</li> <li>• Teachers access internally or externally-developed programs</li> <li>• Compensation benefits for teachers who complete programs</li> </ul>
<b>District C</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Completed one-year pilot of micro-credential programming with an external consulting partner beginning in 2016</li> <li>• Teachers access internally and externally developed curricula</li> <li>• Participating teachers increase chances of accessing new leadership opportunities</li> </ul>
<b>District D</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Started in 2016 with micro-credentials on teacher leadership</li> <li>• Curricula sourced from Teaching Matters,<sup>2</sup> with some developed internally</li> <li>• Compensation benefits provided once teachers reach 15 hours of participation</li> </ul>
<b>County E</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 260 teachers engaged with micro-credentials in the 2016-2017 academic year</li> </ul>

<sup>1</sup> Educator Micro-Credentials. Digital Promise, n.d. <http://digitalpromise.org/initiative/educator-micro-credentials/>

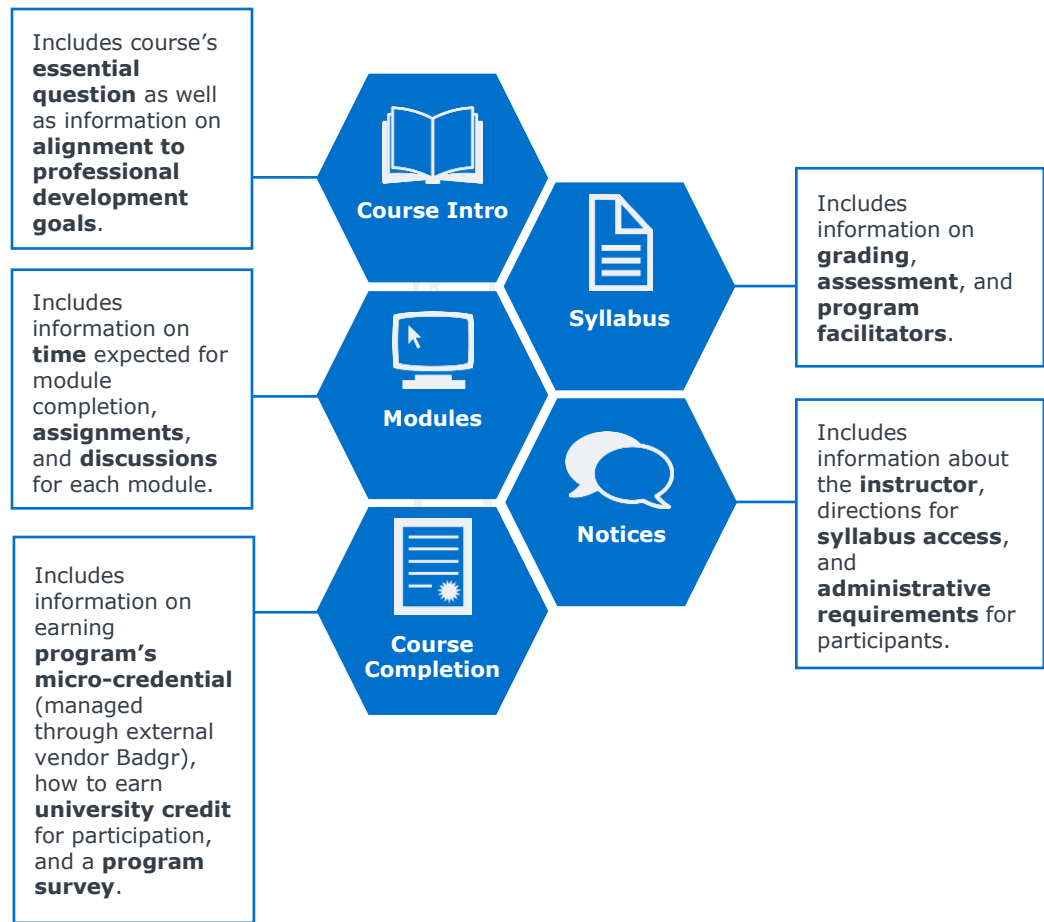
<sup>2</sup> Teaching Matters. Teaching Matters, Inc., n.d. <http://www.teachingmatters.org/>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Curricula developed internally and focused on the county-wide priority of classroom technology integration</li> <li>• Teachers earn professional development or university credits</li> </ul>
<b>District F</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In the process of rebuilding professional development, with a focus on new classroom curriculum implementation</li> <li>• Planned mix of competency-based offerings, but not necessarily incorporating micro-credentials</li> <li>• Planned progress monitoring system to track professional development success twice annually</li> </ul>
<b>State G</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In second year of three-year micro-credential pilot program, which began in 2016</li> <li>• Curricula sourced from Digital Promise and Teaching Matters</li> <li>• Participating districts exploring incentives related to compensation and teacher re-certification requirements</li> </ul>

