

**Overview of Work**

**Background**

The Center for Innovation in Education (CIE) was established at the University of Kentucky in early 2013 with three years of funding for basic operations from the William and Flora Hewlett and Bill and Melinda Gates Foundations. The Center supports state efforts to test and scale innovations that result in systemic shifts to deeper learning with a special focus on empowering the voices of teachers and local leaders in state strategy. CIE has a deliberately small footprint and a national mission; we seek outsized impact through partnerships and pursue our work by facilitating collaborations among leaders from the state and local levels, partners, researchers and philanthropists who seek transformation of the education system.

We focus on underdeveloped aspects of the transformation agenda that we feel uniquely qualified to lead. The Center works with state-district-local partnerships in the Innovation Lab Network as a partner with the Council of Chief State School Officers. We also work with other states and their district partners when those collaborations represent a serious commitment to systems-wide change. We have chosen to work only with those seeking to transform our historic legacy institutions.

As anticipated during a design phase with funders, the Center shapes its scope of work with input from two ongoing advisory structures:

* A kitchen cabinet called the Critical Friends Group[[1]](#footnote-1), which advises on strategic direction, and
* The ILN Implementation Leaders Advisory, a group composed of local practitioners, who shape and guide the specific strands of the Center’s work.

Based on input from both groups, CIE adopted the following scope of work in September 2013, which anchors our focus, strategy and decision-making:

* Strand One – Being a national voice for a new system to build consensus around a new, more coherent vision of education grounded in deeper learning and to help individual states develop and act on robust theories of change.
* Strand Two – Producing developmental frameworks of key skills and dispositions to help states operationalize their understanding of readiness, with a focus on how deeper learning skills and dispositions from Pre-K through transition to postsecondary can be taught, learned and measured.
* Strand Three - Personalizing learning in the secondary years to help systems use levers such as funding to develop strategies for re-shaping the secondary experience and examining new approaches to resource allocation.
* Strand Four – Building a culture of evidence to develop a comprehensive framework for collecting and managing evidence of learning.
* Strand Five – Empowering the voices of teachers and local leaders to tap the collective potential of and amplify the voices of practitioners in this work.
* Strand Six – Facilitating collaboration with postsecondary and business to build support for and direct involvement in the work of the ILN.

The Center began operations in March 2013 as Gene Wilhoit, Executive Director, ended his tenure as Executive Director of the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO). In that role, he led the nation’s P12 leaders to adopt common core standards, to reach agreement on development of college and career ready assessments, to commit to principles for the redesign of teacher preparation, and to build strong data and information systems. He formed a smaller, forward-thinking group of states to establish the Innovation Lab Network and begin developing proof points of personalized, competency-based systems. Mr. Wilhoit continues his role in advancing education reform; the Center is the focal point for all aspects of his work. Linda Pittenger, former director of the Innovation Lab Network, left CCSSO to join Wilhoit at the Center as Chief Operating Officer. Pittenger has long established relationships with coalitions and communities working to advance breakthrough learning models enabled with technology such as the Innovation Lab Network, the Deeper Learning Network, Next Generation Learning Challenges, and iNACOL – on whose board she currently serves. Carmen Coleman, former superintendent of Danville (KY) Public Schools, joined the team in July 2014. As a superintendent, Coleman accelerated learning through new personalized, competency-based options for students from kindergarten through high school including blended learning and project-based learning and shifted the entire district to a performance assessment model. With this team and with Wilhoit as a leader, the Center has strong capacity, can attract state and national thought leaders and expertise to its work, and is able to deliver on its commitments.

**Where We Are Today**

Being a National Voice for a New System

The Center is working to build consensus around a new, more coherent vision of education and to help individual states that are signaling deep commitment to transformation develop and act on robust theories of change. We promote the need for a transformative shift from systems of schooling to systems for learning that will advance the goal of college, career and citizenship readiness for every child.

The Center generally characterizes this shift as one to Systems of Personalized Learning in which students’ educational experiences from early childhood on:

* Are designed to support them to graduation in a culture of high expectations, having mastered the Knowledge, Skills and Dispositions (Attachment A) that prepare them for success in further learning and career, and
* Are tailored to individual needs, skills and interests so that all students are able to take responsibility for their learning and develop purposeful connections to the transformative power of education in their lives.

