In this module, you will learn what goes into implementing a CBE model at the district or state level, what structural changes may need to be made, and the challenges you may face in doing so. Pay close attention, as your mastery will be assessed at the end of the module!

As you learned in Module 2, instituting a program of Competency-Based Education requires a number of fundamental shifts in mindset and practice in the classroom. At the district and state level, policies, processes, and attitudes must change as well.

The Education Elements graphic that was introduced in Module 2 outlines the structural changes that need to occur in systems working to successfully implement CBE.
States and districts looking to implement CBE cannot immediately “throw out the old and bring in the new.” A first step is collaboratively laying the groundwork for transformation, and while every district will follow a unique path, re-engineering the system around competency-based learning and teaching requires several key ingredients[1]:

**Shared Leadership**

Shared leadership, also known as collaborative, distributive, or adaptive leadership, involves empowering colleagues, seeking their input, developing collective ownership of initiatives, and ensuring transparent decision-making. This style of leadership, as opposed to traditional top-down leadership, is a critical early step within the shift to CBE[2].

**Shared Journey of Inquiry**

School leaders will want to invest in a collaborative “period of study” before making the leap to CBE, considering questions such as, “What is the purpose of our school?” and “What should our graduates know and be able to do?” This reflection and review of research on how students learn and are motivated signal that educator input is respected and trusted.

**Shared Vision and Ownership**

Community stakeholders must also be engaged in CBE planning, through authentic dialogue that asks, “What do we want for our graduates?” and “What are school, family, and community roles in this process?” Creating a task force comprised of students, parents, community members, and educators charged with addressing challenges and identifying potential solutions in the shift to CBE better informs the implementation process and ensures that all perspectives are addressed.

Kettle Moraine School District engaged in a community consensus building process, called "strategic visioning," as they shifted to CBE. The district learned to take time to build a firm foundation for change, particularly with teachers, and ensure transparent and frequent communication to tell the CBE story internally and externally. They also worked to identify partners to help with CBE, and regularly and widely celebrate successes, avoid shortcuts, and constantly check for teacher understanding of the work[3].


The district also learned that they needed to engage their families and community members before the change took place. They describe their process below:

**Approximately every three years the district conducts a Community Forum, usually attracting around 100 community members, including parents, business partners, municipal leaders, school board members, teachers, students, alumni, and taxpayers. The original community forum started as a way to share the findings of the Transformation Task Force ... and the resulting recommendations. That work launched our journey into personalized CBE. We reconvene the community every three years to share our progress and results and to ensure that we continue to meet their expectations. (p. 1)[4]**

Consensus for CBE must also be built with parents and families at the school; click the image below for a brief tutorial from sophia.org on explaining CBE to stakeholders.

If you are not familiar with the Learning Management Systems (LMS) that this tutorial discusses, more information will be provided later in this module.

**STOP AND CONSIDER**

To what extent does shared leadership exist in your school or district? What is the level of trust among educators and among school and district leaders? What conversations need to occur among educators, the community, and families before a move to CBE?

**Want to see CBE in Action?**

- Click [here](#) for an example of how the McCombs school district engaged stakeholders to develop a strategic plan for transitioning to a personalized CBE system.
- Achieve has created a toolkit of practical resources to help communicate the value and need for CBE in states, schools, and districts. Click [here](#) to view the toolkit.

[4] Ibid.
STANDARDS AND ASSESSMENT

While the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) have come under fire from states, districts, and schools across the nation, those same entities understand the need to use standards to set goals, increase expectations, organize instruction, and redesign grading systems. In CBE, meaningfully linking competencies to standards is critical to fully aligning systems, policies, and practices. As states and districts are considering, reconsidering, or implementing the Common Core, they should also think about what competencies reflect those standards and how to measure mastery of those standards[5].

Several states and national organizations are taking on the work of designing and administering agreed-upon assessments, including the PARCC assessment, that measure competencies and provide states with access to collaboratively developed assessment systems, information, and tools to improve instruction and help students succeed. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) now allows states to choose from a wide variety of student-centered and innovative assessment models that can incorporate student-led components or performance tasks[6]. Click here to learn more about 15 assessment models proposed by Knowledge Works.

INFRASTRUCTURE AND POLICY

Large scale educational changes such as CBE require that districts and states first consider which policies are supportive and those which hamper progress and then make changes to infrastructure that will enable CBE systems to flourish. Several key changes to infrastructure and policy are described below.

