

## **A response to NEPC's review of *Harnessing Micro-credentials for Teacher Growth***

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NEPC recently published a review by Elena Aydarova of New America's [Harnessing Micro-credentials for Teacher Growth](#) report. The review mischaracterizes the paper in several ways that we, the authors, would like to address.

First, the review incorrectly asserts that we do not explain our research methodology and that we rely on the perspective of micro-credential providers over the perspective of educators. The report's [Appendix](#) includes our methodology where it makes clear that, of the 42 interviews we conducted, only six were with for-profit entities, with the remainder being entities that represent, support, and/or employ teachers (e.g., the National Education Association and Learning Forward, along with 19 state, regional, and local education agencies or cooperatives). We also relied on myriad secondary research sources that provided accounts not only of educators' knowledge of and experiences with micro-credentials,<sup>1</sup> but with professional growth opportunities more broadly, including the same [Learning Policy Institute \(LPI\) study](#) of effective professional learning practices cited in the review.

The review also portrays the paper as overstating the potential for micro-credentials alone to promote teacher growth. The abstract of our report states: "Whether [micro-credentials (MCs)] will fulfill their promise will depend largely on the ability of education leaders to set an appropriately and consistently rigorous bar for quality in MC offerings, as well as to ensure sufficient and appropriate implementation processes and supports *outside of the MC offerings themselves*" (our emphasis). We do find, however, that the process required to earn a micro-credential could help promote *application of new learning and reflection on practice* within the professional learning process, which are two core tenets the LPI research identifies for successful adult learning (and why many teachers find the [National Board certification process valuable](#)).

Our paper clearly states that high-quality micro-credentials (which we do [define](#), despite the review's claims to the contrary) are a tool that could help shift teachers toward evidence-based best practices in professional learning (which we also [define](#)), but "like any specific tool to improve our K–12 education systems, MCs are not a silver bullet...Reaping success from MCs requires making bigger shifts to systems, rather than simply layering MCs on top of, or next to, policies and processes already in place."

Based on our research, we [recommend](#) revisiting current policy approaches to professional learning and advancement which are based on hours of workshops attended or accrual of higher education credits. Prior research (which NEPC's review also cites) finds these "traditional" compliance-focused professional development experiences often lack relevance to, or impact on, teacher practice, and teachers themselves largely find them to be unsatisfying. We maintain that education leaders should move toward a more competency-based approach that changes the focus to whether teachers can implement the skills pursued via professional learning experiences. This approach should also be used to assist in identifying which teachers have the requisite skills to take on teacher leader roles. Contrary to the review's claim, the goal of providing opportunities for advancement is to support the professional growth and retention of other teachers, not to breed competition. To make teaching the well-compensated and respected profession the NEPC review advocates for, teachers must have opportunities for professional growth that recognize they have unique strengths and weaknesses, rather than treating them as indistinguishable from each other. It also requires making additional investments in teachers, including time to collaborate, share ideas, and model successful practices for moving their students forward. Regardless of one's

stance on micro-credentials, we hope we can agree that this is ultimately the goal of promoting teacher growth.

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<sup>1</sup> See in particular the section “Putting Educator Micro-credentials Into Practice,” on pages 22-25, which draws on five research publications to summarize teacher experiences with micro-credentials. Additionally, our report was informed by research, including educator focus groups, that was being conducted simultaneously by RTI International: Katherine McKnight, *NC Feasibility Study Report to the North Carolina Partnership for Micro-Credentials*, (Raleigh, NC: RTI International, 2021), [https://nmcdn.io/e186d21f8c7946a19faed23c3da2f0da/0a143ac0adb340a3b12bfea12da96a52/files/FeasibilityReport\\_Final\\_Jan7\\_2021.pdf](https://nmcdn.io/e186d21f8c7946a19faed23c3da2f0da/0a143ac0adb340a3b12bfea12da96a52/files/FeasibilityReport_Final_Jan7_2021.pdf).