## Internally Developed Micro-Credential Programs Maximize Curricular Flexibility

Instructional designers at **County E** develop micro-credential programs internally. Administrators offer teachers several micro-credential programs related to the county’s priority of in-classroom technology integration. Teachers in County E can select either shorter courses (which take one to two hours to complete) on topics such as digital lesson planning or longer academies (which take six to eight hours to complete) on topics such as integration of Google applications into the classroom. The individual courses tend to be skill-based, while academy programs dive deeper into pedagogical tactics. For the county’s online programming, instructional designers must include certain information on the program’s webpage, such as a syllabus, assignments, and information on administrative requirements for participants.

## Content Included on Micro-Credential Informational Webpages at County E



Contacts at County E appreciate the flexibility that internally developed micro-credential curricula provides. This flexibility allows the office's four instructional designers to adapt micro-credential programs to fit the unique needs of individual groups of teachers seeking professional development. Although the county does manage most aspects of its micro-credential program internally, it does still rely on Badgr<sup>3</sup> to organize all of the district's awarded micro-credentials.

## External Micro-Credential Programming Can Minimize Internal Program Management Responsibilities

Profiled districts vary in the amount that they rely upon external organizations to develop micro-credential curricula. Multiple districts partner with Digital Promise and/or Teaching Matters to provide teachers with pre-developed, micro-credential programs. By partnering with external organizations, district administrators minimize the costs associated with curriculum development, learning platform maintenance, and performance assessment. However, districts lose some flexibility in adapting programs to fit their unique needs.

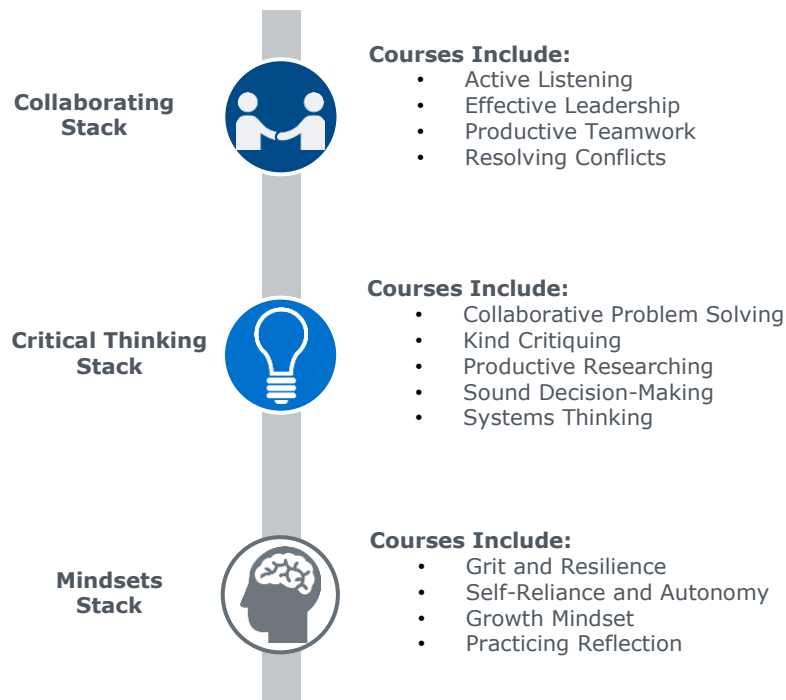
**District D** and **State G** both partner with Teaching Matters to provide teachers with pre-packaged, micro-credential programs. In addition to Teaching Matters, State G also partners with Digital Promise for curriculum development. District D's programs

