The iNACOL Federal Policy Frameworks 2015

WRITTEN BY:

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The mission of the International Association for K–12 Online Learning (iNACOL) is to catalyze the transformation of K-12 education policy and practice to design powerful, personalized, learner-centered experiences through competency-based, online and blended learning. iNACOL is a non-profit organization focused on research; developing policy for student-centered education to ensure equity and access; developing quality standards for emerging learning models using online, blended, and competency-based education; and supporting the ongoing professional development of classroom, school, district and state leaders for new learning models. Learn more at **www.inacol.org**.

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Introduction

Across the country, innovative educators and leaders are embracing a shift to student-centered learning and rejecting an outdated, one-size-fits-all K-12 education model. Because this shift holds the potential to close persistent learning gaps, improve equity, and dramatically improve student achievement, forty-two states have adopted policies to enable next generation learning models, waiving seat time requirements, providing credit flexibility, developing proficiency-based diplomas, creating innovation zones and pilots, or initiating a redesign of accountability and assessments.

Despite state progress, outdated federal K-12 education policies still present considerable barriers to widespread adoption of student-centered learning models. However, recent activity in Congress provides potential for federal progress that mirrors the shift in many state policy environments.

In 2015, the House and the Senate are making significant progress towards reauthorizing the expired Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). Congress is also beginning to examine priorities for a rewrite of the Higher Education Act (HEA). These efforts present an important opportunity to align federal K-12 education policy with local and state efforts to develop personalized, competency-based learning models, and to address persistent barriers, which include:

- Single, summative year-end tests and punitive accountability frameworks that may act as a disincentive for serving struggling students.
- Outdated human capital systems that do not adequately prepare teachers and leaders for personalized, competency-based learning environments.
- Federal grant programs that do not prioritize innovative, personalized learning models.
- Concerns around the use and security of student data privacy.
- Lack of federal investment in research on the prevalence and effectiveness of new learning models and on student learning progressions.
- Lack of anytime, everywhere access to broadband connectivity by students in low-income and rural communities.
- Inadequate availability of free, high-quality, customizable open educational resources (OER).

These barriers show that despite incremental progress, work still remains. Because iNACOL's mission is "to catalyze the transformation of K-12 education policy and practice to design powerful, personalized, learner-centered experiences through competency-based, online, and blended learning," we have created these Federal Policy Frameworks.

The iNACOL Federal Policy Frameworks provide concrete, actionable recommendations for federal policymakers along eight key issues that will be explored in more detail in the following pages:

1. Redesign assessment around student-centered learning.
2. Rethink accountability for continuous improvement of next generation learning models.
3. Modernize educator and leadership development.
4. Make personalized learning a cross-cutting grant priority.
5. Protect student data privacy and security.
6. Invest in new learning models research and development.
7. Build robust technology infrastructure and improve broadband.
8. Support the development and use of open educational resources (OER).

THIS POLICY BRIEF PROVIDES ACTIONABLE RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FEDERAL POLICYMAKERS ON 8 KEY ISSUES

➤ Redesign assessment around student-centered learning.

➤ Rethink accountability for continuous improvement of next generation learning models.

➤ Modernize educator and leadership development.

➤ Make personalized learning a cross-cutting grant priority.

➤ Protect student data privacy and security.

➤ Invest in new learning models research and development.

➤ Build robust technology infrastructure and improve broadband.

➤ Support the development and use of open educational resources (OER).

Issue #1: Redesign Assessment around Student-Centered Learning

BACKGROUND

The current ESEA relies on static, end-of-year, summative assessments that have motivated many educators to "teach to the test," narrow the curriculum and focus on some, instead of all, students.

A shift to student-centered learning necessitates a shift on the role of assessments to a tool to inform teaching and learning. At the same time, annual information from these assessments shine a light on student achievement and learning gaps. Personalized, competency-based systems require multiple measures of learning in real time.

A growing number of states are developing new systems of assessments designed to support competency-based learning. These systems include statewide, standards-aligned banks of performance assessments, entry and exit benchmarking, and annual summative validation. Federal law should provide a clear path to approval for these states, and ensure rigor and quality of these new, innovative systems of assessments.

