

# Building Incremental and Stackable Credentials to Transform Higher Education: The Colorado Experience

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WICHE Legislative Advisory Committee  
September 11, 2024



# *Colorado Department of Higher Education*

## **Mission**

*We advocate, develop policies, and support students to maximize higher education opportunities for all.*

## **Vision**

*All Coloradans will have an education beyond high school to pursue their dreams and improve our communities.*

September 11, 2024

# Strategic Plan for Higher Education

Increase the number of Coloradans benefiting from valuable career skills, obtained while in high school or via postsecondary education, that –at a minimum– enable additional lifetime earnings greater than the cost of attendance.

**Three strategic pillars underpin the goal and the opportunities available to institutions, policymakers, and others that affect change.**

## Pillar #1

Identify and improve pathways with a negative return on investment.

## Pillar #2

Focus on equity and enable more learners to succeed.

## Pillar #3

Catalyze increased postsecondary and workforce collaboration, alignment, and creation of new pathways

# House Bill 21-1330: Higher Education Student Success

- Comprehensive bill to accelerate economic recovery in Year 2 of Covid (including appropriation of ARPA funds)
- Collection of strategies to get more Coloradans to apply, enroll, and complete postsecondary credentials
- Created the Colorado Re-Engaged Initiative (retroactive awarding of associate degrees by universities)**
- Reduced regulations for community colleges to award BAS degrees
- \$49 million additional funds for the Colorado Opportunity Scholarship Initiative
- Created task force on the future of postsecondary education and strengthening alignment to workforce needs**

METROPOLITAN  
STATE UNIVERSITY  
OF DENVER



# HB21-1330 Task Force Recommendation: A Learner Centered Talent Ecosystem

- ❑ Expand flexible pathways that allow students to enter, pause, and progress at their own pace through expanded competency-based and work-based learning throughout the learner's life and career, from grade school through an advanced degree, with navigation supports along the way;
- ❑ Develop Stackable Credential/Work-Based Learning Pathways:  
Lawmakers should work with education and business leaders to develop legislation that creates credential pathways in high-need, high-value fields at large scale.

# HB21-1330 Task Force Report Generated Several Bills

- ❑ Create Innovation and Scaling Partnership Grants ([HB22-1350](#): *\$90 million for “Opportunity Now”*)
- ❑ Enhance Transparency of Postsecondary and Workforce Data and Develop New Statewide Success Metrics ([HB22-1349](#) and [HB24-1364](#))
- ❑ Develop Stackable Credentials and Work-Based Learning Pathways ([SB22-192](#) and [HB22-1215](#)—“*Big Blur*”)
- ❑ Post-Script: Eliminate Geographic Service Areas for Public Institutions (*CHE Policy Section I, Part N*)



# Three distinct but aligned initiatives

- HB21-1330: Creation of the “**Colorado Re-Engaged Initiative**” (CORE) and retro-active awarding of associate degrees
- SB22-192: **Stackable Credential Pathways** in five industries plus development of quality standards to guide inclusion
- **Credential As You Go:** Federally funded multi-state effort to create incremental credentials “on the way” toward a degree



# Riddle, Part I

What have you got  
when you have 120  
credits?

# Riddle, Part II

What have you got  
when you have 119  
credits?

# I Feel A Change Comin' On...

Growing interest in shorter-term and other sub-baccalaureate credentials accelerated by the pandemic

Public doubts about the value of higher education and the return on investment of time and money

The "all or nothing" approach to the bachelor's degree suggests nothing short of 120 credits has value

Demand for enhanced employability in stages on the way to a degree

Pressure to recognize learning through work and integrate work-based experience into academic programs

Growth in shorter term programs that are part of the general curriculum (not limited to extended studies or continuing education)



Campus quad sidewalks2:  
University of Notre Dame  
<https://tour.nd.edu/locations/south-quad/>



What do you see?





Footpath shortcut:

Michael Sankey

<https://michaelsankey.com/2012/02/07/the-path-of-least-resistance/>

What do you see now?



4BED5BB.jpg

+

o



# How We Design Our Programs

vs.

