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Integrating Industry Certifications into Degrees

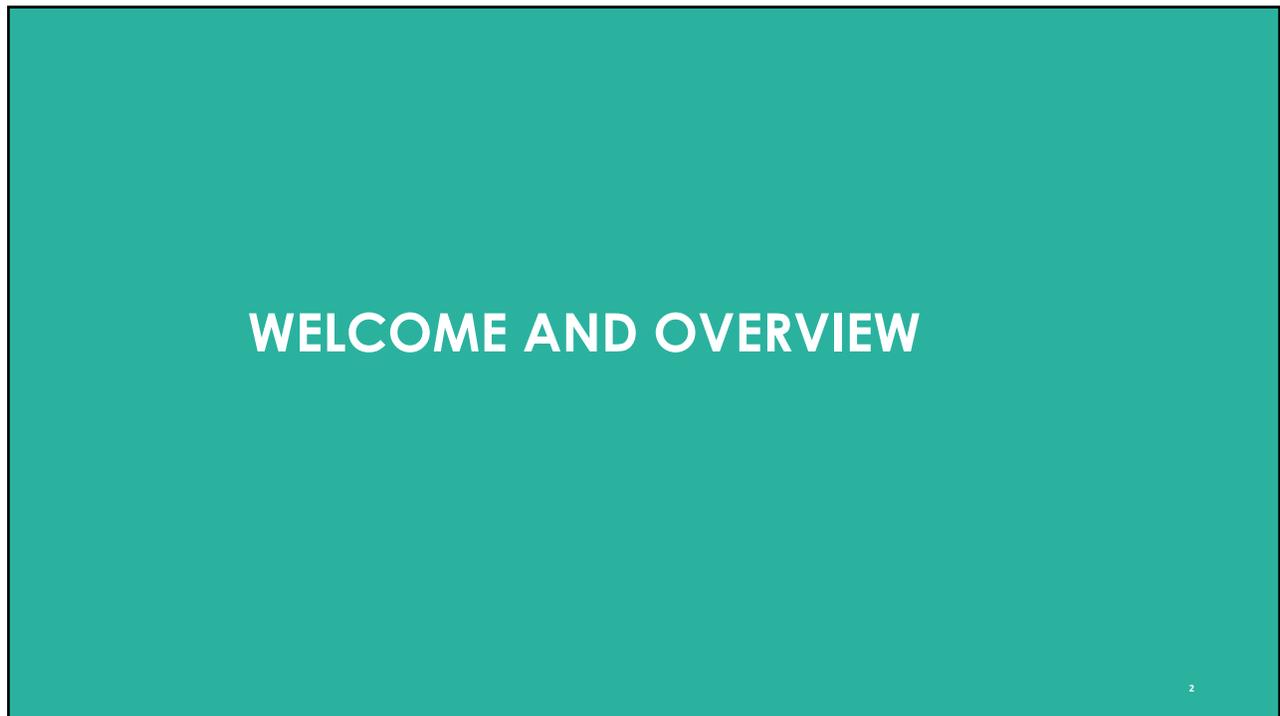
Workcred, League for Innovation in the Community College and Higher Learning Commission

Higher Learning 2026 | March 23, 2026

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WELCOME AND OVERVIEW

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Presenters

Karen Elzey, Interim Executive Director, Workcred

Rufus Glasper, President and CEO, League for Innovation in the Community College

Karen J Solomon, Vice President and Chief Transformation Officer, Higher Learning Commission (HLC)

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Agenda

- Introductions
- Overview of the project
- Resources
 - Institutional playbook
 - Working with certification bodies
 - Accreditation considerations
- Open discussion and adjournment

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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

