

Toward an Improved School Credentialing Process:  
Analysis of Progress in Equity, Access, and Authenticity

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## Executive Summary

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.

We approached this work through the lens of fidelity of implementation theory, using an adapted version of the process identified by Carol 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.

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. These five project questions guided our inquiry:

- ◆ In what ways does Summit to Learn communicate the concepts of equity, authenticity, and access to key stakeholders throughout the credentialing process?
- ◆ What are key stakeholders’ perceptions of the new credentialing process?
- ◆ *Access*: How accessible and achievable do key stakeholders find the new credentialing process?
- ◆ *Equity*: Do key stakeholders perceive that the new process maintains high expectations for learners and supports them in their growth and development?

- ◆ *Authenticity*: What characteristics of the new credentialing process do key stakeholders perceive as reflecting and honoring the unique aspects of their school community?

## Findings

We identified nine findings in response to our project questions:

**Finding 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.

**Finding 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.

**Finding 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 credentialed; some initial verbiage is contradictory and may be discouraging.

**Finding 4.** School leaders feel their voices are heard and that they are supported within the credentialing process.

**Finding 5.** StL professionals perceive that they lack adequate tools and training to effectively shepherd school leaders through credentialing.

**Finding 6.** The revised credentialing process feels more accessible and achievable to school leaders than the past process did.

**Finding 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.

**Finding 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.

**Finding 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.

### **Organizational Context**

Summit to Learn (“StL”) is a nonprofit organization founded in 1991 which partners with K-12 schools to provide schools with support and resources in service of three dimensions of student achievement: mastery of knowledge and skills, character, and high-quality student work. Based on the philosophy and values of Outward Bound founder Kurt Hahn, the organization operates under the belief that both teachers and students need to be involved in work that is challenging, engaging, and meaningful; when schools can meet these conditions, achievement and learning follow naturally (StL website, n.d.). The act of creating effective classrooms in which students outperform their own expectations lays the groundwork for an even more aspirational goal of becoming active contributors to a better world.

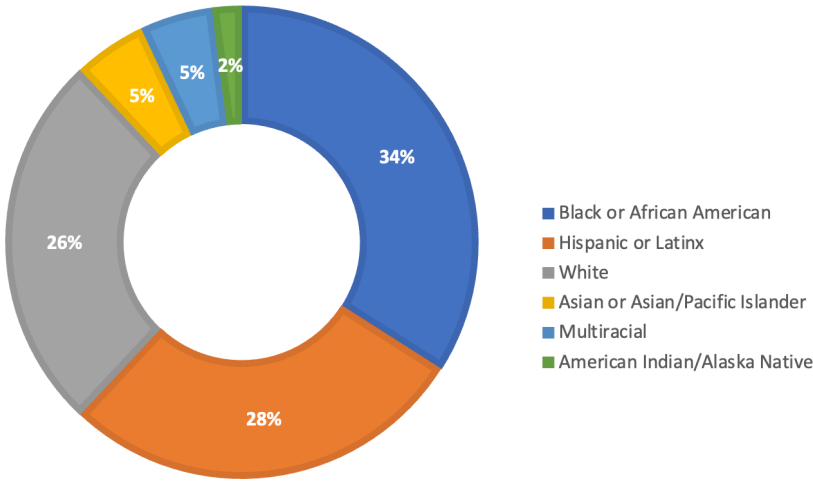
With such a steadfast commitment to these lofty goals, Summit to Learn’s success and momentum come as no surprise. The organization has undergone exponential growth of late—while it took 27 years to reach 100 employees, it doubled to over 200 staff from 2019 to 2022. Currently serving about 450,000 students and 31,750 teachers in over 1,000 schools across 32 states throughout the U.S., Summit to Learn generates annual revenue in excess of \$45M (Personal communication, August 2023).

Summit to Learn offers several options for schools to partner with the organization. While some schools opt to use StL’s curriculum resources or attend conferences or workshops, other schools select the full partnership option, meaning they strive to attain full implementation of StL’s educational model. Partner schools may use the StL name and logo and are provided with access to an StL professional who serves as a school site designer and coach. They also receive professional development, curricular materials, and seats at StL’s conferences and

workshops. StL professionals lead partner schools through continuous improvement cycles, working with school leaders to develop work plans and track progress toward goals. StL has developed an Implementation Rubric (IR) to help schools and coaches evaluate where the school is on the journey to full implementation of the StL model. StL also offers a “credential” as an acknowledgement of excellence for partner schools who meet a specific set of criteria.

Summit to Learn serves schools and students representing a variety of demographic profiles as illustrated in Figure 1. Sixty percent of students in Summit to Learn’s partner schools are considered economically disadvantaged (StL annual report, n.d.). The organization is committed to maintaining partnerships with schools in a variety of settings.

**Figure 1**  
*Demographic Information: Students in StL Schools*



*Note.* Adapted from StL Annual Report, 2022

Maintaining impact at scale while adhering to the powerful core values which animate their people and mission is careful work; in this spirit, our capstone project endeavors to help Summit to Learn evaluate the efficacy of their recently redesigned credentialing process.



### **Problem of Practice**

While StL partners with many more schools than it credentials, the organization values formally recognizing those schools that reach a specific threshold of quality as a signal of excellence in education and alignment with their core values and practices. StL has been credentialing schools since 2013 but sought to reevaluate the process after nearly a decade of using their original credentialing model.

Through survey data and listening sessions with partner schools, leaders at StL identified several areas for improvement within their process. With feedback collected from more than 150 students, faculty, and staff members, StL set about the redesign of their school credentialing process in the fall of 2021. They piloted and launched the updated credentialing process in late 2022. StL leaders sought to understand what leading indicators say about their progress toward their goals for the redesigned process.

The previous credentialing process at StL had been successful by many measures but failed to fully meet the organization's expectations and needs. Specifically, members of the organization's leadership team cited data trends illustrating inequities in which schools were eligible for credentialing. For example, StL directors shared that schools with higher percentages of indigent students rarely met the organization's standards for credentialing when it came to meeting their expectations for "mastery of knowledge and skills," which is primarily measured through standardized test scores (Personal communication, August 2023).

Analysis of this data was instrumental in informing StL's determination that improving equity and access should be goals of a revised credentialing process. StL directors also expressed that they are interested in exploring alternative measures for student achievement beyond standardized test scores, which could offer a pathway to credentialing for schools in low-income areas that had not been available to them through the previous process (StL staff, personal communication, August 2023).

A second concern that emerged as the organization assessed the success of the credentialing program was related to authenticity. Feedback gathered by the credentialing team during listening sessions and through individual conversations indicated that there was a potential imbalance between the amount of work involved and the benefits of the process for partner schools (StL staff, personal communication, August 2023). Further, school leaders expressed that the work of becoming credentialed amounted to a lot of “checking boxes” and felt completely separate from their daily work. Thus, StL leaders identified a need to bolster their value proposition and improve the authenticity of the credentialing program.

When the StL credentialing team launched the updated version of the credentialing process, they maintained a commitment to continuous learning, and intending for the credentialing process to not only signal excellence, but to be an opportunity for partner schools to engage in continuous improvement through a collaborative partnership with the national organization.

In response to what they learned through their feedback process, StL set out to redesign their credentialing process to be more equitable, accessible, and authentic. They defined each of these constructs as follows (StL website, n.d.):

***Equity*** - *The Credential demands that all students are expected and supported to develop and grow as learners.*

***Access*** - *The Credential is a ‘north star’ and achievable for all Summit to Learn partner types across the country.*

***Authenticity*** - *The Credential is a result and recognition of a process that honors the unique assets of each school community.*

To understand whether this updated version of the credentialing process represented progress toward better meeting the needs of the organization and its credentialed, we

conducted an analysis of leading indicators related to the new credentialing process. StL leaders didn't have reason to suspect that the new credentialing process was flawed—rather, they wanted to understand how stakeholders perceived it, what problems might be emerging, and identify early issues to optimize the process going forward. Like many credentialing processes, there is a cycle to applying for and maintaining the credential. Therefore, some StL credentialed schools have experienced only the first version of the process, some have experienced only the revised process, and others have experienced both.

The national organization and its partner schools both have a stake in the success of the revised credentialing process. Summit to Learn has an interest in ensuring credentialed schools truly represent excellence within their model. Further, the organization desires for partner schools who are undergoing the credentialing process to have a meaningful and positive experience. Within each partner school, school leaders, teachers, parents, and students all have a stake in the outcome of the credentialing process. As an organization, StL's leadership team stands to benefit greatly from the redesign of this process not only in more closely adhering to their values, especially their strong value around equity, but also in terms of brand awareness and revenue—the more StL credentialed schools that exist, the more their model is seen as legitimate and making a difference.

This revised process can provide significant value for partner schools as they undertake credentialing. Providing a formative feedback loop and deepening partnerships with schools allows StL to provide value to schools beyond the label of being “credentialed.” The credentialing process, accompanied by professional development, can also facilitate deeper learning for professionals at partner schools and within the organization.

The redesigned credential process includes two significant changes that were implemented to help the organization meet its goals of making the credentialing process more equitable, accessible, and authentic. First, the credentialing process now provides an opportunity to become credentialed in one or two of the three identified areas through a

“pathway credential.” In an effort to recognize schools who meet credential-level standards in one or two areas but have struggled to show strong outcomes in another, this partial credential is intended to serve as an interim step toward full credentialing. Schools receiving the pathway credential must commit to striving toward the full credential.

Second, the organization offers schools seeking a credential the opportunity to undergo a “beating the odds” analysis, should they not meet the benchmarks for demonstrating excellence in the area of mastery of knowledge and skills. This analysis compares a school’s actual performance to a predicted performance based on the performance of demographically similar schools in the same state.

As an organization with a genuine commitment to improving continuously, operationalizing its values, and serving under-resourced schools as thoroughly and inclusively as possible, StL has high hopes that its redesigned credentialing process is having a positive impact. This project helps StL investigate the progress it has made and identify potential areas of focus by gathering feedback from key stakeholders about their experiences of the three priorities of equity, access, and authenticity.

## **Review Of Literature**

### **Value of Credentialing**

Though credentialing is typically considered in terms of its value for signaling quality to external stakeholders and outside entities (Okulova & Shakina, 2020), credentialing processes also have the potential to provide advantage to those engaged within them. For any given organization undergoing a credentialing process, a clear understanding of how value is defined and measured is an essential first step; the specific merits of credentialing for an organization will vary greatly, but the existence of such benefit to those engaging in the credentialing process is worth consideration.

Organizations undergoing processes that mirror credentialing reviews have seen valuable, positive impacts for the involved organizations. In a K-12 education context, Ehren

and Vischer (2008) found school improvement gains alongside school inspections (i.e., site visits, reviews) in all ten case studies conducted in Dutch schools; they contend that the school inspections were a positive impact factor for school improvement. All of the schools in their study implemented improvements based on feedback and suggestions received from school inspectors as part of their own ongoing improvement plans, shedding some light on the mechanism by which school inspections can create value for the schools. The potential benefit to schools engaging in such processes warrants further investigation.

A critical look at value creation within higher education also reveals relevant lessons for credentialing organizations. Higher education institutions have increasingly determined value based primarily on stakeholders' self-perceived goals using the practice of marketization, which has been criticized as a movement toward focus on short-term gains such as student satisfaction, at the expense of focus on long-term goals such as personal growth through life-long learning (Judson & Taylor, 2014). Though short-term self-reported stakeholder goals are presumably easier to measure and result in positive sentiments toward the institution, the move away from marketing their true intended benefit has been criticized as being to their long-term detriment.

Those responsible for determining criteria and measures for credentialing processes are well-served to carefully consider their intended outcomes for both the credentialing organization and, importantly, for those engaged in their process. Value creation is a complex process that should not be overlooked to achieve outcomes and measures or for short-term organizational gain.

### **Improvement Science**

Unlike randomized control trials in experimental science, research in educational settings must factor in variability in both process and setting. Improvement science focuses on these nuances and attempts to learn from them. "Rather than thinking about a tool, routine or some other instructional resource as having proven effectiveness," Bryk et al. (2010) explain,

“improvement research directs efforts toward understanding how such artifacts can be adaptively integrated with efficacy into varied contexts” (p. 25). No curriculum, pedagogical approach, or school design exists in a vacuum, and those who seek to affect student outcomes must focus not only on the components of a program, but also on the contexts in which it will be put into practice.

Credentialing bodies rightly concern themselves with the degree to which a set of standards is applied in a given school setting. Here the notion of implementation fidelity provides a discipline around ascertaining how fully any program in question is enacted. Many have argued that program adaptation is what determines the impact and ultimate success of an intervention. As explained by Shen et al., this lens advocates for “flexibility in allowing program implementers to adjust the program to the changing time, target populations, localities, and other factors” (2008, p. 468). The intervention Shen et al. analyze—a program created by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation aimed at bolstering and connecting rising philanthropy leaders—proves illustrative and relevant for our application, as it represents a “value-based” program derived from the organization’s core values rather than a proven scientific theory. Yang et al. (2004) put forth that balancing flexibility and uniformity is key, especially when evaluating programs and interventions applied across multiple sites and levels.

Directing this same line of thinking to the school setting, teachers choose varying approaches to implementation of any pedagogical practice, as the students themselves and the learning context are both quite variable—Paunesku and Farrington expound on this notion and assert that, “because of this variability in context and implementation, high-impact educational practices that work in one context all too often prove ineffective in new contexts or in the hands of new practitioners” (2020, p. 17).

Credentialing organizations are wise to carefully consider the true objectives of their credentialing program and ensure that attention is paid to the factors that influence positive outcomes, rather than just on the outcomes themselves. Paunesku and Farrington (2020, p. 1)

contend that schools should “measure learning environments, not just students,” insisting that a focus on learning outcomes rather than the activities which lead to good outcomes is ill-advised.

Similarly, Judson and Taylor (2014) argue that careful consideration in the selection of ends is imperative in order to ensure achievement of objectives that are of true importance to the organization. In other words, if the true objective of improving learning is for teaching and learning to be pedagogically effective, measures for K-12 credentialing organizations should not be so heavily focused on outcomes. Paunesku and Farrington (2020) identify this as focusing on the causes of effective learning, rather than the effects.

A shift in focus of this nature can improve systemization and scaling of credentialing processes, and equity. Paunesku and Farrington propose that “schools could foster learning and development more systematically and more equitably if they started to measure, not just downstream learning outcomes, but also the upstream developmental experiences that make those outcomes more likely to unfold” (2020, p. 1).

### **Equity: A Two-Dimensional Construct**

For as prevalent as the term is in the current public discourse, equity as a construct can have wildly different definitions and connotations. In a chapter of on inequity in education, Kyriakides (2020) summarizes two distinct “views” of equity.

#### ***Meritocratic Equity***

In the meritocratic (fairness) view, “differences in student learning outcomes are attributed to differences among students in terms of their cognitive abilities, talents, and amount of work dedicated to schooling” (Kyriakides, 2020, p. 14). This conceptualization of equity as something earned by an individual is fundamental to the American Dream (McCoy and Major, 2007). Those who abide by this notion, hold McCoy and Major, are better off because they don’t blame circumstance for differential outcomes among social groups (2007). In three studies exploring the effects of priming subjects to think meritocratically, McCoy and Major found “reduced tendency among members of low status groups to see themselves and their group as

victims of discrimination but with an enhanced tendency among members of high-status groups to see themselves and their group as victims of discrimination” (p. 342). In other words, when prompted to think about meritocratic equity, the “have nots” were less likely to feel that they were discriminated against unfairly, while the “haves” demonstrated the opposite effect.

Especially in the field of education, where teachers’ “practice is devoted to the increase of merit” (Cruz and Stake, 2012, p. 118), the framing of equity as fairness has drawn wide criticism. While equity in the classroom may seem to be about holding everyone to the same standard, problems with that approach quickly arise, as teachers often end up inadvertently devoting more time and attention to learners who demonstrate promise, and grading systems are inherently discriminatory in that they sort students into ranked labels (Cruz and Stake, 2012). Ultimately, Cruz and Stake put forth a hauntingly simple point: “The merit of meritocracy is partly to be found in its treatment of and effects upon the less meritorious” (Cruz and Stake, 2012, p. 117).

### ***Egalitarian Equity***

As a response to critiques of the meritocratic framing of equity, based on “hidden mechanisms in the society” along with observed disparities in student performance despite being given ostensibly the same opportunities, an egalitarian (inclusion) view has formed and become prevalent. In this view of equity, schools and institutions are “expected to provide further support to those socially disadvantaged groups of students ... in order to ensure that differences in learning outcomes are substantially reduced” (Kyriakides, 2020, p. 14).

Yet, differences in learning outcomes continue to plague the education field, due in no small part to the methods employed to measure educational attainment. Grodsky et al. hold that “standardized testing in American education has reflected, reproduced, and transformed social inequalities” (2008, p. 385). They note that test scores regularly vary according to socioeconomic status throughout the entire schooling spectrum (kindergarten through college) and posit that continued use of the instruments in application processes perpetuates disparity.



From a K-12 education standpoint, much is known about what good teaching looks like, but the specific actions that constitute good teaching are often notably absent from schools in high poverty areas (Haberman, 1991). An approach to credentialing that acknowledges the persistence of conventional teaching strategies in those settings and aims to reward the existence of excellent pedagogy (e.g., active student involvement) in schools rather than the existence of excellent outcomes (e.g., test scores) could make a substantial difference in improving equitable access to the credentialing process. Grodksy et al. (2008) recommend a focus on opportunities to learn (OTL), defined as “resources available to students, most often in the classroom setting, that facilitate their acquisition of knowledge or skills” (p. 388), as varied educational outcomes hinge, fundamentally, on disparities based on the provision of these opportunities. Indeed, the relative lack of student achievement in schools in low-income areas should be considered within their situational context and other factors outside of their control; a focus on effective school actions rather than strict outcomes is inherently more equitable from this perspective.

