**TOPIC:** **RESOLUTION TO** **ENDORSE THE COLORADO GenEd Foundational Skills Credential**

**PREPARED BY:** **ALLANA FARLEY, CREDENTIAL PATHWAYS COORDINATOR**

**I. SUMMARY**

This item presents for discussion and potential action a Commission resolution to endorse and encourage adoption of the *Colorado GenEd Foundational Skills Credential*.

**II. BACKGROUND**

The *Colorado GenEd Foundational Skills Credential* is a formal recognition of an undergraduate student’s completion of all GT Pathways requirements at a Colorado public college or university. GT Pathways, or Guaranteed Transfer Pathways, is a 31-credit general education core in 6 different content areas that builds student competencies in civic engagement, creative thinking, critical thinking, diversity and global learning, information literacy, inquiry and analysis, problem solving, quantitative literacy, and written communication. The GT Pathways program was launched in 2002 in response to 2001 legislation directing the Commission to address challenges in student transfer by adopting a statewide common course numbering matrix for general education.

Public colleges and universities in Colorado align select lower-division courses with the content and competencies in GT Pathways to facilitate student transfer and degree completion, such that GT Pathways is part of the student experience across most associate of arts, associate of science, and bachelor’s degree programs. The same 2001 legislation created a council of higher education representatives, known as the General Education Council (or GE Council), to develop and oversee the initiative.

The *Colorado GenEd Foundational Skills Credential* is a mechanism to formally recognize students when they have fulfilled all GT Pathways requirements, which rewards them for achieving a significant milestone in their degree pathways and highlights the in-demand skills and competencies that are developed through general education—competencies that employers indicate again and again are foundation for workplace success.

**III. STAFF ANALYSIS**

Discussion of the need to formally recognize the significance of completing all general education requirements began in 2019 but was postponed, like many initiatives in progress, due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Ironically, Covid accelerated many existing trends in higher education, including a demand for shorter-term credentials to meet immediate job training needs, and growing doubts about the general value of higher education and the economic returns of a bachelor’s degree, themes that were woven through the final report of the HB21-1330 taskforce. Additionally, a national movement has emerged to better recognize student achievement on the way to a degree, both to reward student progress and to validate their career-connected learning.

In 2021 and 2022, the Department engaged in two initiatives to encourage institutions to develop shorter-term credentials on the way to a bachelor’s degree, or that could stack into a bachelor’s degree while functioning as standalone vehicles for workplace advancement. The first of these initiatives is *Credential As You Go*, a multi-state demonstration project funded by the U.S. Department of Education’s Institute of Education Sciences. The second is SB22-192, *Opportunities for Credential Attainment*, which directed Department staff to work with institutions to develop stackable credential pathways in five different industries. Out of these efforts emerged a renewed focus on the role and value of general education in preparing students for advanced study in a specific major or academic discipline, as well as preparation for career through the timeless, foundational skills that are developed through the general education curriculum. Related to this work, the Commission approved changes to its academic programs policy (Section I, Part V) in June 2023 to clarify that all institutions are allowed to offer certain sub-baccalaureate credentials, including certificates that can be applied to one or more degree programs.

In August 2023, Department staff convened a General Education Credential Task Force to develop a framework for a completion award using the GT Pathways competency matrix. The resulting framework and recommendations were endorsed by the General Education Council at its January 8, 2024 meeting.

**IV. STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

This item is presented for discussion, but on recommendation could be moved for immediate action. If moved to action, staff recommend that the Commission approve the Resolution to Endorse the *Colorado GenEd Foundational Skills Credential*.

**V.** **STATUTORY AUTHORITY**

This item does not represent a policy or other action requiring statutory authority.

**VI.** **ATTACHMENTS**

Attachment A: Proposed Resolution to Endorse the Colorado GenEd Foundational Skills Credential

Attachment B: Colorado GenEd Completion Credential Proposal