



European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2023 update

CASE STUDY:

Learn everywhere alternative programmes
(USA – New Hampshire)

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Abstract

Learn Everywhere has been selected as an international case study due to its status of a new and innovative initiative introduced in 2020. The initiative mainstreams validation across the secondary education system and has established a transparent process for learners to gain credits for learning acquired in non-formal learning contexts. Operating on the principle that non-formal learning equips learners with real-world knowledge and skills, it enhances their learning and offer opportunities to explore career options. This initiative allows any public or private organisation to apply and offer high school credits, enabling learners to gain credits for learning that takes place outside the school environment. The idea builds on experiences around “extended learning opportunities” (ELOs) in the USA, validating knowledge and skills obtained outside traditional classrooms, such as through private instruction, internships, service learning and online courses) in the USA.

1 Introduction and methodological note

The Learn Everywhere initiative targets students in high school. The initiative was initiated in New Hampshire in 2020, following an invitation in 2018 by the State Board of Education (SBOE) to adopt rules for its implementation under the scope of New Hampshire Legislation¹. The initiative is therefore currently limited to the New Hampshire public education system. The idea was to create an eco-system of additional learning opportunities for students, and to recognise their learning wherever and whenever it occurs. Furthermore, the initiative aims to address the “equity gap,” which involves discrepancies in engagement and achievement between socio economically advantaged students and those facing poverty. Additional aims of the initiative are to tackle skills shortages, to boost enrolment in high school as well as provide an alternative to apprenticeship opportunities, which are lacking in the USA. Regarding skills shortages, the initiative offers courses in innovative fields such as gaming applied to everyday life (e.g., grocery delivery done with drones) (interview with the Administrator of Educational Pathways at the New Hampshire Department of Education) which are normally not part of the regular school curriculum.

According to the interviewed Administrator of Educational Pathways at the New Hampshire Department of Education, the main stakeholders (teachers/parents and those listed in 2.1) together with stakeholders at large have exhibited a growing interest in the initiative. However, Learn Everywhere is a new and non-traditional programme in education, and has also been met with some resistance. One of the biggest criticisms is related to the fact that to run a class, it is not necessary to be a certified or licenced teacher. This has been met with some reluctance, particularly from high school teachers.

The information presented in the following sections are the result of a mix-method approach. Data were collected through secondary and primary sources, including an interview with the Administrator of Educational Pathways at the New Hampshire Department of Education. Most of the findings and viewpoints laid out in the report come from that interview.

¹ [Learn Everywhere | Department of Education \(nh.gov\)](https://www.nh.gov/education/learning-experiences/learn-everywhere)

2 Basis for the validation arrangement and approach

The Learn Everywhere legislation² outlines all the steps for non-formal education programme providers (organisations or individuals) to apply to the State Board of Education to participate in the programme. The following information should be provided in the application: (for a detailed overview of the application requirements please refer to section 2.1.2 of this report):

- The sponsoring organisation's purpose, mission statement, or both;
- The name and contact information of the individual responsible for oversight and administration of the program for which approval is sought;
- A description of demonstrated qualifications and a statement assuring that the instructor satisfies those qualifications, which shall not be construed to imply that instructors require a New Hampshire educator license; and
- A criminal history records.

The next paragraphs summarise how the initiative works in practice.

2.1 Stakeholders and practitioners

In the Learn Everywhere initiative, the main stakeholders involved are the New Hampshire Department of Education, the State Board of Education, and the trainers/providers, who may or may not be certified teachers. The role of the Department of Education is to help trainers/providers (e.g., dance academies, theatre companies, sports and cultural centres, maths or language teaching providers, flight schools, etc...) to apply for and obtain the role of 'provider' of the Learn Everywhere programme. Administrative staff at the Department supports, within their limited capacity, providers with their application to the programme. The support is provided by guiding applicants with the use of suitable assessment methodologies to identify the learners' competencies. For instance, for learners who already learn how to play the piano outside of school, Learn Everywhere's objective is to provide structure around that learning process to allow learners to earn credit. The credit they earn can then be redeemed in the form of a certificate at their high school - who is obliged to recognise such certification once the programme has been approved by the State as part of the Learn Everywhere initiative.

