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Designer of Fundamental Change in the New Hampshire School System

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Meet Fred Bramante. We think you'll like what he has to tell you about fundamental change in school systems. We like what Fred has to say. In fact, when it comes to defining change in America's schools, we are all on the same page.



Fred Bramante, Education Activist

Fred is a former middle school science teacher turned entrepreneur. In 1972, while still teaching at Dolan Middle School, in Stamford Connecticut, Fred invested his life savings, \$600, to found Daddy's Junky Music Store. With Fred as its president and CEO in the early years, and now as its CEO and board chairman, Daddy's has grown from a single storefront into the 14th largest music products dealer retailer in the United States, with 20 stores throughout New England and upstate New York. Daddy's grossed \$25 million in sales in 2009.

Fred's work, however, wasn't finished with his success in the music business. Based primarily on an education platform, Fred ran for governor of New Hampshire. Fred lost the election, but the passionate views he expressed on the changing the public education system in New Hampshire so that students could take ownership of their learning — what we at the International Center have long advocated as replacing seat time (Carnegie units) with student mastery as the measure of learning — made an impression on people. One of them was the man who became the Governor of New Hampshire. In 2003, Craig Benson appointed Fred as Chair of the New Hampshire State Board of Education, with the goal that Fred would be the catalyst for the changes he espoused. While no longer the Chair, Fred

is the senior member of the New Hampshire State Board and has been appointed and reappointed by both Republican and Democratic governors.

Fred isn't just outspoken about change; he also acts from his heart. He was a non-traditional learner who ranked 206 out of 212 students in his high school class. School taught Fred that he wasn't very bright. Life taught Fred that school was wrong. He learned that traditional schools don't serve non-traditional learners well. In fact, traditional schools all too often leave non-traditional learners behind.

Schools Still in the 20th Century

Fred's purpose, like ours at the International Center for Leadership in Education, has been to change the dominant paradigm in education. That model is centered on adults: what is good for them and how they are best served. This 20th century model, which is still in place, focuses on teaching as opposed to learning.

- It is system-centered and regulated by a series of bells and other time constraints.
- Learning takes place during a set schedule of 180 days.
- Students have four years to complete high school.
- Time and place are the constant in this model, carried over from the Industrial Age.

And the variable? That's achievement. Students are educated within the confines of classrooms and led by teachers as the primary content providers. Curriculum exists within silos; its focus is inward, resisting collaboration with outside sources. The results are disappointing: 52% of boys and 43% of girls say school is boring. The high school dropout rate is high, about 6.2 million in 2007. No matter how good a teacher might be, his or her compensation usually does not reflect it. Teachers have limited pay scales based on a uniform

schedule. For most teachers, pay increases only with the number of years of service and according to the degrees one holds.

Vision for the 21st Century

We are now 10 years into the 21st century—and we can't waste any more time. Our nation is struggling. Our schools are struggling. The time for bold action is now. Student achievement must become the constant, with time as the variable. Some students might finish high school in two years. Why hold them back? Others might need longer. Moreover, with changes in direction propelled by Race to the Top and innovation funds, teacher evaluation will soon be based on student performance.

Let's create a student-centered model based on what is right for students. Learning can and does take place in multiple arenas—there need not be a single building for that purpose which students enter and leave day after day. The entire community outside the school has much to offer as quality learning environments. And, most vital, teachers' jobs will move toward becoming facilitators of learning. Their primary role will not be to deliver and control information, but rather guide students on the path to finding it themselves.

Mastery will matter. Individual student's personal needs will dictate how much time is required to complete learning. Every student will matter as an individual. If a student has mastered part of a subject area, he or she will move on to the next topic. No longer will students be tethered to peers whose learning needs differ. Every student will be engaged in learning, no longer bored. And, someday in our history classes, we'll be telling about how students used to drop out of high school. Champions in the political arena will still have different viewpoints, but there will be a general consensus on the whole child and involving the whole community, embracing all the resources that a community has to offer.

It is from the platform of a 21st century education that Fred has spent the past seven years tirelessly advocating for and bringing about change, often working more than 50 hours a week. Fred knows all too well that traditional schools shortchange the non-traditional learner, and, as a non-traditional learner himself, has become an ardent advocate for these students, immersing himself in this effort. He has traveled widely to speak about fundamental change. In all, Fred has made more than 500 presentations in and outside of New Hampshire to education groups, parent groups, boards of education, and state legislators. Fred has met with focus groups of students, educators, community leaders, business leaders, parents, and interested citizens who helped provide the perspective for change. In New Hampshire, they not only listened to Fred, they heard what he was saying. He got what he came for.

Changing the New Hampshire Education System

Fred led a major effort to review and successfully revise the state education policies in New Hampshire. His focus was always on the end result: each student becoming an engaged and productive learner who demonstrates joy in learning. Fred's leadership brought about not just redesign, but meaningful redesign. The new vision focuses on what matters most — the documented progress of each student academically, personally, socially, and physically.