When viewed through this equity lens, credentialing organizations can address accessibility concerns by instituting processes that focus on rewarding the existence of specific activities that have shown to lead to positive outcomes, rather than solely on outcomes themselves (Paunesku and Farrington, 2020). This approach emphasizes ingress toward credentialing for schools doing the ‘right’ work, but not necessarily seeing quantitative results. Further, the traditional outcomes (e.g., student test scores) measured in credentialing processes often serve as a proxy for actual desired outcomes (e.g., deep understanding of concepts). Focusing on specific activities removes the potential validity problems inherent in using proxy variables to measure outcomes. Paunesku and Farrington suggest “prioritiz[ing] the measurement of experiences that reliably support academic motivation, engagement, and success,” also taking care to pick factors a teacher might be able to influence (2020, p. 15).

Using these criteria, they recommend a focus on meaningful and relevant work, teacher caring, and supportive feedback that promotes a sense of potential.

The ultimate goal would be a level of inclusive learning and teaching which would meet Hockings' (2010) definition, which assesses the "ways in which pedagogy, curricula, and assessment are designed to engage students in learning that is meaningful, relevant, and accessible to all" and thereby "embrac[ing] a view of the individual and individual difference as the source of diversity that can enrich the lives and learning of others" (p. 1).

### **Access and Authenticity**

While the literature teems with studies related to equity in education, especially with the focus on egalitarian equity and the role schools can play in redressing (or perpetuating) systemic inequities, scholars have offered surprisingly little research around access to and authenticity of credentialing—and accreditation—in the field.

In terms of access, Hasbun and Rudolph (2016) acknowledge both the value and challenges of attaining accreditation; they conducted a meta-analysis of existing scholarship on best practices around pursuing a credential for education preparation programs. Despite ample discussion of the strain institutions experience and the observation that "the process itself can be daunting and time-consuming" (para. 2) and that they "expressed frustration and even anxiety" (para. 2) with the process, no mention is made of attempts by accrediting bodies to ameliorate the burden on the schools undergoing the process beyond encouraging connecting with those who have previously attained the credential. Indeed, perhaps the only notion relevant to StL's definition of accessibility is unrelated to attainability—while not mentioned directly, the general notion that credentialing can be used as a 'north star' had echoes in the 'benefits' section, though the main focus centered on self-discovery and evidence of rigor and quality (Hasbun and Rudolph, 2016).

Similarly, authenticity was not the center of any studies we identified on accreditation or credentialing in schools. The closest proxy involved a look at school accountability, where the

concept of "authentic accountability" has appeared in education literature over the past several decades, within the constructs of adult education, higher education, and to a lesser extent, K-12 education. Eckert & Bell (2004) argued for accountability practices within adult education that were based on an acknowledgement that "learners, teachers, and programs are interacting complex systems whose uniqueness and integrity should be reflected in accountability efforts and policy" (p. 174).

### **Continuous Improvement: At the Intersection of Credentialing and Equity**

Defined as "ongoing commitment to quality improvement efforts that are evidence-based, integrated into the daily work of individuals, contextualized within a system, and iterative" (Park et al., 2013), continuous improvement (CI) is an integral tenet of StL's work with schools. Yurkofsky et al. (2020) claim the CI has the potential to "surface and confront deep underlying issues of inequity" which are "at odds with many of the structural and cultural features of the American educational system" (p. 425). Further, they argue that despite its innocuous label true continuous improvement methods afoot in the education field in fact represent a "deeply countercultural movement that challenges, and seeks to transform, many aspects" of the system itself (p. 425).

Education in school settings with underrepresented minority or lower socio-economic status students has long been characterized by teachers and students engaging in 'traditional' learning experiences (Haberman, 1991). These conventional pedagogical strategies have corresponded with poor outcomes for students in low-income, urban areas; school improvement in such settings would likely benefit from an emphasis on continuous improvement, specifically the 'how' of teaching, rather than improvement strictly focused on outcomes. A credentialing process that emphasizes the power of school inspections (including site visits and document reviews) on school improvement, coupled with what we know about the potential positive impact of such inspections (Ehren & Visscher, 2008) has the capacity to contribute to leveling the playing field for schools applying for credentialing.

## Conceptual Framework and Project Questions

### Fidelity of Implementation

In a review of research literature on fidelity of implementation, O'Donnell (2008) gleaned several definitions of the term, with the most frequently cited being Dane and Schneider's: "the degree to which programs were implemented as planned" (1998, p. 23). Organizations deploying a program or intervention in schools or any social service settings must do so with an eye toward implementation, acknowledging the many variables which warrant careful consideration. Even after anticipating and designing elements to meet the specific, varying needs of the target population in question, the equally challenging work of assessment and improvement remains. Is the designed solution making the intended difference? The field of program evaluation supports the work of organizations looking to launch, scale, and optimize initiatives intended to change human behavior or systems. Much of the existing literature in this realm pertains to behavioral interventions, specifically substance abuse prevention. Beyond defining the term, Dane and Schneider (1998)—in a sprawling meta-analysis of prevention literature—created five much-cited dimensions to be assessed when exploring fidelity of implementation: adherence, exposure, quality of delivery, participant responsiveness, and program differentiation. These areas form the core of the conceptual framework through which we will approach the problem of practice facing StL.

Implementation fidelity also has antecedents in diffusion of innovation theory, which was introduced by Everett Rogers in his 1962 book, *Diffusion of Innovations*. The text established a field of inquiry around how and why new ideas gain momentum over time. The theory, with roots in analyzing the success of the space program, was applied for almost two decades by federal policy makers and centered around the concept that rigorous evaluation and demonstration of effectiveness would drive consumer support of innovation (Dusenbury et al., 2003). In 1976, Berman and McLaughlin pushed back on this notion with a study of how innovation spreads in schools and introduced implementation fidelity as a central, critical factor.

Berman and McLaughlin found three core variables moderating the effectiveness of innovations: institutional setting (especially organizational climate and participant motivation), local implementation strategy, and the degree of change the project necessitated relative to its setting (Berman and McLaughlin, 1976). Applied to schools, this means that the impact of even the most expertly designed intervention would depend upon the culture of the school into which it is introduced, the methods employed by the school administrators rolling it out, and how different from the status quo the change would be.

At its core, fidelity of implementation inherently hinges on the intentions of program developers (Dusenbury et al., 2003)—in order to assess whether an intervention or program is having the effect intended by its designer, one must familiarize oneself with the goals and priorities of the parties responsible for crafting the aspects of the program undergoing analysis. Our project focus, therefore, necessarily originates from the minds and hearts of the administration of StL and the three values its most recent strategic plan identified as integral to their mission and efforts around credentialing its partner schools: equity, access, and authenticity.

Dane and Schneider (1998) conceptualized fidelity of implementation across five dimensions, four of which serve as the basis for our conceptual frame. The fifth area, program differentiation, asks whether a program possesses critical features which set it apart from other programs. Because StL's partner schools are likely not considering or pursuing competing credentialing processes through other organizations, school leaders we interviewed would not be able to speak to this aspect of Dane and Schneider's model. The remaining four dimensions comprise the core of our conceptual framework:

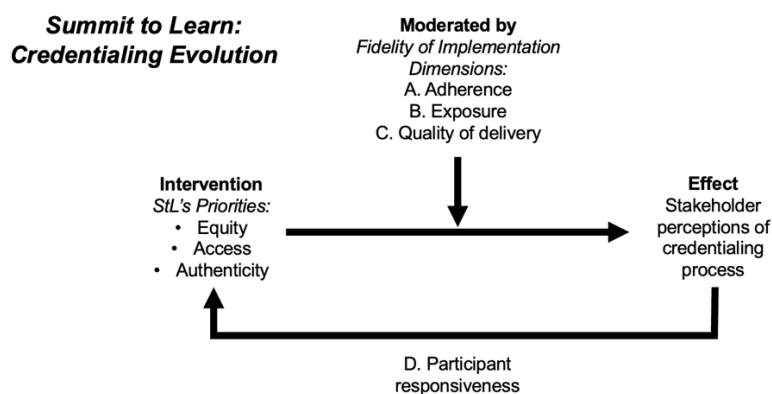
1. *Adherence: Is the intervention being delivered as it was designed?*
2. *Exposure: How many have been implemented, for how long, how frequently?*
3. *Quality of program delivery: Do implementers use the techniques or methods prescribed by the program?*

4. *Participant responsiveness: To what extent are participants engaged by and involved in the activities and content of the program?*

Represented visually in Figure 2, the evolution of StL’s credentialing process begins with the organization’s three stated priorities: equity, access, and authenticity. Using Dane and Schneider’s framing, we conceptualize these three named values as the “intervention” to be analyzed. The effect of the interventions is the perceptions stakeholders have of the credentialing process, and this effect is moderated by three of the four dimensions of Dane and Schneider’s model: adherence, exposure, and quality of delivery. In other words, the level of adherence, exposure, and quality of delivery all affect the extent to which stakeholders experience the credentialing process as equitable, accessible, and authentic. If stakeholders feel they have a voice in the improvement process—labeled in the diagram as participant responsiveness, to use Dane and Schneider’s terminology—then a feedback loop is formed, helping StL further inform its intervention and the degree to which it can operationalize the priorities of equity, access, and authenticity in their continued attempts to improve the credentialing process for its partner schools.

**Figure 2**

*Conceptual Framework for StL’s Credentialing Evolution*



*Note.* Adapted from Carroll et. al. (2007) and based on Dane & Schneider (1998).

## Project Questions

Viewing our problem of practice through the lens of this conceptual framework, we developed the following project questions to explore several facets of StL's intervention to augment their credentialing process, making sure to situate our inquiry within the context of the organization.

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?

## Study Design and Methodology

### Data Collection

The data collection methodology for this project included semi-structured interviews and focus groups with school leaders and StL staff members, document review, field observation at StL's national conference sessions related to credentialing, and a brief survey of a small group of conference participants interested in the credentialing process. Document review is a commonly used method for gleaning context and deeper understanding of any qualitative research topic (Bhattacharya, 2017); we began the process by exploring the ways our partner organization talked about, signaled, and described various aspects of the credentialing process—in particular, whether and how they alluded to the concepts of equity, access, and authenticity. Thus, we began with a thorough collection of the credential-related materials StL makes available to its partner schools and its public-facing website. These included: the

organization's annual report, slide decks, credentialing application tools and forms, the credentialing website itself, credential-related planning and guidance documents, as well as transcripts and handouts from sessions at StL's national conference. Taken together, these documents helped us thoroughly investigate our first project question, which focused on how StL conveys the concepts of equity, access, and authenticity to key stakeholders throughout the credentialing process.

The remaining four project questions concerned the perceptions of stakeholders. To explore these questions, we endeavored to collect qualitative data from two primary groups: leaders of schools who had undergone or were currently navigating the credentialing process, and staff members at StL who had firsthand experience supporting school leaders as they attempted to earn the credential.

Semi-structured interviews and focus groups were selected as primary data collection methods for this project. One-on-one interviews are frequently lauded as a powerful qualitative data collection tool; (Ravitch and Carl, 2021, p. 126) endorse qualitative interviews for their potential to "gain focused insight into individuals' lived experiences; understand how participants make sense of and construct reality in relation to the phenomenon, events, engagement, or experience in focus." While the depth of discussion afforded by individual interviews is obvious, focus groups have been shown not only to help scale data collection, but also to help reveal group consensus (Cyr, 2016).

Our decision to employ a combination of focus groups and interviews was aimed at what Lambert & Loiselle (2008) describe as an enriched data collection methodology, where the use of both methods can provide a deeper understanding of a phenomenon and aid in the triangulation of data. By cross-referencing individual interview responses with group discussions and comparing those with documents published by the organization, we were able to compare the narratives of school leaders with the perspectives of StL staff members whose primary focus



was on supporting school leaders in the attainment of the credential. The cumulative result was a robust set of qualitative data that led to clear findings synthesized from multiple sources.

### ***Participant Selection***

Participants for interviews and focus groups were selected through two sampling methods: purposive and snowball sampling. Because one of our primary aims was to understand stakeholder perspectives, we chose purposive sampling to identify participants who “have a certain experience” and “have knowledge about a phenomenon” (Ravitch and Carl, 2021, p. 84). First, current school leaders at StL partner schools who had experience with StL’s credentialing process were identified for participation. The StL Director in charge of credentialing identified these participants through StL’s current list of schools who were credentialed or were in the process of becoming credentialed; both school leaders who had recently completed the credentialing process and those who were currently engaged in it were included. This StL director sent an initial email and short Google Form to this list of individuals to solicit availability of potential participants (Appendix G). Seventeen responses were received from school leaders, 15 of whom agreed to participate. Ultimately, nine of those potential participants participated in a focus group or interview. Of those nine, five had previous experience with the credentialing process, three were taking part in it for the first time, and one had been involved only in recredentialing, using the original process.

After identifying the initial participants, we found snowball sampling, also known as chain referral sampling, to be advantageous for the study. This method, which involves participants helping identify other potential participants, is regarded as beneficial in social research for enriching sampling clusters (Noy, 2008). Snowball sampling resulted in the addition of StL professionals to the list of participants. The StL leadership team suggested that we include a group of participants who work for the organization alongside schools engaged in the credentialing process in order to better understand stakeholders’ perceptions about the redesigned process.

The participant request letter and Google Form (same copy as what was sent to school leaders, included as Appendix G) were sent to StL professionals who were directors, coaches, or school designers who work with schools who are credentialed or who are undergoing the credentialing process. Ten affirmative responses for participation were received from StL staff members. Six StL staff members engaged in focus groups or interviews, all of whom had direct responsibility as “school designers” and coaches to help support school leaders in navigating the credentialing process from exploration to final awarding of the credential.

### ***Interviews and Focus Groups***

The facilitation of interviews and focus groups was divided at random between researchers, with some consideration for aligning the participants' and researchers' respective time zones to aid with scheduling. Each researcher facilitated one focus group and four or five of the nine total interviews. All sessions were conducted remotely via Zoom and were scheduled through email correspondence and the use of an online scheduling tool; a ‘poll’ feature was also used to coordinate focus group sessions. With participant permission, each session was recorded by the facilitator for transcription and data analysis purposes. Participants were informed that the data would be used for the purposes of this project only, and that information or quotes would be de-identified prior to being reported. Data and transcripts were secured through password-protected accounts and devices.

In the end, seven school leaders and two StL professionals participated in 45-minute one-on-one interviews. Two focus groups were conducted; one focus group was held for school leaders (two participants) and one focus group contained StL professionals (three participants). The two stakeholder groups were placed in focus groups independent of one another so that the unique perceptions of each group could be gathered separately. Initially, both focus groups were slated to involve four or five participants each, but personal illness and scheduling conflicts resulted in smaller groups than were anticipated.

Our interview and focus group protocols (Appendix A) were developed to solicit general perceptions of school leaders and StL staff members, as well as to gain insight specifically about the three goals of the redesigned credential leveraging our conceptual frame. To avoid priming participants to focus immediately on equity, access, and authenticity, the first three questions were set forth to participants without specific reference to any of StL’s goals or documentation. We asked them: what about the credentialing process struck them as distinct or valuable; to tell us about their experiences with and perceptions of the credentialing process in general (including the most supportive and most challenging aspects); and to describe what they thought StL values and promotes in their credentialing process.

After those questions, the interviewer explained the three priorities in redesign (equity, authenticity, and access), including StL’s definition of terms and sharing the verbiage and the accompanying visual. Participants were asked to review the definitions that StL uses for each term; the interviewer kept the visual image represented in Figure 3 displayed during the subsequent three questions which asked them to share their experiences with the credential process related to each of the terms.

### Figure 3

#### *Summit to Learn’s Credential Redesign Explanation*

#### What’s New About the Credential?

In Fall 2021, StL partnered with school communities to redesign the StL School Credential to be more equitable, accessible, and authentic. More than 150 stakeholders, including students, educators, and staff, provided feedback. The organization piloted a new process for earning the Credential, including school site visits, authentic ways to demonstrate impact, and a balance of the three dimensions of student achievement.

In Fall 2022, StL launched redesigned Credential incorporating lessons learned from the redesign process.

- **Equity** – The Credential demands that all students are expected and supported to develop and grow as learners.
- **Accessibility** – The Credential is a ‘north star’ and achievable for all StL partner types across the country.
- **Authenticity** – The Credential is a result and recognition of a process that honors the unique assets of each school community.



*Note.* Visual representation of the three priorities for StL’s redesigned credentialing process, which was shown to participants during interviews and focus groups. (StL Credential website)

The sessions concluded with additional broad-based questions about how they might describe the process to a peer, whether they felt they had a voice in the evolution of the process, and whether there was anything else they thought was important to share to help us understand their experience with credentialing.

### ***Document / Media Review***

A document review was conducted both as a primary means of evaluating what StL conveys about equity, authenticity, and access in its materials and with the aim of helping us “understand the complexities of what we study better by providing a form of data triangulation of first-person accounts” (Ravitch and Carl, 2021). We reviewed what Ravitch and Carl (2021) call “official documents,” those that were produced and disseminated by StL, and “popular culture” documents, which included publicly accessed documents, websites, and videos.

Documents were first gathered through perusal of the organization’s credentialing website, which was provided by the StL Director in charge of credentialing and led to a variety of other linked sources related to the process and the recent redesign, such as the overview depicted in Figure 3, promotional videos, and an outline of the benefits of credentialing. Documents were also collected during one researcher’s attendance at StL’s national conference sessions. These documents included StL’s most recent annual report, credential overview documents, slide decks, the credential application, and handouts from the conference sessions. The document analysis table (Appendix E) provides an overview of the documents collected and analyzed.

### ***Field Observation and Survey***

Because one of our team members attended StL’s national conference during the data collection period, we were able to attain additional data from conference sessions related to the StL credentialing process. We elected to use observation, fieldnotes, and recordings as tools for this project so that we could “see and record firsthand the activities in which research participants are engaged in the context in which these activities happen (Ravitch and Carl,

2021). Our researcher attended two sessions; one session outlined the “road to the credential,” which was intended specifically for prospective credentialeds, and the other session focused on “impact in the three dimensions,” which had a broader appeal, but also focused heavily on credentialing as a next step for partner schools.