To advance systems of personalized learning, we rely on six critical attributes (Attachment B) as design principles, three of which we view as inter-dependent and inseparable. Without the other two, either one will fall short:



The Center has invested considerable time and energy into advocacy since its inception with national organizations, chiefs and other state-level leaders, and regional groups. This has included several meetings with state chiefs and their staff, site visits, speaking engagements, ongoing interactions with groups advocating for systems change, testimony to and requests to facilitate legislative and executive committees, presentations to state boards, and others. We receive far more requests for Wilhoit’s time, especially, than we are able to accommodate. Exactly how the Center should continue to balance these kinds of activities with other priorities is an open question.

A major activity to which the Center has contributed is the release of a paper with Linda Darling-Hammond, “Accountability for College and Career Readiness: Developing a New Paradigm”, to help states reconceptualize assessment and accountability in ways that align with and support the new vision for our nation’s education system (paper included in meeting materials). The premise of the paper is that our current systems of assessment and accountability are not sufficient to meet the country’s aspirations for preparing college- and career-ready students and that we need to engage now in the debate that will be necessary to move the nation forward. Building on the fact that states are adopting higher standards and expectations, developing higher quality assessments, and undertaking major initiatives to build professional teaching capacity, the paper recommends an accountability approach that focuses on “meaningful learning, enabled by professionally skilled and committed educators, and supported by adequate and appropriate resources.” We hope that the paper provokes productive discussion leading to vastly different conceptualizations at both the state and federal levels of the role of assessment and accountability in systems transformation.

**Bringing Deeper Learning Skills and Dispositions to Life**

The ILN states adopted a Knowledge, Skills and Dispositions framework for college and career readiness. But, our understanding about how to operationalize skills and dispositions is comparatively underdeveloped. The need to close the gap between that broadened understanding of readiness and our ability to act purposefully against two of its major dimensions was identified as a high priority by states:

* Teachers need clear definitions of skills and dispositions, an evidence-based model showing how they develop, and tools to integrate them into instruction and assessment, and
* Policy makers need a clearer understanding of how (or if) skills and dispositions are teachable, learnable, and identifiable as competencies that fit into assessment and accountability systems.

The Center engaged the Educational Policy Improvement Center (EPIC) to help states address this issue. The work is led through the Implementation Leaders Advisory, which allows us to enage teachers and local leaders directly as thought partners and solutions designers. (*The Center Advisory was established in fall 2013 and is composed of local practitioners from the ILN and other states. See more on the critical importance of the Advisory and its role in Empowering the Voices of Teachers and Local Leaders*.)

In Phase One, Implementation Leaders Advisory teams worked with the Educational Policy Improvement Center to develop Beginner to Emerging Expert progressions for a core set of skills and dispositions most closely associated with student success. To date, frameworks have been developed for: Collaboration, Communications, Creativity, and Self-direction.

The model of skills development being used for this work is based on extensive research, but might best be described as being derived from ethnography of how people learn to play jazz: a move from rule-based, structured acquisition to intuitive, nuanced application, to novel tasks in new contexts. Each framework addresses both the inter-personal and intra-personal dimensions of the skill and proposes major subcomponents that can be used to hone in on the experiences that students will need to understand, practice and demonstrate the skill in varying contexts. The developmental frameworks will not be tied to grade levels so that they are truer to what we know about learning dynamics and appropriate for embedding within competency-based systems.

Phase II Teacher Network

The second phase of this project will then take the frameworks into the field to answer the following questions:

* How can these frameworks help establish a shared understanding among teachers of how these skills and dispositions develop? How can they establish a shared understanding between teachers and students?
* How can these frameworks be translated into instructional practice?
* What are contexts and conditions necessary for these skills and dispositions to thrive in the classroom, at a school, and within an education system?

CIE will launch and facilitate an invitational teacher network. Consisting of approximately 100 educators located at no more than 8 - 10 school or district sites initially, the Network will engage in a cycle of action research and iterative design during the 2015-16 academic year. An expanding network of teachers will engage in rapid prototyping of the frameworks and instructional and assessment tools, resulting in a curated bank of exemplar resources, proven strategies for professional learning, and development of supportive state policy. Among other things, we hope to demonstrate that through practice in applying these skills in different contexts students will deepen learning across disciplines and develop the all important attribute of student agency.