What Students Tell  
Us They Need  
(the *Desire Path*)

# Practical and Political Questions

- Who should offer which programs, to whom, where, and in what modalities
- Statutory or policy questions related to role, mission, and service areas (CORE required legislation)
- Finance questions such as what should “count” in productivity metrics and funding formulas
- Consumer questions around transparency and transferability (e.g., what is a “certificate” or a “microcredential”?)
- Quality questions around market value, comparability, and validation
- Systemic questions around equity and stackability
- Does your innovation threaten my existence?
- IN OTHER WORDS, JUST ANOTHER DAY IN THE OFFICE.*



# The Colorado Re-Engaged Initiative (CORE) House Bill 21-1330

Retroactive awarding of associate degrees to  
improve economic and educational  
outcomes for baccalaureate stop-outs



## Legislation

CORE allows four-year institutions to award associate degrees **to students who meet specific eligibility criteria.**

“The goal of awarding an associate degree is to increase a student's earning potential, making it more likely the student will **re-enroll and complete a bachelor's degree.**”

CDHE data suggests over **19,000 former students from the last 4 years\*** may be eligible for an associate degree under the CORE initiative.

\* enrolled any time during 2016 through 2020, earned 70+ credits, and stopped out before earning a credential



## Legislation

Student  
Eligibility  
Requirements  
Limit Program  
Scope

- ✓ Earned **70+ credits**
- ✓ **Stopped-out from a bachelor's program** within the last **10 years**
- ✓ **Unenrolled** for the last two semesters
- ✓ **Not eligible for Reverse Transfer**



Associate  
Degree  
Design

**Working Group  
Guidelines**  
created additional  
**Student Eligibility  
Requirements**

- Earned at least **18 credits in residence** from the awarding institution (25% of 70 credits).
- Cumulative GPA of 2.0 or higher from the awarding institution
- Nearly **1,000 degrees awarded!**

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CREDENTIALS

Published on Mar 11, 2024

# The Colorado Re-Engaged Initiative: Recognizing Learning for Non-Credential Students

Holly Zanville | Research Professor and Co-Director of Program on Skills, Credentials and Workforce Policy in the Institute of Public Policy, George Washington University



modern campus | Engagement Evolved

WEBINAR

## Freeze the Summer Melt Away

Best Practices for Activating Enrollment with Stop Outs

Watch Now

COLORADO  
RE-ENGAGED

The CORE Initiative



[cdhe.colorado.gov](http://cdhe.colorado.gov)



## *Back to the “stackable credential pathway”*

**“A sequence of credentials earned through various means, including through assessment of prior learning, that may be accumulated over time and move an individual along a career pathway or up a career ladder.”**

**May lead to a degree, or may not.**

# SB22-192: Developing Pathways

- ❑ Implement a process to encourage institutions to identify incremental achievements on the way to a degree, and organize stackable credentials that may articulate to pathways in high-demand industries
- ❑ Identify how credentials may be evaluated for their component skills, competencies, and learning outcomes
- ❑ **Evaluate the quality of nondegree credentials that are currently available that lead to in-demand living wage jobs**
- ❑ Identify where alignment exists between degrees, nondegree credentials, work-based learning, apprenticeships, and opportunities to further alignment
- ❑ Two reports with pathways maps: [January 2024](#) and [June 2024](#)

# SB22-192 OPPORTUNITIES FOR CREDENTIAL ATTAINMENT

Developed a Credential Quality Rubric: Four signals of Quality



**Demand.** The credential must align with industry and economic demand. It is recognized in the marketplace and leads to job opportunities in growing industries.

**Evidence of Skills.** Must have transparent evidence of the skills and competencies learned.

**Employment Outcomes.** Must have evidence of substantial employment outcomes. There is proof that having the credential either directly leads to jobs paying a living wage in a growing occupation or develops the skills and competencies needed for those jobs.

**Stackability.** Credential can exist as part of a sequence of credentials that can be accumulated over time to build skills and advance an individual's career and earnings.

