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A plan for every future.™**

Big Picture Learning Receives \$450,000 from American Student Assistance to Provide Increased Access to Career-Connected Professional Development for Hundreds of High School Educators

BOSTON -- August 30, 2021 -- Big Picture Learning (BPL) has received a \$450,000 grant from American Student Assistance® (ASA), a national nonprofit that helps to foster students' understanding of postsecondary education and career pathways. The grant will enable BPL to increase and accelerate its Learning Through Interests and Internships (LTI) implementation in 150 locations across the United States, providing workplace learning opportunities for more than 30,000 high school students. This will be accomplished by providing professional development to more than 450 educators and school leaders as well as access to *ImBlaze*, Big Picture Learning's proprietary internship management system app.

Community-based learning has long been core to BPL's practice, and the development of *ImBlaze* makes it possible for students and educators to access curated databases of internship opportunities. Educators connect with students to explore potential internship sites hosted by adults who wish to serve as mentors. When complemented with educator professional development, *ImBlaze* has proven highly successful in helping students explore their interests and passions, both in schools and in their communities.

"We at Big Picture Learning have seen the impact that connecting with mentors who share their interests can have on young people. We know that it is particularly important to create opportunities for young people to develop connections to supportive mentors who can play vitally important roles in their lives. It's precisely this kind of social capital development that can be transformational for students while strengthening entire communities," said BPL's Co-Executive Director Andrew Frishman. "We are thrilled to partner with American Student Assistance in ways that will enable us to spread and scale the practice of interest-driven real-world learning experiences for so many more young people."

According to the ASA and Burning Glass Technologies report, "The View from the Schoolhouse: How Middle and High School Educators See the Skills Shaping the Modern Economy," which analyzed teacher attitudes – prior to and since the start of the pandemic – toward incorporating high-demand workforce skills into school curriculum, only a quarter of educators (25%) believe that their school is doing an excellent job at preparing students for job

opportunities. Key to unlocking more of these opportunities is increasing access to professional development.

“ASA and Big Picture Learning have a shared commitment to creating work-based learning opportunities among students and career-focused professional development for educators,” said ASA’s Chief Strategy Officer Annabel Cellini. “By expanding access to career exploration tools, technologies, and online resources, BPL’s LTI program will drive long-term student success outcomes, build skills that foster employability, and encourage postsecondary education success, including access to non-college pathways.”

The LTI program is designed to increase student access to career exploration activities such as informational interviews, shadow days, internships and mentorship opportunities integrated within other components of the educational experience. With the support of ASA’s funding, Big Picture Learning will be able to expand *ImBlaze* adoption to 150 schools/sites, provide LTI programming to 30,000 students, and support 450 educators and school leaders through dynamic professional development, training, and support.

An initial focus of this partnership will be in supporting schools across the state of California. Principal Robert Fung of the San Diego Met High School, one of the beneficiaries of this expansion, expresses his delight and appreciation in seeing the work of interest-based education and internships expanding across the state: “We have witnessed how Big Picture Learning and *ImBlaze* empowers students to take ownership of their search for internships. This agency and motivation breeds confidence and resilience, so I’m pleased to learn that even more students and educators will get to be part of the growing collection of success stories that we ourselves have benefitted from.”

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About Big Picture Learning

Big Picture Learning's mission is to activate the potential of schools, systems, and education through interest-driven real-world learning. As a non-profit organization dedicated to the fundamental redesign of public education, Big Picture's vision is the generation of innovative, personalized learning environments that work in tandem with the real world of their greater community. At the core of Big Picture Learning's mission is a commitment to equity for all students, especially historically marginalized populations, and the expectation that these students can achieve success. For more than 20 years, the Big Picture Learning network has served over 26,000 students in over 23 states and thousands of additional students internationally. www.bigpicture.org

About American Student Assistance® (ASA)

American Student Assistance® (ASA) is a national nonprofit committed to helping kids know themselves, know their options, and make informed choices to achieve their education and career goals. ASA® has a 60-year legacy of working directly with students to increase their access to higher education through loans and financial education. ASA has turned its experience into impactful solutions for students in grades 6-12 to help them pursue their dreams. To learn more about ASA, visit www.asa.org/about-us.

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