WHAT IS CBE?

Competency-based education (CBE) supports students’ progression through their academic work toward proficiency and mastery — regardless of time, method, place, or pace of learning[1]. It is sometimes referred to as “proficiency-based,” “performance-based,” or “mastery-based” learning. For the purposes of this toolkit, a competency is defined as “a combination of skills, abilities, and knowledge needed to perform a specific task” that is tied to a specific goal or standard. A competency is a “general and evolving accumulation of related capabilities that facilitate learning and other forms of goal attainment.”[2] Therefore, competency-based education stresses acquisition and demonstration of targeted knowledge and skills.

CBE has advocates from all sides of the education debate, likely because it fosters individualization and personalization[3] while still requiring evidence of learning and

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accountability. Furthermore, CBE is firmly grounded in both the learning sciences (e.g., what is known about how students learn and develop) and in principles of equity. Equitable education systems ensure that all students’ needs are met, that all students reach their academic and social potential, and that the capacity for race, income, or other factors to predict achievement is reduced or eliminated[4].

A comprehensive CBE plan has several components and can impact multiple levels of schooling. Full implementation involves systemwide change and thus requires careful consideration, planning, preparation, and monitoring. For more information on what your school or district may need to implement CBE, see Modules 2 and 4.

Basic principles of a robust CBE model include:

- **students advance based upon demonstration of mastery**, regardless of time spent in instruction or place in the academic calendar
- **mastery of competencies that reflect explicit, measurable, transferable learning objectives that have shared relevance**, including the application and creation of knowledge along with the development of important skills and dispositions
- **students receive timely, individualized support** based on their individual learning needs and interests
- **student progression toward mastery of each competency is mapped**, allowing educators, students and parents to track performance and needs in real time
- **assessments are meaningful and positive learning experiences** for students and provide transparent, meaningful information to all stakeholders on the impact of instructional practices
- **technology is used** to make efforts feasible, scalable, actionable, and transparent

**HOW DOES CBE DIFFER FROM TRADITIONAL MODELS OF EDUCATION?**

The major difference between CBE and most traditional education programs concerns how instructional time is viewed. Traditionally, time spent in learning is held constant (e.g., the 180-day school calendar or a year of Algebra I) and results in varied learning across students (e.g., letter grades A–F or other ratings). CBE inverts that traditional model, with “learning held constant, while time varies.”[5] A key to CBE is the


WHERE IS CBE BEING IMPLEMENTED?

The map on the next page from the International Association for K-12 Online Learning (iNACOL) shares the status of Competency Education policy in each state as of May 2019. Notably, 49 states now have policies on CBE. Seventeen states fall in the Advanced category, with “comprehensive policy alignment and/or an active state role to build capacity in local school systems for competency education.”[7] This trend shows that state
CBE allows for variation in...

- A. the amount of learning, holding time constant.
- B. educators’ competencies, holding learning constant.
- C. the amount of time, holding learning constant.
- D. both time and learning.

Accountability is unimportant in CBE systems.

- True
- False

One basic tenet of a CBE model is...

- A. differentiated student support is provided based on their needs and interests.
- B. technology is always used during instruction.
- C. age-based instructional grouping is used.
- D. the use of summative assessments at the end of the school year.

If you answered C, False, and A, you were correct! If you have mastered this module, continue on to Module 2.