Report on Policies & Initiatives Related to Credential As You Go: Colorado, New York, and North Carolina

Overview

Credential As You Go is working toward a nationally recognized system of incremental credentialing that captures and validates all relevant learning, enabling individuals to be recognized for what they know and can do. Many types of credentials (e.g., degrees, certificates, industry certifications, licenses, badges, microcredentials) may document an individual's learning, and these credentials are awarded by many different entities. Credential providers include community and technical colleges, four-year colleges and universities, third-party organizations, companies, the military, and state licensing boards.

The Credential As You Go initiative is focusing on efforts in Colorado, New York, and North Carolina to rapidly prototype and test the benefits of an incremental credential system. Given the many related efforts underway in these three states, the initiative is working to identify the key efforts with two main goals: (1) to leverage resources to advance incremental credential developments more quickly, and (2) to make more efficient use of the resources being applied to reform the learn-and-work ecosystem.

Credential As You Go is just one of many efforts underway to improve that ecosystem—in the U.S. and in other nations. A related initiative, the Learn & Work Ecosystem Library, has catalogued hundreds of these efforts. The initiatives, alliances, and networks listed in the library are developing new approaches and finding innovative solutions in several areas, such as: new credentialing systems, microcredentialing and badging, skills-based hiring, digital platforms to expand opportunities for learners, navigation and career advising, data standards to enable interoperability, and policies to guide system change.

Research Question

The report focused on a question key to Credential As You Go's research: *Can we inventory the initiatives and alliances in the three states in which we work most closely: Colorado, New York, and North Carolina?*

We want to understand the extent to which multiple related initiatives and alliances can be used to build connections within and across states. Such connections can enable these efforts to leverage resources, learn from one another, and improve and accelerate the work of incremental credentialing and other innovations in the learn-and-work ecosystem.

Methodology

Material for this report was culled from information provided by each of the three state leadership teams (Colorado, New York, North Carolina) and from the Learn & Work Ecosystem Library database. Credential As You Go conducted a year-long study to identify and inventory key initiatives and alliances compatible with our efforts around incremental credentialing. The resulting report inventories these many efforts by state, and shows where efforts overlap.

Findings

Three *compilation charts* were developed from the inventory of initiatives and policies. As a group, the three charts include 27 potential initiatives and policies in the learn-and-work ecosystem that are related to Credential As You Go. Although the three states vary somewhat regarding the initiatives and policies at work in their states, each state features more than 20 active efforts. The report categorized them into three areas:

1. **State and Institutional Policy Strategies** (8)— Policies guiding work at the state level and/or within higher education systems (university system and/or community college or both).
   - Statewide Education Attainment Goal
   - Statewide Articulation Agreements, Guaranteed or Seamless Transfer Policy
   - Bilateral Agreements, Co-Admission, Co-Enrollment and Engagement Policy
   - Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI policy)
   - Data Tools
   - Tuition Assistance Program
   - Military Credits
   - Talent Match for State Government Agencies

2. **State and Institutional Policy Studies Combined** (8)— State and initiative efforts where there are both state policy and on-the-ground efforts (which could not be separated easily).
   - Apprenticeships: Create opportunities for employers to choose working with institution of higher education(s) to provide related instruction for apprenticeship
   - Career Navigation, Pathways, Talent
   - Credit for Prior Learning
   - Online Programs
   - Reverse Transfer
   - Recordkeeping
   - State, Higher Education and Employer Partnerships with Workforce/Jobs Focus/ Credential Engine

3. **Key National Initiatives** (11)—Key national initiatives that are grant-funded or funded via state funds that are working in various of the states and/or higher education institutions (both public and private):
   - Credential As You Go
   - GEAR UP (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs)
   - Guided Pathways
   - Innovation Labs
   - Equitable and Accelerated Pathways for All
   - Math Pathways
   - Quality Criteria for Nondegree Credentials
   - REACH (Racial Equity for Adult Credentials in Higher Education)
   - Re-Enroll to Complete: Urging re-enrollment of student borrowers before loan payback; academic and financial supports, program options
   - Services for Applying/Paying For College and High School Transcripts Recordkeeping
   - Skills-Based Pathways

Early Lessons Learned

There are many significant early lessons from this inventory of efforts—for the three states and for the broader learn-and-work ecosystem.

- *Number of efforts*. States have many initiatives and alliances at play—and many of these efforts have common goals. While this level of activity would seem ideal, lack of coordination is a major problem. Initiatives are housed in different agencies and/or institutions, and there is no ready inventory of efforts created by the states. Connecting the dots is a major challenge.

- *Impacts on staffing*. Many of the same state-level officials are called on to participate in and/or attend committee meetings and steering groups for the various initiatives. They also serve (and in some cases staff) policy-related efforts at the state level. This often causes staffing

burdens and creates confusion among the many overlapping efforts.

- *Siloing and competition*. Each effort tends to work individually, for its own ends. Such siloing often creates competition among the various initiatives, especially for external funding.

- *Partnering challenges*. Even when collaboration is intended, partnerships present challenges. For example, formal agreements are sometimes required to coordinate partnerships, accountability among partners is sometimes difficult to assign and assure, and the rapidly changing landscape of credentialing can affect work plans and timelines.

- *Role of intermediaries*. There is an increasing need for regional and national intermediaries to help manage the dynamic landscape. Third-party organizations frequently receive foundation funds or subcontracts from a state to support innovation work and to manage projects in a state. These intermediaries provide technical assistance, handle communications within and among states and participating institutions, assist with data analysis and building workplans for research and development, and help in many other ways.

- *Work that ebbs and flows*. Work is often supported by external funds, and this suggests that efforts will come and go. If efforts are not institutionalized, the landscape can be shaky.

- *Sharing information*. Credential As You Go is acquiring valuable (possibly unique) learning from this work. How can it best be shared?

Conclusion

Regardless of how crowded the landscape of innovation has become—and it is crowded, especially in states known for innovation such as Colorado, North Carolina, and New York—all of these initiatives are helping to change the learn-and-work ecosystem. This report, essentially a "snapshot" review of the landscape, identified 27 initiatives in just three states. We estimate that a 50-state "snapshot" landscape review would result in over 1,000 initiatives—just at the post-secondary level. There would be thousands more at the K-12 level.

Advances in technology allow us to collect and centralize information and share it in new ways (i.e., through the Learn & Work Ecosystem Library and other emerging centralized databases). To improve information sharing, the field would do well to answer three questions:

1. Can we build better information resources to truly enable better leveraging of resources?

2. Can we assess outcomes (i.e., is the needle of innovation moving, and in what areas)?

3. Can we accelerate the work of incremental credentialing and other innovations underway in the learn-and-work ecosystem by improving access to information?

This report is a first step to inventory significant efforts in three states that can inform future research related to these three questions—and others.

See the full report and the related report which maps key national initiatives: Credential As You Go – Mapping Key Learn-And-Work Ecosystem Initiatives/Alliances.

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