We’re fundamentally rethinking assessment.

Supported by a national group of partner organizations, the Assessment for Learning Project is a multi-year grant program and field-building initiative inviting educators to fundamentally rethink the roles that assessment should play to advance student learning and to improve the K-12 education system.

The partners are “leading with learning” and believe that will require taking a fundamentally different approach to grantmaking, grantee engagement, and community building. The purpose of this document is share what we’ve learned and where we’re going.
The Need

The nation’s promise is that all children will experience a motivating, challenging education that prepares them to succeed in postsecondary learning, work, and civic life. Though America’s public education system is doing a better job of reaching every child, it is abundantly clear that at this present time, we are not fulfilling the promise of equity and excellence for all.

‣ First, traditional assessments address only a small percentage of what matters most – the knowledge, skills, and dispositions most predictive of success.

‣ Second, assessment is too often treated as something done to learners rather than for learning —isolated from instruction and conflated with accountability.

‣ Finally, we are not sufficiently preparing and empowering educators to determine and deliver the most appropriate roles for assessment in support of deeper, more personalized learning.

The Opportunity

To address the significant need, ALP sees an opportunity to catalyze new, and scale existing, innovations in assessment for learning design, staked to richer, deeper definitions of student success, with two core common goals:

GOAL ONE

Advance our understanding of assessment’s essential roles in the learning process, as learning models become more personalized, less cohort-restricted, more competency-based, and student-centered.

GOAL TWO

Help inform and develop crucial enablers such as a) models of assessment and accountability system design, b) models of educator capacity building, and/or c) use of technology tools, all to advance Goal One.
**Shifting the Field**

The project’s stated aim is to not only to have grantees fundamentally rethink assessment for learning but to have the field rethink the role of assessment in the continuous improvement of entire systems.

**To that end we seek to:**

- Create robust approaches to assessment for learning at the school, district, and state level which are locally effective but also nationally networked and learning from one another.
- Rebrand assessment for students, teachers, parents, and policy makers from a negative association with testing to a crucial, productive lynchpin in the process of supporting deep and personalized learning.
- Fund work that creates a productive dialogue between local assessment innovations and the policy contexts within which they live to promote scaling of innovations and expanding impact of what is being learned.
- Illustrate ways in which new approaches to grantmaking can create a movement of innovative learners (educators and students) engaged in a national dialogue about learning.

**Grantmaking as Collective Learning**

In an attempt to spark a field-wide redefinition of assessment for learning the project is attempting to redefine how grantmaking itself can foster field-wide learning.

**Starting hypotheses:**

This novel approach to grantmaking is founded on five key hypotheses:

FROM: Single assessments used for high-stakes determinations

TO: Systems of assessments used to improve outcomes for students, teachers, and the system

FROM: Grantors assessing grantee reports of outcomes

TO: Grantors and grantees as partners in learning
**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: HYPOTHESES**

### Hypotheses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Learning to date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A range of expertise and perspectives guiding the project will foster productive debate and <strong>yield new approaches</strong>. The diversity of our partnership will attract a wider range of applicants representing a full spectrum of the field.</td>
<td><strong>Structured collaboration between organizations with shared values, but different perspectives, creates a creative inclination to question how things will best get done.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By modeling a formative, exploratory, and flexible approach to the project we will <strong>attract innovation and new discoveries rather than simple compliance and reporting.</strong></td>
<td><strong>A high, latent demand exists in the field to rethink assessment.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By establishing complementary connections between grantees we will build <strong>collective learning for the field alongside individual grantee insights and outcomes.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Diverse opinions grappling with the direction the field should take transform grant selection processes from evaluative end-points to launching-points for more learning.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By creating a <strong>flexible pool of funds</strong> to connect technical assistants to grantees we will address unforeseen challenges and <strong>be able to pursue promising avenues learning.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Using a ‘portfolio mindset’ to construct constellations of a shared learning agenda redefines impact. This approach emphasizes the depth and breadth of field-wide learning over discrete, disconnected outcomes.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We believe that supporting a <strong>learning orientation among partners</strong> representing many perspectives in education will <strong>produce a level of learning that functions at scales greater than the sum of its parts.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Exposure and reaction to each other’s work confirms that community members share a set of values. It is hoped that community norming will become a foundation on which to collaborate.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>A TURN TOWARDS SYSTEMNESS</strong></td>
<td><strong>Will a flexible approach to funding and support yield deeper learning for individual grantees as well as the broader learning community?</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>FLEXIBLE, FORMATIVE SUPPORT</strong></td>
<td><strong>Does the intentional inclusion of ‘systemness’ in a project’s design expand the scope of its impact on a system?</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>A LEARNING COMMUNITY</strong></td>
<td><strong>Partnerships exponentially increase the diversity of applicant pools enabling new connections and learning for both funders and partners.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>A LEARNING ORIENTATION</strong></td>
<td><strong>Attracting proposals built upon deep, dynamic learning requires an eye for true inquiry. It demands a willingness to risk learning alongside grantees rather than a more transactional funding relationship based on fixed outcomes.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>A FUNDING PARTNERSHIP</strong></td>
<td><strong>Basing a gathering on shared questions, as opposed to on disseminating information, allows people to construct plans for learning together.</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Assessment for Learning Project has just begun its 2 year journey to rethink assessment.

