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New Report Urges Education Policy Makers to Invest in Competency-Based Approaches to Help High School Dropouts

Vienna, VA, January 13, 2011 - A new report by leaders in the youth development field encourages state education leaders to lift barriers and invest in innovative schools that implement dynamic competency-based approaches (CBA) to help over-age, under-credited students earn their diplomas.

CBA is a holistic, student-centered method of development with explicit and measurable learning objectives for youth. Services and support vary depending on the need of each student.

The paper was compiled by leaders from: MetisNet, a consulting firm that helps foundations and non-profit organizations maximize their community investments; Our Piece of the Pie[®], (OPP[®]), a youth development agency based in Hartford, CT; the International Association for K–12 Online Learning (iNACOL), a non-profit association based in the Washington, DC area; and Ephraim Weisstein, an independent education consultant who is piloting the Schools for the Future program.

According to the report, "*Clearing the Path: Creating Innovation for Serving Over-Age, Under-Credited Students in Competency-Based Pathways*," education policy-makers must offer flexibility to reorganize functions and staffing, expand high-quality content and instructional systems, and incorporate new tools, technologies and supports. In addition, policy needs to be amended to replace the current time-based system with a learning-based system allowing students to earn credits based on demonstrated proficiency, not seat-time.

The report urges policy-makers to lift barriers allowing students to enroll in competency-based online courses, transfer competencies across schools, and recognize proficiency in learning objectives developed outside of the traditional school day (including jobs, participation in clubs, and community service).

"Clearing the path for this innovative method of education is essential in ensuring over-age, under-credited students have the tools to succeed," said Bob Rath, President/CEO of OPP. "States and school districts that focus on competency-based approaches can reap tremendous economic benefits averaging over \$300,000 for every student that graduates high school instead of dropping out," Rath said.

According to the report, a set of policy conditions must be in place for state education agencies to realize the full benefit of CBAs.

"Competency-based approaches offer a new value proposition for our education system," according to Susan Patrick, President and CEO of iNACOL. "It focuses on a departure from seat-time requirements to concept mastery—a vital change toward student-centered learning."

In addition, the report urges education leaders to establish "innovation space" and "local laboratories" in school districts to allow the CBA method to be tested and fine-tuned.

"There are too many young people who have been left behind with gaps in their skills because of our time-based system," said Ephraim Weisstein. "Competency-based models are invaluable for addressing our dropout crisis by offering a high-engagement, accelerated path to a high school diploma."

About the Authors

Chris Sturgis is the principal of MetisNet, a consulting firm working with foundations, government, and individuals to shape effective investments that build communities, benefit children and families, and brighten our future. The mission stems from the very roots of their name—metis—a Greek word for local knowledge and wisdom. Drawing on multiple perspectives, MetisNet works with clients to develop vibrant, asset-based investment strategies.

Bob Rath is the president and CEO of Our Piece of the Pie®, Inc. (OPP®), based in Hartford, CT. With more than thirty years' experience in organizational leadership, Bob led the transformation of OPP into a youth development organization intently focused on helping urban youth 14–24 become successful adults. OPP's signature program, Pathways to Success, has been successfully implemented in the community at large, as well as inside Opportunity High School—a partnership school for over-aged and under-credited youth—launched in August 2009 by Hartford Public Schools and OPP.

Susan Patrick is president and CEO of the International Association for K–12 Online Learning (iNACOL), a nonprofit 501(c)(3) membership association based in the Washington, DC area with more than 3,700 members. iNACOL is unique in that its members represent a diverse cross section of K–12 education from school districts, charter schools, state education agencies, nonprofit organizations, colleges, universities and research institutions, corporate entities, and other content and technology providers. iNACOL's mission is to ensure all students have access to a world-class education and quality online learning opportunities that prepare them for a lifetime of success (www.inacol.org).

Ephraim Weisstein is an education consultant. With R & D support from the Mott Foundation, Weisstein is piloting Schools for the Future. Previously as vice president at the Commonwealth Corporation, Ephraim designed the Diploma Plus model, which is now used by 29 schools nationally, serving over 4,000 students.

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