



# Pittsfield School District

## Questions and Answers about School District Redesign for Student Centered Learning

### ○ **Why do schools need to change?**

- Our traditional school calendar is based on an agricultural society
- Our traditional school organization is based on an industrial model
- High school as we know it was developed more than 100 years ago
- Students are increasingly disengaged by schools designed for times past
- Achievement in U.S. schools has not kept pace with the progress of those of other nations
- Development of U.S. schools has not matched development in the working world or society

***Our schools – reflections of early 20<sup>th</sup> Century economy and society – are not preparing students for the real world of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century***

### ○ **What do we know about how people learn?**

- Students don't learn only in classrooms and only during school hours
- Students can learn from a wide variety of adults
- Students demonstrate learning through performance of real tasks
- Students learn best with learning activities serve their needs and interests

***Student learning can be maximized by taking greater creative advantage of available resources – time, capable and interested adults, and passion for learning.***

### ○ **Who is Nellie Mae and why do they care about Pittsfield?**

- The *Nellie Mae Education Foundation* is New England's largest public charity dedicated to supporting the success of our region's learners
- Nellie Mae is a leader in advancing *student centered learning* and educational reform in New England
- More than 350 New England high schools qualified to apply for a *District Level Systems Change* planning grant
- Through a rigorous selection process, Pittsfield is one of 7 school districts – the only New Hampshire district – to be awarded a one-year planning grant to develop a long-term plan for student centered learning
- Up to four school districts will be awarded major multi-year implementation grants – announcement of awards will be made in December 2011

***The Nellie Mae Education Foundation considers Pittsfield to be a strong candidate for long-term funding in support of student centered learning.***

### ○ **What is “student centered learning?”**

- Rather than passively receiving lists of facts, our students will pursue their own goals, follow their passions, design and complete projects, engage in powerful conversations, plan their futures
- Rather than being dragged through meaningless, abstract exercises and concepts, our students will know what they are doing and why they are doing it in all learning activities
- Rather than sitting quietly at their desks for six hours per day, our students will be actively connected to others - both here and around the globe – as they deepen understandings
- Rather than learning in narrow, subject-specific confines, our students will maximize learning time by concentrating on skills that are useful across subjects and outside of school.

***Student centered learning empowers and inspires students to take responsibility for their own learning by developing personal learning plans of relevant, real world experiences through which they meet and exceed high academic standards.***

### ○ **What's been done with the Nellie Mae planning grant?**

- A *Pittsfield Schools Community Advisory Council* (CAC) was formed last fall
- The CAC includes students, parents, teachers, school leaders, civic leaders, and business people
- Nellie Mae awarded the one-year planning grant in December 2010
- In January, the CAC divided into six sub-teams to develop the plan under the grant; each of the sub-teams expanded membership and community involvement:
  - The Best Practices Sub-Team visited effective small schools and researched successful educational strategies
  - The Communications Sub-Team organized outreach to our community
  - The Data Sub-Team gathered and analyzed relevant student outcome data
  - The Logic Model Sub-Team integrated input from other sub-teams to develop a graphic representation of our long-term plan
  - The Performance Management Sub-Team planned a community-wide event to examine the effectiveness of the school and district and to develop a strategic plan for improvement

- The Policy Sub-Team examined school and district policies that require modification to support student centered learning
  - A draft logic model – long-term plan – was submitted to Nellie Mae on July 8
  - The CAC will continue to refine the plan for submission to Nellie Mae at the end of October
- The Community Advisory Council, organized last fall, has been working since January to develop our implementation plan with the hope that Pittsfield will be awarded a long-term grant for implementation in December.***

○ ***What changes are happening now?***

- Planning for district redesign began more than two years ago with community forums that rewrote the district's mission and vision
- Planning specific to PMHS began last fall
- PMHS was awarded a three-year *School Improvement Grant* (SIG) last August by the New Hampshire Department of Education; this grant is providing resources to begin the transformation of our schools
- Improvements under way include: articulating the district's curriculum; greater use of data for focusing instruction on student needs; development of an *early warning system* to catch students who may need additional support; *extended learning opportunities* (ELOs) that provide credit for learning from community experts; professional development for staff to support reading and writing development in all subjects; additional support for students needing help with literacy or math; major revision to the teacher evaluation system; training and consultation for bullying prevention; development of our *Pittsfield Parent Information and Resource Center*; development of Site-Based Council that involves students, teachers, and community members in school-level decision making; organization of student leadership for improvement of the school's climate; redevelopment of student advisories; college visits; the initiation of a post-secondary school survey to gain feedback from PMHS graduates; and many others.
- The Pittsfield Youth Workshop (PYW), in partnership with the school district and with the support of the Carsey Institute (of UNH), has established *Pittsfield Listens* as a structure to ensure that all voices are heard in district redesign
- Results include increased achievement scores (PMHS math scores now exceed the state average and continue to trend upward) and lowered dropout rate (from 6.1% five years ago to 1.1% for this past year)

***Thanks to earlier planning and a three-year School Improvement Grant, our district's redesign is well under way and the early results are very positive.***

○ ***What's the long-term plan for Pittsfield's schools?***

The draft logic model – the long-term plan – for Pittsfield's schools is organized into five areas, each intended to address specific needs and each supported by a range of strategies; in brief:

- Student Ownership for Learning – to fully engage students as responsible, self-directed learners:
  - Student leadership opportunities expanded
  - Students develop personal learning plans
  - Students take lead in student-led conferences twice each year
  - Extended Learning Opportunities (ELOs) support students in pursuing passions
  - Ongoing professional development for staff
- Student Achievement: Core Skills – to ensure high levels of achievement for all learners:
  - Curriculum articulated and available online
  - Ongoing professional development for staff
  - Supports for students begun under School Improvement Grant refined and expanded
- 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills – to strengthen preparation of students for the real world of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century:
  - Standards and assessments for 21<sup>st</sup> Century skills articulated
  - Greater use of digital environment for learning at any time in any place
  - Community service requirements strengthened
- Adult Role Expectations – to increase skills of adults in shift from adult-centered to student-centered schools:
  - Ongoing professional development for staff
  - Job / role descriptions adjusted to support student centered learning
  - Opportunities for teacher leadership expanded
  - Leadership succession plan developed
  - Community involved in strategic planning
- Community Engagement – to involve the community actively in our students' learning:
  - Community Advisory Council (CAC) continues to advise on district development
  - Site-Based Council continues to function as school-level decision making body
  - Extended Learning Opportunities (ELOs) provide students with creative learning opportunities
  - Community mentors support student learning
  - Pittsfield Youth Workshop continues work of *Pittsfield Listens* for community conversations
  - Parent Information and Resource Center supports parents in a variety of ways
  - Communication plan enhances two-way communications

***Our long-term plans for our students and our schools represents a bold step into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century as we provide our students with the best possible foundation for their lives as family members, citizens, workers, and leaders.***