BUILDING COMPETENCY IN COMPETENCY-BASED EDUCATION

A TOOLKIT FOR EDUCATORS

CENTER ON INNOVATIONS IN LEARNING

MODULE 1

I'M NEW TO THIS: WHAT'S COMPETENCY-BASED EDUCATION (CBE)?

> **In this module, you will learn what Competency-Based Education is, how it differs from traditional models of education, and what the current landscape of CBE implementation is across the country. Pay close attention, as your mastery will be assessed, and you will be asked to demonstrate "competency" at the end of the module!**

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

[1] U.S. Department of Education (USDOE). (n.d.). Competency-based learning or personalized learning. Retrieved from http://www.ed.gov/oii-news/competency-based-learning-or-personalized-learning
[2] Redding, S. (2014b). Personal competencies in personalized learning. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University, Center on Innovations in Learning.
[3] Redding, S. (2014a). Personal competencies: A conceptual framework. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University, Center on Innovations in Learning.; Redding, S. (2014b). The something other: Personal competencies for learning and life. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University, Center on Innovations in Learning.

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

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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

[4] Casey, K., & Sturgis, C. (2018). Levers and logic models: A framework to guide research and design of high-quality competency-based education systems. Retrieved from https://www.inacol.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/CompetencyWorks-Levers-and-Logic-Models.pdf
[5] Barr, R. B., & Tagg, J. (1995). From teaching to learning—A new paradigm for undergraduate education. Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning, 27(6), 12-26.

notion that each learner demonstrates competency, regardless of the amount of time demonstration of that competency may take.

The graphic below [6] highlights differences in traditional and CBE models across five domains: scheduling; instructional design and delivery; assessment; grades and reporting; and promotion and crediting.

