

# MICRO-CREDENTIALING: A TRANSFORMATIVE PATHWAY TO EDUCATOR RE-LICENSURE

Paul Erickson, PhD

"Data gleaned in this study revealed a significant positive relationship between micro-credentialing and elements of both self-efficacy and collective efficacy."

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Professional learning is a core expectation for educators. Educators, whether they are self-directed as intrinsically motivated learners or compliantly fulfilling requirements set by their employing districts, engage in professional learning throughout their careers.

While educators engage in traditional means of professional learning in the form of workshops and conferences, this study centered on educators' personalized professional learning efforts in the form of micro-credentials. A micro-credential is a "personalized professional unit of study in which a specific competency is earned and/or recognized through a tangible credential" (Professional Standards Board, 2018). Participants in this study completed two micro-credentials over two semesters. This study analyzed their professional learning in its relationship to both self-efficacy and collective efficacy before, during, and after their completion of these micro-credentials. As a tangible incentive, participants also earned re-licensure of their Kansas Teaching License after completing two micro-credentials as approved by the Kansas State Department of Education Professional Standards Board.

Data gleaned in this study revealed a significant positive relationship between micro-credentialing and elements of both self-efficacy and collective efficacy. Additionally, numerous educators earned re-licensure upon completion of their micro-credentialing efforts.

## INTRODUCTION

Existing research indicates that educators engage in ample professional learning but are finding little satisfaction and utility in these experiences. For example, "while 84% of teachers report participating in in-service days only 20 percent are satisfied with them" (Grunwald Associates LLC & Digital Promise, 2015, p. 7). Darling-Hammond, Wei, and Richardson (2009) also report that educators are dissatisfied with traditional forms of professional learning. Darling-Hammond, Wei, and Richardson (2009) found that 90% of educators report participating in professional learning on a yearly basis, but only 59% find their learning "useful."

Satisfaction and perceived utility result when professional learning experiences are efficacious. Educators need more experiences that are efficacious. This study investigated the relationship between micro-credentialing and educator efficacy.

The Kansas State Department of Education is redesigning our educational system with the following vision: Kansas is committed to "leading the world in the success of each student" (Kansas State Department of Education, 2018). This vision challenges Kansas educators, administrators, and policy-makers to rethink how

schools operate, analyzing every system in the field to discern whether it is a support or impediment to meeting the needs of each student (Kansans Can: Talking Points, 2018). In the opinion of the central researcher, leading the world in the success of each student starts with leading the world in the success of each educator. Researchers must analyze every system in the field to discern whether it is a support or impediment to meeting the needs of each educator, starting with professional learning and educator re-licensure. In cooperation with the Kansas State Department of Education Professional Standards Board (a committee formed and overseen by Teacher Licensure and Accreditation), this study analyzed micro-credentialing as a personalized professional pathway to educator re-licensure.

If micro-credentialing is a substantiated means of spiking and sustaining efficacy among educators, then it is a worthwhile effort to redesign our pathway to re-licensure to include personalized professional learning.

## METHODS

This study assessed educator efficacy through digital surveys of Likert-type items as well as interviews with participants and analysis of micro-credentials as artifacts. The study included 42 participants. Their digital survey responses were analyzed along with focus group interviews from nine participants and three artifacts in the form of randomly selected micro-credential submissions. All participants were practicing educators in public schools in Kansas, and all were seeking re-licensure as a result of their completion of two micro-credentials over the course of two semesters of school: Spring 2018 and Fall 2018.

Participants selected from a menu of micro-credentials by Bloomboard, an online platform and provider of micro-credentials, or created their own micro-credentials. Whether Bloomboard provided the micro-credential or the participant created it himself/herself, content connected to a Kansas State Department of Education Board Outcome (for example, Social Emotional Learning) and included the following design components: Research and Plan, Implement, Analyze, Share and Reflect. Digital survey data indicated a significant positive relationship between micro-credentialing and efficacy. Particularly strong relationships were found in efficacious elements like a sense of expertise and ability to effectively teach peers, as well as perception of teammates' knowledge base and teammates' ability to effectively teach students.

Interviews and artifacts indicated similar connections, but also revealed new and different examples of efficacy in the form of empowerment, strong sense of professional identity, and pride in teammates. One educator even shared that morning meetings (the focus of her self-created micro-credential) are now her "secret weapon in building a relentlessly positive class culture."

## CONCLUSION

In the end, it is clear that personalized learning is more than a fad, and it cannot be stereotyped as something only millennial educators do. Instead, personalized learning can serve as an impetus for a meaningful learning experience that can enhance an educator's sense of efficacy, become a pathway to re-licensure, and, most significantly, impact educators on a personal level, transforming their professional identities and/or bringing them closer as a team that trusts, respects, and believes in their collective ability to serve students.

"If micro-credentialing is a substantiated means of spiking and sustaining efficacy among educators, then it is a worthwhile effort to redesign our pathway to re-licensure to include personalized professional learning."

