

Frequently Asked Questions

On Credentialing Learning in Nevada

What does “credentialing learning” mean?

Credentialing learning means documenting and recognizing what students know and can do, even when learning happens outside of school.

This might include:

- work
- volunteering
- internships
- service projects
- independent learning

Why does learning outside of school count?

Learning that happens outside of school provides the most authentic learning environment. While the classroom helps students understand concepts, activities such as jobs, sports, or volunteering allow them to demonstrate growth in real-world settings and situations and refine the skills outlined in the Portrait that are essential for long-term success.

What kinds of experiences can be documented, and how do I know if they are rigorous enough?

Meaningful experiences usually involve planning, practice, problem-solving, and reflection over time, not just a short task. An experience is considered rigorous when it requires learners to demonstrate mastery of relevant standards or competencies through meaningful application, reasoning, or transfer. Teachers can review a proposed learning experience in advance and suggest ways to strengthen it so the resulting evidence clearly demonstrates mastery of the intended standards or competencies.

How does this connect to the Portrait of a Learner?

Documenting learning may include artifacts, reflections, and other evidence that show what students did, what they learned, and how their learning connects to the competencies outlined in the Portrait of a Nevada Learner. This documentation makes student growth visible across each guiding question:

EMPOWERING — “How am I growing in my learning?”

CONNECTING — “How am I building and sustaining relationships and community?”

IMPACTING — “How am I contributing to make an impact?”

THRIVING — “How am I navigating challenges, changes, and well-being?”

What happens when learning outside of school is documented?

Students have clear evidence of developed skills. This documentation shows how their experiences helped them grow in the skills outlined in the Portrait of a Nevada Learner.

Documented learning outside of school can:

- Help students stand out in college or career conversations
- Show employers evidence of real-world skills
- Build confidence by seeing progress

This kind of documentation helps others understand the learning and helps students see their own progress over time.

Credentialing Learning

Breaking Down Barriers: How Districts can create inclusive credentialing learning opportunities for K-12 learners



Overview

Credentialing learning allows students to demonstrate mastery through real experiences such as service work, internships, work-based learning, and creative projects. By shifting recognition from seat time to mastery, districts expand where learning can happen and make more meaningful opportunities possible. This resource outlines common barriers that limit access and offers practical steps districts can take to build strong, sustainable credentialing systems.

Creating Opportunities for Every Learner

District leaders play a central role in ensuring all students can access meaningful credentialing opportunities. When systems intentionally address financial, cultural, logistical, and informational challenges, more learners — including those historically underserved — are able to demonstrate what they know and can do. This strengthens belonging, expands pathways to success, and supports a learner-centered, future-ready approach across Nevada schools.

Barrier 1

Financial and Resource Gaps



Common Challenges

- Students face increased financial burdens that limit participation in credentialing opportunities.
- Lack of awareness about available support or pathways.
- Fees for programs or exams are prohibitive for many families.
- Limited local opportunities for real-world learning experiences.
- Resource deserts create gaps in access to essentials like transportation, reliable internet, and required equipment.



Examples

- Students cannot participate in internships because they lack transportation.
- Families cannot pay fees for certification exams.
- Rural students lack access to nearby work-based learning sites.



Solutions

- ⇒ **Prioritize** and expand no-cost, high-value credentialing pathways that leverage existing school and community programs.
- ⇒ **Establish** a diverse funding portfolio (e.g., stipends, micro-scholarships, grants) to eliminate financial barriers for all eligible students.
- ⇒ **Leverage** technology access for remote internships, virtual mentorship, and distance learning programs.
- ⇒ **Partner** with local businesses and community organizations to provide equipment on campus or subsidize transportation.
- ⇒ **Elevate** the value proposition by clearly communicating the alignment between credentialing opportunities and concrete college and career readiness outcomes.

Limited Awareness of Credentialing Options



Common Challenges

- Information asymmetry among students, families, and caregivers.
- Limited understanding of available credentialing pathways and their benefits.
- Lack of accessible, family-friendly resources.
- Communication gaps between schools and communities.
- Inconsistent outreach efforts across channels.



Examples

- Families don't know credentialing exists because information is only shared in English.
- Students hear about opportunities too late to participate.



Solutions

- ⇒ **Implement** a multi-modal, sustained communications campaign via high-traffic channels (e.g., social media, targeted newsletters, community events).
- ⇒ **Create** action-oriented, multilingual resources that are family-friendly and simplify documentation and validation of out-of-school learning experiences.
- ⇒ **Host** family and caregiver-focused information sessions at varied times to increase awareness and participation.

Barrier 3

Lack of Cultural Representation



Common Challenges

- Program materials, mentorship, and leadership lack visible cultural representation.
- Students from marginalized, yet resilient communities feel disengaged and lack a sense of belonging.
- Credentialing pathways fail to honor diverse forms of knowledge and experience.



Examples

- Marketing materials only show certain groups of students participating.
- Credentialing pathways overlook culturally rooted community service or contributions.



