

Micro-credential Pilot: Year Two

Overview

Micro-credentials are a way for teachers to demonstrate professional competencies and provide evidence of outcomes from professional learning. Their strength lies in the flexibility, voice and choice, and relevance they provide teachers. Teachers have control over how the learning occurs and can choose topics that are most relevant to them and their students at the time. While teachers can earn micro-credentials independently, the department conducted the Tennessee Micro-credential Pilot to gather feedback and explore avenues for providing more personalized learning for educators across the state.

The Tennessee Department of Education believes that:

1. Its role in professional learning is to inform, educate, guide, and support districts in creating systems and structures that promote personalized, competency-based professional learning to educators and support staff.
2. Providing educators with opportunities for personalized, competency-based professional learning, supported by district and school leaders, will increase instructional effectiveness and will ultimately improve the quality of outcomes for students in Tennessee.
3. By increasing district capacity to offer personalized competency-based professional learning, districts will see higher retention rates of high-potential and effective educators.
4. Differentiating educator learning experiences and giving teachers voice and choice in their own professional development produces two important outcomes: 1) increased relevance of content leading to more active engagement in learning, and 2) increased professionalism in districts and schools with environments that are more likely to attract, effectively develop, and retain talented educators.

Year One Summary

The department's strategic plan, *Tennessee Succeeds*, identifies educator support as one of five priority areas to help the state reach its four major education goals by 2020. In specifically aiming to support "the preparation and development of an exceptional educator workforce," Tennessee set the stage for the exploration of micro-credentials (MCs) as a form of personalized professional learning.

The year one pilot sought to directly impact up to 100 teachers, 58 of whom met face-to-face and served as a focus group. An additional 17 teachers agreed to participate virtually by earning micro-credentials independently and providing feedback on the experience. Among teachers in the focus group, 29 (with 4–9 years of teaching experience) acted as mentor teachers to 29 novice teachers (with 1–3 years of teaching experience). Teachers in the pilot were asked to earn up to three micro-credentials from a curated set aligned to the TEAM rubric indicators of questioning, thinking, and problem solving. These categories present the most common areas for growth within the TEAM rubric.

The pilot sought to capture teacher perceptions about micro-credentials as a form of personalized learning, including details around the general quality, rigor, and relevance of the credentials. It also aimed to collect teacher input on the process required to earn micro-credentials. This input addressed questions about

isolation and collaboration, helpfulness of associated resources, and time required to earn the credential. The department used findings from the pilot to help inform policy changes regarding micro-credentials as a pathway to license renewal and advancement. The department will continue to use lessons learned from the micro-credential pilot to inform other professional learning pathways.

Year Two Vision

Building on year one of the Tennessee Micro-credential Pilot, year two specifically seeks to begin building district capacity to offer differentiated professional learning to educators through micro-credentials in two pathways. The pathways include:

1. **Expanded TEAM-aligned pathway:** This pathway builds on year one of the pilot by continuing to offer micro-credentials associated with the TEAM indicators of questioning, thinking, and problem solving. While teachers have been generally pleased with the quality, rigor, and impact of the original 14 micro-credentials, more experienced teachers have asked for expanded options within and across TEAM indicators. Therefore, depending on available micro-credentials, the expansion will either increase the number of individual MCs within each of the three categories, expand the number of categories to align with more indicators from the TEAM rubric, or both.
2. **Teacher leader pathway:** In the early stages of year one, the potential for MCs to provide objective recognition for teachers who demonstrate leadership skills and capacity became apparent. The department believes this teacher leader pathway could provide a structured framework whereby teachers who are learning to become leaders have targeted outcomes and tailored support in progressing toward this goal.

Year Two Goals

Through this pilot, the department expects to:

1. Support districts in making data-based decisions and personalizing professional learning through micro-credentials, making districts more effective at developing novice teachers, retaining talented teachers, and attracting promising teachers to their systems. Success measures may include higher satisfaction ratings with district professional development on the Tennessee Educator Survey and higher retention rates of effective teachers within the next three to five years.
2. Learn about the structures, supports, and conditions that lead to the greatest success with MCs. Success measures may include increased rate of teacher MC submissions, positive teacher self-reported impact of MCs on instruction, and positive impact on student behavioral outcomes, formative measures, and summative achievements.

Selection Criteria for District Participation

Building district capacity to provide personalized, competency-based professional learning is critical in developing and retaining effective educators in Tennessee. Such efforts must be manned at a local level where embedded support can be offered and accessed by educators on a daily basis. Therefore, year two of the Tennessee Micro-credential Pilot will directly engage districts and support them in engaging teachers. The department will seek districts which fall into the following six categories in selecting participants for the pilot:

1. Districts that have regional coaches in the Teacher Leader Network.

2. Districts that are in phase two of the Teacher Leader Network
3. Districts that reach out for self-selected participation in the TEAM-aligned pilot
4. Districts that had teachers engaged in the Tennessee Micro-credential Pilot: Year One
5. Districts that have over 10 percent attrition of highly effective teachers based on human capital reports
6. Districts that were involved in the department's Personalized Learning Task Force
7. Districts that are located in CORE regions that have no other representation in statewide networks

Criteria for District Participation: Memo of Understanding

1. Appoint a district coordinator who would be responsible for overseeing the pilot implementation within the district.
2. Use district- and state-level data to provide a well-defined rationale for participating in the pilot, including an explanation of what problem will be addressed with MCs.
3. Invite a minimum of ten teachers to participate in the pilot and provide adequate support as they earn micro-credentials throughout the year. The maximum number of pilot participants in the teacher leader pathway is fourteen. The maximum number of participants in the TEAM-aligned pathway is 100 teachers.
4. Send appropriate representatives to face-to-face convenings throughout the school year.
5. Provide release time and cover the cost of substitute teachers for designated teachers to attend any required convenings as part of a team representing the district. (This will vary by pathway.)
6. Approve five PDPs for each earned MC or allow MCs to stand in lieu of some portion of five district professional development days.
7. Provide the department with names of participants, and share all requested data for research purposes.

Requirements for District Coordinators

Each participating district will be asked to appoint a district coordinator to oversee pilot implementation at the district level. This will help ensure that after the conclusion of the pilot, districts have sufficient expertise and experience to leverage MCs at the system level. Below are the responsibilities that the district coordinator will be asked to have the capacity to perform:

- 1) Organize the selection of teacher participants.
- 2) Attend monthly update meetings held in alternating formats of face-to-face and virtual sessions. Face-to-face meetings will be held in Nashville from 10 a.m. – 3 p.m. in September, October, December, March, and May. Mileage will be covered for all coordinators and hotel will be reimbursed for those driving more than three hours each way.
- 3) Provide sufficient support to teacher participants to promote successful completion of MCs. These supports may include timely and accurate communication, district pilot meetings between October and May, and/or site visits with teachers to answer questions, share ideas, clarify misunderstandings, gather feedback, and celebrate milestones.

Cost

The only cost associated with this pilot is the cost of providing substitute teachers to allow pilot participants to attend a total of three convenings in Nashville.

Timeline: Teacher Leader Pathway

Late June 2017	Select districts to be invited to pilot
Early July	Send official invitations
Mid July	Receive notification of districts who opt-in to pilot
Late August	Send welcome packet with key dates and information
Late September	Orientation Session
October (LEAD)	Session Two
Sept-Dec	Mid-pilot Check-ins – Collected via site visits to individual districts
Dec	Virtual Session
Late January 2018	Session Three
April/May	Final Pilot Survey
May	Concluding Session

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