This researcher was attending the conference in her own professional capacity, but does not work at an StL partner school, nor has she ever been affiliated with the credentialing process; she would not have attended these specific sessions if not for this specific purpose. That said, her position as a professional in the field allowed for full participation in the sessions she was observing.

At the start of each session, an StL Director introduced our team member, stated her purpose for attendance, and indicated that the session would be recorded for these purposes only and that information, transcripts, and observations would be de-identified prior to use. Our researcher participated in the conference sessions through what Dewalt and Dewalt (2002) deem “full membership,” where she participated in a way described by Bhattacharya (2017) as engaging as if she were “a core member of the group,” engaging in all activities alongside participants and where the “cultural insiders are aware of the researcher’s intent, presence and role” (Bhattacharya, 2017, p. 140).

StL Directors who work directly with credentialing delivered the content in the sessions, which were primarily comprised of slide deck presentations and videos. The sessions had a significant amount of direct delivery of content that could be easily recorded for analysis, but there were also several opportunities for participants to engage with the content through “turn and talk” style conversations. Because the sessions were being recorded and the “full membership” observation method was selected, field notes were completed primarily before the session began and after the session was completed; they were inclusive of some descriptive data such as numbers of participants and room layout, but were mostly inferential and

evaluative notes recorded after the sessions, rather than real-time recordkeeping of events, phrases, and times, which were captured within the session recordings.

All participants attending those sessions were invited to complete a short survey (Appendix D) about their perceptions of the credentialing process immediately after participating in the conference session. This survey was developed using Qualtrics, and survey questions were created to be in direct alignment with the project questions. Surveys used within the context of qualitative research “can be a useful data source within a larger data collection plan for a variety of reasons that relate to triangulation of methods” (Ravitch and Carl, 2021). The survey contained one question asking participants to share their experience level with credentialing (e.g., first-time, currently-engaged-in, etc.), five Likert-scale questions related to equity, access, and authenticity, and one open-ended question soliciting participants to share their perceptions about the credentialing process. The survey also offered respondents the opportunity to share their email address if they were interested in participating in an interview or focus group.

Surveys were distributed via a QR code on a quarter sheet of colored paper (to distinguish it from other materials at the conference session tables. The lead presenter mentioned the survey at the start of the session and asked participants to respond to the survey when the session ended, pointing out the papers with QR codes available at each table. Eleven participants responded. Of these 11 participants, eight were interested in the credential process, but were not engaged in it, nor had they participated in it previously. Three respondents had taken part in the credentialing process in the past, and one was currently involved in credentialing for the first time.

## **Data Analysis**

### ***Interviews and Focus Groups***

Since all interviews and focus groups were conducted and recorded using Zoom, they were transcribed using an online transcription tool (otter.ai). The transcripts were very accurate;

small errors and omissions were remedied prior to data analysis. Each transcript was reviewed by a researcher at least twice through simultaneous listening and reading. While inductive codes were being developed and discussed, additional review of transcripts occurred to help determine appropriate codes and identify illustrative quotes; all interviews and focus groups were read or listened to at least one additional time during this process.

### ***Deductive Analysis***

To increase methodological credibility, both researchers first created deductive codes independently, compared the two for consistency, and then created a single deductive codebook for the project, with consideration given to close alignment with the project questions and conceptual frame. Any qualitative research project involving more than one investigator must involve efforts to achieve a modicum of intercoder reliability, to demonstrate that the “basic analytic structure has meaning that extends beyond an individual researcher” (O’Connor & Joffe, 2020, p. 3). To that end, we used multiple coding, as described by Ravitch and Carl (2021), where each researcher coded the same interview separately and reviewed results collaboratively, ensuring any discrepancies were discussed, clarified, and resolved prior to conducting deductive analysis on remaining transcripts.

Each researcher identified several potential deductive codes based on the project questions, which were subsequently reviewed by the team to determine the final six deductive codes (Table 1). Because the codes were tied closely to our project questions, the codes of each researcher were very similar and final codes were determined without much need for deliberation.

We first categorized data according to its relationship to equity, access, and authenticity as a means of determining what leading indicators say about whether StL is making progress toward its goal of making their process more equitable, accessible, and authentic. These were the first deductive codes established. We also created a set of deductive codes related to the

conceptual frame of implementation fidelity and the value proposition of the credentialing process.

After further consideration of the literature and discussion about how equity would be coded, we added a code for the use of equity in its egalitarian sense, rather than solely as meritocratic, as it had been defined by StL in the context of the credential redesign. The inclusion of two separate codes for equity (one for egalitarian equity and one for meritocratic equity), as described in Table 1, was deemed necessary to adequately capture and analyze participant responses related to this concept. Because StL's definition did not map precisely to the common use of the word in our interviews and focus groups, we believed it was essential to be able to discern and analyze both separately.

Each researcher applied these six deductive codes to the transcripts of one another's interviews and focus groups by reviewing each transcript at least twice through the lens of the codes. While deductive codes were the focus of this process, any emergent themes or repeated words and phrases were noted for future reference in the subsequent inductive coding phase.

**Table 1**

*Deductive Codes*

<b>Deductive Codes</b>	
<b>Code</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>Equity (egalitarian)</b>	Systemic obstacles limiting student achievement
<b>Equity (meritocratic)</b>	Fairness or uniformity in applying standards  StL definition as it relates to credentialing: The Credential demands that all students are expected and supported to develop and grow as learners.



<b>Authenticity</b>	StL definition as it relates to credentialing: The Credential is a result and recognition of a process that honors the unique assets of each school community.
<b>Accessibility</b>	StL definition as it relates to credentialing: The Credential is a 'north star' and achievable for all Summit to Learn partner types across the country.
<b>Value proposition</b>	Characteristics of the process or credential that made it worth it
<b>Implementation fidelity</b>	<u>Conceptual Frame Components</u> Adherence: Is the intervention being delivered as it was designed? Exposure: How many have been implemented, for how long, how frequently? Quality of program delivery: Do implementers use the techniques or methods prescribed by the program? Participant responsiveness: To what extent are participants engaged by and involved in the activities and content of the program?

### ***Inductive Analysis***

An inductive analysis was also conducted to make further meaning of the conference session transcripts, interviews, and focus groups. This analysis revealed emergent themes that helped illuminate the perspectives of participants as they related to the project questions. Layering inductive analysis on top of deductive analysis created a hybrid coding approach which follows best practice for rigorous analysis of qualitative research, complementing data-driven codes with theory-driven ones (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). During the initial deductive coding process, each researcher kept track of repeated words, phrases, and/or themes that stood out and recorded them before moving on with their deductive coding. Each researcher then reviewed the written transcripts they had analyzed to identify additional words, 'turns of phrase' or themes for inductive codes. Otter.ai was used as an additional tool for identifying repeated use of specific words and phrases in the data.

Again, both investigators created lists of potential inductive codes independently before coming together to compare codes, settling on a unified set of codes that best represented the data, aligning each inductive theme or concept with the relevant deductive code(s) as applicable (Table 2). These resultant inductive codes and themes were then recorded in the codebook. Each researcher then carried out the inductive analysis of the transcripts of one another's interviews and focus groups. Finally, the coded transcripts were compiled, reviewed, and analyzed to identify potential findings.

**Table 2**

*Inductive Codes*

<b>Inductive Codes</b>			
<b>Theme / Concept</b>	<b>Related Deductive Code(s)</b>	<b>Explanation</b>	<b>Illustrative Quotes</b>
Amount of effort credentialing process requires	Accessibility	Schools are required to expend significant effort to gather materials, host a site visit, plan a 3-hour presentation, etc.	<i>"So, with the application process that happens first, it's really challenging . . . it's a lot of work."</i>
Partial credential	Access/ Equity	Schools who underwent original credential balked at modified version; idea of meeting criteria in one or two of the three dimensions seems like a step toward equity and accessibility	<i>". . . around this idea that schools can be partially credentialed . . . you're implementing the model, you've got to implement all of the models, not just one area, it doesn't work like that, right? . . .so, at first, the credential to us, it's like an honor piece. It's pride, like, we're credentialed because we're implementing the entire model. . . if</i>

			<i>you're gonna give somebody that credential, it's gotta be the whole thing, you know, and so at first, that was some of that struggle in my mind. What do you mean, you can only implement the character side and get credentialed in character, but not have the mastery of knowledge and skills or the high-quality work?"</i>
Role of coaches / school designers	Access/value proposition	Variability in knowledge/preparation of StL staff; notion of having to pay for a bank of days of support	<i>"I think the only piece that was missing was having someone who could sort of be that check in or join a meeting like this to be like, hey team, we're well on our way. . . where you just didn't have that bit of coaching through it . . . I think having some coaching for a school's initial credentialing application would be beneficial."</i>
Having a voice in the evolution of the credentialing process	Authenticity	School leaders' and StL staff members' ability to give feedback and speak into the continued evolution of the work of StL	<i>"Through constant feedback, and (sharing) this is what we didn't like about it, this is what we did like about it, those things have started to change where</i>

			<i>we've been able to more tell our story."</i>
Tell your/our/their story	Authenticity	The extent to which schools feel that they are able to demonstrate the distinct qualities of their school throughout the credentialing process	<i>"I had the freedom to design how that was rolled out. And I really appreciated that because every school is unique in their own way. And they all have a story to tell. And it's hard to do it with the rigidity of 123 . . . So, they have their freedom to design and create and then pull my players into the presentation."</i>
Measurement of Outcomes	Equity	StL uses standardized testing to measure outcomes (growth or achievement)	<i>"I still feel like we have schools that say we're doing all the things we're supposed to be doing, and our test scores are still really low. They might have high implementation or high impact, I should say, in character, high quality work, but they're still struggling with that mastery of knowledge and skills."</i>
Inputs (Implementation of Model) vs. Outcomes	Equity, Access	StL uses an Implementation Rubric to measure implementation for schools, but focuses more on outcomes for the credential	<i>"I think this brings up some of the questions I have about our implementation rubric and review, which is, that is perceived data from teachers and leaders. It's not impact data. So, I think that is</i>

			<i>something where, sometimes we forget, maybe, or at least I might forget that the IR is not impact data. So, I think the IR and the credential are both aligned and also aligned to StL's core practices. But the IR as a tool is self-perception data. So, there's just that to contend with, I think, sometimes."</i>
Peer/community connections	Value proposition	Value in learning from peers, sense of belonging	<i>"And then every summer when I get together with my other credentialees, colleagues, there's always that opportunity to say here's our process."</i>
Continuous improvement	Value proposition	The process of credentialing is valuable to schools for identifying strengths and needs, next steps for continuous improvement	<i>". . . here's an area we know we're doing really great. But here's an area, we know, we need to get better at, like being able to get feedback from people on this . . . how can we get better, we haven't figured that out yet. But other people give us feedback on how to get better in those areas. I think has only made us better as a school"</i>
Sense of accomplishment/ awareness	Value proposition	School leaders use credential as a way to showcase to faculty, staff, and rest of school community	<i>". . . going through this process and highlighting all the amazing and wonderful things, and how rich and</i>

		what they have accomplished together	<i>rigorous you know, we're doing the three dimensions how much work goes into this, it's almost a good way to continue to celebrate all success that we have."</i>
Signal of quality to marketplace	Value proposition	Achieving the credential signals quality to prospective students and parents, district administrators, etc.	"And that became a really powerful marketing tool for us afterwards. So, we were able to share that with prospective families. But also being part of a school district, it allowed me to constantly share what we were doing with, you know, Assistant, superintendents, superintendents, because we know that in districts, there's constant change, and we didn't want to be just kind of flopping around, just doing what a new superintendent might tell us to do, we wanted to have more of a continuous school improvement approach, and continue working on that model. So, this has helped me share some of the key things that we're doing, as a school with new people that come through that or above me."

### ***Document Analysis***

Following the compilation of the organization's credentialing-related documents and communications to school leaders, a comprehensive review was completed. The first review of these documents was conducted by a thorough reading of documents and viewing of media, resulting in placement on the document review and analysis table (Appendix E). The initial review led us to request several additional documents from the organization, which had either been referenced directly in the initial content, or whose existence was implied within the reviewed sources. StL's team provided those additional documents for inclusion in our review.

After the initial review, the documents were re-read using our deductive codes, looking for mentions or references of equity (both types), access, authenticity, value proposition, and implementation fidelity; these findings were documented in the document analysis table (Appendix E). A third review and analysis were conducted with consideration for the established inductive codes. Overall, the media and documents analyzed represented a wide variety of sources, from public promotional videos to presentation slide decks and internal application tools. The full scope of the document review, including corresponding codes, is reflected in the document analysis table (Appendix E), which maps each document to project questions, key themes and illustrative quotes.

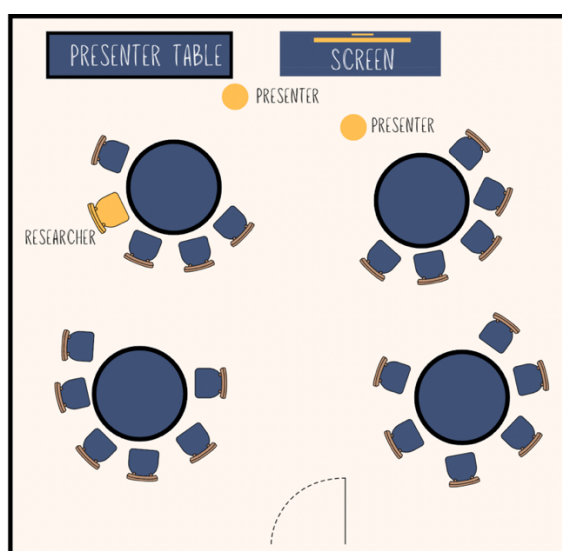
### ***Observation and Survey Analysis***

Since the conference sessions were recorded and transcribed, we analyzed the transcripts using the same deductive and inductive coding processes used for interviews and focus groups referenced earlier. Observational field notes provided descriptive data: each session was hosted by two presenters from StL; the lead presenter in both sessions was the StL Director in charge of credentialing, with a secondary presenter participating in each session. There were 18 participants at the start of each session, spread across four tables. Because StL staff members attending the conference were easily identified by their unique nametags, they were distinguishable from school leaders within the sessions. In the session related to "impact in

the three dimensions,” about 17 school leaders attended; no StL staff members were present at the start of the session. During the “road to the credential” session, about six of the participants were StL staff members and 12 were school leaders. Some individuals attended both sessions, but data about how many individuals fit into this category is not available since specific individual attendance was not tracked.

#### Figure 4

##### *Conference Session Room Layout*



*Note.* The yellow chair represents the researcher’s location during the session. The yellow dots represent the presenters most common location, though the presenters moved around the room at times.

To enrich our data, a short survey was given immediately following each session for school leaders who participated in one or both conference sessions. Eleven participants responded to the survey. Though respondents could share their email address if they were interested in participating in an interview or focus group, only one did so, and that person did not respond to our email request to be interviewed. Since survey participation was limited to only 11 responses, we used the survey response data only as part of our qualitative analysis, rather



than as a separate set of quantitative data. We used Qualtrics to compile survey responses into comprehensible data, which provided additional insight into the perceptions of school leaders who were interested in and/or engaged in the credentialing process. Within our study's broader context, we identified these results as part of the larger discussion of findings. Our full survey and results may be found in Appendix D.

### Data Collection and Analysis Overview

An overview of our data collection approach for this project is represented in Table 3, where each data collection method has been mapped to relevant project questions. The timeline for data collection spanned several months and is represented in Table 4.

**Table 3**

*Data Collection Methods and Analysis Procedures*

Project Questions	Data source	Data Collection Method(s)	Data Analysis Procedures
<p><b>In what ways does Summit to Learn convey the concepts of equity, authenticity, and access to key stakeholders throughout the credentialing process?</b></p>	<p>Documents and speaker notes/talking points used in the credentialing process including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Slide decks</li> <li>● Application forms</li> <li>● Credentialing website</li> <li>● Speaker notes/talking points</li> <li>● Other media</li> <li>● Email communications</li> <li>● Rubrics/handbooks</li> <li>● StL site visit notes/report</li> <li>● StL report/analysis of school application</li> <li>● Transcript of conference</li> </ul>	<p>Document review: Our contact within the organization has provided this data.</p> <p>Interviews, focus groups</p> <p>Observation and fieldnotes from conference sessions at national conference</p>	<p>Analysis of key words or phrases in the organization's materials viewed through the lens of authenticity, access, and equity.</p> <p>Further analysis viewed through the conceptual framework of implementation fidelity.</p>

	<p>sessions offered on credentialing</p> <p>Perspectives of school leaders related to this communication</p>		
<p><b>What are key stakeholders' perceptions of the new credentialing process?</b></p>	<p>School leader responses to questions about their perceptions.</p>	<p>Interviews, focus groups</p> <p>Access any relevant survey data from prior surveys (through our org point of contact)</p> <p>Survey for conference session participants</p>	<p>Analyze and categorize responses. Run through the lens of conceptual framework(s).</p>
<p><b>How accessible and achievable do key stakeholders find the new credentialing process?</b></p>	<p>School leader responses about accessibility and achievability of the credentialing process.</p>	<p>Interviews, focus groups</p> <p>Access any relevant survey data from prior surveys (through our org point of contact)</p>	<p>Analyze and categorize responses. Run through the lens of conceptual framework(s).</p>
<p><b>Do key stakeholders perceive that the new process maintains high expectations for learners and supports them in their growth and development?</b></p>	<p>School leader responses about equity, as defined by the org, of the credentialing process.</p>	<p>Interviews, focus groups</p> <p>Access any relevant survey data from prior surveys (through our org point of contact)</p> <p>Survey for conference session participants</p>	<p>Analyze and categorize responses. Run through the lens of conceptual framework(s).</p>
<p><b>What characteristics of the new</b></p>	<p>School leader responses about the authenticity of</p>	<p>Interviews, focus groups</p>	<p>Analyze and categorize responses. Run through the lens</p>

<b>credentialing process do key stakeholders perceive as reflecting and honoring the unique aspects of their school community?</b>	the process, as defined by the partner organization	Access any relevant survey data from prior surveys (through our org point of contact)  Survey for conference session participants	of conceptual framework(s).
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**Table 4***Data Collection and Analysis Timeline*

<b>Data Collection and Analysis Item</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>
Data gathering at organization's national conference sessions	December 1-2, 2023
Schedule interviews and focus group sessions	December 1-15, 2023
Interviews and Focus Groups conducted	December 15, 2023 - January 30, 2024
Document analysis completed	December 15 - January 30, 2024
All data collection complete	January 30, 2024
Analysis of focus group and interview data conducted	January 30 - February 28, 2024

**Findings**

In answer to our five project questions, we identified nine findings. Overall, we found that Summit to Learn has made positive progress toward achieving its goals of improving equity, access, and authenticity within their credentialing process. Our findings revealed that StL's progress toward authenticity in credentialing was especially strong. StL's communications consistently convey their commitment to all three constructs, and stakeholders' perceptions are

overall positive. Though our findings relate to specific project questions, there is some overlap where a finding may answer more than one project question. In that case, they are reported with the project question that best aligns with the finding, and connections with other project questions are noted.

