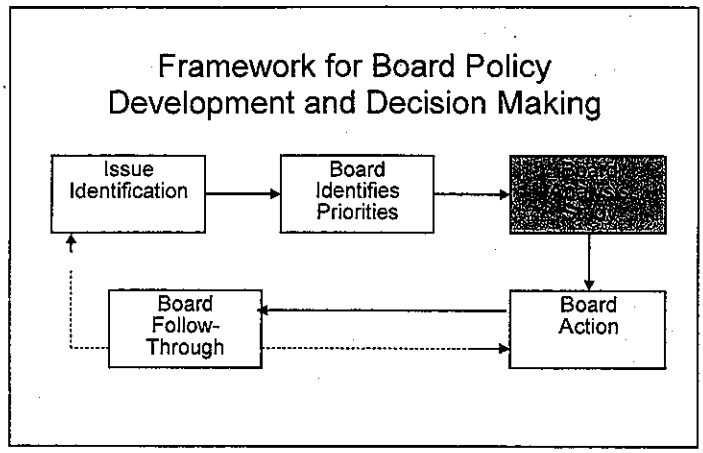
Iowa State Board of Education

Executive Summary

January 27, 2011



Agenda Item: Competency-based Education

Iowa Goals: All K-12 students will achieve at a high level.

Equity Impact Statement: A competency or performance-based education system is designed to ensure that all students master essential competencies and skills.

Presenters:

Fred Bramante, Member
New Hampshire State Board of Education
National Consultant on School Redesign and Competency-based Education

Kevin Fangman, Administrator
Division of PK-12 Education

Attachments: 2

Recommendation: It is recommended that the State Board hear and discuss this information.

Background: One of the policy development priorities identified by the State Board of Education is "Competency-based Education." A competency or performance-based system of education is designed to ensure that students master a set of specific competencies or skills. Students are provided with personalized learning opportunities, anytime/anywhere learning experiences, and opportunities for team-based and project-based tasks. This approach requires developing multiple measures to assess student

achievement and allowing students to demonstrate learning through performance and application to real-world tasks.

Our speaker and facilitator for this session is Fred Bramante, senior member of the New Hampshire State Board of Education, and a national consultant in the area of school redesign. Mr. Bramante was instrumental in bringing competency-based education to New Hampshire. He will discuss what competency-based education is, what's going on around the country with examples of what other states are doing, and will describe the path that New Hampshire has taken.

On Friday, January 28th, the first meeting of the State Board's Competency-based Education Design Team will convene. We have invited members of the Design Team to sit in on Mr. Bramante's session with the State Board.

Introducing Fred Bramante:
Designer of Fundamental Change in the New Hampshire School System

Willard R. Daggett, Ed.D, CEO and Raymond J. McNulty, President
International Center for Leadership in Education

April 2010

Meet Fred Bramante. We think you'll like what he has to tell you about fundamental change in school systems. We like what Fred has to say. In fact, when it comes to defining change in America's schools, we are all on the same page.

Fred Bramante, Education Activist

Fred is a former middle school science teacher turned entrepreneur. In 1972, while still teaching at Dolan Middle School, in Stamford Connecticut, Fred invested his life savings, $600, to found Daddy's Junky Music Store. With Fred as its president and CEO in the early years, and now as its CEO and board chairman, Daddy's has grown from a single storefront into the 14th largest music products dealer retailer in the United States, with 20 stores throughout New England and upstate New York. Daddy's grossed $25 million in sales in 2009.

Fred's work, however, wasn't finished with his success in the music business. Based primarily on an education platform, Fred ran for governor of New Hampshire. Fred lost the election, but the passionate views he expressed on the changing the public education system in New Hampshire so that students could take ownership of their learning — what we at the International Center have long advocated as replacing seat time (Carnegie units) with student mastery as the measure of learning — made an impression on people. One of them was the man who became the Governor of New Hampshire. In 2003, Craig Benson appointed Fred as Chair of the New Hampshire State Board of Education, with the goal that Fred would be the catalyst for the changes he espoused. While no longer the Chair, Fred is the senior member of the New Hampshire State Board and has been appointed and reappointed by both Republican and Democratic governors.

