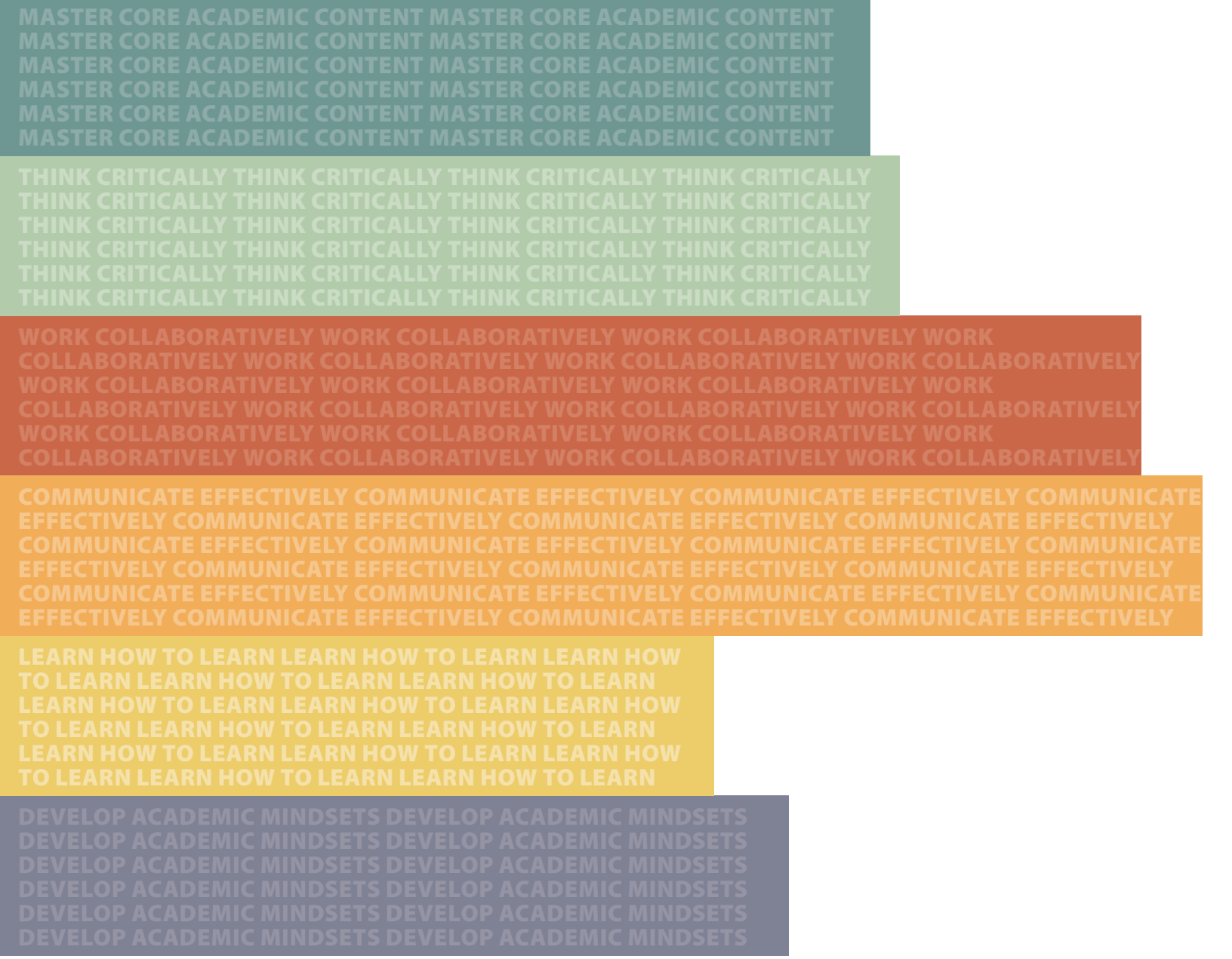

Charting the Progress of the Hewlett Foundation's Deeper Learning Strategy 2010–2015

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RTI International

February 2017

Foreword

In 2016, we asked RTI International to examine the Hewlett Foundation's efforts over the first five years of our Deeper Learning strategy. This encompassed our work to help more students--especially those from communities farthest from opportunity--graduate high school as confident, life-long learners who are equipped for successful and fulfilling lives. I am pleased to share their findings. For all of us working to move the U.S. public education system toward a higher bar of equity and excellence, this evaluation contains both hopeful news about our progress so far and ideas about where we can work harder.

Deeper learning is the shorthand phrase the Foundation has developed to describe our grantmaking focus in the Education Program since 2010. The term refers to the higher-order knowledge, skills and dispositions that research shows are the surest path to postsecondary success in a more connected, global and technologically-driven world. These competencies include critical thinking and creative problem-solving, communication, collaboration, learning to learn and developing an academic mindset—all applied to mastering challenging academic content.

The Foundation made the shift to prioritizing deeper learning because it recognized that U.S. students were increasingly ill-prepared for the new challenges of the 21st century, even as other countries and school systems—including Singapore, Finland, Canada, and Shanghai—had been revising their education systems to focus on helping more students reach higher expectations. In particular, we recognized this gap was especially large for students from communities of poverty who too often have limited opportunities to acquire the skills, knowledge and dispositions to be successful in today's economy, where the types of jobs they will hold may not have even existed before.

To guide our education grantmaking strategy, the Foundation set a long-term goal that by 2025, at least 80 percent of U.S. students would be in classrooms reflecting instruction that emphasizes deeper learning. With this goal, we recognized most school districts—especially those with underserved and low-income students—lacked not only the incentives and accountability measures to help students develop these skills, but also didn't have the capacity to deliver them to more than just a subset of (often honors) students. Our strategy was committed to making a difference. Hundreds of nonprofits, school networks and advocates have worked together to begin advancing these changes.

All strategies are built on assumptions about what activities will cause which changes. Although still many years away from 2025, we asked RTI International to conduct an independent investigation of our work during the first five years, to document progress between 2010-2015, to examine whether the field was beginning to change, and to uncover issues the Foundation needed to focus more attention on moving forward. We also wanted to assess progress in particular toward our interim goal - having 15% of K-12 students assessed on deeper learning skills by 2017.

Much of our energy in the early years of the Deeper Learning strategy was focused on resetting and reframing the education system's learning goals, to counteract the narrowing of expectations that occurred in too many schools under the No Child Left Behind Act. We worked to support the Common Core standards, improve tests and textbooks, strengthen the evidence base for deeper learning approaches, and create and strengthen networks of educators committed to this vision for student learning.

The RTI research documented important headway in each of these areas, as well as optimism from our grantees about the promise of this movement to impact the education system. Importantly, the Foundation met its initial goal to "reset state learning goals" by helping a significant number of states transition to new assessments that emphasize more deeper learning competencies and rely on more performance tasks. RTI found promising evidence that educators across the country are

increasingly recognizing and emphasizing deeper learning competencies in their classroom practice. And grantees told RTI that the Foundation's emphasis on organizational collaboration has helped advance their work and the field.