**Project Question 1:** In what ways does Summit to Learn communicate the concepts of equity, authenticity, and access to key stakeholders throughout the credentialing process?

**Finding 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.

StL communicates their commitment to equity, access, and authenticity throughout their written and verbal communication. Evidence of StL's commitment to these three priorities was present in their credentialing materials, the language they use in videos and at conference sessions, and in their application documents. The words equity, access, and authenticity are used explicitly, and the concepts are represented in their framing of the credentialing process through their website, presentations, slide decks, application questions, and evaluation rubric. Examples of phrases used by StL in materials and conference sessions related to credentialing highlight a commitment to equity, access, and authenticity. Examples of such phrases are provided in Table 5.

**Table 5**

*Illustrative Quotes from StL's Documents, Media, and Conference Sessions*

Illustrative Quote	Associated Code(s)
<i>“Great schools empower <b>all</b> students to contribute their unique genius to the world.”</i>	Equity
<i>“The credential is a way for us to celebrate schools that have reached a level of excellence and equity in terms of implementing the StL model and seeing the results through impact in our three dimensions.”</i>	Access
<i>“The Credential is open and accessible to all Summit to Learn partners. We support all partners in their pursuit of the Summit to Learn school model”</i>	Access
<i>“The journey of implementing the Core Practices will be unique for each partner.”</i>	Authenticity
<i>“All Summit to Learn partners are encouraged to pursue the Credential over a multi-year journey of continuous improvement for equity.”</i>	Access Equity
<i>“While we know much about the pathway from early implementation to strong equitable impact, the journey of implementing the Core Practices will be unique for each partner. It will need to match their community context, assets, and needs.”</i>	Equity Authenticity
<i>“We want to work with you about what configuration of groups is feasible and works best to tell your story.”</i>	Authenticity Telling your/their story
<i>“Tell your story in Three Dimensions of Student Achievement (through a 2-day site visit for new applicants or a 3-hour presentation for renewing applicants, and through the submission of data your school collects to track</i>	Authenticity Tell your/their story

<i>progress towards impact in Character, High-Quality Work, and Mastery of Knowledge and Skills.”</i>	
<i>“We used to have a timeframe on the slide. We don't anymore because the journey is different for each of you for each of the partnerships. For some of you, it might take longer than others and for others, for some of you it might be shorter.”</i>	Authenticity

Further, StL's commitment to improving access and equity was evidenced by:

- The addition of a partial credential, called the pathway credential, which allows schools to celebrate their achievements in one or two of the three identified areas of excellence without having achieved all three. This further enhances the notion of the credential as a “North star” for partner schools, giving them interim steps, rather than the credential being an “all or nothing” proposition.
- The inclusion of a “beating the odds” analysis for schools who are outperforming similarly situated schools in their state so that they can meet criteria for excellence in mastery of knowledge and skills in a way that recognizes their unique set of challenges. This also reflects a commitment to authenticity.

StL's commitment to authenticity was evidenced by:

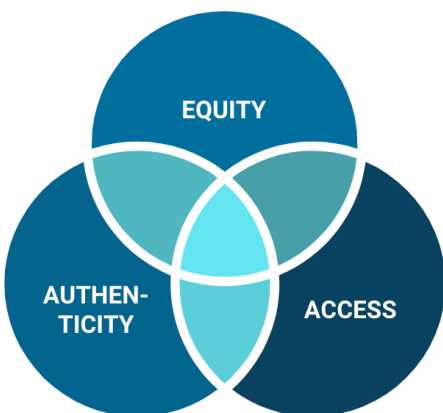
- The addition of a site visit to the initial credentialing process, which allows schools to better share their unique stories in person.
- For schools renewing their credential, the shift to a comprehensive presentation, rather than just a written submission provides an opportunity for them to share their story ‘live,’ rather than just through written content and data.

The current Venn diagram (Figure 5) portrays the three constructs of equity, access, and authenticity as separate, but overlapping. The circles and overlap areas are represented as equivalent in size, implying equal importance and equal overlap between each concept. Our

data demonstrated that the relationships between these concepts are more complex than the current visual represents. The principles do overlap, but there is an interaction between all three constructs that is not represented in StL's portrayal of them. Further, we found that there is significant overlap and strong interplay between the constructs of equity and access, which is not currently represented in the Venn diagram (Figure 5).

### Figure 5

*StL's Visual Representation of their Goals for the New Credential*



*Note.* Adapted from StL website.

**Finding 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.

Though we found evidence of all three priorities in StL's communications and throughout interviews, focus groups, and organizational presentations, equity consistently emerged as the leading construct. The terms "equity" or "equitable" were mentioned 125 times in interviews, focus groups, and presentations, while "access," "accessible," or "accessibility" occurred 63 times, and "authentic" or "authenticity" appeared 79 times. In addition, the word "equitable" is

included in the organization's mission and explanation of who they are. Equity is at the core of the organization and is interwoven within the credentialing process.

A document which provides an overview of the credentialing process proclaims: "All Summit to Learn partners are encouraged to pursue the Credential over a multi-year journey of continuous improvement for equity." The inclusion of equity as the goal of continuous improvement within the credentialing process places this construct at the center of the process. Further, StL's credential application asks: "What does continuous improvement for equity mean to your school?" There are no parallel statements or questions related to authenticity and access; these concepts are unique as goals of the new credentialing process and not necessarily priorities of the organization. As mentioned above, the concept of equity is omnipresent across the data we examined.

StL's definition of equity in the credentialing process is: "the credential demands that all students are expected and supported to develop and grow as learners." This definition represents a meritocratic approach aimed at fairness or uniformity in applying standards and differs from how the term is commonly used in education circles. The common understanding of equity in education reflects an egalitarian focus. The stakeholders we spoke with used the term frequently in terms of this conventional thinking around equity. StL's definition doesn't sufficiently reflect the scope of their work in this area.

One StL professional responded to questions about access by sharing an experience with the credential process prior to its most recent revision. The experience reflected a commitment to StL's version of meritocratic equity, but when viewed in terms of egalitarian equity, there was a perception that the organization fell short.



*“One Principal I worked with... he wasn't able to get into credentialing... he tried three times. And he ran this beautiful school. And he was like, I don't need you to tell me that my test scores aren't as strong as the state. I know that.”*

*~StL professional*

School leaders and StL professionals consistently cited equity as a priority for the organization overall, but their responses strayed from StL's limited definition, despite it being read aloud and displayed visually during interviews and focus groups. Equity was most often described by stakeholders in terms of systemic obstacles limiting student achievement, reflecting a more egalitarian definition than StL's.

*“So, when we were asked to highlight elements of our commitment and work toward equity in our school, we were able to pull a lot of information together to say, here are the conversations that we're having about equity and it starts in the classroom with students, it feels like it's about a sense of belonging.”*

*~StL Credentialed School Leader*

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*“I think equity is something that they're also thinking about . . . what does equity look like in that school? How are they achieving equitable impact for everyone across the three dimensions?”*

*~StL Professional*

Our review of documents and interviews with StL stakeholders revealed that references to access were often made as a byproduct of equity; the two concepts were deeply interconnected. One StL professional reflected on that intersection of equity and access.

*“It feels disingenuous that . . . because of pieces that are outside of school’s control that if we believe in the roots of inequity in this country, that . . . we have a system that is built on haves and have nots . . . if we truly believe that schools can solve that problem, and that StL can solve that problem . . . I think it’s the part of the Venn diagram here between equity and access. . . I think if we’re really talking about accessible, or equitable access, then holding this as a North Star, I think is disingenuous.”*

*~StL Professional*

**Finding 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.

The document analysis revealed that, though StL’s credentialing materials use words and phrases that reflect access as a priority, those materials weren’t always visible in the first few clicks of the website, or from other pages / documents. For example, the phrase *“The Credential is open and accessible to all Summit to Learn partners. We support all partners in their pursuit of the Summit to Learn school model”* is in the credentialing overview document, which was distributed during the conference session about credentialing, but was not available on the credentialing landing page or linked directly from that initial page. The encouraging sentiment *“All Summit to Learn partners are encouraged to pursue the Credential over a multi-year journey of continuous improvement for equity”* appears on the landing page for the credential, but it is accompanied by the statement: *“Schools should apply for the Credential only if they are seeing impact in all three dimensions against the eligibility criteria.”* The partial “pathway” credential and the “beating the odds” analysis are not mentioned on the landing page.

There is a contradiction between the statements on the landing page, as well as between what is visible on that page and what is portrayed in internal documents that are available at other points in the process. Prospective credentialees may be discouraged and

navigate away from the page before they see information about the partial credential or the “beating the odds” analysis, which portray access as a priority for StL and offer support for all schools in pursuit of the credential.

Transparency around inroads to achieving the credential is lacking in these first touchpoints for prospective credentialees, particularly regarding alternative pathways to earning the credential. Further, prospective credentialees may expect that if they use the StL model with fidelity and score well on the StL Implementation Rubric, impact in the area of mastery of skills and knowledge will follow to a credential-worthy level, which may not always be the case.

**Project Question 2:** What are key stakeholders’ perceptions of the new credentialing process?

**Finding 4.** School leaders feel their voices are heard and that they are supported within the credentialing process.

All school leaders who took part in interviews and focus groups expressed that they felt they had at least some voice in the evolution of the credentialing process. School leaders commonly cited the summer Credentialed School Leadership Institute and the availability and supportiveness of StL Directors as examples of how they felt supported and heard by StL about the credentialing process.

School leaders viewed StL’s feedback and improvement process as a strength, citing StL’s use of listening sessions, solicitation of feedback, and the school leader ‘credential cohort’ as means for them to assist StL in identifying strengths and areas for improvement in credentialing. They felt that their input resulted in action on the part of StL. Further, school leaders felt that structures like the Credentialed School Leadership Institute and the Credentialed School Leader Cohort (Community) provided them with opportunities to discuss important topics related to credentialing with StL staff.

Though school leaders overwhelmingly felt they had a voice in the process, there was some variation between individuals, with some leaders citing that they had always had a voice, while others felt that they did not have input before but did have a voice now. StL professionals also expressed that school leader voices were valued. Data was limited regarding StL professionals' perceptions of whether they had a voice in the process; one StL professional expressed that the growth of the organization may have contributed to a decrease in the degree to which StL professionals were given a voice in the process. This may warrant further investigation.

In answer to the question, "Do you feel you have a voice in StL continue to evolve it's credentialing process?" school leaders and StL professionals shared:

*"100% . . . Every time we've gone through the credential process we've had listening sessions, where they just asked us, how did it go? What did you like, what did you not like? And so that was more one on one kind of feedback. And then every summer when I get together with my other credentialeds, colleagues, there's always that opportunity to say here's our process. And there's always that opportunity to provide voice and feedback in terms of like, what do you think? How's it going? . . . And it seems like every time we get together, maybe not every time, but there are iterations. It seems like there's a tweak, there's tweaks and those tweaks sound familiar. It's not like where did that come from? You know, it feels like it comes from the voices of myself or peers that have gone through that trial and tribulation . . . Even from the first . . . ever since we went through that process, it was, it was constant, constant feedback to the development that, you know, the version that they're in now."*

*~StL School Leader*

*"StL really values voice, whether that is the voice of the school, whether it's the voice of the staff, whether it's the voice of the students, the parents, all of the above."*

*~StL School Leader*

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*"Through constant feedback, and (sharing) this is what we didn't like about it, this is what we did like about it, those things have started to change where we've been able to more tell our story."*

*~StL School Leader*

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*"We weren't a part of any of the conversations until we were re-credentialed. And then I went to my first credentialed school leaders meeting and they're like, "Oh, yes, we've been a cohort all this time. We've been doing all of these things . . . I do now... now that I've attended two StL credentialed school leader institutes."*

*~StL School Leader*

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*"The biggest supportive piece of it is, you've got a million people offering to help me, and offering to answer questions . . . There's examples and models to look at on the website . . . they put it out to Principals to sit on the panels for other schools going through it."*

*~ StL School Leader*

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*". . . my teachers, their biggest comment was that they did not want the site visit team to leave. They were just so thrilled that they were there . . . they were getting feedback on the things that they were striving for, and they felt valued. And so, they were absolutely thrilled to have that team in the building."*

*~StL Professional*

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*“I will say that the renewal process feels a lot more streamlined than the previous process of creating a website and a portfolio, which has felt really good in a positive way.”*

*~StL Professional*

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*“I think school coaches could have a bigger voice . . . that's changed over the past few years. . . we were a much smaller organization. . . as we've grown and things have evolved, I feel like our input has been not asked for as much or not valued as much and so we I think there could be more opportunity to provide it.”*

*~StL Professional*

**Finding 5.** StL professionals perceive that they lack adequate tools and training to effectively shepherd school leaders through credentialing.

While few school leaders expressed any concern with the support they received from StL professionals within the revised credentialing process, StL professionals expressed a need for additional tools and/or training that would help them understand credentialing and be better prepared to support schools through the process. Some recent improvement was noted, but there is still a lack of a consistent, uniform process for ensuring StL professionals are prepared to support schools with credentialing.

*“. . . one of my new colleagues. She's been around for almost two years now. She was like, I've never been to a credentialed school. I don't even know what that looks like.”*

*~StL Professional*

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*“One thing is, I haven't been on an actual site visit.”*

*~StL Professional*

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*“ . . . how long it takes to get the feedback. I didn't get feedback from the school that I was working with, until after I had already written their work plan with them.”*

*~StL Professional*

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*“The (credentialing) website. . . is housing everything. But I think as a coach . . . I'm still learning what's on there. . . it's like one of those things where we're like, what's the most valuable document to read? And I think . . . the credential criterion--I think it holds a lot. Then, I could look at it now, with their presentation only two weeks away, and I'm like, oh, I'm seeing something new that I maybe didn't pick up before.”*

*~StL Professional*

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*“I think the only piece that was missing was having someone who could sort of be that check in or join a meeting like this to be like, hey team, we're well on our way. . . where you just didn't have that bit of coaching through it . . . I think having some coaching for a school's initial credentialing application would be beneficial.”*

*~StL School Leader*

**Project Question 3:** *Access: How accessible and achievable do key stakeholders find the new credentialing process?*

**Finding 6.** The revised credentialing process feels more accessible and achievable to school leaders than the past process did. (also relates to project question 2)

School leaders articulated their appreciation for the revised credentialing process for its alignment with the work they do each day. There was a sentiment among leaders who had taken part in the past process that there had been an excessive amount of paperwork in the past and that it felt like an extra load to carry. Leaders felt that StL had been responsive to their concerns and had streamlined the process, which made it feel like a more reasonable undertaking. School leaders shared:

*“This credentialing, and this process seems like this is just our time to **tell the story** . . . having this framework of what to align our structures with and knowing that we're going to be putting this together to present our story. That's kind of what's keeping me focused in this process.”*

*~StL School Leader*

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*“I think there's been a lot of changes . . . I gotta tell you, when I told my staff that we were up for the renewal, and should we do this, the ones that were a part of the original old credential process were like, no, I don't think we need to, that was so much work. It took so much time, we are doing all of these things. I don't know if we could do that again right now. So, I met with [StL Directors] . . . really explained how it had been changed and streamlined and the renewal process is also updated. And so obviously, feedback was given, and changes were made, and they were for the better.”*

*~StL School Leader*

StL also uses videos and testimonials of credentialed schools that highlight their positive experiences with the process; videos and quotes from school leaders are visible on the landing page of the credential site and were featured during the credentialing sessions at the StL national conference.

Further, the survey data collected at the conference session from school leaders who were interested in credentialing and attended a session about it indicated that most respondents who participated in the session felt the credential was achievable for their school. Although our survey had limited participation, of 11 participants who responded to the statement “The StL Credential seems achievable for my school site,” six strongly agreed that credentialing was achievable at their site, four somewhat agreed, and one responded neutrally.



**Table 5***Conference Participant Responses Related to the Achievability of the Credential*

Question: The StL Credential seems achievable for my school site.

#	Answer	Count
1	Strongly Agree	6
2	Somewhat agree	4
3	Neither agree nor disagree	1
4	Somewhat disagree	0
5	Strongly disagree	0
	Total	11

Stakeholders also perceived that there had been an improvement with the new credential process with regard to the monetary and time costs associated with support from StL for credentialing, which improved access to the credential. There was a consensus among school leaders and StL professionals that the process takes time, but strides have been made in limiting the amount of “separate” work that needs to be done within the process. Some school leaders reflected that portions of the StL credentialing process aligned with work they were doing for their school district or for other accreditation entities, making the workload much more reasonable. School leaders who had participated in the credentialing process both prior to and following this revision noted improvements in this area.