FUNDING AND "SEAT TIME"

For decades, funding for public education has been primarily determined by formulas based on average daily enrollment of pupils in a district, average daily attendance, or various forms of “weighted” student enrollments. Weighted enrollments provide additional allocations, on top of a set amount per pupil, for students with greater needs, such as English language learners [ELLs] or students with special needs. CBE systems work best when these weighted student funding models are used and when states allow districts to determine how funds are used to meet each student’s needs. Flexibility is important for CBE to work well, and states must offer waivers or other ways for districts to remove barriers, such as class size limits or staffing configurations, that are likely to be encountered when implementing CBE[7].

“If you are measuring seat time rather than competency, then you are measuring the wrong end of the student.” – Kate Kazin, CAO of Southern New Hampshire University’s College for America

When students are engaged in instruction outside of the traditional school day or location, such as online courses, independent study, or mentorship in business or trade, calculating funding becomes much more complicated. Some states have responded by requiring a student to be present at school for some minimum number of minutes, known as “seat time,” to be counted in the funding formula, or by developing mechanisms other than time in school to determine “attendance.” This is especially relevant for districts and states trying to implement CBE, as instructional modes and time are not constant across classrooms or schools. CBE models challenge the traditional method of seat time accounting by allowing flexibility in where, how, and when credits are earned, awarded, and counted.

Proponents of seat time flexibility regard it as a key strategy in the effort to increase graduation rates[8]. Flexibility in how and when credits are earned and awarded is often viewed as a necessity in the efforts to reduce the number of students at risk of dropping out or aging out of the K-12 system without graduating. CBE has the potential to expand and enhance K-12 credit-earning opportunities, in combination with strategies such as online and blended coursework, specialized courses, credit recovery opportunities, or dual enrollment programs. For instance, Ohio’s Credit Flex policy requires districts and schools to support alternative means (including CBE) to earn high school credit[9], while New Hampshire is moving to make all high schools competency based[10]. For all states, tying CBE efforts to the credit-earning process will require broad-based efforts and substantial planning and coordination but may make the changes more appealing to a larger audience[11].

For lessons from New Hampshire’s recent efforts to confront age-based grade configurations and traditional assessment and grading practices, as well as incorporating personalized learning into a CBE system, click the image to the right.

**GRADING POLICIES AND GRADE-LEVEL STRUCTURES**

Traditional grading practices that, for example, assign letter grades or scores to reflect students’ learning, are not consistent with the CBE principle of advancing upon demonstrated mastery. The movement toward eliminating traditional grades and recognizing competency may be incremental, but even small steps can make a significant difference. For instance, districts may

reduce the range of what is considered acceptable by eliminating D’s as a passing grade or replace norm-referenced or bell curve grading systems with systems that are criterion- or standards-based. As described in Module 2, these changes can substantially change students’ learning experiences for the better.

Abandoning the use of rigid, calendar-based grade levels may be the most visible change that accompanies a full CBE reform. While many schools have started to modify the traditional grade-per-year system through programs such as advanced college credit, dual enrollment, and ability grouping across grades, only a few schools and districts -- and no states -- have done away with a grade level system entirely.

Want to See CBE in Action?

One district that has made the leap is Lindsay Unified in California, which has completely restructured its system, implemented a full CBE model -- including eliminating seat time requirements, grades, and grade levels -- and focused on a proficiency-based system designed to prepare learners for their futures. The district describes its promotion procedures in this way:

Students advance once they have demonstrated mastery of a specific content standard. Once they master the standards within a specific content level, they get to move up and start working at the next content level, regardless of their age or the time of year[12].

Click the image below to learn how Waukesha STEM Academy has redesigned its use of instructional time, grades, and even classroom space.

DATA COLLECTION SYSTEMS

Just like at the classroom level, it is important for states and districts to continually monitor progress towards goals in a CBE system. In order to have common measures across contexts, including schools, districts, states, universities, or potential employers, there must be a level of uniformity in

how competencies and CBE terms are described. Once concepts are defined, states and districts can determine agreed-upon measures to help achieve that commonality and transferability and measure the success of a CBE system. Along with standard measures, an integrated data system is fundamental to the effective implementation of CBE:

**Student-centered data systems should collect, report, and provide transparent information on where every student is along a learning trajectory based on demonstrating high levels of competency, to help educators customize learning experiences to ensure that every student can master standards and aligned competencies (p. 11)**[13].

Data can be collected through learning management systems (LMS). LMS’s provide a digital platform for students to access content and allows for documentation of student progress in real-time. Teachers use these systems, such as Edmodo® and Blackboard®, to organize their instruction and communicate with students and parents. These, and the many systems like them, provide a centralized place for teachers to post learning resources and personalize student learning, as well as promote more student-oriented, social, and collaborative learning experiences[14].

One example of an LMS used by students and staff, often collaboratively, is at the Bronx Arena High School. Click the image to the right to watch a video about their system and how it guides and motivates students at the school.

