State OF CTE

The State of Career Technical Education:
Credentials of Value

1 BRIEF

Identifying and Approving Credentials of Value

The State of Career Technical Education: Credentials of Value report is a collection of four briefs highlighting state approaches to credentials uncovered through a 50-state survey, a 50-state landscape scan, and interviews. Each brief includes policy exemplars from across the nation and practical strategies for implementing more robust processes around determining which credentials matter most to ensure that learners are prepared for the world of work and that employers have the talent they need to prosper.

1	**Identifying and Approving Credentials of Value**
2	Revalidating Previously Approved Credentials
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4	Collecting Data for Informed Credential Decisions

This section of the larger *The State of Career Technical Education: Credentials of Value* report shares findings from Advance CTE's national research on how states approach the identification and approval of industry-recognized credentials (IRCs) and provides recommendations for states, including:

- **setting criteria and evidence for credential assessments,**
- **connecting industry demand and wages to credential approval,**
- **collaborating with state partners and employers, and**
- **navigating policymaking barriers.**

The full report also explores state approaches to revalidating previously approved credentials, state incentive structures focused on credential attainment, and data collection.

States approach the work of identifying and approving credentials for use within their state education systems in a variety of ways. While 44 states (as of 2024) have publicly available lists of credentials, not all states consider those lists to be approved or endorsed. Just 34 states have a process by which they formally approve credentials for inclusion on their state list(s). The remaining states maintain "informational lists," in which they share back with the public credentials that are earned by learners or embedded within programming but do not formally approve or endorse specific credentials.

State Approaches to Credential List Development

Through its research, Advance CTE identified three distinct approaches that states take to developing approved credential lists. As states evolve their credentialing work to include high-stakes incentives and cross-sector coordination, their approach may evolve from one category to the next.

- **"Informational lists"** capture credentials that are available within the state or are being used locally without going through a formal approval process or assessment of value. States with informational lists rarely have incentives such as funding or accountability tied to credentials and may not consider these lists to be state endorsed or approved.

- **"Use case lists"** include credentials approved for particular programs or funding streams. States that create use case lists may have multiple lists that serve different purposes or populations. These states also may approve credentials for each list through distinct approaches that are informed by each list's aligned incentives or funding.

- **"Unified lists"** capture all approved credentials across use cases and are ideally aligned to state definitions and/or priorities. These lists serve the needs of multiple systems, including secondary and postsecondary education and workforce systems, and require strong cross-sector coordination and the development of common criteria, processes, and community engagement strategies.

Currently, most states are creating use case lists. For example, a state may maintain a list applicable to secondary accountability and graduation requirements, a separate list applicable to postsecondary programs, and other lists tied to workforce training programs. As a result of the use case approach, credential lists themselves have proliferated across states. While having use case lists might meet the short-term needs of state or local leaders charged with implementing credentialing programs or policies, maintaining multiple lists also leads to confusion for learners, educators, and employers. Creating a unified credential list—a list that includes state-approved credentials for all potential programs and uses—provides clarity for learners, a single voice and information source on credentials that hold value, and opportunities for coordination and alignment across education and workforce programs.

Narrowing the Field: State Approaches to Identifying Credentials

Credential Identification Sources

Making sense of the vast credential ecosystem can be daunting, and most states employ a variety of strategies to identify which credentials should be considered for state approval. The most common strategy for soliciting credentials is via an application process from schools, districts, or postsecondary institutions. Nineteen states leverage their state staff to identify credentials for inclusion on state lists, while fewer states accept applications directly from employers (13 states) or vendors (nine states). While 17 states are using only one strategy to identify credentials for consideration, most states are using a combination of strategies, sourcing credentials from a variety of interested parties. Many states leverage employer input in their approval processes, but only **Kentucky** reported exclusively accepting applications from the employer community.

CREDENTIAL IDENTIFICATION SOURCES	STATES	% OF ALL STATES	% OF STATES WITH PUBLICLY AVAILABLE LIST
Application from school, district, or institution	23	46%	52%
Identified by state staff	19	38%	43%
Accepting applications from multiple sources	17	34%	39%
Application from employer	13	26%	30%
Application from vendor	9	18%	20%

Review Timelines

States also vary in the cadence at which they review credentials for approval. While the most common approach is to review credential submissions annually, 17 states review credentials more frequently. A common challenge expressed by states with multiple use case lists is coordinating the timing of the credential review process such that interested parties, especially employers, who are engaged in the process can do so once, rather than through multiple processes across agencies.