*“So, with the application process that happens first, it's really challenging . . . it's a lot of work. It wasn't as much work for us, because we were already having to do a lot of this with the school district anyway. So, it was a lot of repeating stuff but it's a lot of work to get all of the things together that they want, and to try to summarize your entire school in this form that you have to fill out, it's really hard to make sure you cover everything, because it's so much . . . there's word limits on parts of it . . . I understand why because you could go on forever . . . So that's just a challenging thing to try to capture it all . . .”*

*~StL School Leader*

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*"What was most frustrating from my perspective, going through the (previous credentialing) process, building the portfolio, all of those things were . . . at first it felt like a checklist of things. . . I think was most frustrating, checking off boxes of things that you were looking for, that didn't that didn't feel like you were really **telling the story of your school** and living the culture of your school, letting that come out in the credential process. It was more . . . data driven . . . running a school and all that stuff is a lot of work. During this credential process that you're asking us to put together, it felt like another thing to do, and we didn't want it to feel like another thing to do."*

*~StL School Leader*

StL professionals shared that the previous credentialing process required schools to pay for support from StL coaches in the credentialing process, which forced school leaders to either expend more funds, or use the financial resources they have allocated for StL support for credentialing rather than to support the work of the school. This created a barrier to access for the credential, which has now been remedied in the revised process.

*". . . this is the only time where I've actually been allocated time to support this process. So, in the past . . . I would use one of the days that they've paid for to do this work. So that felt like, again, why are we having to use our school designer day to do this thing that you want us to do? And now there's days within my allocations where I, when I'm going to support . . . in this, I don't charge them for that . . . I think that sends a strong message to our schools. It has made me feel like I don't have to say, no, or I'm sorry, I have to charge you, and I have time to do this work."*

*~StL Professional*

**Finding 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. *(also related to project questions 2 and 4)*

While StL's implementation rubric measures how well a school is implementing specific StL practices, the criteria for credentialing are based on outcomes. Therefore, it does not necessarily follow that a school with high levels of implementation of StL's practices will meet criteria for credentialing. There is a disconnect between full implementation of StL's school model and the outcomes required for credentialing, which creates a potential barrier to access to the credential, even for schools that are implementing the model with fidelity.

Access to credentialing is also impacted by StL's utilization of standardized test metrics, which reflect a focus on outcomes/impact vs. implementation. The StL implementation rubric (IR) serves as a guide for schools to assess their level of implementation of the school model. However, the credentialing criteria embody a shift away from implementation toward outcomes, and state-selected standardized tests are used as the measure.

StL professionals shared:

*"I think this brings up some of the questions I have about our implementation rubric and review, which is, that is perceived data from teachers and leaders. It's not impact data. So, I think that is something where, sometimes we forget, maybe, or at least I might forget that the IR is not impact data. So, I think the IR and the credential are both aligned and also aligned to StL's core practices. But the IR as a tool is self-perception data. So, there's just that to contend with."*

*~StL Professional*

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*"Even with high levels of implementation, it doesn't necessarily catch up with outcomes immediately. And so, where's the gap between implementation and outcomes?"*

*~StL Professional*

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*"I can't imagine a school becoming credentialed without strong implementation data. But . . . that doesn't mean that implementation is having the impact we want to have."*

~StL Professional

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*"I think there's intents and then output. So equitable intents, and then equitable output. And I think the equitable output is still a little bit challenging to get, really at, what do we mean by that . . ."*

~StL Professional

**Project Question 4:** *Equity: Do key stakeholders perceive that the new process maintains high expectations for learners and supports them in their growth and development?*

**Finding 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.

There is a discrepancy between the standards for implementation of the StL school model, which focus on inputs, and the focus of credentialing, which focuses on outcomes. The focus on outcomes, as measured by standardized tests, stands in contrast to supporting students in their growth and development, which is part of how StL has defined equity.

The "beating the odds" analysis presented a paradox for some stakeholders. While it is aimed at improving equity and access, for some, it also represented a turn away from maintaining high expectations for all learners, particularly because of the reliance on state standardized testing, a system known for perpetuating inequities (Grotsky et. al, 2008).

However, some stakeholders felt that the addition of a “beating the odds” analysis helped bridge the gap between implementation and impact. StL professionals shared:

*“I still feel like we have schools that say we're doing all the things we're supposed to be doing, and our test scores are still really low. They might have high implementation or high impact, I should say, in character, high quality work, but they're still struggling with that mastery of knowledge and skills. I know, the beat the odds . . . is one of those ways we're trying to support schools and saying, yes, there are different ways we can measure growth and achievement, but it still seems to be a hurdle for many.”*

*~StL Professional*

Though limited, survey data from conference session attendees revealed that all eleven respondents agreed that the StL credential demands that all students are expected and supported to develop and grow as learners (Table 6). Most conference session attendees were new to credentialing, but had learned about credentialing process, including the partial (pathway) credential during the conference session. The presenters at the conference sessions did not discuss the “beating the odds” analysis.

**Table 6***Conference Session Attendees Responses Regarding StL's Definition of Equity*

**Question:** The StL Credential demands that all students are expected and supported to develop and grow as learners.

#	Answer	Count
1	Strongly agree	11
2	Somewhat agree	0
3	Neither agree nor disagree	0
4	Somewhat disagree	0
5	Strongly disagree	0
	Total	11

Notably, participants in our focus groups and interviews were more experienced with the credential process than conference participants; it follows that they were more likely to know about the “beating the odds” analysis available for schools struggling to meet the credential criteria in the area of mastery of knowledge and skills. Though we did not specifically ask about this analysis in interviews or focus groups, several stakeholders we spoke with expressed concern that the “beating the odds” analysis ran counter to equity.

Because the existence of such an analysis seemingly acknowledged inequities within the process, its use was seen by some as moving away from StL’s definition of equity which insists that the credential demands that all learners are expected and supported to develop and grow. One school leader shared:

*“I think that beating the odds option that lives within credentialing is actually counter to equity. . . there was this panel. . . was speaking on literally the concept of beating the odds, and how, if we know that these odds that exist, and there are these systemic issues that tend to have*

*negative impact, or especially on Title One schools and students, schools with the majority of students of color, to then create a prize for beating the odds, you're naming that you recognize that these odds exist, but you're going to still work in that system, and try and get schools to prove that they can beat those odds, but you know, that those odds are wrong. And you know that shouldn't be there, then why not figure out something to get rid of them, or to work against them instead of instead, like, why work within a system that you know, is already inequitable, and so even to be calling, what? You know what they're deeming like beating the odds, if you can show that your school is beating the odds, you know, we'll review, I'm showing you that my students aren't able to meet something that has a white supremacist connotation to it, and how it's how it's determining if my students are successful. And you're telling me like, we know that that exists. So, show us that you're beating those odds, that seems a little counter to equity as a goal."*

*~StL School Leader, on the use of the "beating the odds" analysis*

Though the utility of the partial (pathway) credential from an access and equity standpoint was clear, some stakeholders perceived the partial credential as problematic in that it might diminish the value of the credential. There were discrepant opinions about the value of this initiative, but even those who expressed concern seemed to have come to terms with it, citing an understanding of the intent behind it, and that the partial credential was intended to be a pathway to the full credential, rather than just an end in and of itself.

On the pathway credential, school leaders said:

*". . . around this idea that schools can be partially credentialed . . . you're implementing the model, you've got to implement all of the model, not just one area, it doesn't work like that,*

*right? . . .so, at first, the credential to us, it's like an honor piece. It's pride, like, we're credentialed because we're implementing the entire model. . . if you're gonna give somebody that credential, it's gotta be the whole thing, you know, and so at first, that was some of that was a struggle in my mind. What do you mean, you can only implement the character side and get credentialed in character, but not have the mastery of knowledge and skills or the high-quality work?"*

*~School Leader, on the pathway credential*

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*"The more people are doing good stuff (meeting criteria for the partial credential), and the more connections you can make with other schools, I think it's great."*

*~School Leader, on the pathway credential*

**Project Question 5:** *Authenticity: What characteristics of the new credentialing process do key stakeholders perceive as reflecting and honoring the unique aspects of their school community?*

**Finding 9** Schools have the opportunity to “tell their story” during the credentialing process, which fosters authenticity.

The concept of credentialing as an opportunity for schools to tell their story was salient among interviews and focus groups. All mentions of this idea were conveyed positively. The frequency for the inductive code “tell you/their story” was very high within our interviews and focus groups. The use of the specific phrase “tell our/their story” or a very slight variation was present in seven of our 11 interview and focus groups sessions. Specifically, this code was present in both of our focus groups and in five interviews. In an additional two interviews, participants alluded to this concept indirectly by using phrases such as “showcase unique



strengths” and “celebrate successes.” The concept was *not* present in only two of the 11 interviews (one StL staff member and one school leader).

School leaders and StL professionals cited the addition of site visits as having improved authenticity in credentialing. Leaders also identified credentialing as analogous to student passage presentations, which felt like a nod to authenticity because the organization was using the same practices for schools to celebrate and share their accomplishments that they ask students at partner schools to take part in. There was a sentiment that the new credentialing process allows schools to tell their story, whereas the prior process had felt more about “checking boxes.”

Our document review found that this phrase is also mentioned in Summit to Learn’s documents (see Finding 1). For example, the site visit guidance document states “We want to work with you about what configuration of groups is feasible and works best to tell your story.” Though this phrase was not used in the conference sessions related to credentialing, StL staff members presenting at the conference did highlight their commitment to authenticity in the process, stating that “We’ve designed the credential to try to be adaptable. So, it looks different at [School Name], and it looks different in [City, State] and it looks different in rural [State]. . . so it’s adaptable.” There were no specific references to the process as an opportunity for schools to share their story or highlight their unique attributes, but StL presenters made it clear that the process was not one-size-fits-all.

*“Those things have started to change where we’ve been able to more **tell our story.**”*

*~StL School Leader*

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*“. . . I guess it’s really about **telling your story**, and wouldn’t you want to do that? And then having a framework to be able to say it, because if not, you’re going to tell your story, and you’re going to feel like you miss out on pieces.”*

~StL School Leader

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*“I had a lot of freedom in how I designed my presentation, how I **told my story**. As long as I was able to make my claim and support it with high quality evidence, then I had the freedom to design how that was rolled out. And I really appreciated that because every school is unique in their own way. And **they all have a story to tell**. And it's hard to do it with the rigidity of 123 . . . So, they have their freedom to design and create and then pull my players into the presentation. I had students, parents, teachers, school leaders, a board member, who are all there to be a part of it. I think that brought the joy into the process and the celebration.”*

~StL School Leader

The StL professionals we spoke with saw the credential process as an opportunity for schools to tell their story, while acknowledging the tension between a standardized process and highlighting schools' unique attributes. As previously mentioned, site visits were viewed as an opportunity for schools to tell their stories. StL doesn't use site visits for renewals; a school leader who had recently participated in the renewal process reflected that not having this opportunity for a site visit hindered the school's ability to highlight its unique culture, which is difficult to understand without being at the school in person.

*“There is more room for flexibility and more room for schools to **tell their story**, their unique story in a way that feels less performative.”*

~StL Professional, on the new credentialing process

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*“Schools, without a doubt, have this opportunity to demonstrate their unique assets in one way or another. I think that there's just this an inherent tension between authenticity, though, and a standardization process, and that the credential has to be in some ways standardized.”*

~StL Professional, on the new credentialing process

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*“ . . .you can't authentically show something unique about your school through Zoom . . . for some things, you just have to be here to get the energy and the feel and the culture . . . You're not just looking at data and numbers . . . We're trying to also judge the character of the school, the character, the culture of the staff, the culture of the school. And that without being here and feeling it and just being around, when the kids and around, you don't get the true sense of it. So, I think that's the part that's missing. And you don't get to go see classrooms. You know, you don't get to see actual instruction, you just get to talk to people or see the products of the instruction, which is great. But how are you going to judge that without seeing an actual classroom in action?”*

*~School Leader, having recently completed a renewal*

### **Recommendations**

Our findings led us to provide eight recommendations for Summit to Learn, reflecting their progress toward making their credentialing process more equitable, accessible, and authentic. Our recommendations primarily center around improving equity and access within the revised credentialing process. Authenticity would also be improved through several of these recommendations in as much as the three constructs are interrelated, but since our findings revealed that authenticity is a bright spot for stakeholders, we primarily focus our attention on the other two domains. We recommend that StL:

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 the idea of credentialing as an opportunity for partner schools to “tell their story” in order to make the credentialing process feel more accessible and achievable to prospective credentialeds.

Our first finding indicated that the concepts of equity, access, and authenticity were evident in StL’s communication and materials as dynamic, complex constructs, but that the current visual representation inadequately portrays the relationships between these constructs. We also found that equity was the leading construct and was clearly defined. However, StL’s definition is incomplete relative to the scope of the organization. The concept of access shone through many of the credential materials, but some of the initial verbiage was contradictory and could be discouraging. Therefore, we make the following recommendation:

**Recommendation 1.** Evaluate and redesign StL’s credentialing materials to better reflect the organization’s commitment to equity, access, and authenticity.

- a. Develop a more robust definition of equity that is inclusive of both meritocratic and egalitarian equity.

The use of a strictly meritocratic definition (Kyriakides, 2020) of equity fails to encompass the pervasiveness of both meritocratic and egalitarian equity in StL’s materials and within conversations with stakeholders. Because the prevalent connotation of equity in the field of education—and so many of the comments we encountered in our interviews and focus groups—

approach equity from an egalitarian perspective, many teachers and school leaders will rightly associate StL's emphasis on equity as aiming to counteract systemic inequities in the educational system. Meritocratic equity also has a place in the conversation, and the careful work StL has done to operationalize both senses of the concept deserves to come through more clearly in the way equity is framed throughout the credentialing process. This is nuanced work; we recommend acknowledging so directly from the outset.

- b. Redesign the visual representation of how the three concepts of equity, access, and authenticity overlap; replace the Venn diagram with a new visual that better represents the overlap and interplay between those constructs.

We propose that a redesigned visual representation of StL's desired outcomes could better reflect the complexity of the overlap and interactions between these three constructs. For example, the significant intersection of access and equity should be portrayed, and the interactions between constructs should be represented visually, such as with arrows.

- c. Increase the use of phrases and other indicators that demonstrate achievability of the credential in places prospective credentialees visit early in the process.

We recommend that StL make the achievability of the credential a focus on the main StL website and within materials for partner schools that don't specifically relate to credentialing. Specifically, it is recommended that StL add information about the pathway credential to the front page of their main website in an effort to encourage partner schools to view the process as achievable. It would be helpful to include testimonials from credentialed school leaders that acknowledge the initially daunting nature of the process, provide assurance that support is there throughout credentialing, and attest that the return on the effort invested is clear.

Our fourth finding indicated that school leaders overwhelmingly felt their voices were heard throughout the credentialing process. Therefore, we recommend:

**Recommendation 2.** Maintain continuous improvement practices related to feedback and revision for StL credentialing.

StL should continue its use of practices such as listening sessions to garner feedback from stakeholders, and implement changes based on feedback. StL should also continue using structures like surveys and listening sessions for credentialed school leaders that provide ample opportunities for them to voice their perspectives about the process. Further, we recommend that StL consider evaluating its practices for soliciting and using feedback from StL professionals who work with schools around credentialing to ensure that they have a similar opportunity to provide feedback.

In response to our fifth finding regarding the lack of adequate tools and training for StL professionals to support schools through credentialing, we make the following recommendation:

**Recommendation 3.** Provide credentialing-specific training to all StL staff who support schools in pursuing the credential.

Ensuring that StL staff members who support schools are well-versed in credentialing—and can offer the coaching necessary to achieve it—stands to improve access for partner schools throughout the process from initial interest to the site visit to a final credentialing presentation. This recommendation is aimed at improving access for schools but may also serve to help maintain the credential as a “North Star” within the organization. The more acquainted StL coaches and school designers are with the process, the more likely it is the credential will be interwoven into their daily work with partner schools as a goal.

In response to our sixth finding that the revised credentialing process feels more accessible and achievable for school leaders than the past process did, we recommend:

**Recommendation 4.** Integrate credentialing-related experiences as part of the implementation process for all partner schools.

- a. Invite and encourage partner school leaders to visit a credentialed school, join another school's site visit, or watch a credentialing presentation.

The addition of this practice will allow partner schools to identify what a credentialed school looks and feels like and potentially provide a powerful model for partner schools who are still aiming for impact in implementation of the StL model. This practice has the potential to improve perceptions of the achievability of the credential for prospective credentialees.

- b. Consider making site visits (like those used for credentialing) a part of StL's regular continuous improvement practice for all partner schools.

Continuous improvement practices have been shown to be powerful in counteracting issues of inequity, and schools stand to benefit from site visits conducted for that purpose (Yurkofsky et al., 2020; Ehren & Visscher, 2008). Conducting such visits before schools have decided whether they are 'interested' in credentialing could help level the playing field for partner schools on the path to becoming credentialed. Further, StL should consider the inclusion of site visits as part of the re-credentialing process for schools. This could bolster perceptions of authenticity amongst already credentialed schools seeking renewal and provide additional opportunities for school leaders at non-credentialed schools to visit credentialed schools.

Finding seven noted that the credential criteria are based on outcomes rather than implementation. Further, although a school may receive a high score on StL's implementation rubric, this is not necessarily an indicator of a school's chances of being credentialed. Therefore, we make the following recommendation:

**Recommendation 5.** Align rubrics for full implementation of StL's school model more closely with rubrics for achieving the credential.

Aligning the full implementation of StL's school model with attaining the credential would empower partner schools to see credentialing as a part of a progression toward excellence, rather than a separate pathway influenced by factors outside their control. The alignment of implementation and credentialing would improve access by allowing schools to work with StL professionals toward implementation, knowing there is a pathway to the credential as a direct result of that same work.

This alignment of implementation and credentialing would move StL toward a more accessible and achievable process where "schools could foster learning and development more systematically and more equitably if they started to measure, not just downstream learning outcomes, but also the upstream developmental experiences that make those outcomes more likely to unfold" (Paunesku and Farrington, 2020, p. 1). Aligning the credentialing targets with those for implementation would allow schools to achieve the StL credential by fully implementing the model based on standardized measures of inputs and action items prescribed by StL, instead of being obligated to show the outcomes of the model within their setting.

StL has ample research in support of their school model in a variety of settings, including those in low-income areas (StL website, n.d.); full implementation of the model should remain the responsibility of the individual school, allowing for the model's implementation to result in the desired outcomes. If a school is fully implementing the model and unable to achieve expected outcomes, StL staff should engage in thorough analysis of the factors contributing to such a circumstance and work with schools to address root causes.