At the same time, the RTI research elevates important areas the Foundation will need to prioritize as it works to spread and scale deeper learning. These include:

- **Sustaining the gains so far** by making sure there is no backsliding on the policy gains that have been made at the national and state levels despite the uncertain political climate ahead.
- **Helping to create the next-generation of tests and assessments,** including making the use of performance assessments and student portfolios more prevalent in more classrooms, and helping to create measures of other deeper learning student competencies, such as collaboration.
- **Doing more to give educators tools and support to help them shift their practice to emphasize deeper learning.** We've already moved our grantmaking in this direction—this year, for example, we are starting large investments in local teacher networks to strengthen assessment practices and in testing new models for scaling deeper learning-aligned teacher practices in school districts.
- **Pushing to make sure all students benefit from a focus on deeper learning,** particularly by understanding the challenges in schools with large numbers of underserved students and what solutions can uniquely help.
- **Continuing to rely on our grantees as the leaders of this work and as the energy powering the deeper learning movement.**

These findings arrive as I wrap up my eight-year term as the Foundation's Education Program Director. It's been exciting to see the steady progress—made with the contributions of so many partners—over the past few years to reorient schools to a higher bar for learning. I'm thankful for the work of the whole Education team at the Hewlett Foundation (including the past and present program officers, program associates, program fellows, and our other colleagues throughout the building), as well as the work of our grantees and funding partners to realize our vision. All of us continue to consider ways the deeper learning movement can evolve and maintain momentum. There is much more work ahead for all of us to do together.

Barbara Chow
Education Program Director, 2009-2017
The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation
February 2017

Overview

The Hewlett Foundation's Deeper Learning strategy, first funded in 2010, addresses the need for the nation's public education systems to better prepare all young people, particularly those who are often underserved, with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed to succeed today in career and civic life.

The strategy calls for developing more complex and challenging learning activities, designed so that students uncover meaning as they encounter core academic content and work toward mastery of new competencies. Rather than simply memorizing material, students demonstrate learning by applying knowledge to interesting and engaging problems and by using information in new and creative ways, both in and out of the classroom. To move from the status quo toward this ideal, the Foundation organized on several fronts: leveraging research and using policy levers to reset standards; aligning assessment and accountability; and supporting teachers with tools for teaching to the more sophisticated standards.

The Deeper Learning strategy kicked off at a time of significant change within U.S. education policy. While the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation had been in place since 2002, many stakeholders were beginning to suggest that the law had driven schools to emphasize multiple choice tests, rote memorization, and curricula with too much breadth and insufficient depth. By 2010, to counter the low and uneven learning expectations for students, state leaders joined forces to craft the Common Core State Standards—which 47 states ultimately adopted—with the goal of helping students across the nation to become college- and career-ready by the end of high school.

Building on these efforts, the Foundation's strategy prioritizes six interrelated "deeper learning" competencies that all students should be mastering in school.[1] These six competencies were later shown, in a report from the National Research Council, to fit within three broad skill areas that students need to navigate the demands of the 21st century: Cognitive (thinking and reasoning), intrapersonal (self-management to reach goals), and interpersonal (expressing information to others and interpreting others).[2]

From 2010 to 2015, the Foundation's Education Program invested more than $100 million in its Deeper Learning strategy with over 350 grants in four strategy areas (shown in the left most column of Exhibit 2). These areas cover the drivers and capacities for systemic educational change that underpin the Deeper Learning strategy and are theorized to ultimately lead to improved student outcomes.

Five years into the implementation of its Deeper Learning strategy, the Foundation commissioned RTI International

1 For all competencies, the Foundation required that they be measurable, meaningful, and malleable (Hewlett Foundation staff, personal communication, February 2, 2016).

2 National Research Council. (2012). Education for life and work: Developing transferable knowledge and skills in the 21st century. Committee on Defining Deeper Learning and 21st Century Skills, J. W. Pellegrino and M. L. Hilton, Editors, Board on Testing and Assessment and Board on Science Education, Division of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.

Exhibit 1. Deeper Learning Competencies

	National Research Council 21st Century Skills		
	Cognitive (thinking and reasoning)	**Intrapersonal** (self-management to reach goals)	**Interpersonal** (expressing information to others and interpreting others)
Deeper Learning Competencies	**Thinking critically**	**Learning to learn**	**Working collaboratively**
	Mastering rigorous academic content	**Developing academic mindsets**	**Communicating effectively**

to conduct an independent evaluation to answer several questions: What progress has been made in the field of deeper learning? How effective have strategic grantmaking decisions been? Do the assumptions undergirding the Deeper Learning strategy have merit? What next steps should be considered? RTI relied on multiple sources of evidence, including grant reports, grantee surveys, a national teacher survey, prior Hewlett-funded evaluations, and interviews with current and former Foundation staff. The evaluation covers the period from 2010 through the end of 2015. Its analysis and conclusions are summarized in this brief.