# SB22-192 OPPORTUNITIES FOR CREDENTIAL ATTAINMENT

## Distributed Funds

\$1.8 Million in student support to encourage enrollment in and completion of short-term credentials in high-demand industries.

Over \$400,000 in technical assistance to IHEs to support creation of new non-degree credentials

## Developed 11 Stackable Credential Pathways in 5 industries

### Behavioral Health

1. Social Work

### Cybersecurity

2. Information Security Analyst via Industry Certifications and Work Experience
3. Information Security Analyst via Cybersecurity Apprenticeship

### Education

4. Early Childhood Education to Degree + Licensure
5. Early Childhood Education Apprenticeship to Degree

### Healthcare

6. Emergency Medical Services
7. Nursing
8. Medical Technician

### Software Development

9. Full-Stack Developer
10. Military to Front-End Developer
11. DevOps

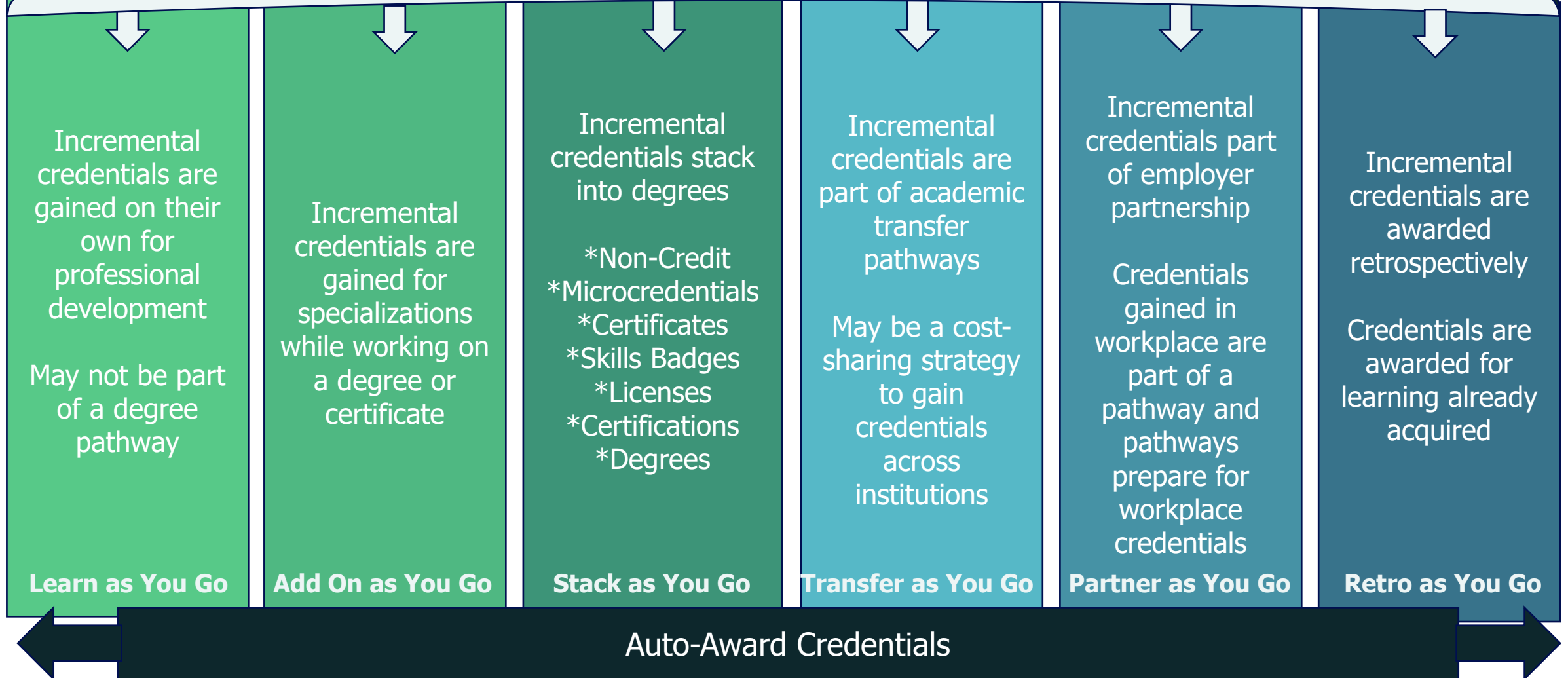
# Credential As You Go

- National initiative to transform the degree-centric system into an incremental credentialing system designed to meet evolving workforce needs and open opportunities for learners
- Equity-focused system for individuals to be recognized for what they know and can do as they acquire learning
- Led by Empire State University, the Corporation for a Skilled Workforce, and the Program on Skills, Credentials & Workforce Policy at George Washington University
- Multistate initiative involving Colorado (CDHE), New York (SUNY) and North Carolina (UNC System and NC Community Colleges)
- Research initiative funded by the Institute of Education Sciences, US Department of Education



# Incremental Credentialing Strategies

## External Learning (Credit for Prior Learning)



# Colorado Stackable and Incremental Initiatives

- **Red Rocks Community College:** Stackable Early Education Certificates in the Child Care Development Specialist Apprenticeship Program
- **Colorado Community College System:** Behavioral Health Stackable Pathways
- **Colorado Mountain College:** Curated Essential Skills Experience for IT and Healthcare
- **CSU Fort Collins:** Design Thinking Certificate Portfolio
- **CSU Pueblo:** Retroactive Awards