Sites will be selected based on the following criteria: 1) a demonstrated leadership commitment to next generation teaching and learning; 2) a distribution of school type from small rural to large urban, regular public to charter, traditional brick-and-mortar to blended or virtual; and 3) sites with a set of existing policy conditions or instructional transformations that are of particular interest (e.g., schools using curriculum-embedded performance assessment, districts with graduation portfolios, states implementing competency reforms). Selected teachers will also demonstrate a commitment to and interest in next generation teaching and learning, and they will be teamed with colleagues to explore how skills and dispositions develop across subject areas (e.g., all the core content teachers within a grade level) and across grade levels (e.g., math teachers at feeder elementary, middle, and high schools).

The design and rationale of the Network is based on several successful models, including the Literacy Design Collaborative (LDC). Like LDC, this project will build teacher capacity through ongoing professional learning as well as the use and adaption of templates and exemplar instructional tools. Spread across physical sites, the Network will use a virtual platform to provide support, facilitate communication, and engage teachers as co-owners and co-designers in this work. At the end of this second phase of the project, this virtual platform will move from being an internal Network tool to being an externally-facing, interactive website housing the developmental frameworks, a bank of prototyped and refined instructional tools aligned to the frameworks, virtual training materials and other implementation resources, and a series of action research briefs.

**Leveraging Finance Policy to Support Personalized Learning at Scale**

There are two distinct dimensions of finance policy that must be addressed by reformers:

1. The way in which funds are distributed to districts and schools, and ultimately made available to students, should be a major issue for state consideration if we are to insure that resources are being generated based on defensible need. States must evaluate their formulae to make sure they are aligned with real needs of students and to insure that those formulae are seen as fair and equitable by educators and communities.
2. The work that the Center is undertaking is focused on the second issue, which is how those fair and equitable resources can be allocated in ways that result in the desired goals for universal graduation and readiness for success.

Because we see it as the structure most resistant to change and as the place where pathways and opportunities for students diverge most dramatically, we have chosen to focus this work on the high school. Traditional high schools are deeply rooted in a tangled system of legacy structures that inhibit our ability to support a broadened set of learner outcomes, dampen the potential for deeper learning, and are antithetical to the development of student agency. Practitioners perceive most finance policy as supporting that status quo.

This project offers an opportunity for interested states to combine learning from local experimentations in ways that advance personalized, competency-based sytems and also inform the larger dimension of questions about state formulae.

* Phase One: Teams of educators, working with experts, identified barriers and developed a set of design principles (Attachment C) to describe a more desirable system. A project overview has been developed to solicit interest among states for Phase Two (included in meeting materials).
* Phase Two: Three to five states will a) enable school-to-district partnerships to pilot new schema, b) craft relationships with new assessment and accountability designs, c) conduct research to monitor implementation and assess impacts, and d) collaborate to iterate on and refine models under study.

Phase Two will rely in no small measure on the expertise and ingenuity of local teachers and leaders, who will come together to propose and test how time, facilities, technology, human capital and other resources might be used differently to advance learning for all students.

This is work of inquiry that will ask questions such as:

* Can we shift the system to place a premium on mastery of expectations?
* Will more flexibility and an invitation to innovate produce measurable changes in the way schools allocate resources?
* Will greater flexibility at the local level, accompanied by increased accountability for results, increase the likelihood that students are better and more equitably served?
* What strategies can SEAs adopt to balance the need for innovations with the responsibility to safeguard equity and protect the public’s interest in financial stewardship?
* What is the difference between funding schools, funding programs, and funding students? What happens when we shift the object of funding?

Building a Culture of Evidence – New Paradigm of Assessment and Accountability

As states move to change entire systems to expect and support genuinely deeper and higher levels of learning for all, there is a new focus on higher order skills and increasing attention to dispositions, or behaviors. That will require that evidence be multi-dimensional and relevant in the context of individuals as well as the systems that support them. The states want to create and sustain “cultures of evidence” in which data and artifacts of student learning, and of the systems that support student learning, are systematically collected, analyzed and shared from a range of sources to improve outcomes on a continuing basis.

