From Signals to Evidence

Lessons from Six New Skills Validation Pilots

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USE CASE 2

From Academic Signals to Validated Skills

Validating Algorithm-Derived Skills Profiles

Education Design Lab

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1038
Rowland Unified seniors received personalized skills profiles through SkillSight

339
students registered for XCredit

84
students took at least one XCredit assessment

70
students validated at least one skill

26
students earned a digital credential

About the Learners

This pilot focused on high school students in Rowland Unified School District preparing to make decisions about college, training, and work. Many were seniors nearing graduation, a moment when students are expected to make high-stakes choices about their futures with limited work experience and often limited visibility into how their academic performance connects to career pathways.

For these learners, the challenge is not only career awareness. It is skill visibility. Students may be building workforce-relevant skills through coursework, projects, career technical education, and life experience, but those skills are often communicated through grades, transcripts, or course completion rather than clear, employer-facing skill signals.

The Use Case

The ERP + XCredit pilot was set up to test a specific question:

Can independently validated durable-skill evidence strengthen a skills-currency platform that translates academic performance into workforce-relevant skills profiles?

ERP's Skills Currency platform uses academic inputs, such as grades and standardized test scores, to generate skills profiles and job matches. XCredit added a second layer of evidence: performance-based assessment of durable skills.

The pilot explored whether these two forms of evidence could work together: algorithm-derived skill matches and independently validated skill credentials to better prepare students for their next step.

Our Partners

The pilot was conducted in partnership with ERP and Rowland Unified School District.

Educational Results Partnership (ERP) is piloting a Skills Currency platform that translates academic performance into workforce-relevant skills profiles. Through this pilot, ERP made a link to EDL's XCredit assessments available within its Skills Currency platform for participating Rowland Unified students.

Rowland Unified School District in Los Angeles County, California served as the K-12 implementation partner. supporting student access to the platform and helping bring skills-based career navigation into a high school context. ERP delivered personalized skills profiles to all 1,038 Rowland USD seniors through its SkillSight platform.

The Challenge

High school systems run on academic signals: grades, course completion, test scores, college eligibility. These matter, but they don't answer the questions students, counselors, and employers increasingly need answered: What skills does this student actually have? Can those skills be demonstrated beyond a grade? Would an employer trust this evidence?

ERP's platform begins to address this by inferring skills from academic data. But inference has limits. A grade may suggest critical thinking or problem-solving, but it doesn't show how a student applies those skills under realistic conditions. In focus groups, counselors noted that students often leave high school unsure of what their strengths are or where they point. Discussion with ERP indicated that the differences in teachers and experiences in any one learning experience can be quite dispersed and requires some element of teacher external assessment.

> “I personally don't feel like I know what jobs I would be good at."
>
> — Anonymous Student

The core challenge: **generating skill signals that students, educators, and employers can trust not just infer.**

The Idea

Test whether XCredit could serve as an independent validation layer inside ERP’s Skills Currency platform.

ERP’s platform could suggest skill and job matches based on academic data. XCredit could then give students a way to demonstrate selected durable skills through performance-based assessments.

Deeper learning questions:

- Could XCredit help validate skills that ERP’s algorithm inferred from academic records?
- Could independently validated credentials make students’ skills profiles more credible?
- Could scenario-based assessments give high school students another way to show readiness beyond grades?
- Could this combined model help counselors and educators support career navigation in a more skills-based way?

What Was Tested

The pilot embedded access to XCredit assessments within ERP's Skills Currency platform. Students entered through ERP's platform, completed an industry selection quiz, and could then access XCredit's performance-based durable skills assessments. Students who successfully validated their skills could earn a digital credential issued by Education Design Lab.

The pilot was also designed to support ERP's research agenda. By comparing XCredit results with ERP's skills-currency outputs, the partners could begin exploring whether algorithm-derived skill profiles aligned with independently validated skill evidence.

What Happened

The Rowland Unified pilot created two connected learning moments.

