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Micro-chat: How Community Colleges Integrate Certifications into Career Pathways

**Workcred, Higher Learning Commission, League for
Innovation in the Community College, Community
College of Aurora, Kirkwood Community College,
and Moraine Valley Community College**

October 15, 2025

Agenda

- Overview of the project from Workcred
- Pathways Discussion:
 - Community College of Aurora
 - Kirkwood Community College
 - Moraine Valley Community College
 - Q&A with panelists
- Overview of the resources developed by the League for Innovation in the Community College and the Higher Learning Commission
- Open discussion and adjournment

WELCOME AND OVERVIEW

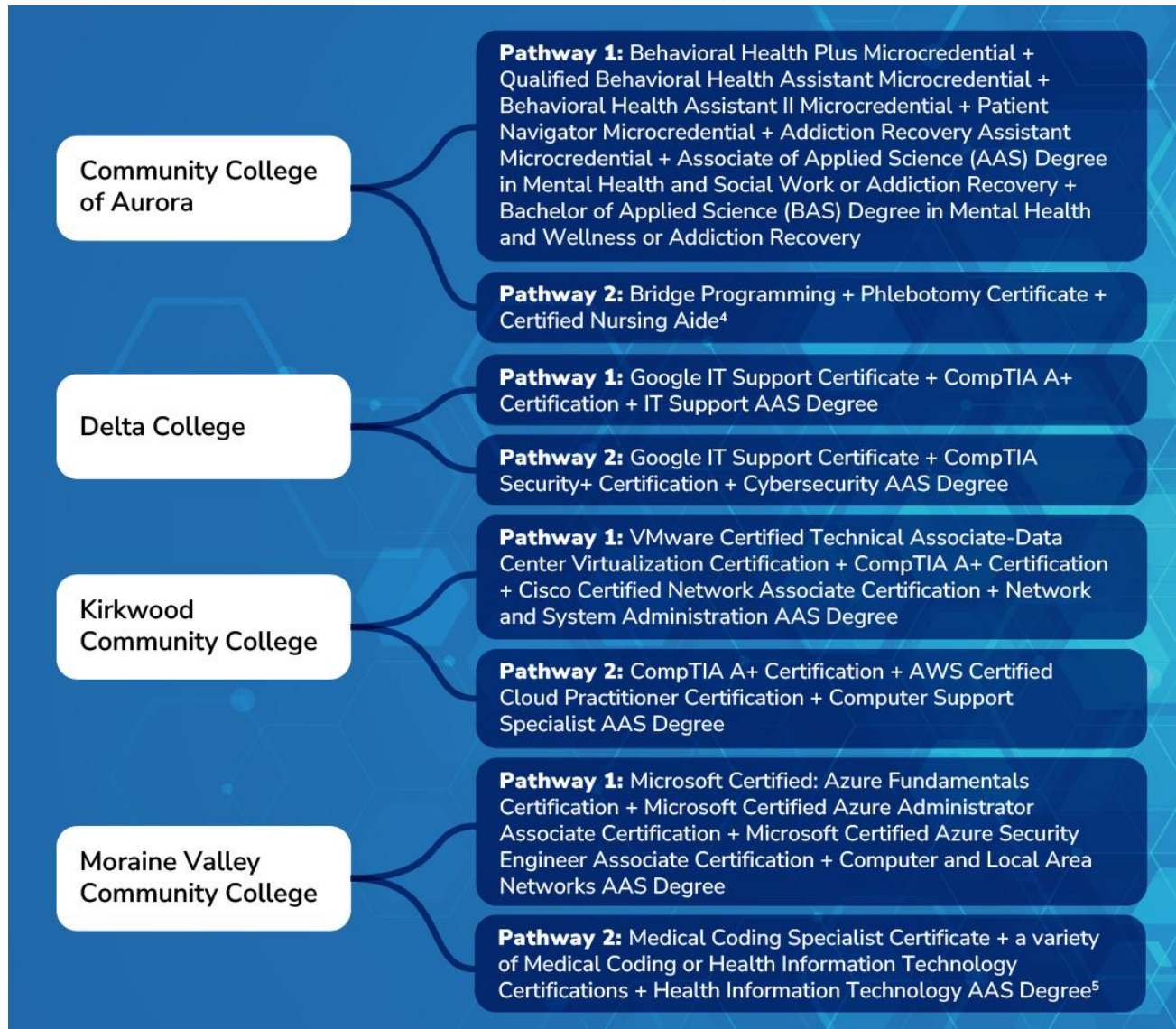
Karen Elzey, Associate Executive Director