As originally conceived, this strand of work focused on helping states determine what constitutes evidence of meaningful learning, how it can be collected and used at different levels of the system, and how multiple measures can be used to answer critical questions about where a student is on the road to readiness and what it will take to ensure not only entry but success at next levels of learning and work. States characterized this work as setting conditions that would result in:

* A comprehensive, multi-dimensional system that collects and synthesizes evidence of learning to inform important decisions about and by students
* Multiple forms of evidence – both formative and summative - that can be designed and adjudicated at different levels for different purposes
* A more portfolio-like credential, customized to the student’s next steps in college and/or career, that is valid and reliable and that replaces – is not simply layered onto – current reporting mechanisms
* Credentials that transfer with the student into postsecondary and can be used for a number of purposes

The Center’s response to these conversations with states and similar conversations with others evolved into participation with a broad group of thought leaders and eventual publication of the paper, (*introduced earlier in Being a National Voice)* with Linda Darling-Hammond in August 2014, “Accountability for College and Career Readiness: Developing a New Paradigm.” That paper calls for a new system of higher-quality assessments and a new approach to accountability that raises the bar for all, is focused on capacity building, and is performance-based and aligned with multiple measures. The paradigm the paper proposes rests on three pillars: Meaningful Learning, Resource accountability, and Professional Capacity.

The paper proposes how multiple forms of evidence could be used to support meaningful learning within a balanced system of assessment and accountability. The imagined “51st state” is typified by things such as:

* Authentic learning
* Multiple measures
* Much richer and deeper forms of assessment that reflect where students are in learning progressions
* Less reliance on evidence from summative assessments and much more emphasis on formative assessment as, by and for instruction
* More interplay between summative and formative to validate local judgments and to guide state-level policy
* Better preparing teachers to analyze evidence of student learning in relation to practice and engage in ongoing improvement
* Evidence collected in digital portfolios and portfolio-like credentials, and
* Greater transparency with the public.

Given the ideas put forward in the paper and the states’ response, the Center has opportunity to reframe this strand of work in the context of a much more evolved conversation about what constitutes worthy evidence of meaningful learning and how it is used to improve outcomes at all levels of the system.

**Empowering the Voices of Teachers and Local Leaders**

One of the most exciting, surprising and impactful developments during the last year has been the launching of the Implementation Leaders Advisory, which met for the first time in November 2013. The Advisory, composed of local practitioners from ILN and other states, convenes twice a year in person and meets via telephone or video conference as needed. Two persons represent each state, usually one from the district and one from the school levels; state points of contact are invited to Advisory meetings. A standing Advisory provides feedback on the design of specific strands of work with a particular view towards implementation supports for teachers and students, suggests high-priority areas of unmet need, and reviews and responds to resources being developed by working groups.

The Advisory plays a critical role in all of the Center’s strands of work, is proving to be an excellent talent cloud, a good vehicle for outreach to the field, and is demonstrating how powerful the direct engagement of teachers working across states can be. As one example:

* In the work on skills and dispositions, the Advisory completely shifted the initial layout of the frameworks from a more traditional rubric-like approach to the developmental progressions format that you see today. They also insisted that we differentiate between inter- and intra-personal dimensions of the skills. Teams of teachers, nominated by members of the Advisory, worked with EPIC over the summer to produce the four initial frameworks.

**Developing Local Leadership for Transformative Change**

The Advisory is now helping formulate a strand of work that we did not anticipate but on which they place high priority: 1) to challenge the field to think more broadly about the major roles and responsibilities of a transformational local leader and the competencies that person must have to be successful and 2) bring new thinking to the field of leadership development that is aligned with enlightened approaches to teacher effectiveness as well as continuous improvement within the profession, generally. Between the refreshment of the ISLLC standards and state efforts underway on teacher effectiveness, we are getting a better sense of where the preparation and support gaps may be around the critical role of the principal.

Responding to unparalleled societal advancements and shifts, many educators are ready to embrace a transformational agenda. As they do so, they point to the critical role of leadership in places where meaningful change is taking place. On the other hand, people see places where policy is a barrier to innovation and holds back the spread of new ideas. Building the understanding of teachers and the trust of parents in the power of digital learning and competency-based education, for instance, is especially important if the ideas are to take hold. The professional training that principals and superintendents receive does not prepare them for the job of leading transformative change.

The responsibilities and strengths needed in a leader whose primary role is to manage a traditional school unit are vastly different from those of a leader whose mission is to transform an education system and build public will for the changes that are taking place. Transformational leaders have significantly different roles and responsibilities, including:

* + - Empowering teachers to personalize learning and ensure each student achieves high levels of mastery
    - Ensuring personalized, next generation approaches are student-centered and provide more autonomy at the point of learning to meet each student’s unique needs
    - Increasing performance and re-aligning accountability for meaningful learning and improving resource allocation
    - Leading a community of practice and a community of stakeholders to accept and trust new approaches to teaching and learning, such as blended and online learning, competency-based approaches, and the move to meaningful credentials with evidence of mastering knowledge, skills and dispositions needed for success, and
    - Shifting school culture to one of continuous improvement.