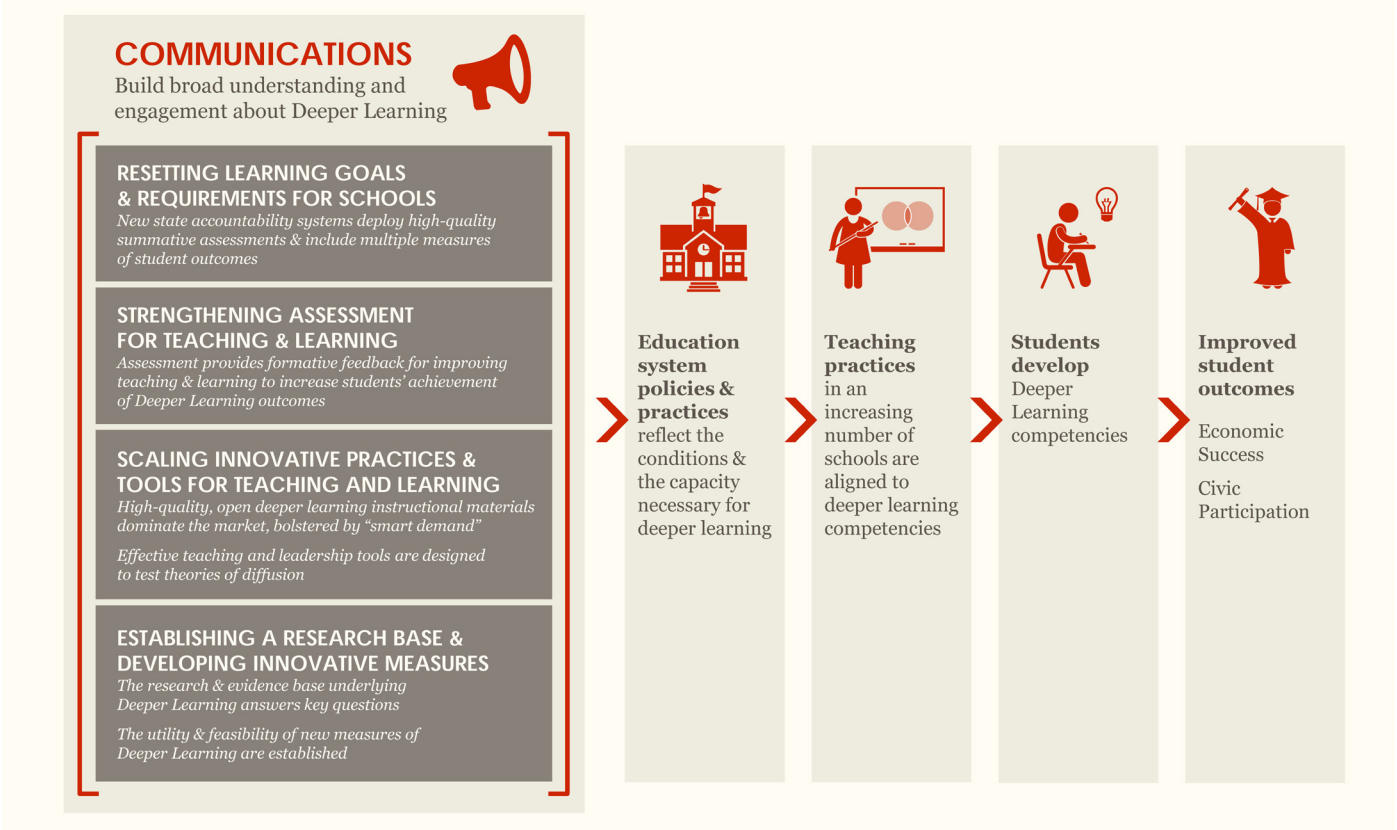
As educational reforms that require shifts in policy and practice likely require decades, not years, to achieve meaningful outcomes, we urge readers to consider the findings from this evaluation to be an early summary of the Deeper Learning strategy's progress. The evaluation offers no single conclusion of success or failure; instead, it is intended to provide information on the strengths and limitations of the strategy, and to suggest strategic refinements to the assumptions and activities that serve the effort to expand deeper learning opportunities to all students.

What progress has been made in the field of deeper learning?

We describe six major accomplishments in the field of deeper learning since the Foundation began its investments:

1 Ahead of schedule, the Foundation met its short-term goal of having 15% of U.S. students assessed on deeper learning metrics.

Exhibit 2. 2015 Hewlett Foundation Deeper Learning Logic Model has four main areas of emphasis that cover both system "drivers" and "capacities"



SOURCE: Hewlett Foundation.

One of the Foundation's key strategies has been to focus on standards, accountability policy, and assessments—elements it regarded as key drivers of systemic educational change. As an initial milestone toward its vision of providing *all students in the United States the knowledge and competencies they need to be successful in 21st century work and civic life,* the Foundation set a goal of having 15 percent of K-12 students assessed on deeper learning competencies by 2017. The Foundation believed that assessments provide a signal to teachers about what is valued in education, and that higher quality assessments can lead to higher quality instruction. Looking forward, the Foundation also set a longer-term goal of having 80 percent of U.S. students in classrooms reflecting instruction that emphasizes deeper learning by 2025.

With the creation and adoption of the Common Core State Standards in English language arts and mathematics beginning in 2009 and 2010, the Foundation saw one major and early opportunity to advance its strategy: if implemented with high quality, these new standards could produce national momentum toward a subset of deeper learning competencies. That conviction led Hewlett to invest heavily in championing the central place of Common Core standards in the curriculum, assessment, and pedagogy of deeper learning schools.

The Foundation also invested in two assessment consortia with national reach—the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) and the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (Smarter Balanced). Both consortia worked to develop "next generation" state assessments with greater focus on problem-solving, writing and critical thinking skills called for by the Common Core and in the deeper learning competencies. Each consortium included a large network of states that committed to using the new assessment in their systems. A national study of the consortia's emerging test designs suggested that summative assessments from both tests "are likely to represent important goals for deeper learning, particularly those related to mastering and being able to apply core academic content and cognitive strategies related to complex thinking, communication, and problem and problem solving."[3]

3 http://www.csai-online.org/resources/road-assessing-deeper-learning-status-smarter-balanced-and-parcc-assessment-consortia

HumRRO's 2016 report found that PARCC and Smarter Balanced, by and large, reflected greater range and depth of cognitive challenges, matched the grade-level expectations of the Common Core, and reflected high expectations for classroom teaching.[4] The Foundation provided early, flexible funding to the consortia with the goal of helping states to build awareness, to support state policymakers and advocates, and to contend with implementation issues.

At the start of the 2015-16 school year, analysis showed that over 43% of students taking state tests (grades 3-8 and one grade in high school) were in a state using a high-quality assessment, including 3.8 million students in PARCC states and 6.1 million in Smarter Balanced states.[5] Exhibit 3 shows the 23 states and DC that administered PARCC or Smarter Balanced during the 2015-16 school year. Eight states and DC administered PARCC and 15 states administered Smarter Balanced.