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: PROGRESS & DETAILS**

**A FUNDING PARTNERSHIP**

**A LEARNING ORIENTATION**

**A LEARNING COMMUNITY**

**FLEXIBLE, FORMATIVE SUPPORT**

**A TURN TOWARDS SYSTEMNESS**

**DETAILS**

- **High Demand:** 148 applicants representing the field: consortia, states, districts, schools, CMOs, researchers and private firms
- **Learning Orientations:** 12 final grantee partners with proposals that push the edge of their own learning
- **Collective Effort:** Projects organized into five Learning Agenda Constellations for complementary impact
- **Project Size:** *Average budget* - $193,000; *Average timeline* - 20 months
- **Total Investment to date:** $2M+
‘Walking the Talk’

The *Assessment for Learning Project* is a collaboration led by the Center for Innovation in Education with EDUCAUSE’s Next Generation Learning Challenges and 2Revolutions as consulting design partner. ALP was conceived and is funded by the *Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation* and the *William and Flora Hewlett Foundation*.

The project has requested that its grantees bring a deep commitment to learning to their work. Every grantee was asked to organize their proposals around clear hypotheses, a learning plan, and milestones of reflection and presentations of learning. Those learning plans become living compacts between the project team and grantees.

Likewise, the ALP team has identified its own hypotheses, learning plan, and milestones for reflection. This document is the first presentation and articulation of *what the team has learned* during the early milestones of building a partnership and initiating its call for the field to #rethinkassessement. Insights were gathered and synthesized through stakeholder interviews, observations, and document review conducted by our “anthropologist” partner, Gravity Tank.

Navigation

Below you will find links to the core sections of this document: the *project’s design* and its *core hypotheses*.

The document can be read slide by slide or by choosing each of these links separately. The home link in the upper right will return you to this page from anywhere in the document.

**THE PROJECT**
- MISSION
- APPROACH
- PROGRESS
- COMMUNITY
- GRANTEE PARTNERS

**HYPOTHESES**
- A FUNDING & SUPPORT PARTNERSHIP
- A LEARNING ORIENTATION
- A LEARNING COMMUNITY
- FLEXIBLE, FORMATIVE SUPPORT
- A TURN TOWARDS SYSTEMNESS
A range of expertise and perspectives guiding the project will foster productive debate and yield new approaches while encouraging grantees to do their best work.

The diversity of our partnership will attract a wider range of applicants representing a full spectrum of the field.
WHAT WE LEARNED

**Intentional, Productive Tension**

The Assessment for Learning Project is a gathering of people and organizations intentionally designed to bring multiple perspectives on education, formative assessment, and grantmaking into productive tension with one another. They are aligned with the project's objectives but their approaches and areas of expertise vary widely.

They include:

- Two Foundations with historical investment strategies that are not symmetrically aligned but are creatively complementary: *Personalized Learning and Deeper Learning*.
- Three organizations with different skill sets and different vantage points on innovation in education: *Systems and Policy Design, School Model Design, Innovation Design*.
- An advisory group with a range of theoretical acumen and *practical experience*.

Through months of meetings whose minutes read like structured but wide-ranging debates, this collection of experienced educators, thinkers, and designers asked themselves not how they'd done similar work in the past but what new work they should be doing now based on unique market needs and how the structure of the work should model the aims themselves.

- How can we model the learning we hope to fund?

WHAT WE DID

"We decided that we were all going to be equal partners and, along with our grantees, we decided that we were going to be learners in this process. So we set up a structure that required us to stay in dialogue with each other and do iterative, developmental thinking, making changes as we learn together."

- Gene Wilhoit, Center for Innovation in Education

---

**Structured collaboration between organizations with shared values but different perspectives creates a creative inclination to question how things will best get done.**
WHAT WE DID

“An RF...Something”

Because the three core institutions (Center for Innovation in Education, Next Generation Learning Challenges, 2 Revolutions) were working as partners, charged by the funders to think differently and work differently, their approach to the grantmaking process was not assumed.

No one institution’s routine approach would apply.

Because they worked as a partnership each organization had to articulate its assumptions and, together, intentionally rethink the process of grantmaking.

The partners believed strongly that they needed to challenge those responding to the call to think differently and take their work to new levels of learning rather than simply execute and report against a predetermined plan.

For a period of time, this new approach lived by the name “RFSomething” in the partnership discussions. What does it mean that a group of people working together leaves a phrase central to their work expressly unfinished for a period of weeks? It signals that, while inertia at a single organization might undermine aspirations for innovation, a collection of aligned organizations with productively different perspectives is more likely to hold the group accountable to its highest objectives.

In the end, the partnership decided to name their call for grantee partners a ‘Request for Learning’.

