

Credentialing Learning

Breaking Down Barriers: How Districts can create inclusive credentialing learning opportunities for K-12 learners



Overview

Credentialing learning allows students to demonstrate mastery through real experiences such as service work, internships, work-based learning, and creative projects. By shifting recognition from seat time to mastery, districts expand where learning can happen and make more meaningful opportunities possible. This resource outlines common barriers that limit access and offers practical steps districts can take to build strong, sustainable credentialing systems.

Creating Opportunities for Every Learner

District leaders play a central role in ensuring all students can access meaningful credentialing opportunities. When systems intentionally address financial, cultural, logistical, and informational challenges, more learners – including those historically underserved – are able to demonstrate what they know and can do. This strengthens belonging, expands pathways to success, and supports a learner-centered, future-ready approach across Nevada schools.

Financial and Resource Gaps



Common Challenges

- Students face increased financial burdens that limit participation in credentialing opportunities.
- Lack of awareness about available support or pathways.
- Fees for programs or exams are prohibitive for many families.
- Limited local opportunities for real-world learning experiences.
- Resource deserts create gaps in access to essentials like transportation, reliable internet, and required equipment.



Examples

- Students cannot participate in internships because they lack transportation.
- Families cannot pay fees for certification exams.
- Rural students lack access to nearby work-based learning sites.



Solutions

- ⇒ **Prioritize** and expand no-cost, high-value credentialing pathways that leverage existing school and community programs.
- ⇒ **Establish** a diverse funding portfolio (e.g., stipends, micro-scholarships, grants) to eliminate financial barriers for all eligible students.
- ⇒ **Leverage** technology access for remote internships, virtual mentorship, and distance learning programs.
- ⇒ **Partner** with local businesses and community organizations to provide equipment on campus or subsidize transportation.
- ⇒ **Elevate** the value proposition by clearly communicating the alignment between credentialing opportunities and concrete college and career readiness outcomes.

Limited Awareness of Credentialing Options



Common Challenges

- Information asymmetry among students, families, and caregivers.
- Limited understanding of available credentialing pathways and their benefits.
- Lack of accessible, family-friendly resources.
- Communication gaps between schools and communities.
- Inconsistent outreach efforts across channels.



Examples

- Families don't know credentialing exists because information is only shared in English.
- Students hear about opportunities too late to participate.



Solutions

- ⇒ **Implement** a multi-modal, sustained communications campaign via high-traffic channels (e.g., social media, targeted newsletters, community events).
- ⇒ **Create** action-oriented, multilingual resources that are family-friendly and simplify documentation and validation of out-of-school learning experiences.
- ⇒ **Host** family and caregiver-focused information sessions at varied times to increase awareness and participation.

Lack of Cultural Representation



Common Challenges

- Program materials, mentorship, and leadership lack visible cultural representation.
- Students from marginalized, yet resilient communities feel disengaged and lack a sense of belonging.
- Credentialing pathways fail to honor diverse forms of knowledge and experience.



Examples

- Marketing materials only show certain groups of students participating.
- Credentialing pathways overlook culturally rooted community service or contributions.



Solutions

- ⇒ **Proactively** audit program assets (materials, websites, social media) to ensure visual and narrative inclusivity across student, mentor, and professional representation.
- ⇒ **Clearly** communicate how credentialing opportunities align with career and college readiness.
- ⇒ **Co-design** credentialing frameworks with cultural organizations, tribal programs, and community leaders to ensure the pathways are culturally relevant and honor diverse forms of knowledge and experience.

Barrier 4

Inadequate Accommodation Protocols



Common Challenges

- Credentialing systems lack established protocols for accommodations and modifications.
- Students with documented needs face barriers to demonstrating mastery.
- Educators lack training to recognize competency in alternative formats.



Solutions

- ⇒ **Formalize** partnerships with Student and School Supports (e.g., Special Education, 504 Services) to co-develop centralized resource identification and fulfillment strategy for student accommodations.
- ⇒ **Offer** alternative formats and varied methods for students to demonstrate mastery within credentialing learning opportunities.
- ⇒ **Provide** comprehensive, ongoing professional development and coaching so learning providers can recognize competency demonstration across all alternative and accommodated formats, ensuring success in serving learners with disabilities.



Key Questions for Stakeholders to Consider

How do we ensure out-of-school learning experiences are calibrated with the rigor of the Portrait of a Nevada Learner competencies?

Does the credentialing activity clearly connect to and strengthen each student's learning experience?

Does each credentialing opportunity provide appropriate support and accommodations for students?

Does the current credentialing system honor diverse forms of demonstrating mastery?

Which community organizations, employers, cultural institutions, and tribal nations should be at the table?

Are all necessary resources, supports, and information equitably available, representative, and accessible to all students across different communities?