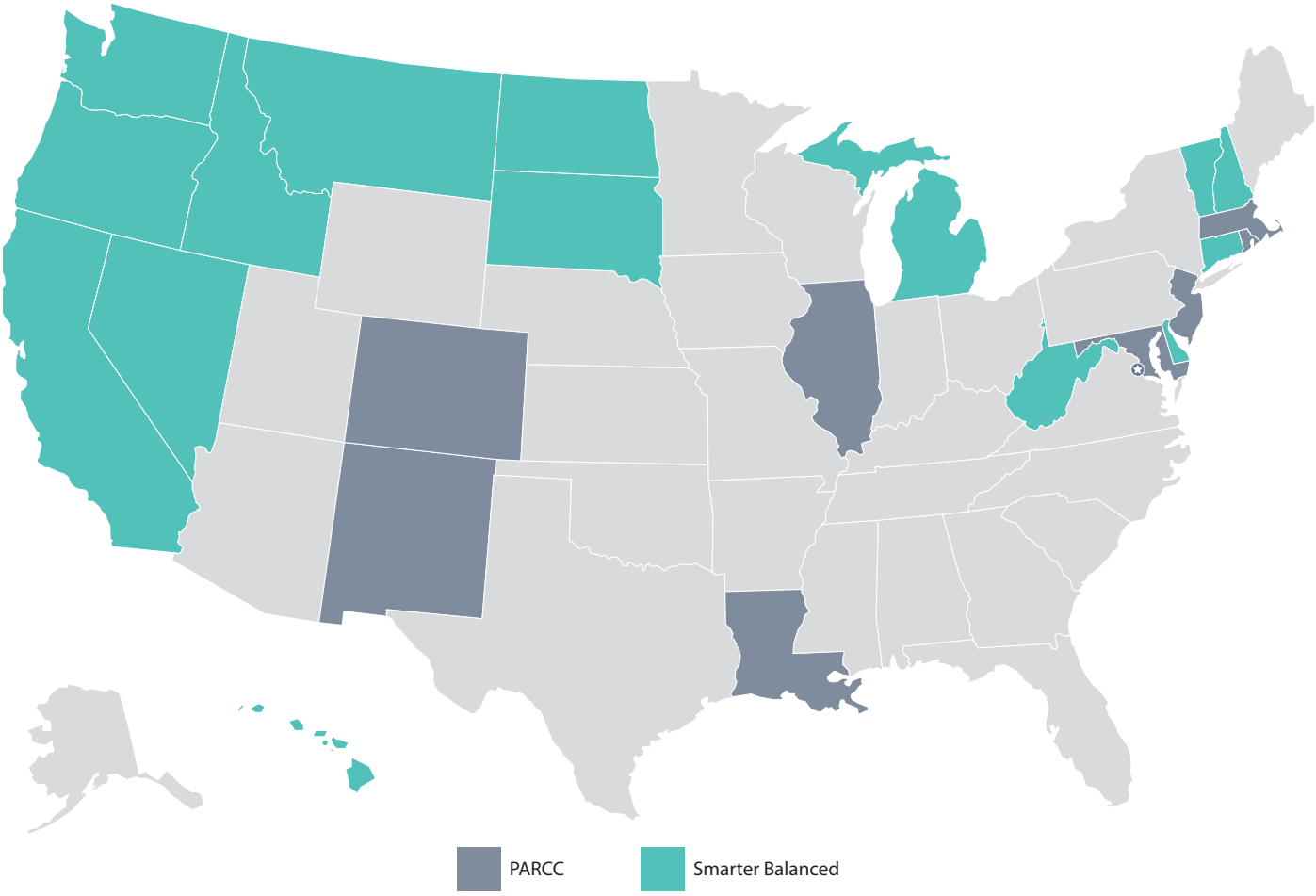
2 New assessments now measure some—but not all—of the six deeper learning competencies. The Foundation has made and is planning additional significant investments to help educators and policymakers assess additional deeper learning competencies that aren't currently measured well at scale.

Foundation staff recognized the limitations of using only large-scale standardized assessments as the marker of the initiative's progress. They saw the critical need to better measure the remaining competencies: effective (oral) communication, working collaboratively, directing one's own learning, and developing an academic mindset. A comprehensive set of measures for all competencies is necessary to track progress towards the Deeper Learning strategy goals. Consistent with the Foundation's assumption that accountability policies and high-quality assessments drive classroom instruction, the Foundation's

4 http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/curriculum/2016/02/parcc_smarter_balanced_assessments_score_well.html; Fordham Institute review (grades 3 and 8 tests) at https://edexcellence.net/publications/evaluating-the-content-and-quality-of-next-generation-assessments; HumRRO review (high school tests) at https://humrro.org/corpsite/press-release/next-generation-high-school-assessments

5 Education First analysis of State Education Agency websites; Education Week, "The National K-12 Testing Landscape," (2015), http://www.edweek.org/ew/section/multimedia/map-the-national-k-12-testing-landscape.html

Exhibit 3. Twenty-three states and D.C. administered PARCC and Smarter Balanced Assessments in 2015-16



SOURCE: Education First analysis of State Education Agency websites; Education Week, "The National K-12 Testing Landscape," (2015), http://www.edweek.org/ew/section/multimedia/map-the-national-k-12-testing-landscape.html

program team also believes that student progress on these other competences should be included in school accountability frameworks encourage school communities to prioritize them. The Foundation is investing in research and development activities related to measuring these competencies and is coordinating with other public and private funders interested in this area. These investments can provide needed resources to support research, but the investments also promise to position the Foundation as a leader in advancing hard-to-measure concepts that are critically important in education.

3 Educators across the country are increasingly recognizing and emphasizing deeper learning competencies in their practice.

In 2016, information gathered from a national sample U.S. teachers[6] demonstrated considerable and increasing activity in U.S. classrooms that is consistent with deeper learning competencies.

6 The RAND Corporation administers the American Teacher Panel (ATP) survey to a panel of public school teachers. For more information, see http://www.rand.org/education/projects/atp-aslp.html.

1. **Professional development:** When asked whether their professional development placed emphasis on various deeper learning competencies, between 52% and 79% of teachers reported they were at least moderately emphasized (Exhibit 4).

2. **Classroom practice:** Considering their own classroom practice, between 41% and 52% of teachers reported that they emphasized various deeper learning competencies more in the current school year than in the previous one (Exhibit 5).

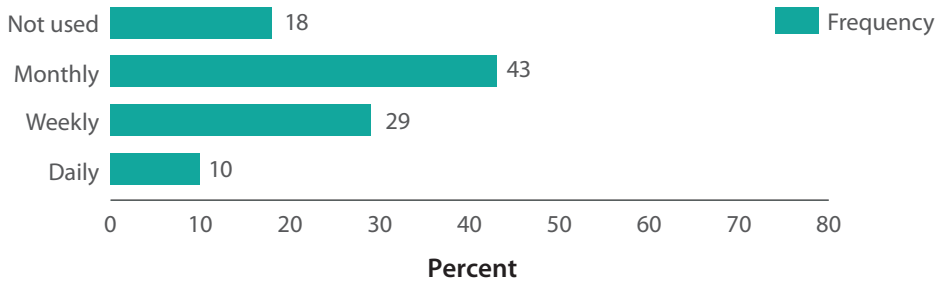
3. **Performance assessments:** Deeper learning can be measured through teachers' use of performance assessments, which gauge student progress by allowing "students to demonstrate their abilities to design and conduct investigations, solve complex problems, and communicate in a variety of ways."[7] About half of surveyed teachers reported that their professional development placed either a moderate or high emphasis on the use of performance assessments, and approximately 80 percent

7 Conley, D.T., & Darling-Hammond, L. (2013). Creating systems of assessment for deeper learning. Stanford, CA: Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education. Available at https://edpolicy.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/publications/creating-systems-assessment-deeper-learning_0.pdf

Exhibit 4. Teacher Reports of Professional Development Emphasis on Deeper Learning Competencies

Exhibit 5. Teacher Reports of Increased Emphasis on Deeper Learning Competencies in their Classroom Compared to Prior School Year

Exhibit 6. Teacher Reports of Frequency of Performance Assessment Use



SOURCE: American Teacher Panel Survey.

of teachers reported at least monthly use of performance assessments, with about 40 percent reporting daily or weekly use (Exhibit 6).