TIMELINE FOR CREDENTIAL REVIEW	NUMBER OF STATES
Not applicable/no process	16
Annually	13
Rolling review upon submission	9
Varies by agency	6
Quarterly	4
Twice a year	2
Every 5 years	1

Additionally, state leaders noted that executing processes to review credentials is a substantial draw on the time and capacity of state staff. While nine states reported reviewing credentials as they are submitted in efforts to keep state lists as up to date as possible, others noted that their review process was timed to support annual planning on the part of educators and that program and course offerings are often solidified on an annual basis. **States should consider their staffing, the intensity of their review process, the planning needs of education and training providers, and the burden on interested parties engaged in the work as they design the cadence of their review process. Reviewing too frequently can tax employers or other critical parties whose input informs approval; reviewing too infrequently can leave critical credentials off the list in an ever-evolving economy.**

Once states have the credentials they wish to consider in hand, they take a variety of approaches to assessing quality and value and to collaborating with employers and other state agencies to approve credentials for use in education and training programs.

Approaches to Cultivating Collaboration: From Input to Joint Decisionmaking

Creating clarity for learners and employers in the credentialing ecosystem requires intentional collaboration within and across agencies. Many states are collaborating across agencies, boards, or their governor's office through their credential approval process.[1] A handful of states reported extensive collaboration across multiple state agencies; **Delaware**, **Florida**, **Indiana**, **North Carolina**, **Oklahoma**, and **Oregon** all reported collaborating with five agencies in the credential identification and approval process, while **Connecticut** reported collaborating with six.

Both secondary and postsecondary state agencies named state workforce agencies as their most common collaborator on credential approval processes (23 states). In particular, state workforce agencies are a common source of wage information that states use in their decisionmaking frameworks, with 15 states noting that they leverage wage information from their state workforce agencies in their process. Eleven states engage their Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs) in their credential review process, and in one state (Kentucky), the WIB is the decisionmaker for final approval. Seven states engage their governor's office in the credential approval process, while eight states engage industry-focused regulatory or licensing agencies in their work.

Throughout Advance CTE's research, states reported cultivating collaboration as a key component to create alignment across education and workforce development efforts. While they widely acknowledged that collaboration is crucial, many states reported getting partners to the table as an enduring pain point. One state reported that while it has invited its WIB to the meeting during which credentials are approved, a representative from the WIB has never attended. In contrast, Maryland shared that collaboration is key to its long-term plans for building an aligned and sustainable credentialing ecosystem. Tracy Kyttle, Director – Career Connected Learning, shared, "I think what's really special about **Maryland** is that we are building champions in other sectors [beyond K-12] to help us move this work."

While states consult or collaborate with other agencies, employers, or other interested parties in their process, that does not mean that they have a practice or routine around shared decisionmaking. To create clarity for learners, as well as to streamline and maximize the engagement and input process, states should work toward creating shared decisionmaking, outreach, and engagement approaches across all relevant state agencies.

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State Approaches to Assessing Credential Quality and Value

Determining which credentials matter is crucial to ensuring that learners, employers, and states see a meaningful return on their investments. Because credentials can be earned through public providers such as schools, postsecondary institutions, or workforce development programs; private, for-profit providers; or employers themselves, collecting data on who earns credentials and how those credentials affect career trajectories and wages can be complicated for states. As a result, many states anchor their assessment of credentials in quality criteria that focus on strong practices around assessment, alignment to course or program standards or learning outcomes, and assessment security procedures.

Ideally, states seeking to assess credential value would be able to leverage wage data from credential earners in their decisionmaking framework; in the absence of those data, many states look toward wage data for occupations that request credentials under consideration. As approaches have evolved, some states have designed a combination of criteria and metrics to assess credentials. Their goal is to ensure that credentials that are endorsed by state Career Technical Education (CTE) and workforce agencies and offered by local education agencies, districts, and institutions meet quality and value thresholds that will enable positive wage and skills-based growth for all learners.

