



## NEWS RELEASE

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### **Nellie Mae Education Foundation and Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation Partnership to Support Bold Multistate Effort to Prepare Students Across New England for Success in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

*Groundbreaking four-state collaboration will work to reinvent the high school experience*

**QUINCY, MA** – In an effort to transform the American high school for the 21<sup>st</sup> century and ensure that the academic performance and educational attainment of every student in Maine, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont will be competitive with their peers worldwide, the **Nellie Mae Education Foundation**, the largest philanthropy in New England focusing exclusively on education, has committed \$1 million—which includes a \$500,000 partnership grant from the **Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation**—to provide initial support for the **New England Secondary School Consortium**.

Coordinated by the **Great Schools Partnership at the Mitchell Institute**, the Consortium will initially include four states—Maine, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont—and bring together their departments of education, districts, and high schools with independent school-support organizations and educational leaders from across New England in a far-reaching regional alliance. The group will share resources, talents, and expertise while exploring cost-saving efficiencies in pursuit of a common mission: ensure that by 2016 every public high school student in the four states will receive an education that will prepare them for college, career, and civic responsibility in the interconnected global community of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Recognizing that the traditional ways of educating students are no longer aligned with today's civic and professional expectations, and that the time has come to rethink the traditional American high school experience on a regional scale, the Consortium will support the development of high-performing, internationally competitive schools and new learning experiences that will better mirror the lives and learning needs of today's students. These transformed schools will no longer be limited by building design, geography, or educational convention, but will be flexible, borderless, multidimensional community learning centers that blend secondary and postsecondary education—students will conduct research in their communities, acquire real-world skills through challenging internships, take online and on-campus college courses, use powerful new technologies to access the world, and engage in other innovative learning opportunities both inside and outside the classroom.

“We’re thrilled to be working with the Consortium and the Gates Foundation to stimulate the transformative change needed in our public schools,” said **Nellie Mae Education Foundation President and CEO Nicholas C. Donohue**. “We also remain open to extending membership to the rest of the New England community as the work of the Consortium develops. This is a tremendous opportunity to ensure that learners across New England acquire the skills and knowledge necessary today to be economically self-sufficient, lifelong learners. What sets the Consortium apart from other reform efforts is that we’re focused on the next generation of educational standards, assessments, and other policies defining schooling.”

Building on the success of the New England Common Assessment Program, the Consortium will leverage forward-thinking policies, model educational programs, positive messaging, and the combined resources and expertise of four states to launch a coordinated regional movement that will bring to scale systemic and sustainable innovations in the design and delivery of secondary education. Collaboration will be the engine of effective and sustainable large-scale educational transformation over the coming decades, and the Consortium intends to become a pioneering multistate partnership that can serve as a model for the nation.

“Far too many young people leave high school without the education they need or deserve,” said **Andrew Smiles, Program Officer with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation**. “We are proud to partner with the Nellie Mae Education Foundation and are excited about the prospect this work holds for improving education in New England and beyond.”

During the initial eighteen-month phase of this multi-year effort, the participating states will conduct a comprehensive review of the rules, regulations, and laws governing education. The resulting policy map will inform the development of new state and local policies that will stimulate educational innovation, encourage the implementation of new models of teaching and learning, require personalized support for each student, and clarify performance expectations for both educators and students.

“Changing an education system requires a serious commitment of time and resources from stakeholders across the spectrum of the education community,” said **Peter McWalters, Rhode Island’s Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education**. “In Rhode Island, we have been engaged for several years in implementing a Diploma System based on personalization, supports for students, and proficiency-based graduation requirements. We are eager to work with our partner states across New England to share our successes and to learn from and implement the best practices of the other states in the region.”

The Consortium will also undertake a wide-ranging examination of state learning standards, teaching strategies, assessment practices, professional-development programs, and student outcomes in relation to the highest-performing international educational systems. New England students are part of a global community that has redefined the knowledge, skills, and habits of mind that students need, and this work will identify the characteristics of effective education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and apply these lessons to the creation of new models of teaching, learning, and leading.

“The Consortium will bring bold, transformative innovations to the design and delivery of secondary education,” said **Maine Commissioner of Education Susan Gendron**. “Maine has already made great strides in connecting and bridging the high-school experience with postsecondary options. Working with the Consortium will allow us to pursue international standards and to explore the best ways to provide learners with the quality and variety that they need in a global society and economy. This partnership brings the sorely needed resources, tools, intellectual talent, and support our state needs to take our efforts to the next level.”

In addition to building in-state educational networks that will connect state agencies, support organizations, postsecondary institutions, districts, and schools, the Consortium will also collaborate with the Council of Chief State School Officers, the New England Association of Schools and Colleges, and the New England

Board of Higher Education to bring greater coordination and alignment to the promotion of best practices and common expectations across the region.

“New Hampshire’s participation in the Consortium will help us strengthen our commitment to creating a personalized educational experience for every learner that includes extended learning opportunities that allow for learning in both in school and in real-life environments,” said **New Hampshire Commissioner of Education Lyonel B. Tracy**. “We see this collaboration as a way to create a system that can build the capacity all of our administrators and teachers to better identify and address the learning needs of individual students.”

A steering council consisting of representatives from governors’ offices and key legislative, education, and business leaders will be established to guide and build support for the Consortium’s work.

“All four of the states have made great strides on their own in recent years, but together we can reach every student in every school,” said **Bill Talbott, Vermont’s Acting Commissioner of Education**. “For more than a year, we have been laying the groundwork for this important partnership. We know that we share the same goals and that we can work together effectively. This important grant will help us advance our transformation work from vision to implementation.”

For more information on the Consortium, visit [www.newenglandssc.org](http://www.newenglandssc.org).

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**The Nellie Mae Education Foundation** is the largest philanthropy in New England that focuses exclusively on education. The Foundation provides grants and other support to education programs and intermediary organizations in order to stimulate transformative change in public education systems and ensure that all New England’s learners are prepared for success. The Foundation investigates, promotes and supports a greater variety of high-quality educational opportunities that enable all citizens—*especially and essentially those from underserved populations*—to obtain the skills, knowledge and supports necessary to become civically-engaged, economically self-sufficient, life-long learners. Since it was established in 1998, the Foundation has distributed nearly \$83 million in grants. Currently, it primarily provides funding through five strategic initiatives: *Early Learning, Pathways to Higher Learning, Time for Learning, Adult Learning, and Systems Building*. [www.nmefdn.org](http://www.nmefdn.org)

Guided by the belief that every life has equal value, **the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation** works to help all people lead healthy, productive lives. In developing countries, it focuses on improving people's health and giving them the chance to lift themselves out of hunger and extreme poverty. In the United States, it seeks to ensure that all people—especially those with the fewest resources—have access to the opportunities they need to succeed in school and life. Based in Seattle, the foundation is led by CEO Jeff Raikes and co-chair William H. Gates Sr., under the direction of Bill and Melinda Gates and Warren Buffett. [www.gatesfoundation.org](http://www.gatesfoundation.org)

**The Great Schools Partnership at the Mitchell Institute** works to redesign and strengthen public and private education to improve the quality of learning for all students. With decades of collective service in support of public secondary schools, the Partnership develops cutting-edge tools and resources, oversees the implementation of major public and private grants, and provides school coaching, professional development, technical assistance, and consulting to educators, schools, districts, organizations, and government agencies. The Partnership is led by J. Duke Albanese, former commissioner of education for the state of Maine, and David Ruff, former executive director of the Southern Maine Partnership at the University of Southern Maine. [www.greatschoolspartnership.org](http://www.greatschoolspartnership.org)