**Workforce 3One**

**Transcript of Webinar**

**Implementing Effective Acceleration Strategies Virtual Institute**

**Competency Based Education: A New Approach to Acceleration**

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ERIC BELLINO: And now I'm going to turn it over to Samantha Brown who is going to go over today's agenda. And, Samantha, you can take it away.

SAMANTHA BROWN: Thanks so much. Hey, and welcome to today's webinar. I'm Samantha Brown from the DOL national office. This is the third and final webinar of the implementing effective acceleration strategies virtual institute. The topics of discussion during this virtual institute are in response to feedback from TAACCCT grantees. So we hope that you find today's webinar helpful.

I want to thank those of you who have already submitted a proposal for a session at the TAACCCT convening in February 2016. We are accepting proposals until December 9th. We extended that a bit. And as you may have read via e-mail, the dates and location have been finalized for the convening. It will be held February 9th through the 11th in Washington, D.C. at the Omni Shoreham Hotel. You can refer to the save-the-date e-mail that you received from TAACCCT at dol.gov for more details.

Now, I would like to introduce our moderator for today's webinar, Barbara Endel, senior director at Jobs for the Future, and our presenters, Tara Smith, senior program manager at Jobs for the Future, Nancy Thibeault, dean of distance learning at Sinclair Community College, Ed Sargent, project director for PACE-IT at Edmonds Community College, and Linda Smarzik, dean of computer studies and advanced technology at Austin Community College. Now, I will turn it over to Barbara.

BARBARA ENDEL: Samantha, thank you, and welcome again, everyone, to the third of our series. It's so exciting to be able to talk to you about this really terrific topic about competency-based education. To me it represents such a promising new strategy for the field.

So I'd like to initially thank our moderator with the deep dive session, my terrific colleague, Tara Smith, and I'd also like to thank, as Samantha just did, Nancy, Ed, and Linda. Thank you for taking time out of your busy schedules and your managing your TAACCCT grants to share with us all of the terrific things you're learning and doing with your work. We're excited to have you present. So thank you for that.

So what I would like to do is talk very briefly about today's agenda. I – as – we're going right now through our welcome and introductions. And then in just a moment I will open with – I am going to open with the – an overview of competency-based learning approaches, and that's largely – it will take about 10 minutes or so, 10 to 15 minutes just so we can establish a common understanding around competency-based education basics so that it will provide a good foundation when we go into our breakup – our breakup groups, our breakout sessions.

So for that we will be spending time, about 50 to 60 minutes, where we'll be dividing the group, as you've been indicating both in a survey and today whether you'd like to join Nancy and I into a one-on-one session where we'll be presenting more foundational concepts and about the work Nancy's doing with her consortium. And then also we're so lucky to have Tara Smith, and then she will go into the breakout session with Ed and Linda into what we're calling our deep dive.

And to me I really love the way this concept is playing out because I think it's a lot more germane to have you go to where your educational level and your interests are and look and talk about the things that are either at the foundational part or if you feel like I'd really like to know more about these advanced concepts. So we'll – that will largely be the bulk of today's virtual institute.

And then around 4:45 or 4:50 Eastern Time we will come all back together. The tremendous technical team will make sure we get all back into our large conference – audio conference, and then we'll each – the folks from 101 and our deep dive will provide a quick overview on key things that were discussed.

And then we'll end with asking our presenters where they think the field is heading, give us a sense from their vantage point where they think things are going to be moving and for us to kind of keep aware of. And then remember throughout the time you've got, if you want the information in the file share, that will be there as well.

OK. So let's go into what we're calling our opening plenary. So I'll take about 10 to 15 minutes for this part. So essentially, the problem we're trying to solve, which is consistent so much so with the Department of Labor and the whole idea around the investments in rounds one through four with the TAACCCT grants, we need to definitely improve our completion of – and connect students to the labor market.

And the innovative work you're doing is just so exciting, the many strategies that you have. So for this one, we're going to be focusing on competency-based education. We feel it's one of the strongest innovations out there that are being tested. Lots of work going on, and so it's our pleasure to share with you more about where – what we're finding around this particular topic.

So for today's session we want to basically establish with you this is a real game changer, especially for adult learners, obviously with the colleges and employers. There are now more than 300 institutions, both two and four-year, offering competency-based training and workforce programs, and we think that this number is even largely underrated.

We think there's a lot more work happening over time, and I think this will continue to be the case. As we learn more and more we can see promising models from colleges that are being focused today and the good work that you may want to start then at your college.

