

EDUCATION DAILY®

The education community's independent daily news service

CAREER EDUCATION

Obama proposal offers hope for CTE, dual enrollment

\$12B initiative could align high school, postsecondary requirements

By James Michael Brodie

President Obama earned high marks from a pair of career and technical education advocacy groups for his proposal to expand course offerings and dual enrollment programs at high schools and universities.

The American Graduation Initiative, unveiled Tuesday by the Obama administration, would also promote the transfer of credit among colleges and align graduation and entrance requirements of high schools, community colleges, and four-year colleges and universities.

The plan calls for an investment of \$12 billion in community colleges to help 5 million more students graduate by 2020.

The American Graduation Initiative includes \$2.5 billion for construction and renovation at the nation's community colleges, \$500 million to develop new online courses, and \$9 billion for "challenge grants" aimed at spurring innovation at the colleges.

Key provisions of the plan that intrigue CTE proponents include:

- Creating a Community College Challenge Fund to help community colleges and states innovate and expand proven reforms. The colleges would be encouraged to work with businesses, offer dual enrollment courses in high schools and universities, and improve remedial and adult education programs.
- Creating an online skills laboratory with the departments of Defense, Education and Labor, which would make online courses available through one or more community colleges and through the Defense Department's distributed learning network. The plan also includes finding ways to award academic credit based on achievement rather than class hours.

Janet Bray, executive director of the Association for Career and Technical Education, said she hopes

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UNIFORM STANDARDS

Coalition: Universal design could improve outcomes

By Mark W. Sherman

In architecture, universal design means building facilities in a way that makes them accessible to people with a wide range of needs.

Now, three dozen groups have teamed up to promote the same concept in education, asserting that students with disabilities, English-language learners, and any number of other students would benefit from a fundamental shift in how classrooms are run.

Most curricula are "designed for the middle of the class, and then the burden is on the teachers to take that ... curriculum and try to make it work for whoever's in the class," said Ricki Sabia, associate director of the National Down Syndrome Society's National Policy Center and chair of the National Universal Design for Learning Task Force.

UDL is gaining force because of demographic changes that have brought children from many more nationalities to the classroom as well as the growing popularity of approaches like response to intervention, Sabia said.

RTI involves working with students at the first sign of academic or behavioral trouble using techniques of increasing intensity.

The combination of these trends and NCLB's focus on making sure all children reach proficiency in reading and math has led educators to adopt

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UDL does not mean lowering expectations, advocates say

Proponents of universal design for learning often cite the example of a child who understands a topic well but would have difficulty putting what she knows in writing.

Let such a student stand up in class and discuss, say, the origins of the Civil War instead of writing an essay, they say.

But that does not mean students shouldn't learn how to put their thoughts on paper, said Myrna Mandlawitz, policy director for the Learning Disabilities Association of America and a participant in the National UDL Task Force.

The intent of UDL "is absolutely not to dumb down anything," she said. "If anything, it is to make sure that when kids graduate high school, that it means something."

Historically, Mandlawitz said, "kids were referred to special ed because there was no other avenue in

general ed" when problems arose.

In contrast, she said, teachers who use UDL try to make the general ed classroom a place where all students can thrive. And that means making sure "that kids are really learning, rather than just floating through space," she said.

Employing UDL is the only way to meet the challenge posed by NCLB, according to Ricki Sabia, chair of the task force and associate director of the National Down Syndrome Society's National Policy Center.

NCLB requires schools to test all students in reading and math and make sure all subgroups, including students with disabilities, reach proficiency.

School officials "are looking at them, they're expecting proficiency," she said. The question is how to reach that goal while "keeping the rigor high."

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a wider array of teaching methods, give students more than one way to show what they know, and look for new ways to keep students engaged — the three components of UDL, Sabia said.

"Kids aren't getting it, not just kids with disabilities," she said, citing the example of her own son. "If he is really lost, so are about 10 other kids who don't have IEPs."

In 2008, NDSS and other groups succeeded in adding UDL provisions to the Higher Education Act, starting with a definition.