FROM → TO

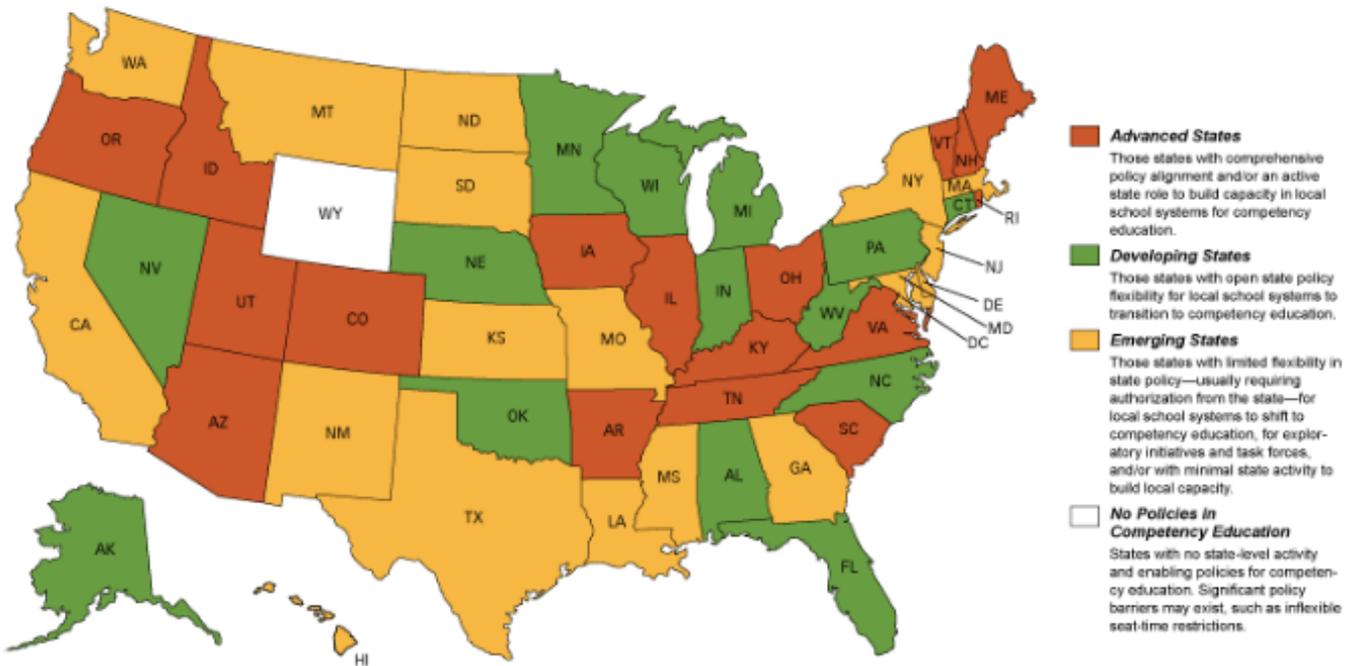| #	FROM	Domain	TO
1	• Time is structured by courses with fixed time allocations • Students are placed in fixed groups based on age or ability	SCHEDULING	• Schedules are modular and flexible • Time is structured around competency-based learning outcomes tied to a) specific work products and b) student needs (e.g., intensives, workshops) • Schedules allow for personalized, asynchronous learning
2	• Same age, same page • Whole-class lesson plans and delivery, possible "differentiation" of lesson • Single classroom configuration, typically print materials and lecture style	INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN AND DELIVERY	• Students working at different places on competency-based learning progressions • On-demand instructional decisions based on student needs • Learning assets available just-in-time, multiple formats • All unit materials are designed to be student-facing • Multiple learning configurations across learning spaces
3	• Assessments *of* learning • Scheduled at same time for all students • Traditional testing formats low on Bloom's Taxonomy (recall, comprehension) • One opportunity, often punitive	ASSESSMENT	• Assessment *as* learning, *for* learning, and *of* learning • Assessments available just-in-time • Summative are performance-based tasks, requiring application of skills and knowledge • Tasks derived from college and career level work • Multiple opportunities; revision cycles are central
4	• Use of grade calculations to sort students • Grades typically include behavioral elements (attendance, homework, participation), conflating performance measures and hiding skill/knowledge gaps • Expectations for earning a particular grade vary substantially between teachers and schools	GRADES & REPORTING	• Transparent and continuous reporting on performance and growth, measured by competency • Grades (if necessary) are numerical representations of student performance and/or growth strictly (not conflated by behavioral elements like attendance, participation) • Behavioral elements are reported on separately
5	• Quarterly and/or annual grade reports • Crediting and advancement is based on seat-time and "passing" grade • Undefined expectations for what skills/knowledge are required for earning credit	PROMOTION & CREDITING	• Crediting of competencies or competency bundles upon achieving a specific performance level (can be mapped to traditional courses) • Student advancement based on demonstrations of mastery, not seat-time • Portfolios help quantify the body of evidence required for showing mastery

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

[6] The "From-Tos" of Competency-based Education. (2016.) SpringPoint. Retrieved from http://www.springpointschools.org/blog/2016/01/five-key-lessons-mastery-startup/
[7] Truong, Natalie. (2019). iNACOL Releases Updates to the Snapshot of K–12 Competency Education State Policy Across the United States. iNACOL. Retrieved from https://www.inacol.org/news/inacol-releases-updates-to-the-snapshot-of-k-12-competency-education-state-policy-across-the-united-states/

support across the country is growing. For more details on state practices and how districts are incorporating CBE, click **here**.

Advanced States
Those states with comprehensive policy alignment and/or an active state role to build capacity in local school systems for competency education.

Developing States
Those states with open state policy flexibility for local school systems to transition to competency education.

Emerging States
Those states with limited flexibility in state policy—usually requiring authorization from the state—for local school systems to shift to competency education, for exploratory initiatives and task forces, and/or with minimal state activity to build local capacity.

No Policies in Competency Education
States with no state-level activity and enabling policies for competency education. Significant policy barriers may exist, such as inflexible seat-time restrictions.

Want to see CBE in Action?

Click the image below to watch a video about Competency-Based Education and what it looks like when real teachers and students implement it!

Now it's time to assess your competency on Module 1!

1. 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.

2. Accountability is unimportant in CBE systems.
☐ True
☐ False

3. 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*.