Common Strategies for Assessing Credentials

CRITERIA TO ASSESS VALUE AND/OR QUALITY	COMMONLY USED EVIDENCE
Alignment of the credential to local, regional, or statewide employer needs (as evidenced through labor market information or employer signals)	Traditional and/or real-time labor market information; employer engagement, including surveys, focus groups, and advisory groups
Alignment of the credential to state-determined high-skill, high-wage, and/or in-demand definitions	Traditional and/or real-time labor market information, including wage and demand data
Evidence of wage increase as a result of the credential	Pre- and postcredential wage data for credential earners or wage data for similar noncredential earners for comparison
Evidence of career advancement connected to attainment of the credential	Information about the career trajectories of credential earners; employer policies related to hiring and/or advancement as the result of credential attainment
Credential portability	Real-time labor market information; employer engagement that demonstrates wide acceptance of the credential across employers
Credential stackability	Demonstrated connection to additional credentials that can build an individual's skills or qualifications over time
Alignment of the credential to program/course standards or learning outcome	Demonstrated connection between program/course learning outcomes and competencies assessed by the credential
Transparent evidence of competencies demonstrated through the credential	Assessment materials and/or feedback reports that demonstrate which competencies are assessed/demonstrated through the credential
Assessment integrity	Evidence of strong and consistent assessment procedures, including assessment security

Assessing Value: Considering Occupational and Credential-Specific Demand

States generally articulated that they aim to ensure that credentials on state-approved lists are aligned to state, regional, or local "good jobs," thus providing a viable route to economic opportunity for learners and employers. State leaders are generally keeping industry and employers top of mind and involved in the credential approval process, with the goal of creating value for learners and employers. Many states are leveraging statewide definitions for high-skill, high-wage, and/or in-demand jobs as part of their credential review process, and 11 states use all three definitions as part of their credential review.

Demand data undergird most states' approaches to validating credentials, with demand data sourced from a variety of local, state, and national entities, most commonly the state workforce agency. States also source data from industry sector partners such as labor unions or associations, research entities such as postsecondary institutions, third-party data sources such as real-time labor market data providers, and local agencies to assess demand within a geographic area. Eleven states use real-time labor market information to assess demand for individual credentials. Real-time labor market information uses online job ads and similar sources of information to provide states with a current assessment of the labor market, including requests for specific credentials that employers list in job ads.

COUNT OF STATES USING STATE SKILL, WAGE, AND DEMAND DEFINITIONS IN THEIR REVIEW PROCESS

High-Skill	High-Wage	In-Demand
13	17	22

Assessing Value: Considering Wage Data

While 17 states use statewide high-wage definitions in their credential approval process, states vary substantially in how they deploy those definitions. No state reported using wage data for credential earners in the initial approval process; rather states are considering the wages tied to occupations for which individual credentials are a key qualification. Some states, such as **Tennessee**, consider wages by aligning credentials to programs of study and assessing whether the programs of study are tied to high-wage occupations, while others, such as **Hawai'i**, are evaluating whether individual occupations that leverage the credential have strong wages.

STATE EXAMPLE: Tennessee

Using a robust scoring rubric to assess identified credentials through an open application process, Tennessee prioritizes cross-agency collaboration to approve high-value credentials that align with CTE program standards and employer needs. All credential applications go through an internal team review at the state education agency level and an external partner review using the same rubric. Some external partners include the Tennessee Board of Regents, the Department of Labor, the Department of Agriculture, the Department of Transportation, and others. The rubric includes components that measure a credential against high-skill, high-wage, and in-demand occupation definitions; seeks evidence of attainment for employment; and cross-references labor market trends. Both teams compare rubric scores and settle discrepancies with a third evaluative team to ensure coherency across the state-approved credential list.

Tennessee has implemented an annual review process for both CTE programs of study and their associated IRCs. Transitioning from a 3-year evaluation cycle, state leaders have found that the updated annual timeline empowers local education agencies and educators with greater flexibility in their teaching and enables more responsive adjustments.

For instance, this approach allows vendors to update credential information more frequently, ensuring alignment with CTE program standards.

To strengthen this work, the state is upgrading and monitoring its data systems to track trends in existing credentials and identify opportunities to investigate credential value. Tennessee can better record trends and adjust previously approved credentials by incorporating new data components, such as pass, fail, and incomplete rates.