First, students received personalized skills profiles through ERP's SkillSight platform. These profiles helped students see the workforce-relevant skills they had developed through their K–12 education and connect those skills to occupations, earnings, and future pathways.

The student response was strong. Among 298 survey respondents, 83% agreed or strongly agreed that SkillSight helped them better understand their skills and strengths. Eighty-two percent said it helped them identify opportunities that matched their skills, and 76% said it increased their confidence in the value they could bring to an employer.

Second, students had access to XCredit as an independent validation opportunity. 84 students took at least one XCredit assessment, and 70 validated at least one sub-competencyl. This suggests that once students reached the assessment experience, many were able to demonstrate durable skills through applied scenarios.

Top Findings

The findings below translate pilot learnings into practical design guidance for work-learn ecosystem practitioners building skills-based programs. Rather than asking whether student parents have durable skills, the pilot surfaced a more actionable question: what does it take for skills developed through caregiving to be validated, trusted, and used across education and employment systems? These findings show that quality validation depends not only on assessment, but also on how evidence is defined, how results are communicated, and how the experience is delivered for learners navigating complex lives.

Finding	What Was Observed	Principle for Skills Validation Quality at Scale
Skills validation gives high school students another way to show readiness beyond grades.	ERP's platform used academic data to generate skills profiles, while XCredit gave students a way to demonstrate durable skills through applied scenarios. Together, they point toward a richer student profile that includes academic signals, career interests, job matches, and validated skills.	**Data, Security, + Integration; Performance-Based Evidence + Real-World Contexts.** High-quality skills systems should combine multiple forms of evidence while giving learners secure, portable ways to use their validated skills across education and employment pathways.
Algorithmic skills matching needs a validation layer.	ERP's platform translated academic data into workforce-relevant skills profiles and job matches. XCredit added independent, performance-based evidence that could help test whether inferred skills show up in applied scenarios. Analysis is ongoing to determine whether any correlations were inferred.	**Performance-Based Evidence + Real-World Contexts; Transparency + Trust.** Skills inferred from grades or test scores should be complemented by applied evidence that students, educators, and employers can understand and trust.
K-12 implementation depends on institutional choreography, not just student interest.	In a K-12 context, participation depends on timing, district approval, IT integration, counselor engagement, principal buy-in, CTE leadership, student communications, and concentrated moments of promotion.	**Accessibility, Fairness, + Inclusivity; Scalability + Adaptability.** Skills validation should be embedded into structured moments of engagement, such as career days, CTE activities, counselor-supported sessions, or platform nudges. Passive access is not enough. Scalable implementation requires clear ownership, low staff burden, and a rollout model that fits the realities of school systems.
Data-sharing and interoperability are part of the learning agenda, not just operations.	The pilot depended on multiple systems working together: ERP's platform, school district data, XCredit assessment results, credential issuance, and research reporting. Because the learners were high school students, privacy and FERPA considerations shaped what data could be shared and how. The ability to evaluate the pilot depends on whether partners can connect student engagement, algorithm-derived skill matches, XCredit validation results, and credential outcomes in a responsible and analyzable way.	**Data, Security, + Integration; Transparency + Trust.** Skills validation systems must be secure, ethical, and interoperable. For pilots testing algorithmic skills matching, data architecture is not back-end administration. It is central to whether the evidence can be trusted, analyzed, and improved over time.

