

Emily Levasseur

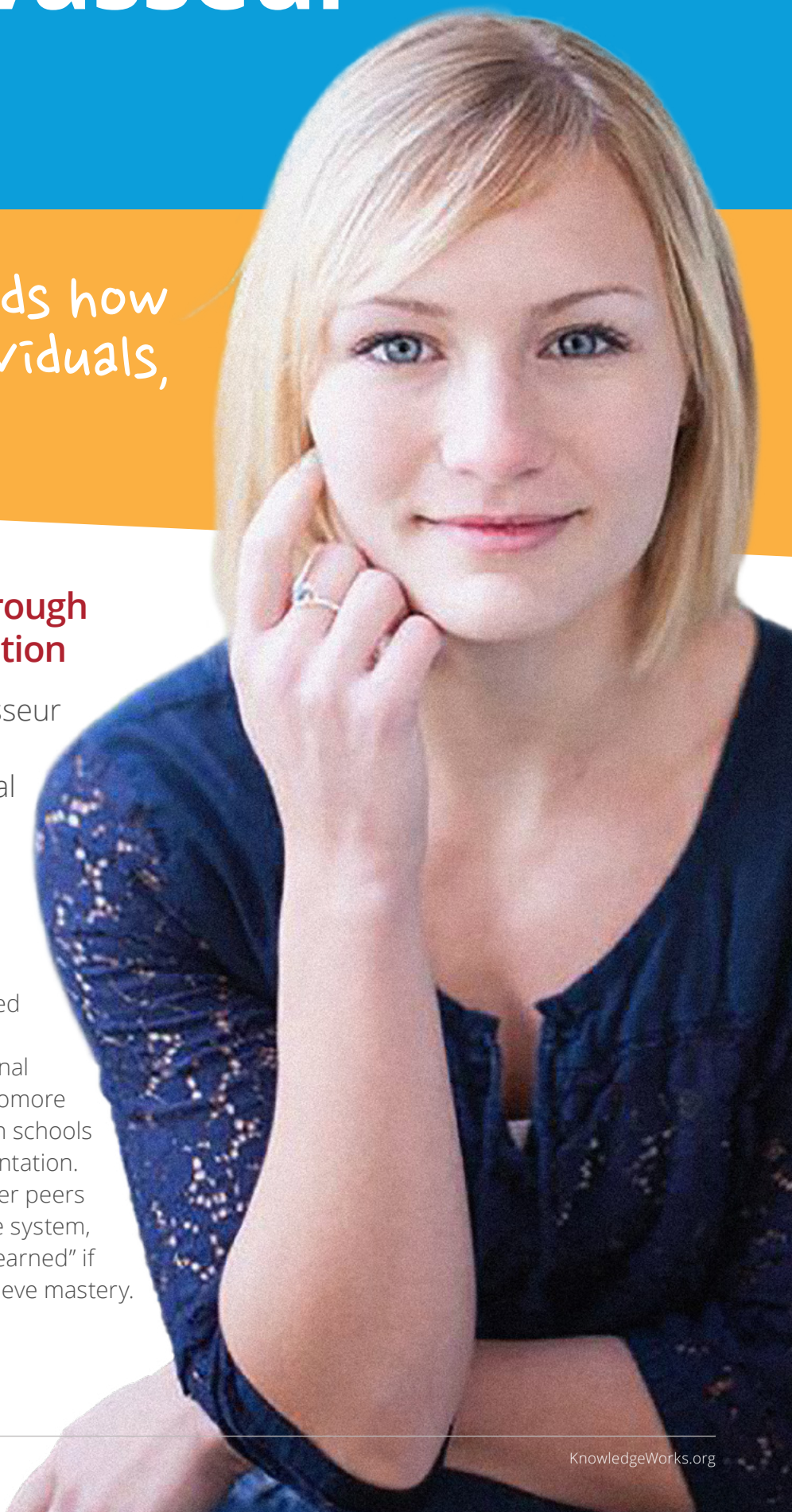
Graduate of Monmouth Academy
Monmouth, Maine

“We’re teaching kids how to be strong individuals, how to trust...”

Self-Reliance = Success through Competency-Based Education

Trust was something Emily Levasseur had to learn to do in high school when her district, RSU2 in Central Maine, made the transition to competency-based education.

Levasseur had always been a strong student and hoped to be the first in her family to attend college, and she wondered what this new system would mean for someone who had done well in a traditional classroom setting. Levasseur was a sophomore at Monmouth Academy, one of three high schools in the district, when they began implementation. Levasseur recalls that she and some of her peers were concerned about the fairness of the system, questioning whether a grade was really “earned” if students were given multiple tries to achieve mastery.



“As I’ve gotten older, I’ve realized that was a selfish way of thinking. In some subjects, I might need more time, but that doesn’t mean that I’m not trying my hardest. It just means that I don’t understand the material yet,” Levasseur stressed. “Competency-based education allows people to reach the highest grade that they possibly can.”

Standards in a competency-based system are never lowered, but students are given more options to meet them than they would in a traditional environment, and multiple opportunities to demonstrate mastery. For Levasseur and her peers, it was always about trying to go above and beyond, and she felt that drive was what really prepared her for college. “If you wanted to get that higher grade, you had to strive for it: revisit the material, learn to apply it, do your own research,” said Levasseur, who likened her strategies in high school to what she’s had to do to succeed in college: rely on herself.

Levasseur was able to graduate from high school in her junior year thanks to the accelerated pace that competency-based education allows. Because multiple standards can sometimes be met at the same time, she could move more quickly through competencies in her English classes, where she excelled, and take the extra time she needed to demonstrate mastery in math, which she found

more challenging. Every student in Levasseur’s school had a free period each day to devote to the subjects where they needed a little more time, and Levasseur appreciated having the opportunity to work at a pace she was comfortable with.

Now, Levasseur is helping others learn to trust, and to recognize and realize their own potential.

“I’m studying adventure therapy, a form of experiential education, which basically uses the outdoors as a therapeutic tool,” said Levasseur, who is in her third year in the program at Unity College in Unity, Maine. “We’re teaching kids how to be strong individuals, how to trust, building a supportive community by having these adventures together.”

For Levasseur, the student-centered focus of competency-based education had an added effect: it helped her to realize that the only person she needed to be measuring herself against was herself, and that when she could rely on her strengths to help others, there was a world of opportunity waiting.

“Learning shouldn’t be competitive,” said Levasseur. “You’re better off and you learn more when you have a supportive community.”



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