4 Some states have started putting in place deeper learning "system drivers" such as high-quality assessments and aligned accountability policies, but adopting a comprehensive set of the deeper learning policies remains a challenge.

As part of its strategy to support state policy-leaders in learning about and implementing a range of policies that could support deeper learning practices in schools, the Foundation invested in the Council of Chief State School Officer's Innovation Laboratory Network (ILN). Among other activities, the ILN focuses on developing capacity in 12 member states to implement assessments that measure the full range of deeper learning competencies through targeted technical assistance. Although not representative of progress across all 50 states, the experiences of the 12 ILN states offer insight into the successes and challenges of advancing deeper learning-aligned practices when provided external supports.

The ILN has been successful in assisting the network states to develop policies and encourage local districts to incorporate deeper learning competencies in classroom practice.[8] All ILN states focused on college and career readiness, many had plans for implementing performance-based assessments, and most states implemented changes to their accountability systems to emphasize college and career readiness. The ILN also contributed to several critical policy successes such as greater use of performance assessments at both the local and state level in a number of places, including New Hampshire, Virginia and Kentucky. Yet even with these resources, progress toward a set of comprehensive deeper learning drivers backed by legislative or other policy support among ILN states varied, due in part to challenging political contexts, shifts in state and local leadership, and limited capacity.

5 The Foundation has started transitioning from a primary focus on research, policy and "system drivers" that characterized the early years of its grantmaking strategy to one that now is seeking ways to strengthen teaching and scale deeper learning.

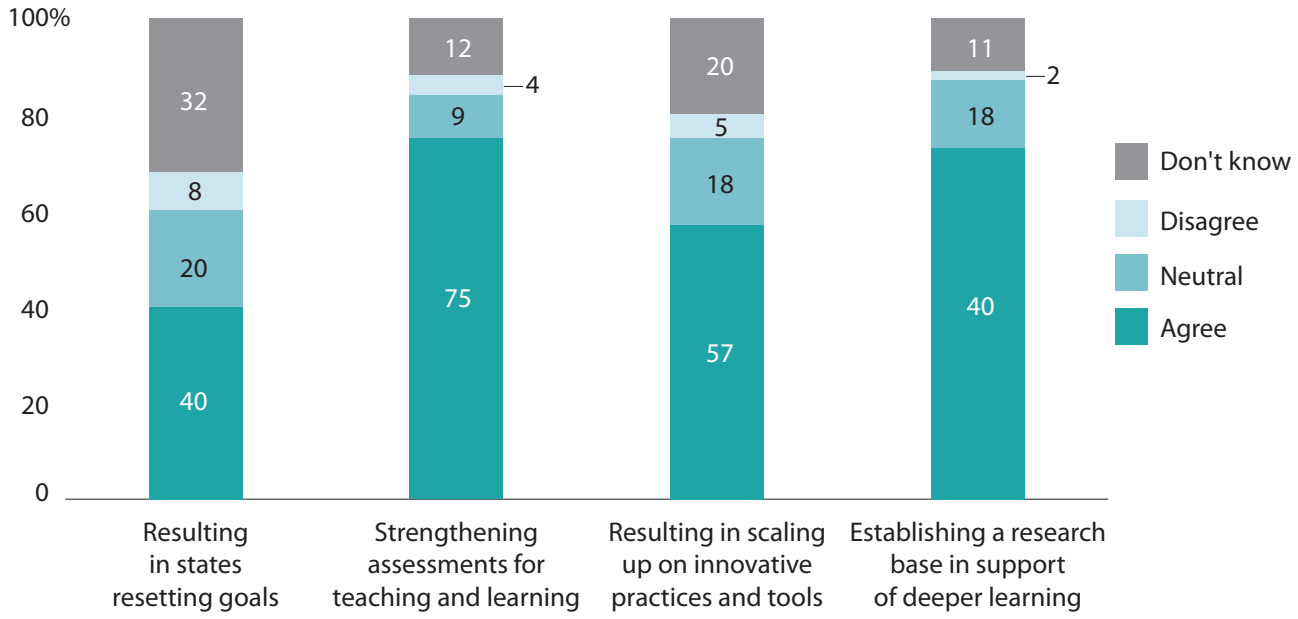
In 2012, a report from the National Research Council wrote that "Deeper Learning can be supported through teaching practices that create a positive learning community in which students gain content knowledge and also develop intrapersonal and interpersonal competencies."[9] The report recommended increased emphasis on the development of innovative curricular materials that integrate learning across cognitive and non-cognitive domains and teacher preparation and professional development that provide active learning opportunities, interaction with colleagues in communities of practice, ongoing work with mentors, and practice-based settings.

In response to these and other calls to address teaching practices and materials to support schools and classrooms in meeting the new, higher expectations, the Foundation increased spending on innovative practices and tools for teaching in 2014 and 2015. According to grantees, the Foundation's efforts in funding these areas have proved beneficial. Grantees were asked whether the Foundation's emphasis in deeper learning has resulted in progress in the four key strategy areas. Seventy-five percent of responding grantees agreed that the Foundation's deeper learning emphasis has strengthened assessments for teaching and learning and 73 percent agreed that progress had been made in scaling up innovative practices and tools (Exhibit 7).

8 Warkentien, S., Charles, K., Knapp, L., & Silver, D. (2016). Innovation Lab Network. Summary of evaluation findings. Research Triangle Park, NC: RTI International

9 National Research Council. (2012). Education for life and work: Developing transferable knowledge and skills in the 21st century. Committee on Defining Deeper Learning and 21st Century Skills, J. W. Pellegrino and M. L. Hilton, Editors, Board on Testing and Assessment and Board on Science Education, Division of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.

Exhibit 7. Survey Grantees Agreement that Deeper Learning Emphasis Has Resulted in Progress in key Deeper Learning strategy areas



SOURCE: 2016 RTI Deeper Learning Survey.

