Micro-credentials & the transformation of professional learning in California schools
IF WE ARE TO REALIZE A PERSONALIZED, COMPETENCY-BASED SYSTEM OF LEARNING FOR EVERY STUDENT, THEN POLICYMAKERS IN CALIFORNIA MUST ALSO SUPPORT TEACHERS AND ADMINISTRATORS LEADING THEIR OWN LEARNING.
Across the United States, personalized, competency-based learning, where K-12 students can demonstrate mastery at their own pace, is gaining momentum. However, if students are going to have more flexibility in how and when they learn, those who teach them must also have the power to lead their own learning. To ensure that every student meets the academic demands of the Common Core and its emphasis on higher order thinking and real-world applications, the way teachers and administrators learn is the key to school reform. And with good reason: new research points to the power of teacher-led learning to improve student achievement.

First, Dylan Wiliam found that teachers learn best from colleagues and supervisors who help them take risks and embrace their weaknesses, not hide from them — and in doing so, activate ownership of their own learning. Second, Ken Frank discovered that teachers are more likely to make instructional shifts when they have indirect exposure to new ideas through collegial interactions, coupled with formal professional development. Third, Alan Daly uncovered a strong relationship between teachers “reaching out” to one another by sharing knowledge of teaching strategies and higher student scores on formative assessments. And finally, Elizabeth Stosich’s investigation revealed that teachers are more likely to revise their instruction in alignment to the Common Core when there is support for “working with students and content in new ways rather than simply one that requires teachers to execute specific pedagogical approaches.”

Nowhere is there more urgency to transform teachers’ professional learning than in California — where increasingly diverse students are expected to graduate from high school with the knowledge, higher order thinking skills, and social and emotional dispositions necessary to be successful in the global economy and our pluralistic democracy. The September 2012 report of the California Task Force on Educator Excellence called for the state to “establish a strong infrastructure” for teachers and administrators to engage in high-quality professional learning as well as “develop, leverage, and incentivize” a range of opportunities for them to do so.

Since the release of the task force report a few years ago, micro-credentials have emerged as a catalyst for educators to show how they develop and spread student-centered teaching practices and deeper learning outcomes for students they serve. Unlike most one-size-fits-all approaches to professional development, micro-credentials are designed for educators to pursue learning based on their own needs and their students’ challenges and strengths, as well as on school goals and district priorities. They are meant to be responsive to busy professional schedules and are expected to generate new ways to recognize what teachers and administrators know and can do.
THE EMERGING MICRO-CREDENTIALING MOVEMENT

Over the past several years, Digital Promise has been building an "ecosystem" for advancing the design, development, and implementation of micro-credentials as a way for K-12 educators to personalize their learning and demonstrate their skills and accomplishments. Teachers often have very little choice in their formal professional development (only one in five teachers in America always chooses his or her professional development). Micro-credentials present a completely different approach:

Micro-credentials are based on evidence of educators' actual skills and abilities, not the amount of "seat time" they have logged in their learning.

Educators select micro-credentials to pursue based on their own needs, their students' challenges and strengths, school goals, district priorities, and/or instructional shifts.

Micro-credentials are responsive to teachers' schedules — using an agile online system to identify competencies and submit evidence to trained reviewers.

Educators can share their micro-credentials across social media platforms — and have the potential to serve as portable currency for professional learning that can be recognized across districts and states as well as unions.

Micro-credentials can assist school system leaders in tapping into the portfolio submissions data to inform decision-making about investments in professional learning to most effectively support teaching practices, student learning, and leadership development.

The micro-credentialing movement also comes at a time where there are unprecedented opportunities to learn anytime and anywhere. EdSurge, a California-based for-profit enterprise, created a research guide that highlights the "extraordinary changes in PD tools" now available for educators to engage with one another, find support for using new pedagogical approaches, and assess the impact of their teaching practices. The EdSurge Product Index includes more than 600 curriculum products to help educators teach, more personally, a number of
concepts and skills typically associated with current student standards in California and across the nation.

