



Direct Support Professional Certification Pilots

A look at the findings of three state evaluations

New York, Georgia, and Tennessee

While DSPs are often considered entry level workers, this work requires complex skills, ethical decision making and a high level of competence from consistent, qualified staff

Why NADSP Certification for DSPs and Frontline Supervisors?

- ✓ The results of three recently published state studies clearly demonstrate that credentialing has a positive impact on workforce outcomes and organizational satisfaction
- ✓ Credentialing and professional development is associated with lower turnover, stronger staff skills and improvements to organizational culture and service quality
- ✓ Credentialed DSPs in all three studies overwhelmingly reported that participation strengthened their skills, confidence and professional identity



Office for People With Developmental Disabilities

New York State OPWDD

Used ARPA funds to recognize the work of DSPs, support recruitment and retention, and enhance workforce skills and capacity.

Primary Goal

Strengthen and stabilize workforce

Main Focus

Recruitment, retention, workforce innovation



DBHDD

Georgia DBHDD

Used ARPA funds to compare three different pilot approaches to professionalization of the DSP Workforce.

Primary Goal

Test DSP certification pilot models

Main Focus

Certification pathways



Division of TennCare

The TennCare Program

Partnered with NADSP in 2024 to offer the NADSP E-Badge Academy to DSPs and FLSs in Tennessee.

Primary Goal

Assess impact of certification on retention

Main Focus

Competency-based credentialing



Shared Themes Across all Three Reports

- ✓ Professional development improves workforce stability and supports retention efforts among DSPs and FLSs.
- ✓ Career pathways are important! Credentialing, badges, and structured training were viewed as important tools for career advancement
- ✓ Recognition and validation matter to DSPs. DSPs responded positively when agencies recognized their skills, valued competency, celebrated accomplishments, and invested in career growth
- ✓ Workforce investment improves organizational culture. Providers commonly described improvements in teamwork, employee confidence, staff engagement and overall workplace culture.

State Pilot Comparisons

NADSP Certification – Employee Experience

New York

Certified DSPs and FLSs overwhelmingly reported that participation strengthened skills, confidence, and professional identity. Many valued reflection on their work by writing testimonials.

Data indicated that the turnover rate of certified DSPs was substantially lower than non-certified peers - 11% vs 44% in 2022 and 8% vs 38% in 2023 - with evidence that turnover declined for both groups in participating organizations.

Staff reported a stronger sense of professional identity and empowerment with certification.

Georgia

Participants reported high satisfaction, notably how certification positively impacted their work and support from their agency.

Nearly all certified staff felt better equipped for their work after completing DSP-I certification.

More than half of DSP-I certified staff planned to remain in direct support work for over 10 years, and nearly another 20% planned to stay for 3-10 years.

Long-tenured DSPs reported gaining new knowledge and practices and embracing their work with fresh enthusiasm.

Tennessee

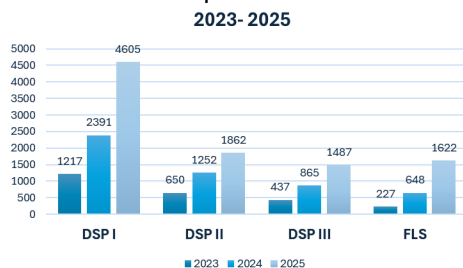
1st year data: Over 90% of DSPs:

- Felt recognized and valued for achieving certification
- Noted a connection between obtaining E-Badges and providing high quality supports
- Felt that earning the E-Badges reflected their strong commitment to excellent service
- 96% of DSPs reported the E-Badge Academy improved their ability to deliver better support
- 13% increase in career commitment post-program

2nd year data: Providers reported the program strengthened DSP pride and professionalism, fostering ambition and a career mindset.

2025 E-Badge Academy Quick Facts

- 26,812 System Users
- 228,652 Submissions reviewed
- 9576 Certifications issued
- 559 Participating Organizations
- 41 States Represented



The E-Badge Academy is in over 41 states with several larger state-level projects:

- Pennsylvania
- Alaska
- Hawaii
- Montana

Register for NADSP's free webinar on 7/15/26!
Insight into statewide certification evaluation.

