



Our Teacher Leadership Microcredential Journey

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Colorado ASCD's focus on teacher leadership has led them to developing teacher leadership microcredentials presenting an opportunity to grow teacher leadership in the state, while also providing an opportunity to support teachers who want to be able to lead from the classroom.

In the 2017-18 school year, the Colorado ASCD Board engaged in a robust strategic planning session, seeking to get to the heart of how we could meet our mission and vision while providing value to Colorado educators by meeting their professional needs. In a state that has tremendous geographical challenges for teachers to be able to travel to attend professional learning, and with an incredible array of well-established professional organizations offering a variety of opportunities already, we knew we needed to really understand our teachers' needs and identify our niche. We conducted a thorough stakeholder analysis where we listed all of our education stakeholders from students to superintendents and business leaders to politicians. Next, we identified what a "win" would be for each one of them. Finally, we considered what our fellow professional organizations were offering to see where we fit. Through this process it became crystal clear: teacher leadership was an area of great need as well as emerging interest in our state. Focusing our efforts on teacher leadership could fuel our mission of excellence for each Colorado learner. Not only was there new research showing the impact teacher leadership has on student achievement (School Leadership Counts, 2017), but also a teacher leadership career pathway held great potential to elevate the teaching profession and provide a motivating new career path for teachers who prefer to lead from the classroom, where they can have the greatest impact for our students.

Finding Our Way to Microcredentials

The Colorado ASCD Board knew that traditional face-to-face workshops would be a challenge in Colorado, and with limited funding that teachers, schools, and districts have, we needed to find a cost-effective way to develop and deliver professional learning for teacher leadership. Embracing what we knew –that "one and done" workshops rarely have any lasting impact on teacher skills, let alone student learning, and that our ultimate goal was to develop and validate teacher leadership skills that could eventually lead to a new career path, we began to investigate ways that we could utilize technology to not only provide professional learning but also document teacher skills.

What We Learned

As an emerging professional learning option for educators, little research on the impact of microcredentials was available, but initial reports and feedback from teachers engaged in this kind of professional learning was encouraging. An initial report from early adopter states (DeMonte, J. (2017) Microcredentials for teachers: what three early adopter states have learned so far. American Institute for Research.) laid out the following research findings showing that teachers perceived the skills learned in the micro-credential as important as leading to greater student learning (Teaching Matters, 2016); teachers enjoyed the micro-credential approach and felt that their practice had improved through earning them. (Digital Promise, 2016); and teachers earning microcredentials use what they have learned in their teaching (Acree, 2016).

We further discovered that with the right technology system, we could record and store the metadata that lists the skills that are demonstrated through the micro-credential work, thus validating the teacher's leadership skills as they worked through a "stack" of microcredentials. This would be a way for us to advocate with our state department of education for certificates and/or endorsements in teacher leadership, a first step in our larger goal of forging a new career path for teacher leadership.

Finding the Right Technology System

Perhaps the most challenging task for us was finding a technology system that we could afford, and that would provide the desired elements: an easy-to-use interface for us as content creators, facilitators, and assessors, and an appealing and easy-to-use interface for our participants. We also sought a system that could store the metadata and provide an easy way for participants to interact and for all of us to communicate with each other and to provide formative feedback.

The first system we tested performed marginally well in the user-interface category for our micro-credential participants, but the process of posting the content and communicating with participants was not very user-friendly. A learning community was completely lacking, and giving feedback to participants during their micro-credential work was extremely difficult to manage. Additionally, the system was not able to store the metadata recording the teacher leadership skills – instead, we had to manually create and store this information elsewhere.

Pilot a Success

In spite of difficulties with the first technology system, a pilot of the first three teacher leadership microcredentials with a group of teachers from elementary, middle and high schools, some in traditional learning environments, and others in blended and online schools was a success. Feedback from the teachers and administrators was incredible. Here's a sampling of what they shared:

"The microcredentials were seamless. I appreciate how each step naturally led to the next."

–Pilot Teacher

“The microcredentials were perfect for our current state of affairs at our school. We needed to take a good current level of trust and culture and put action plans together to intentionally build and grow as a staff.”

–Pilot Teacher

“The microcredentials influenced the culture and climate such that improvements in the school culture and climate continued even after some of the teachers moved on to different positions.”

–Pilot Administrator

“I was surprised by and very much appreciated the rigor of the program.” – Pilot Administrator

New Partnership

We were fortunate to find the ideal platform with our new partner: Belouga, an online community that fosters global connection and collaboration. Teachers can now not only pursue the microcredentials in a beautiful, easy-to-use platform that provides great tools for communicating and giving feedback, but also get unlimited access to Belouga’s Continued Learning Community. Their premium membership in Colorado ASCD includes a Belouga subscription that provides teachers with a world of resources from global professional development and online courses to everyday, practical classroom lessons. Additionally, Belouga is working with us to design the perfect interface to store the metadata that documents teacher leadership skills.

One Step Closer to our Goal

As it turns out, documenting the teacher leadership skills is more important than ever, due to our collaboration with the Colorado Department of Education (CDE). We approached CDE with the idea of linking our teacher leadership microcredentials to the Master Teacher Certificate. The end result was a year-long collaboration to draft teacher leadership standards that are aligned with our microcredentials and, pending Board approval, with potential to provide an alternate pathway to the Master Teacher Certificate in Colorado. We were also asked to provide expertise in developing Teacher Mentor standards in support of new legislation passed in 2019 (SB 19-190) calling for teacher preparation program support.

We have much to celebrate in 2020. Our teacher leadership microcredentials are launched. They are affordable, easy to access, and have an evidence-base to make a difference. They have tremendous potential to impact teachers and students in Colorado through our partnership with Belouga and collaboration with CDE. At Colorado ASCD, we are living our vision: Professional growth, voice, and innovation for Colorado educators; advocacy and success for each Colorado learner.

Nancy White is board secretary for Colorado ASCD and a Learning & Innovation Specialist for Innovations in Education. She is passionate about helping teachers to become designers of learning, and helping them to help students own their learning.