As expressed in finding eight, stakeholder perceptions of equity within the credentialing process were varied, with some stakeholders expressing support for the pathway credential and/or the "beating the odds" analysis, while others indicated concern about the potential for diminishing the status of the credential or running counter to equity. With this complex finding in mind, we make the following recommendations.



**Recommendation 6.** Continue to recognize schools who have achieved credential-level impact in one or two dimensions of student achievement.

We recommend maintaining the recognition of schools who have met the criteria for credentialing in one or two dimensions of student achievement. This could continue via the use of the partial ‘pathway’ credential as a means of improving equity and access by making the credential more accessible and achievable for all StL partner schools. StL should ensure that their communication about the pathway credential is clear by emphasizing its use as a tool for helping schools achieve the full credential, and not as an end itself.

The use of the term “pathway” is helpful in identifying the transient nature of this designation. However, StL may also wish to consider changing the name of the single or dual dimension achievements to omit the word “credential,” as this could help combat confusion and clarify its purpose as a *portion* of the credential, but not as a credential itself. StL should consider selecting unique names for meeting credential criteria in the dimensions of high-quality work and character, respectively.

**Recommendation 7.** Develop alternative standardized measures for earning the credential that promote equity and can be applied uniformly to all schools.

- a. Assess and evaluate the gap between implementation and outcomes.

In order to identify the magnitude of any gaps between implementation of the StL school model and student outcomes, StL should conduct an analysis which compares partner schools’ scores on the implementation review rubric with their ability to meet the standard credential criteria. Findings from this analysis should be the focus of an evaluation of whether StL continues to prioritize outcomes as the focus of the credential process. As noted in Recommendation 5, consideration should be given to whether the StL credential should be based on fidelity of implementation of the model rather than on outcomes.

In this vein, the work of Paunesku and Farrington (2020) offers insight for establishing criteria aimed at gauging implementation. They contend that focusing on specific activities removes the potential validity problems inherent in using proxy variables (i.e., test scores) to measure outcomes. Paunesku and Farrington suggest “prioritiz[ing] the measurement of experiences that reliably support academic motivation, engagement, and success,” also taking care to pick factors a teacher might be able to influence (2020, p. 15). Their recommendations for focusing on meaningful and relevant work, teacher caring, and supportive feedback may offer guidance for development of measures.

- b. If StL elects to continue using outcome measures for the credential, StL should develop a set of alternative standardized measures for the credential which can be applied for all schools and in accordance with their definition of equity that insists on high expectations for all learners.

Rather than relying solely on standardized testing to measure outcomes and including a workaround in the “beating the odds” analysis, StL should create one standardized approach to measuring credential-level outcomes. This could be inclusive of strategies employed in the “beating the odds” analysis but should be a part of the cohesive structure of the process rather than a behind-the-scenes option.

- c. If StL continues to use outcome-based measures for credentialing, they should reconsider whether outcomes should be measured through state standardized tests at all and identify other ways to measure outcomes.

Although StL’s use of a variety of standardized test measures (such as the ability to submit growth scores instead of achievement scores) is commendable, the use of these measures has been implicated in perpetuating inequities in education (Grotsky et. al, 2008), and their use should be reconsidered altogether.

Our last finding indicated that StL received high marks for authenticity within the credentialing process. School leaders and StL professionals indicated that the credentialing process was an opportunity to “tell their story.” To that end, we recommend:

**Recommendation 8.** Continue to capitalize on the idea of credentialing as an opportunity for partner schools to “tell their story” in order to make the credentialing process feel more accessible and achievable to prospective credentialees.

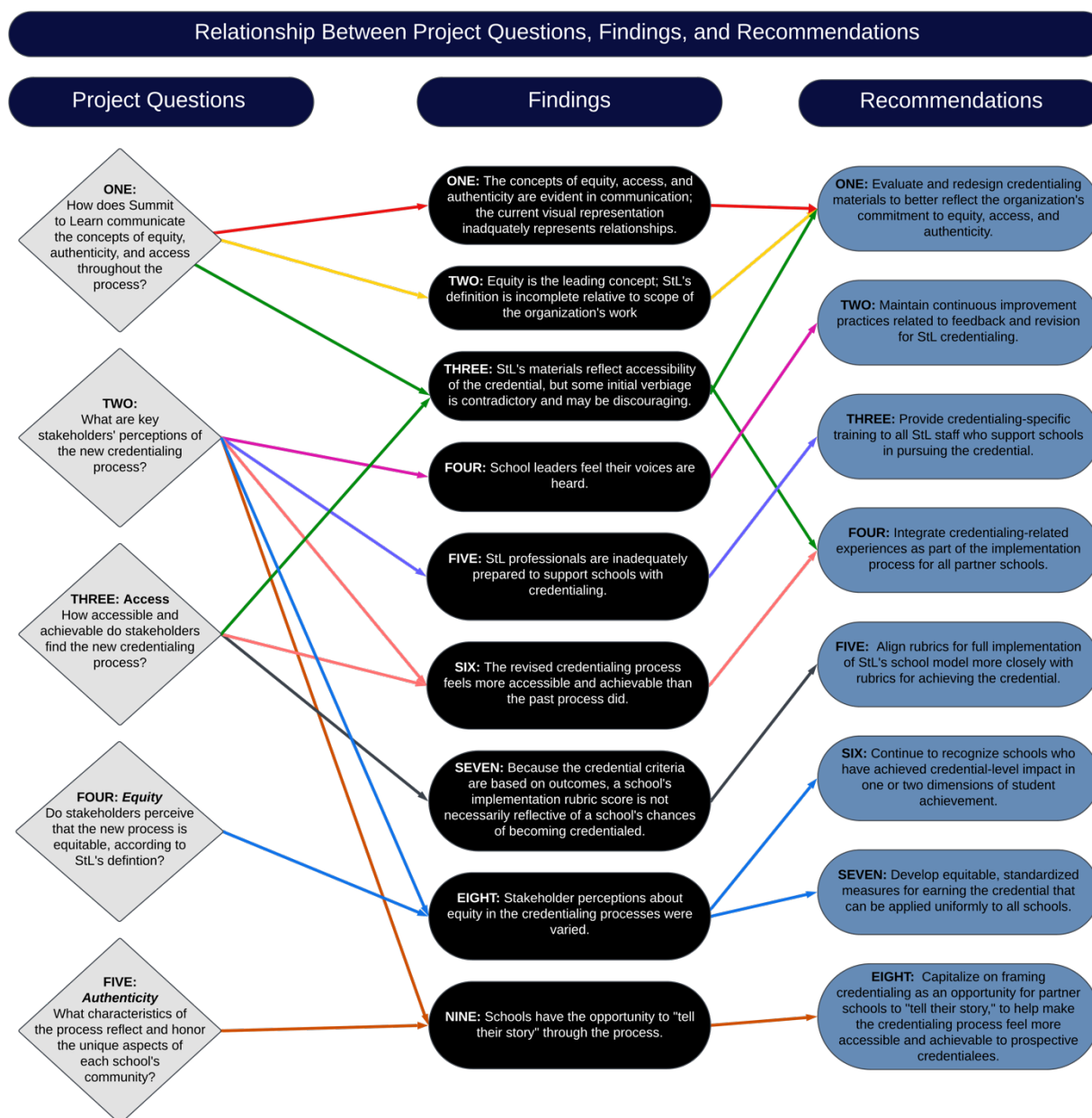
StL should continue the use of videos and quotes that highlight the experience of credentialing as a positive opportunity for schools. Because the idea of credentialing as an opportunity for schools to tell their story was ubiquitous and overwhelmingly positive throughout the data we collected, we recommend emphasizing the idea of “telling your story” as a throughline for communications about credentialing.

StL leaders should consider using this phrase in written and verbal communications with potential credentialees. This could include future credentialing-focused videos or presentations, written documents, and the organization’s website. This might take the form of a tagline such as “*tell your story*” integrated with the credentialing logo on pages of the credentialing site and in materials intended for prospective credentialees. Similarly, a header or footer used throughout the credentialing website pages and documents may emphasize this important part of the value proposition for credentialing. A phrase like “ready to share your school’s story?” could also be leveraged as an appeal to visitors on the main StL page, prompting them to click the link and learn more about credentialing.

The relationship between our project questions, findings, and recommendations is complex; there is substantial overlap between these components. Figure 6 provides a conceptual map of the relationships between these aspects of the project.

Figure 6

*Conceptual Map of the Relationship Between Project Questions, Findings and Recommendations*



*Note.* Colored lines indicate a correlation or throughline between a project question, finding, and/or recommendation.

## Discussion and Conclusion

We worked with Summit to Learn's credentialing team to assess the progress they have made since they redesigned their credentialing process to improve equity, access, and authenticity. Through a document review, interviews, focus groups, observations, and a survey, we collected and analyzed data to answer our project questions, striving to understand how StL communicates the concepts of equity, access, and authenticity and how key stakeholders perceive these concepts within the context of StL credentialing.

While we found that StL has made significant progress toward ensuring their credentialing process is equitable, accessible, and authentic, the complexity of these constructs has presented unique challenges that leave room for continued progress. We found that the organization and its leaders have created a strong culture of continuous improvement that has resulted in significant progress in terms of authenticity. Our recommendations identify key steps StL can take to continue progress toward these end goals, particularly in the areas of equity and access.

One limitation of our study was that we didn't include specific questions about the pathway credential or the "beating the odds" analysis in our survey protocols. Because we did not ask directly about these initiatives aimed at improving equity and access in the credentialing process, our data provides an incomplete picture of stakeholders' perspectives related to these two options.

A further limitation of our investigation is our lack of data surrounding the frequency of high-implementation StL partner schools failing to achieve credential criteria, and those who achieve it only through a "beating the odds" analysis. Because we do not know the frequency with which this occurs, our recommendations do not provide consideration for the full extent to which this may or may not be an area of concern.

### **Areas For Further Inquiry**

Given our findings and study limitations, we identified two areas that may warrant further inquiry for the organization:

- ◆ Analyze the correlation between any given school's IR scores and the likelihood they will be eligible for the credential.
- ◆ Evaluate whether the IR tool is an objective, reliable measure of implementation in StL schools.

Beyond this project's scope was a review of StL's Implementation Review rubric (IR). If StL has not yet done so, the credentialing leadership team should explore the correlation between IR scores and a school's ability to meet the criteria for credentialing. A full exploration of the correlation between full implementation of StL's school model and the existence of impact in the form of standardized tests is essential to provide StL with a clear understanding of how inputs and outcomes are related when it comes to their school model.

Further, the subjectivity of the implementation review process was brought to our attention during this project. StL may wish to re-examine the IR to ensure that it remains a good measure of implementation of the StL model. Re-evaluating this tool would be an opportunity for StL staff to identify any areas for improvement that may limit subjectivity, such as including more specific action items and more discrete set of criteria that mitigate subjectivity as much as possible. Since the organization already uses evaluative tools for walkthroughs, these could be leveraged to lend objectivity to the IR tool. Pairing a more objective IR tool with a similar self-evaluation tool could provide an even more robust set of information for school leaders, coaches, and StL Directors to use in determining readiness for the credential.

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## Appendices

### Instruments

#### Appendix A. Interview and Focus Group Protocol

1. What about the credentialing process struck (strikes) you as distinct or valuable?
2. Tell us about your experience with and perceptions of the credentialing process in general.
  - a. What has felt like the most supportive aspect of the process?
  - b. What felt most challenging?
3. Describe what you think Summit to Learn values and promotes in their credentialing process.
  - a. Were there any key themes that emerged during the process?

Explain the three priorities in redesign (equity, authenticity, and access), including StL's definition of terms (visual). Take a moment to read these definitions of these goals that StL has had in the process. Rephrase it to be digestible/palatable for folks (keep displayed).

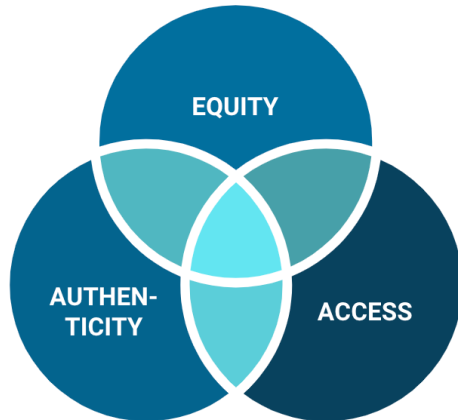
*In Fall 2021, Summit to Learn partnered with school communities to redesign the StL School Credential to be more equitable, accessible, and authentic. More than 150 stakeholders, including students, educators, and staff, provided feedback. The organization piloted a new process for earning the Credential, including school site visits, authentic ways to demonstrate impact, and a balance of the three dimensions of student achievement.*

*In Fall 2022, StL launched redesigned Credential incorporating lessons learned from the redesign process.*

**Equity** - *The Credential demands that all students are expected and supported to develop and grow as learners.*

**Accessibility** - *The Credential is a 'north star' and achievable for all Summit to Learn partner types across the country.*

**Authenticity** - *The Credential is a result and recognition of a process that honors the unique assets of each school community.*



4. With regard to authenticity, what has been your experience?
5. With regard to equity, what has been your experience?
6. What has been your experience with regard to accessibility?

*Ask for any specific examples and anecdotes, moments in time, acute experiences in the process.*

7. If a school leader (at a peer institution) asked you about the credentialing process with StL, how would you describe it?
8. Do you feel that you have a voice in helping StL continue to evolve its credentialing process?
9. What's something we didn't ask you that would be important for us to know as we work to understand how stakeholders experience StL's credentialing process?

## Appendix B. Data Collection and Analysis Table

Project Questions	Data source	Data Collection Method(s)	Data Analysis Procedures
<p><b>In what ways does Summit to Learn convey the concepts of equity, authenticity, and access to key stakeholders throughout the credentialing process?</b></p>	<p>Documents and speaker notes/talking points used in the credentialing process including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Slide decks</li> <li>● Application forms</li> <li>● Credentialing website</li> <li>● Speaker notes/talking points</li> <li>● Other media</li> <li>● Email communications</li> <li>● Rubrics/handbooks</li> <li>● StL site visit notes/report</li> <li>● StL report/analysis of school application</li> <li>● Transcript of conference sessions offered on credentialing</li> </ul> <p>Perspectives of school leaders related to this communication</p>	<p>Document review: Our contact within the organization has provided this data.</p> <p>Interviews, focus groups</p> <p>Observation and fieldnotes from conference sessions at national conference</p>	<p>Analysis of key words or phrases in the organization's materials viewed through the lens of authenticity, access, and equity.</p> <p>Further analysis viewed through the conceptual framework of implementation fidelity.</p>
<p><b>What are key stakeholders' perceptions of the new credentialing process?</b></p>	<p>School leader responses to questions about their perceptions.</p>	<p>Interviews, focus groups</p> <p>Access any relevant survey data from prior surveys (through our org point of contact)</p> <p>Survey for conference session participants</p>	<p>Analyze and categorize responses. Run through the lens of conceptual framework(s).</p>
<p><b>How accessible and achievable do key stakeholders find</b></p>	<p>School leader responses about accessibility and</p>	<p>Interviews, focus groups</p>	<p>Analyze and categorize responses. Run through the lens</p>

<p><b>the new credentialing process?</b></p>	<p>achievability of the credentialing process.</p>	<p>Access any relevant survey data from prior surveys (through our org point of contact)</p>	<p>of conceptual framework(s).</p>
<p><b>Do key stakeholders perceive that the new process maintains high expectations for learners and supports them in their growth and development?</b></p>	<p>School leader responses about equity, as defined by the org, of the credentialing process.</p>	<p>Interviews, focus groups</p> <p>Access any relevant survey data from prior surveys (through our org point of contact)</p> <p>Survey for conference session participants</p>	<p>Analyze and categorize responses. Run through the lens of conceptual framework(s).</p>
<p><b>What characteristics of the new credentialing process do key stakeholders perceive as reflecting and honoring the unique aspects of their school community?</b></p>	<p>School leader responses about the authenticity of the process, as defined by the partner organization</p>	<p>Interviews, focus groups</p> <p>Access any relevant survey data from prior surveys (through our org point of contact)</p> <p>Survey for conference session participants</p>	<p>Analyze and categorize responses. Run through the lens of conceptual framework(s).</p>

## Appendix C. Interview & Focus Group Questions

Relationships to Project Questions and Conceptual Frame			
Interview Questions	Domain	Project Questions	Conceptual Frame
1- What about the credentialing process struck (strikes) you as distinct or valuable?	General Perceptions	In what ways does Summit to Learn convey the concepts of equity, authenticity, and access to partner schools throughout the credentialing process?  What are the school leaders' perceptions of the new credentialing process?	Quality of program delivery: Do implementers use the techniques or methods prescribed by the program?  Participant responsiveness: To what extent are participants engaged by and involved in the activities and content of the program?
2- Tell us about your experience with and perceptions of the credentialing process in general. What has felt like the most supportive aspect of the process? What felt most challenging?	General Perceptions	What are the school leaders' perceptions of the new credentialing process?	Adherence: Is the intervention being delivered as it was designed?  Exposure: How many have been implemented, for how long, how frequently?
3 - Describe what you think Summit to Learn values and promotes in their credentialing process. Were there any key themes that emerged during the process?	General Perceptions Equity Accessibility Authenticity	What are the school leaders' perceptions of the new credentialing process?  Equity: Do school leaders perceive that the new process	

		<p>maintains high expectations for learners and supports them in their growth and development?</p> <p>Accessibility: How accessible and achievable do school leaders find the new credentialing process?</p> <p>Authenticity: What characteristics of the new credentialing process do school leaders perceive as reflecting and honoring the unique aspects of their school community?</p>	
4 - With regard to equity, what has been your experience?	Equity	Equity: Do school leaders perceive that the new process maintains high expectations for learners and supports them in their growth and development?	
5 - What has been your experience with regard to accessibility?	Accessibility	Accessibility: How accessible and achievable do school leaders find the new credentialing process?	