As of June 2017, Digital Promise and its 40 content partners (issuers of micro-credentials) have developed more than 300 micro-credentials to address a variety of educator skills and competencies. They vary widely in the focus and time investment required for teachers and administrators to submit their evidence. For example, they may assess highly granular aspects of teaching (such as Wait Time, issued by Digital Promise) and more ambitious deeper learning pedagogies (such as Creative Thinking and Innovation and Learning to Learn, also issued by Digital Promise). They might also assess bigger picture competencies like a bold brand of teacher leadership, such as the Collective Leadership and Virtual Community Organizing stacks of micro-credentials issued by the Center for Teaching Quality (CTQ) or the Performance Assessment Design stack issued by the Center for Collaborative Education (CCE).

Micro-credentials are assessed and awarded by each of the content partners, including nonprofits, universities, and an increasing number of school districts.* As of late July 2017, there have been more than 5,000 submissions from more than 550 school districts across the nation. And at least 3,440 unique users have applied for one or more micro-credentials. Approximately 55 percent of those who submitted “electronic portfolios” of evidence have been awarded a micro-credential by issuing organizations.

Currently, these micro-credentials are housed on a first-generation online platform, supported by BloomBoard, which facilitates selection and submission assessment. Over the last several months, there have been about 13,000 unique visitors per month to the Bloomboard “storefront.” Most recently, the National Education Association (NEA) is launching its own micro-credentialing system and platform as part of its Center for Great Public Schools to create a competency-based pathway for members to be recognized for

---

* As the micro-credentialing ecosystem matures, submissions will be evaluated by expert educators who have already earned a particular micro-credential; reviewers will assess evidence using a rubric and scoring guide to offer feedback. Standard assessment practices require that at least two trained reviewers examine the evidence, and if they do not agree, then a third assessor makes a judgment about whether to award the micro-credential.
their accomplishments in both teaching and leading. The NEA is partnering with CTQ in this effort and is developing a strategy where district and union leaders can collaborate on using micro-credentials to transform how teachers are recognized for their learning and leadership. With a goal of supporting professional learning among all educators (members and non-members), NEA will make freely available more than 70 micro-credentials in the fall of 2017.

Additionally, in an effort to build currency for micro-credentials, nine states now offer continuing education units (CEUs) for teachers who earn them from the Digital Promise ecosystem, and several more state proposals are pending approval. Beyond CEU approvals, several states are now formally engaging with micro-credentials in their professional development structures:

- **Arkansas** is piloting micro-credentials in leadership, as well as in novice teacher mentoring, and expecting 1,500 participants;

- **North Carolina** convened a policy working group—including its state education agency, NC State University, UNC-Greensboro, and several school districts—to inform and define a framework for using micro-credentials to transform professional learning for educators;

- **Rhode Island** piloted a stack of teacher leadership micro-credentials (created by CCE) for performance assessment reform micro-credentials as part of a larger Assessment for Learning Project (funded by the Next Generation Learning Challenge) — and is now preparing to expand this effort with Phase II support with other school districts and states;

- **South Carolina** is piloting an array of micro-credentials (including CTQ’s stack on Collective Leadership) and drawing on teachers’ experiences to fuel the development of statewide models for collective leadership for school improvement and teacher recruitment and retention; and

- **Tennessee** is beginning the second year of a pilot with 100 teachers in 15 districts, which follows year one of 60 teachers experimenting with 15 micro-credentials aligned with the state’s teaching evaluation standards. (This fall, CTQ, with its stack on going public with policy and pedagogy, is working with the Tennessee Department of Education to help teachers in the pilot share their experiences and insights with policymakers and practitioners.)

Colleges of education are exploring how micro-credentials can help them transcend the prescribed fixed set of seat-time oriented courses required of their
teacher and administrator candidates. Both Arizona State University and the University of Central Florida are at the forefront of preparing pre-service candidates in engaging personalized learning opportunities tied to both state and national teaching standards. In addition, Educators Rising has developed a set of micro-credentials for high school students to demonstrate basic teaching skills while encouraging them to enter the profession.