# Transitioning from Course Outcomes to Competency based Education (CBE)

Crosswalked 9 ECE courses in the AAS-Early Childhood Education Degree with [Colorado Competencies for EC Educators and Professionals](#). Non-credit trainings completed in EC Apprenticeship along with evidence demonstrating competencies are awarded college transfer credit via PLA. 4 of the 6 remaining ECE courses are practicum-based. 2 courses cover technical information that lacks sufficient workplace training opportunities and are still best taught as traditional residency coursework in addition to 5 Gen. Ed. Courses (CBE or traditional coursework).

STACKING CERTIFICATES	NUMBER OF CREDITS	CBE/PLA PROCESS + RESIDENCY COURSEWORK	CBE EVALUATION METHOD
<b>EARLY CHILDHOOD ASSISTANT TEACHER CERTIFICATE</b>	6 - credits	1 ECE course via CBE/apprenticeship + 1 regular ECE college course	PLA Portfolio → college transcript
<b>EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION CERTIFICATE</b>	12-credits	3 ECE courses via CBE/Apprenticeship + 1 regular ECE college courses	PLA Portfolio → college transcript
<b>EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHER CERTIFICATE</b>	18-credits	4 ECE courses via CBE/Apprenticeship + 2 regular ECE college courses	PLA Portfolio → college transcript
<b>EARLY CHILDHOOD DIRECTOR CERTIFICATE</b>	30-credits	7 ECE courses via CBE/Apprenticeship + 3 regular ECE college courses	PLA Portfolio → college transcript
<b>ASSOCIATE OF APPLIED SCIENCE (AAS) – ECE</b>	60-credits	9 ECE courses via CBE/Apprenticeship + 6 regular ECE college courses and 5 regular or CBE Gen. Ed. Courses	PLA Portfolio + College transcript

# Behavioral Health with CCCS, EDL, and 181

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## Goals and Processes:

- Increase behavioral healthcare workforce in response to community need.
- Reduce barriers for students wanting to get into the field.
  - Learner Focused and Employer driven
- Highly collaborative and interactive process (7 initial colleges and now the full 13), K-12 and CTE partners, industry partners, etc.
- State Agencies
  - Collaboration with CDHE and 192
  - Behavioral Health Administration (BHA)
  - Health Care Policy & Finance (HCPF)
  - Department of Regulatory Agencies (DORA)