## RESEARCHER RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings in this study led the central researcher to consider a diverse range of recommendations from embedding micro-credentials in methods courses in teacher preparation programs to cementing micro-credentials as the framework for Individual Plans of Study for Kansas educators. Perhaps the most unique and potentially impactful is a recommendation for the State of Kansas to honor educators' personalized learning efforts with re-licensure.

In collaboration with the KSDE Professional Standards Board, the researcher discussed and drafted a model for instituting a policy related to micro-credentialing equating to re-licensure. Based on the findings in this study, the Professional Standards Board has reached consensus on the belief that personalized professional learning is a significant pathway toward building educator efficacy and should be considered as work/evidence toward educator re-licensure.

It is the recommendation of the central researcher that there is a continued emphasis on Kansas State Board Outcomes as part of the content for micro-credentials that would equate to re-licensure. It is also recommended that the number of micro-credentials required for re-licensure should increase from two to five. This recommendation corresponds to the the teacher licensure period and implies that learning is ongoing; one microcredential should be completed each year of the professional license.

The Professional Standards Board supports this recommendation and has settled on five micro-credentials (over a five-year cycle) that correspond to re-licensure and originate from defined categories of professional learning. The proposed categories of professional learning have been Kansas State Board Outcomes and Individual Professional Learning Outcomes. While consensus has not been reached yet on the set number of micro-credentials per category, the recommendation has been a ratio of three micro-credentials falling in the category of Kansas State Board Outcomes and two micro-credentials falling in the category of Individual Professional Learning Outcomes. The Kansas State Board Outcomes category would include a menu of micro-credentials that emphasize the five Kansas State Board Outcomes—Social Emotional Learning, Kindergarten Readiness, Individual Plans of Study, Graduation Rates, and Post-Secondary Success. The Individual Professional Learning Outcomes category would be much more diverse and would emphasize district, school, or personalized professional learning interests that the educator's school or district Professional Development Council (PDC) would approve.

This model embraces the tight-loose orientation (DuFour & Fullan, 2013) that is essential to innovative policy and its success. The model is tight in that it is a set number of micro-credentials over a five-year re-licensure cycle and in its connection back to Kansas State Board Outcomes. One could argue that it would have a significantly more relevant connection to Kansas State Board Outcomes than any current re-licensure pathway, as those are open to any professional learning topics so long as they as equate to PDC points and/or graduate credit. The model is loose in that it allows the individual learner significant voice and choice within the recommended parameters. While the category is defined, the educator can choose on which Kansas State Board Outcome to focus and in which micro-credential on the menu he/she would

"Systems and individuals within systems both crave and need continuity if both are to be optimally effective."

engage his/her learning efforts. In addition, two of the five required micro-credentials would still be specific to the educator's individual learning curiosities and/or needs.

Systems and individuals within systems crave and need continuity if both are to be optimally effective. For educators in Kansas, that continuity encompasses professional learning, evaluation, and state initiatives. All three of these crucial elements currently exist in relative isolation. Micro-credentials could be the variable that welds them together, providing an unprecedented level of continuity among state and district systems and the individuals that work and thrive within them.

## REFERENCES

Darling-Hammond, L., Wei, R.C., & Richardson, N. (2009). Professional learning in the learning profession: A status report on teacher development in United States and abroad. National Staff Development Council.

Dufour, R. & Fullan, M. (2013). Cultures built to last: Systemic PLC's at work. Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree Press.

Grunwald Associates LLC & DigitalPromise. (2015). Making professional learning count: Recognizing educators' skills with micro-credentials. Creative Commons. Retrieved from: [http://digitalpromise.org/wpcontent/uploads/2014/05/making\\_professional\\_learning\\_count.pdf](http://digitalpromise.org/wpcontent/uploads/2014/05/making_professional_learning_count.pdf)

Kansas State Department of Education. (2018, March 1st). Kansans can: Kansas leads the world in the success of each student. Retrieved from: [http://www.ksde.org/Portals/0/Communications/Vision/KC\\_Vision\\_for\\_Education\\_KS\\_pageview.pdf](http://www.ksde.org/Portals/0/Communications/Vision/KC_Vision_for_Education_KS_pageview.pdf)

Kansas State Department of Education. (2018, March 1st) Retrieved from: <https://www.ksde.org/Agency/Division-of-Learning-Services/Teacher-Licensureand-Accreditation/Postsecondary/Educator-Preparation/Professional-Learning>

Kansas State Department of Education. (2018, March 1st). Retrieved from: <https://www.ksde.org/Portals/0/TLA/Educator%20Eval/Training%20Archives/ANN/KSEdEvalSysHdbk%20-%202016-2017.pdf>

Professional Standards Board, Teacher Licensure and Accreditation, Kansas State Department of Education, (2018).

## CONTACT INFORMATION

To learn more about this research brief and other research endeavors in the College of Education at Kansas State University, please reach out to the Office of External Funding and Research at: [coeresearch@k-state.edu](mailto:coeresearch@k-state.edu)

Major Professor: Dean Debbie Mercer

To view the full Dissertation, go here: <http://hdl.handle.net/2097/39796>