



# THE EDUCATION PLAYBOOK

FOR THE NEXT PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

Let's raise the level of education debate  
in our country



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## Introduction

A Presidential campaign provides a key opportunity to promote a new vision for national education reform, a vision that leverages the vast amount of innovation occurring in states and districts across the country to improve academic and economic outcomes for all students. States and districts are taking bold steps to promote personalized learning opportunities to ensure students master what they need to succeed in school and the workforce. The Federal government should help these local leaders, providing the policy flexibility and support to design and build high-quality personalized learning environments where all students have the opportunity to thrive in college, career, and civic life. The reasons for this shift are clear: our international success depends on the transformation of our education system. Our ability to compete as a nation—and for states, regions, and communities to attract growth industries and create jobs—demands a fresh approach to the way we educate our children.

These recommendations outline a bold vision for transforming our education system. We encourage the nation's presidential candidates to consider these recommendations as they craft and refine their education platform:

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## Recommendation 1

# Build State-Based Competency Education Systems

### STATEMENT OF NEED

States are increasingly interested in the establishment of state-based systems of competency education, an emerging form of personalized learning. These systems create customized pathways that eliminate gaps in learning by ensuring all students master critical academic knowledge, skills, and social and emotional competencies by graduation. Despite the growing demand for this approach to teaching and learning, Federal education requirements, particularly around accountability, assessment, and time-based reporting requirements, have hindered their implementation. As a result, many states that would like to scale competency-based education at the state level remain stagnated in the pilot stage.

### PROPOSAL

We recommend that the Federal government provide resources and necessary flexibility to help states move beyond the pilot stage and begin to implement fully operating State systems of competency education. Allowable systems should include:

- Statewide accountability and assessment systems that empower state and local leaders to increase college- and career-readiness and close achievement gaps using competency-based school and district models.
- Statewide systems of personalized and adaptive supports that incorporate real-time data and personalized diagnostic support to ensure all students are able to reach mastery of standards and aligned competencies.
- Robust professional development systems, aligned to statewide instructional competencies, which provide educators and leaders with the opportunity to customize their professional development and advance at their own pace.





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## Recommendation 2

# Develop a Digital Registry of High-Quality Learning Opportunities Aligned to Standards and Competencies

### STATEMENT OF NEED

We understand more than ever that students learn in different ways, through different means, and at different speeds. Fortunately, an increasing number of states and districts have worked to redesign their systems to reflect the diverse needs of students by implementing personalized learning strategies that enable students to earn credit for mastery of critical academic knowledge, skills, and social and emotional competencies in customized ways.

With this newfound focus on personalized learning, we are at a crossroads. In order to build upon the pioneering work of the states and districts, learning experiences need to be aligned to state standards and competencies and produce high-quality outcomes in student achievement, postsecondary readiness and completion that result in meaningful employment. As states implement different approaches, stakeholders in the K-12, post-secondary, and workforce systems need a way to make sense of the multitude of learning experiences to ensure they lead to college- and career-readiness of K-12 graduates. Equally important, educators, students and parents need to understand where different personalized learning pathways lead and how students benefit from those approaches.

### PROPOSAL

We recommend that the Federal government provide start-up funding to help states establish digital registries of credit-bearing personalized learning opportunities and pathways, both formal and informal, that are aligned to state standards and competencies as well as to the college- and career-ready outcomes that postsecondary institutions and employers demand. Federal assistance can help states document, replicate, and expand credit-bearing personalized learning opportunities that have produced the results that K-12 schools, colleges, employers, and states themselves expect.

As part of this approach, states would partner with industry and postsecondary institutions to identify learning experiences outside the classroom that are aligned to college- and career-ready outcomes and to leverage additional dollars to support ongoing identification and replication. States would monitor the quality of these learning experiences by requiring any interested party to apply to the State for inclusion in the digital registry. Over time, the registry would populate with high-impact learning experiences determined effective by the State using a quality assurance process that takes into account student/parent satisfaction, higher education and workforce satisfaction, and rating through the state's accountability system.

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### Recommendation 3

## Launch a National Initiative to Train Corps of Community Educators

#### STATEMENT OF NEED

In order for personalized learning to reach scale, the nation must establish the educator workforce to support critical changes in teaching and learning. There will be significant demand for new educator roles that range from community volunteer to full-time classroom educator to a part-time learning journey mentor, as well as increased demand for programs that ensure applicants have the qualifications to maximize student performance in a variety of school- and non-school-based learning environments. Unfortunately, the combination of antiquated state credentialing policies and traditional approaches to educator preparation in Institutions of Higher Education (IHEs) serve as barriers to the establishment of these flexible, needs-based, educator preparation approaches.



#### PROPOSAL

We recommend that the Federal government help states, in partnership with IHEs, alternative certification programs, and/or school districts, expand the pipeline of educators ready to design and implement personalized learning pathways for all students. States would play a key role in helping establish this pipeline of new educators by modernizing their certification process and incorporating credentialing guidelines that reflect the personalized learning approaches that align to the needs of local stakeholders. IHEs, and alternative certification programs, would design flexible, competency-based pre-service training programs aligned to these modernized credentialing guidelines. Districts would partner with certified institutions to provide innovative learning opportunities for applicants training to fill new educator roles and to bring new capacities to traditional educator roles.

