State OF CTE 2025

The State of Career Technical Education: Credentials of Value

Brief 2: Revalidating Previously Approved Credentials

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.

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 review and revalidation of previously approved credentials to maintain state credential lists and provides recommendations for states. The full report also explores state approaches to identifying and approving credentials, state incentive structures focused on credential attainment, and data collection.

As the world of work continues to evolve, state credential systems should be agile and adaptable to ensure that credential offerings remain relevant and worthwhile for learners and employers alike. To verify that credentials still meet the criteria of leading to in-demand and high-wage opportunities, leaders across the education, workforce, and employer communities should regularly review credential offerings using a data-informed decisionmaking framework. A collaborative and standardized approach to maintaining credential lists by revalidation of previously approved credentials ensures continued alignment with industry needs and allows for timely updates so that the credentials states encourage are valued in state, regional, and local workforces.

Enduring Relevance and Value: State Approaches to Reassessing Approved Credentials Over Time

Reaffirming the value of previously approved credentials creates truth in advertising for learners who look to these lists to inform decisions about their futures and provides employers with enduring talent pipelines of workers with skills aligned to industry needs. While many states are growing their capacity for the initial work to identify high-value credentials aligned to industry needs, fewer have clearly defined standard review or revalidation processes for these credentials. **Of the 34 states with established initial approval processes, 27 states have also developed a reapproval or review process for credentials on their state-approved lists.**

Some states, such as **South Dakota**, have intentionally mirrored their initial credential approval process by incorporating similar labor market information and employer feedback in their revalidation of previously approved credentials, along with additional metrics that align with their initial approval processes. Yet, other states undertake a distinct process for reviewing previously approved credentials that may not incorporate the use of labor market data or employer feedback to justify continued credential approval. For example, nine states reported using occupational wage data in their initial approval process but not in their revalidation processes. Only one state (**Kansas**) reported adding an assessment of occupational wages in its credential review/reapproval process that was not included in the initial approval. **Mirroring the use of data and stakeholder engagement from the initial decisionmaking framework in the state's credential revalidation process ensures that the outcome of the process reflects credential value, rather than methodological differences. States can also assess the impact of specific credentials directly by adding new data that may not have been available for initial approval (such as wage or career transitions data for credential earners) to their revalidation process.**

State Spotlight: South Dakota

South Dakota recently overhauled its state-approved credential list and the process for reviewing the list on an annual basis. Using real-time data from the state labor agency, leaders reviewed job listings across the state to determine the required credentials employers sought for specific occupations. This work prompted a thorough review of currently approved credentials, resulting in the identification of a number of credentials that are no longer available that, at a minimum, needed to be replaced with an updated version of the credentials that are more relevant to the field. From this reset, a new process was created to ensure that credentials remained relevant and of high value for learners who earn them.

The state education agency sent out forms to school districts to nominate a representative from economic development, industry partners, postsecondary partners, and their local advisory boards to create a statewide advisory board of 20 members to review credentials annually. Each nominee was then interviewed, briefed, and provided sufficient training to review credentials. Having input from multiple sectors provided a holistic and realistic viewpoint of which credentials were valuable to business and industry in South Dakota, rather than keeping a list of solely nationally recognized credentials. This process of annually reviewing a list of credentials guarantees relevant, applicable, and valuable credentials that change as the world of work does.

Employer Signaling: Engaging Industry and Leveraging Labor Market Data

Stakeholder input from employers, industry leaders, and educators emerged as a common practice in both the identification of credentials of value and revalidation of credentials that are already on state-approved lists. Overall, states engage stakeholders far more deeply to approve credentials initially than through their revalidation process. Thirty-four states leverage employer recommendations in their initial approval process, while only 21 states seek employer recommendations as part of continued follow-up. Similarly, 24 states use assessments of industry demand from national, state, local, or third-party labor market information providers in the initial approval process, as compared to only 16 states that use this information in their revalidation process.

While 14 states include metrics on the occupational wages associated with particular credentials in their review process, only eight states (**Colorado**, **Delaware**, **Florida**, Kansas, **Kentucky**, **Minnesota**,

South Dakota, and **Wisconsin**) are able to leverage actual wage outcome data from learners who attained the credential under consideration. Most states reported that they are not able to access wage outcome data for credential earners, but developing this capacity is worth the effort. With these data in hand, states can more deeply understand which credentials produce a true return on investment for learners, employers, and communities. Absent data on outcomes for learners who attain credentials, feedback from employers and other stakeholders is key to ensuring continued relevance of state-approved credentials. States should deepen their engagement with employers and other stakeholders through the revalidation process, rather than taking their foot off the gas.

Ensuring Workforce Alignment

At the secondary level, Colorado directly ties its reevaluation of approved credentials to its Talent Pipeline Report. The report "identifies areas of growing demand and opportunity, key features of the current labor force, and strategies to balance the supply and demand equation for talent." The report is updated annually through a partnership across multiple state agencies and additional partners. Indiana incorporates direct feedback from an in-state industry advisory board and weighs input from employers in its decision process.