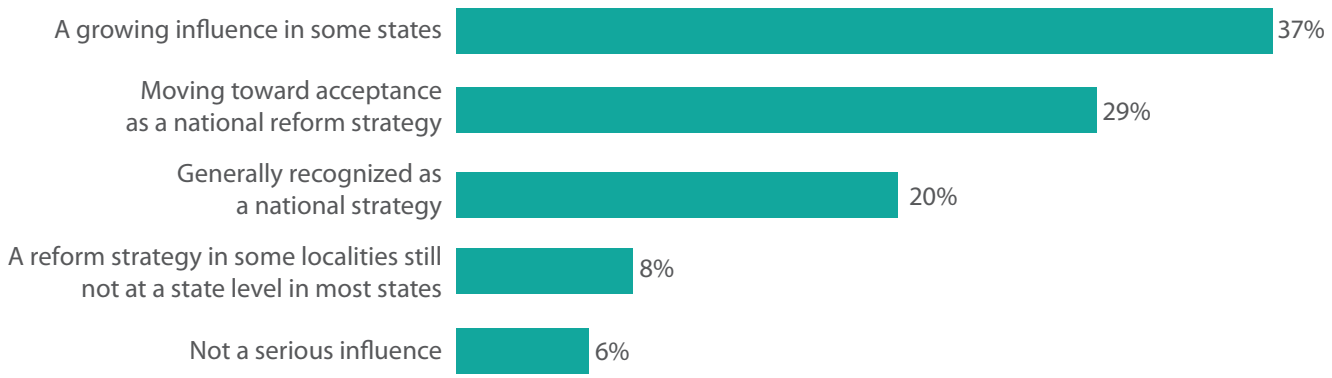
6 Many grantees are optimistic about the promise of the deeper learning movement to influence K-12 education.

Grantees working across the four Deeper Learning strategy areas can provide a snapshot of their perceptions of whether deeper learning efforts are influencing public education. Although the views of grantees who work closely with the initiative may differ from educators, parents, or the general public, the strategy is unlikely to be successful without buy-in from these leaders in the field.

Grantees are generally positive about the Deeper Learning strategy's progress. As shown in Exhibit 8, nearly half think of deeper learning as moving towards or having achieved the status of a nationally-recognized reform. Another 45% see it as having gained traction in states or localities. Just 6 percent of grantees reported that they felt deeper learning was not a serious influence.[10]

10 Percentages exclude the 13.6% of respondents overall who were "not sure" about the impact of deeper learning.

Exhibit 8. Impact of Deeper Learning As Perceived by Grantees



Source: 2016 RTI Deeper Learning Survey.

How effective have key Foundation strategies been?

Many of the Foundation's Deeper Learning strategies contributed to progress in the field of deeper learning between 2010 and 2015. We cannot quantify the unique contribution of Foundation's efforts, but it is undeniable that their vision and funding have affected change. For instance, one key strategy decision was to focus on the standards, accountability policy, and assessments—elements the Foundation regarded as key drivers of educational change. Hewlett's investment in this area made them a central contributor to championing the Common Core State Standards and aligned assessments. As one program officer notes "I think that's probably the biggest contribution. Hewlett has become a major player in promoting and preserving the Common Core and advancing its implementation."

But the progress made in the field of deeper learning is affected not only by funding strategies, but also by their organizational strategies. This section focuses on the extent to which one of the Foundation's key organizational strategies—the grouping of grantees into clusters—has been effective.

Grantees: Influential Individually, More Powerful Together

Through its grantmaking, Hewlett has assembled and mobilized a powerful group of advocates for change. Most grantees have a clear understanding of the Deeper Learning logic model (Exhibit 9). Roughly one third understand the entire logic model well, another third understand the part of the logic model that relates to their work, and virtually all understand it in at least general terms. So while not all grantees have a firm grasp on all elements of the logic model, there is a fairly strong foundation for aligned efforts.

Grantees' current awareness of the logic model likely reflects the Foundation's efforts to improve this aspect of their work. In 2014, in an effort to improve grantee awareness of the broad strategy goals and increase participation in goal-setting, and in a marked shift from "business as usual" in which the Foundation set the strategy goals, the staff reorganized the Deeper Learning grantees into "clusters" (groups of grantees focusing on similar goals). The Foundation set aside money to fund cluster activities and to promote self-monitoring and collaboration within clusters. Although coordination among grantees has been a challenge at times, most grantees recently reported valuable collaboration with other grantees, which appears to have played a role in advancing the work of individual grantees (Exhibit 10). Surveyed grantees reported that collaboration

Exhibit 9. Percent of Grantees' Who Strongly Agreed or Agreed with Statements about their Understanding of the Deeper Learning Logic Model

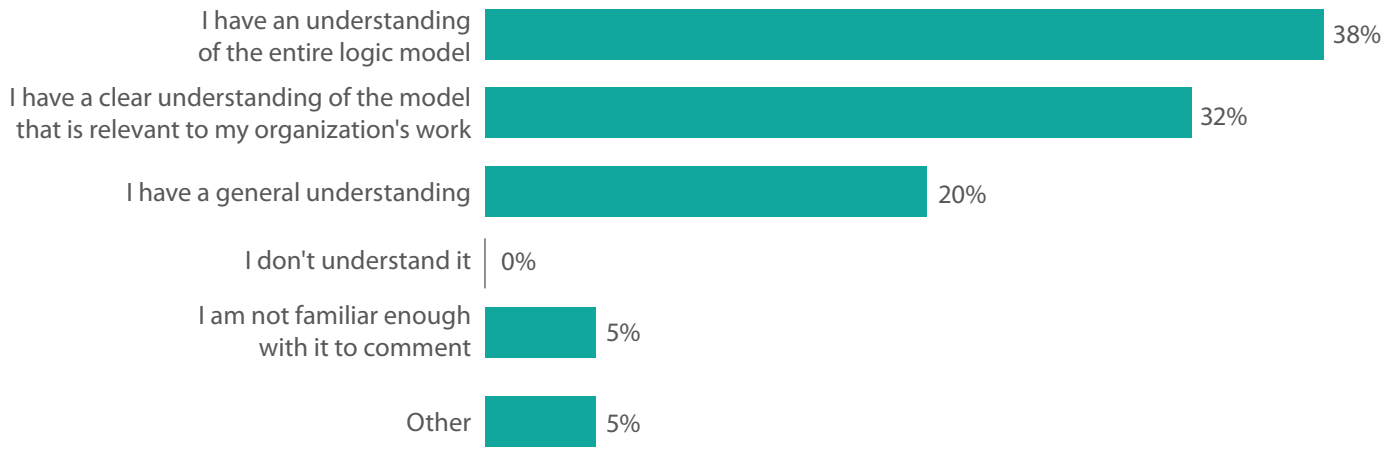
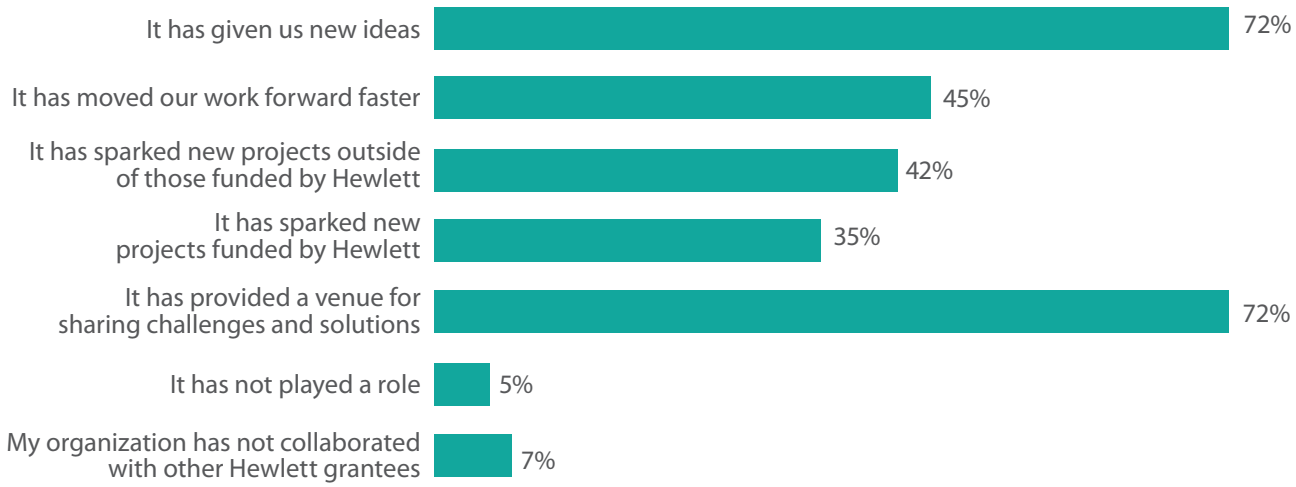