Provisions of UDL

UDL "provides flexibility in the ways information is presented, in the ways students respond or demonstrate knowledge and skills, and in the ways students are engaged; and reduces barriers in instruction, provides appropriate accommodations, supports, and challenges, and maintains high achievement expectations for all students, including students with disabilities and students who are limited English proficient," the law says.

Other provisions say teacher preparation programs should emphasize UDL so that general education teachers can "more effectively educate" students with disabilities, but also because such techniques are useful with all students.

Now, the task force is looking to add similar

UDL language to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which is overdue for reauthorization.

"What we're hoping to accomplish by all this is that when people are ... designing the curriculum, when people are doing professional development, when people are making choices about materials and textbooks, that they will consider the needs of all students," Sabia said.

It is a principle around which people who might otherwise disagree about education policy can find common ground, she added.

That's why the task force membership is so broad, she said. It includes the Council of Chief State School Officers, the National School Boards Association, the Council for Exceptional Children, and the National Association of State Directors of Special Education, as well as the American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association.

The task force has given these and other groups "an opportunity to interact where some of these groups don't interact that well or that often," agreed Myrna Mandlawitz, policy director for the Learning Disabilities Association of America.

The task force's breadth also shows that UDL is for all students, not just those with disabilities or other classic needs, Mandlawitz said.

"I was a general education teacher, and I can tell you that every kid in the classroom needed a special technique," she said.



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Study: Schools must move to 'mass customization' model

Advocates establishment of innovation fund through ESEA reauthorization

By Frank Wolfe

To harness technology and improve the academic achievement of students, the federal government must help states and localities move to a "mass customization" model of education that puts students, not adults, at the center of learning, according to a new study published by the Information Technology & Innovation Foundation.

The existing "mass production" K-12 model of teacher-driven instruction, note memorization, and standardized tests serves to disengage students and dampen their achievement, according to the report, *How Information Technology Can Enable 21st Century Schools*.

The report may find a receptive audience, given Education Secretary Arne Duncan has said that an overhaul of U.S. education is needed and incremental change is unacceptable.

Some cutting-edge public schools, like the School of the Future — a joint project of the School District of Philadelphia and Microsoft Corp. — are moving toward a student-driven, information technology-enabled project model of learning, but the report notes that such schools are the exception, not the rule. As an example of the types of schools needed, the study cites the New Country School in the rural town of Henderson, Minn. — a teacher-run cooperative charter school with a project-based pedagogy.

Indeed, Minnesota recently established a NewSchools nonprofit group to spur innovation

in nontraditional public schools.

The ITIF report said that states should establish NewSchools organizations to raise and direct public and private funds toward school innovations in pedagogy enabled by IT. The reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act should create a NewSchools America Fund to encourage states to establish NewSchools nonprofits separate from the management structure of traditional public schools, according to the study.

"To design schools for the 21st century, our country needs a strategy for educational innovation," the study said. "At present, there is none. Chartering has gotten us part of the way there, but though many new chartered schools have been created, most of them do not depart from the pedagogy or management paradigm of batch-procession schools."

The new report calls for "Type 2 learning," which is achieved through the use of a mass customization model that allows students to employ IT seamlessly to personalize their learning and control the pace of instruction.

"Type 2 learning harnesses technology in ways that inspire students to learn and conduct their own inquiries outside of the framework of traditional classes and standardized tests," the report said. It "can allow the student's interests, needs, strengths, and weaknesses to drive the learning process, with the instructor facilitating rather than dictating. It allows materials to be designed much more around the needs of individual students."

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the proposal will be a boost to technical colleges, career technical centers, and all institutions that deliver postsecondary education and technical training.

"It's refreshing to see President Obama emphasize the critical role that two-year colleges and training programs play with respect to building a pipeline of qualified workers," Bray said. "It's the first time in recent years that an American president has recognized the value of these institutions."

Dual enrollment growth

Kimberly Green, executive director of the National Association of State Directors of Career and Technical Education Consortium, called the Obama plan "a noteworthy down payment toward strengthening the K-12 pipeline."

The administration's proposal comes as some states, faced with severe budget shortfalls, are cutting dual-enrollment programs or passing the costs on to students. "One of the challenges

that states have had with dual enrollment is how you build funding mechanisms to support those courses and credits," Green said.

She expressed hope that the infusion of federal funds could keep such programs available, particularly to low-income students who would be priced out.