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## Recommendation 4

# Support Lifelong Learning by Uncoupling Federal Title IV Aid from Antiquated Time-Based Requirements

### STATEMENT OF NEED

The Federal financial aid system does not reflect the realities of today's postsecondary learner. The current system must provide aid to students based on the number of hours they attend class or the number of credit hours in which they are enrolled. Traditional 12 credit-a-semester, full-time enrollment in postsecondary education is no longer the norm as individuals increasingly seek access to postsecondary opportunities as early as middle or high school, while working and raising a family, or later in life as part of a career change. Unfortunately, Federal student loans and grants are tied to "maximum eligibility periods" or semesters and thus are not available to students who are currently enrolled in the K-12 system.

### PROPOSAL

We recommend an overhaul of the Federal financial aid system to ensure it is more flexible and reflective of the nation's increasing interest in personalized education and more able to support students in preparing for careers and reskilling as career requirements change. Students should be able to access their total amount of Federal student aid based on their learning and financial needs, rather than being limited to arbitrary yearly limits that do not accurately reflect the cost or the nature of learning in a personalized learning environment. Under this approach, students would have access to a need-based, lifelong learning account they could use for any postsecondary opportunity offered by a Title IV eligible and accredited institution. Title IV institutions would be held responsible for setting parameters around the cost of different personalized learning approaches, with parameters ensuring all students get a high quality education at a reasonable price.



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## Recommendation 5

# Create an Innovation Competition Focused on the Development of New Technologies to Improve the Efficiency of K-12 Education

### STATEMENT OF NEED

Innovative uses of digital technologies such as algorithms, artificial intelligence, encryption technologies, and smart contracts are revolutionizing other industries by creating significant efficiencies (Think iTunes, Amazon, Uber, and SmartHome devices to name a few). If a market existed to incentivize this type of innovation in education, these same advances in technology would have the potential to accelerate both learning and meaningful transformation of the education system. Since no such market currently exists, the system continues to fall further behind other industries. Equally concerning is the lack of research and development dedicated to education innovation at every level of the system.

### PROPOSAL

We recommend a new approach to Federal investment in education technology. This approach would leverage innovation and entrepreneurship through a grant program that would seed promising ideas in education technology and build a research base to expand best practices. Reaching beyond simply digitizing textbooks and enabling greater access through smart boards and tablets, this competition would spur innovators to create, justify, and test new technology-based approaches to teaching and learning. The U.S. Department of Education would run this competition with the guidance and recommendation of top education and technology industry experts. In order for this effort to be successful, educators must be trained to leverage these innovations to improve student learning and encourage a personalized learning approach. Therefore, the competition must include a high-quality implementation plan.





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## Conclusion

The United States needs a strong leader to help modernize our education system to ensure success in our rapidly changing and volatile world. We need a leader who will transform our outmoded education system into a vibrant and diverse learning ecosystem and who has a vision for what is possible and necessary to ensure America remains the vanguard of economic innovation. The next Administration needs not only to make advancement of education key but to make it foundational to propelling our international economic opportunities, protecting our national security, and nurturing democracy at home and abroad.





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# Appendix

## What is Personalized Learning?

KnowledgeWorks defines personalized learning as a teaching and learning framework in which: <sup>1</sup>

- Instruction is aligned to rigorous college- and career-ready standards, and the social and emotional skills students need to be successful in college and career;
- Instruction is customized, allowing each student to design learning experiences aligned to his or her interests;
- The pace of instruction is varied based on individual student needs, allowing students to accelerate or take additional time based on their level of mastery;
- Educators use data from formative assessments and student feedback in real-time to differentiate instruction and provide robust supports and interventions so that every student remains on track to graduation; and
- Students and parents have access to clear, transferable learning objectives and assessment results so they understand what is expected for mastery and advancement.

## What is Competency Education?

Competency Education is defined by the following elements: <sup>2</sup>

- Students advance upon mastery, not seat time.
- Competencies include explicit, measurable, transferable learning objectives that empower students.
- Assessment is meaningful and a positive learning experience for students.
- Students receive timely, differentiated support based on their individual learning needs.
- Learning outcomes emphasize competencies that include application and creation of knowledge, along with the development of important skills and dispositions.
- By integrating all five elements, high-quality competency education ensures that each student graduates with the knowledge and skills he or she needs to be successful in college and career.

<sup>1</sup> Williams, M., Moyer, J., and Jenkins, S. A State Policy Framework for Scaling Personalized Learning. A KnowledgeWorks Policy Brief. (2015). <http://knowledgeworks.org/state-policy-framework-scaling-personalized-learning>

<sup>2</sup> Patrick, S. and Sturgis, C. Necessary for Success: Building Mastery of World-Class Skills. A CompetencyWorks Issue Brief, International Association for K-12 Online Learning. (2013). [http://www.competencyworks.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/inacol\\_cw\\_issuebrief\\_building\\_mastery\\_final.pdf](http://www.competencyworks.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/inacol_cw_issuebrief_building_mastery_final.pdf)

Created by



One West Fourth Street  
Suite 200  
Cincinnati, OH 45202

[knowledgeworks.org](http://knowledgeworks.org)

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