# Colorado Community College System Behavioral Health Assistant - Qualified BHA

A Micro-Pathway to Become a Behavioral Health Assistant

Issued by



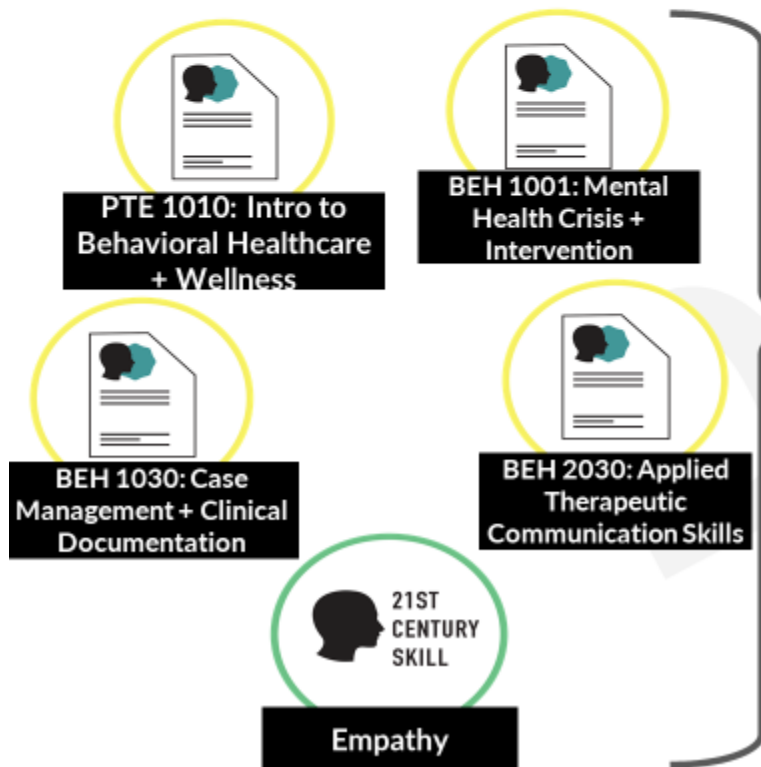
Designed with

Education  
DesignLab

**SUMMARY:** The *Behavioral Health Assistant* micro-credential ensures students develop entry-level behavioral health knowledge and competencies. Upon completion of this coursework, they will be a Qualified Behavioral Health Assistant as outlined by the Behavioral Health Administration. The curriculum includes entry-level skills and foundational knowledge about behavioral health and wellness, intercultural competency, therapeutic communication, case management, and crisis intervention.

## CREDENTIALS EARNED

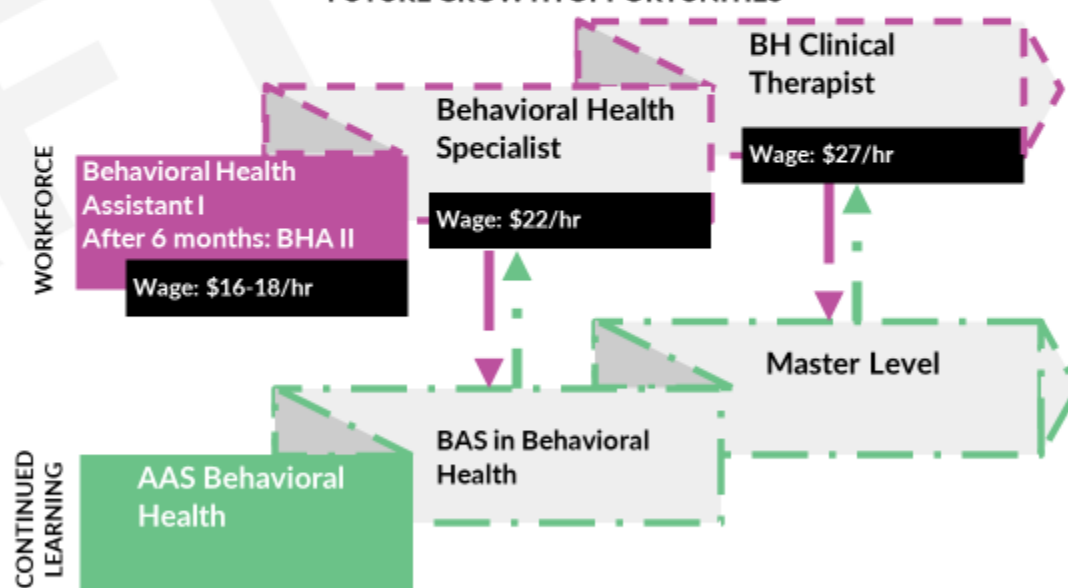
6 months | 10 Credits towards higher credential | Hybrid