WHAT WE LEARNED

Well managed grantmaking partnerships can foster (just enough) debate to overcome institutional inertia and develop innovative approaches.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS</th>
<th>REQUEST FOR LEARNING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fixed outcomes</td>
<td>Learning plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-defined theory of action</td>
<td>Willingness to reflect, adjust, and refine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific reporting requirements</td>
<td>Guiding design principles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fixed grant amounts</td>
<td>Grants followed by flexible, additional assistance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
WHAT WE DID

Diverse Networks, Diverse Responses

The diversity of partners allowed the call to applicants to reach nationally and across a wide range of levels from states to districts, to schools, to consortia of partners.

Working intentionally against a system's tendency to atomize and against traditional grantmaking's tendency to be either too insular or too broad to foster meaningful cross-grant learning, the partnership sought a diverse but intentionally selective call.

This lead to a pool of 148 diverse but select applicants, ultimately leading to a diverse group of 12 grantee partners.

WHAT WE LEARNED

Partnerships exponentially increase the diversity of applicant pools enabling new connections and learning for both funders and grantee partners.

“Part of what helped us was the richness of the partnership mix. Gene and Linda at CIE are deeply connected to the whole ecosystem of players at the state level and we [NGLC] are in deep with the ecosystem of players at the practice level. Which is why you see the presence of Two Rivers from DC or Summit mixed with state agencies and [district networks].”

Andy Calkins, Next Generation Learning Challenge
WHAT WE DID

Seeking Right-sized Projects

In addition, the RFL simply capped the time and dollar amounts rather than providing specific guidance on the length and size of projects.

It was hoped that this flexible definition of grant size would encourage a wide range of ‘right-sized’ grants well matched to challenges each grantee partner was proposing to solve.

The RFL also refrained from the traditional distinction between planning and implementation grants. This open-ended approach was designed to give applicants the agency to fit the size and scope of their work to actual learning they hoped to achieve.

The majority of applications, however, sought the full allowable time and budget. Upon review, it was clear that many of the projects were requesting time and budgets for implementations that outstripped their capacity to learn.

WHAT WE LEARNED

An open call with a flexible grant size aligned did not achieve the desired effect of diverse, right-sized proposals. The majority of applicants asked for the full time and budget regardless of readiness, capacity, or context-appropriate scope.

“We were not interested in people who clearly just wanted resources to do their work. To do more of their work. There are a lot of people who have that mindset and they may have a very good reason for it. They’re trying to get something done. Or maybe they think they are ready to implement but clearly need more development...planning. But we were looking for people who had a learning disposition and orientation to community and the notion that this work was greater than just what they could do alone. “

Linda Pittenger, Center for Innovation in Education
What We Are Still Learning

- Will the partnership’s wide array of resources, perspectives, and TA providers create a new model for engaged, sustained grantee support?
- Will this model of networked support and guidance lead to and accelerate wider, deeper, collective learning?
- Will the debates had by the partnership serve as an effective proving ground for pressure testing and then launching a national reassessment of assessment?
- What can we learn from the 126 grant applications not selected about the state, capacity, and demand for reassessing assessment in the country?
HYPOTHESIS: A LEARNING ORIENTATION

By modeling a formative, exploratory, and flexible approach to the project we will attract innovation and new discoveries rather than simple compliance and reporting.
**WHAT WE DID**

**Activating Latent Demand**

The number of quality applicants generated by the Request for Learning was the second largest ever received by the team's most experienced grantmaking partner, Next Generation Learning Challenges.

The call apparently offered an *affirmation* to some of the field's most passionate but, as of yet, marginalized work on formative assessment. Many applicants who participated in the process but were not selected to receive grants opted to receive feedback on their proposals. In the majority of these calls, applicants said that the process of writing the application had been a *helpful and edifying experience* for their teams and partners. It is hoped that they will stay engaged through the ALP learning community launching in later spring of 2016.

The RFL seems to have provided a structure (hypotheses, approaches, learning plans) for teams with an inclination but - no external *impetus* - to think about assessment differently.

**WHAT WE LEARNED**

*A high demand exists in the field to rethink assessment.*

> “[working on the application] was so incredibly motivating. Because in the past I’ve written many, many grants as a professor, and as a classroom teacher. And my focus always had to be not on the learning, but on the accountability. They were saying to me, “Unless you can show me right now how you’re going to measure your impact, I’m not even going to read this.” But until you’re in the work, no one can truly tell you how they’re going to measure it. So this just blew my mind. My husband was laughing at me because he was like, “Are you ever going to sleep?” I was like, when this is done, when this thing is done.”

*Mary Earick, New Hampshire Department of Education*

> “For me, this [work on formative assessment] is 20 percent of my my workload, but it is the innovative part of what I'm doing, the most inspiring part. This project is giving me [the opportunity] to accelerate that. It really energizes me to work within this domain.”

*Khizer Husain, Two Rivers Public Charter Schools*
WHAT WE DID

Calling on the Field to Change Itself

The Assessment for Learning Project is an attempt to ask the field to rethink many of its legacy assumptions, practices, and goals regarding the meaning and role of assessment.