At the district level, there are more than 50 formal and informal pilots underway. They range widely in structure and approach. (See most recent CTQ and Digital Promise policy update.) In fact, some districts and states are interested in using their own platforms so teachers and administrators can experience a more "one-stop shop" professional learning experience. For example, Kettle Moraine School District, a small district in Wisconsin, has made the most progress to date. As noted in a recent Digital Promise report, about 80 percent of the district’s teachers have earned at least one pre-approved micro-credential over the last three years, increasing their base salaries anywhere from $100 to $600, depending on the scope and complexity of the micro-credentials earned.9

Long Beach Unified School District (LBUSD) is also pursuing micro-credentials. Over the last year, and with support from the Stuart Foundation and Silver Giving Foundation, CTQ worked with LBUSD educators to pilot a stack of micro-credentials in support of teacher and administrator learning aligned with the Common Core and NextGen Science Standards.

CTQ and LBUSD began collaborating in 2016 with the design of a stack of micro-credentials focused on teachers as leaders of professional learning for teaching to the standards. The stack was developed (See Appendix A) in concert with the Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education (SCOPE) and teachers and administrators involved in the Instructional Leadership Corps — an initiative of the California Teachers Association (CTA) and SCOPE. And while CTA chose not to engage directly in the micro-credentialing pilot, it was important to work with teachers and coaches who had been trained through the Instructional Leadership Corps (ILC) to “provide expertise in subject area instructional shifts” and create “digital learning modules” aligned to particular Common Core or NexGenScience Standards.

Our Common Core PD micro-credentials expect educators to show evidence of how they use adult learning theory to understand, plan for, and implement shifts in teaching practice. The micro-credentials also require them to show—using a variety of artifacts—how they planned for and assessed the professional learning experience they led. To earn the micro-credentials (among other criteria), educators must offer a compelling case for what they would do differently to facilitate a similar session in the future, and why. Artifacts that educators must assemble to earn the ELA PD micro-credentials include the following:

- Modeling the instructional shifts in action through live demonstration, inquiry, or lesson videos;
- Facilitating protocols to analyze teaching videos and/or student work;
- Unpacking instructional planning, teaching, and assessment tools to strengthen lesson design and implementation;
- Providing opportunities for educators to practice analyzing text complexity, including quantitative, qualitative, and reader and task analysis; and
- Providing opportunities for educators to analyze their own efforts to embed the ELA shifts into daily lessons using facilitation or coaching tools such as the Instructional Practice Guide (IPG).
LBUSD was ready to collaborate and needed a vehicle to take its leading approach to professional development even further. Here's what school leaders told us:

**RUTH ASHLEY**
**DEPUTY SUPERINTENDENT**

“With micro-credentials we could see what teachers already have (in terms of knowledge and skill) as well as what they would be able to do. We could possibly build a profile of teachers with those skills and have a means by which so many more can expand their expertise.”

**JILL BAKER**
**DEPUTY SUPERINTENDENT**

“We don’t have a great way of tracking résumé additions. Micro-credentials seem huge as an active way to show what educators know. We now want teachers and administrators to be able to bring in skills from outside the district as well — like becoming Google certified.”

**DAVID ZAID**
**DIRECTOR OF EMPLOYEE RELATIONS**

“Ideally, if I were able to dream out loud, I would like to see us aligning micro-credentialing with the California Standards for the Teaching Profession to take classroom management, teaching, planning, and analysis to the next level. I also see an area of career development where we develop pathways for leadership without leaving the classroom.”

We have learned early lessons from our micro-credentialing work nationwide as well as with our pilot in California with LBUSD educators. The next section describes findings from surveys, interviews, and our on-the-ground work with administrators, teachers, and coaches in the district.
Educators, policymakers, and even the general public have heard much about LBUSD. Accolades abound for the district — including winning the prestigious Broad Prize for Urban Education in 2003, and being identified in 2012 as one of “Five of the World’s Highest-Performing School Systems” along with Finland, Hong Kong, Ontario (Canada), and Singapore.