Workcred

Certification + Degree Pathways

- **Purpose of the project:** To work with four community colleges to create eight new certification + degree pathways (C+D pathways)
- **Target population:** Low-income, first-generation, and adult learners
- **Academic discipline focus:**
 - Health science
 - Information technology (IT)
- **Partners:**
 - Higher Learning Commission
 - League for Innovation in the Community College
 - Community College of Aurora
 - Delta College
 - Kirkwood Community College
 - Moraine Valley Community College

The Pathways



Outcomes and Resources

The project culminated in several resources:

- [Building Credentialing Pathways Using Credit for Prior Learning: A Case Study about Delta College](#)
- [Certification + Degree Pathways Evaluation Framework](#)
- [Creating Credentialing Pathways in Behavioral Health: A Case Study about the Community College of Aurora](#)
- [Designing Credentialing Pathways in IT: A Case Study about Kirkwood Community College](#)
- [How Certification Bodies Can Support Colleges Efforts to Integrate Certifications into Academic Programs](#)
- [IT and Health Certifications Examples for Community Colleges](#)
- [Medical Coding and Health Information Technology Pathways: A Case Study about Moraine Valley Community College](#)
- [Playbook for Certification + Degree Pathways](#)
- [Promising Practices for Certification + Degree Pathways](#)

COMMUNITY COLLEGE OF AURORA

Jennifer Dale, Ph.D., Associate Vice President for Online and the Centennial
Campus

Aurora, Colorado

Behavioral Health C+D Pathway

- CCCS + Education Design Lab + SB22-181
- Goals and Processes: Iterative and Collaborative
 - Increase and diversify behavioral healthcare workforce
 - Reduce barriers for field
 - Curriculum Design team: Metro & Rural colleges, faculty, and administrators
 - Ecosystem partners and guidance
 - Industry (employers and employees) and Learners
 - State Agencies (BHA, HCPF, CDHE, DORA, CDPHE, Governor's office)
 - SB22-181 (expand BEH workforce and tiered educational advancement opportunities)
 - K-12 partners
- Faster entry, retention, and advancement from entry- to mid-level
- Increased social and economic mobility

Behavioral Health C+D Pathway

- Certificates
 - Behavioral Health +
 - **Qualified Behavioral Health Assistant (and Bootcamp)
 - **Qualified Behavioral Health Assistant II
 - **Addiction Recovery Assistant
 - Patient Navigator
- Associate Degrees
 - **Peer Support Specialist
 - **Registered Behavior Technician
- Bachelor Degree
 - **Certified Addiction Specialist Coursework
- Advisory Board critical
- Direct employment as well as degree and certificate alignment

Behavioral Health C+D Pathway

Behavioral Health Pathways: Stackability

A pathway is "stackable" when smaller curricula (micro-credentials) build into each other and into larger degrees, allowing for shorter-term gains toward longer-term goals. Take a look at the building-block style of CCCS's stackable Behavioral Health coursework represented here, noticing how micro-credential coursework fits into Associate and then Bachelor of Applied Science degrees. Stackability allows students to continue credentialed learning in small, bite-size steps toward greater qualifications!

Qualified Behavioral Health Assistant (QBHA) Bootcamp

- Self-paced, non-credit training designed in coordination with the Behavioral Health Administration (BHA) for current Behavioral Health professionals seeking to become QBHAs.
- Assesses competency demonstration from 4-courses included in the QBHA micro-credential, as well as upskilling opportunities.
- Successful completers will be QBHAs and therefore eligible to serve as part of a Medicaid reimbursed care team.
- Bootcamp completion may be leveraged as Credit for Prior Learning (CPL) at your local community college.

MICRO-CREDENTIALS

CSL Suite (9 courses)	BEH 2030			SWKT100
PSY 1001	SOC 1001			SOC 2018
BEH 1001	BEH 1001	BEH 1001	BEH 2030	BEH 2030
HPR 1000	HPR 1000	PTE 1010	BEH 1030	BEH 1030
			BEH 1001	BEH 1001
			PTE 1010	PTE 1010
Addiction Recovery Assistant	Patient Navigator	Behavioral Health + (BH+)	Qualified Behavioral Health Assistant (QBHA)	Behavioral Health Assistant II
20 credits	12 credits	6 credits	10 credits	16 credits