Finding	What Was Observed	Principle for Skills Validation Quality at Scale
Evidence stacking requires a shared translation layer across skills systems.	The pilot showed the promise of combining multiple evidence sources: academic data, skills profiles, career matches, performance-based assessments, and digital credentials. But it also surfaced a deeper ecosystem challenge. Each system defines skills differently. ERP translates grades and assessment data into workforce-relevant skills profiles. XCredit validates durable skills through performance-based scenarios. Employers define skills through job requirements, but those skills show up differently depending on the role, industry, and workplace context. Without a shared translation layer, connecting these systems becomes difficult. The challenge is not only validating skill. It is making sure that a skill means enough of the same thing across education, assessment, credentialing, and employment systems to be trusted and used. |	**Transparency + Trust; Data, Security, + Integration; Performance-Based Evidence + Real-World Contexts.** Skills validation systems need clear definitions, interoperable data structures, and context-specific interpretation. Practitioners should not assume that the same skill label carries the same meaning across systems. High-quality validation requires crosswalking skill definitions, documenting what each evidence source measures, and clarifying how a skill manifests in different jobs.
Performance-based validation must be calibrated to the learner's experience base.	Although the pilot was conducted with high school students, XCredit assessments are designed around real-world scenarios that often assume some familiarity with workplace expectations, entry-level professional judgment, or prior work experience. This may help explain why validation and credential attainment looked different from pilots with adult learners or participants who had more work experience. The issue may not be that high school students lack durable skills. Rather, they may not yet have enough exposure to workplace contexts to recognize what the scenario is asking, choose between competing professional judgments, or connect their school-based experiences to the applied context of the assessment. Workplace experiences, per district interviews can help students "put their skills into action" and thus learn how to communicate them better.	**Accessibility, Fairness, + Inclusivity; Performance-Based Evidence + Real-World Contexts; Bias Mitigation.** High-quality validation should use real-world contexts, but those contexts must be developmentally and experientially appropriate for the learners being assessed. For high school students, this may mean adapting scenarios, adding orientation to workplace norms, offering practice examples, or pairing validation with career-connected learning experiences before assessment. Interview participants reiterated the need for both exposure and application.

Replication Guidance

For Organizations Considering Skills Validation for with High School Students
The ERP + XCredit pilot offers a practical framework for organizations exploring how to combine academic data, career navigation, algorithmic skills matching, and independent validation.

Before You Launch

+ **Define the validation question.**
  Be clear about what a validation method is meant to assess. Is it confirming a skill inferred by the algorithm? Filling a gap that academic data cannot capture? Giving students a portable credential? The research question should drive the design.
+ **Align skills frameworks early.**
  Academic standards, durable skills frameworks, employer skill language, O*NET data, and assessment constructs may not map cleanly. Misalignment will weaken both the student experience and the research analysis.
+ **Design the data model before the rollout.**
  Decide what data needs to move across systems, who can access it, what identifiers will be used, and what privacy rules apply. Do not treat this as an afterthought.
+ **Build activation into the school calendar.**
  Passive links will not be enough. Plan for career days, CTE pathway sessions, counselor-supported pushes, advisory periods, or other concentrated moments when students are guided into the experience.
+ **Reduce staff burden.**
  K-12 staff are often supportive but overextended. The implementation model should require minimal lift from counselors, teachers, principals, and district IT teams.
+ **Test the full student journey.**
  Run the complete flow before launch: platform entry, quiz, XCredit link, sign-up, assessment, result, credential issuance, and return to the ERP platform. Any confusing step can reduce participation.

When Validation May Work

- The platform already gives students a skills profile or job match that can be strengthened with independent evidence.
- There is a clear hypothesis about how academic data and performance-based assessment results should relate.
- Students have a structured moment to engage, such as a career event, CTE session, advisory period, or counselor-supported activity.
- The selected assessments map clearly to the skills being inferred or recommended.
- The district, platform partner, and assessment provider have a clear data-sharing agreement.
- Students can access and use their credentials beyond the pilot.

When to Reconsider

- Validation may have limited impact when:
- The assessment is only added as a link with no structured activation plan.
- The skills being assessed do not clearly map to the platform's skills profile or job matches.
- Data-sharing agreements are not in place before launch.
- District staff do not have the capacity to support rollout or troubleshooting.
- The platform cannot connect assessment results back to the learner profile.
- The pilot cannot answer whether independent validation strengthened the algorithmic match.

Voices from the Pilot

> Grades are part of the story. To better understand a student's skills a more holistic approach is necessary.
>
> **— Alex**

> I think that as a whole, education has really gone to college first, college-centered... I think we had it wrong — that we should be career first, career focused, with college as a path, along with all kinds of other ways to get there.
>
> **— Mitch**