

# Toward an Improved School Credentialing Process

*Analysis of Progress in Equity, Access, and Authenticity*

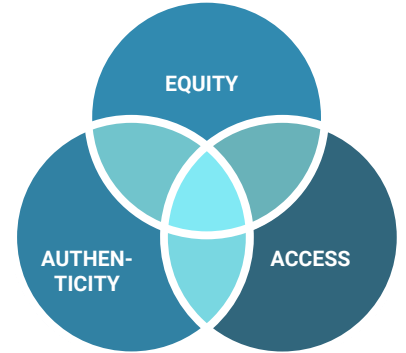
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## Organizational Context & Problem of Practice

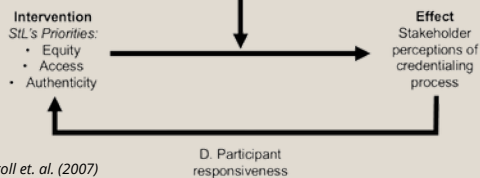
This project sought to provide support to our partner organization, Summit to Learn (StL), in identifying progress toward goals in their recently revised school credentialing process. As a nonprofit organization partnering with K-12 schools, StL offers a credential option for schools that are fully implementing their core practices. They began offering a credential in 2013 and, in the spirit of continuous improvement, launched a revised process in 2022 to address stakeholder feedback. In response to the input they gathered from various groups, StL set out to make its credentialing process more equitable, accessible, and authentic. As part of this initiative, StL added a school site visit, a partial “pathway” credential, and a “beating the odds” analysis for meeting credential criteria. The goal of our project was to help StL determine what leading indicators are saying about the impact of their efforts thus far.



## Conceptual Framework

**Summit to Learn:  
Credentialing Evolution**

Moderated by  
Fidelity of Implementation  
Dimensions:  
A. Adherence  
B. Exposure  
C. Quality of delivery



*Adapted from Carroll et al. (2007)  
Based on Dane & Schneider (1998)*

We approached this work through the lens of fidelity of implementation theory, using an adapted version of the process identified by Carroll et al. (2007) and inclusive of the work of Dane and Schneider (1998) which identified five components of fidelity of implementation. For the purposes of this project, we considered four of these dimensions: adherence, exposure, quality of delivery, and participant responsiveness.

## Study Design

To assess StL's progress toward making their credentialing process more equitable, accessible, and authentic, we reviewed documents and conducted focus groups and individual interviews with StL professionals and school leaders who have experienced the credentialing process.



Document Review



Focus Groups



1:1 Interviews

## Project Questions

These five project questions guided our inquiry.

1. In what ways does Summit to Learn communicate the concepts of equity, authenticity, and access to key stakeholders throughout the credentialing process?
2. What are key stakeholders' perceptions of the new credentialing process?
3. Access: How accessible and achievable do key stakeholders find the new credentialing process?
4. Equity: Do key stakeholders perceive that the new process maintains high expectations for learners and supports them in their growth and development?
5. Authenticity: What characteristics of the new credentialing process do key stakeholders perceive as reflecting and honoring the unique aspects of their school community?

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## Findings

We identified nine findings in response to our project questions:

1. The concepts of equity, access, and authenticity are evident in StL's communication as dynamic, complex constructs, but **the current visual representation inadequately portrays the relationships between constructs**.
2. **Equity is consistently the leading concept**, and while clearly defined by the organization, StL's definition of the term is incomplete relative to the scope of the organization's work.
3. StL's materials reflect the accessibility of credentialing to all schools, but this priority is not reflected in the materials most likely to be seen first by potential credentialees; **some initial verbiage is contradictory and may be discouraging**.
4. **School leaders feel their voices are heard** and that they are supported within the credentialing process.
5. StL professionals perceive that they lack adequate tools and training to effectively shepherd school leaders through credentialing.
6. The revised credentialing process **feels more accessible and achievable** to school leaders than the past process did.
7. Because the credential criteria are based on outcomes, a school's implementation rubric score is not necessarily predictive of a school's chances of becoming credentialed.
8. Stakeholder perceptions about equity in the credentialing process, as defined by StL, were varied.
  - a. Some stakeholders expressed concern that the addition of the partial credential and the "beating the odds" analysis, while intended to promote equity, might diminish the status of the credential.
  - b. Some stakeholders expressed concern that the partial credential and the "beating the odds" analysis would lower expectations for all learners, which is contrary to equity.
9. **Schools have the opportunity to "tell their story"** during the credentialing process, which fosters authenticity.



## Recommendations

Our findings led to the following recommendations for Summit to Learn, related to their revised credentialing process:

1. Evaluate and redesign credentialing materials to better reflect the organization's commitment to equity, access, and authenticity.
2. Maintain continuous improvement practices related to feedback and revision for StL credentialing.
3. Provide credentialing-specific training to all StL staff who support schools in pursuing the credential.
4. Integrate credentialing-related experiences as part of the implementation process for all partner schools.
5. Align rubrics for full implementation of StL's school model more closely with rubrics for achieving the credential.
6. Continue to recognize schools who have achieved credential-level impact in one or two dimensions of student achievement.
7. Develop equitable, standardized measures for earning the credential that can be applied uniformly to all schools.
8. Capitalize on framing credentialing as an opportunity for partner schools to "tell their story," to help make the credentialing process feel more accessible and achievable to prospective credentialees.

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## Relationship Between Project Questions, Findings, and Recommendations

