



Tennessee Promoted Student Industry Credentials

Tennessee Department of Education

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Executive Summary

In Tennessee, workforce development through high-quality career and technical education (CTE) programs and training is essential to our long-term success as a state. Alignment across the complex education and workforce development systems, including the validation of workplace competencies and skills through industry credentialing, must be prioritized. Historically, however, industry certifications, certificates, and other credentials have not been clearly defined, aligned to coursework or training programs, or accessible to students, making it difficult to attain the credentials needed for workplace readiness and success.

To mitigate these risks and more closely align with the needs of Tennessee business and industry, the Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE) uses a process to review and promote industry credentials for K-12 students. The process establishes clear criteria to promote an industry credential statewide and allows for industry credentials to be submitted for review by representatives of the secondary, postsecondary, workforce, and other governmental agencies. If approved, the industry credential is categorized into one of three tiers – **Recognized**, **Valued**, or **Preferred** – and promoted for use in K-12 schools.

This report provides an overview of the industry credential approval process, establishes definitions, provides criteria for submissions, and explains uses for the Tennessee Promoted Industry Credential List.

Summary

- Each year schools, businesses, and other organizations submit possible industry credentials to be considered for the Tennessee Promoted Student Industry Credential List.
- There were 190 industry credentials on the Tennessee Promoted Student Industry Credential List in January 2023. The tier assignment was as follows: 41 were Recognized, 52 were Valued, and 97 were Preferred.
- To access the Tennessee Promoted Student Industry Credential List, please visit our website, [here](#).

Background

It is the mission of TDOE to “set all students on a path to success” and for many Tennessee students, CTE serves as that pathway. CTE programs develop key employability and technical skills while providing opportunities for students to demonstrate readiness through the attainment of industry credentials, work-based learning experiences, and/or the attainment of postsecondary credit hours through early postsecondary opportunities (EPSOs).

More specifically, industry certifications, and the broader term **industry credentials**, have been highly discussed in Tennessee K-12 schools and postsecondary institutions for many years. Industry credentials are often used as a measure of quality in Tennessee CTE programs and validate the technical skill and competencies students have acquired through their chosen CTE program. Additionally, industry credentials factor into Tennessee’s school and district accountability framework under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) as part of the college and career readiness indicator, “*Ready Graduate*.”

The reauthorization of the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act, otherwise known as Perkins V, again highlighted the importance of industry credentialing in Tennessee CTE programs. In 2019, various focus group meetings were conducted to draft the Perkins V Tennessee State Plan. During this process, it was determined that a specific statewide strategy should be included in the state plan to focus on industry credential alignment and attainment. As a result, the statewide promoted student industry certification process and criteria would be coordinated with the Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC), Tennessee Board of Regents (TBR), Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development (TDLWD), and others, to increase postsecondary articulation and the ability for students to earn stackable certifications, credentials, and degrees in high-skill, high-wage, and in-demand career pathways.

TDOE conducted conversations with these and additional state agencies, secondary, postsecondary, and workforce partners in 2019 and 2020. A revised industry credential review process, with updated criteria and definitions, was developed to reflect the unique needs of Tennessee.

Definitions

The Tennessee Promoted Student Industry Credential List is used to identify various industry credentials available to secondary students which are recognized, valued, and preferred by the industry in Tennessee. The Tennessee Promoted Student Industry Credential List is inclusive of broader industry credentials and includes industry certifications, certificates, and licenses, as defined below.

In Tennessee, **industry certifications** are awarded to secondary and postsecondary students based on the mastery of a specific set of industry or job-related competencies. Industry certificates are usually developed in collaboration with employers and validated through a third-party vendor which uses an assessment to determine mastery. Industry certifications are typically awarded or are valid for a limited time but may be renewed.

In Tennessee, **certificates** are typically awarded to individuals based on the completion of a specific task, such as a training module, course, program (i.e., apprenticeship), etc. There is no standard for awarding certificates and not all certificates include an assessment to measure learning outcomes or reflect mastery of a set of competencies. Certificates may be associated with needs for a specific job role or very broad general skills, like employability or leadership skills.

In Tennessee, **postsecondary credentials, degrees, or licenses** are awarded by a postsecondary institution or governmental agency granting the individual the legal ability to be employed in a specific occupation, such as a licensed practical nurse or cosmetologist. Licenses are valid for a limited time, generally require continuing education to renew, and may be revoked by the awarding agency.

Industry credentials on the list at the **Recognized Tier** are the lowest value credentials. While valuable, employers and industry value these credentials least of the credentials on the list.

Industry credentials on the list at the **Valued Tier** are the middle value credentials. Employers and industry value these credentials for the specific skills and knowledge they represent.