Like the grantee they are funding, the project's key stakeholders are engaged in a dynamic evaluation of a nascent transformation of practice.

How can a field first clearly see, and then, transform itself? ALP is bringing many strong points of view together but ensuring that they are held loosely.

The selection and screening process brought four key points of view on the field to the table: expert challenge panelists representing perspectives on a wide continuum from research to practice and using an evaluation rubric flexible enough to accommodate interpretation, two funding partners with complementary funding priorities, the ALP partnership with a set of guiding design principles, and finally, a diverse set of applicants whose proposals shed light on the essential questions in the project's learning agenda.

This diversity of perspectives resulted in a selection process focused less on finding proposals that supplied answers to predetermined questions but on finding those willing to explore, through collaboration, some of the most profound problems of practice that arise when rethinking assessment.

WHAT WE LEARNED

Diverse opinions grappling with the direction the field should transform grant selection processes from evaluative end-points to launching-points for more learning.
Grantees as Partners in Learning

The RFL's applicants were initially screened using this core rubric: the boldness of their ideas, the quality of their learning plan, their potential for broad impact, and their readiness to substantively add to existing knowledge.

The resulting pool of high quality, competitive applications was filtered in the end by two key criteria: the depth of the applicant's orientation toward learning and the applications degree of 'systemness'.

An orientation toward learning was determined in applicants' ability to create well-articulated hypotheses and clear plans for testing those hypotheses and adjusting, mid-stream to what they learned.

Applications that did not demonstrate this fundamental learning orientation often sought to expand or replicate well-established practices. Others interpreted “learning plan” as a section of the RFL to describe summative (often compliance-oriented) program evaluations; traditional academic research methods, data collection, and analysis; or even a schedule of teacher trainings the project would provide.

These applicants stood in stark contrast to the projects that were not only taking risks with bold ideas, but taking these risks smartly - by reflecting often, using practice measures of progress and impact, by being eager to access resources and supports, and by being agile in making adjustments to the project as they go along.

"Requests for proposals that have come out from the government or from foundations have been “pre-cooked” and that is that they have determined what they want, they have literally determined the model in most cases that they want to see. And so the process for someone out there making a decision about whether they want to apply or not is do we fit? Can we deliver on somebody else's model?"

Gene Wilhoit, Center for Innovation in Education

“We developed an RFL. We’re trying to learn from the work. Learning is the constant, the variable for how we meet you [grantee] as a learner and are pushing you. Success from our perspective as a leadership team, is not just outcomes but learning. Learning is the higher prize for us. If you execute your prototype and it fails but you learned a ton that will inform systemness and equity and your own learning.”

Adam Rubin, 2Revolutions

WHAT WE LEARNED

Attracting proposals built upon deep, dynamic learning requires an eye for true inquiry. It demands a willingness to risk learning alongside grantees rather than a more transactional funding relationship based on fixed outcomes.
What We Are Still Learning

How might we attract more “right-sized” proposals without overly prescribing project designs?

How can we best maintain the grantees’ commitment to learning during planning and implementation?

Should future calls refocus on screening criteria other than ‘systemness’ or learning orientation?
By establishing complementary connections between grantees we will build collective learning for the field alongside individual grantee insights and outcomes.

**HYPOTHESIS: A LEARNING COMMUNITY**

- **CONSTELLATIONS OF LEARNING**
- **FOSTER COLLABORATION ONLINE**
- **CONVENING IN DENVER**
- **SHARED VALUES AND SHARED INQUIRY**
- **A COLLECTIVE APPROACH TO LEARNING**
WHAT WE DID

**Constellations of Learning**

The Assessment for Learning Project’s focus on field-wide learning shifted how the final selection of grantee partners was made. The selected grants were considered not only on their individual merits but as a *portfolio of complementary efforts*.

A group of ‘anchor’ projects was identified for their exceptionally strong approaches to learning. These ‘anchor’ partners were then considered in combinations of other compelling projects as a set of possible *opportunities for shared learning*. These combined, complementary learning opportunities were termed ‘constellations’ and helped to form the core elements of project’s overall **Learning Agenda**:

- How can assessment support a *broader definition of student success*?
- What assessment practices most effectively *empower students* to own and advance their learning?
- How can we most effectively build *educator capacity* to gather, interpret, and use evidence of student learning to enhance instruction?
- How does assessment for learning inform broader contexts of accountability, policy, and *system design*?
- How can we pursue *equity* through assessment for learning?

WHAT WE LEARNED

**Using a ‘portfolio mindset’ to construct constellations of shared learning redefines impact. This approach emphasizes the depth and breadth of field-wide learning over discreet, disconnected outcomes.**
WHAT WE DID

Ensure Shared Values, Foster Collaboration

Prior to meeting in person, the grantees were introduced as a virtual community of learners. This community is being hosted on what is termed the ALP Hub—an online community and document sharing platform hosted by ALP.

Each grantee posted a synopsis of their projects and key areas of inquiry. Members were asked to review, identify connections, and post questions about each others’ work.