While some states consider a firm threshold for wages that must be met or exceeded for further consideration in the approval process, others do not employ wage thresholds as a decisionmaking factor. One state noted that, while wages were a consideration in its credential review process, it did not approach evidence of wages as a requirement but rather as one piece of the puzzle for considering credentials holistically. Other states, such as Florida, take a regional approach to using wage data, as wages vary across economic regions. In this case, the state considers whether credentials are tied to occupations that meet a particular wage threshold within some of the state's economic regions, rather than considering a statewide wage standard that may be affected by areas with especially high or low cost of living.

In the research, Advance CTE found that postsecondary agencies were less likely to report the use of wage data than state education agencies or workforce agencies, and state leaders noted that postsecondary credential review processes were often tied in with general program approval processes that may or may not require wage data for consideration. While most postsecondary agencies are not using real-time labor market information or wage data in their processes, **Wisconsin** requires substantive demonstration of labor market demand and wage information for every new program considered. Through the approval processes, colleges must provide average entry-level wage rates for new programs. This information primarily is provided through data analysis using a real-time labor

market information provider and direct employer-supplied wage information from employer surveys. The state office then uses data from state and federal agencies to assess the college-provided information.

Finally, while many states use state-defined wage thresholds in their credential review work, others are looking to external thresholds to assess wages. Two states (**Michigan** and **New Hampshire**) reported using the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Living Wage Calculator to determine family-sustaining wages to assess the value of credentials, while others reported consulting the United Way's ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) reports to better understand financial hardship in communities and wage levels that create economic mobility for learners. **Considering wages as key criteria during credential approval processes ensures that the conditions for economic mobility are intentionally designed into the state's decisionmaking framework.**

Common Challenges: The Intersection of Demand and Wage

As states work to create a flush and skilled talent pipeline and meet the needs of local employers through their credentialing efforts, they share a common challenge of balancing employer needs to fill high-demand but low-wage positions with the intent to prepare learners for opportunities that are both high wage and in demand. This tension shows up in the state approval processes by the inclusion of tiered requirements in some state approaches to approving credentials. For instance, one state created an inverse approach to considering wage and demand: As demand increases, the wage threshold for approval decreases. States have sometimes coupled these approaches with additional requirements regarding credential portability and stackability. States should tread carefully when considering the balance of wage and demand. **Sacrificing wage considerations can result in learners attaining credentials that do not qualify them for employment that pays family-sustaining wages.**

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State Leaders Connecting Learning to Work

Leveraging Input to Assess Quality and Value: Engaging Educators and Employers

Beyond leveraging data to understand occupational and credential demand and the wages associated with those opportunities, states are also deeply engaging their communities through their credential identification and approval processes. Twenty-one states consider recommendations from schools, districts, or postsecondary institutions in their process, while 27 states consider educator recommendations as part of their credential consideration process. Most commonly, educators are engaged in the credential approval process through the ability to develop applications and alert the state to consider new credentials, but in 10 states, educator recommendations are a required component in the approval process. State leaders rely on educators for information about everything from local demand to alignment to programs of study, and in 13 states, educators are engaged in reviewing the credentials themselves before approval.

APPROVAL PROCESS INPUTS	NUMBER OF STATES
Employer recommendations	34
Educator recommendations	27
Industry demand information	24
Wage information for occupations or credentials	23
Local education agency recommendations	21
Required educator recommendation	10

Engaging Employers: Validating Labor Market Value of Credentials

Validating credentials with employers during the approval process is key to ensuring that approved credentials meet the needs of employers. Nearly all states that have a codified process to approve credentials for use in education and workforce programs engage employers in some way throughout their processes. The vast majority of states consider employer recommendations in their processes, and in 21 states, such recommendations are required evidence to demonstrate value. While many states factor in employer input as one aspect of a multipronged approach to considering credentials, three states (**Arkansas**, **Ohio**, and **South Dakota**) note that employers provide final approval of their credential list(s). Though mechanisms by which states are using employer input vary widely, across the board states report employer engagement as both a crucial component of their work and one the most challenging components of their processes.