"One of the ways that you can encourage more students to go into postsecondary education is that if they leave high school with some postsecondary credits already paid for, they might continue on and earn a degree," Green said. "Our hope is that it will help to build a more systemic infrastructure around dual enrollment."

Green said credit portability is something she also hopes will be expanded under the initiative, as many programs are between a specific high school and community college. "Kids don't always go to the college that's right down the street, so it would be interesting to start looking at the portability of those credits to multiple colleges, either statewide or by region," she said.

Budget 2010

Groups say funds needed for gifted education program

A House Appropriations subcommittee voted in support of President Obama's proposal to eliminate the Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Program, which provides grants to serve gifted and talented special education students, particularly those who are economically disadvantaged, have limited English proficiency, or have disabilities.

But groups such as the National Association for Gifted Children are urging the House Appropriations Committee to reverse the Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies' vote so that the 20-year-old program can continue to be funded.

Obama proposed zero-funding it in his FY 2010 budget. The Appropriations Committee is scheduled to mark up its version of the FY 2010 budget proposal today.

"At a time when our nation should be redoubling its commitment to our most promising students, Congress could not make a worse mistake than cutting the Javits program," NAGC President Del Siegle said.

The program costs "less than 3 cents of every 100 education dollars," he said.

Javits funds have helped former NAGC President Sally M. Reis develop teaching strategies for instructing advanced readers and helped Western Kentucky University Researcher Julia Roberts identify methods to increase achievement in elementary science and math, the researchers said.

NAGC proposes instead of eliminating the program, Congress should create a national gifted education policy to meet the needs of gifted children and ensure educators are properly trained to teach such students.

Newsmakers

Weingarten to leave NY union post at end of month

Effective July 31, American Federation of Teachers President Randi Weingarten will leave her role as president of New York City's United Federation of Teachers to devote herself full-time to the American Federation of Teachers.

"My work advocating for a strong and improved public education system nationally requires my full-time attention. I'm leaving the UFT in a very strong position," she said in a statement.

Weingarten served as president of both unions for a year. Before assuming the national role, she spent a decade as the UFT president.

The UFT announcement said the union's executive board will meet in the coming weeks to nominate and vote on candidates to complete the remainder of Weingarten's term through spring 2010.

Until the election, UFT Chief Operating Officer Michael Mulgrew will be the acting leader.

"Randi has been a big part of many of the reforms we have implemented over the past seven years and a big part of the incredible turnaround our schools have made," New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg said in a statement.

Weingarten spoke about UFT's role in getting the city to raise teacher salaries, up 43 percent between 2002 and 2008, to break "the \$100,000 mark."

She also credited the union for beginning a movement toward unionization of charter schools, including the recently negotiated contract between the UFT and the Green Dot charter management.

The move marries "professionalism and student achievement — a model that retains due process and makes advancements on class size and teacher voice," she said.

Study Hall

Study: Adolescent binge drinking affects information relay

Adolescents with histories of binge drinking have a lower coherence of white matter fibers, which are essential for the efficient relay of information within the brain, new findings show.

A study of adolescent binge drinkers, which is to be published in this month's issue of *Alcoholism: Clinical and Experimental Research from the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence*, found that even infrequent exposure to large doses of alcohol during youth may compromise how white matter matures and interconnects in the brain.

"Because the brain is still developing during adolescence, there has been concern that it may be more vulnerable to the effects of neurotoxins, such as high doses of alcohol," said Susan F. Tapert, associate professor of psychiatry at the University of California, San Diego and director of the Substance Abuse/Mental Illness program in the VA San Diego Healthcare System.

Tapert said that indicators of white matter integrity are linked to performance on a range of cognitive tests, including measures of reading, copying complex figures, and speeded coding of information.

Abnormalities in white matter health could relate to a student's compromised ability to consider multiple sources of information when making decisions, and to emotional functioning, she said.

"These findings add to a growing literature indicating that adolescent alcohol involvement is associated with specific brain characteristics," said study coauthor Duncan Clark, associate professor of psychiatry at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center.

The authors said that long-term studies following adolescents over time are essential to clarify the extent to which alcohol causes such brain abnormalities.