States such as Wisconsin and Kentucky collect employment-related outcomes data, including wages, from various sources to review return on investment for graduates and credential earners. Wisconsin also requires annual program reviews at the postsecondary level with advisory boards whose members include employers and employees from the local workforce.

Changing Course: Removing Credentials From State-Approved Lists

Phasing out outdated credentials that do not provide a strong return on investment for states, learners, or employers is crucial to making good on the promise of state credentialing efforts. While stakeholders may resist the removal of credentials from state-approved lists (discussed further in the *Incentivizing Credentials of Value* section of this report), ensuring a strong match between the credentials approved and incentivized by states and those employers seek creates value for both learners and employers. Maintaining outdated credentials runs counter to the needs of learners who seek credentials that will lead them to opportunities that pay a family-sustaining wage and employers seeking talent with relevant skills.

Despite the need to remove errant offerings from approved lists, **less than half of states reported having a process for phasing out credentials identified as no longer relevant for employers and learners, and 13 states reported not removing any credentials from their list(s) over the past 5 years.** Even in states with a codified process, the timeline to remove credentials from state-approved lists can be long. Most states provide a 1-year buffer between when they identify a credential for removal and when the credential is actually removed from state lists, but five give a multi year transition window.

CREDENTIAL REMOVAL TIMELINES	
Immediately	1

CREDENTIAL REMOVAL TIMELINES

1 Year Following ID	12
2 Years From ID	3
5 Years From ID	2
Varies by Agency	2
Other	1

When designing an approach to phasing out credentials, states should act with learners in mind. Establishing a teach-out period for learners completing previously approved credentials and providing all external partners adequate time to adjust to programmatic changes resulting from credential removal eases transitions at both the state and local levels. To intentionally consider learner needs in its credentialing process, **Indiana** approves credentials in a learner cohort-based model. Credentials approved at the start of a learner's cohort remain available until they graduate high school to mitigate negative impacts to learners as the state's credential list evolves. **Mississippi** gives educational institutions the capability to teach out and report a credential up to 2 years after it has been identified for removal. This process allows secondary CTE learners currently enrolled in a program the opportunity to earn the credential they sought at the start of their program.

Overall, state processes to revalidate credentials are less robust than their approaches to initially approve credentials, resulting in stagnation of credential lists across the country. States should strive to design revalidation processes that are equally as rigorous as initial approval processes and build upon those processes by including information about outcomes for credential earners. Ideally, states should aim to have their revalidation processes shift from considering the promise that a credential holds to considering the real impact on learner career and educational trajectories. Keeping credential lists keenly focused on just those credentials that have demonstrated value ensures a strong return on investment for states, learners, and employers.

State Highlight
ARIZONA

Arizona has created a <u>Credential Update Request Form</u> that allows continuous submissions from local education agencies, educators, employers, and vendors that want to provide information and evidence about specific credentials that have been previously approved. This process gives the state team access to real-time information on what credentials need to be prioritized during the review and removal process. The web form provides options for edits that external partners can identify, such as if the credential has new requirements, no longer exists, or has a technical update.

Additionally, through a maintained internal data portal, credential attempts can be easily tracked. Using these data, leaders are able to identify credentials that have not been attempted for 4 years and set them to automatically be removed in the 5th year.

Recommendations for State Leaders

- Develop a process to revalidate credentials on state-approved lists. States should mirror and build on the processes they used to initially approve credentials. By mirroring and building upon the initial decisionmaking framework, states can ensure a consistent, manageable cycle for leaders that are involved in determining which credentials hold value and for the educational institutions bringing those credentials to learners.

- Leverage and match administrative records on wages, career transitions, and continued education for credential earners to assess the short- and long-term impact of credential attainment for each state-approved credential.

- Coordinate cyclical review of credential lists across secondary, postsecondary, and workforce agencies. This coordination should extend beyond using common definitions into using a shared decisionmaking framework.

- Communicate clearly with providers and learners about the impact of removing credentials from approved lists, and ensure that they have a runway for the transition.

Questions for States to Consider

- Does the state's approach to reviewing and maintaining its credential list(s) mirror the decisionmaking framework used for initial approval?

- Does the review timeline and cadence align to the release of new or updated wage, demand, or learner outcome data?

- Can the state add wage and/or educational attainment data for learners who earned credentials to the reassessment of the credential's value? If not, what steps does the state need to take to access these data?

- Which stakeholders are included in the review and updating process? Who is missing from this process, and how is the state approaching these relationships to build buy-in for the process?

- Does the state's process result in regular removals of credentials that do not demonstrate value or are no longer available? How is the state communicating these changes to local stakeholders and education providers?

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. Visit ***The State of Career Technical Education: Credentials of Value webpage*** for companion tools, including a filterable list of commonly approved credentials by Career Cluster and interactive data visualizations.