I mean, obviously the game changer around this concept is it's getting away from what we're calling some traditional seat time but trying to build in more ways where we've got demonstrated proficiency what students can know and can do at the post addressing really the relevance certainly around the content and courses, etc., but being able to get through with an acceleration strategy and getting students both in and through and hopefully helping students succeed along the way.

So I want to talk – and I'll give our presenters a quick heads-up here. There are largely two primary ways that competency-based models can be structured. And while there are some nuances out there, we think for the purposes of just establishing some common understanding, this idea that there's what's called direct assessment and then course or credit-based CBE.

And so with direct assessment this is something, as I just mentioned, where it does largely leave behind clock hours and seat time and recognizes that students would be able to essentially go through material and progress through material at their own pace and demonstrate mastery and competencies across time. Generally the content is project-based. It can also be integrated with other things, but it's leaving, if you will, isolated discreet problems and doing more integration of the work.

And then secondly with credit-based or course-based CBE, these are designed to basically take a standard course, which could be your 15, 16-week semester, but provide a competency-based design within the parameters of that credit-based course.

So I'd like to very quickly call on our presenters and maybe, Nancy, if you wouldn't mind if I would – could call on you first. Can you explain a little bit to those in the virtual institute today which one out of these two models are you working with, and what might have led to the decision to do that?

NANCY THIBEAULT: Thanks, Barbara. Yes. We are using the credit-based or course-based model, and we align our CBE courses with our traditional courses. So really it gives the student another option. The main difference between a credit-based traditional course and credit-based CBE is that the CBE packages the competencies and the students step through the course by demonstrating mastery of the competencies instead of working in a traditional course week by week through the content that the instructor is leading.

MS. ENDEL: Thank you, Nancy. Again, this is Barbara. Linda, can you tell us what's happening at Austin Community College? Which model are you working with?

LINDA SMARZIK: We're also working with the course-based CBE, and what allows our students to be able to accelerate through and they do leave behind the seat time and the clock hours. So in terms of – is it direct assessment? We don't use direct assessment because we recognize that there's some limitations with direct assessment with financial aid, but we recognize we can do everything that direct assessment offers and still hold it in a credit-based course.

MS. ENDEL: Terrific. Thank you. And then, Ed.

ED SARGENT: Yes. We decided to go with the credit or course-based CBE for a lot of reasons. One of the reasons that we decided to do it, quite frankly, doing direct assessment would have been a really huge change for our institution.

So folks were a lot more comfortable with the course-based CBE, and also we find that when you're trying to get folks to transfer to a four-year school or folks are looking for courses that they've taken, it just makes it a lot easier for the student to transfer the knowledge that they have to other places if they're familiar with courses. Direct assessment made it a little bit more difficult for us.

MS. ENDEL: Great. Thank you, Ed and Linda and Nancy, for that perspective. And there will be plenty of time when we do get to the breakout sessions to dive into more questions you may have there. So if you do have some questions, be sure to jot those down, and you'll have access to our speakers here in just a few moments.

So this is just a very quick overview on how is course-based, competency-based education different from traditional. And here you can see some of the traditional parameters around outcomes, weekly lessons, student services are centralized, the advance happens weekly with the class regardless of performance.

And then obviously with course-based CBE there are some huge differences around being able to be modularized. Students demonstrate competency before going on to the next topic. The case is managed by an academic coach in many ways. There are flexible starts. So there are some huge advantages obviously to testing these competence or course-based competency-based models.

So basically, here's just a quick primer that you all can quickly scan. This is something that – trying to really get at identifying bodies of knowledge that are taught and getting students in and through sooner, faster, and being able to demonstrate mastery. And as many of you have – I've taught before. So have you. You all know what it's like to basically deliver instruction to the mean of the class; right?

Hopefully you've got skilled students that are with you. You also find ways to help students that you know you need to help catch up. But here that just takes that model – this really takes this model to a whole different level and just offers so much promise.

And then obviously, with the core factors, it permits instructors, employers to share this common language and establish a standard performance. It provides students to clearly demonstrate what they know measured against some established benchmarks. And with all of the institutions, all three that we have represented here today, it's just so powerful because I know all three are very employer-driven institutions.

And then obviously this model works by empowering students to manage their learning process and being able to take advantage of a different platform and the self-paced that sometimes can happen and then obviously being able to align and integrate academic and other support services because what happens if you get students that don't progress as needed when you get through models like this, something I hope we can discuss in each one of our breakouts.

