



A Phased Approach to Implementing Competency-based Learning



“If we are asking educators to provide differentiated and personalized learning experiences for students, it only makes sense that we help districts provide teachers with that same level of personalization in their professional learning.”

Machel Mills
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 for Tennessee's Department of Education

Introduction

Tennessee's strategic plan for education, Tennessee Succeeds, identifies five priority areas to help the state reach its education goals by 2020. One of these priorities is supporting the preparation and development of an exceptional educator workforce.

Through teacher survey data, state leaders found that teachers wanted more specialized and flexible professional learning opportunities that fit their needs. The Tennessee Department of Education decided to explore competency-based professional learning via micro-credentials to address this desire for more personalized learning opportunities. To ensure success, the department laid out a phased approach to implementing micro-credentials that aimed to:

- Improve opportunities for professional growth for educators
- Enable greater ownership of the teaching profession by its practitioners
- Increase retention of effective teachers
- Expand licensure pathways through micro-credentials
- Curate a set of rigorous micro-credentials

Solution

The Tennessee Department of Education worked with BloomBoard to design a phased approach to implementing micro-credentials that would:

- Support teacher collaboration that is not constrained by location and time.
- Align professional learning opportunities to TEAM key competencies of questioning, thinking, and problem solving. These competencies were determined as high need based on evaluation evidence across the state. Phase two of the program will expand to include academic feedback, assessment, and grouping students.
- Capture perception data on the impact of competency-based professional learning on teaching practice and student learning experiences.

Solution (Cont.)

Implementation was structured into three phases that will span across three years. The year one phase, which ended in 2017, included 58 educators who met face-to-face and served as a focus group, as well as an additional 17 teachers who participated virtually by earning micro-credentials independently and providing feedback on the experience.

Impact

One full year has been completed with 46.5 percent of participants in phase one completing and earning their micro-credentials. A key goal of this phase was to capture teacher perceptions and feedback on their learning experiences. The department has used these findings to inform policy changes regarding micro-credentials as a pathway to license renewal and advancement and plans to continue to use lessons learned to inform other professional learning pathways.

Initial qualitative feedback from educators also shows that they value the flexibility, personalization, and job-embedded nature of micro-credentials:

“Earning a micro-credential has enabled me to immediately implement the knowledge gained from the research. I don’t have to wait until school begins. I can instantly apply my learning to my classroom instruction. Professional learning through a micro-credential has allowed me to be in charge of my own learning in a way that is meaningful and applicable.” - Stephanie Gouge

“How many times have you said or heard, “We have to differentiate everything for our students, so why don’t we have differentiated professional development for us?” This is it! We get to choose, adapt, and create work that is meaningful to our students that already aligns to what we’re doing in class.” - Amy Kate McMurry

“I knew before I started that micro-credentials were for me. Personalized learning is relevant not only for our students but also for us teachers. To be able to bring my students along with me on my journey has been more meaningful than other PD that I have participated in.” - Teacher in Wayne County School District, Tennessee

Looking Forward

The Tennessee Department of Education has learned that to truly maximize the potential of micro-credentials, district-level understanding and support are critical. In 2018, which marks phase two of implementation, the state will focus on building district capacity to leverage micro-credentials at the system level. This means scaling their work from 58 teachers to 15 districts and nearly 200 educators, expanding micro-credential options aligned to TEAM indicators, and creating a pathway for teacher leadership.

To learn more about Tennessee’s shift to competency-based learning, visit <http://team-tn.org/professional-learning/micro-credentials/>

For more information about BloomBoard, visit schools.bloomboard.com or email us at sales@bloomboard.com