

# Digital Badge Credentials Prepare Students with Special Needs for Employment

## *How to Transform Classroom Skills into Workplace Assets*

What is the difference between a skill and an asset?

Let's consider the ability to safely and effectively operate a powered hand drill. Without application, this is a skill. While a noteworthy source of pride, without function it lacks definite value. The skill is similar to potential energy. It needs direction to be put to work.

In the employment of a general contractor, that ability to operate a powered hand drill becomes an asset. It has definite value and can be put to good use, benefiting the employer, the employee and the contractor's client. So, how does a student, especially one with special needs, translate new skills into assets that are valuable to an employer?

**Digital Badge Credentials** from **Education Associates** capture the skills obtained by students who demonstrate specific concept proficiency and transform those abilities into marketable assets.

## **An Established Partnership with New Objectives**

Nearly 50 years ago, the US Commissioner of Education funded a grant to develop assessments that would validate the knowledge and skill sets of individuals working toward a degree in career and technical education. That initial effort developed into the National Occupational Competency Testing Institute. Now identified by its acronym, **NOCTI** delivers an array of industry credentials and sets the gold standard for measuring workplace competency.



**'We are proud to partner with Education Associates to introduce the dynamic world of Digital Badge Credentials for students, including those with special needs. This program provides employers with important access to the detailed competencies that job-seekers have obtained.'**

**– Heidi Speese  
Customer Care & Outreach Manager, NOCTI**

Since the early 1980s, Education Associates has been expanding and enhancing hands-on career preparation and life skills training. Approved and validated by the US Department of Education, their flagship program Project Discovery and companion series Achieve Life Skills, have helped thousands of students nationwide prepare for employment and independent living.



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Education Associates and NOCTI have a history of collaboration in the **Career and Technical Education (CTE)** arena. Much of the curriculum developed by Education Associates is directly correlated to the competencies set by NOCTI.

Education Associates' Digital Badge Credential program is the most recent development in the collaboration with NOCTI. These credentials represent that a recipient has completed specific career preparation and life readiness coursework and demonstrated concept competence.

## Identifying a Need

According to the Autism Society, in 2014, less than 20% of people with disabilities in the United States were participating in the labor force – either working or seeking work. This disturbing truth is not an inevitability. With the correct preparation and support, learners of all levels can increase their independence and take steps toward satisfying employment.



**'A breakdown in communication can present barriers to employment for individuals with special needs.'**

**'When employers are aware of the specific skills students have gained, they understand how these individuals can be valuable assets to the company.'**

– Shelley Mauer  
Executive VP  
Education Associates

Equipping students with definite, applicable skill sets is the first part of a direct response to these challenges. **Hands-on career readiness** and **life skills preparation** from Education Associates furnishes students, including those with special needs, with marketable skills related to specific jobs.

Allowing those students to clearly communicate their valuable abilities to potential employers puts that potential into action. The Digital Badge Credential program takes students' significant accomplishments and presents them using a concise, appealing platform.

# Communicating Competence & Readiness

In order to understand how Digital Badge Credentials from Education Associates become essential tools for employment, let's imagine a typical scenario:

Olivia is a high school student who has special needs. She also has ambitions to get a job serving tables in a local restaurant.

- 1) With the help of her teacher, Olivia completes the hands-on activities in Education Associates' Career Exploration: Table Service kit.
- 2) Olivia demonstrates comprehensive knowledge and specific skill attainment by scoring 'Competent' or 'Highly Proficient' on a performance-based evaluation of her Table Service knowledge and skills.
- 3) After receiving the scores from her teacher, Education Associates issues Olivia a Digital Badge Credential (DBC) for Table Service.
- 4) Olivia can access her Table Service DBC by logging into her NOCTI Skillbadge™ Locker. She can easily and proudly share her Table Service DBC by email, social media or by printing it to add to a resumé.
- 5) Restaurant owners and managers can see that Olivia has achieved competency and demonstrated a variety of job-specific skills including:
  - Setting the Table
  - Taking Orders & Serving Meals
  - Computing and Presenting the Check
  - Busing the Table



**'The Digital Badge Credential Program provides well-deserved recognition for students' achievement. These credentials concretely demonstrate to potential employers that the applicant has certain sets of job-specific skills. These abilities become crucial building-blocks in a resume.'**

**– Shelley Mauer, Executive VP, Education Associates**

By reducing barriers to communication and empowering applicants, Digital Badge Credentials allow students to take that critical last step between skill acquisition and utilization.

## Students Showcase Their Job Skills

Education Associates is already seeing encouraging results from initial **Beta Tests** of the Digital Badge Credential program. In one South Carolina high school, students have qualified for and received Digital Badge Credentials for several life skills, including **Developing a Resume**, **Verbal & Non-Verbal Communication** and **Teamwork**. Many of the students have qualified for multiple badges, already building their own portfolios in the NOCTI Skillbadge™ Locker.

In the fall semester, Anne Filyaw, a Transition Coordinator for Florence, SC will be expanding the programs that offer her students the potential to earn and utilize Digital Badge Credentials. Education Associates is excited to support these teachers and their students as they explore the capacity of these resources to bridge the gap from classroom to independent living.

**'Our students are excited to receive these Digital Badge Credentials for successfully completing titles in our job and life preparation program.'**

**'They can access the badges independently, allowing them to be shared with future employers.'**

**'In addition to the employment possibilities, the credentials can be added to each student's electronic portfolio as they are completed.'**

**– Anne Filyaw  
Transition Coordinator  
Florence, SC**



## What's Next for Digital Badge Credentials?

In the past several years, digital badges, digital credentials, micro-credentials and other virtual representations of specific, verified skills have begun to get significant traction with the public's attention. Increasingly, employers are familiar with, or even expecting, these objective verifications of employee accomplishments.

Education Associates and NOCTI are proud to be on the leading edge of Digital Badge Credentials in the field of education, elevating expectations for students with special needs. By providing students a mechanism to accurately portray their skill sets and helping employers evaluate applicants, Digital Badge Credentials pave the way for an engaged student population and qualified workforce.



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