## TOP SKILLS:

1. Understanding of Behavioral Health and Healthcare Systems
2. Empathy and Healthy Boundaries
3. Therapeutic Communication Skills
4. Case Management and Documentation
5. Crisis Intervention and Wellness
6. Trauma-Informed Care and Cultural Competency

## FUTURE GROWTH OPPORTUNITIES



**Medicaid Competencies:** (Under supervision), these individuals will be able to do elements of: Wellness Promotion, Education, Community Needs Assessment, Screening, Referral, Crisis Management, Case Management, Orientation to Services, and Individual & Group Interventions

# Lessons Learned from Stackables Implementation

- 1) Requires broad and sustained stakeholder engagement (from employers, higher ed, subject matter experts, state agency partners, K-12 representatives, intermediary organizations, and learners)
- 2) Landscape analysis: Build from promising practice and partnerships
- 3) Requires a quality framework or principles at an early stage in the process
- 4) Develop a communications plan
- 5) Develop a plan for analyzing existing data and acquiring new data for measurement
- 6) Plug into existing work (like our Credential As You Go initiative)
- 7) Engage in succession planning and sustainability efforts early on
- 8) How to expand coalitions of the willing?

# SB24-143 INTEGRATING FRAMEWORKS FOR CREDENTIAL EVALUATION AND CLASSIFICATION

Rapidly changing workforce needs

Traditional degree programs are the foundation of our postsecondary system, but they cannot fully meet Colorado's evolving skilled workforce needs.

Need for practical pathways to upskill

Non-Degree Credentials that are aligned to postsecondary education programs allow workers to upskill and reskill in high-wage, in-demand jobs.

Excess of options - with variable quality

There are over 1 million unique education credentials in the United States. This places a considerable burden on both learners and employers as they try to navigate this space.

Therefore

“Colorado requires a system that brings quality assurance, clarity, and order to the complex landscape of both nondegree and traditional degree credentials...” – by employing “a quality assurance framework and an internationally recognized standard classification system”

**Study and make recommendations concerning use of the ISCED as Colorado's standard framework for organizing and classifying nondegree credentials (with partners and stakeholders)**

By July 2025

**Evaluate nondegree credentials offered through state-recognized programs.** For year one = NDCs within the 11 stackable credential pathways.

January 2026 (then annually)

**Supply the Workforce Development Council with a list of quality nondegree credential programs** for inclusion in the Colorado Talent Report and in a credential registry endorsed by the state.

January 2026 (then annually)

## SB24-143 OTHER DELIVERABLES FOR THE OFFICE OF THE FUTURE OF WORK

Apprenticeship program alignment with international classification:

Collaborate with the State Apprenticeship Agency to determine ISCED equivalency levels for each apprenticeship program registered on or after July 31, 2025

January 2026 (then annually)

Determine ISCED equivalency levels for each apprenticeship program registered before July 31, 2025

January 2027 (then annually)



- ❖ 2-year IHEs
- ❖ 4-year IHEs
- ❖ Colorado Department of Labor & Employment
  - Office of the Future of Work
  - Apprenticeship Agency
- ❖ State Workforce Development Council
- ❖ Colorado Department of Education
- ❖ Colorado Office of Economic Development
- ❖ Employers
- ❖ Industry associations and Trade associations
- ❖ L/Earners

SB22-192



SB24-143

## In many ways, SB24-143 is an affirmation and continuation of the work completed under 22-192:

- Uses the new credential quality rubric
- The credentials in the 11 new pathways will be the first to be assessed for quality and assigned an ISCED classification.
- Tasks the Department with identifying the next set of stackable pathways and industries.
- Applies lessons learned from creation of the first 11 pathways

# Thank you!

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