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## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### **Winooski and Burlington School Districts Receives \$3.7 Million Grant From Nellie Mae Education Foundation to Implement New Approach to Education**

*\$130,000 also goes to Voices for Vermont's Children to support student-centered learning; Tarrant Foundation provides an additional \$200,000 gift to support Burlington and Winooski Middle Schools*

**QUINCY, MA – February 23, 2012-** Winooski and Burlington School Districts announced today that they have received a three-and-a-half-year, \$3.7 million grant from [the Nellie Mae Education Foundation](#) (NMEF), the largest charitable organization in New England focused exclusively on education, to support student-centered approaches to learning. The grant will be used to develop personalized, proficiency-based learning approaches to be developed by educators in partnership with students, parents and community partners such as Vermont Adult Learning, The Tarrant Institute for Innovative Education, Linking Learning to Life, and the Tarrant Foundation, with Voices for Vermont's Children serving as the lead community partner.

In order to prosper as a community, we need more learners achieving at higher levels. Student-centered approaches are aimed at reshaping education to move away from the current system's "one-size-fits-all" methodology. Student-centered learning models 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; basing advancement on demonstration of proficiency in skills and knowledge.

"We applaud this initiative in Burlington and Winooski, and appreciate the continued support of NMEF, the Tarrant Foundation, and Voices for Vermont Children," said Armando Vilaseca, Vermont Education Commissioner. "Innovations such as this are creating new models of learning for Vermont students; using flexible pathways and proficiency based strategies to create transformative learning environments."

Burlington and Winooski High Schools serve over 4,700 students, from multi-generation Vermont families to New Americans from around the world. Together with community partners Vermont Adult Learning, The Tarrant Institute for Innovative Education, Linking Learning to Life, and the Tarrant Foundation, Winooski and Burlington have undertaken this work to make sure that ALL our young people have what it takes to succeed in today's world. During the past year, the community participated in developing a shared vision for this initiative – to ensure that every student in Burlington and Winooski will graduate from high school with the confidence, enthusiasm, skills, and knowledge to build a satisfying and sustainable future for themselves, their community, and their world.

Superintendents Mary Martineau and Jeanné Collins stated that “this funding from NMEF will be crucial in helping us re-design education in ways that insure the success of every student, including those who face the greatest barriers.”

As the lead community partner in the Winooski-Burlington Partnership for Change, Voices for Vermont’s Children will engage parents and youth from underserved communities to help design student-centered learning reforms that ensure the success of every student. Carlen Finn, Executive Director, noted “This initiative supports Voices’ long-term goals of helping all Vermont children thrive, especially those who struggle because of economic and social barriers in our society. Voices brings a strong voice for community participation and engagement to this initiative.”

In conjunction with the NMEF grant, the Richard E. and Deborah L. Tarrant Foundation announced today a \$200,000 gift over the next three years to support student-centered, technology-rich learning at Burlington and Winooski’s middle schools. The funds will go to the Tarrant Institute for Innovative Education at the University of Vermont as part of a research-based initiative combining deep, sustained teacher learning, technology integration, and best practices in student-centered learning to promote engagement and improve learner outcomes.

“Our Foundation has been working with the Partnership for Change since the beginning, and we are thrilled to bring these additional resources to the table,” said Foundation director Lauren Curry. “By supporting engaging, relevant, personalized learning in the critical middle school years, we believe students will be better positioned for success when they make the leap to these newly-transforming high schools.”

This is not the Foundation’s first investment in the Burlington and Winooski School Districts. It provided \$100,000 for technology infrastructure in Winooski over a decade ago – a grant that, according to Curry, helped spark the Foundation’s current strategic education initiative. It’s also invested more than \$200,000 to support student-centered, technology-rich learning on a 90-student team at Edmunds Middle School over the past three years.

“The combined challenges of more learners needing to succeed and succeed at a higher level, led us to these partners,” said Nicholas C. Donohue, President and CEO of NMEF. “Our grant is a value-add to the momentum the district and its key stakeholders already have. We are looking forward to seeing their successes.”

Grants are being made under [NMEF’s District-Level Systems Change](#) (DLSC) initiative that the Foundation is using to promote the implementation of student-centered approaches.

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### **About 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 three-part strategy that focuses on: developing and enhancing models of practice; reshaping education policies; and increasing public understanding and demand for high quality educational experiences. The Foundation’s initiative areas are: District Level Systems Change; State Level Systems Change; Research and Development; and Public Understanding. Since 1998, the Foundation has distributed over \$123 million in grants. For more information, visit [www.nmefoundation.org](http://www.nmefoundation.org).

### **About Winooski and Burlington School Districts**

Burlington and Winooski School Districts enroll approximately 4,700 students in Pre-Kindergarten through Grade 12. Students in Burlington and Winooski come from many

places – including multi-generational Vermont families and new Vermonters from throughout the United States and the world. Opportunities for students include challenging advanced through foundational academic, music, arts, world languages, physical education, social-emotional development, and rich extra-curricular activities including drama and sports programs. A number of innovative partnerships with area universities and colleges, youth centers, and local community organizations enhance student learning. For more information, visit [www.wdschools.org](http://www.wdschools.org) and [www.bsdyt.org](http://www.bsdyt.org).

#### **About Voices for Vermont's Children**

For twenty-nine years, Voices for Vermont's Children has worked on behalf of children and youth by: advocating during the Vermont Legislative session; organizing and working in state and regional coalitions; providing up-to-date information, policy briefs and fact sheets on issues important to children and youth; Co-sponsoring workshops, trainings and conferences; publishing Vermont KIDS COUNT child and family data reports, and; developing community leaders and organizing community members across the state on behalf of children and youth. For more information, visit [www.voicesforvtkids.org](http://www.voicesforvtkids.org).

#### **About the Richard E. and Deborah L. Tarrant Foundation**

The Richard E. and Deborah L. Tarrant Foundation makes grants to create opportunity, help meet basic needs, and improve the lives of people in Vermont. The Foundation pursues an aggressive spending strategy, granting double the standard amount for similarly-sized foundations. The Foundation's primary fields of interest are human services and education. Between 2005-2011, the Foundation granted more than \$10 million. For more information, visit [www.tarrantfoundation.org](http://www.tarrantfoundation.org).

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