States vary in their approaches to leveraging employer recommendations. Some states consider the number of recommendations, coming in the form of letters of support for particular credentials or another form of endorsement coming directly from employers. The number of required recommendations varies across states, with some states requiring as few as two, while others require 10 or more. **Wyoming**, for example, asks employers two specific q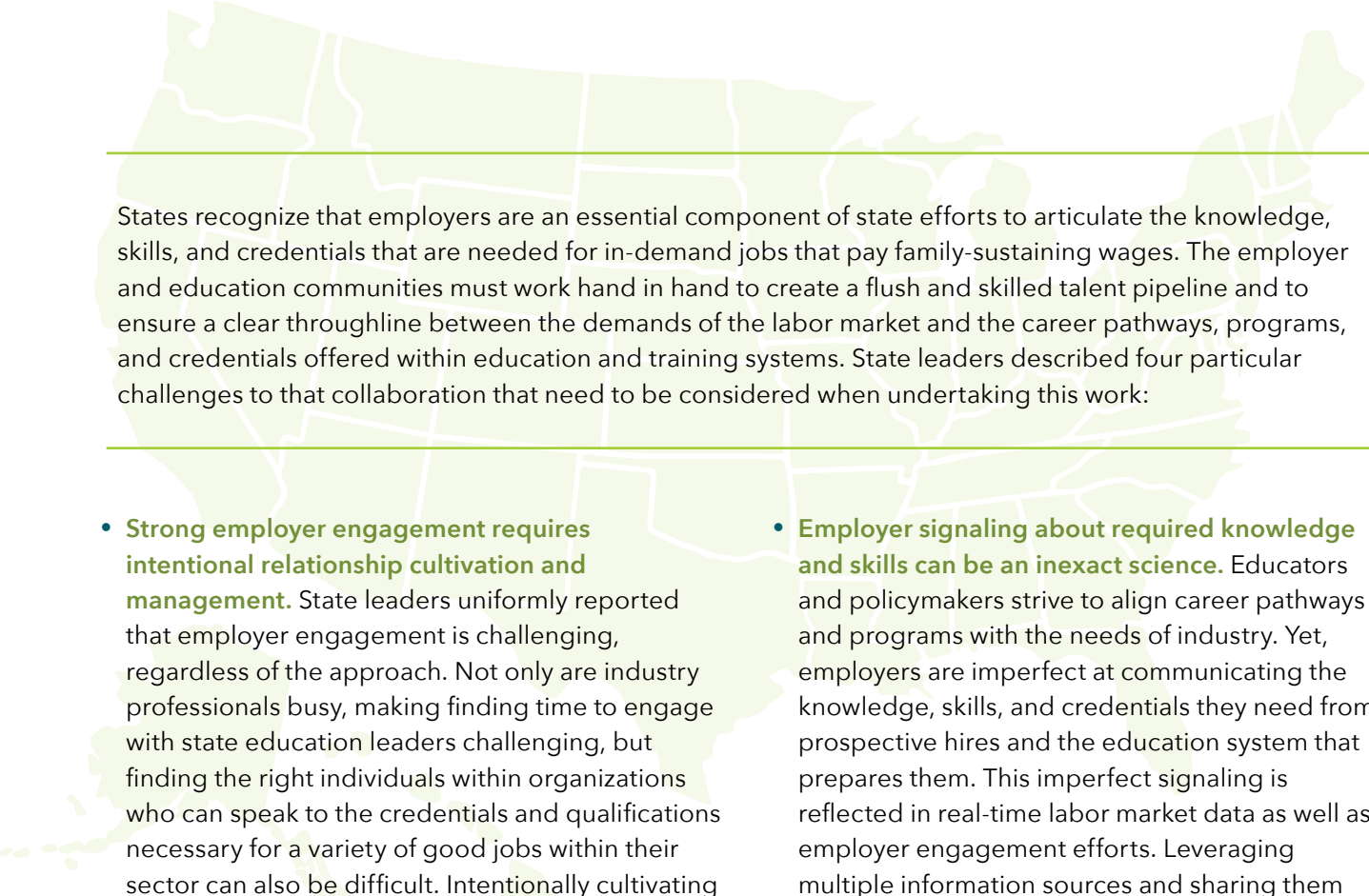uestions: (1) If a learner comes to you with this credential, would you monetarily incentivize them? (2) If a learner comes to you with this credential in a hiring situation in which all things are equal, will this credential give them hiring preference? Before approving a credential for addition to the state list, Wyoming requires a minimum of 10 employers to answer affirmatively to both questions.