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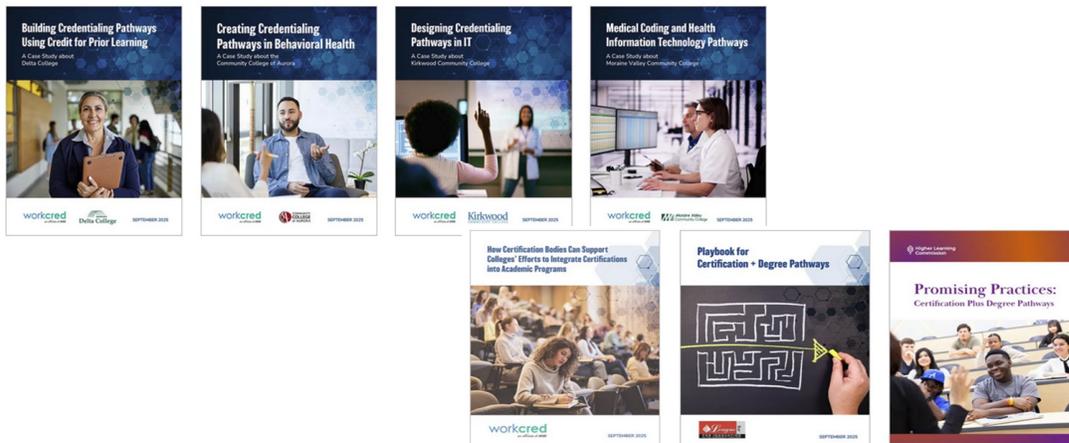
Lessons Learned

- Ensure adequate planning time
- Understand the eligibility requirements for certifications and the labor market demand
- Integrate standardized test preparation into the pathway
- Have a certification testing center on campus
- Provide support for faculty to earn certifications
- Develop a process to gather data to collect whether learners earn the certification
- Use credit for prior learning to provide college credit that is applicable to the pathways

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Resources for Credential Pathways

The work to create and improve credential pathways in higher education resulted in several case studies and playbooks.



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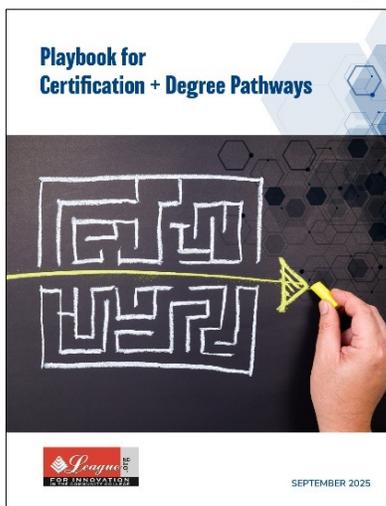
LEAGUE FOR INNOVATION IN THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Rufus Glasper, President and CEO

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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

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Key Stakeholders in C+D Pathways Development



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

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Planning Considerations



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

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Implementation Steps



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

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Challenges and Mitigation



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

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Outcomes and Impact



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

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WORKCRED

Karen Elzey, Interim Vice President

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Resources from Certification Bodies

Exam Blueprints

Career Information
and Credential
Roadmaps

Academic Pricing

Exam Vouchers

Practice Exams

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HIGHER LEARNING COMMISSION

Karen Solomon, Vice President and Chief Transformation Officer

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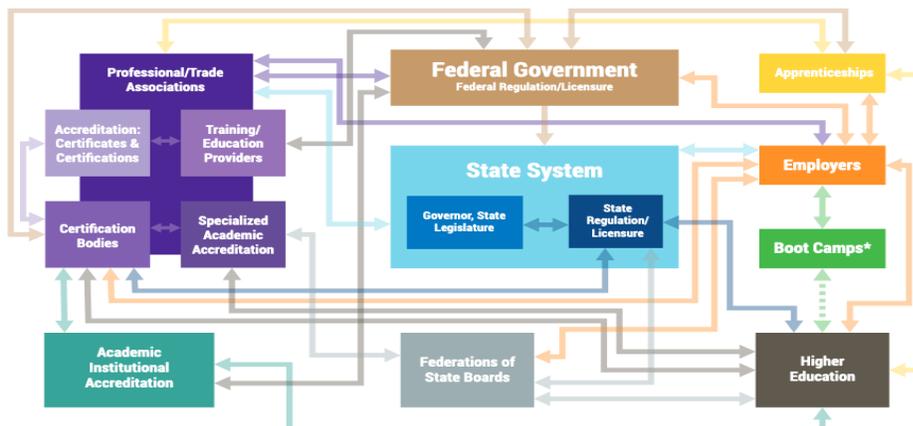
Accreditation shouldn't stifle innovation – it should provide *the fuel*.



