



Micro-credentials for Career and Compensation Advancement



“Micro-credentials are at the center of our Human Capital Management System and enable us to promote educators based on demonstrated competency versus seat-time.”

- Dr. Burak Yilmaz,
Project Director,
Harmony Public Schools

Introduction

Harmony Public Schools is the second largest charter network in the United States with a mix of STEM, project-based learning, personalized and blended learning initiatives in a small supportive environment. As a recipient of the Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF) grant, the organization had been exploring ways to provide educators with performance-based compensation and career advancement opportunities to improve teacher effectiveness, retention, and satisfaction. A big focus was to ensure that leaving the classroom was not the only path to moving up the career and compensation ladder. The district wanted to help teachers develop throughout their careers while adding incentives to stay in the classroom.

To accomplish this, organization leaders started by taking a look at it's existing systems and structures. In doing so, they realized that all of its structures - including professional development, licensure, incentive-based pay, and educator evaluation - had been siloed. The best way to approach the challenge and better support teacher growth was to unify these structures by completely redefining career pathways across the district.

Implementation

Such a large undertaking required a lot of time, effort, planning and change management across the organization. Most importantly, it required buy-in across all stakeholders. With the support of BloomBoard, Harmony began by mapping out a new career map of all the potential instructional roles an educator could hold across the organization. Taking a phased approach to their micro-credential implementation, they selected five roles to focus on in their first year of implementation: System Course Leader, PLC Leader, Mentor Teacher, Curriculum Writer, and Induction (New Teacher and Core Teaching Competencies).

Starting with these five roles, organization leaders came together to define the competencies (i.e. micro-credentials) that mattered most for each of the roles and develop formal “role cards”, which are defined by the organization as job descriptions of the future, to help create coherence across the organization.

Implementation (Cont.)

In developing these role cards, it was important for Harmony to position this new micro-credential initiative as an integrated part of their existing professional development structures, rather than another layer that educators needed to take on, and also to ensure it was job-embedded. As such, they looked at existing professional development structures and developed specific micro-credentials around initiatives that already existed. For example, Harmony works with an organization called TeachPlus to provide PLC Leaders with coaching and support. BloomBoard and TeachPlus worked together to develop a set of micro-credentials aligned to the specific tools and strategies Harmony PLC Leaders were receiving from their TeachPlus coaches.

To incentivize educators who want to develop their skills, a stipend was offered for each micro-credential earned, with a limit on the number of stipends they could receive in a given year. In addition, 15 continuing professional education hours would be awarded for every micro-credential earned. With incentives in place, the organization developed a plan to communicate this new initiative to all educators and began implementing phase one to those educators in the five selected roles.

Impact

Within the first year of implementation, Harmony Public schools is already seeing great momentum around engagement. Educators from 28 of the organization's 56 campuses have submitted for a micro-credential and they've found that those who have earned a micro-credential are going on to earn multiple micro-credentials. This indicates that while there is an initial hurdle to get started and complete one, educators are engaged in the process and motivated to earn more. Instructional coaches have also become involved in the program and as a result, Harmony has created a dedicated micro-credential designed for coaches who support other educators in engaging in the micro-credential process.

As the program continues, Harmony believes that micro-credentials will bring more cohesion and transparency to the organization. Micro-credentials layer on each other and act as stepping stones for educators as they work their way through their career path. This provides educators with a clear understanding of the competencies needed to advance along the career pathway.

Looking Forward

Harmony started year one of their implementation with four key teacher leader roles and new teachers. Many lessons were learned during this year and the organization is excited to take these learnings and expand the program in 2020 to include additional roles and micro-credentials including counselors, instructional coaches, principals, deans of academics, year two induction educators, STEM educators, and coordinators with specialized roles (such as Special Education, ESL and Gifted and Talented). While the program is currently optional, Harmony's ultimate long term goal is to tie micro-credentials to role eligibility and compensation advancement.

According to Dr. Burak Yilmaz, Project Director of Harmony Public Schools, micro-credentials are at the core of their long-term career advancement and human capital management system that looks to promote teacher leaders within the organization. This will allow leaders to make advancement decisions based on competency, rather than seniority or seat time.

Interested in exploring micro-credentials for your school or district? BloomBoard works with a variety of organizations on small and large implementations. Contact us at hello@bloomboard.com or visit www.bloomboard.com to learn more.