

Contact:

Nick Lorenzen, Nellie Mae Education Foundation, [nlorenzen@nmefdn.org](mailto:nlorenzen@nmefdn.org)  
781-348-4239 cell: 617-688-0525

For Immediate Release

**Seven Organizations, Schools and Districts Receive Nearly \$1 Million in Awards from  
Nellie Mae Education Foundation for Work on Proficiency-Based Pathways**

*Funded efforts support advancing students through high school at their own pace*

As part of its efforts to prepare all of New England's learners with the skills and knowledge they need for success in postsecondary education, work and life, the **Nellie Mae Education Foundation** (NMEF) has awarded one-year grants to seven organizations, schools, and districts across New England. The grants were issued through NMEF's [Research and Development Initiative](#) with funding from the **Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation**.

Proficiency-Based Pathways allow students to progress toward their goals based on mastery rather than a required number of hours spent in a classroom. These pathways represent a significant move towards learning opportunities that allow students to achieve proficiency at their own pace. Proficiency-Based Pathways enable students to show deeper levels of understanding and acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to indicate content mastery.

The organizations, schools and districts receiving Proficiency-Based Pathways grants are:

- [Big Picture Learning](#) – CT and VT Locations
- [Boston Day and Evening Academy](#) – Boston, MA
- [Third Sector New England](#) in coordination with [Diploma Plus](#) – MA and RI Locations
- [Expeditionary Learning/Casco Bay High School](#) – Casco Bay, ME
- [Maine School Administrative District 15](#) – Gray and New Gloucester, ME
- [National Center on Education and the Economy/CREC Schools](#) - Windsor, CT
- [Vergennes Union High School](#) – Vergennes, VT

Grant amounts range from \$74,000 - \$185,000. Specific amounts and brief descriptions of each recipient's grant-related work are available on the [NMEF website](#).

The grants are the cornerstone of NMEF's Proficiency-Based Pathways project and are managed by the organization's Research and Development department. The project is designed to build understanding of mastery-based approaches, as well as learn from both grantees' past experience and their upcoming implementation of a wide variety of projects that will be supported over the coming year.

“These grants are intended to support a dual emphasis on learning and doing,” said Beth M. Miller, Ph.D. [Director of Research and Evaluation at NMEF](#). “We're excited to help advance the work being done by these organizations and at the same time learn a lot about this emerging field.”

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The Foundation will share what is learned with interested stakeholders in the education and philanthropic communities, where interest in these approaches has grown quickly in recent years.

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**The Nellie Mae Education Foundation** is the largest charitable organization in New England that focuses exclusively on education. The Foundation supports the promotion and integration of student-centered approaches to learning at the middle and high school levels across New England. To elevate student-centered approaches, the Foundation utilizes a three-part strategy that focuses on: developing and enhancing models of practice; reshaping education policies; and increasing public understanding and demand for high quality educational experiences. The Foundation's new initiative areas are: District Level Systems Change; State Level Systems Change; Research and Development; and Public Understanding. Since 1998, the Foundation has distributed over \$123 million in grants. For more information, visit [www.nmefdn.org](http://www.nmefdn.org)