Grantees said this simple review had the outsized benefit of expanding their own conception of their work from an individual, local endeavor to a part of a national, collective effort.

Reviewing others’ project materials, prior to collaborating at the convening, allowed participants in this emergent community to confirm that their peers shared a set of common values focused on assessment for learning and students.

Many of the online comments expressed strong interest, framed as methodological questions, about how each project would achieve its goals suggesting that the questions posed by many were questions held by their peers.

WHAT WE LEARNED

Exposure to each other’s work confirms that community members share a set of values. It is hoped that this community norming will become a foundation on which to collaborate.
WHAT WE DID

Getting Together to Ask Questions

Having been introduced to each other online and encouraged to establish initial connections around the questions they had about each other’s learning plans, the grantees were brought together for a day and a half in Denver, Colorado.

The gathering was organized as a series of conversations sparked by the questions in the overall Learning Agenda. There were no presentations. There was no keynote. The work of the convening was not in receiving information but in grappling with shared questions.

Many grantees arrived at the convening seeking specific peers in order to ask about aspects of their work that could enhance their own.

Focusing activities on shared questions and challenges on topics such as equity, data overload, and student agency focused the grantees on how they might collectively solve these challenges. This stands in contrast to more routine gatherings in which individual organizations describe their individual work and deep dialog only happens in the margins of the meeting’s agenda.

What emerged from this collective discussion was not so much a sense of what the projects had in common but how they might complement and support one another.

WHAT WE LEARNED

Basing a gathering on shared questions, as opposed to on disseminating information, allows people to construct learning together.

“[During the selection process] we drew up a set of constellations, a map of how we imagined these guys could work together, but right now they are out there redrawing the map together.”

Sarah Lench, Center for Innovation in Education

“…you get there and these people, like it’s like they pop off the page, and all of a sudden what they were presenting in their proposals no longer sounded academic. It sounded like a revolution.”

Mary Earick, New Hampshire Department of Education
**Opportunities to Share Work**

“We spent so many years kind of working in our own cave. It's not that we didn't want to talk to others, but we just never had that opportunity or [found] that kindred spirit...I feel like now we've made bonds.”

Khezir Husain, 2 Rivers Charter School

**Rewriting Team Learning Plans**

“I realized there is a lot of knowledge out there that we either don't know about yet or only know just a little bit about. The connections we made are going to be really good.”

Aaryn Schmuhl, Henry County Schools

**Learning Agenda Small Group Sessions**

“It was interesting to hear different perspectives. Everyone is flying at a different altitude. To hear the work that others are doing at those different altitudes, and how they're doing that work.”

Alec Barron, Del Lago Academy

**WHAT WE DID**

*Shared Values, Complementary Work*
What We Are Still Learning

How do we continue to foster and support the connections made when grantees go back to their daily work?

Will these connections continue to serve as useful provocations for grantees, or will the tendency to isolate prevail?

Will grantees work openly in the online ALP Hub online to benefit the larger community?

How will we engage the unselected grant applicants in the ALP learning community?
By creating a flexible pool of funds to connect technical assistance to grantees, we will address unforeseen challenges and be able to pursue promising avenues learning.
WHAT WE DID

Coaching and Access to Flexible Assistance

The project is establishing an intentional structure for the sustained support of grantees as they launch their projects and begin learning in earnest.

Core team members will serve as peer to peer coaches and be assigned to constellations of grantees. Their intended role is to foster learning within projects by fielding questions and functioning as sounding boards for emergent insights. In addition, they will seek to create connections between grantees grappling with similar issues that may be apparent only to those with views into the multi-site effort of the community.

The project has also kept a funding reserve to enable support from a pool of nationally recognized experts providing on-demand technical assistance. Projects teams committed to learning may discover needs, opportunities, and synergies that will enable them to pivot their approaches as they learn more. It is hoped that this flexible access to support will enable more nimble, deep learning than would be possible in a more fixed funding model.

WHAT WE HOPE TO LEARN

Will a flexible approach to funding and support yield deeper learning for individual grantees as well as the broader learning community?

AREAS OF ON-DEMAND EXPERTISE:

- Learning Progressions
- Building Student Agency
- Systems of Assessment
- Performance-based Assessment for Deeper Learning
- Broader Definitions of Student Success (e.g. SEL, Noncognitive/21st Century Skills)
- Building Educator Capacity and Professional Learning
- Student Profiles and Portfolios of Learning
- Personalized Learning
- Competency-Based Education
- Policy and System Design
- Education Equity and Supporting Diverse Learners
- Community Engagement
- Data Systems Design
- Strategic Planning & Project Management
**What We Are Still Learning**

What role will coaching play? Is it primarily as a matchmaker between grantees and technical assistance providers?

Does it function as a side car guide to grantees as they work? Does this shift how they work and what they learn?

Will technical assistance providers see value in this mediated interaction with ‘clients’? Will it substantively change the ability for them to serve grantees?

What role will technical service providers play in the broader community outside this one on one relationships?