So there are some emerging evaluations, and this will – this is largely the last content piece before we head into our breakouts. There have been some pioneers working in this field for many years, including obviously the institutions presenting today but Southern New Hampshire University, Western Governors University, and others. So Southern New Hampshire University is basically working on a direct assessment, and they're really experimenting with different ways to do that.

A lot of that work also is working with industry and frontline workers in a program called College for America. Check that out when we get done here. It's really terrific. And then obviously many competency-based programs, they take time to develop. It takes great care, and I think both Nancy, Ed, and Linda will attest it's not for the faint of heart. It's a lot of hard and deep work at the institutional level. And even different models that may look the same on paper I think tend to generally be quite different in their execution.

So lastly, the shift to competency-based, if you haven't already guessed, requires some strong vision and leadership, obviously agreement on the competencies and the definitions of those competencies, faculty engagement in particular, aligning within a career pathways framework.

We do know we need significant support and training. It can be a very – as the last line points out, a very new and defining role for faculty and other staff. So it's – it is really a terrific opportunity to rethink how even instruction is delivered to benefit students, faculty, and our employers.

So with that, Eric, I'll turn it over to you. I think that now is the time. I think you're all very eager, as I am, to break up into our 101 session and our deep dive group. So let's go ahead and do that. So, Eric?

MR. BELLINO: Yes. Thank you, Barbara. So I just want to point out something before we do go into the breakout rooms. This is what the breakout room will look like, and this is – we'll open the screen, something similar to this. When I do hit the breakouts, you will have to follow with your phone's keypad.

So if you voted for 101 and wanted to be in 101, you would hit 1##, and if you wanted to be in the deep dive, you will hit 2##. But it will be very easy because the screen will – it will pop right up on the screen for you, and it will be very easy and should be a lot of fun. So I am going to hit start breakouts now. So again, just follow the directions on your screen, and you will be able to listen to today's audio. Thanks, everyone.

OK. If you can hear my voice, we are back in the main meeting. We'll just get kicked off in just a couple more seconds here. Thanks, everyone, for participating in all of the breakout rooms, and we will just get kicked off here in just a couple seconds. We'll go over what happened in breakout room one and what happened in breakout room two. Again, just a couple more seconds, and we'll be discussing what happened in each breakout room. So for the first breakout room I believe we said, Barbara, you'll be taking over the notes going through what happened in each – in breakout room one.

(Pause for breakout rooms.)

MS. ENDEL: Yes. Thank you. Of course. So again, welcome back, everyone. This is Barbara Endel at Jobs for the Future, and we had a really robust and rich discussion and dialogue in our 101 session. We'd like to thank Nancy once again for presenting a really terrific overview, and there's never enough time because it's such great work. So thank you, Nancy.

I came away with four major themes, and my terrific colleague, Jennifer Freeman, took wonderful notes that are posted here that you can scan kind of along the way. But my shorthand for our session, kind of four themes emerged.

The first point was Nancy mentioned this work really requires where she said, and I quote, "Build a college within a college." And how it really takes redesign across every aspect of the college from financial aid to instruction to admission to support services and faculty role, et cetera. It really impacts and touches every part of the college.

Number two, Nancy talked really terrifically well about that they had a strategy to bring in faculty both during the development of the proposal and that the faculty put in a fair amount of work to bring along the coalition of the willing and the champions at the beginning. And Nancy presented a little bit about really how faculty role changes across the CBE work. So that drew some questions and some good Q&A back and forth.

And then the third point out of our four points is Nancy is going to be submitting a session, you mentioned, Nancy, for the February TAACCCT convening around the student support services. But Nancy mentioned that monitoring the pace and monitoring the students is really critical.

She has a five-phase student support model, and every student has a coach. And that coach is different than their instructor for the course, but they are the one key lynchpin to help that student with every other facet of their work. And Nancy just mentioned how important the student success model was or the student support model.

And then my last point and then, Tara, I'll hand it over to you here in a moment, is there are many challenges with this work. And Nancy went over a huge list, so to better inform our group, if they're thinking about things, maybe kind of not what – not – kind of what not to do is as important as what to do. But I think that in the end, Nancy, your points around the innovation and the advantages are well worth it and that this is really amazing work and that I think hopefully you're glad you're doing it.

So with that, Tara, I'll kick it over to you, and let us know what happened in the deep dive session.