ASSOCIATE OF APPLIED SCIENCE

Mental Health & Social Work (17 credits)	Addiction Recovery (17 credits)
Emphasis Courses (Student selects 1 path)	
General Education Courses (25 credits)	
Career & Technical Education Courses (25 credits)	

Associate of Applied Science
(AAS) in Behavioral Health

67 credits

Mental Health & Wellness (15 credits)	Addiction Recovery (15 credits)
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Emphasis Courses
(Student selects 1 path)

General Education Courses
(21 credits)

Career & Technical
Education Courses
(17 credits)

AAS

Bachelor of Applied Science
(BAS) in Behavioral Health

53 (+ 67 in AAS) = 120 credits

KIRKWOOD COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Gary Vogt, Outreach Coordinator, Business and Information Technology

Cedar Rapids, Iowa

IT Certification + Degree Pathways

• Pathway 1

- **Degree: Networking and Systems Administration** – This degree focuses on the skills to design, build, integrate, maintain and secure local area networks, design and support server systems and software, and provide end-user support for LAN-based applications.
- **Certifications:***
 - VMware Certified Technical Associate – Data Center Virtualization
 - CompTIA A+ Certification
 - Cisco Certified Network Associates (CCNA)

• Pathway 2

- **Degree: Computer Support Specialist** – This degree focuses on combining customer service skills with a variety of IT skills that include hardware, software, networking, and programming, as well as problem-solving and analytical skills.
- **Certifications:****
 - Amazon Web Services (AWS) Cloud Practitioner
 - CompTIA A+ Certification

**Students will attempt to sit for these certifications at the end of their first year (CompTIA A+) and second year (VMware Certified Technical Associate – Data Center Virtualization/CCNA).*

***Students will attempt to sit for these certifications at the end of their first year.*

Challenges in the Implementation Process

- Validation of the value and usefulness of a certification
 - Pace of technology change
 - Understanding industry partners priorities and how they may differ
 - Determining if the certification is appropriate for the need
 - Teaching the “skill set” not just to “pass the certification”
- Difficulty in tracking student outcomes on certification exams
 - No centralized system to track certification outcomes and impact
- Certification exam logistics
 - Availability of local testing centers
 - Convenient testing availability and time

Continued Alignment to Labor Market Needs

- Bi-annual industry partner feedback through an advisory council
- Employer surveys
- Feedback from internships and job placement opportunities
- Local job postings
- Regional skills assessment surveys
- Regular faculty involvement in the community
- Adjunct faculty are comprised of individuals with experience working in IT

Markers of Student Success*

- Development of the skill set
 - Ability to research and ask questions
 - Employability skills
 - Understanding the **why** behind the technology
- Proficiency with the product
 - “Work ready” students
 - Desire/ability to continue professional development
- Ability to pass the certification exam
- Retaining the knowledge from the certification exam and the educational process

**These markers have been identified through feedback from our industry partners.*

Overarching Thoughts on Credential Pathways

- Gaining knowledge versus teaching to the test
 - This debate has existed for years.
 - Why can't we have both?
- Cost/benefit discussion
 - Employers have a place for individuals with certain skill needs and can train internally for the remaining needs. Certifications can open up more entry-level opportunities.
 - More efficient to upgrade the current workforce with specific certifications as opposed to a long-term degree program.
- Meet students where they are
 - Certifications early in the education process increase the likelihood of retention and success.
 - Certifications can build student confidence, thus encouraging additional educational attainment.

MORAIN VALLEY COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Kevin Vaccaro, Department Chair, Computer Integrated Technologies