<sup>3</sup> Badgr. Concentric Sky, n.d. <https://info.badgr.io/>

focus on leadership skills, including programs related to assessment, student analytics, planning professional learning, and managing discussions.

**District A** maintains a unique relationship with Digital Promise that significantly limits costs associated with the district’s micro-credential program. Teachers at District A can access Digital Promise’s micro-credential programs for free, and, in exchange, Digital Promise collects teacher data to assess the effectiveness of their programs. Teachers can participate in individual micro-credential programs or opt to complete full stacks of related programs (i.e., a group of related micro-credentials, such as a critical thinking-related set that includes courses on collaborative problem solving, productive researching, and systems thinking). Teachers who complete full stacks of micro-credentials can receive professional development credits for their participation.

### Micro-Credential Stacks Offered Through Digital Promise at *District A*



### *District B* Offers Both Internally and Externally Developed Micro-Credentials to Maximize Opportunities for Teacher Learning

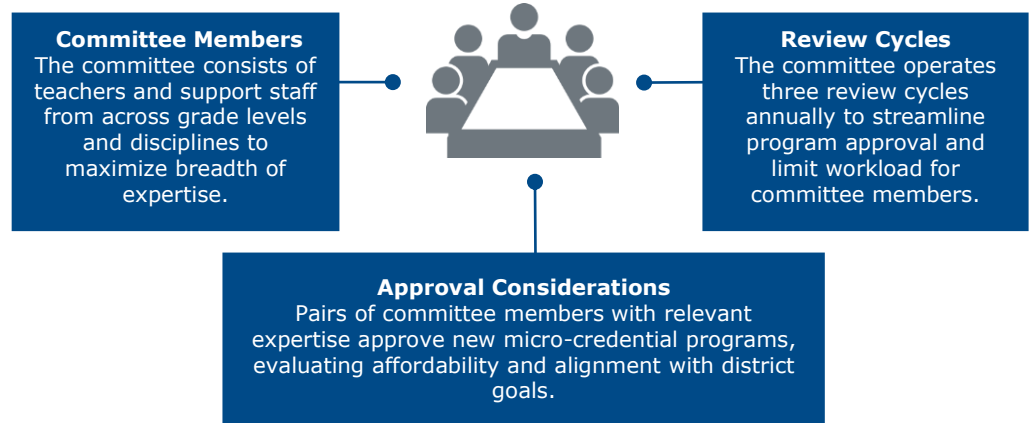
Administrators at **District B** offer teachers a mix of internally developed and externally developed micro-credential options. Teachers can access micro-credentials through one of three routes:

- (1) District-developed micro-credentials designed for small groups of teachers
- (2) Third-party micro-credentials from groups such as Digital Promise
- (3) Teacher-developed micro-credentials for individual educators

A committee of district professionals (profiled below) pre-approves all potential micro-credential programs for the district, evaluating programs based on affordability and alignment with district goals.



## Micro-Credential Approval Committee at District B



## Micro-Credential Program Options at *District B*



### District-Provided Programs

- Teacher leaders or instructional coaches flag areas of broad interest across faculty
- Administrators develop and publicize curricular offerings
- Small groups of teachers participate in programs together



### Third Party-Provided Programs

- Teachers can participate in programs created by third party curriculum developers, such as Digital Promise
- Programs could also be provided by a local higher education institution



### Individually Submitted Programs

- Individual teachers design and complete their own curricula
- Often used to support highly specialized teachers who lack subject area collaborators within the district