Fred isn't just outspoken about change; he also acts from his heart. He was a non-traditional learner who ranked 206 out of 212 students in his high school class. School taught Fred that he wasn't very bright. Life taught Fred that school was wrong. He learned that traditional schools don't serve non-traditional learners well. In fact, traditional schools all too often leave non-traditional learners behind.

Schools Still in the 20th Century

Fred's purpose, like ours at the International Center for Leadership in Education, has been to change the dominant paradigm in education. That model is centered on adults: what is good for them and how they are best served. This 20th century model, which is still in place, focuses on teaching as opposed to learning.

- It is system-centered and regulated by a series of bells and other time constraints.
- Learning takes place during a set schedule of 180 days.
- Students have four years to complete high school.
- Time and place are the constant in this model, carried over from the Industrial Age.

And the variable? That's achievement. Students are educated within the confines of classrooms and led by teachers as the primary content providers. Curriculum exists within silos; its focus is inward, resisting collaboration with outside sources. The results are disappointing: 52% of boys and 43% of girls say school is boring. The high school dropout rate is high, about 6.2 million in 2007. No matter how good a teacher might be, his or her compensation usually does not reflect it. Teachers have limited pay scales based on a uniform

schedule. For most teachers, pay increases only with the number of years of service and according to the degrees one holds.

Vision for the 21st Century

We are now 10 years into the 21st century—and we can't waste any more time. Our nation is struggling. Our schools are struggling. The time for bold action is now. Student achievement must become the constant, with time as the variable. Some students might finish high school in two years. Why hold them back? Others might need longer. Moreover, with changes in direction propelled by Race to the Top and innovation funds, teacher evaluation will soon be based on student performance.

Let's create a student-centered model based on what is right for students. Learning can and does take place in multiple arenas—there need not be a single building for that purpose which students enter and leave day after day. The entire community outside the school has much to offer as quality learning environments. And, most vital, teachers' jobs will move toward becoming facilitators of learning. Their primary role will not be to deliver and control information, but rather guide students on the path to finding it themselves.

Mastery will matter. Individual student's personal needs will dictate how much time is required to complete learning. Every student will matter as an individual. If a student has mastered part of a subject area, he or she will move on to the next topic. No longer will students be tethered to peers whose learning needs differ. Every student will be engaged in learning, no longer bored. And, someday in our history classes, we'll be telling about how students used to drop out of high school. Champions in the political arena will still have different viewpoints, but there will be a general consensus on the whole child and involving the whole community, embracing all the resources that a community has to offer.

It is from the platform of a 21st century education that Fred has spent the past seven years tirelessly advocating for and bringing about change, often working more than 50 hours a week. Fred knows all too well that traditional schools shortchange the non-traditional learner, and, as a non-traditional learner himself, has become an ardent advocate for these students, immersing himself in this effort. He has traveled widely to speak about fundamental change. In all, Fred has made more than 500 presentations in and outside of New Hampshire to education groups, parent groups, boards of education, and state legislators. Fred has met with focus groups of students, educators, community leaders, business leaders, parents, and interested citizens who helped provide the perspective for change. In New Hampshire, they not only listened to Fred, they heard what he was saying. He got what he came for.

Changing the New Hampshire Education System

Fred led a major effort to review and successfully revise the state education policies in New Hampshire. His focus was always on the end result: each student becoming an engaged and productive learner who demonstrates joy in learning. Fred's leadership brought about not just redesign, but meaningful redesign. The new vision focuses on what matters most — the documented progress of each student academically, personally, socially, and physically.

New Hampshire's Minimum Standards for School Approval, as guided by the work of Fred Bramante, are in direct alignment with the goals of the International Center. The new standards call for:

Personalization of learning. Learning strategies must be put into place to address the personal learning styles, strengths, interests, and needs of each student. Each district is expected to develop local board policies, as well as policy and guidance at the school level, to implement these changes. This demands attention to development of a student advisor process.

