



Moving Forward with High School Redesign program review 2016

Beyond the Carnegie Unit

Authors: Sturgis, Chris

Competency Works | Learning from the Cutting Edge

[LINK](#)

- Challenges the report “[The Carnegie Unit: A Century-Old Standard in a Changing Education Landscape](#)” by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (CFAT)
 - Notes contrasts between a system to engage students deeply in learning in a competency-based environment where schools claim responsibility for ensuring that students learn, to the Carnegie Unit, in which we only promise exposure to a topic.
 - Says we can’t wait for think tanks or policymakers to lead the way to a personalized system. Instead they are creating a new personalized system of education piece by piece.
 - The CU is rarely a barrier, with the exception of financial aid and getting the full benefit from online learning, but neither is it a valuable unit of learning.
 - Notes three major problems with the report in regard to the K12 public education system.
 1. It fails to ask, “What is the impact on students?”
 2. They claim that although not designed to do so, the CU has value as an opportunity-to-learn standard – without a full analysis regarding whether it is really needed.
 3. It doesn’t help us move forward.
- Main Concerns with the report:
- Does not address, “*What is in the best interest of kids?*” It’s all about making decisions that are student-centered and then figuring out how to manage the adult issues that arise.
 - The report seems to suggest that online and blended learning is a reform that can be stopped rather than a broad societal change.
 - They encourage us to be cautious – indicating these reforms might not work – rather than asking:
 1. What will make them work?
 2. What type of research is needed?
 3. And what type of system needs to be in place to make it so?
- CFAT is very focused on the efficiency of the system vs delivering what students need.
 - The CU has contributed to the loss of millions of dollars in funding when schools are forced to offer full course credit recovery.
 - Rather than directing resources to the specific areas where students need help, students must repeat another 120 hours, in the same subject to the same thing in the same way.
 - Although the CU was not designed as a way to ensure equity, CFAT points out that: *No less importantly, the Carnegie Unit has, since its inception, helped to ensure that the vast majority of the nation’s students, regardless of their backgrounds or the institutions they attend, receive the same number of instructional hours in high school and college courses – supplying an often-undervalued component of equal educational opportunity in American education.* and
 - *...continues to provide a valuable opportunity-to-learn standard for students in both higher education and K-12 education, where inequitable resources and variable quality are more the rule than the exception.*
 - The authors asks, “If we didn’t have the CU as a guardian of instructional time, what would happen?”
 - We already have rules that impact schools:
 - kids need to go to school
 - age attendance requirements,
 - number of days or hours that schools need open, and
 - number of minutes of instruction in a day.
 - who can teach,
 - what it means to be a highly qualified teacher,
 - accountability tests (i.e. DIPs and PaTs), and
 - Common Core (i.e. Program of Studies).
 - With all these other mechanisms in place, do we also need the CU?
 - What are the key mechanisms we need in place in a personalized system to ensure equity?
 - Competency-based structures
 - a personalized system from the ground up – in schools, districts, and up

When reviewing the Carnegie Unit, consider your task as the re-engineering of the system rather than a review of one piece of it in isolation:

1. Deconstruction of the Standardized System:
 - We need a formal deconstruction of the role the CU plays in both sectors, but most importantly in higher education.
 - The Carnegie Unit credit is involved with budgeting – how accurate is it as tool for managing costs and deploying resources, especially in the context of online learning?
2. Outline the Personalized System as Currently Developing.
 - Already know many of the elements of the personalized system:
 - student-centered with an emphasis on student agency,
 - transparent standards (or competencies) with calibrated understanding of proficiency,
 - expanded learning (anywhere, time, and/or place),
 - adequate supports,
 - standards-referenced grading,
 - an emphasis on developing higher order skills, and
 - teachers who are facilitators of learning armed with highly developed assessment literacy.
3. Start Asking What is Possible:
 - Draw on the most creative business minds to help us look past our assumptions about how educational organizations need to operate.
 - If we didn't have a Carnegie Unit to estimate budgets, what else might we use?
 - For example, let's take a look at calibration as an important element in a personalized system. At this point in the development of a competency-based system, educators are working together to calibrate their understanding of proficiency. It's a critical step for building capacity internally, as well as ensuring that credits in fact indicate that students have learned. The next step will be to develop ways to do this more systematically. Technology will certainly play a critical role. Just imagine – an app that teachers could use to help them in determining what proficiency looks like, pointing out a few questions to ask to help them build confidence in their assessment, and perhaps suggests places where students often have trouble regarding that specific skill. Or perhaps what we will see is students themselves using such an app.

Those who are going to create the future education system are our practitioners – the teachers, principals, district staff, and state education agency staff who are doing the work, never wavering from the mantra – we are going to do what is best for our kids.

OTHER READING RESOURCES

[The Carnegie Unit: A Century-Old Standard in a Changing Education Landscape](#)

“The Carnegie Unit: A Century-Old Standard in a Changing Education Landscape” describes how the Carnegie Unit’s time-based standard of student progress came to define the design and delivery of American education. The result of a two-year study, the report examines the history of the influential, century-old Carnegie Unit and its impact on education reform in K-12 and higher education.

[Two Sides of the Same Coin: Competency-Based Education and Student Learning Objectives](#)

We are in the midst of two major reform initiatives occupying the attention of school district leaders throughout the country.

NOTES