

Our Time to Shine -

I am not sure how many of you are aware that Iowa schools now have the opportunity to move away from the Carnegie Unit, or Credit Hour, which is a time-based reference for measuring educational attainment which was developed during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In place, schools can accept the challenge to re-think what learning the 21st century should look like and feel like. As of January of this school year, schools could for the first time, apply for a one year waver, and submit a plan or design for Competency-based Pathways for the 2012-13 school year. My hope is that legislation proposed in the Governor's bill will be approved to support competency-based instruction going forward.

The Carnegie Unit has long been a hindrance to high ability or gifted learners. It requires a determined amount of seat time, and a progression rate that just doesn't work for many of our students. We know that students need proper challenge, deep curriculum, and opportunities to engage in authentic intellectual tasks in order to learn how to work hard, problem solve, and create multiple ideas for solutions. In many cases the Carnegie Unit has instead contributed to lack of motivation for once eager students who quickly discovered that school was a place where they waited to learn. While Competency-based Pathways is not designed just for gifted learners, there is much that can be gained from a system that allows students to move at the pace and level that they cognitively need. In our gifted field alone, we have many different types of students with varied needs. George Betts and Maureen Niehart updated their Profiles of Gifted in 2010, providing 6 focus areas of giftedness to consider. Out of these 6, many schools identify for only one or two of these categories: The Successful, Creative, Underground, At-Risk, Twice/Multi Exceptional, and Autonomous Learner. Allowing students to access the level of curriculum that is needed for optimal learning will help us to remove some of the labels, and provide for many students who fall through the holes of the current system. Competency-based instruction has the potential to provide students access to the learning supports that best fit their needs regardless of their age level or labels.

We are so fortunate that we have access to years of research that has been clearly defined and articulated that can help us with this task. The Templeton National Report on Acceleration, *A Nation Deceived: How Schools Hold Back America's Brightest Students*, 2004 is a highly researched document which clearly presents multiple ways in which students can experience learning and move through a system. Competency-based instruction that is designed to include the research based practices of acceleration can provide optimal learning experiences that challenge high ability and gifted children while still supporting the needs of struggling students. Competency-based instruction, when designed right, can meet most needs of multiple student sub-groups. Well written, this plan has the potential to make revolutionary changes in learner experiences.

The waver for this year was the first week of January and very few school districts had time to consider the task or the conversations that will be needed to develop the vision for this fundamental change in thinking. Ask to be a part of the decision-making as your school has conversations about applying for this waver in the future (depending on legislative decision making). Read and share the important resources on acceleration so that research is laying the foundation for these essential instructional and curricular changes. We realize that acceleration is not synonymous with competency-based instruction; however, they can support each other to build an educational system that provides rigor, depth and fluidity.

What an exciting time to be in education. With research to back our decision making we have the opportunity to help lead the way in this educational reform. It just might be our time to shine!

Linda Moehring, ITAG President