Harnessing of local resources. Within each district there are untapped resources available for partnerships that will encourage learning. The New Hampshire regulations call for harnessing of all worthwhile local resources, including businesses, not-for-profits, and talented individuals. A consistent example of this strategy has been the career and technical education (CTE) centers that have for years been engaged with their respective communities. A viable aspect of CTE is student internships at local businesses, where not only does learning take place, but also students often find permanent employment following graduation, while the business

gains a well- and pre-trained employee. School districts need to recognize that the CTE model has valuable lessons that can be applied to virtually every student.

Greater flexibility in developing a school calendar. This revision calls for the school year to be defined in terms of hours of instructional time rather than number of days per year. It allows education to happen at any time and any place, opening the doors to broader learning communities. Students are able to fulfill credit requirements at various times and places, not necessarily within school walls. It is a concept that provides New Hampshire schools with the means to address students' learning and personal needs and those of faculty as well.

Extended learning opportunities (ELO) for credit toward graduation. By causing schools to think differently about harnessing local resources, this revision empowers students to take an active role in determining the path of their education. Students can propose alternative approaches to acquiring skills and knowledge other than the traditional classroom setting. The Minimum Standards state that credit toward graduation through ELOs can be attained through private instruction, independent study, online courses, internships, work-study, and more. The role of the teacher is to ensure that students meet standards for competency established by the state and the district before they can earn the credit toward graduation. Districts are called upon to establish local board policies describing the process of approval prior to implementing extended learning. At all times, the relevance and rigor of the students' learning experience must be maintained, and students must demonstrate competencies gained through the experience. Additionally, local policies must make extended learning available to all students.

Distance learning and technology. The revised standards clearly engage technology to access new learning opportunities. Technologies can be used to support online learning and to improve student-teacher communication. Technology not only delivers a program, but also is a tool to support the learning process. Moreover, technology provides access to courses and other opportunities that local budget simply cannot afford to support on site.

Moving from Carnegie Units to demonstration of mastery. Thank you, Fred! The International Center has been saying for years that we must do away with the archaic Carnegie Units in favor of a system that uses the demonstration of mastery to identify student achievement. The New Hampshire Department of Education asks districts to certify that they have policies in place to assess competency for all courses at the high school level. Districts are afforded the autonomy to identify or develop high school course competencies, decide on appropriate competency assessment methods, and define the necessary and sufficient evidence for students to demonstrate mastery. Districts are encouraged to measure competency not by a single test but by multiple forms of assessment as recommended by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges. This encourages formative assessment. It allows students to learn and reach beyond current understanding and performance and helps school focus on a higher level of learning than that which awards credits based on seat time. Middle school students are allowed to get high school credits if they can demonstrate mastery of high school level work. Districts are encouraged to think about the standards they want students to reach and how students will demonstrate what they have learned.

New Role for Teachers

Strong leadership at the administrative level in New Hampshire brought teachers into the change process, allowing for shared leadership, gaining support for educational redesign at all levels, and developing the skills of effective leaders in everyone. Teachers in New Hampshire no longer fit the standard definition of the job: firsthand, direct delivery of a learning experience. Instead there is a move toward teachers as facilitators of student learning.

The result is an enlivening of the learning community as teachers become active designers of curriculum. They no longer implement externally made curriculums but are decision-makers in the curriculum planning process. While most teachers still hold the role of instructors, as students begin taking ownership of their learning, teachers are becoming co-learners and co-investigators along with their students. They are becoming catalysts for student learning and growth and organizers of learning opportunities for every student, guiding students to the most effective learning environment.

As facilitators, teachers are being called upon to challenge, question, and stimulate students in thinking, problem solving, and self-directed study. By sharing knowledge and responsibility, with teachers as models, students are able to challenge themselves and each other as they work, think, and learn. Thus, as we move from teacher-centered to student-centered education, students are being called upon to accept responsibility for the direction of their learning and to reflect on learning actively and continually.

It is as though the 20th century writer and poet William Arthur Ward envisioned 21st century teachers when he wrote, "The mediocre teacher tells. The good teacher explains. The superior teacher demonstrates. The great teacher inspires."

Fred Bramante and the International Center welcome the opportunity to work with you to create bold new learning initiatives that will improve student engagement and achievement.