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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. © 2021, Workcred Inc., All Rights Reserved

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

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HLC Credential Lab

Short-term Credential Provider Endorsement

- Quality Assurance of Provider Organizations
- Trusted providers identified through “HLC’s Endorsement”
- Voluntary

Innovation Center

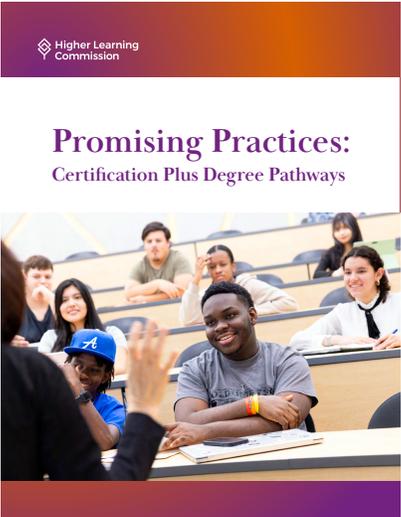
- Resources and Tools
- Networking
- Training and Technical Assistance
- Employer and Provider Support

© HLC's Credential Lab 21

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





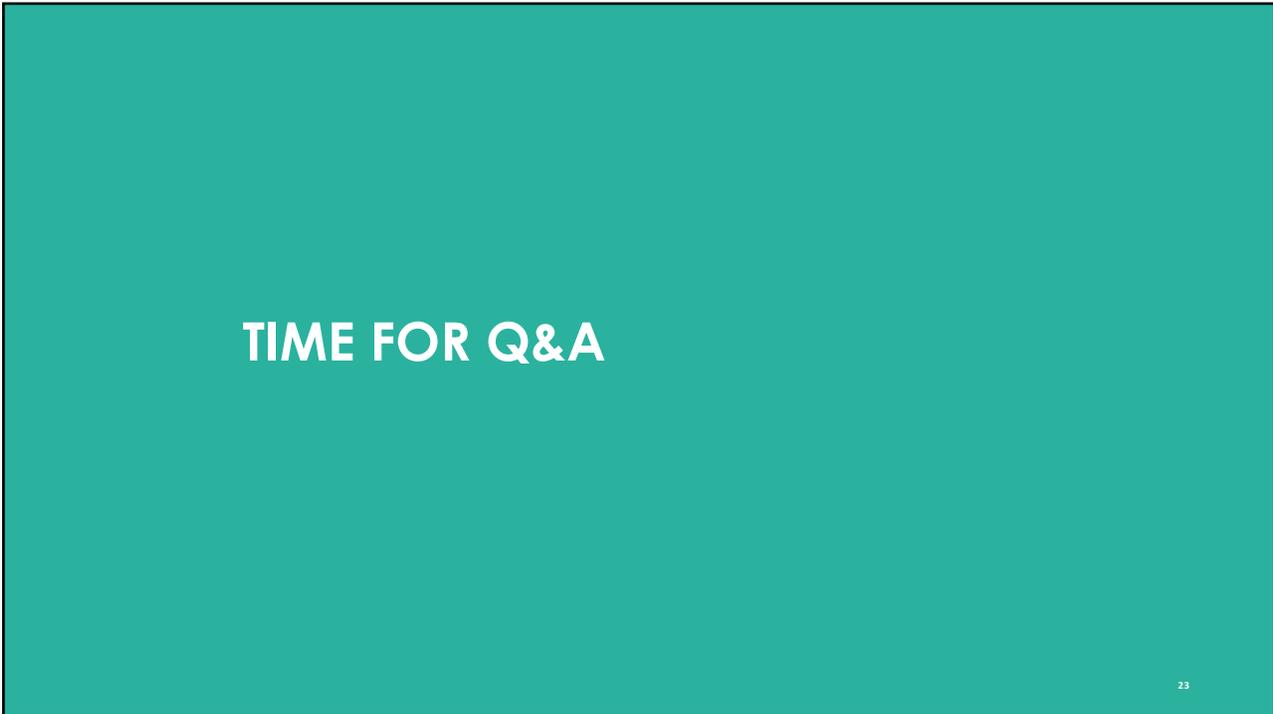
Promising Practices:
Certification Plus Degree Pathways

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

<https://www.hlcommission.org/about-hlc/initiatives/innovation/#resource-collection>

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