Palos Hills, Illinois

Computer and LAN Degree and Microsoft Azure Pathway at Moraine Valley

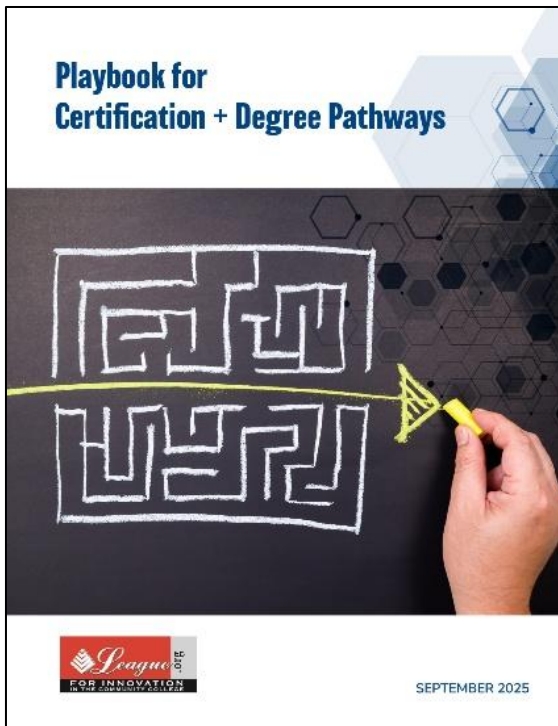
- Moraine Valley Community College pioneered a curriculum overhaul and developed three courses to prepare computer and local area network (LAN) degree students to become certification-ready for Microsoft Azure, one of the most in-demand platforms in the IT ecosystem.
 - Course LAN 125 – Microsoft Azure Fundamentals: Provides an overview and introduces the core concepts necessary for the Microsoft Certified: Azure Fundamentals (AZ-900) certification, including cloud principles, resource management, and networking basics.
 - Course LAN 225 – Microsoft Azure Administration: Focuses on managing cloud services, scaling virtual environments, and configuring Azure identities and storage solutions, aligning with the Microsoft Certified: Azure Administrator Associate (AZ-104) certification exam.
 - Course LAN 235 – Microsoft Azure Security Technology: Addresses the implementation and management of Azure security configurations, policies, and defense strategies required for the Microsoft Certified: Azure Security Engineer Associate (AZ-500) certification.

TIME FOR Q&A

LEAGUE FOR INNOVATION IN THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Rufus Glasper, Ph.D., President and CEO

The Playbook for Certification + Degree Pathways



The playbook includes:

- Key stakeholder information
- Planning considerations
- Implementation steps and checklist
- Challenges and mitigation strategies
- Outcomes, impact, and sustainability

Key Stakeholders in C+D Pathways Development



- Students
- Faculty
- College Leadership
- Industry
- Certification Bodies

Planning Considerations



- Design and development
- Outcomes and evaluation
- Student success support
- Regulatory oversight
- Sustainability

Implementation Steps



- Administrative setup and resource allocation
- Curriculum integration
- Technology and infrastructure
- Faculty development
- Student recruitment and support
- Partnerships
- Monitoring and evaluation

Challenges and Mitigation



- Curriculum alignment → Advisory boards
- Faculty engagement → Incentives + PD
- Student test anxiety → Practice exams, workshops
- Accreditation → Early engagement with HLC

Outcomes and Impact



- **Students:** Faster entry into jobs, stronger career ladders
- **Colleges:** Employer partnerships, improved enrollment
- **Employers:** Skilled workforce, reduced training costs