Every organisation/individual who is offering a learning opportunity to a learner outside of the high school environment can apply to Learn Everywhere. However, there is no appointed worker to help organisations with their application. We were informed that if the Department of Education had sufficient financial resources, it would enlist ad-hoc consultants to expedite the process. These consultants could then assist in reviewing the applications as well as offer training to non-educators on processes and content they may be unfamiliar with.

As regards the funding of the initiative, the programme does not divert any State funding from public schools, other than funding the time spent by administrative staff working at the Department of Education on the Learn Everywhere initiative. However, this approach leaves limited resources available to properly promote the initiative to families and students, as well to support its effective implementation.

² [learneverywhererules.pdf \(nh.gov\)](https://www.nh.gov/education/learn-everywhere/rules)

2.2 Methodology and outcomes

By law, while applying to the Learn Everywhere programme, applicants are required to submit:

- A plan for recording student progress in meeting expected student outcomes;
- A description of the assessment of student learning outcomes, including, but not limited to:
 1. Instructor observation of project-based learning, including off-site learning projects;
 2. projects;
 3. Competency-based or performance based assessments;
 4. Instructor observations of student performance;
 5. Project evaluation rubrics used to evaluate program proficiencies; and
 6. Other assessment approaches as determined by the Learn Everywhere programme;
 7. The number of credits the program will fulfil; and
 8. A description of the competency-based grading system.

This documentation implies the use of a specific methodology for the initiative, emphasising a competency-based approach that represents a key feature of the New Hampshire education system. Within this context learners must demonstrate competence in all required areas before advancing further with their studies. However, as previously noted, the effective application of this methodology is often hampered by the fact that running a Learn Everywhere programme does not necessitate an educator, hence applicants may lack the necessary skills/expertise to identify and assess the competencies of their learners. As already stated above, the Education Department faces a significant challenge in training applicants due to insufficient financial resources.

As previously explained, a provider who successfully applies to the initiative and obtains the Learn Everywhere programme status, can issue a certificate confirming that the learner has acquired competencies in a certain domain. The learner's school is obliged to recognise such certificates. The certificate can boost enrolment in high schools, diversify the set of courses and learning environments to which a learner has access to, or speed up the graduation process (meeting graduation requirements). The initiative allows learners to accumulate as many Learn Everywhere credits as they wish. Nevertheless, only one third of the credits necessary to fulfil the graduation requirements of their local school district can be earned through approved Learn Everywhere programmes.

Indeed, the certificates that students acquire is something additional to what they achieve through formal education, as the Learn Everywhere initiative is not intended to replace traditional school education.

Learn Everywhere represents an educational activity that students are already participating in outside of the traditional school day. The initiative emerged as an opportunity to reframe education through different perspectives, set up by non-traditionally trained educators. It is founded on idea of blending education with an entrepreneurial aspect, aiming to enhance primary and secondary level learning experiences. Among the 18 approved Learn Everywhere programmes³, a few notable examples stand out:

- The New Hampshire Academy of Science (NHAS) is approved as a Learn Everywhere programme to offer four science courses for high school credit. The NHAS is an independent non-profit organisation that offers a variety of science-based programmes, including summer courses, after school programmes, and

³ A full list of approved programmes and providers is available here [Approved Learn Everywhere Programs | Department of Education \(nh.gov\)](#).

science lessons in conjunction with professional mentoring and hands-on research projects. The programme is approved to offer credit in Biology, AP Biology, Chemistry, and Physics.

- FIRST Robotics, with a mission to inspire young people to be science and technology leaders and innovators, engages them in mentor-based programmes fostering skills in science, engineering, and technology, while also inspiring innovation, and promoting life skills and capabilities such as self-confidence, communication, and leadership.
- Signum University is another approved programme offering various Open Elective credits in high school English and language acquisition.

Teachers can also set up their Learn Everywhere provision outside of their work with schools (for example after school hours or during weekends), nevertheless the fact that they do not receive any financial compensation serves as a demotivating factor for their participation in the initiative.

3 Results (strengths, barriers)

As far as the results of the initiative are concerned, from the interview with the Administrator of Educational Pathways at the New Hampshire Department of Education, it emerged that there are no real data available on the programme since it is relatively new. However, data on the number of credits awarded is collected. From the latest data published by the State Board of Education on the 5th of September 2023, 32 credits were awarded between 1st of July 2022 and 30 June 2023. The New Hampshire Academy of Science registered the highest number of credits awarded (11).

