

The Case for Industry-Recognized Credentials

A Credential Can Be a Ticket to Upward Economic Mobility

Industry-Recognized Credentials (IRCs) are used by employers to certify that an applicant is qualified for a job. Students who earn industry certifications have an advantage finding high-demand jobs with good wages because the certifications are globally portable and valuable to employers. Often, these industry certifications are “stackable”, which means multiple credentials can be accumulated over time to build up an individual’s qualifications to pursue a career pathway or another postsecondary credential.

The skills embedded in certification courses often can transfer to multiple career pathways, retaining their relevance as the student learns and evolves their career interests. The process of earning an industry certification allows students to experience the real-world demands of work in a practical way. Acquiring an industry certification helps students with essential skills such as critical thinking, problem solving and prioritizing information.

While industry certification courses are often embedded within the curriculum of the Massachusetts’ vocational technical systems, the opportunity to expand this opportunity across all high schools should be a priority.

States can encourage school districts to offer industry certification courses to students by creating a financial incentive tied to performance and/or by adopting these industry-recognized credentials into the school accountability rating. Seven states currently provide funding for each student who earns an industry certification and several others are moving in this direction.

Expanding Opportunities to Earn Industry Recognized Credentials

Florida, Wisconsin and Louisiana have been successful expanding access to industry-recognized credentials. In Florida, where the program was established in 2007, over 71,000 students have earned industry certifications with student enrollment rising every year. The Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education is proposing a similar model. We are calling on the state to:

- **Audit the landscape of credentials in Massachusetts**
We must identify which credentials are currently offered, how many students earn them, and how many schools offer them. The data is essential and currently lacking.
- **Survey business to identify labor market demand**
Identify the skills and credentials that are missing among job applicants; and verify which credentials are most in labor market demand.
- **Enact legislation to incentivize high schools to offer industry certifications and credentials**
MBAE will propose legislation that would require the state to:
 - Produce an annual list, available to all school districts and the public, of high need occupations that require an industry-recognized credential

- Award each school district a financial incentive for each student who earns an industry certification for an occupation that has high employment value or recognized by a higher education institution
 - Districts would have to allocate at least 80% of the award to the school whose students obtained the certification; allocation may not be used to supplant funds for school operations

- **Promote partnerships between school districts and employers**

MBAE will continue to work with our partners and affiliates to promote partnerships between schools and local companies.

We need your support! Join our effort to prepare students for success and build a strong talent pipeline that fuels opportunity and growth in our companies and economy.

MBAE is being advised on this project by senior human resource experts that are members of MBAE's Future Ready Advisory Council. Contact Jackney Prioly Joseph at jjoseph@mbae.org for more information.