## Program Logistics & Coordination

### Micro-Credential Award Processes Depend on Sources of Program Curricula

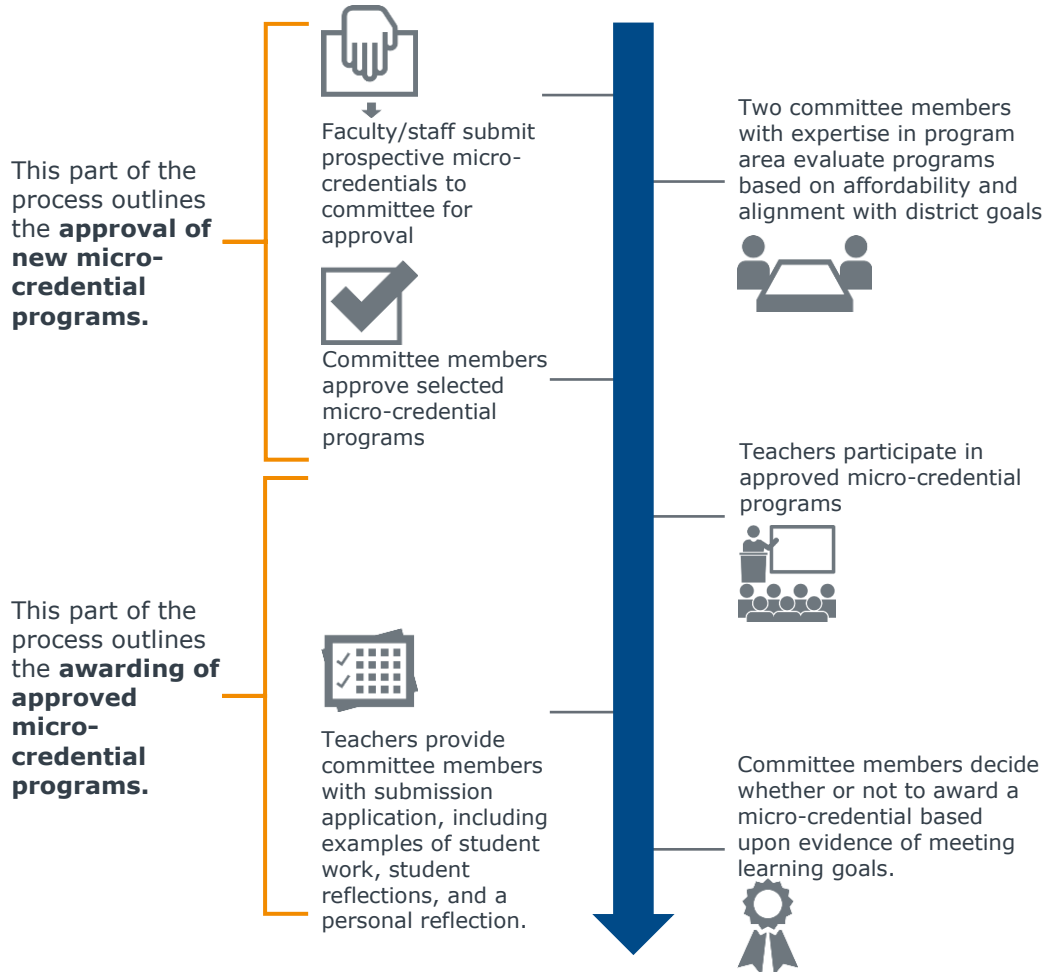
Micro-credential award processes vary across profiled districts. For externally managed micro-credential programs, the vendors typically maintain evaluation responsibilities and determine when teachers exhibit a level of mastery that merits a micro-credential.

However, profiled school districts and educational systems that manage micro-credential programs internally (**District B** and **County E**) award teachers' micro-credentials internally as well. Both of these systems use internal staff members to evaluate teachers' performance in micro-credential programs and ultimately award micro-credentials to teachers who demonstrate content proficiency.