Will the funding be fully utilized, over subscribed or under utilized? What does this say about the capacity of grantees to reimagine their relationship to funding?
We believe that supporting a learning orientation among partners representing many perspectives in education will produce a level of learning that functions at scales greater than the sum of its parts.
WHAT WE DID

A Turn Toward Systemness…

The Assessment for Learning Project is expressly focused on shifting the way the field thinks about and practices assessment.

This emphasis on field-wide impact has been a starting assumption for the project. Single projects crafting hyper-localized innovations will not produce the scope of learning the project aspires to discover. Grantees were chosen for the degree to which their projects could directly impact the systems in which they are situated (CMO/District/State), as well as provide an opportunity to influence systems more broadly as a proof point of what is possible.

This capacity to effect the behavior or achieve coherent shift within a system, whether in schools or districts or within the policy context surrounding a project team, is the project team’s emergent definition of ‘systemness’.

The Assessment for Learning Project is not intending to fund discrete, innovative pilots. The entire initiative is designed to catalyze system-wide learning and reassessment of assessment and the contexts in which it operates.

WHAT WE HOPE TO LEARN

Does the intentional inclusion of ‘systemness’ in a project’s design expand the scope of its impact?

“We looked for systemness when we were looking at these grant proposals to decide finally who to bring into the portfolio. We were looking for people who had a big, a possibility to influence systems beyond themselves. But we’re not seeking people who just say “I’m the state department of education. I’m responsible for all the policy and all the laws, therefore I can impact the system.

We think you can’t impact systems without a learning orientation. You have to be open to new ideas. You have to be willing to listen to folks. You have to be able to sit yourself in the middle of a lot of different perspectives and help people have really hard conversations. So that you can co-create the new system … set policy, fiscal, workforce conditions, etc. so that others across the system can make their changes.”

Linda Pittenger, Center for Innovation in Education
A TURN TOWARDS SYSTEMNESS

What We Are Still Learning

Will the grantee partners involve and impact the broader systems they sit in as they work?

Will cross-project collaboration and a range of system-levels and grain sizes represented by grantees lead to learning that is greater than the sum of each project's part?

How will the learning across ALP as a whole extend beyond the local contexts of each project to systems that are not being directly funded?
Rethinking Assessment Together

Our community of partners has only just begun to connect and start redefining the field of assessment. If you are interested in learning more or getting involved please discover the growing conversation online and get in touch!
Grantee Profiles

The Assessment for Learning Project is funding 12 grantees representing a range of system-levels, geographies, and innovation strategies. Below we profile 5 grantees which represent the diversity of our learning community. The full community of projects and partners can be reviewed at the link below.

TWO RIVERS PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL
KHIZER HUSAIN

NEW HAMPSHIRE LEARNING INITIATIVE
MARY EARICK

DEL LAGO ACADEMY
ALEC BARRON

FAIRFAX COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS
SHANNON KING

HENRY COUNTY SCHOOLS
AARYN SCHMUHL
Two Rivers Public Charter School

Project Introduction

Two Rivers nurtures students to be active participants in their own education. Students and teachers regularly review data (assessments and student work) to gauge progress on core content as well as deeper learning skills. The staff makes adjustments to the instructional focus based on this data. Students participate in 10-week project-based learning expeditions that build the skills of critical thinking and problem solving. However, the school has not had a robust system for measuring growth in this area. None exists.

In this project, the team plans to build short, formative assessments that are not subject-specific to test transference of deeper learning skills cultivated in expeditions. When externally validated, the rubrics and tasks can be profitable to Two Rivers and to other schools. But the process for building these tools is perhaps even more valuable as schools improve instruction based on deeper learning assessments.

The Hypotheses

1. If we administer hour-long, discipline-agnostic, validated and reliable formative assessments (performance tasks) across grade bands, then we can effectively gauge the transfer of critical thinking skills outside the context of expeditions.
2. If students are given this new data and rubrics, then they will be better equipped to speak specifically about their mastery (or deficits) of critical thinking skills separate from their mastery of standards.
3. If staff is engaged in task design, administration, and scoring of tasks, then they will better appreciate the level of classroom rigor required for student skill mastery.

Seeking a Community

“We want to foster a learning environment steeped in authentic learning and we’ve built out our data architecture to live up to that lofty mission. Other people were talking a lot about testing and standardized assessments, particularly on reading and math scores, but not on what really matters. So we waited for a number of years for someone to come up with an assessment to get at what we’re really concerned about. What we realized was...no one has kind of come out and said, “We are the shop to turn to for this sort of work. So we felt like we were in a bit of a vacuum and we didn’t have that community to latch onto.”

Khizer Husain, Two Rivers Public Charter School
"We spent so many years kind of working in our own cave. It's not that we didn't want to talk to others, but we just never had that opportunity or [found] that kindred spirit...I feel like now we've made bonds."

Khizer Husain

---

**Learning is Social**

“We learn better together. A lot of learning and understanding happens in a social context. So you make the connections when you respond to a stimulus, like something from the literature. Then you can have folks in a room that kind of bring their own experience base to articulate what that means.”