International Center for Leadership in Education
1587 Route 146 • Rexford, NY 12148
(518) 399-2776 • fax 399-7607
www.LeaderEd.com • info@LeaderEd.com

New Hampshire Department of Education

New Hampshire's Vision for Redesign:

Moving from High Schools to Learning Communities

Executive Summary

The New Hampshire Department of Education has released a report, "New Hampshire's Vision for Redesign: Moving from High Schools to Learning Communities." This report brings together state, regional, and national resources with the work of New Hampshire educators in a plan to support the improvement of our secondary schools.

One hundred years ago, less than 20% of secondary students completed high school. Today, every student must complete a rigorous high school curriculum leading to graduation. But in 2005, an estimated 2,300 of our students dropped out of high school.

To address these issues, education leaders have come together over the past several years to gather research, opinion, and data on the New Hampshire high school experience. A series of meetings, forums, and focus groups was held, including two New Hampshire education summits, three statewide student forums, and the activities of a state-level high school leadership team. These activities generated input from administration, teachers, counselors, students, school boards, business and community members, as well as state and national organizations, such as the National Association of School Principals, the U.S. Department of Education, the New England Association of Schools and Colleges, and the National Governors Association's high school redesign initiatives.

The vision for New Hampshire high school redesign is to recognize and accept that the interests, passions and dreams of each student are keys to ensuring that they are engaged and successful learners.Six guiding principles for the future of our high schools emerged from this body of discussion and research:

- Personalization and Relationships
- Rigor and High Standards
- Relevance and Engagement
- Results
- Empowered Educators
- Follow the Child

Personalization and Relationships

Personalization is education that places the student at the center (Fullam, 2006; Leadbeater, 2002). Personalization is relational. Educators, parents, and the community assist students to develop learning plans that create a real sense of belonging by helping and enabling students to take ownership for their own learning. For personalized learning to successfully benefit students, it is critical for each student to have a student advocate or mentor. Schools that report success with high school redesign efforts cite personalization as the central aspect of all learning relationships.

Rigor and High Standards

Every student deserves a course of study that allows them to learn in a deep, meaningful and practical way. Achieving this requires high standards that clearly identify and describe what is expected of students across the curriculum. Such standards serve as a common target for students, staff, and parents. High standards should address character and emotional development as well as academic growth. They should apply to all programs, including Career and Technical Education programs. They should apply to all students, not just those in certain academic tracks. Standards should address not only academic knowledge but everyday life skills such as problem-solving, team building, and time management. In developing high standards, everyone should be involved, including school personnel, students, parents and community members.

Relevance and Engagement

Relevance connects what students learn to the skills they practice in real-life situations. By engaging every student in learning we can dramatically reduce the number of dropouts and allow students to acquire the skills they need to be successful and contributing citizens. Expanding the scope of extended learning opportunities (such as through internships and independent study) is a practical way to make this connection and ensure that students are engaged in their education. The challenge for educators is to engage each student, showing relevance while at the same time keeping the students' horizons broad, because we know that we cannot predict today what may or may not be relevant in students' later lives.

Results

Collecting and analyzing data on results is vital to the success of high school redesign efforts. This data should first be used to determine the steps to support a student's growth. It can also help a school understand whether it has reached its goals or whether a program needs to be modified. Assessment should include both academic and non-academic goals, and schools should have a plan to collect and report the data internally and to the greater community. Such a system should encourage teachers to be reflective about their teaching so they can improve it and therefore improve student learning.

Empowered Educators

This goal incorporates several components:

Effective Leadership

Educators must become effective leaders, making choices that serve the vision and mission of the school, creating environments in which others share in the leadership process, and reaching out to community members to draw them into a relationship with the schools. Schools must nurture effective leadership with ongoing training and support.

Teachers as Learning Facilitators

Teachers should transition from a traditional delivery approach toward coaching, mentoring and facilitating student learning. As learning facilitators, teachers become more active designers of curriculum. They encourage students to assume responsibility for their learning and move from teacher-centered to student-centered education. The transition to new roles for teachers will require a strong professional development effort, but will lead to more exciting and rewarding careers for teachers.