For example, at District B, the committee that reviews submissions for new micro-credentials also reviews teacher learning to determine whether or not to issue a micro-credential. For the micro-credential award process, teachers participating in micro-credential programs must submit examples of student work, student

reflections, and a personal teacher reflection. All of these components should provide evidence that the teacher has not only gained but also practiced the new skills. The committee reviews these applications during one of its three annual, two-week review periods. Committee members make final micro-credential award decisions and communicate decisions to teachers within a three week turnaround time.

### Complete Micro-Credentialing Process at *District B*



Participating teachers in County E upload evidence of content mastery to progress through online programs. Program administrators provide weekly feedback on teachers’ submissions. Based upon submitted evidence of learning, administrators determine whether teachers can progress to the next module or whether they need to spend more time on the current module. Contacts at County E do report, however, that teachers have about a 90 percent success rate progressing through modules on their first attempt. Regardless, administrators provide all teachers with feedback throughout their progression in micro-credential programs.

Administrators at **District F** have planned a robust new system to measure professional development effectiveness. The district’s new plan focuses on providing teachers with in-person observations of their teaching practices to track success of district professional development programs. While current professional development offerings are not competency-based, district administrators seek to move professional development offerings towards a competency-based model in the future.

## Tentative Professional Development Evaluation Process at *District F*



### Staffing

Each zone of seven to ten schools will have three support advisers: one each per content areas of math, science, and language arts.



### Evaluation Schedule

Support advisers will spend six days in the fall and spring observing all classrooms that they assist to monitor teacher progress towards district-desired skills and competencies.



### Goals

This bi-annual data collection process will give district-level administrators the ability to track the effectiveness of professional development efforts more accurately.

## Incorporate Micro-Credential Opportunities into the Faculty Evaluation Process to Deepen Teacher Learning

Profiled districts vary in the degree to which they align teacher evaluation frameworks with micro-credential programs. At **County E**, micro-credential program administrators publicize which micro-credential offerings will help teachers meet the requirements of individual sections of teacher evaluation frameworks. Similarly, at **State G**, program administrators intentionally designed micro-credential offerings to align with state-wide teacher evaluation rubrics. Specifically, administrators curated curricula through Digital Promise that fit with State G's teacher evaluation framework.

In other cases, such as at **District A** and **District B**, micro-credential program administrators integrate micro-credential programs into teacher evaluation systems more informally. For example, union influence in **District A** limits the ability for micro-credential program administrators to amend the agreed-upon evaluation framework to include relevant micro-credential program participation. Instead, micro-credentials play an informal role in the evaluation process as components of required personalized professional development plans. Administrators at District B use the Danielson Group's Framework for Teaching Evaluation<sup>4</sup> and believe that micro-credential opportunities help evaluators make professional development-related parts of required evaluation conversations more nuanced.

<sup>4</sup> *The Framework*. The Danielson Group, 2017. [www.danielsongroup.org/framework/](http://www.danielsongroup.org/framework/)

## 3) Program Implementation

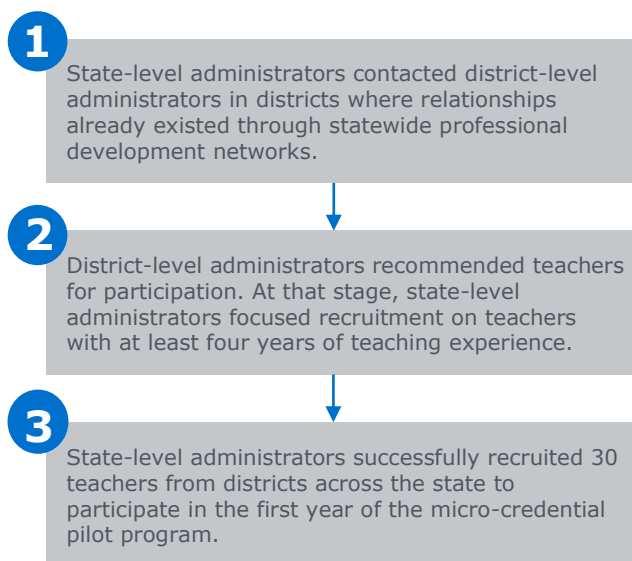
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### Program Launch

#### Develop a Pilot Program to Solve Potential Challenges before Full-Scale Micro-Credential Program Implementation

Contacts at **District C** and **State G** find their respective micro-credential pilot programs especially valuable. These two pilot programs give administrators the opportunity to alleviate any implementation or design issues prior to rolling out the program to all teachers across each school system.