Solutions

- ⇒ **Proactively** audit program assets (materials, websites, social media) to ensure visual and narrative inclusivity across student, mentor, and professional representation.
- ⇒ **Clearly** communicate how credentialing opportunities align with career and college readiness.
- ⇒ **Co-design** credentialing frameworks with cultural organizations, tribal programs, and community leaders to ensure the pathways are culturally relevant and honor diverse forms of knowledge and experience.

Barrier 4

Inadequate Accommodation Protocols



Common Challenges

- Credentialing systems lack established protocols for accommodations and modifications.
- Students with documented needs face barriers to demonstrating mastery.
- Educators lack training to recognize competency in alternative formats.



Solutions

- ⇒ **Formalize** partnerships with Student and School Supports (e.g., Special Education, 504 Services) to co-develop centralized resource identification and fulfillment strategy for student accommodations.
- ⇒ **Offer** alternative formats and varied methods for students to demonstrate mastery within credentialing learning opportunities.
- ⇒ **Provide** comprehensive, ongoing professional development and coaching so learning providers can recognize competency demonstration across all alternative and accommodated formats, ensuring success in serving learners with disabilities.



Key Questions for Stakeholders to Consider

How do we ensure out-of-school learning experiences are calibrated with the rigor of the Portrait of a Nevada Learner competencies?

Does the credentialing activity clearly connect to and strengthen each student's learning experience?

Does each credentialing opportunity provide appropriate support and accommodations for students?

Does the current credentialing system honor diverse forms of demonstrating mastery?

Which community organizations, employers, cultural institutions, and tribal nations should be at the table?

Are all necessary resources, supports, and information equitably available, representative, and accessible to all students across different communities?

Documenting Learning Outside of School

A Resource for Families and Caregivers

Documenting Your Learning = Credentialing

*Another way to say “documenting your learning” is **credentialing**, which means turning real experiences into proof of learning and growth and showing how students build important skills beyond the classroom.*

Why document learning outside of school?

Students learn important skills through work, service, activities, and responsibilities outside of school. Documenting these experiences helps students show what they know and can do, not just where learning happened.

What does credentialing mean?

Credentialing means turning meaningful experiences into documented evidence of learning. This evidence can show how students develop skills connected to the Portrait of a Nevada Learner.



What role do families play?

Start by suggesting or connecting your student to experiences that build skills, such as sports teams, church activities, volunteering, part-time jobs, or community projects. Make sure they do the work themselves. After an experience, help them notice and talk about what they learned. Remind them to capture evidence with notes, photos, or examples.

Open-ended questions to ask your learner:

What did you learn from this experience?

What skills did you practice or strengthen?

What challenges did you work through?

How does this experience connect to your goals?

Quick Tips

- Encourage your student to keep notes, photos, or examples of their work.
- Help them reflect on how their experience connects to specific competencies from the Portrait of a Nevada Learner
- Remind them that quality and effort matter more than just participation

Documenting Your Learning Outside of School

A resource for high school students to use when preparing portfolios, college/career applications, or defenses of learning



Documenting Your Learning = Credentialing

*A fancy way to say “documenting your learning” is **credentialing**. It means turning real experiences into proof of your growth and skills.*

Why document your learning?

Credentialing helps you show what you’ve learned outside of school. It turns real experiences into proof of your skills and growth.

How It Connects to Portrait Skills

The Portrait of a Nevada Learner includes important skills such as problem-solving, communication, and resilience. Credentialing shows how your experiences helped you build skills that matter now and in the future.



Learning happens everywhere!

Examples of Experiences That Count

Jobs, volunteering, service projects, clubs, and personal interests can all help you grow. Meaningful experiences usually involve planning, practice, problem-solving, and reflection over time, not just a quick task. An experience is considered rigorous when it shows mastery of a skill or competency. Teachers can help review your idea ahead of time and suggest ways to make it stronger so it clearly demonstrates that mastery.



What does “credentialing” mean?

- Credentialing is the documentation of your learning outside of school.
- It turns meaningful experiences into proof of your growth and skills.
- Strong experiences include planning, problem-solving, reflection, and progress over time.
- You can learn through jobs, volunteering, service projects, clubs, and personal interests.
- Portrait skill levels help you see if an experience is challenging enough for high school and what evidence shows real growth.





Questions to guide your reflection:



How did this experience help me grow or make an impact?

What skills did I practice or improve?

What challenges did I face and how did I respond?

Which Portrait of a Nevada Learner competencies am I developing with intentionality?

Example: One way to document your learning is through a portfolio that tells your learning story. You'll want to organize your portfolio by skill or competency. Your portfolio should include:

- ❑ REFLECTION: Short reflections about what you learned (from a project, work-based learning, community experience, etc.)
- ❑ EVIDENCE: Photos, work samples, notes, artifacts, or projects
- ❑ ADULT FEEDBACK: Feedback and verification of rigor from an adult connected to the experience

Documented learning outside of school can:

- Help you stand out in college or career conversations
- Show employers your real-world skills
- Build confidence by reminding yourself how much you've grown

Choose one out-of-school experience and use the Portrait of a Nevada Learner progressions to reflect on how it challenged you and helped you grow.

Portfolio

DID YOU KNOW?

NEXT STEPS