Industry credentials on the list at the **Preferred Tier** are the highest value credentials. These include credentials that indicate completion of a program or required licenses for employment in certain industries.

Criteria

To be considered for the Tennessee Promoted Student Industry Credential List, the submission must meet the following **minimum criteria**:

- The credential is aligned to at least one TDOE-approved CTE program of study.
- The student-level credential attainment data is documented in the form of a certificate or certification.

Additional criteria are used to evaluate submissions for the Tennessee Promoted Student Industry Credential List, including but not limited to:

- The credential has statewide or national recognition and is based on student mastery of relevant skills, knowledge, and/or demonstration.
- The credential is aligned to statewide high-skill, high-wage, and/or in-demand occupations and a CTE program of study that is identified as high-skill, high-wage, and/or in-demand in most economic regions of Tennessee.
- The submission identified and included letters of support from state-wide employers who use the industry credential as a preferred requirement for entry-level employment or as part of the components of an entry-level job description.
- The credential is required to enter the workforce in the relevant industry area, i.e., a license to operate, etc.
- The credential can be used to enhance an internship, work-based learning, or job shadowing experience and students work with an external business partner or organization to complete the credential.
- A third-party or governing board administers the assessment exam or other quantifiable measure to validate student attainment and mastery.
- The curriculum and standards used to prepare students for the industry credential is relevant, research-based, and high-quality and have been updated to the most current industry trends.
- The credential is attainable by a secondary student.
- Postsecondary institutions are involved in discussions to accept or currently accept the credential for post-secondary credit.

Impact

There are several impacts related to credentials being on the Tennessee Promoted Student Industry



Credential List. It provides schools and districts with a list of valuable credentials for the students to earn. Perkins V funding may be used to support student attainment of the Tennessee Promoted Industry Credentials. Finally, the industry credentials will be used to impact funding based on the TISA (Tennessee Investment in Student Achievement) Formula.

Process and Review

The industry credential submission window is open to schools, businesses, and other organizations for electronic submissions each year from April through July. Once the submission window closes, a team of reviewers representing secondary and postsecondary educators, TDOE, TBR, TDLWD, THEC, Tennessee Department of Agriculture (TDOA), and Tennessee Department of Economic and Community Development (TECD) uses the identified criteria and scoring rubric to review each submission. Available programs for submissions are based on the career cluster under review that year. Credentials submitted that do not align with a program within the career clusters being reviewed that year will not be accepted. The chart below shows the years the various clusters are open for submission.

2023	2024	2025
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advanced Manufacturing Agribusiness Agricultural Engineering, Industrial, and Mechanical Systems Arts, AV technology & Communications Business Management and Admin Information Technology Law, Public Safety, Corrections, and Security 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Architecture and Construction Education and Training Government and Public Administration Horticulture Science Human Services Marketing Veterinary and Animal Science 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Environmental and Natural Resources Finance Food Science Health Science Hospitality and Tourism STEM Transportation

Each submission is evaluated by multiple reviewers and the average rubric score is used to approve or deny additions for the Tennessee Promoted Industry Credential List. If approved, the industry credential is categorized into one of three tiers – **Recognized, Valued, or Preferred** – based on the rubric score and promoted for use in K-12 schools.

Tier 1 - RECOGNIZED	Tier 2 - VALUED	Tier 3 - PREFERRED
This is the minimal level at which an industry credential can be promoted and is considered recognized statewide. To be included in this tier, credentials must receive a minimum of 40 points on the rubric.	This is the second level at which an industry credential can be promoted and is considered valued statewide. To be included in this tier, credentials must receive a minimum of 51 points on the rubric.	This is the third level at which an industry credential can be promoted and is considered preferred statewide. To be included in this tier, credentials must receive a minimum of 61 points on the rubric.

Figure 1

Please note, the tiering of industry credentials is used to distinguish the perceived value of the credential by Tennessee postsecondary, employers, businesses, and industry. TDOE continues to evaluate the use of these tiers in other meaningful ways, including how the tiers would impact the *Ready Graduate* indicator. The tiers of industry credentials will be used to impact funding based on the Tennessee Investment in Student Achievement Act (TISA).

Conclusion

As we work across the state to support workforce development, the implementation of student industry credentials through high-quality CTE programs must remain a statewide strategy. Tennessee's K-12 districts are strongly encouraged to include student industry credentials as part of the district's larger strategic approach and priorities.

Moving forward, the industry credential submission window will be released annually each spring to produce a Tennessee Promoted Student Industry Credential List that is updated annually. For more information on Tennessee Promoted Industry Credentials and to access the Tennessee Promoted Student Industry Credential List, please visit our website, [here](#).