To engage employers, most states articulated a multipronged strategy that leverages a combination of synchronous and asynchronous opportunities for employers to provide input. Common approaches to employer engagement include the following:

- employer/industry advisory committees (commonly used in most states)
- ad hoc engagement of state industry groups/partners
- solicitation of letters of support
- employer surveys and focus groups

Through employer engagement efforts, states aim to better understand not only credential demand and the wages associated with credentials but also which credentials themselves are *required* for employment, preferred for employment, or not a factor when considering a candidate for employment.
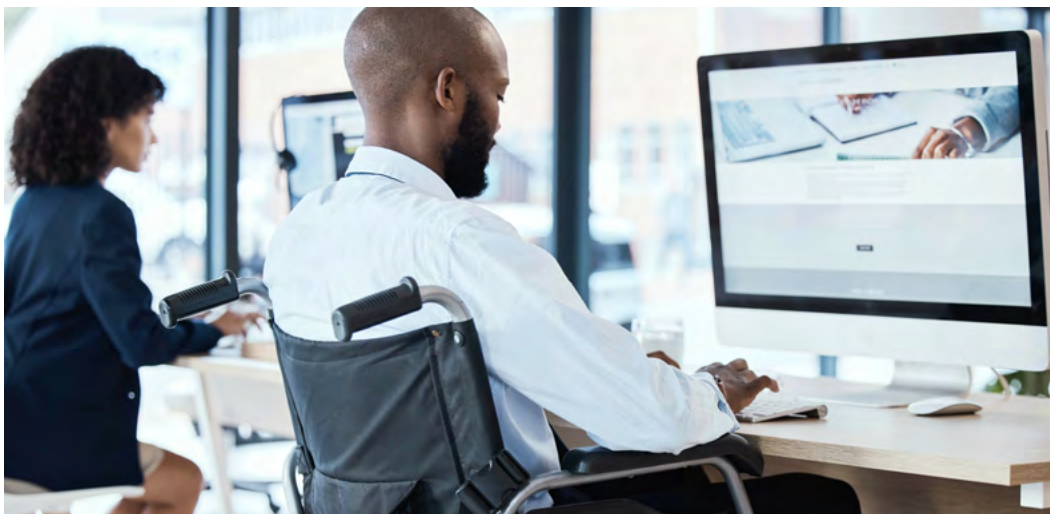
States recognize that employers are an essential component of state efforts to articulate the knowledge, skills, and credentials that are needed for in-demand jobs that pay family-sustaining wages. The employer and education communities must work hand in hand to create a flush and skilled talent pipeline and to ensure a clear throughline between the demands of the labor market and the career pathways, programs, and credentials offered within education and training systems. State leaders described four particular challenges to that collaboration that need to be considered when undertaking this work:

- **Strong employer engagement requires intentional relationship cultivation and management.** State leaders uniformly reported that employer engagement is challenging, regardless of the approach. Not only are industry professionals busy, making finding time to engage with state education leaders challenging, but finding the right individuals within organizations who can speak to the credentials and qualifications necessary for a variety of good jobs within their sector can also be difficult. Intentionally cultivating relationships and paying continued attention to network-building with industry leaders can help overcome these challenges.

- **Approaches to credentialing vary across sectors, and not all employers are familiar with the credentialing ecosystem.** States are prioritizing employer engagement as part of their credential approval processes across all industry sectors. Simultaneously, industries have vastly different approaches to how credentials are leveraged to assess knowledge and skill. Some industries—especially those that rely upon licensing—are especially knowledgeable about and reliant upon credentials; others are not. States struggle to respond to these distinctions and to balance the goal to have approved credentials closely match the needs of employers with the requests from the education community for each program of study to have credentials approved for use to meet accountability requirements and other state incentive structures.

