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High Schools in Four States Piloting Program Designed to Bring American High Schools Up To Global Standards

Washington, DC - High schools in Arizona, Connecticut, Kentucky and Mississippi are participating in a national pilot program that could result in basic changes in high school structure, curriculum, and testing throughout the country.

The new program, *Excellence for All* (formerly the Board Examination Systems Program), is based on more than 20 years of research by the National Center on Education and the Economy (NCEE) on those countries that routinely outperform the United States on international assessments of student performance. American high school students' performance is far below that in the top ten countries. Dropout rates from American high school approach 30 percent, while those in the top performing countries are all below 10 percent.

According to Marc Tucker, NCEE's president, "*Excellence for All* is designed to incorporate the features of the high school systems used by the top-performing countries that appear to account for their superb performance, while maintaining the American commitment to opportunity for everyone. If the program is successful in the pilot schools, NCEE expects that the system embodied in the program will be used throughout the United States."

Students in the pilot high schools will be using the best high school curriculums in the world available in the United States. These include curriculums and aligned, high quality assessments from the College Board, University of Cambridge in England, the International Baccalaureate Program, and ACT. Teachers in the pilot high schools are being trained by the providers of these programs to teach them well to students from many different backgrounds.

Excellence for All has been designed not just to bring superior curriculum, teaching and assessments to American high schools, but also to make basic changes to the structure of our high schools. The goal is to make sure that no student leaves high school without being ready to succeed in a local community college or in a four-year college. The premise is that all students, whether they plan to be plumbers or brain surgeons, will need at least two years of education or training beyond high school to be successful. Today, we fall far short of that goal with more than 40 percent of those who apply to our community colleges needing remediation before they can take credit-bearing courses.

The programs that have been certified by NCEE for use in the pilot schools have been divided into those that will be used in the freshman and sophomore years (i.e.

lower division), and those that will be used in the junior and senior years (i.e. upper division). The schools have to choose one certified lower division program and one upper division program. Students who are not prepared for the rigor of the lower division program will be offered a transition program designed to get them ready. Those who may be a little behind will be offered additional assistance so they can keep up. The aim is to make sure that all students can do the work demanded by these curriculums.

NCEE is now researching the levels of math and English literacy needed to succeed in the nation's community colleges. That information will be used to help determine the passing grades needed on the lower division courses. Students who pass their lower division exams can stay in their high school and take one of the certified upper division academic programs intended to get them into a selective college or a technical program intended to result in an industry-recognized certificate launching them on to a good career.

Students who pass their exams will also be able to leave their high schools as early as the end of their sophomore year and go directly to their local community college, having received a special proficiency-based diploma from their state. No student who goes to their community college after passing their lower division exams will have to take any remedial courses. Students who choose to go to their community college can enroll in a general education program intended to enable them to transfer to a four-year college or a two-year degree or certificate program leading to a good career.

All options are open to all students as soon as they pass their lower division exams. Students who do not pass their lower division examinations will be offered customized programs put together by their high schools intended to address the areas where they struggled, so they can pass the exams on their next try. The objective of the program is to get all students to this standard before they leave high school.

The twenty-one high schools participating in the Fall 2011 pilot program serve a diverse group of students and represent a mix of charter and regular public schools as well as schools with low-performing and high-performing students. Participating schools are using federal grant money, support from local and state philanthropies, and state and local tax dollars. The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation has contributed to the planning, research, and evaluation phases of the pilot program and the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan is conducting a rigorous independent evaluation of the effectiveness of the pilot.

To learn more about the program and for a full list of the participating schools, visit www.ncee.org. Districts that are interested in participating in the pilot program should contact Jason Dougal, Chief Operating Officer of NCEE, at jdougal@ncee.org.

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The National Center on Education and the Economy was created in 1988 to analyze the implications of changes in the international economy for American education, formulate an agenda for American education based on that analysis and seek wherever possible to accomplish that agenda through policy change and development of the resources educators would need to carry it out. Follow NCEE on Twitter @CtrEdEcon and on [Facebook](#).