



# ENGAGING ALL STUDENTS FOR COLLEGE, CAREER, AND CIVIC SUCCESS

**Students at the Center** synthesizes—and adapts for practice—current research on key components of student-centered approaches to learning that lead to deeper learning outcomes. Our goal is to strengthen the ability of practitioners and policymakers to engage each student in acquiring the skills, knowledge, and expertise needed for success in college, career, and civic life.

An edited volume of Students at the Center research papers, *Anytime, Anywhere: Student-Centered Learning for Schools and Teachers* (2013), is available from Harvard Education Press. Additional papers are forthcoming and will be published online starting in late 2014. Further, a wealth of teaching tools, materials, newsletters, blogs, and other resources are freely available on the project website: [www.studentsatthecenter.org](http://www.studentsatthecenter.org)

## RATIONALE & BACKGROUND

In an increasingly interconnected and fast-changing world, our educational system must provide all young people with the sorts of high-level learning opportunities that used to be reserved for a privileged few.

That premise has fueled more than three decades of efforts to improve the performance of the nation's schools. However, for all of the ways in which reformers have shaken up the world of K-12 education in recent years, the heart of the enterprise—teaching and learning—has changed very little in most schools and for most children. And as a result, the leading approaches to educational reform have largely failed to boost educational achievement across the U.S., or to close the achievement gaps that divide our students.

Students at the Center provides educators with tools and information that can help them not just to set ambitious goals for student learning but, even more important, to make real improvements to teaching practices and the school and district policies that affect them, so that all students—with a special focus on underserved youth—have concrete opportunities to acquire the skills, knowledge, and dispositions needed for success in college, in the workforce, and in civic life.

Jobs for the Future launched Students at the Center by commissioning teams of distinguished scholars to synthesize existing research on student motivation and engagement, cognitive development, school improvement, and efforts to take effective teaching practices to scale. Students at the Center has since commissioned its second set of white papers, analyzing research and describing policy strategies that promise to support deeper learning in the nation's schools.

JFF disseminates such work widely by way of conferences, social and mainstream media, publications, professional development, and outreach to educational associations. Working in partnership with university researchers, school and district leaders, and classroom teachers alike, JFF also develops online tools and other resources to help practitioners implement student-centered approaches in schools, districts, and other settings.

Students at the Center continues to expand the knowledge base for student-centered approaches and deeper learning outcomes, and we continue to adapt that research to the needs of practitioners and policymakers, empowering them to solve critical and persistent problems in U.S. education.

## THE STUDENTS AT THE CENTER FRAMEWORK

The Students at the Center framework defines a set of core, researched-backed principles for powerful teaching and learning, meant to ensure that all students develop the sorts of high-level knowledge, skills, and dispositions they need to succeed in college, careers, and civic life.

These four key tenets of student-centered learning—drawn from the mind/brain sciences, learning theory, and research on youth development—are overlapping and complementary. In combination, and when guided by a coherent and rigorous set of educational goals, they provide a strong foundation for the pursuit of deeper learning:

- 1. Learning Is Personalized:** Together educators, parents, and students customize learning experiences—what they learn, and how, when, and where they learn it—to students' individual

developmental needs, skills, and interests. Although where, how, and when they learn might vary according to their needs, students also develop deep connections to each other and their teachers and other adults. Many applications of personalized learning emphasize the use of technology to enable the level of differentiation at scale.

**2. Learning Is Competency-Based:** Students move ahead based not on their age or the numbers of hours they log in the classroom but, primarily, based on their ability to demonstrate that they have reached key milestones along the path to mastery of core competencies and bodies of knowledge. Further, each student must be provided with the scaffolding and differentiated support needed to keep progressing at a pace appropriate to reaching college, career, and civic outcomes, even when unequal resources are required to achieve a more equitable result.

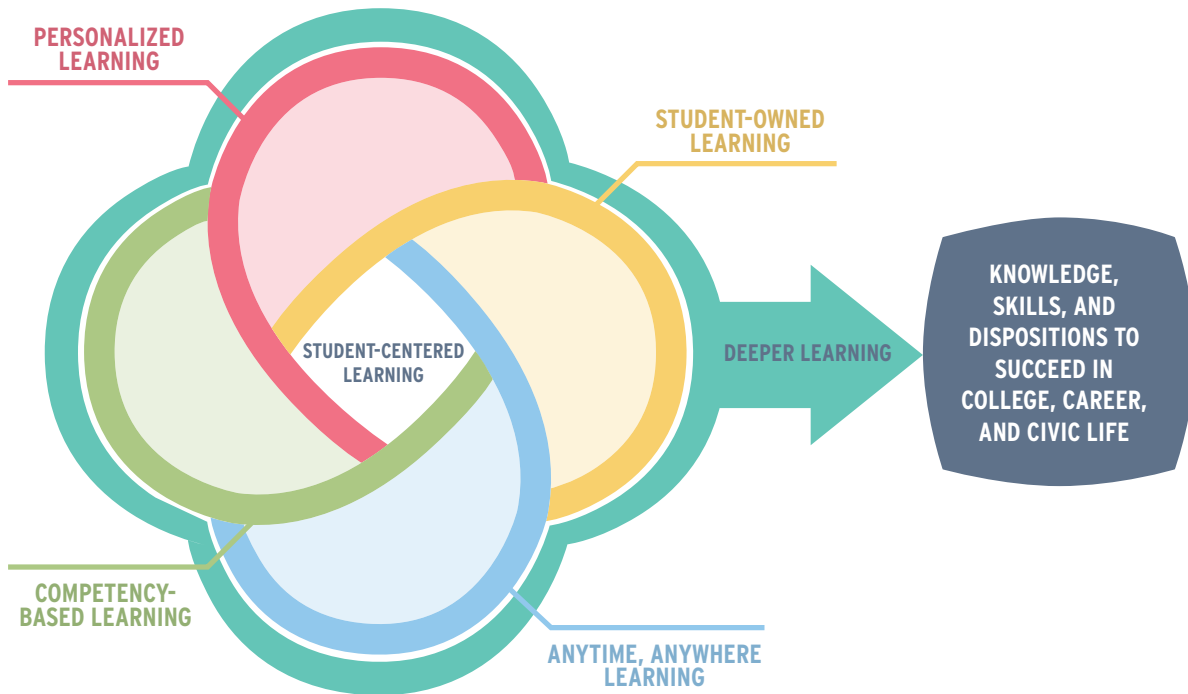
**3. Learning Takes Place Anytime, Anywhere:** Time is fully utilized to optimize and extend student learning and to allow for educators to engage in reflection and planning. Students have equitable opportunities to learn outside of the typical school day and year in a variety of settings, take advantage of the variety of digital technologies that can enhance learning,

and can receive credit for this learning based on their demonstration of skills and knowledge.

**4. Students Have Ownership Over Their Learning:** Students understand how to get “smarter” by applying effort strategically to learning tasks in various domains and content areas. They have frequent opportunities to direct and to reflect and improve on their own learning progression toward college and career ready standards through formative assessments that help them understand their own strengths and learning challenges.

Deeper learning establishes two major types of outcomes as essential to college and career readiness for all:

- > The mastery of core academic content, including foundational domain knowledge, concepts, and modes of inquiry in the humanities, mathematics, sciences, and arts that form the building blocks for further study and skill specialization.
- > The academic ability and predilection to continue to learn and to apply and transfer knowledge effectively through higher-order skills, such as critical thinking, problem solving, communication, collaboration, and self-directed learning.



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**Jobs for the Future** works with our partners to design and drive the adoption of education and career pathways leading from college readiness to career advancement for those struggling to succeed in today's economy.

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