Exhibit 10. Percent of Grantees Reporting the Effects of Grantee Collaboration on Reaching Deeper Learning Goals



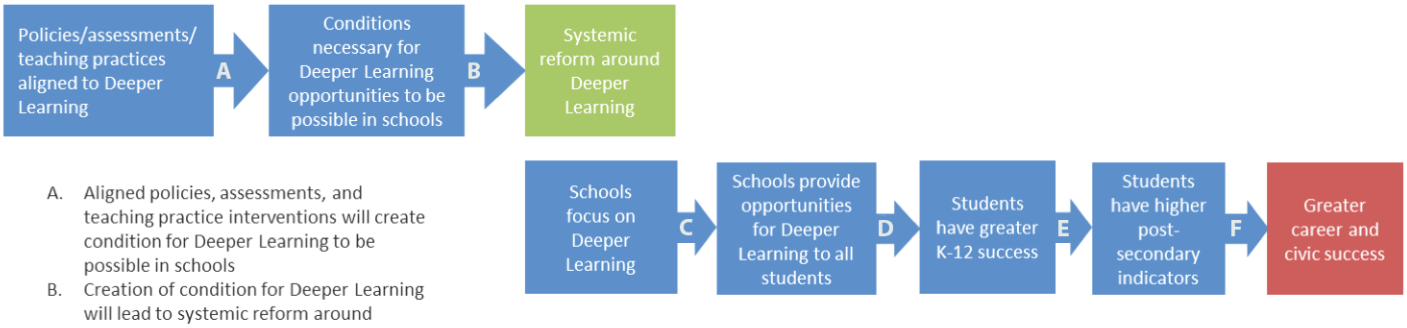
had provided a venue for sharing challenges and solutions (72%), and had given their organization new ideas (72%). In addition, 45 percent responded that such collaboration had moved their deeper learning work forward faster.

There is little reason to believe that an expectation for grantees to operate in lockstep would be productive, since one of the strengths of the network is its diversity. The evaluation suggests that the most effective approach in this context is to facilitate collaboration when possible and to use reporting and goal setting in the grant-making process to ensure emphasis on deeper learning outcomes.

What have we learned about the Foundation's key strategic assumptions?

The Foundation's Deeper Learning strategy was premised on a series of assumptions: policies, assessments, and teaching aligned to deeper learning will lead to systemic reforms, providing more students with deeper learning opportunities in schools that better prepare them for success in K-12 and beyond.

Exhibit 11. Deeper Learning Key Strategic Assumptions



A. Aligned policies, assessments, and teaching practice interventions will create condition for Deeper Learning to be possible in schools
B. Creation of condition for Deeper Learning will lead to systemic reform around Deeper Learning

C. Schools that are focused on Deeper learning provide greater learning opportunities for all students to develop Deeper learning competencies
D. Those Deeper Learning opportunities to learn will improve students' overall K-12 academic achievement
E. In the short term, Deeper Learning outcomes will improve college enrollment, persistence, and attainment, which are powerful indicators of long-term earnings, health, and more
F. In the long-term, Deeper Learning outcomes will increase student success beyond formal education, into careers and civic life

SOURCE: Hewlett Foundation.

Drivers of Systemic Change

Policies, assessments, and tools aligned to deeper learning will lead to deeper learning opportunities in schools, and then to systemic reform around deeper learning. Although this is the Foundation's most basic assumption, it is also the most challenging to assess given the time it takes to engage policymakers, enact policy, and implement assessments at scale. As deeper learning policies continue to gain traction, more research is needed – particularly with respect to the question of how policy and deeper learning assessment lead to systemic changes in classroom practice, pedagogy, and student learning. This evaluation found correlational evidence that demonstrated positive trends supporting a causal link, but the evidence remains thin. An in-depth study of policy wins could shed much-needed light on whether and how accountability policies provide students with deeper learning opportunities in the classroom.

Benefits of Deeper Learning

The evidence to support assumptions around the benefits of deeper learning comes primarily from the American Institutes for Research's (AIR) study of the Foundation's Deeper Learning Network (DLN) schools. AIR conducted a multi-year study of the impact of attending DLN schools on student outcomes. The Deeper Learning Network includes networks of schools the Foundation identified early in its strategy that were committed to teaching practices (such as project-based learning, portfolio assessments, and internship opportunities) that seemed likely to advance deeper learning by their students. The AIR analysis focused on twenty high schools across ten school networks[11] and compared the opportunities for deeper learning, high school achievement, and postsecondary outcomes in these schools to those at twelve comparison high schools.[12]

Researchers found:

1. Schools that focus on deeper learning provide greater opportunities for all students to develop the six key competencies. Overall, Deeper Learning Network schools employed strategies such as project-based learning and collaborative learning opportunities more often than comparison schools.

2. Deeper learning opportunities improve students' overall academic achievement. Students who attended DLN schools had higher OECD PISA-based Test for Schools scores and were more likely to graduate from high school on time.

3. In the short term, deeper learning opportunities in high school appear to improve college enrollment. Students attending network schools more often enrolled in postsecondary institutions overall, and more often enrolled in four-year programs and selective institutions than their peers in non-network schools.

The final assumption is that in the long term, deeper learning outcomes will increase student success beyond formal education, in the context of career and civic life. Long term outcomes may not be known for many more years, but there is evidence from prior research that postsecondary success leads to better labor market outcomes and a more engaged civic life.[13] Investments that promote the conditions, policies, and practices that get the most students into and through postsecondary education will likely contribute to improvements in career and civic success.