Over the last 25 years, the district, serving 74,000 diverse students in 84 schools, has maintained a focus on curriculum and instruction as well as respect for and support for its teachers, which has contributed significantly to their substantial and sustained success. This has been “the Long Beach Way.” Led by just two superintendents over two and a half decades (Carl Cohn from 1992 to 2002, and Chris Steinhauser from 2002 to present), the district has been steadfast in its efforts not to “fix” teachers but to unleash their potential. Jeff Bryant, an education reporter, after spending time with district educators and the students in the spring of 2017, said:

In virtually every interaction I had with teachers, the day-to-day work with students and their responses to the students’ interests and needs, rather than adherence to standards, was foremost in the conversation. Also in Long Beach, student performance is frequently assessed at classroom, district, and state levels, but test scores are never used to rank schools and evaluate teachers.10

Several years ago, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation invited LBUSD to be one of a handful of districts to be part of its professional development challenge — to take its professional development approach to a new level and align with growing evidence of how teacher training makes a difference for student learning.

The district drives top-down reforms, but does so by first learning from and with front-line educators: principals, teachers, coaches, and paraprofessionals. As part of their Gates-funded professional development reforms, district administrators spent a year gathering data from 4,000 teachers with surveys and in-depth design work with more than 150 classroom practitioners and instructional coaches. The district learned that teachers were interested in a system that allowed them to show their expertise and validate their learning around common frameworks — and even celebrate their work. They also learned that teachers wanted the opportunity to learn asynchronously.

As a result, myPD launched almost three years ago. The platform is designed to help teachers personalize their learning based on their students’ academic performance data, previous professional development courses, self-assessments, and administrator feedback. LBUSD teachers create a personal learning plan based on the feedback. Next, the district’s online platform proposes an array of professional development offerings, aligned with California Standards for the Teaching Profession that can be accessed in both virtual and face-to-face

TAKING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT TO THE NEXT LEVEL IN LONG BEACH UNIFIED

Ninety-three percent of teachers stay [in LBUSD] forever. We have 2,000 credentialed teachers who want to get into the district. We give up to 15 years of service credit. Half our hires are new and half the hires have experience, and 95% of administrators were teachers in district.

—LBUSD Superintendent Chris Steinhauser
settings. Teachers can contribute their own analyses as well as feedback from their peers, creating ways for classroom practitioners to know more about one another’s professional learning. The district continues to add self-paced online modules and videos of Long Beach teachers demonstrating what it looks like to teach to the standards. Each step of myPD’s technology platform, built by Performance Matters, is automated. And now the district is ready to invest more in teachers, trained as virtual community organizers, to support a range of online learning groups.

LBUSD educators keep refining and improving the system while slowly engaging teachers (and the principals who support them) in myPD. In 2017, an average of nearly 1,500 of the district’s 4,000 teachers are accessing learning opportunities through myPD each month. And with its feedback loops, district administrators assemble evidence to push themselves to be better at supporting teachers and principals. For example, survey data assembled over the last several years reveal that teachers are more likely to define professional development as formally collaborating with their colleagues, not just workshops. And when they engage in workshops, teachers report they are more likely to be organized by and for their colleagues. Since 2012, when the first surveys were administered, teachers’ sense of collective responsibility for students has increased as well as their “overall professional development ownership and engagement.” Teachers report spending about three hours on professional development each week — more than twice the national average.

But the evidence we examined suggests that more work needs to be done.

For example, we learned that two in three district teachers reported there was not enough time for collaboration with colleagues. And their responses revealed that from 2013 to 2016, the usefulness of their collaborative activities decreased significantly for almost all activities—such as observing peers, analyzing student data, and developing instructional materials. In fact, four in 10 teachers have yet to observe another classroom to offer feedback to one of their peers. However, as we learned from district leaders, teachers may be engaged in offering feedback to one another — but it is often more informal.

While the district has created over 650 self-paced learning opportunities for teachers through myPD, district leaders recognize that the diverse needs of teachers and the students are not fully met. And while 70 percent of teachers in the myPD early adopter schools agreed that professional development activities met individual needs, 41 percent of teachers reported that they wanted more time for professional development. And only 16 percent of teachers strongly agreed that there was sufficient flexibility in their schedule to pursue professional development of their interests.