The low uptake of the initiative is due to various factors/barriers which are summarised below and partially highlighted in previous sections of this report:

- **Lack of human resources.** Currently, the Administrator of Educational Pathways at the New Hampshire Department of Education is the only person working on Learn Everywhere for the State approximately one day a week. With additional staff on board, the programme could expand much quicker.
- **Lack of financial resources.** New Hampshire is notably conservative with its allocation of what the interviewee termed “general funds”, which are State-level funds that are general in nature and not supported by federal funds or other funding sources. Consequently, there is significant competition to secure these funds in the annual state budget. These funds, if obtained, could potentially be used to train the non-trained educators for the programme as well as to promote the initiative among the key stakeholders.
- **Lack of awareness.** Once a curriculum has been approved by the State Board of Education, this enhances the providers market appeal to students. However, engaging students and their families proves challenging due to limited state resources for provider recruitment and awareness raising activities. The absence of a direct connection with students and parents further compounds this issue. Increasing involvement from school’s teachers in the initiative could help alleviate these barriers, but their reluctance often stems from the lack of financial incentives for their participation. Significantly, the initiative has recently experienced a surge in other entrepreneurs seeking to leverage the Learn Everywhere programme to promote their own programme and curriculum, rather than supporting the core objectives and essence of the initiative.

- **Equity issue.** Due to a lack of funds, participation in the initiative is at the expense of families and students. This represents a financial barrier restricting access thus preventing a portion of the population from benefitting from the initiative.

Learn Everywhere's benefits lie in its learner centred approach, empowering participants to develop competencies in their areas of interest, through voluntary participation. The approval process of the programme involves determining the content area in which the course credit would be assigned – aligning with local school district curriculum, for example in the case of a “standard” math course. Alternatively, they may not match up, for instance in the case of a flight school. Indeed, New Hampshire's traditional schools normally do not offer that experience. Elective credits would be sought for such non-core academic courses. Moreover, students improve their time management skills and proactiveness. Finally, the small size of New Hampshire schools limits educational offerings, but Learn Everywhere addresses this gap by providing students with access to non-traditional school subjects such as augmented reality which meet the future demands of the job market.

4 Conclusions

Overall, the initiative seeks to “formalise” / “certify” students' learning outcomes obtained by taking part in activities outside the traditional school environment, offering a unique opportunity to build valuable capacity across several domains, ranging from life skills, languages to biology and robotics. Learn Everywhere serves as a vehicle to acknowledge and recognise students learning in non-formal learning contexts, although its take up so far has been somewhat limited. The potential for replication across states inside and outside the USA (e.g., European countries) exists provided that adequate financial resources are allocated for successful and equitable implementation.

Given New Hampshire influential role in the educational sector, many aspects of the initiative could be transferred to other contexts, even though a shift toward competencies-based learning may be required in some contexts.

Adequate funding is crucial for fostering inclusion among socio-economically disadvantaged individuals. Moreover, elevating the training and qualification requirements of the educators involved in the programme would enhance the initiative's credibility and trust among various stakeholders.

A notable aspect of the initiative is its focus on individual learning experiences and competence development. It offers students the chance to acquire skills in non-traditional domains that are in high demand in the job market. Furthermore, the initiative has the potential to enhance motivation for learners and encourage them to pursue further education, fostering their personal growth and aspirations.

Sources

[Learn Everywhere | Department of Education \(nh.gov\)](#)

[learneverwhererules.pdf \(nh.gov\)](#)

[N.H.'s latest education initiatives draw support from national, local conservative groups | New Hampshire Public Radio \(nhpr.org\)](#)

Interview with the Administrator of Educational Pathways at the New Hampshire Department of Education⁴

<https://www.education.nh.gov/partners/education-outside-classroom/approved-learn-everywhere-programs>

[Summary of Learn Everywhere Program Provider Annual Reports \(September 2023\). It was shared as a preview by the Administrator of Educational Pathways at the New Hampshire Department of Education with ICF.](#)

⁴ Most of the report's content is based on the findings from the interview.

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