#### Teacher Participant Recruitment in Year One of *State G's* Micro-Credential Pilot Program

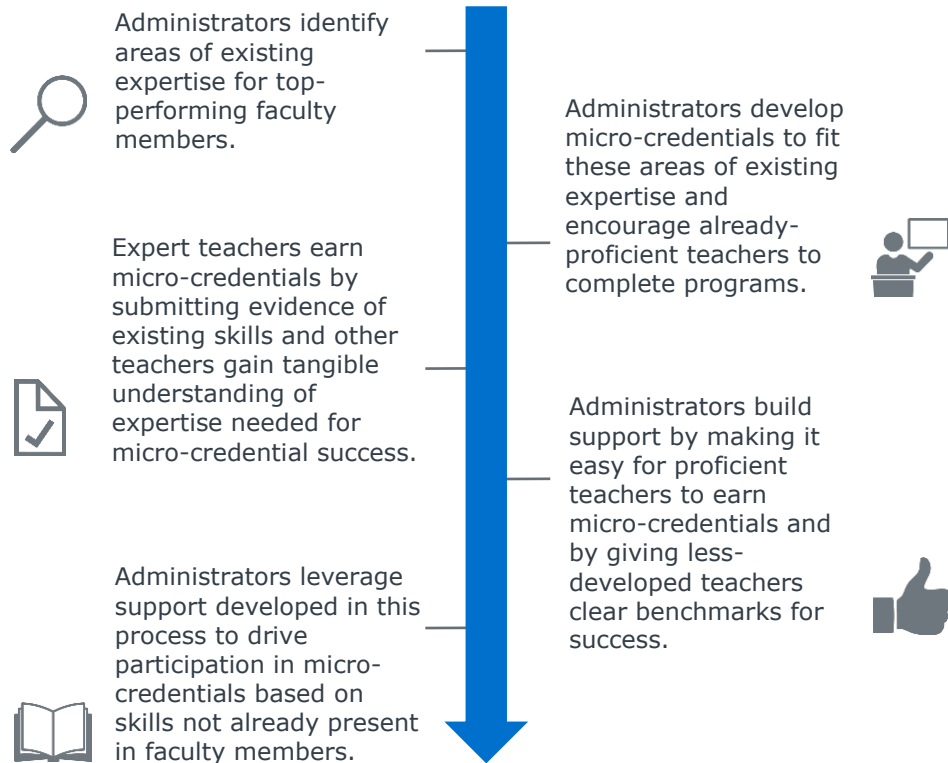


Similarly, administrators at District C also focused pilot participant recruitment on teachers with already strong skillsets by targeting members of the district's National Board Certified Teachers, Common Core development team, and curriculum team.

In addition to its focus on more experienced teachers, administrators at State G recruited less-experienced teachers to participate as well, partnering them with more experienced teachers to foster collaboration during the micro-credential programs.

Administrators in both districts studied teachers' progress in pilot programs closely but did so using different methods. Administrators at State G gathered feedback from program participants internally after the first year of the pilot program. At District C, administrators partnered with an education consulting firm, to manage program curriculum and evaluate teacher success.

## Micro-Credential Program Full-Scale Implementation Plan at *District C*



Through teacher feedback, administrators at State G learned that participants sought greater program coordination at the district level. Thus, the state-level administrators added district-level coordinators in the second year of the pilot program. State-level program administrators also expanded the micro-credential program’s curricular offerings between years one and two, growing the program from 14 different micro-credential offerings in the first year to 25 different offerings in the pilot program’s second year.