➲ Learn more: A K-12 Federal Policy Framework for Competency Education: Building Capacity for Systems Change and 23 Groups Call for Innovative Assessment Flexibility in ESEA Reauthorization.

The current ESEA relies on static, end-of-year, summative assessments that have motivated many educators to "teach to the test," narrow the curriculum and focus on some, instead of all, students.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- ESEA should allow all state systems of assessments to:

  - Measure individual student growth;

  - Use multiple measures of student learning from multiple points in time to determine summative scores; and

  - Use adaptive assessments that can measure students where they are in their learning, and not just on grade level.

- ESEA should establish an Innovative Assessment Pilot to allow states to apply for permission to develop rigorous systems of assessments that better align with student-centered, competency-based learning models.

Issue #2: Rethink Accountability for Continuous Improvement of Next Generation Learning Models

BACKGROUND

Accountability should drive continuous improvement of student learning with the goal of achieving equity and college and career readiness for all students; it should motivate educators to meet individual student learning needs in real time. Accountability should extend beyond single-point-in-time proficiency rates on a single test score.

Federal accountability requirements are out of alignment with personalized, competency-based models. The current ESEA drives a narrow focus on academic proficiency, rather than on student academic growth toward deeper learning outcomes.

Next generation accountability systems should provide greater transparency on multiple measures of student learning data; they should celebrate growth, calculate how quickly the achievement gap is being closed, show in real time where students or subgroups of students need supports and interventions, and pinpoint the resources needed to ensure student success.

> *Accountability should drive continuous improvement of student learning with the goal of achieving equity and college and career readiness for all students.*

   Learn more: A K-12 Federal Policy Framework for Competency Education: Building Capacity for Systems Change.

RECOMMENDATION

- ESEA should allow states to design systems of accountability that are focused on continuous, real-time improvement of student learning towards college and career readiness, rapid closure of sub-group achievement gaps, and provide the flexibility to align with and support next generation learning models.

Issue #3: Modernize Educator and Leadership Development

> A highly trained and engaged educator workforce will be the single most important driver of a successful personalized, competency-based education system.

BACKGROUND

A highly trained and engaged educator workforce will be the single most important driver of a successful personalized, competency-based education system. Educators and leaders will take on new roles as they work individually and collectively to design customized pathways to graduation for every student. Many will require new skills to adapt instruction for students with varying levels of competency and interests. This will require significant changes to pre-service preparation, professional development, and evaluation frameworks to ensure educators have the support and resources to make this transition.

Current federal teacher requirements focus on input-based credentials (e.g., the highly qualified teacher (HQT) requirement in ESEA). Federally-promoted state teacher evaluation systems place too much focus on outdated measures of student learning. Teacher preparation program accountability in the Higher Education Act (HEA) ties ratings to the outdated assessments in ESEA. Professional learning should be competency-based and personalized with evidence of success.

New leadership development pathways are needed to help to build a pipeline of bold, visionary school and district leaders to catalyze the transformation to next generation learning.

❯ Learn more: Laying the Foundation for Competency Education: A Policy Guide for the Next Generation Educator Workforce.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Support the development of educator and leader evaluation systems that focus on competency to teach and lead in personalized learning environments.

- Provide incentives for educator and leader preparation programs to align curricula and completion requirements with the expectations of a competency education system.

- Prioritize the use of professional development funds to prepare and support educators and leaders for personalized and competency-based learning environments.

- Eliminate the highly qualified teacher (HQT) provision in ESEA, and allow states flexibility to define what it means to be an effective educator.

Issue #4: Make Personalized Learning a Cross-Cutting Grant Priority

BACKGROUND

Federal policy can play an important role in identifying and scaling up successful new learning models. By making personalized learning a priority in Federal grants and programs and removing unnecessary restrictions on new learning models across programs, the Federal government can help to catalyze the

development and scale-up promising student-centered approaches.

> ❯ Learn more: A K-12 Federal Policy Framework for Competency Education: Building Capacity for Systems Change.

RECOMMENDATION

- Make personalized and competency-based learning a cross-cutting priority for Federal education grant programs in ESEA and in regulation.