Whole Community Involvement
New Hampshire defines parent and community partnerships as collaborations among educators, parents/guardians, and the greater community, all actively engaged in defining, implementing and sustaining relationships to ensure a personalized learning experience for each learner. These collaborations create schools that share the responsibility for the delivery of education, as a vital part of the *whole community's involvement* in the education of young people.

Professional Learning Communities
Professional learning communities are places of continuous learning and growth. They are vital and spirited environments in which the openness to exchange ideas, to share information and insights, and to establish mutually supportive relationships enhances the learning process. Leadership in *professional learning communities* is visionary, committed, and inclusive. The physical environment reflects the inclusive nature of leadership and the school structure facilitates engaged learning. This may sound like an ideal, but it is both possible and necessary if each and every student is to emerge from the school system as an engaged and successful learner.

Follow The Child

The student-centered ***Follow The Child*** initiative calls for personalized learning and assessment so that each child can flourish in four domains: personally, socially, physically and academically. In this initiative, each student's educational plan is personalized through an analysis of who the student is as a person. Parents, educators, and students work together to determine the student's learning pathway. The strategies for learning are both short-term and long-term, and draw from resources inside and outside of the school. They combine classroom and community learning, coached or mentored learning, and independent learning. The student's learning path is monitored, and the delivery plan is adjusted as needed. Schools that develop this type of personalized approach to education help students learn more, encourage more students to graduate from high school, and ensure that those graduates are better prepared for their next steps in life.

Redesign and State Standards

Beyond the guiding principles mentioned above, the report addresses New Hampshire's recently passed Minimum Standards for School Approval and their relation to high school redesign. Important objectives within the new standards are:

- **greater flexibility in developing a school calendar**
  Schools now have the option of maintaining a school year based on hours of instructional time per year rather than the traditional 180-day calendar. This option allows schools to develop innovative pathways to address students' learning and personal needs. A student could now fulfill credit requirements at various times and places and not necessarily inside the school walls.

- **extended learning opportunities for credit towards graduation**
  Schools may now allow students to propose alternative approaches to acquiring skills and knowledge other than in the traditional classroom setting. If a district chooses to implement extended learning opportunities, it must establish policies describing the process of approval, the expected involvement of the student and parents in the process,

how students will demonstrate the mastery of required course competencies, the relationship to the awarding of credit, and how extended learning opportunities will be accessible to all students.

- **harnessing of local resources**
  This section of the new rules states that "Schools shall strive to harness all available community resources, including but not limited to organizations, businesses, talented individuals, natural resources, and technology..." Models of harnessing local resources already exist in many schools that have Career and Technical Education (CTE) Centers.

- **distance learning and the use of technology in learning**
  School districts may, at their option, allow correspondence, video-based, Internet-based, and online courses. The local school board must maintain policies to ensure that such courses comply with federal and state regulations, that academic standards for awarding credit are similar to those for traditional courses, that only approved students may receive credit for such courses, and that such students participate in all required assessment programs.

- **personalization of learning**
  This section of the standards advocates personalized learning strategies to address the learning styles, strengths, interests, and needs of each student. Districts interested in pursuing personalized learning strategies should develop local board policies to implement such strategies.

- **transition from a Carnegie unit-based grading system to credit based on competency demonstration**
  The revised standards require school districts to move from a system based on the Carnegie unit (a measure of the length of time a student has studied a subject) to a system that awards credit based on mastery of the subject. This transition must take place not later than the 2008-2009 school year. Local school districts must identify or develop high school course competencies, decide on appropriate ways to assess competency, and define sufficiency (identifying necessary and sufficient evidence for students to demonstrate mastery).

The report concludes with a sample competency-based assessment transcript that includes extended learning opportunities.

SUMMARY

This report, "New Hampshire's Vision for Redesign," which is a culmination of conversations, leadership efforts, and input from throughout the state, points out and supports concepts that reinforce the need for change and the need to focus on particular issues. The research, data, and changes in the state Minimum Standards for School Approval all serve as guidance and support for local initiative. We believe that the best changes will happen within a district and that the state will support those changes that lead to each student being an engaged and successful learner.