For year three of the pilot program, state-level administrators hope to add school-level program coordination to streamline implementation from the state-level into individual schools.

Half of first-year pilot program participants at State G actually earned micro-credentials, and at District C, only four of 60 pilot program participants earned micro-credentials. Notably, these rates of success were not overly concerning for administrators in either system due to the programs’ pilot status. Instead, administrators focus on learning about factors that influence teacher success in the program, so that they can revise the program and potentially offer it to all teachers within the system.

## Participation Incentives

### Implement Strong Incentives to Drive Participation in Micro-Credential Programs

Contacts from **District A** and **County E** both express the importance of crafting robust incentive structures to increase participation in micro-credential programs. Contacts at District A express the difficulty of communicating the value of micro-credential programs without clear benefits for participating teachers. In contrast,

contacts at **District B** and **State G** believe that teachers' intrinsic motivation to become more skilled serves as the most important force leading teachers to participate in micro-credential programs. However, both do offer participating teachers monetary incentives.

## Common Factors Driving Participation in Micro-Credential Programs



Participating teachers at **District A** can complete a full stack of micro-credential programs to earn one continuing professional development credit to ease ongoing certification requirements.



Participating teachers at **District B** can earn base pay increases of \$200, \$400, or \$600, depending on the breadth and depth of the learning's impact on students.



Administrators at **State G** cite teachers' intrinsic motivation to become better educators as the most important factor influencing teacher participation.

## Offer a Diverse Array of Incentives to Attract Teachers to Micro-Credential Programs

Contacts at profiled districts describe challenges with convincing teachers of the value of these new and innovative professional development models, especially in the absence of clear incentives for program participation. One of the most common ways to drive teacher participation in micro-credential programs is through monetary incentives, as used by **District B**, **District D**, and several districts in **State G**.

At District B, teachers who complete micro-credential programs receive base pay increases of either \$200, \$400, or \$600, with the magnitude of the increase dependent on the depth and breadth of the learning's impact on students. Notably though, teachers at District B must bear all costs associated with completing micro-credential programs on their own, while other districts cover costs for their teachers. While there may not be direct costs associated with internally developed programs, teachers might still need to pay for supplies or resources needed to complete internally developed programs. Administrators at District D also offer participating teachers monetary compensation, but compensation caps over the course of teachers' careers limits pay increases from micro-credential program participation. Contacts at State G explain that two districts within the state's pilot program are exploring monetary incentives for micro-credential program participation as well.

In contrast, contacts at **District A** and **County E** express concerns with the relative lack of strong incentives to participate in district-offered micro-credential programs due to strict, state-level regulations. Administrators at District A cannot provide participating teachers with additional monetary compensation or clear progression on state-required professional development trajectories. However, the district can

provide teachers continuing professional development credits necessary to meet ongoing certification requirements if they complete full stacks of micro-credentials.

Similarly, administrators at **District C** and at County E do not link program participation to direct compensation increases. However, micro-credential participation with County E does provide teachers with professional development experience that moves them along pay scales towards increased compensation. Contacts at District C express concerns about the sustainability of financial incentives for participating teachers. In response to these concerns, administrators frame micro-credential participation to teachers as a way to boost teachers' chances of selection for district leadership opportunities, which could translate into increased compensation.



### **Incorporate Opportunities for Collaboration to Bolster Teacher Buy-In for Micro-Credential Programs**

Contacts at **State G** report that the first participants in micro-credential programs were teachers who were personally driven to gain more pedagogical knowledge and hone teaching skills. However, administrators sought ways to engage teachers who were not as intrinsically motivated to participate. These contacts find that collaborative participation models where teachers engage with micro-credential programs in pairs or small groups are particularly effective at increasing participation among less intrinsically motivated teachers.