6 - With regard to authenticity, what has been your experience?	Authenticity	Authenticity: What characteristics of the new credentialing process do school leaders perceive as reflecting and honoring the unique aspects of their school community?	
7 - If a school leader at a peer institution asked you about the credentialing process with Summit to Learn, how would you describe it?	General Perceptions	What are the school leaders' perceptions of the new credentialing process?	<p>Quality of program delivery: Do implementers use the techniques or methods prescribed by the program?</p> <p>Participant responsiveness: To what extent are participants engaged by and involved in the activities and content of the program?</p>
8 - Do you feel that you have a voice in helping Summit to Learn continue to evolve its credentialing process?	General Perceptions	<p>In what ways does Summit to Learn convey the concepts of equity, authenticity, and access to partner schools throughout the credentialing process?</p> <p>What are the school leaders' perceptions of the new credentialing process?</p>	Participant responsiveness: To what extent are participants engaged by and involved in the activities and content of the program?



9 - What's something we didn't ask you that would be important for us to know as we work to understand how school leaders experience Summit to Learn's credentialing process?	General Perceptions	What are the school leaders' perceptions of the new credentialing process?	
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## Appendix D: Survey for conference session participants

### Credentialing Session Survey

Start of Block: Please tell us about where you are in the credentialing process.

Q1 Which of these statements describe you? Please select all that apply.

- I am interested in / considering the credentialing process for the first time, but I have not started the process. (1)
- I am currently participating in the credentialing process FOR THE FIRST TIME. (2)
- I am participating in the credentialing process to RENEW our credential. (3)
- I have participated in the credentialing process in the past. (4)

Q2 The StL Credential demands that all students are expected and supported to develop and grow as learners.

- Strongly agree (1)
- Somewhat agree (2)
- Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- Somewhat disagree (4)
- Strongly disagree (5)

Q3 The StL Credential honors the unique assets of each school community.

- Strongly agree (1)
- Somewhat agree (2)
- Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- Somewhat disagree (4)
- Strongly disagree (5)

Q4 The credentialing process would be a valuable undertaking for my school site.

- Strongly agree (1)
- Somewhat agree (2)
- Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- Somewhat disagree (4)
- Strongly disagree (5)

Q5 I have a good understanding of what the credentialing process entails.

- Strongly agree (1)
- Somewhat agree (2)
- Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- Somewhat disagree (4)
- Strongly disagree (5)

Q6 The StL Credential is achievable for my school site.

- Strongly Agree (1)
- Somewhat agree (2)
- Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- Somewhat disagree (4)
- Strongly disagree (5)

Q7 Is there anything else you'd like to share about your perceptions of the StL Credentialing process?

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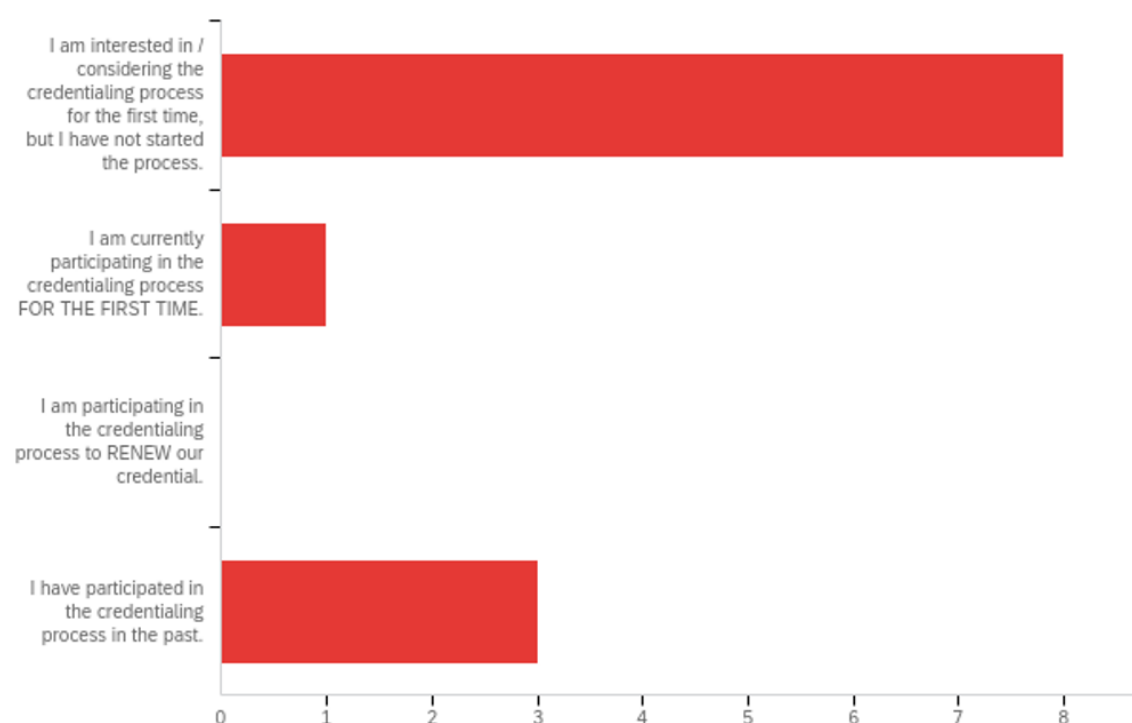
Q8 If you would be willing to participate in a short interview or focus group with a Vanderbilt researcher about the credentialing process, please provide your name and email below.

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End of Block: Please tell us about where you are in the credentialing process.

### Survey Results:

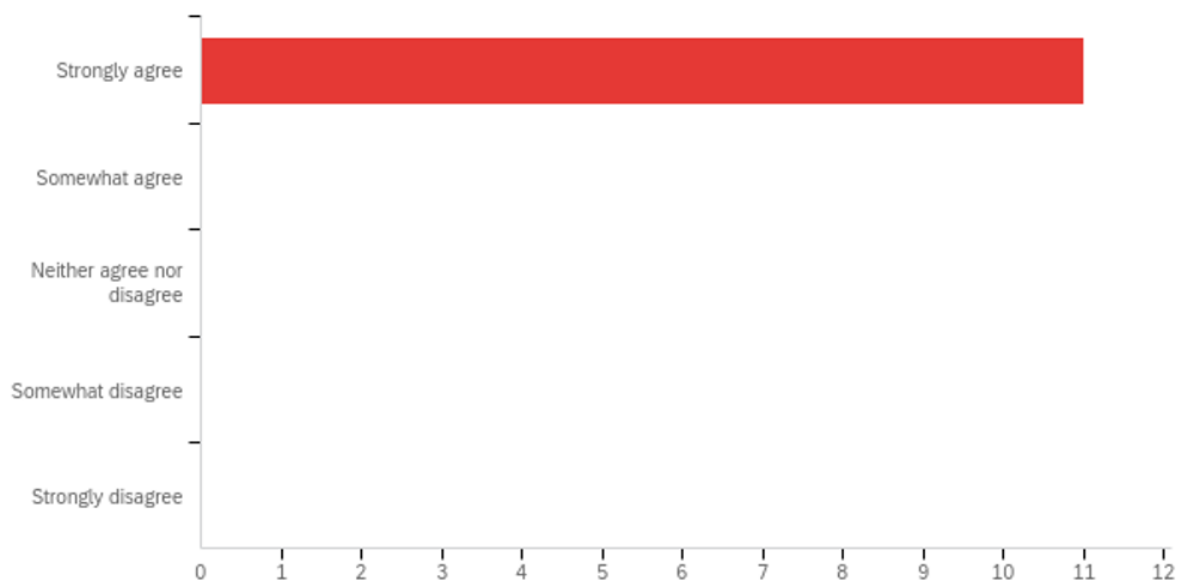
Q1 - Which of these statements describe you? Please select all that apply.



#	Answer	%	Count
1	I am interested in / considering the credentialing process for the first time, but I have not started the process.	66.67%	8
2	I am currently participating in the credentialing process FOR THE FIRST TIME.	8.33%	1
3	I am participating in the credentialing process to RENEW our credential.	0.00%	0
4	I have participated in the credentialing process in the past.	25.00%	3

Total	100%	12
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**Q2 - The StL Credential demands that all students are expected and supported to develop and grow as learners.**

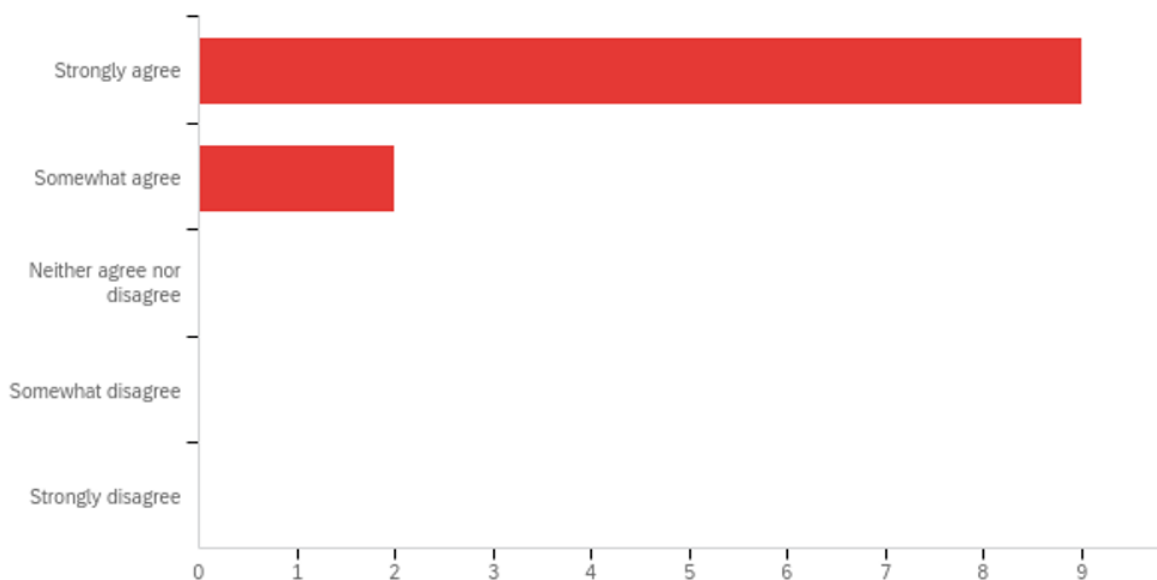


#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	The StL Credential demands that all students are expected and supported to develop and grow as learners.	1.00	1.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	11

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Strongly agree	100.00%	11
2	Somewhat agree	0.00%	0
3	Neither agree nor disagree	0.00%	0
4	Somewhat disagree	0.00%	0

5	Strongly disagree	0.00%	0
	Total	100%	11

**Q3 - The StL Credential honors the unique assets of each school community.**

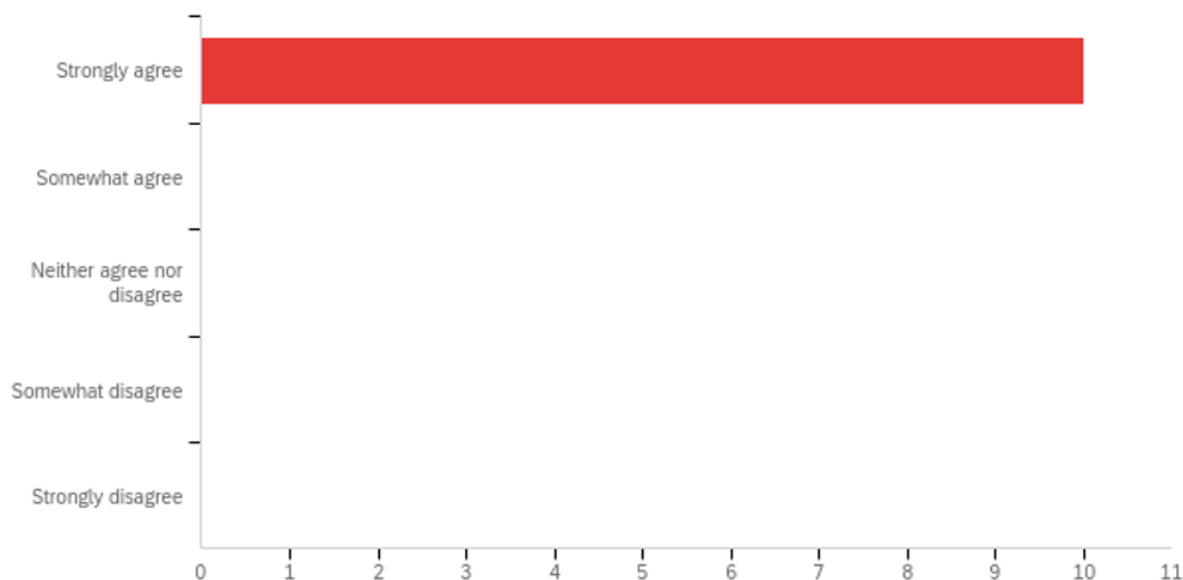


#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	The StL Credential honors the unique assets of each school community.	1.00	2.00	1.18	0.39	0.15	11

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Strongly agree	81.82%	9
2	Somewhat agree	18.18%	2
3	Neither agree nor disagree	0.00%	0
4	Somewhat disagree	0.00%	0

5	Strongly disagree	0.00%	0
	Total	100%	11

**Q4 - The credentialing process would be a valuable undertaking for my school site.**

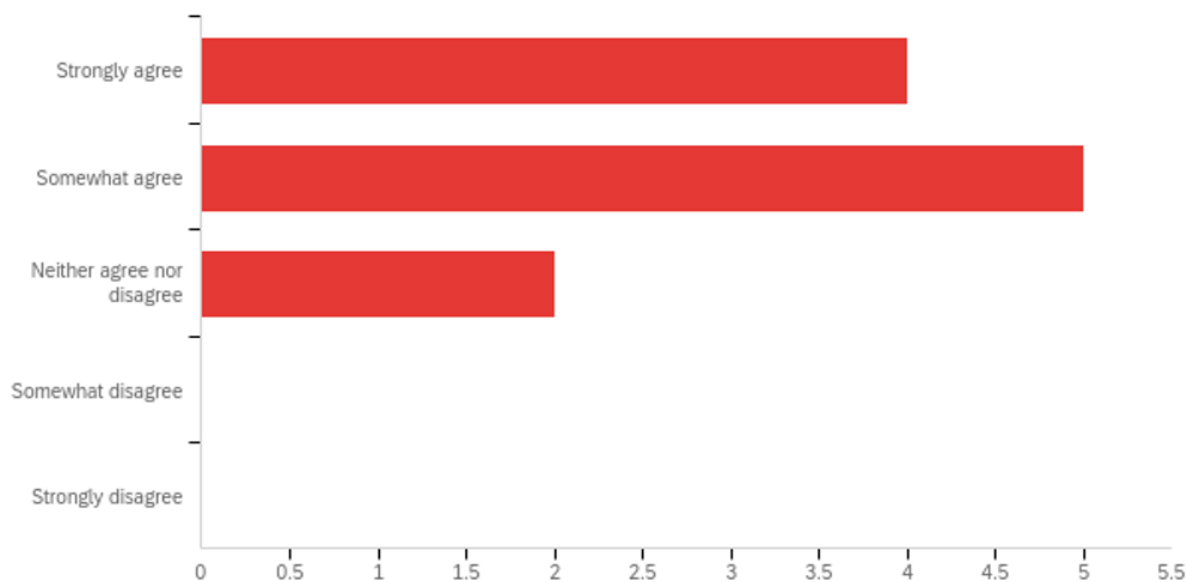


#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	The credentialing process would be a valuable undertaking for my school site.	1.00	1.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	10

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Strongly agree	100.00%	10
2	Somewhat agree	0.00%	0
3	Neither agree nor disagree	0.00%	0
4	Somewhat disagree	0.00%	0

5	Strongly disagree	0.00%	0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>10</b>

**Q5 - I have a good understanding of what the credentialing process entails.**



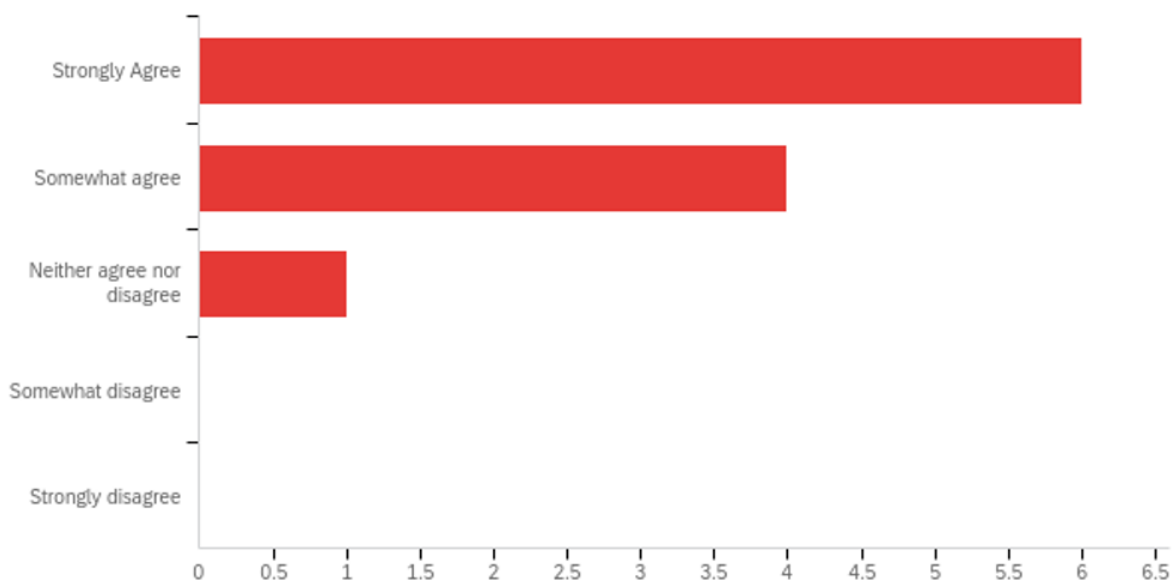
#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	I have a good understanding of what the credentialing process entails.	1.00	3.00	1.82	0.72	0.51	11

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Strongly agree	36.36%	4
2	Somewhat agree	45.45%	5
3	Neither agree nor disagree	18.18%	2
4	Somewhat disagree	0.00%	0



5	Strongly disagree	0.00%	0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>11</b>

**Q6 - The StL Credential is achievable for my school site.**



#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	The StL Credential is achievable for my school site.	1.00	3.00	1.55	0.66	0.43	11

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Strongly Agree	54.55%	6
2	Somewhat agree	36.36%	4
3	Neither agree nor disagree	9.09%	1
4	Somewhat disagree	0.00%	0
5	Strongly disagree	0.00%	0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>11</b>

**Q7 - Is there anything else you'd like to share about your perceptions of the StL Credentialing process?**

Definitely still trying to chew through what is expected with respect to both impact and documentation

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I still think the dimension of high quality work is a bit subjective and fuzzy relative to how we measure schools. I think the new toolkit will help.