What are Promising Next Steps?

From this review and the progress made so far, we have identified several promising next steps the Foundation could take to continue advancing the deeper learning movement and the institutionalization of policies and practices to sustain deeper learning in schools.

11 Networks Participating in the Hewlett Foundation's Deeper Learning Community of Practice: Asia Society – http://asiasociety.org/international-studies-schools-network; Big Picture Learning – http://www.bigpicture.org/; ConnectEd – http://www.connectedcalifornia.org/; EdVisions Schools – http://www.edvisions.com/; Envision Schools – http://www.envisionschools.org/; Expeditionary Learning – http://elschools.org/; High Tech High – http://www.hightechhigh.org/; Internationals Network for Public Schools – http://internationalsnps.org/; New Tech Network – http://www.newtechnetwork.org/; New Visions for Public Schools – http://www.newvisions.org/

12 See http://www.air.org/project/study-deeper-learning-opportunities-and-outcomes to view all of the Deeper Learning Network reports from AIR.

13 See, e.g., Baum, S., Ma, J., & Payea, K. (2013). Education pays 2013. The College Board. Available at https://trends.collegeboard.org/sites/default/files/education-pays-2013-full-report.pdf

"Trust them to carry the work forward"

The findings from this evaluation suggest that the Foundation's Deeper Learning strategy is not in need of a major shift. In fact, some stakeholders likened the progress resulting from the Foundation's investments to making it three-quarters of the way down a football field, with more of the same investments needed to reach the goal line. As one former program officer noted, "You've got all this momentum and capacity you've built. Just let it play out. Even if you're not actively directing it, just pick your most effective, most brilliant grantees, and then trust them to just carry the work forward."

The Foundation has gathered a creative, connected, and diverse group of deeper learning advocates—researchers, practitioners, policymakers, and conveners—some of whom have been contributing to the field of education in ways consistent with deeper learning for much longer than five years. Although the Foundation helped to guide early work, more established grantees may have the capacity to continue efforts to ensure that momentum is not lost.

Moving toward a known and accepted definition of deeper learning

One issue that continually surfaced during the evaluation was a desire among advocates of the Foundation's strategy to have a universally known and accepted definition of "deeper learning." To that end, we recommend clarifying the concept of the term. Although the Foundation made a calculated decision not to force a particular pedagogy or brand of deeper learning on its grantees and the stakeholders with which they work and communicate, we suggest the Foundation may be able to strengthen the movement in two ways:

1. Supporting a high-quality communications campaign to publicize the competencies and measures that define deeper learning. The decision not to overdo the "deeper learning" branding has helped to create a context in which the science behind the learning concepts can stand apart from the Foundation's strategy. The tradeoff is that messaging to educators must be more sophisticated and more detailed if the concepts are to permeate the field in the way that the Deeper Learning strategy intends.

2. Accelerating its work in support of valid and reliable measurement of all deeper learning competencies, and giving names to the measures and categorizing them by competency so that the field uses common language in reference to them.

Expanding capacity-building efforts that are already underway

Numerous stakeholders identified technical assistance for classroom practice as the most critical next step to ensure the success of deeper learning reforms. For the Deeper Learning strategy to have a widespread impact on students at the classroom level, the Foundation should continue to explore options for increasing the ways it can support the work of local educators. Although Foundation staff are mindful that large-scale teacher professional development would require more resources than the Foundation has available, the Foundation has an opportunity to build on the teacher capacity work it has begun, potentially by leveraging existing networks and funding a single wide-reaching capacity-building effort.

For instance, the Foundation could consider further supporting the use of formative assessment as an instructional tool and the training of teachers to design lessons and curriculum that are aligned with the deeper learning competencies, so that the education system can deliver on the promise of deeper learning. These efforts have already begun through the Assessment for Learning Project.[14] Successes with capacity-building efforts at the classroom level by some Deeper Learning grantees, including New Hampshire's PACE project, suggest viable ways of dramatically expanding these efforts within states and school networks. Our recommendation is to target a single, wide-reaching effort for additional, significant investment. Leveraging existing networks, including low-cost technical assistance partners such as the Regional Education Laboratories, offer one model.

14 https://www.assessmentforlearningproject.org/

Continuing to build the research base

Our findings suggest that expanding the research base would be useful in an era of increased focus on evidence-based policymaking. While the evaluation found some evidence to support most of the strategic assumptions, more research is needed. We would prioritize addressing the question of how policy and deeper learning assessment affect changes in classroom practice and student learning. The Foundation-commissioned study of Deeper Learning Network schools provided initial evidence that opportunities for deeper learning lead to improved academic achievement and better postsecondary enrollment outcomes. Future studies should expand beyond a select network of schools to investigate the impact of deeper learning on outcomes for a broader student population. In addition, future research should examine whether and how the policy advances that the Foundation has advocated have actually helped to generate the conditions for deeper learning within schools, for all students.

Conclusion

In 2010, the Hewlett Foundation's began funding an ambitious agenda with the ultimate goal of having U.S. students equipped with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions required to succeed in the labor market and in civic life in the 21st century.

Between 2010 and 2015—a relatively short period to accomplish educational reform objectives—the Foundation made considerable progress in several key areas. First, it met the initial goal of having 15 percent of public school students assessed on deeper learning competencies, and accomplished this two years ahead of schedule. Although the new Common Core assessments (PARCC and Smarter Balanced) only assess a portion of the six deeper learning competencies, the Foundation has made significant investments toward measuring and assessing the remaining competencies. Many of the system drivers from assessment to new accountability policies are now in place, in part due to the Foundation's investments. And while only a handful of states have adopted a comprehensive set of deeper learning-aligned accountability policies and assessments, many states, particularly the ILN states, are poised to do so with continued support. Finally, many more deeper-learning-aligned resources are available today, as a direct result of the Foundation's investment in instructional and assessment materials.

The metaphor of moving toward the goal line on a football field may be apt in this situation. The Foundation has successfully gotten key players on the field by mobilizing a core group of creative and powerful advocates of deeper learning. In addition, the Foundation's targeted investments—starting with the policy and assessment activities believed to drive all subsequent changes—have successfully moved many closer to the goal line. Although not all strategies have reached the goals, most strategies are moving in the right direction. Ending the game now, or changing the rules of the game substantially, would do a disservice to the efforts and progress already in motion.

Implementing lasting changes to the education system is challenging and requires long-term investment. The progress made as part of the Deeper Learning strategy is positive and promising for such a young initiative. Five years in, the Foundation has set the stage to increase deeper learning opportunities for students. Continued investment, communication, and mobilization of grantees—alongside the patience to let efforts play out over time—will be required to realize widespread deeper learning opportunities for all students.

For additional information on the Hewlett Foundation's strategy, visit:
http://www.hewlett.org/strategy/deeper-learning/