This is how and why CTQ and LBUSD began its partnership to explore the possibilities of micro-credentials in catalyzing educator-led learning in the district.

---

*However only 12 percent of principals reported that teachers never observe others’ classrooms to get or offer feedback.*
Local conditions require micro-credentials to be flexible in their design, curation, and deployment. Since language can carry a variety of meanings depending on the district context, CTQ was especially attentive to the content of each micro-credential, how that content was communicated to teachers, and how the submissions process would function as educators acclimated to the format.

Working closely with myPD Program Specialist Amy Pendray, initial drafts of the micro-credentials were rigorously vetted and revised over a period of weeks to ensure that what was being assessed corresponded to the language and experience of local educators.

Of the approximately 200 teachers with whom the micro-credential pilot opportunity was shared — primarily National Board Certified Teachers, instructional coaches, and professional development facilitators — more than 50 attended an informational meeting in May 2017. Of those attendees, just one indicated no interest in participating. No incentives were included for participation. The submission window for micro-credential portfolios was open from May to August 2017. Ultimately, portfolios were submitted by four educators.

Though leaders in many districts might be discouraged by the few submissions, LBUSD embraced the valuable data gathered from the effort.

District leaders knew from survey research and focus groups that teachers were interested in micro-credentials as a means of learning and demonstrating expertise. There was an overwhelming response to the district’s query of interest in the micro-credential pilot. Anecdotally, the district continued to hear from teachers about how interested they were in micro-credentials despite being unable to submit portfolios. Yet, teacher capacity for assembling and submitting portfolios did not match their enthusiasm for doing so.

Among those interested in the pilot who opted not to submit a portfolio—four of whom shared feedback on the process through a survey—lack of time was most often cited as the factor that limited participation. The absence of incentives was also cited as a limiting factor. As we learned in follow-up interviews from pilot candidates, "time is money, and this program offered neither.”

Assistant Superintendent Pamela Seki reminded us that while the district offers financial support for National Board Certification and a generous stipend for those who become certified, the district does not have significant numbers of educators working to earn certification. Moreover, this rate of micro-credential completion reflects what CTQ has observed in various district and statewide pilot efforts across the country. Micro-credentials remain in an early stage of innovation rarely tied to any form of compensation, so pilot participants tend to be early adopters.

When asked what factors might lead educators to submit micro-credentials in the future, respondents indicated that incentive structures and a wider variety of micro-credential options would be most compelling.

The micro-credentialing program is already aligned with professional growth goals. I feel it is a valuable program on its own merit. However, when bills must be paid, I must choose between spending my time on work that pays me money or work that does not. This summer I had opportunities for paid work which became a priority. If there had been a financial component to the micro credentialing program, I would have been more likely to complete it.

—LBUSD Educator
The educators also indicated that alignment with professional learning goals and time within the work day to pursue micro-credentials would be persuasive.

Pilot participants indicated that while extrinsic rewards like a stipend would not be a primary motivator for pursuing a micro-credential, being able to use required adjunct hours to assemble a portfolio would be of interest because it would allow for more personalized use of time that is already accounted for in the collective bargaining agreement.

Another factor raised by those who submitted portfolios was the challenge of doing so in isolation. The group recommended that future micro-credential efforts include support for collaboration within schools and districts in order to facilitate group dynamics and discussions that would encourage individual teachers to persevere through the process.

We learned that LBUSD administrators are cautious of the tension between micro-credentials carrying weight among educators and slipping into a mechanism of compliance. District leaders want to ensure that micro-credentials provide access to a broader pool of candidates for leadership while not functioning as a barrier to accessing those opportunities or roles.

Superintendent Steinhauser believes that micro-credentials will allow teachers to demonstrate their proficiency across a range of skills from a variety of learning approaches. From a human capital management standpoint, Deputy superintendent Jill Baker anticipates micro-credentials providing the district with a means of keeping up with the additional skills and areas of expertise that teachers accumulate over the course of a career. David Zaid, director of employee relations, recognizes a related opportunity for teachers to earn distinction within the profession while working toward a particular career pathway.