We propose a series of activities, including:

* Creating an “innovator’s guide” to leadership development, by practitioners for practitioners
* Communicating how successful leaders are prepared, manage change, and how they influence others
* Creating a community of building-level leaders who can advocate for and inform the broader policy conversation among states
* Developing examples of changed relationships between districts and schools where the district is supporting and enabling transformational leadership.
* Developing a leadership development policy framework for state consideration that would incentivize new models of leadership development, attract educators with strong leadership potential to enter the emerging system, and incentives for districts to hire those candidates.

**Partnering with Higher Education and Business**

One of the goals for the Center is to help states develop purposeful relationships with higher education and business that advance the goal of having virtually every child college and career ready. As an example, the competencies expected exiting K12 should align with the competencies expected entering postsecondary, whether for work or a degree or both. Misalignment and missed connections between K12 and postsecondary mean lost opportunities for students, teachers and communities, especially those most at-risk. States are asking key questions, including:

* How can a state develop more comprehensive P20 strategies that will increase readiness and postsecondary success, building on the movement towards personalized, competency-based systems?
* How can we accelerate postsecondary’s awareness of transformative changes underway in K12 and incentivize changes in teacher preparation, certification and supports?
* How can we leverage the emphasis that the business community puts on deeper learning skills and dispositions to advance the policy agenda?

Higher Education: The Center held a first convening in May 2014 to explore interest in cross-state partnerships. The results were disappointing and the effort needs to be refocused and revitalized. Our sense is that we anticpated more awareness of the ILN agenda and K12 innovations generally than existed.

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| Topic |
| How are educator preparation and professional development strategies shifting to prepare teachers for personalized, competency-based systems and to ensure that transformational leaders are emerging in K12? |
| Can we identify a set of core competencies (not course requirements) that postsecondary would agree qualifies a student for admission to credit-bearing work and collect evidence using multiple measures in a student profile? What evidence of readiness would be most meaningful to admissions, placement and student support processes in higher education? |
| Is there interest in pursuing cross-state research on state efforts to achieve college and career readiness and successful transition to postsecondary education, based on ILN research framework? |

Business: While many states are engaged in dialogue with colleges and universities about what it means for students to be “ready”, it’s clear that the demands of higher education – which tend to be focused on academics -  are dominating the conversation and that messages from business and workforce – particularly as regards skills - are not as explicit. The Center has reached preliminary agreement with a strong state-based business coalition to produce a video, featuring leaders of Fortune 500 companies as well as regional employers. The purpose of the video would be to build awareness of and communicate, in very practical and explicit ways, the urgent need to shift to deeper learning outcomes and to build support among the public and policy makers to put this agenda as a central goal of the K12 system.

**Attachment A**

**Knowledge, Skills and Dispositions Framework**

**(Developed for the Innovation Lab Network)**



**Attachment B**

**Six Critical Attributes**

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**Attachment C**

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| **Design Principles for Aligning Finance Policy with Goals for Learning** |
| 1. States have committed themselves to providing students and families with an educational experience in which every student is prepared for college, career and citizenship. |
| 1. Finance systems should be aligned to the expectation that all students will graduate prepared for college, career and citizenship and should be strong enough to pull systems away from the status quo. |
| 1. Finance policy should be in service to the needs of students, include data-driven accountability for educational outcomes and foster productivity in learning. |
| 1. Finance policy should support local flexibility that spurs innovation, continuous improvement and strong teacher development tied to clear performance-based outcomes. |
| 1. Finance systems should strive for equity and adequacy in funding levels and provide full and timely reporting to parents and community about how funds are being allocated and how funds are being used. |
| 1. Finance policy should allow funding to follow learning choices. |
| 1. The state must assume a genuine partnership role with districts and schools to support innovations in learning systems, to facilitate knowledge building and research across the enterprise, and to safeguard equity. |

1. Linda Darling-Hammond, Susan Patrick, David Conley, Peter McWalters, Paul Leather, Jim Rickabaugh, Gerrita Postlewait [↑](#footnote-ref-1)