- **Employer signaling about required knowledge and skills can be an inexact science.** Educators and policymakers strive to align career pathways and programs with the needs of industry. Yet, employers are imperfect at communicating the knowledge, skills, and credentials they need from prospective hires and the education system that prepares them. This imperfect signaling is reflected in real-time labor market data as well as employer engagement efforts. Leveraging multiple information sources and sharing them with employers, as well as creating a consistent decisionmaking and engagement framework for credential review and approval, can help employers understand the type of information that state leaders need to make sound and informed assessments of credentials.

- **Employers tend to prioritize employability skills over technical skills.** Across the board, states reported that employers emphasize the importance of employability skills, often articulating willingness to teach the technical skills as long as recruits come with the work ethic and disposition needed to thrive. States should intentionally design their employer engagement strategy to push past these shallow assessments of the skills most crucial to success on the job. Engaging employers in conversations about the qualifications of individuals they have recently hired and those who have been successful in particular roles may help state leaders learn more specifics about the technical qualifications for high-wage and in-demand occupations.

Political Challenges in the Credential Approval Process

Political challenges related to credential approval are reported across states as an unintended consequence of building credentials into CTE programs, state incentive and funding systems, and other educational pathways. Because these lists send signals to learners about what holds value for their futures, credential vendors see gaining approval as a key step in unlocking state or federal funds. Indeed, vendors see getting their credentials onto state-approved lists as money in the bank. Several state leaders shared that credential vendors are not shy about going directly to state leadership—including governors—in efforts to get their credentials approved.

Similarly, educators see credential lists as important to assessing programmatic value and evaluate the quality of their programs by the credential attained by their learners. Some states reward educators with financial incentives when their learners attain state-approved credentials (explored further in the _Incentivizing Credentials of Value_ section of this report), which raises the stakes for educators further. As a result, state leaders can experience heavy pressure to approve credentials that do not meet quality, demand, or value thresholds. While most states reported some degree of political pushback when refining or building their credential lists,

this pushback can be especially severe when removing credentials from their list, as explored in the next section of this report.

When funding and incentives are involved, having a strong, transparent, and collaborative decisionmaking framework is critical. Agreeing upon a common decisionmaking framework creates the conditions for strong and consistent political support across agencies and institutions and allows state leaders to weather political challenges by having clear and defensible reasoning for credential approval decisions. Ensuring that the decisionmaking framework results in approving only credentials with demonstrated value is of the utmost importance in states in which credentials are tied to funding, graduation requirements, or accountability. Once these incentives are in place, changing course on individual credentials, or the state's approach to decisionmaking, becomes more politically fraught. Those who benefitted from the established policy may object strongly when "their" credential is deemed to no longer meet value criteria and, therefore, is ineligible for associated incentives. States must be data driven and selective from the start about the credentials they approve; adding credentials is much easier than removing them once incentives are in play.

When funding and incentives are involved, having a strong, transparent, and collaborative decisionmaking framework is critical.

State Highlight

FLORIDA

With the 2021 Reimagining Education and Career Help Act, Florida established a Credentials Review Committee that was tasked with defining what constitutes a credential of value and establishing the criteria used to measure the value of credentials for the Master Credentials List (MCL).[2] The list is a public-facing inventory of all state-approved credentials of value that are reviewed by the committee on a quarterly basis.

The Framework of Quality provides an overview of the three main quality metrics required by the committee to support newly proposed, or previously approved, credentials during the committee's review process:

Demand Criteria – Credentials submitted for review must be linked to at least one Standard Occupation Classification (SOC) code that has been identified by one of two internal state labor reports from the Labor Market Estimating Conference or the Florida Department of Commerce as an area of concern, or demand, at the state or region level.

Credentials that do not meet the previous criteria can submit additional documentation of support and evidence of local need based on a subset of criteria available in the framework. All criteria must be met for the credential to be considered for approval.

Wage Criteria – Florida uses the Florida Education and Training Placement Information Program (FETPIP), an internal data collection and consumer reporting system that tracks former learners from the state and matches them to their workforce earnings, to create reports that provide the wage outcome data from credential earners to compare against the committee-approved threshold for that IRC.

Credentials that do not have sufficient wage data available through FETPIP must provide additional evidence from the U.S. Department of Labor that meets a subset of criteria related to the associated SOC code.