Data collected and used this way provide critical information to guide teaching, ensure quality and accountability, and drive efforts to personalize instruction and amplify learning. States and districts continue to tackle issues such as data alignment and interoperability, the movement from compliance monitoring to defining measures of continuous improvement, and protecting student privacy, that are critical for a CBE system to work effectively.


SUPPORT, STAFFING, AND SCHEDULING

CBE environments offer opportunities for teachers to take on additional roles, while often requiring expanded professional competencies. For example, teachers may become instructional designers as they “work with learners and colleagues to design and manage personalized learning pathways aligned to competencies and learning progressions” or they may serve as learner guides by “engaging learner voice and choice to foster students’ intrinsic motivation[15].” Educators in CBE settings must therefore develop their own competencies to prepare for these roles. A few examples include:

- Building their capacity for instructional design for mastery - designing or customizing multiple learning pathways with differentiation strategies based on learner needs, and
- Improving their assessment literacy - an enhanced capacity for conducting formative assessments and facilitating opportunities for student voice and choice in how students demonstrate their mastery.

Professional learning opportunities for educators in CBE should mirror CBE principles for students by enabling a “flexible time, place, path, and pace” for professional development. Educators in CBE systems develop personal learning plans that are aligned to expectations for their competency development[16]. Offering micro-credentialing, or badges that convey teachers’ demonstrations of competency in various areas, is consistent with what is known about effective professional development[17] and allows teachers to personalize their learning to address their professional needs[18]. For example, micro-credentials and training opportunities on working with certain special needs populations could include rubrics and ways teachers can demonstrate their competencies, through videos demonstrating the teaching competency or portfolios of teaching resources created for that specific population.

The use of micro-credentials is rapidly expanding, with at least 15 states either piloting or experimenting with micro-credential programs, and the NEA launching more than 150 options and a platform for members to receive recognition of formal and informal learning[19]. For examples of micro-credentials in action, click here.

[19] Ibid.
Innovative staffing models can also provide opportunities for educators to assume expanded leadership roles within CBE settings, such as coaches, team leads, master teachers, data specialists, and content specialists (e.g., art or STEM); research shows that this can both attract more qualified candidates to the teaching field, and help retain them within the profession[20]. CBE systems “can improve retention of skilled educators by doing for educators what they do for learners: defining multiple, personalized professional pathways”[21].

However, educators “must be able to reallocate their time to integrate new specializations and leadership roles into the core of their practice”[22]. Simply adding on roles to already busy educators’ schedules will do little to support and retain them. Therefore, these personalized pathways require flexible staffing and scheduling approaches, and the adjustment of human capital systems and calendars is necessary to allow educators to assume different roles doing different things at different times. For example, a school could hire a data specialist to work with teachers, and build more planning time into the school schedule for teachers to work with the specialist within their PLCs.

Want to see CBE in Action?

For an example of how non-traditional staffing arrangements can personalize learning within CBE, click the image to the left to read the profile and watch a video on teaching roles at Cristo Rey San Jose High School.

STOP AND CONSIDER

Do teachers in your district have opportunities for meaningful role advancement and growth within existing policies and practices? Are flexibilities in place to support differentiated professional educator pathways? How do staffing models make use of strong educators to support their colleagues and enhance student learning?

[21] Ibid.
[22] Ibid.
Now it’s time to assess your competency on Module 4!

1. Which of the following is an essential element of CBE implementation?
   - A. Explaining CBE to community members.
   - B. Expanding district budgets to hire high-quality educators.
   - C. Increasing seat time flexibility.
   - D. Eliminating the use of letter grades.

2. Which of the following can be barriers to CBE implementation?
   - A. Poor technology infrastructure.
   - B. Weighted student funding formulas.
   - C. Professional development and staffing configurations.
   - D. A and C above.
   - E. All of the above.

3. Which of the following best describes professional learning within CBE models?
   - A. Professional learning is always job-embedded with coaching provided.
   - B. Micro-credentials and badges specify the results of teacher evaluations.
   - C. Professional learning is online to accommodate teachers’ busy schedules.
   - D. Personal learning plans are aligned to teachers’ competency development.

4. Which of the following is an important consideration when linking standards (e.g., Common Core) to CBE systems?
   - A. How to modify standards to reflect competencies.
   - B. How competencies reflect standards.
   - C. How to align grade levels to standards.
   - D. How to assess mastery of standards.
   - E. B and D

5. The most visible change when implementing a full CBE system is:
   - A. The dramatically increased use of LMS and other technologies.
   - B. The elimination of calendar-based grade levels.
   - C. The availability of micro-credentials for professional learning.
   - D. Increased flexibility in how and when credits are earned.

If you answered C, D, D, E, and B, you are correct! If you have mastered this module, continue on to Module 5.