## **Adapt Micro-Credential Programs to Fit the Needs of All Teacher Demographics and Increase Buy-In**






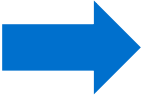
Administrators at multiple profiled school districts and educational systems notice differences in rates of teacher participation in micro-credential programs based upon seniority or grade level. While every district's unique local context will ultimately determine participation rates, contacts at profiled systems highlight effective solutions to potential participation-related issues.

Contacts at **District D** and **State G** both experience drop-offs in participation based upon teacher seniority. Administrators at State G see lower program participation among first-year teachers. These contacts believe that new teachers need time to acclimate themselves to life as professional educators and thus do not tend to have the capacity to participate in micro-credential programs.

In contrast, contacts at District D report that participants in district-offered micro-credential programs tend to be younger teachers. These contacts believe that participants tend to be younger because many older teachers have maximized their potential salary credits. This drop-off also suggests that compensation-based participation incentives become less attractive as teachers become more senior, thus necessitating more diverse incentives, as described above.

Contacts at **County E** state that participant demographics vary more based upon grade level than upon individual teachers' level of experience. These contacts do notice lower participation among teachers in early elementary grades, who tend to be more wary about classroom technology integration—an important issue, because County E's micro-credential programs focuses largely on technology integration. Program administrators at County E respond to these teachers' concerns by delivering more micro-credential program instruction in person, rather than via online modules. This decreases participation lost due to trepidation about technology-based programs.

## Participation Challenges and Solutions of Profiled Micro-Credential Programs by Teacher Tenure and Grade-Level

	Challenge		Potential Solution
	Low participation among first-year teachers		Develop strong support systems for new teachers, including professional development mentorship, as used by <b>State G</b> .
	Low participation among more senior teachers		Use micro-credential success to open access to potential leadership opportunities often sought by more senior teachers, as used by <b>District C</b> .
	Low participation among teachers in early primary grades		Offer in-person professional development to accommodate teachers who may be more apprehensive about integrating technology into their classrooms, as used by <b>County E</b> .



### 3) Research Methodology

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- Project Challenge** Leadership at a member institution approached the Forum with the following questions:
- What types of competency-based professional development experiences have contact districts implemented for their staff?
    - Which programs have proven most impactful?
  - How do contact districts incorporate professional development opportunities focused on micro-credentials or badges specifically?
  - Do contact districts manage competency-based/micro-credential professional development programs internally, externally, or both?
    - If both, which portions of the programming do contact district manage internally and which include partnerships with external organizations?
  - How do contact districts coordinate competency-based/micro-credential professional development programs at the district level?
  - What challenges did contact districts face in the implementation of competency-based/micro-credential professional development programs?
    - How did contact districts overcome these implementation obstacles?
  - How do contact districts incentivize participation and maximize teacher buy-in for competency-based/micro-credentialing professional development programs?
  - How do contact districts measure the effectiveness of competency-based/micro-credential professional development programs?
  - How do contact districts align their professional development programs to their teacher evaluation frameworks?
    - If applicable, how do schools align these two systems using the Marzano Instructional Framework?

**Project Sources** The Forum consulted the following sources for this report:

- EAB’s internal and online research libraries ([eab.com](http://eab.com))
- The Chronicle of Higher Education (<http://chronicle.com>)
- National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (<http://nces.ed.gov/>)
- Concentric Sky: Badgr (<https://info.badgr.io/>)
- Digital Promise: Educator Micro-Credentials (<http://digitalpromise.org/initiative/educator-micro-credentials/>)
- Teaching Matters (<http://www.teachingmatters.org/>)
- The Danielson Group: The Framework ([www.danielsongroup.org/framework/](http://www.danielsongroup.org/framework/))

# Research Parameters

The Forum interviewed administrators of professional development programs at public school systems across the United States.

## A Guide to Institutions Profiled in this Brief

Institution	Location	Approximate Enrollment
District A	Mid-Atlantic	112,100
District B	Midwest	4,000
District C	Pacific West	74,000
District D	Northeast	2,800
County E	Pacific West	N/A
District F	South	109,700
State G	South	N/A