Credential Sequencing Criteria – Credentials that do not meet the wage criteria set forth by the committee can still be approved if they are identified as part of a sequence of credentials that lead to a higher-level occupation. The criteria associated with this set of quality metrics establish a credential as a necessary building block to a high-wage occupation within a longer program of study.

The application for the MCL is open for submissions year-round, but credentials are reviewed only at the quarterly committee meetings. Applications must include all relevant and available evidence required by the framework to be considered for the list. Credentials previously approved by the committee come up for review annually, and continued evidence of state or regional demand aligned to the quality metrics is required for continued approval and inclusion on the MCL. The credentials list is active on a 1-year cycle from July 1 to June 30 of the following year.

State Highlight

MARYLAND

As an aspect of implementing the Blueprint for Maryland's Future, the CTE Committee was created by the Governor's Workforce Development Board. The committee was tasked with creating a set of criteria to assess IRCs for value and show viable benefits for learners who attained them. Maryland set the following criteria for credentials to be approved:

- alignment with in-demand occupations
- documented outcomes
- validated by industry
- assessment based
- standards driven
- attainable and accessible
- portable
- stackable
  (preferred, but not required for approval)
- renewable
  (preferred, but not required for approval)

To enforce these criteria, those who submit credentials for approval must provide documentation and artifacts (sample artifacts) to demonstrate alignment with the seven mandatory criteria. Maryland's state-approved IRC list underwent an audit to measure each existing credential to the new standards, and the list went from 650 credentials to 170.

To facilitate cross-agency collaboration and ensure the viability of credentials for approval, each CTE program of study has a Program Advisory Committee and additional local advisory committees categorized by Career Cluster®. Members include employers, WIBs, and community colleges. Making space for these agencies to come together and discuss credential value in their own sectors builds relevant credentials for learners locally and statewide.

To ensure that the state-approved credential list holds only credentials of value, the CTE Committee and the Maryland State Department of Education undergo the same process of vetting existing credentials every 2 years to remain relevant and impactful.

The other sections of *The State of Career Technical Education: Credentials of Value* report can help leaders build the capacity to provide high-value credential opportunities in their state. Additionally, explore the companion tools, including a filterable list of commonly approved credentials by Career Cluster and interactive data visualizations.

Recommendations for State Leaders

- Create a common decisionmaking framework to assess credential value that is shared across K-12, postsecondary, and the workforce. Ensure that data focused on wage and demand are at the center of the framework. Employ a collaborative approach to building the decisionmaking framework, ensuring that all relevant state agencies, boards, partners, employers, and other interested parties are involved and leveraged.

- Develop rigorous and data-driven processes to assess credentials using a mix of quality and value metrics outlined in the decisionmaking framework. Include labor market information; employer validation; and when available, learner outcome data.

- To reduce confusion for learners, work toward a unified list of credentials, agreed upon by multiple state agencies, that can be weighted or subdivided as needed for programmatic use.

- Coordinate credential identification practices and timelines across state agencies and time them so that local educators can integrate newly approved credentials into their programs of study.

- Validate any data used in the decisionmaking framework, as well as the final set of approved credentials, directly with employers.

- Ensure that criteria for approval are clear, well documented, publicly agreed to, and available to provide transparency for all interested parties and reduce political maneuvering through the credential approval process.

Questions for States to Consider

- To what degree does the state have a common decisionmaking framework to assess credential value that is shared across K-12, postsecondary, and the workforce? If not, what are the first steps toward building such a framework?

- Does the decisionmaking framework leverage thresholds for wage and demand and meaningfully integrate employer engagement into the approval process? If not, what are the first steps toward leveraging such wage and demand data?

- How can real-time labor market information be used throughout the process to assess credential demand and impact?

- How can the state strengthen employer engagement efforts through coordination with other state or local actors?

END NOTES

[1] In total, 25 states noted that they collaborate with at least one other agency on their credential approval processes; however, state agencies did not always report collaboration reciprocally, particularly in states with multiple use case lists. For instance, in several states, the state education agency shared that it collaborates with the higher education agency or coordinating board, but that agency did not report reciprocal collaboration with the state education agency. This analysis includes any report that agencies are collaborating, even if that collaboration was not reported reciprocally by both agencies.

[2] Career Source Florida. (n.d.). *Reimagining education and career help.* https://careersourceflorida.com/boardroom/reach-act/