

WINOOSKI AND BURLINGTON: PARTNERING FOR CHANGE

**Federal Policy Barriers Affecting Student-Centered Learning
in Our Communities – And How We’re Addressing Them**

A few of the current federal policy barriers affecting our schools:

- The legacy of No Child Left Behind continues to severely constrain schools that have reached “re-structuring” status (like several schools in our districts). Re-structuring takes a sweeping approach to school reform and is often not in synch with the school community – inside or outside. For those schools not in re-structuring, but which have attained a certain level of AYP status, funding is again severely limited.¹ School improvement requirements include standardization of curriculum, running counter to innovative, interdisciplinary teaching.
- Though NECAP testing is being replaced by tests based on the national Common Core (a major step forward), creative and innovative teaching is still being measured by concrete and tangible instruments that are not necessarily able to assess the most important skills in a 21st c learning environment, such as cooperation, systems thinking, problem solving and communication.
- As we work toward a co-teaching model, we are constrained by the number of identified Special Ed students who must be in a class before reimbursement for the Special Ed teacher can be attained. This runs contrary to what is best for students, as many students from all backgrounds benefit from alternative curriculum and presentation that these teachers provide.
- Financial support of schools, on the federal level, comes with many strings attached, including mandatory funding of private schools, a mandatory percentage for professional development (on their terms), certain types of coaching, prescribed types of parent involvement. Evaluation is not an allowable expense in any of our federal grants.

The Vermont Department of Education is taking the lead in trying to gain more flexibility for our schools as they work to improve outcomes through effective student-centered learning. In December the DOE will submit an application for a **No Child Left Behind Waiver**. If successful, schools will no longer be labeled “failing”, but instead described as needing targeted support.

There will also be a move to multiple assessments using a student growth model, so that students and schools will be benchmarked against themselves, not an arbitrary target like 100% proficiency. Portfolios will likely play a part in the multiple assessment structure. We anticipate that the Winooski and Burlington Schools, under the auspices of the Nellie Mae project, will develop model portfolios that could be adopted by other districts.

We additionally expect to play a role in helping navigate the issue of age/grade based assessments for accountability purposes. If we hope to move kids through the system at their own pace, how can we help ensure the new accountability structure will allow for that?

Conditions are ripe in Vermont and in our communities for major student-centered learning progress. Specific momentum exists at the federal, state, district and school policy levels, that will substantially benefit the work we propose.

i See Initiative Mapping Tool.