Issue #5: Protect Student Data Privacy and Security

BACKGROUND

Within proper safeguards, data collection is key to personalized learning, allowing educators to customize learning pathways for each student. Current federal privacy laws were enacted long before the digital age. It is time to update these laws to protect student privacy without stifling innovation through prohibitive policies that will limit the potential of student data to empower educators, students and families with valuable insights into the individual learning needs of each student.

Within proper safeguards, data collection is key to personalized learning, allowing educators to customize learning pathways for each student.

> ❯ Learn more: House of Representatives Introduces Privacy Law Update.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Update the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) to ensure that educators are able to use data to provide personalized instruction, that educational institutions protect data privacy and security, and that stakeholders know how data are collected and used.

- Ensure student data privacy policies encourage good data governance by educators, institutions, and providers, and do not inhibit personalized learning approaches.

Issue #6: Invest in New Learning Models Research and Development

BACKGROUND

The federal government should invest in research and development on effective strategies for personalized, competency-based learning and on student learning progressions. The iNACOL Research Agenda, informed by practitioners and researchers in the field of blended and online learning, identifies priority areas for research around new learning models.

There is little data on the prevalence of and student enrollments in blended, online, and competency-based education. The Federal government should collect these data to increase understanding of who is benefiting from next generation models nation-wide and to provide a baseline for researchers studying next-generation learning.

> ❯ Learn more: iNACOL Research Agenda.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Collect baseline data on K-12 blended, online, and competency-based learning including: student demographics, number of course and program enrollments, and student access.

- Support research that addresses questions identified in the iNACOL Research Agenda.

Issue #7: Build Robust Technology Infrastructure and Improve Broadband

> The promise of next generation education models driven by blended and online learning can only be realized when all students, regardless of geography and economic status, have equitable access to anytime, everywhere broadband connectivity.

BACKGROUND

The promise of next generation education models driven by blended and online learning can only be realized when all students, regardless of geography and social economic status, have equitable access to anytime, everywhere broadband connectivity.

E-Rate, which addresses broadband connectivity access issues for schools and libraries, was recently modernized. However, there remains a lack of adequate broadband access for many students at home and in their communities, often called the "homework gap." The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) should leverage the existing Lifeline program to close this gap for low-income households. The Federal government should also invest in the development and scale-up of innovative strategies to increase connectivity in high-poverty and rural communities.

Learn more: FCC Commissioner Throws Weight Behind New 'Homework Gap' Bill.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Update the FCC's Lifeline program to increase access to home broadband service for low-income families.

- Fund pilots and research to identify and scale up innovative approaches to expanding anytime, everywhere broadband access in high-poverty and rural communities.

Issue #8: Support the Development and Use of Open Educational Resources (OER)

BACKGROUND

Open educational resources (OER) are "teaching, learning, and research resources that reside in the public domain or have been released under an intellectual property license that permits their free use and re-purposing by others." OER are powerful tools to help students reach college and career readiness

with customizable learning materials aligned to state academic standards and provide opportunities for educator collaboration and professional development.

The Federal government can help to address barriers to the effective use of OER by ensuring that any learning materials that it develops or funds is created with an open license, and by encouraging the development and use of OER as a cross-cutting grant priority.

> Learn more: OER State Policy in K-12 Education: Benefits, Strategies, and Recommendations for Open Access, Open Sharing and OER and Collaborative Content Development: A Practical Guide for State and School Leaders.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Require educational materials developed through federal grants to be publicly available and accessible as OER.

- Prioritize creating and distributing OER through open licensing in grants to increase access and the ability of educators to personalize learning using OER.

The Federal government can help to address barriers to the effective use of OER by ensuring that any learning material it develops or funds is created with an open license.

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Acknowledgements

The iNACOL Center for Policy Advocacy

The iNACOL Center for Policy Advocacy leads the multi-stage evolution of policy necessary for the growth of effective personalized learning models toward the goals of quality, equity, access, closing the achievement gap, and promoting world-class learning. The Center provides lawmaker education and technical assistance in drafting transformational policy. It responds to requests for support from policy makers, develops the vision of the future of education, and builds knowledge on policies to support student-centered, competency-based, personalized learning.

For more information, contact the iNACOL Center for Policy Advocacy staff via http://www.inacol.org/.

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