Kim Dalton, director of certificated employee services, wants to expand the use of micro-credentials in LBUSD after observing how teachers are getting students to demonstrate through badges (micro-credentials for students) what they can do with what they have learned.

CTQ believes that micro-credentials can leverage important opportunities for principals and teachers to learn to lead together in order to assemble evidence of collective impact on student learning and school improvement.
District administrators in Long Beach have raised good questions about the progress they are making and how they might achieve a transformational vision for professional learning in the years ahead. In the concluding section, we feature four of the most pressing questions that remain for the district to explore in subsequent phases of micro-credential testing.

How might the district and school sites increase the available time for teacher collaboration and improve its usefulness?

Creating time for micro-credentials and inquiry-driven professional development is the primary challenge for transforming professional development. It is also the most vexing. While time is a precious resource, districts in California enjoy a degree of flexibility as part of the Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP). Each school site in LBUSD is given LCAP funds that site councils can allocate, much of which is focused on building release time. Additionally, the 20 adjunct hours per semester that are part of the district’s collective bargaining agreement were considered by a number of district stakeholders as an opportunity worthy of additional exploration.

Across the nation there are a host of examples of how administrators and teachers collectively rethink time, roles, and school design to advance professional learning. The National Center on Time and Learning found that teachers in featured schools spend on average more than 90 minutes per week engaged in collaborative work, and in some schools, they collaborate up to four hours per week. Several years ago, LBUSD conducted a review of professional development time, drawing on the expertise of Marilyn Crawford and her company, TimeWise. In some districts like Fresno Unified, an additional 96 hours of professional development for middle school teachers were created by redesigning instructional schedules. Yet LBUSD is run so efficiently that the TimeWise analysis found little time would be created by revamping schedules across the district.

Long Beach has well-established professional learning communities (PLCs). Effective PLCs hinge on collective inquiry of team members, driven by the rigor of data analytics, and an orientation toward experimentation. The district has many high functioning PLCs across its 84 schools. Micro-credentials can provide tools for teams of teachers and administrators to spread expertise and engage in collective inquiry with a common framework for assembling evidence of impact. Now is the time to experiment with how micro-credentials can be integrated with—not layered on top of—existing PLC tools and processes inside the district. Doing so will require the district’s teachers and administrators to examine what they might abandon to make room for the more intensive time required for assembling, analyzing, and using data associated with the district’s teaching and learning priorities. Today, more than ever, principals and teachers collectively need to learn how to be creative with the time they do have. As Superintendent Steinhauser said:

*The issue will always be time. This nation will never do what Japan does in terms of providing time, outside of their direct teaching responsibilities, to learn from one another. It is not going to happen here. So how do we use the time differently?*

Most schools struggle with finding time for teachers to leave their classrooms to observe their peers, working together in studying student work, and engaging in some form of action research (as required by many micro-credentials). Virtual communities of practice can provide an alternative as a growing body of research points to how to develop them as effective tools of collaborative learning.

How might teacher teams engage in collective inquiry through the micro-credential process, peer observations, and analyses of student work?
Efforts are well underway in Long Beach to establish the right kind of professional learning community — face-to-face and virtual — to support the spread of teaching expertise. For example, in 2016, district teachers logged into myPD over 48,000 times — with peak usage in October (after they were well grounded with their new students and their needs) as well as in June (as they began to reflect on what they needed to work on professionally in the summer). How can the district build on its early efforts to prepare teachers and instructional coaches as virtual community organizers who can deepen and spread expertise on their online platform?

Virtual communities can extend PLCs beyond their usual grade- and subject-level orientation (horizontal and vertical) to a more interdisciplinary focus (diagonal). Long Beach has a long history of using professional development to improve student achievement, including its substantive results on the Common Core assessments. The district supports teachers and coaches in curating content that brings even more instructional cohesion within and across schools. However, if the district is going to deepen and expand its Linked Learning efforts — combining college-focused academics, work-based learning, and integrated student supports — then its PLCs must become more “diagonal” and its teacher evaluation process must value more team-based evidence.