Khizer Husain

---

**Kindred Spirits**

“We spent so many years kind of working in our own cave. It’s not that we didn’t want to talk to others, but we just never had that opportunity or [found] that kindred spirit...I feel like now we’ve made bonds.”
New Hampshire Learning Initiative

Project Introduction

NG2: Personalized Inclusive Education Pathways looks to take New Hampshire to the next level of personalized learning as it tackles long-standing educational barriers to personalized learning... that of "Grades." In this context, the team has recognized that two forms of grades exist in their schools that act as impediments:

1. Grades as student assessments that often reflect very poorly on their true understandings and skills
2. Grades as methods for grouping students (by age) that often poorly align to their true needs as learners.

In this project, seven elementary schools in New Hampshire are piloting methods for combining competency-based learning and performance assessments in multi-age learning settings. The purpose is to develop a new model of personalization that allows a more flexible and effective educational pathway through the development and use of PreK-Grade 8 learning progressions. The result is deeper, more authentic learning opportunities leading to greater student success.

The Hypothesis

If learning progressions are developed in PreK-Grade 8 multi-age environments, applying project-based learning pedagogies with authentic quality performance assessments, then children and adults thrive, as evidenced by their confidence and competency. Therefore, we posit that a focus on NG2 will result in personalized educational pathways that (1) increase academic and social outcomes for children, (2) increase educator effectiveness, and (3) increase access and equity to college and career pathways.

"So what we said in New Hampshire is, what would [it] look like if we took the tenants of competency-based education and the tenants of a personalized multi-aged learning, and if we... bring together educators in a think-tank model with outside experts to check their work [so] that they can develop learning progressions that drive and deepen learning for both the educator and for the students."

Mary Earick, New Hampshire Learning Initiative
New Hampshire Learning Initiative
Community Participation

Connections

- **Hawaii Department of Education**: Hawaii pushing Mary to really think about accelerating her plan.
- **Del Lago Academy**: Inviting Del Lago to the NH ‘Summer Summit’ [of superintendents] to speak about their work.
- **ETS**: Developing a plan to collaborate on learning progressions.

---

**Power [and legitimacy] in Numbers**

“The only way that we’re going to be pushed nationally is if those individuals who have the high readiness to take on systems can network through a shared leadership model. The strength is in the collective. When you’re alone, it’s easy for you to be sidetracked. It’s easy for individuals who are scared of change to put barriers in your way. But when you’re part of a collective, those individuals are de-powered. Being listed in this cohort is offering me [latitude] to move transformative agendas forward.”

---

**Jumping At The Chance to Learn**

“[working on the application] was so incredibly motivating. Because in the past I’ve written many, many grants as a professor, and as a classroom teacher. And my focus always had to be not on the learning, but on the accountability. They were saying to me, “Unless you can show me right now how you’re going to measure your impact, I’m not even going to read this.” But until you’re in the work, no one can truly tell you how they’re going to measure it. So this just blew my mind. My husband was laughing at me because he was like, “Are you ever going to sleep?” I was like, when this is done, when this thing is done.”

Mary Earick
Del Lago Academy
Project Introduction

Del Lago Academy intends to ensure that all of its scholars are adequately prepared to transfer what they learn in school to real-world academic laboratory and industry settings. The team is fully implementing a science competency-based assessment system. “Competency X” is personalized for the school’s learners and results in a curated digital portfolio that scholars use to track and reflect on evidence of their competency with science and engineering practices. Digital badges that are validated by industry and college partners are assigned when scholars have met specific criteria for these practices in their digital portfolio. Scholars use the badges as evidence of their competency with the knowledge and skills required to be a scientist for their internships and their college applications.

The Hypotheses:
1. How do we develop competency-based assessments that are formative in nature and promote reflective thinking on the part of the learner about how to improve?
2. How do we give scholars more opportunities to succeed with skills required to be a competent scientist on performance-based tasks?
3. How can K-12 form partnerships with industry partners to develop meaningful assessment systems that can certify scholars as ready for internships and industry level work?

Learning In and Out of the Classroom

“It’s a reimagined approach for how we expose kids to real-world learning and immerse them into all of the diverse pathways that exists for careers in California. The thing that we’re doing that’s different is connecting student data to a portfolio system with micro-credentialing, or digital badges. So we wanted a workflow that allowed our learners to display their curation of evidence on their science and engineering practices, and the grant is enabling us to explore that system.

Alec Barron, Del Lago Academy
Del Lago Academy
Community Participation

Connections

› **Technical Assistance Providers:** Connecting face to face with people's who's work he follows and reads.

› **Center for Collaborative Education:** Comparing the process of micro-credentialing for students with the process of micro-credentialing for teachers.

Peers Providing Perspective

“It was interesting to be able to hear different perspectives because everyone is flying at a different elevation, or altitude. You know everyone plays an important role in our systems of schooling. It’s really interesting to hear the work that others are doing at those different altitudes. Their perspective is helpful to me so that I can design the work to give them as much information to help craft policy and create other fertile environments for innovation. That’s the goal: you don’t want these projects to live in isolation. You want them to create enthusiasm for change and creativity, across the broader communities in education.

