



## **Convening in Support of Federally Authorized Experimental Sites for Competency-Based Education**

### *Executive Summary* *September 2015*

Lumina Foundation and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation co-hosted a convening on April 7 and 8, 2015, in Washington, D.C., to help 15 interested colleges and universities that met specific readiness criteria gain a better understanding of the U.S. Department of Education's<sup>1</sup> Competency-Based Experiment part of the Experimental Sites<sup>2</sup> Initiative (ESI). Competency-based education is a flexible way for students to earn credit for what they know, build on their knowledge and skills by learning more at their own pace, and earn high-quality degrees, certificates, and other credentials that help them in their lives and careers. Students in these programs are able to show what they know and how well they can apply that knowledge through a variety of learning mechanisms and evaluations.

The goals of the convening were to:

- Develop a shared understanding of competency-based models that could be tested;
- Determine what the Department and participating colleges and universities want to learn through well-structured experiments that address statutory and regulatory obstacles to Title IV support for competency-based programs;
- Foster the communication necessary to effectively promote responsible innovation;
- Explore approaches to generating knowledge about competency-based programs that inform a broad range of stakeholders, including policymakers; and
- Establish a clear understanding of the experimental sites process, including roles and responsibilities of the Department, participating colleges and universities, and regional accreditors.

Convening participants included representatives from each of the regional accrediting organizations; leadership and staff of the Education Department; representatives of the American Council on Education (ACE), American Institutes for Research (AIR), and New America Foundation; foundation leaders; and academic leaders, financial aid officers, and institutional researchers from 15 institutions.

The summary report describes what experimental sites are, details institutional concerns around experimental sites, highlights themes that emerged from the convening and concludes by identifying next steps for this work.

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<sup>1</sup> Also referred to as: 1) Education Department or 2) the Department

<sup>2</sup> The purpose of Experimental Sites Initiative is to test the effectiveness of statutory and regulatory flexibility for participating institutions disbursing Title IV student aid. <https://experimentalsites.ed.gov/exp/index.html>