HIGHER LEARNING COMMISSION

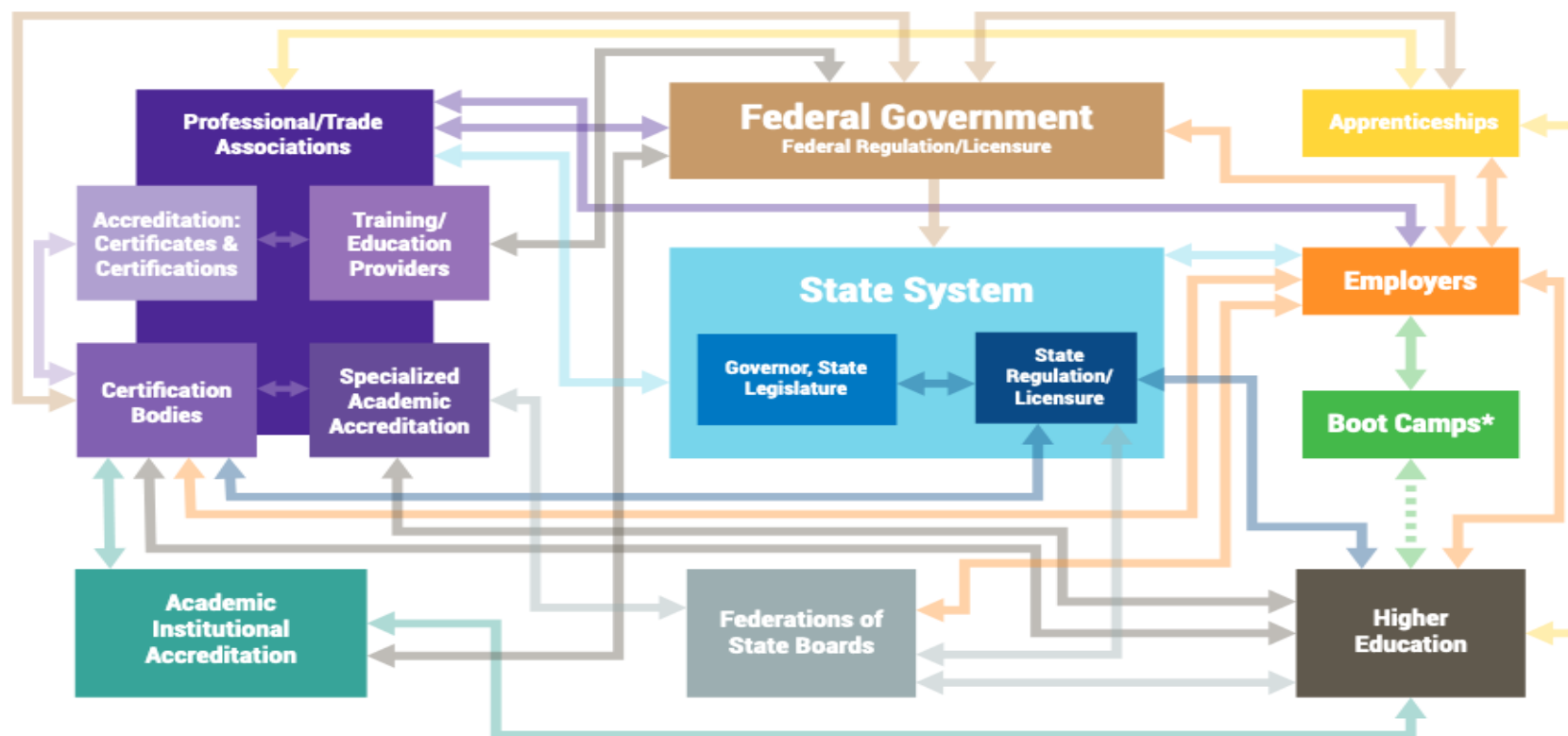
Karen Solomon, Vice President and
Chief Transformation Officer

Accreditation shouldn't stifle innovation
– it should provide *the fuel*.



The Landscape – All the Entities

Entities in the U.S. Postsecondary and Work Ecosystem



* Although boot camps initially existed outside of the higher education system, there is increasing interest of universities to develop partnerships with boot camps.

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From HLC's publication "*EVOLVING: Accreditation and the Credential Landscape*"

Credential Lab

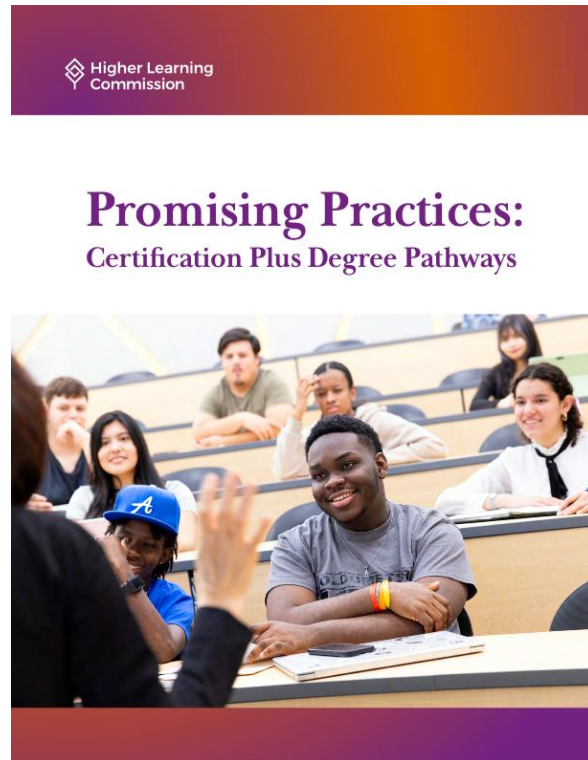
Education and Training Provider “Endorsement”

- ✓ Quality assurance of organizations
- ✓ Trusted providers identified
- ✓ Voluntary

Credential Lab Innovation Center

- ✓ Resources and tools
- ✓ Networking
- ✓ Training and technical assistance
- ✓ Employer and provider Support

Considering C+D Pathways in the Context of the Accreditation Processes



- Institutional lessons learned
- Demonstrating quality within HLC's criteria for accreditation
- Accreditation and state agency focus

OPEN DISCUSSION AND NEXT STEPS

For More Information

www.workcred.org

info@workcred.org

<https://workcred.org/Our-Work/Certification-Degree-Pathways.aspx>

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