The Education Commission of the States Spotlights Access to Higher Ed, the Workforce and 21st Century Skills Delivery in Six New England States

Denver, CO – While hosting top education officials from six New England states recently in Boston, Massachusetts, the Education Commission of the States (ECS) focused on how to improve alternative pathways to postsecondary education and the workforce, along with defining 21st century skills and how they can be assessed.

"Educators, business leaders and policymakers need to meet face-to-face to build trust and bridge gaps in understanding these related issues," said Roger Sampson, ECS president. With generous support from the Nellie Mae Education Foundation, education leaders from Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island and Vermont convened at the Lenox Back Bay Hotel in Boston to delve into these fundamental issues.

According to Sampson, a number of ideas and opportunities emerged. With the current economic crisis, there is urgency to reach consensus about desired outcomes for education and workforce development. Additionally, mastery of 21st century skills — communications, problem solving, creativity and innovation — can lead to successful transitions from high school into postsecondary education, workforce training and employment. "Critical thinking, problem solving, project management and creativity all are in demand by business," he notes.

"As a nation, we have to prepare our youth and retool out-of-work or under-employed adults to meet the current and future workforce demands," Sampson states. "To do this, states must continue to push content mastery and integrate 21st century skills. This is the way forward to compete globally."

To assist with the overall alignment of policies, teacher preparation, skills standards, and performance assessments, ECS will continue to provide evidence-based information to help states individually and collectively resolve these common challenges.

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The Education Commission of the States (ECS) is the only nationwide, nonpartisan interstate compact devoted to education at all levels. ECS helps governors, legislators, state education officials and others identify, develop and implement public policies to improve student learning at all levels. A nonprofit organization, ECS (www.ecs.org) was formed in 1965 and is located in Denver, Colorado.

The Nellie Mae Education Foundation is the largest philanthropy in New England that focuses exclusively on education. The Foundation provides grants and other support to education programs and intermediary organizations in order to stimulate transformative change in public education systems and ensure that all New England’s learners are prepared for success. The Foundation investigates, promotes and supports a greater variety of high-quality educational opportunities that enable all citizens — especially and essentially those from underserved populations — to obtain the skills, knowledge and supports necessary to become civically-engaged, economically self-sufficient, life-long learners. Since it was established in 1998, the Foundation has distributed nearly $83 million in grants. Currently, it primarily provides funding through five strategic initiatives: Early Learning, Pathways to Higher Learning, Time for Learning, Adult Learning, and Systems Building. www.nmefdn.org