TARA SMITH: Thank you, Barbara. I appreciate that. I want to say we had a really good conversation in our breakout. Linda presented on the model at Austin Community College, which has really been a success, and she emphasized how this grant has positioned the college to really embrace CBE moving forward. And they see that this is going to be a really important model for community colleges and universities as we move forward in the 21st century.

And so this has been a great platform for them, and part of that was developing a strong implementation team with real full-time commitment on that team that was able to spearhead the movement and keep leadership engaged. She talked about making sure the employer partners were on board and were really validating the curriculum and developing new faculty roles, asking faculty to take on perhaps a facilitation role that they hadn't necessarily used before.

And then we also heard from Mr. Sargent at Edmonds Community College who talked about how important for their model it was to make sure that these – their CBE program was tied to industry certifications so that the students going through were able to quickly get back into the workplace with something that was going to result in increased wages for them. They did a lot of work also with their faculty and brought in a subject matter expert from industry along with an instructional designer who helped them alter and develop their courses.

And Mr. Sargent also emphasized that they, at the push of their faculty, have included capstone projects in each of their certificates, which enable their students to work one on one with an industry expert and to really leave the certificate program with something tangible that they can use to demonstrate their skills when they go talk with an employer.

And then in our discussion we really focused on understanding that role of college leadership, understanding what the faculty resistance was, and how they were able to overcome that in both of their projects and that both of them see that this is really something that their college has embraced and they see this expanding into the future.

MS. ENDEL: So terrific. So, Tara, thank you very much. So again, this is Barbara, and I'd like to conclude our virtual institute by asking our three subject matter experts, Linda, Ed, and Nancy if you can sum up in – call this the popcorn round – very quickly, where do you see the future of competency-based education heading? What do you think is in store for us?

So, Nancy, since you and I had teamed up earlier, do you mind – let me call on you first. So where is the future going?

MS. THIBEAULT: Well, CBE is the future. When we look at how we have been delivering education over the years, we do – it's been time-based. We expect that every student learn the same amount of material in the same amount of time, and we know in reality everybody learns at a different rate.

So our expectation of everybody learning at the same pace is totally contrary to the way people learn. It is an innovation. It will take time to integrate it into the college, and we do also have the challenges of technology and systems that will need to be changed in order to fully implement CBE.

MS. ENDEL: Terrific. Thank you. Ed, what are your comments around this topic? Where's the future heading?

MR. SARGENT: Sorry. I had to unmute myself. I see CBE as part of three different I guess forks in the road in changing education. CBE is a wonderful thing, and I think that for the percentage of students that it can serve very well, it's an excellent option. I also think that the other directions that education is going into will also be I would say MOOCs and I would say MOOCs with some modifications to that and would also say the boot camp area.

If you're looking at getting folks to work fairly quickly and fairly cheaply, the boot camp model is something that we all should be looking at. So I think CBE would be the biggest component but also looking at using MOOCs or open educational resources and credentializing them along with boot camps as the wave of the future.

MS. ENDEL: Terrific. Thank you. Linda?

MS. SMARZIK: Oh, I agree with my colleagues, and I do believe that I see a collision of the MOOCs – I want to echo that – of the MOOCs and credit and that ASU – I'd said this earlier – is starting to offer credit for – there's MOOCs for the freshman academy, for the freshman courses. I think we're also going to start seeing more in micro degrees, micro credentials.

I think we're going to see a little bit more in that world, but I do believe Nancy said it best. CBE is the future and that we can no longer expect students to sit in a 16-week course and recognize that students need to pace themselves. They need to accelerate, or they need to take it a little slower, one way or the other.

But it's a very exciting future that is upon us. It's a disruption and a very exciting, daunting, and somewhat – and makes some people quite nervous. But for those who can see, I think it's going to be – it's going to help with completion rates, success rates, and be able to meet that skills gap that we are about to see in 2020.

MS. ENDEL: Terrific. Thank you. So, everyone, again, this is Barbara Endel. On behalf of Jobs for the Future, I'd again love to thank our speakers, Linda, Ed, and Nancy. And, Tara, thank you so much for moderating the deep dive session. So again, terrifically presented. It's exciting, this disruption of technologies and education, and I think there is a future that's very bright around competency-based education. I think five years from now we'll have a much different conversation.

So thank you for your pioneering work, and thanks to all the participants for logging in today. We really appreciate your time and learning more about this important topic. So with that, Eric, I'll turn it over to our technical team.

(END)