Virtual learning communities must be inquiry- and data-driven in ways that encourage teachers across different schools to trust one another in order to facilitate extensive sharing and serious critiques of practices and results. As Deputy Superintendent Jill Baker expressed, “Micro-credentials can support professional learning communities being developed around a particular area of expertise or topic across schools in the district. The aspiration is to bring technology and relationships together.” And Superintendent Steinhauser told us:

"We are seeing cyber PLCs beginning to take shape. I see this happening all over. Micro-credentials could bring people together. I see this with Linked Learning. What we have to do is empower as many people as possible to keep this going."

How can principals be better prepared and supported to identify and match the professional development needs of teachers?

While California is one of only a few states that currently makes no investments in the professional development of school principals and superintendents, supporting principals and the conditions for teacher-led learning have long been priorities in Long Beach. In the district, principals are specifically prepared to support professional learning meetings, and teachers are trained to follow a specific protocol to analyze and improve student learning.

There is more to be done, but Long Beach is already on its way. To find the most suitable candidates for administrative positions throughout the district, leadership profiles are developed that take into account demographics and school needs as well as the successes and failures of current and previous principals. The district is working with simulations that will be part of myPD — 50 modules dedicated to leadership development — that will provide data indicating which candidates might best fit a certain profile. Rather than simulation performance alone determining how candidates score on those modules, the district is considering inclusion of a competency component based on a combination of micro-credentials.

In particular, districts need to be explicit as to what principals need to know and be able to do in cultivating teacher learning and leadership — and in particular — how they use the evidence from micro-credentials in doing so. Stosich found that principals need to frame ways for teachers to develop curricular units for the Common Core and share their inquiry experiences with one another, but also offer considerable support for the process — including new or reinvented time and tools.

Next generation training for principals needs to focus on the skills they need in working with teachers to cultivate the kind of teaching and learning conditions necessary for educator-led and competency-based learning and micro-credentialing to take hold. The California School Leadership Academy (CSLA) was sponsored and funded by the state for nearly 20 years but was eliminated as part of budget cuts over a decade ago. The newly-formed California Collaborative for Educational Excellence, led by former Long Beach superintendent Carl Cohn, could be a meaningful venue for organizing and leading this kind of training and certification of school leadership.
What can state, district, and union leaders do in the short- and long-term to use micro-credentials to transform professional development?

Designing state, district, and union policies to take advantage of micro-credentials requires careful planning and implementation to avoid adding to the already crowded field of compliance mechanisms. Long Beach is especially attentive to this notion in light of efforts elsewhere in which micro-credentials have become an exit exam for a transcript record of professional development. If micro-credentials are required, then the concern becomes that their value is diluted by compliance. On the other hand, LBUSD administrators want to develop policies for micro-credentials to hold currency that encourages teachers to develop leadership skills and for the district to utilize them—not serve as a barrier that prevents them from accessing certain roles and opportunities.

Although a growing number of states are offering CEUs or other forms of credit for successful micro-credential submissions, there is currently no framework established for valuing micro-credentials in ways that encourage the kind of instructional experimentation and team-based inquiry that is paramount to successful implementation of the Common Core. There is much work to be done in Long Beach and other districts in California with the leaders from both management and union working side-by-side. With the California Labor-Management Institute (LMI) supporting union and school leaders working together in school reform, the state has an initial infrastructure to address the challenge of creating the right kind of micro-credentialing currency. Ken Futernick, California State University professor and consultant to LMI, noted, “When local union leaders work with district teachers and administrators in developing their own micro-credentials tied to the standards, then there will be more unified policy support for them.” Micro-credentials can jointly serve the needs of Common Core reform as well as the needs of teachers, as individuals and teams. Building the right kind of micro-credentialing infrastructure will require the threading of a policy needle that serves both specific instructional goals tied to the standards as well as professional development needs of educators. Both can be done — but not without thoughtful experimentation, analysis of what works or not, and the engagement of on-the-ground educators in design and implementation.
If we are to realize a personalized, competency-based system of learning for every student, then policymakers in California must also support teachers and administrators leading their own learning. Long Beach provides an encouraging example of what it might look like for districts to establish clear professional learning goals while remaining flexible on how teachers can demonstrate their achievement. Although the movement continues to rapidly advance across the nation, we have many more questions than answers. However, we have learned a great deal over the last 18 months as we developed and revised the micro-credentials with California teachers and SCOPE, engaged union leaders in the possibilities, and worked with one of the state’s more accomplished school systems. Here are five recommendations:

1. **Pilot and study reinvented PLCs, with specific work processes that provide teachers more time and support to engage in long-term inquiry required by many of the most rigorous micro-credentials.**

2. **Investigate how varied incentives can create micro-credentialing currency in the California context while encouraging the risk-taking necessary for successful implementation of project-based learning tied to the Common Core Standards.**

3. **Encourage everyone in the system to participate in micro-credentials in ways that encourage team learning with a focus on how principals can utilize these tools to advance teacher leadership for the Common Core.**

4. **Explore how universities can begin to utilize micro-credentials in their programs to prepare both pre- and in-service teachers and administrators.**

5. **Experiment with virtual learning communities as a way to create more efficiencies and effectiveness in spreading successful instructional practices for those educators to be better known to their colleagues.**

We believe that micro-credentials can leverage important opportunities for principals and teachers to learn to lead together in order to assemble evidence of collective impact on student learning and school improvement. As Superintendent Steinhauser told us:

"I would say that almost all — 99 percent — of our educators are good people. But how do we let people talk openly about their areas of deficiency — and to build on their strengths and weaknesses? People want to be able to show that they are proficient at something. Micro-credentials have endless power to help us make teaching the public act it needs to be for everyone."
The Long Beach Unified School District (LBUSD) was interested in the CTQ micro-credentials because of its focus on the Common Core and viewed the pilot as a relatively simple way to surface data regarding teacher interest and capacity for pursuing learning in such a format. Recognizing that different micro-credentials require varying investments of teacher time and expertise, Long Beach controlled for participants’ experience by limiting the pilot to a stack of micro-credentials focused on teachers as leaders of professional learning for Common Core and the NextGen Science Standards. Importantly, the district was very interested, and extremely helpful, in revising the CTQ stack of micro-credentials that would fit their needs:

The stack includes the following micro-credentials:

- Facilitating professional learning for CCSS ELA: The educator demonstrates the skills to support teacher learning and/or use of the three instructional shifts of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in English Language Arts.
- Facilitating professional learning for CCSS Math: The educator demonstrates the skills to support teacher learning and/or use of the instructional shifts of CCSS Math Standards or Standards of Math Practice (SMPs).
- Facilitating professional learning for NGSS: The educator demonstrates the skills to support teacher learning using the three dimensions including the strategic and appropriate use of the instructional practices and crosscutting concepts of the Next Generation Science Standards.
- Coaching: The Educator provides coaching support for colleagues on the instructional shifts required by Common Core Math (CCSS Math), Common Core English Language Arts (CCSS ELA), or NextGen Science Standards (NGSS).
- Collaboration for continuous improvement: The educator organizes and executes professional learning focused on problems of practice around student work.

Since Long Beach was one of the earliest adopters of CCSS and NGSS, the district anticipated that teachers would find the requirements of micro-credentials to be straightforward. District leaders were interested in a pilot that was “low content, high process,” meaning that participants who would be adjusting to a new process for demonstrating their learning would be able to do so in an area of content with which they were comfortable.
ENDNOTES


The Center for Teaching Quality (CTQ) is a national nonprofit that acts as a catalyst for teachers and administrators to collectively drive needed change in schools. Our vision is a public education system that works better for all students.

**Address**
605 West Main Street
Suite 207
Carrboro, NC 27510

**Contact**
**Phone:** (919) 913-3000
**Fax:** (919) 913-3398

**Website**
www.teachingquality.org