Alec Barron
Project Introduction

The team is establishing a Networked Improvement Community (NIC) across Virginia focused on student-led assessment for deeper learning. Student-led assessment involves students as stakeholders in their learning process, so this means students need opportunities for meaningful learning and structures to reflect on that learning. They also need feedback so they can set goals and measure their growth toward both mastery of the content and the district’s Portrait of a Graduate attributes. Each of the districts within the NIC intends to implement student-led learning in ways that align with their current assessment plan. Some examples:

- Developing a student-curated portfolio system
- Providing opportunities for students to present their work during Exhibitions of Learning
- Implementing rubrics that allow students to self-assess growth

The Hypothesis

If a Networked Improvement Community across districts in Virginia is focused on student self-assessment, then:

- Evidence of student-led assessment practices that lead to improvement in teaching and learning will be identified.
- Those practices that can be reliably spread and scaled across diverse contexts will be identified and implemented (e.g., with a variety of student populations, diverse communities and districts).

Assessment and Student Agency

“We don’t want the face of education to be about policy makers and people externally making decisions for our schools and for our students. What we want is for our students to be able to make informed decisions for themselves about where they need to go with their lives, and what they want to do when they get out of school. We want to turn our attention away from some external trying to catch us not doing a good job by some sort of fill in the blank test and more toward our students (when they’re leaving us) telling us they are prepared for the future.”

Shannon King, Fairfax County Public Schools
Fairfax County Public Schools
Community Participation

Connections
› Henry County Schools: Watching and learning from their work on feedback.
› 2 Rivers: Project based learning as a lens into student agency.
› Hawaii Dept. of Education: Cultural competency and literacy in assessment
› New Hampshire Learning Initiative: Making transformational change at a state level

System Wide Rapid Cycle Learning
“One of the challenges we've had as a big system is that we like to over produce, to make it perfect before we ever launch it and that's restrictive. [This project is helping us] learn - try out an idea, fail fast/fail often and so you get something that works and then take that and start to build slowly. We felt like that's got power to make some difference. There are these counties that are way ahead of us and we can learn from them. We can bring a lot of other counties taking baby steps and so it's been great to really open up the conversation and start trying to think and learn together.”
Shannon King

Learning Together
“This grant was really refreshing in the sense that [the ALP team members] were very clear and transparent from the beginning that it really was about learning for us and for them. And so instead of just trying to write here's what I think they want to hear, I was really actually pushed to think about what is it that I wanted to do, what are the processes needed to put students in charge of their own learning.”
Shannon King, Fairfax County Public Schools
Henry County Schools
Project Introduction

In a personalized learning model, it is essential to focus on the feedback students get on their work and progress and to measure their ability, willingness, and mastery at responding to that feedback to advance learning. Through aligning feedback protocols, the district believes that students will gain a deeper understanding of their work, have greater ownership of the process of progress toward mastery, and grow in 21st century skills of communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity.

The project's goal is to improve leader, teacher, and student capacity to analyze practice turns, provide effective and timely feedback, and track data collected from feedback to determine student agency. The district is piloting a feedback process and student and teacher training, using a locally-developed Learner Profile tool, in 15 pilot schools.

The Hypothesis

If we develop effective feedback protocols, provide systematic professional development on them, and create calibration sessions, then we can transform teachers’ and students’ use of feedback across the district. By connecting that process to a systematic method of collecting and analyzing data regarding the feedback received and how it was acted upon, we will positively impact student achievement and agency.

“Well, honestly as a district we haven’t really applied for many grants because we didn’t feel like we had the capacity to do the reporting and the data analysis and all the work that grants require. You are thinly staffed and you are focused on teaching kids...What we really liked about the grant was the idea that it was about learning, it wasn’t about saying this is what we are going to do and we know it’s going to work, which is I think really powerful for the grantmaking community. And that’s one of the reasons we applied for it because we figured well, if we screw it up it means we still will have learned something.”
Henry County Schools
Community Participation

Connections

- ETS: Seeking synopses of best in class research about formative assessment that are succinct and clear enough for teachers to grasp and use quickly.

Field-wide Learning

“When they sent us the pre-work for the convening I was really inspired by the fact that they had been intentional about picking schools and districts and SEAs and consortia so that you have voices from all the different sectors that are going to be impacted by this. But also, I realized there is a lot of knowledge out there that we either don't know about yet or only know just a little bit about. So the idea that we can be working with others that have more experience and knowledge in areas that will support what we are doing is pretty exciting.”

Aaryn Schmuhl

A Turn Toward Systemness

“When we spent a lot of time with New Hampshire at the convening and were really interested in some of the policies that they have put in place in New Hampshire and how we can push those up to our state. So [as part] of the process we went to our State Superintendent and asked for a letter of support and they [are looking] at the work we were doing [in ALP] to see if it could have an impact on [Georgia] policy.”
Rethinking Assessment Together

Our community of partners has only just begun to connect and start redefining the field of assessment. If you are interested in learning more or getting involved please discover the growing conversation online and get in touch!