New Hampshire's Minimum Standards for School Approval, as guided by the work of Fred Bramante, are in direct alignment with the goals of the International Center. The new standards call for:

Personalization of learning. Learning strategies must be put into place to address the personal learning styles, strengths, interests, and needs of each student. Each district is expected to develop local board policies, as well as policy and guidance at the school level, to implement these changes. This demands attention to development of a student advisor process.

Harnessing of local resources. Within each district there are untapped resources available for partnerships that will encourage learning. The New Hampshire regulations call for harnessing of all worthwhile local resources, including businesses, not-for-profits, and talented individuals. A consistent example of this strategy has been the career and technical education (CTE) centers that have for years been engaged with their respective communities. A viable aspect of CTE is student internships at local businesses, where not only does learning take place, but also students often find permanent employment following graduation, while the business

gains a well- and pre-trained employee. School districts need to recognize that the CTE model has valuable lessons that can be applied to virtually every student.

Greater flexibility in developing a school calendar. This revision calls for the school year to be defined in terms of hours of instructional time rather than number of days per year. It allows education to happen at any time and any place, opening the doors to broader learning communities. Students are able to fulfill credit requirements at various times and places, not necessarily within school walls. It is a concept that provides New Hampshire schools with the means to address students' learning and personal needs and those of faculty as well.

Extended learning opportunities (ELO) for credit toward graduation. By causing schools to think differently about harnessing local resources, this revision empowers students to take an active role in determining the path of their education. Students can propose alternative approaches to acquiring skills and knowledge other than the traditional classroom setting. The Minimum Standards state that credit toward graduation through ELOs can be attained through private instruction, independent study, online courses, internships, work-study, and more. The role of the teacher is to ensure that students meet standards for competency established by the state and the district before they can earn the credit toward graduation. Districts are called upon to establish local board policies describing the process of approval prior to implementing extended learning. At all times, the relevance and rigor of the students' learning experience must be maintained, and students must demonstrate competencies gained through the experience. Additionally, local policies must make extended learning available to all students.

Distance learning and technology. The revised standards clearly engage technology to access new learning opportunities. Technologies can be used to support online learning and to improve student-teacher communication. Technology not only delivers a program, but also is a tool to support the learning process. Moreover, technology provides access to courses and other opportunities that local budget simply cannot afford to support on site.

Moving from Carnegie Units to demonstration of mastery. Thank you, Fred! The International Center has been saying for years that we must do away with the archaic Carnegie Units in favor of a system that uses the demonstration of mastery to identify student achievement. The New Hampshire Department of Education asks districts to certify that they have policies in place to assess competency for all courses at the high school level. Districts are afforded the autonomy to identify or develop high school course competencies, decide on appropriate competency assessment methods, and define the necessary and sufficient evidence for students to demonstrate mastery. Districts are encouraged to measure competency not by a single test but by multiple forms of assessment as recommended by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges. This encourages formative assessment. It allows students to learn and reach beyond current understanding and performance and helps school focus on a higher level of learning than that which awards credits based on seat time. Middle school students are allowed to get high school credits if they can demonstrate mastery of high school level work. Districts are encouraged to think about the standards they want students to reach and how students will demonstrate what they have learned.

New Role for Teachers

Strong leadership at the administrative level in New Hampshire brought teachers into the change process, allowing for shared leadership, gaining support for educational redesign at all levels, and developing the skills of effective leaders in everyone. Teachers in New Hampshire no longer fit the standard definition of the job: firsthand, direct delivery of a learning experience. Instead there is a move toward teachers as facilitators of student learning.

The result is an enlivening of the learning community as teachers become active designers of curriculum. They no longer implement externally made curriculums but are decision-makers in the curriculum planning process. While most teachers still hold the role of instructors, as students begin taking ownership of their learning, teachers are becoming co-learners and co-investigators along with their students. They are becoming catalysts for student learning and growth and organizers of learning opportunities for every student, guiding students to the most effective learning environment.

As facilitators, teachers are being called upon to challenge, question, and stimulate students in thinking, problem solving, and self-directed study. By sharing knowledge and responsibility, with teachers as models, students are able to challenge themselves and each other as they work, think, and learn. Thus, as we move from teacher-centered to student-centered education, students are being called upon to accept responsibility for the direction of their learning and to reflect on learning actively and continually.

It is as though the 20th century writer and poet William Arthur Ward envisioned 21st century teachers when he wrote, "The mediocre teacher tells. The good teacher explains. The superior teacher demonstrates. The great teacher inspires."

Fred Bramante and the International Center welcome the opportunity to work with you to create bold new learning initiatives that will improve student engagement and achievement.

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