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Very valuable

**Q8 - If you would be willing to participate in a short interview or focus group with a Vanderbilt researcher about the credentialing process, please provide your name and email below.**

*One recorded response and email address*

## Appendix E. Document Analysis Table

Document Analysis Table			
Document	Project Question(s)	Key Themes	Quotes/Phrases
2022 StL Annual Report	PQ 1 PQ 4	<p>Credentialing as a north star (accessibility)</p> <p>highlighted in the opening letter</p> <p>Quotes from individuals from credentialed schools throughout the document, highlighting state-level teacher of the year, principal of the year from credentialed schools</p> <p>p.13 - table highlighting high grad rates and achievement compared to other district/state schools</p> <p>Credentialing as continuous improvement</p> <p>Equity</p> <p>Implementation</p>	<p>“...was created as a way to recognize schools that were fully implementing the Summit to Learn school model...”</p> <p>“Students who experience economic disadvantage saw the largest gains compared to their district and state peers.”</p> <p>“The Pathway Credential communicates where schools have met the high bar for the Credential, identifies key areas of improvement, and offers active partnership with Summit to Learn to continue the journey together.”</p>

<p>Credential Program Landing Page</p>	<p>PQ 1 PQ 4</p>	<p>Continuous improvement for equity</p> <p>Equity, authenticity, and access</p> <p>Input vs outcomes</p>	<p>“Great schools empower <i>all</i> students to contribute their unique genius to the world.”</p> <p>“All StL partners are encouraged to pursue the Credential over a multi-year journey of continuous improvement for equity. Schools should apply for the Credential only if they are seeing impact in all three dimensions against the eligibility criteria. Schools that successfully go through the credentialing process may earn the StL <b>Credential</b>.”</p>
<p>Landing Page: The Summit to Learn Credential: A Marker of Excellence and Equity in Education</p>	<p>PQ 1 PQ 2</p>	<p>Implementation</p> <p>Focusing on the whole child</p> <p>Measuring what matters</p> <p>Continuous improvement</p>	<p>Opening Line: “When you think about who people are, they’re not just a test score.”</p> <p>“The credential is a way for us to celebrate schools that have reached a level of excellence and equity in terms of implementing the StL model, and seeing the results through impact in our three dimensions.”</p>
<p>Landing Page: Video- Inspiring Student Achievement in 3 Dimensions: Case Study - Elementary</p>	<p>PQ 1 PQ 2 PQ 4</p>	<p>Implementation in schools (not credentialing-focused)</p> <p>3 Dimensions of student achievement: High quality work, mastery of knowledge and skills, character</p> <p>Equity (High expectations)</p>	<p>“Now I think for a lot of us that we want to see it to fruition and be a shining star in our district. “</p>

<p>Credentialing Slide Deck</p>	<p>PQ 1 PQ 4</p>	<p>Equity Implementation Outcomes and impact Continuous improvement “for equity”</p>	<p>“Great schools empower <i>all</i> students to contribute their unique genius to the world. That’s why it matters how we measure school quality.”</p> <p>Site visits to: “demonstrate exceptional impact and implementation of the Summit to Learn school model.”</p> <p>“The Credential is a recognition of excellence and equity in our partner schools for all students. Thus, it requires the tracking and monitoring of disaggregated data in all Three Dimensions of Student Achievement - Character, High Quality Work, and Mastery of Knowledge and Skills - as a means to realize continuous improvement for equity.”</p> <p>“Tell the school’s story in Three Dimensions through a site visit (first-time) or renewal presentation (renewing).”</p>
<p>Credential Overview Document</p>	<p>PQ 1 PQ 4</p>	<p>Equity Continuous Improvement Accessibility Authenticity Implementation</p>	<p>“The Credential is open and accessible to all Summit to Learn partners. We support all partners in their pursuit of the Summit to Learn school model.”</p> <p>“The journey of implementing the Core Practices will be unique for each partner.”</p>

			<p>“All Summit to Learn partners are encouraged to pursue the Credential over a multi-year journey of continuous improvement for equity.”</p> <p>“While we know much about the pathway from early implementation to strong equitable impact, the journey of implementing the Core Practices will be unique for each partner. It will need to match their community context, assets, and needs.”</p>
Credential Process (also called Credential Application and Earning Criteria for 3DSA)	PQ 1 PQ 4	Implementation Impact Continuous improvement	<p>“The goal of the Summit to Learn Credential program is to recognize schools that demonstrate outstanding implementation of the Summit to Learn Core Practices and equitable impact in the Three Dimensions of Student Achievement.”</p> <p>“Being a credentialed school is a marker of high-quality implementation of the Summit to Learn School Model and Core Practices, and proven impact in the Three Dimensions of Student Achievement.”</p> <p>“What does continuous improvement for equity mean to your school?”</p>
Application Drafting Tool	PQ 1 PQ 4 PQ 5	Continuous Improvement Equity Inputs vs. outcomes Authenticity	<p>“For which groups of students do you disaggregate data? Why does your school focus on these specific populations of students?”</p>

			<p>“Identify 3-5 key trends you notice for all students as well as across groups of students at your school, and how you have used these learnings for continuous improvement.”</p> <p>“How does your school center equity when analyzing student work?”</p> <p>“How does your school center equity when analyzing data and determining how different groups of students are experiencing school?”</p> <p>“We encourage schools to regularly disaggregate data in order to serve and respond to all students in equitable and differentiated ways.”</p> <p>Application question:</p> <p>“How does your school center equity when analyzing data and determining how different groups of students are experiencing school?”</p> <p><u>Beating the Odds Analysis</u> (from the Credential Application): Application Excerpt:</p> <p>“OPTIONAL / To Request a “Beating the Odds” Analysis If your school does not meet at least one of the MKS criteria but you believe that this is not</p>
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			<p>reflective of your actual performance due to the state or district not being appropriate comparisons, you have the opportunity to make your case in this application. If you move forward to the next stage in the Credential process and if your state data system allows for downloadable school-level state achievement data, Summit to Learn will run a “Beating the Odds” analysis, an analytic approach that compares your school’s actual performance to a predicted performance based on the performance of demographically similar schools in your state.</p> <p>To request a “Beating the Odds” Analysis, please use the space below to explain why you are requesting a “Beating the Odds” analysis. In the explanation, please include supporting data about how the school serves a unique population of students.”</p> <p>Verbiage in application: Note that if your school does not meet at least one of the criteria listed above but you believe that this is not reflective of your actual performance due to the state or district not being appropriate comparisons, you have the opportunity to make your case in this application. If you move forward to the next stage in the</p>
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			<p>Credential process and if your state data system allows for downloadable school-level state achievement data, Summit to Learn will run a “Beating the Odds” analysis, an analytic approach that compares your school’s actual performance to a predicted performance based on the performance of demographically similar schools in your state. In this situation, the school should submit a brief description with supporting data about how the school serves a unique population of students. This will serve as evidence of why the school believes it is achieving strong equitable results for all students.</p>
Road to the StL Credential Conference Session Handout	PQ 1 PQ 3	Continuous improvement Accessibility Implementation	<p>Learning Targets: 1. I can use the Credential Criteria to identify my school's strengths and opportunities for growth in each of the three dimensions of achievement.</p> <p>2. I can determine where my school is "on the road to Credential" in order to support long term strategic planning.</p> <p>3. I can prepare for the steps necessary to apply for a new Credential or to renew an existing Credential.</p>
Deeper Impact in 3 Dimensions Conference Session Handout	PQ 1	Impact Implementation Continuous improvement	<p>Learning Target: I can describe a high-level view of what Credential level impact looks like in the three dimensions.</p>

			<p>“When students enter adult life, they will be celebrated not for their performance on basic skills tests, but rather for the quality of their work and their character.”</p>
<p>Credentialing Site Visit Planning Document</p>	<p>PQ 1 PQ 5</p>	<p>Equity Implementation Authenticity</p>	<p>Focus group participant selection instructions for site visit:</p> <p>“We will respond with feedback and fine-tune the schedule together as the site visit approaches to ensure your school is authentically represented during the visit.”</p>
<p>Renewal Presentation Guidance</p>	<p>PQ 1 PQ 5</p>	<p>Equity Impact Authenticity</p>	<p>“We want to work with you about what configuration of groups is feasible and works best to tell your story.”</p> <p>“Identify the strategies you have used to create equitable impact.”</p> <p>“The application will support you in developing your presentation and illuminate your school’s journey toward equitable impact. Use the questions in the application to support the story you want to tell about your evolution and growth in service of Three Dimensional Impact.”</p> <p>“Find inspiration and get a better sense of how you might tell your school’s unique story in ways that are authentic and Meaningful.”</p>

			<p>“Use the questions below to help tell the story of your school’s journey.” (repeated for two sections)</p> <p>“Tell a brief story of the school’s journey with StL” (introduction guidance)</p>
Coach Recommendation Form	PQ 1 PQ 4	Continuous improvement Equity	<p>Questions about school leader:</p> <p>“Do they understand the synergy of the Core Practices, 3 Dimensions of Student Achievement, and Continuous Improvement for Equity?”</p> <p>“How are they leading toward equity and inclusion at their school?”</p>
Beating the Odds Analysis Slide deck	PQ 1 PQ 4	Equity Access	<p>School Contextual Factors: (e.g., % race/ethnicity, % economically disadvantaged, % English learner, % student with disability, enrollment, locale, Title I status)</p>

## **Appendix F. Email from StL's Credentialing Team to Potential Interview and Focus Group Participants**

Dear School Leaders,

I'm reaching out to invite you to participate in a continuous improvement project that aims to explore school leaders' perceptions of the new [StL] Credentialing process. We are partnering with two researchers from Vanderbilt University to draw upon the experience in the Credentialing process of schools who have recently gone through the process. As a valued partner of [StL], your insights and experiences are invaluable to us. Your unique perspective as a school leader in our community will contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the impact of the new Credentialing process and how we can continue to improve upon it.

I recognize that everyone is very busy this time of year. I ask that you all complete the VERY SHORT survey below. If one of the options below can work for you, please indicate that in the survey.

### **Project Details**

**Objective:** To help StL Education understand your experiences and perceptions of the new credentialing process.

**About the Researchers:** The individuals conducting this project are doctoral candidates in Vanderbilt University's Leadership and Learning in Organizations program in the Peabody College of Education and Human Development. Amy Stuart and Adam Kronk both have experience as school leaders themselves and bring a wealth of knowledge and expertise to the project.

**Confidentiality:** Your responses will remain strictly confidential, and your personal information will be protected.

### **Participation Options:**

9. **Participate in a 45-Minute Interview:** You will engage in a one-on-one interview with a researcher wherein you'll share your thoughts, insights, and experiences related to the continuous improvement project's focus.

**OR**

10. **Participate in a 45-Minute Focus Group:** A focus group involves participating in a structured discussion with a small group of individuals, led by a facilitator or moderator. You will have the chance to express your opinions, hear the viewpoints of others, and engage in a collaborative conversation.

**Why Your Participation Matters:** Your input will help us continue to improve the Credentialing process and ultimately enhance the support provided to our community of schools.

**Timeframe:** Interviews and focus groups will be conducted in **December or January**, based on participant availability.

**How to Participate:** Please fill out this quick survey today to indicate your preferences for participation. Your response is kindly requested no later than **Friday, December 8th**. If you would like to delegate this to another member of your staff who was involved in the Credentialing process, feel free.

Participation Survey Link

Thank you for your dedication and commitment to educational excellence. We look forward to your participation and to further strengthening our partnership.

Sincerely,  
[StL Director]

## Appendix G. Deductive and Inductive Codebooks

### *Deductive Codes*

Deductive Codes	
Code	Description
<b>Equity (egalitarian)</b>	Systemic obstacles limiting student achievement
<b>Equity (meritocratic)</b>	Fairness or uniformity in applying standards  StL definition as it relates to credentialing: The Credential demands that all students are expected and supported to develop and grow as learners.
<b>Authenticity</b>	StL definition as it relates to credentialing: The Credential is a result and recognition of a process that honors the unique assets of each school community.
<b>Accessibility</b>	StL definition as it relates to credentialing: The Credential is a 'north star' and achievable for all Summit to Learn partner types across the country.
<b>Value proposition</b>	Characteristics of the process or credential that made it worth it.
<b>Implementation fidelity</b>	<u>Conceptual Frame Components</u> Adherence: Is the intervention being delivered as it was designed? Exposure: How many have been implemented, for how long, how frequently? Quality of program delivery: Do implementers use the techniques or methods prescribed by the program? Participant responsiveness: To what extent are participants engaged by and involved in the activities and content of the program?

## Inductive Codes

Inductive Codes			
Theme / Concept	Related Deductive Code(s)	Explanation	Illustrative Quotes
Amount of effort credentialing process requires	Accessibility	Schools are required to expend significant effort to gather materials, host a site visit, plan a 3-hour presentation, etc.	<i>“So, with the application process that happens first, it's really challenging . . . it's a lot of work.”</i>
Partial credential	Access/ Equity	Schools who underwent original credential balked at modified version; idea of meeting criteria in one or two of the three dimensions seems like a step toward equity and accessibility	<i>“. . . around this idea that schools can be partially credentialed . . . you're implementing the model, you've got to implement all of the models, not just one area, it doesn't work like that, right? . . .so, at first, the credential to us, it's like an honor piece. It's pride, like, we're credentialed because we're implementing the entire model. . . if you're gonna give somebody that credential, it's gotta be the whole thing, you know, and so at first, that was some of that struggle in my mind. What do you mean, you can only implement the character side and get credentialed in character, but not have the mastery of knowledge and skills or the high-quality work?”</i>

Role of coaches / school designers	Access/value proposition	Variability in knowledge/preparation of StL staff; notion of having to pay for a bank of days of support	<i>"I think the only piece that was missing was having someone who could sort of be that check in or join a meeting like this to be like, hey team, we're well on our way. . . where you just didn't have that bit of coaching through it . . . I think having some coaching for a school's initial credentialing application would be beneficial."</i>
Having a voice in the evolution of the credentialing process	Authenticity	School leaders' and StL staff members' ability to give feedback and speak into the continued evolution of the work of StL	<i>"Through constant feedback, and (sharing) this is what we didn't like about it, this is what we did like about it, those things have started to change where we've been able to more tell our story."</i>
Tell your/our/their story	Authenticity	The extent to which schools feel that they are able to demonstrate the distinct qualities of their school throughout the credentialing process	<i>"I had the freedom to design how that was rolled out. And I really appreciated that because every school is unique in their own way. And they all have a story to tell. And it's hard to do it with the rigidity of 123 . . . So, they have their freedom to design and create and then</i>



			<i>pull my players into the presentation.”</i>
Measurement of Outcomes	Equity	StL uses standardized testing to measure outcomes (growth or achievement)	<i>“I still feel like we have schools that say we're doing all the things we're supposed to be doing, and our test scores are still really low. They might have high implementation or high impact, I should say, in character, high quality work, but they're still struggling with that mastery of knowledge and skills.”</i>
Inputs (Implementation of Model) vs. Outcomes	Equity, Access	StL uses an Implementation Rubric to measure implementation for schools, but focuses more on outcomes for the credential	<i>“I think this brings up some of the questions I have about our implementation rubric and review, which is, that is perceived data from teachers and leaders. It's not impact data. So, I think that is something where, sometimes we forget, maybe, or at least I might forget that the IR is not impact data. So, I think the IR and the credential are both aligned and also aligned to StL's core practices. But the IR as a tool is self-perception data. So, there's just that to contend with, I think, sometimes.”</i>

Peer/community connections	Value proposition	Value in learning from peers, sense of belonging	<i>“And then every summer when I get together with my other credentialees, colleagues, there’s always that opportunity to say here’s our process.”</i>
Continuous improvement	Value proposition	The process of credentialing is valuable to schools for identifying strengths and needs, next steps for continuous improvement	<i>“. . . here’s an area we know we’re doing really great. But here’s an area, we know, we need to get better at, like being able to get feedback from people on this . . . how can we get better, we haven’t figured that out yet. But other people give us feedback on how to get better in those areas. I think has only made us better as a school”</i>
Sense of accomplishment/ awareness	Value proposition	School leaders use credential as a way to showcase to faculty, staff, and rest of school community what they have accomplished together	<i>“. . . going through this process and highlighting all the amazing and wonderful things, and how rich and rigorous you know, we’re doing the three dimensions how much work goes into this, it’s almost a good way to continue to celebrate all success that we have.”</i>
Signal of quality to marketplace	Value proposition	Achieving the credential signals quality to prospective students and parents, district administrators, etc.	<i>“And that became a really powerful marketing tool for us afterwards. So, we were able to share that with prospective families. But also</i>

			<p>being part of a school district, it allowed me to constantly share what we were doing with, you know, Assistant, superintendents, superintendents, because we know that in districts, there's constant change, and we didn't want to be just kind of flopping around, just doing what a new superintendent might tell us to do, we wanted to have more of a continuous school improvement approach, and continue working on that model. So, this has helped me share some of the key things that we're doing, as a school with new people that come through that or above me.”</p>
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