



Nellie Mae Education Foundation District-Level Systems Change FAQ

- **What is the Nellie Mae Education Foundation?**
 - The Nellie Mae Education Foundation is the largest charitable organization in New England that focuses exclusively on education. The Foundation supports the promotion and integration of student-centered approaches to learning at the middle and high school levels across New England. To elevate student-centered approaches, the Foundation utilizes a strategy that focuses on: developing and enhancing models of practice; reshaping education policies; increasing the body of evidenced-based knowledge about student centered approaches and increasing public understanding and demand for high quality educational experiences. Since 1998, the Foundation has distributed over \$123 million in grants. For more information about the Nellie Mae Education Foundation, visit www.nmefoundation.org.

- **What is student-centered learning?**
 - Student-centered learning is a bold new approach that aims to reshape education to fit a 21st Century model. The principles behind student-centered learning are built around the fact that different students learn in different ways, including: being flexible about how time is used for both students and educators, including learning opportunities outside the traditional school calendar; harnessing the broader community to support and deepen learning experiences; using curriculum, instruction, and assessment that promotes the skills and knowledge needed for success in college, work and life; advancement based on demonstration of proficiency in skills and knowledge. NMEF believes that innovative, rigorous, year-round student-centered approaches that draw on the resources of the larger community will bring about a more equitable system to help meet the economic, social, and educational challenges we face together as a society.

- **Who received grants?**
 - A total of \$16.4 million in grants over three years have been awarded among four New England School districts and organizations: Burlington/Winooski School Districts – Burlington, VT; Jobs for Maine’s Graduates – Portland, ME; Pittsfield School District – Pittsfield, NH; and the Sanford School Department – Sanford, ME. Four additional Lead Community Partner grants were also made to organizations in each community: Voices for Vermont’s Children (Burlington/Winooski, VT); The Pittsfield Youth Workshop (Pittsfield, NH); The

Refugee Services Program (Portland, ME); and Safe and Healthy Sanford Coalition (Sanford, ME).

- **Why are these grants important?**
 - The grants will support the ongoing efforts of the districts and their communities to implement long term plans to reshape their systems to help all students succeed at a higher level in an increasingly complex world.
- **What is the District-Level Systems Change initiative?**
 - The District-Level Systems Change (DLSC) initiative is one of four long-term strategic initiatives that NMEF is employing to promote the implementation of student-centered approaches. By supporting efforts at the district level, NMEF hopes to: develop models of practice by working with districts to establish, enhance, and implement high-quality student centered approaches to learning; change existing policy by reducing barriers to support community efforts to integrate and assess rigorous, student-centered learning; support advocacy to grow the capacity of students, parents, educators and other stakeholders within districts and communities to work together to demand, implement, and sustain student-centered learning approaches at the district level across the region.
- **What are the other long-term strategic initiative areas?**
 - The three other long-term strategic initiative areas include: **State-Level Systems Change**, which focuses on promoting state and federal education policies that support student-centered learning; **Research and Development** to inform the work of NMEF and practitioners in the fields of education and philanthropy; and **Public Understanding** to increase both awareness of student-centered learning experiences and the public will to implement them.
- **Why were these districts selected?**
 - The grantees were selected based on their proposals for a design strategy for implementing a student-centered education system that meets the needs of all learners. These four districts have proven their ability to build support from education and community leaders, ultimately creating the public will necessary to reshape policies to support student-centered approaches.